

# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

JANUARY 2017  
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D. Thiagarajan



## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

After weeks of dry weather in this somewhat disappointing monsoon cycle, on Deepam Day, Cyclone Varda hit the Tamil Nadu coast with 100mph-winds that left hundreds of large trees uprooted, bringing down electrical posts and causing large-scale power outages. Northern parts of the state enjoyed vigorous precipitation while Tiruvannamalai only got light rain.

Early on the 16th, the first of the month's Dhanurmasa pujas began in Bhagavan's shrine followed by Punarvasu and Swami Ramanananda Day pujas.

In this issue of *Saranagati*, we look at Bhagavan's life as a continual prasad, the guru's grace that blessed the hundreds and thousands who came to him (see p. 3).

Kartigai Deepam came late this year and in spite of stormy weather, was a blessing for all (see p. 9).

For videos, photos and further news of events, go to <http://www.sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan,  
The Editorial Team

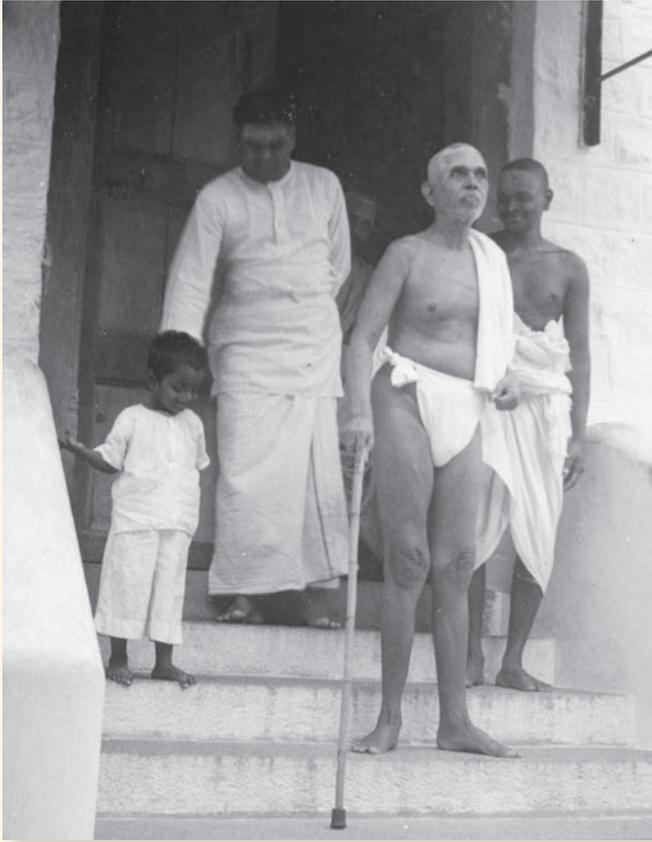
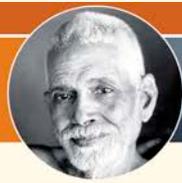
<i>Daily Life in the Dining Hall: The Guru's Prasad</i>	3
<i>Wordwise: Annam</i>	4
<i>Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Food</i>	5
<i>Events in Tiruvannamalai: Pavala Kunru Mandalabhishekam</i>	6
<i>Events at Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's Deepam Day Prasad</i>	7
<i>Events at Ramanasramam: Annamalaiyar Girivalam</i>	8
<i>Events at Ramanasramam: Kartigai Deepam Celebrations</i>	9

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

11th January (Weds) Full Moon  
12th January (Thurs) Bhagavan's 137th Jayanthi  
12th January (Thurs) Sivaprakasam Pillai Day  
14th January (Sat) Makar Sankranti Pongal  
14th January (Sat) Ramaswami Pillai Day  
15th January (Sun) Mattu Pongal/Tiruvoodal Festival

31st January (Tues) Swami Rajeswarananda Day  
9th February (Thurs) Punarvasu Day  
10th February (Fri) Chinnaswami Day/Full Moon  
12th February (Sun) Munagala Venkataramiah Day  
15th February (Mon) Sundara Iyer Day  
24th February (Fri) Mahasivratri





## Daily Life in the Dining Hall (part IV) The Guru's Prasad

Food played a central role in Ashram life and was one of the key modes of communication between the guru and his devotees. According to tradition it is understood that whatever is given from the guru's hands is by definition prasadam, that is, a precious gift of the guru's grace. This goes to the heart of worship in India where during the puja, material substances such as rice, fruit, sweets, vibhuti, kumkum and flowers are offered as *naivedya* to the deity who 'tastes' of them and then returns them in their divinely consecrated form as prasadam. This is God's grace made palpable, the incarnation of divine perfection to be worn on the body, as in the case of flowers, vibhuti and kumkum or imbibed, as in the case of food items such as sweets, fruit, milk and tirtha. Food is thus an integral feature in places of worship and every temple and Ashram will invariably give great importance to the careful and proper functioning of its kitchen.

In India, the first major rite in a child's life is the auspicious day in the sixth month when solid food is given to the child for the first time. Indeed every sacred occasion in the child's life, whether invocation ceremonies, puja at the temple, service to the poor, ritual offerings to ancestors or personal deities, or the yagna on one's marriage day, food offerings are central. It is not just that food is the means of sustenance of the body. The *sruti* tells us that food is Brahman Himself. Sankara once said one should not speak ill of food as one would not speak ill of one's guru.

It is in this spirit that Bhagavan enjoined the kitchen staff to handle Ashram food items donated by devotees with care, never allowing anything to be wasted. For devotees in the dining hall, food that came from Bhagavan's kitchen was holy prasadam. But for Bhagavan, *all food* was prasadam. Readers may recall a scene that took place in the darshan hall when a sadhu approached Bhagavan and humbly beseeched him, "Swami, I pray that when you take food, you may be pleased to give me a morsel as prasadam." Bhagavan looked at him and said, "Take *all the food you eat* as prasadam. Then it will in fact become God's prasadam. Who is it that eats? Where does he come from? If you go to the very root of things and know the truth, you will find that everything is God's prasadam."<sup>1</sup>

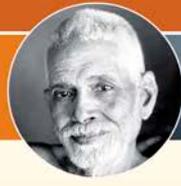
### Sanctified Sugar-Candy

Of course, Bhagavan was not oblivious to popular expectations and was quite amenable to accommodating visiting guests, even those that did not make their wishes directly known. Once a devotee from North India came for Bhagavan's darshan and wanted to have prasad to take back home to his family though he did not verbalise his wish. He bought a good quantity of sugar-candy and placed it in front of Bhagavan, not aware of the Ashram custom of distributing offerings to Bhagavan to all gathered in the Hall. The attendant took the plate of sugar-candy to Bhagavan. Under the pretext of picking out the smallest piece, Bhagavan picked up and touched almost all the lumps of sugar-candy on the plate and then finally took a small piece for himself. He told the attendant, quite unusually: "Don't distribute the whole lot; keep some as prasad to take to his family."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, 8th July 1947.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mountain Path*, July 1983, 'Eternal Ramana', pp. 170-171.





### Healing Prasad

More than mere deference to tradition, devotees had intense faith in Bhagavan's prasad, its transformative power and its capacity to heal the sick. Over the decades, there were numerous reports of cures brought about by taking Bhagavan's prasad. A simple example is the case of Sundaram, who having lost his wife, gave up his job and came to Ramanasramam. Not long after arriving he was asked to serve in the Ashram kitchen where he had the good fortune to work directly under Bhagavan. As he had been an asthma patient for long years, cooking in the smoke-filled environment near the kitchen fires aggravated his respiratory condition but he never made his complaint known to Bhagavan or the kitchen staff. Once, however, when Bhagavan made some chutney and gave everybody in the kitchen a pinch to sample, he turned to Sundaram and as he gave him a sample of the chutney, he said, "This is medicine for you." Without giving it much thought, Sundaram swallowed the titbit, but not long afterward, he came to realise that Bhagavan had completely cured him of his asthma.<sup>3</sup>

### Prasad for GVS's 'Friend'

A similar case is told by GVS. Once when taking leave from the Ashram, Chinnaswami handed him three packets of prasad. Puzzled, GVS enquired for whom

<sup>3</sup> 'Bhagavan's Cooking', in *Ramana Smrti* p. 159. July 1947.

they were intended. Sri Bhagavan who was having his oil bath in the same room (which in those days served as both the dining room, office as well as Bhagavan's bathroom), replied: "One for your family, one for Narayanappa and one for your friend." But GVS had no idea who 'your friend' referred to, nor did he make any further inquiry. After reaching home, however, a letter redirected from the Ashram arrived. It was from Mr. R. P. Reddy Zamindar sent to GVS's Ashram address, pleading Bhagavan's grace on behalf of his aging grandmother who was quite ill, even on the verge of collapse, due to the inability to take food for many months. GVS then understood who Bhagavan had in mind when he said 'your friend'. GVS hastened to Mr. Reddy with the prasad. A few days later, the lady experienced a turning point in her condition and was able to eat again. The family wanted to express their gratitude and so insisted on financing the publication of GVS's translation of *Sri Ramana Gita* which was released as an Ashram publication.<sup>4</sup>

### Prasad for a Weak Stomach

Once, Devaraja Mudaliar was suffering from diarrhoea and could not eat anything, not even rice gruel. He wrote to Bhagavan about his condition some days before coming to the Ashram and even experienced inconvenience en route. But though

<sup>4</sup> *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, G.V. Subbaramayya, pp. 7-8.

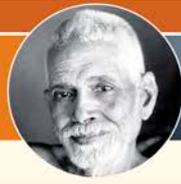
## Wordwise: Annam

अन्नम्

*Annam* (lit. 'that which is eaten' from the verb root *ad*, 'to eat', as in Lat 'edere') means food and is traditionally seen as a form of Brahman (*annam parabrahma swaroopam*). It is said that *that which gives strength is superior to strength*. But food is not only materiality that nourishes the body but anything that nourishes mind, spirit or body. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* says, "All beings that exist on earth are born of food, live by food and ultimately go back to food. So verily food is the eldest of all creatures. On that basis food is called medicine." The *Taittiriya* also says, *That which is in man is also in the sun*, and so *agni* in the human body is the sacrificial fire that converts food into spiritual knowledge and becomes the seed of human fertility.

In one place Muruganar writes: *Mad people who instead of [making themselves] food for God think that they can feed on God will through their ego be devoured as prey by Death (GVK §853). [But] those who as food for Siva pour their minds into the raging sacrificial fire of true awareness, dare to worship and merge in Siva's form, attain His own auspicious formlessness. (GVK §353).*





unable to take food, when he arrived at the Ashram in time to join the evening meal, he was invited to sit along with others and was served not only the usual meal but sweets donated by a devotee from Bangalore. The next morning, he partook of rich and tasty extra items that were served along with breakfast. And again at lunch, a full meal. He narrated, “With such medicine, Bhagavan stopped my diarrhoea and after a brief stay, I went back thoroughly cured.”<sup>5</sup>

A similar case is when T.S. Ananthamurthy ate breakfast sitting opposite of Bhagavan in the dining room. The usual breakfast of idli, sambar and hot coffee was served and most in the dining hall finished in a short time. Bhagavan, however, sat and sipped the coffee slowly. Fried vadais which had also been served sat on Ananthamurthy’s leaf-plate but he hesitated in eating them because he was unable to digest fried food. He mentioned his trouble to Bhagavan. Bhagavan looked at him and gently said, “You will digest them. You may eat them.” Ananthamurthy then ate the vadais and found that, as promised, he suffered not the least indigestion.<sup>6</sup>

### Healing Idlis

Once, TKS and Chinna-swami had a misunderstanding because TKS had prostrated before a saintly lady. TKS thought he was merely showing respect. But for Chinna-swami, only one should ever be venerated in Bhagavan’s Ashram and that was Bhagavan himself. Chinna-swami reprimanded the devotee, saying, “When Bhagavan is here, why go and prostrate before another?” Because of hurt feelings, TKS skipped the evening meal. Early the next morning, Bhagavan was making idlis in the kitchen and saw TKS’s downcast face. He said, “Come on, sit down and have some idlis.” TKS replied, “Bhagavan, I have to rush to the school, I have classes.” Bhagavan said, “Hey, the cat

<sup>5</sup> *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, Chapter II.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Sri Ramana Bestows His Grace’, *Ocean of Grace*, vol 3 p. 725.

is out of the bag! Today is Sunday. How can you have classes? Come on, sit down.” Bhagavan brought a leaf-plate and put it before him. “I have made some special sambar.” Bhagavan sat next to him and piled up the idlis, and in his inimitable way, idli by idli, soothed the devotee’s aching heart. TKS later said, “I have never eaten so many idlis in my life!”<sup>7</sup>

### Dream Prasad

But Bhagavan’s healing grace worked in very unexpected ways and could even be communicated through dream. When Ramachandra Rao’s wife suffered from tuberculosis and consequent digestive troubles, doctors said nothing could be done. Mrs. Rao and her husband knew what Bhagavan was capable of. In their first darshan of Bhagavan during the days at Skandasramam, Bhagavan had sat them on a platform and served them food with his own hands. But now Mrs. Rao’s health was in tatters until one day, Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream and blessed her. After the dream, to the great surprise of medical professionals and family alike, she was completely cured without the need for any medical treatment whatsoever. Not long afterward, Bhagavan relieved Rao of the chronic pain in his elbow by the same means. He had a dream of Bhagavan taking food at their home. After the meal, he handed a mug of water to Bhagavan to wash his hands. But before washing his hands, Bhagavan took the mug and poured water on the affected elbow. From the next day on, the pain completely vanished.<sup>8</sup>

### Casual Movements

Of course, for Bhagavan, not everything he did was intended as a blessing and sometimes devotees made a thing of that which had only been casually intended by Bhagavan. A devotee once asked Bhagavan: “I hear that

<sup>7</sup> Unpublished Manuscript, *Ramana Peria Puranam*, (available online), pp. 89-90.

<sup>8</sup> *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 235.

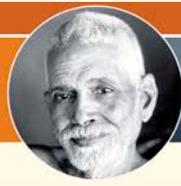
## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: Food

At lunch a visitor from Nellore asked the Master for a tiny bit of food (prasada) from his dish.

M.: Eat without thinking of the ego. Then whatever you eat becomes Bhagavan’s prasada.

— Talks §216





Bhagavan blessed a devotee by touching his head. Is that so?” Bhagavan replied, “How is it possible? As I got up from the sofa or conversed with people or went about here and there, my hand might have unintentionally touched their head and they might have taken it as a blessing. In the case of people with whom I am a bit familiar, I might even have patted them. That’s all. I have never deliberately done this. I like to move with people freely and in a natural manner. And they might have taken it as an act of grace from me. But just because of that, will it become initiation by touch?”<sup>9</sup>

### Abstaining from Coffee

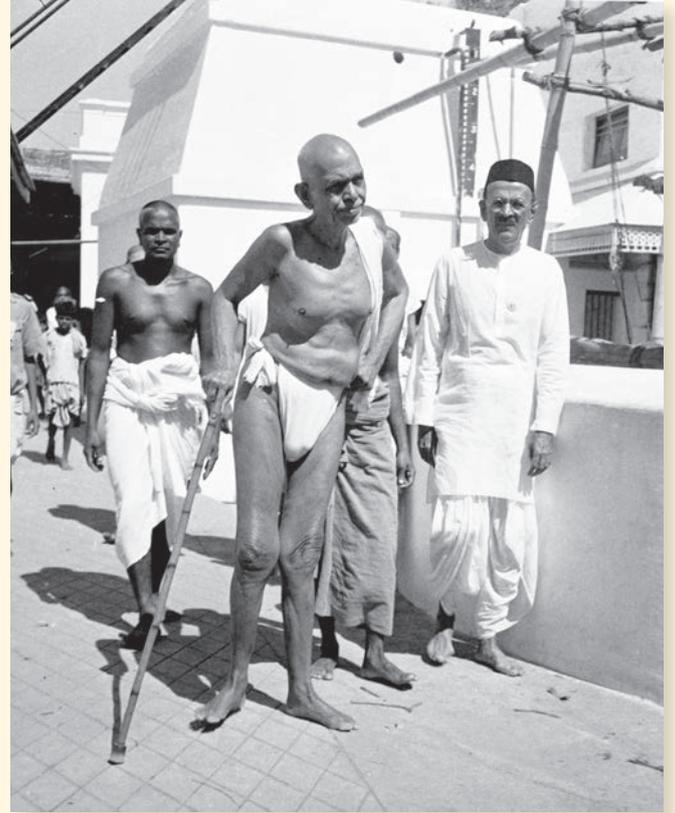
There were other occasions where Bhagavan was quick to point out the ways devotees sometimes overstated matters regarding prasad. Once Krishna Bhikshu’s brother Venkatesa came to the Ashram. As a sadhaka, he was not in the habit of taking coffee which for him was too stimulating. So, when offered coffee at breakfast and told that it was Bhagavan’s prasad, he hesitated and turned to Bhagavan to ask him outright: “Am I to take this as your prasad?” Bhagavan understood his meaning and immediately replied, “No. These people want to drink coffee and so to justify themselves, they offer it first to me and then call it my prasad.”<sup>10</sup>

### Prasad for Bhagavan

A curious reversal regarding prasad is the way that devotees sometimes brought prasad to Bhagavan. Each time, Bhagavan accepted their gifts respectfully. He would say, “Look, Subrahmanya from Tiruchendur has come. Here is Ramalingeswara

<sup>9</sup> Letters, 8th July 1947.

<sup>10</sup> The Mountain Path, October 1965, p. 218. It might be argued that while Bhagavan always gets the last word, devotees are perhaps to some extent justified in calling whatever is associated with Bhagavan as ‘prasad’, even if he did not intend it as such.



from Rameswaram. Here is Mother Ganga, there is Gouthami, this is the Kaveri and that is Krishnaveni.”

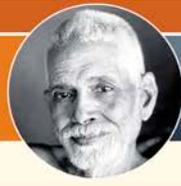
Nagamma sometimes wondered about the inanity of bringing prasad of the Lord to the Lord Himself, who is ‘the origin of all *tirthas* and who is shining in his abode as Himself’. But once when someone brought sea water (*sagara tirtha*), Bhagavan accepted it saying, “Up to now all the rivers have come to me but not the *sagara*, the ocean. This is the first time. Very good.” When Nagamma heard it, she “suddenly remembered the ancient lore where it is stated that all *tirthas*, *samudras* and *devatas* go to such Sages as Ramana to pay respects to their lotus feet”. She commented: “I used to feel that this was all hyperbole because stones and waters

## Events in Tiruvannamalai: Pavala Kunru Mandalabhishekam



On Friday 23 December, Mandalabhishekam Puja was performed at Pavala Kunru Temple to mark the culmination of 45 days since Mahakumbabhishekam on Monday, 7th November.





cannot walk to the places where great people live. But now, what I find is that without anybody desiring it, all these holy waters, holy ashes and the like are brought by bhaktas and Bhagavan accepts them, saying, 'They have come'. Since Bhagavan accepts all these waters with evident pleasure, it should be interpreted as his accepting the service of all *tirthas* and prasadas."<sup>11</sup>

#### Iswara Prasad

To be sure, the nature of prasad (God's grace) is mysterious and cannot be adequately grasped with the ordinary thinking mind. Once when a devotee asked Bhagavan if "Iswara prasadam is necessary to attain successful samadhi", Bhagavan said, "We are Iswara. By Iswara *drishti* (seeing ourselves as Iswara), we receive Iswara prasadam. So, we need Iswara prasadam to obtain Iswara prasadam! (Bhagavan smiled as he said this and devotees all laughed.) "The thought of Iswara *is* Iswara prasadam. His nature is *arul* or prasadam, i.e. grace. It is by Iswara's grace that you think of Iswara."<sup>12</sup>

#### Self-surrender and Offerings to a Jaggery Ganesa

Another time, Bhagavan said, "We are familiar with a custom among some people in these parts based

<sup>11</sup> *Letters*, 4th January, 1946

<sup>12</sup> B.V.Narasimhaswami, *The Mountain Path*, January 1980, p. 21.

on deep sentiments of devotion they have for Lord Ganesa. Worship of his image is indispensable for them before their daily meal.

"A certain poor traveller of this persuasion was passing through a sparsely inhabited region. Not finding a temple of Ganesha anywhere where he might perform his daily worship to the image before his midday meal, he resolved to make an idol of the deity out of the small quantity of jaggery he had with him. Having made the idol out of the jaggery, he proceeded with the ritual in right earnest. And then to his bewilderment, found that since he had converted all the jaggery he had into the idol, he had nothing sweet in his bag for *naivedya* or food offering. But no worship is complete without the customary *naivedya*. So, the simple-minded wayfarer pinched off a small bit of the jaggery from the idol itself and offered the bit as *naivedya* to the small deity. It did not occur to him that in the act of pinching off the jaggery he had defiled the very idol he wanted to worship and had therefore made both the worship and the offering worthless."

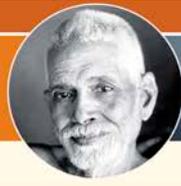
Bhagavan added, "Your idea of self-surrender is nothing better than the offering made by the wayfarer. By presuming your existence as something apart from the Supreme Being, you have 'defiled' it. Whether you

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's Deepam Day Prasadam



With cyclone Varda already on its way from Chennai, the Ashram kitchen staff began the Deepam Day Narayana Seva at 7am to try and serve as many pilgrims as possible before the storm hit. Pilgrims were steadfast in their devotion and made their way around the Hill despite the inclement weather. Devotees carried on serving even after the rain began and some 10,000 received bhiksha in the morning up till 1.30 pm and another 2,500 in the evening after the hilltop flame was lit. Luckily, Varda let the holy town off lightly.





surrender yourself or not, you have never been apart from that Supreme Being. Indeed, at this present moment, as in the past and future, the Divine alone is.”<sup>13</sup>

### The Silent Prasad of Bhagavan’s Presence

Finally, it must be said that while prasad as traditionally conceived is vital in the life of the seeker, nevertheless, for the devotee of Bhagavan Sri Ramana, the greatest prasad of all is Bhagavan’s abiding presence which can be partaken of at any moment and in any place.

Once in 1933 when V. S. Neelakanta sat entranced before Bhagavan in the darshan hall, without any reference to eatables, he partook of Bhagavan’s prasad:

“I was sitting with a steady downcast look when the sound of the lunch bell announcing meal time barely reached me. I noticed that devotees had gone and something told me that I was not alone. After about ten minutes, I felt someone tap me on the shoulder and turned to find Chinnaswami standing behind me. He said slowly: “People are waiting for Bhagavan to begin eating. Bhagavan will get up from the sofa if you get up from your posture”. Bhagavan was on the sofa and in great surprise, I looked up. How can I describe the beauty of what I saw on the

<sup>13</sup> “Sri Ramana, The Embodiment of Advaitic Truth”, Swami Madhavatirtha in *Golden Jubilee*, pp. 389-390.

sofa? No language can bring forth an expression of it. Suffice it to say that I found Sri Ramana’s steady frame gracefully gazing down upon me. The haloed golden disc decorated his head like a crown and I saw the yellow-tinged wave moving within its circular limits. The more I watched, a childlike fondness caught hold of me and forcibly made me get up, requesting him to come for meals. “Yes! I am coming”, he graciously replied. The apparition changed to its usual appearance and Bhagavan got up and walked towards the dining hall.

“Was Chinnaswami witnessing the whole episode? I cannot say, because experience had taught me that divine grace always works out its charms quite secretly, like the mysterious action of death doing its work, screening away from the vision of others close by. A good camera can easily take a clear photo from which any number of copies can be reproduced at will, all alike. This was the lesson I studied at his feet, not by words, but through intuition, and I still see him as the sage with the golden disc, the reverted thousand-petalled lotus in the head, a stage attainable rarely by one in a million great spiritual souls.”<sup>14</sup>

(to be continued)

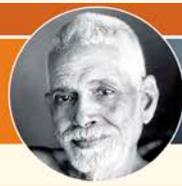
<sup>14</sup> This edited excerpt is drawn from *The Call Divine*, vol. 10, pp. 49-50. Reading the full account gives hints that at least some of this deep meditation experience may have been subjective or internal.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Annamalaiyar Giripradakshina



Arunachaleswarar came to the Ashram on the morning of the 14th December in his annual Deepam pradakshina. Ashram devotees waited as the entourage approached. The Ashram staff made their usual offerings and arati was performed as another light Deepam rain began to fall.





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kartigai Deepam Celebrations

Punyakalas like Kartigai Deepam are born of auspicious planetary conjunctions. Deepam day takes place when the Moon is conjunct with *kritika* nakshatra and the sun is in Vrichhaka (Scorpio) in the month of Kartigai. The Purana says that those beholding the Deepam flame during this conjunction will be blessed by the Lord. This year's conjunction fell on the 12th December and even very stormy weather that day did not deter lakhs of pilgrims from making the journey to Tiruvannamalai where they hoped to get a brief glimpse of the hilltop flame through the misty clouds and rain. At Sri Ramanasramam, devotees gathered in Bhagavan's Samadhi Hall for evening puja and, following a rain-soaked lighting of the flame just outside the hall, assembled in the Old Dining Hall where the Deepam flame was lit before Bhagavan's photo and the chair Bhagavan used on Deepam days. Devotees sang *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Ramana Sat Guru*.

