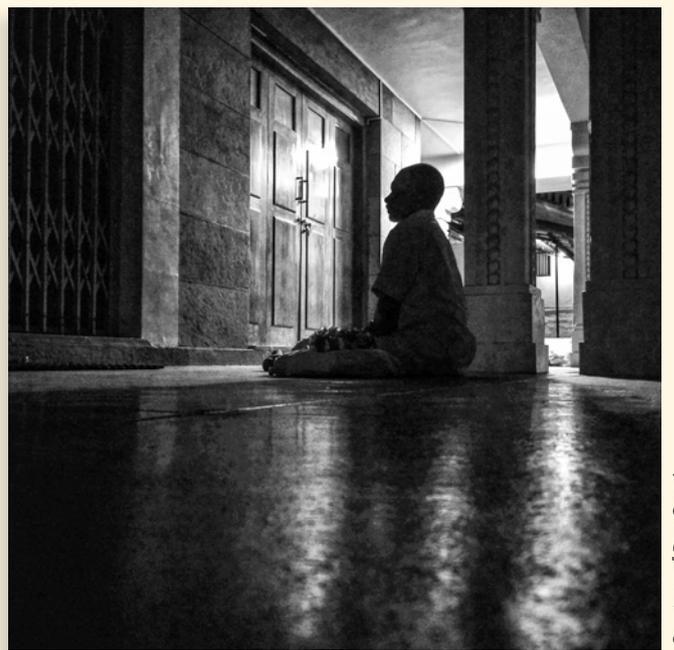


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

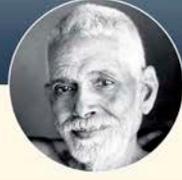
NAVARATRI OCTOBER 2016  
VOL. 10, NO.10



Courtesy of Dev Gogoi



## Saranagati



OCTOBER 2016  
VOL. 10, NO. 10

IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

October begins in sweet devotion and hectic movements at the Ashram in preparation for the 2016 Navaratri celebrations. Goddess Yogambika was taken out in procession at sundown on the evening of the 30th September and placed in the Mantapam. Music performances are scheduled for the first two nights of the festival in the Library Auditorium on the 1st and 2nd of October. This year's festival goes for ten days up till the 10th October.

The current issue reflects on Bhagavan's compassion and the healing effect he had on people, not least of all, in the often intimate interactions in the kitchen and dining hall in the series, *Daily Life in the Dining Hall*, starting on page 3.

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

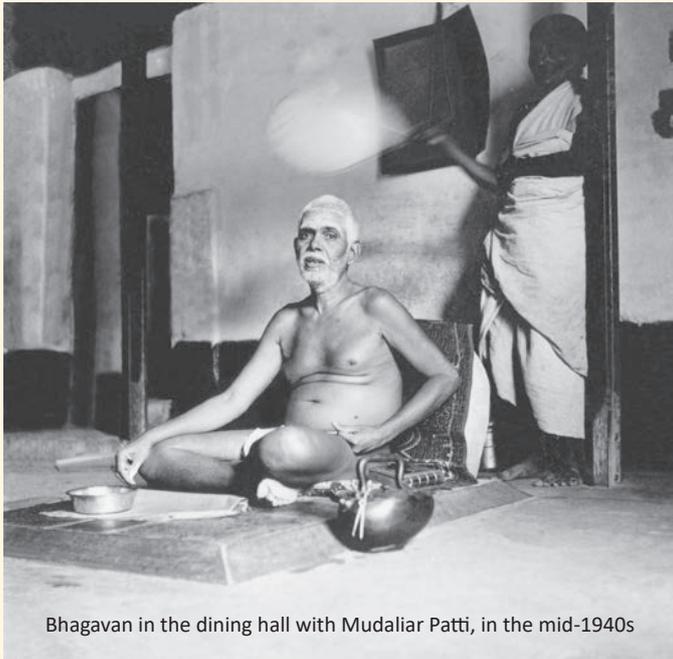
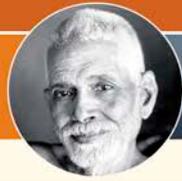
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

1st October (Sat) Navaratri Festival Commences  
10th October (Mon) Saraswati Puja  
11th October (Tues) Vijayadasami Day  
15th October (Sat) Full Moon  
22nd October (Sat) Punarvasu Day  
29th October (Sat) Deepavali

14th November (Mon) Full Moon  
19th November (Mon) Punarvasu Day  
12th December (Mon) Kartigai Deepam  
13th December (Tues) Full Moon  
16th December (Fri) Punarvasu Day  
31st December Lucy Cornelsen Day





Bhagavan in the dining hall with Mudaliar Patti, in the mid-1940s

## Daily Life in the Dining Hall (pt. I): Bhagavan the Compassionate

When studying his life, it is wonderful to behold the care and concern Sri Bhagavan showed for all people and indeed, for all creatures. If someone were to say that Bhagavan was known for the wisdom of his teaching or the power, beauty and cogency of his poetic compositions or the compelling presence of his Silence in the hall, they would not be incorrect. But it is almost certain that among the simple people of Tiruvannamalai, what struck them most over the many decades since his arrival at Arunachala in September 1896 was the compassion, love and consideration he showed for all people.

The reader may recall the scene of a small group walking with Bhagavan toward Palakotthu in the late 1940s when an American accompanying them piped up, “Maharshi, when one attains *jnana*, how does one help others?” Without the least pause the Master turned to him and replied in unfaltering English, “When one attains *jnana*, there *are* no others!”

A striking statement, and yet, if pondered sufficiently, it reveals the reality Bhagavan lived in, moment by moment. For Bhagavan, each person was his very own self, and the most natural thing in the world for him was to treat everyone with kindness and affection.

During the work day in the kitchen, for example, when situations arose, Bhagavan consistently met each with grace-filled compassion utilising the healing balm of his presence to smooth out every obstacle. He was not bound by ordinary social conventions but could greet every person as an embodiment of the same divinity that undergirded his own life. In short, compassion was natural to him because he saw that all beings are endowed with the same gift. Thus his every action expressed the reverence he felt for the Self-nature he beheld in each person, even if they could not see it themselves. By seeing their inner beauty, he was in a position to free them of every burden—whether anxiety, self-reproach or accumulated regret at life’s misfortunes, losses and disappointments—simply by reminding them of the golden treasure that lay hidden within them, thus putting in proper perspective all worldly cares.

If he slept less than others, it was not by virtue of any desire to model yogic practice per se but rather, to use his time in making himself available to others in order to bring forth their good and assist them, even if at times, in only small ways<sup>1</sup>. He made himself available mostly by not allowing himself to be treated specially. For example, at meals in the dining hall, he did not sit up on a raised dais but ate his food informally at ground-level along with other devotees, meticulously resisting any special treatment, sharing with them freely. When he took rest at night, he kept the Old Hall doors unlatched in case visitors came. And he shared equally in daily duties, making it a point to visit the kitchen regularly to assist the kitchen staff. He knew the pressure they were under and the responsibility they bore in getting meals ready in time. He knew that their task precluded their joining devotees in the hall for his darshan.

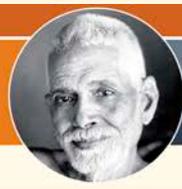
One of the widow-cooks<sup>2</sup> in the kitchen once aptly commented: “When you see Bhagavan reclining on the sofa surrounded by his devotees in the meditation hall, you are reminded of Lord Krishna holding court in Mathura. But Bhagavan in the kitchen is like Lord Krishna in Gokulam, sporting with the simple cowherd folk.”

The kitchen staff was blessed to share special moments

<sup>1</sup> In *Letters* (6th April, 1947), Bhagavan says, “Great people restrict their sleep to the barest minimum so that they may not waste their time but use it for the performance of selfless good deeds.”

<sup>2</sup> Varanasi Subbulakshmi. See *Cherished Memories*, p. 185.





with Bhagavan in the kitchen and dining hall where he was one among them. It is safe to say that in the daily life in the kitchen and dining hall, it was his humility and simplicity that were among the most profound of his teachings. If, as the saying goes, *good manners are second only to God*, then Bhagavan's unfailing kindness and earnest giving of himself day in and day out stood as the shining example of his teaching-in-practice, something that could be followed by all. Most of all, he won the hearts of those in the kitchen with the small things, the little sacrifices he made for their sake, never allowing any to get left behind.

A simple example of this is an occasion in 1944 when Bhagavan fell sick with jaundice. Decades earlier, Echammal and Mudaliar Patti had taken a vow never to eat on any given day until Bhagavan had first taken food cooked by them. Due to the jaundice, however, Bhagavan lacked the digestive power to properly assimilate normal food. So he snacked on light items instead, sometimes chewing on popcorn and, as is recommended in cases of jaundice, avoiding heavy foods. Fruit, ideal in treating jaundice, was offered him. But he would only take such luxury items if they were offered equally to all.

Remembering the vow of the two women, however, he knew that if he didn't eat any of their food, they must per force go hungry. So even though it was not advisable, Bhagavan insisted on having some of their food each day.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Letters*, 20th January, 1946.

### Care for Newcomers

Of course it wasn't just the older well-known devotees that received such thoughtful consideration. Even newcomers arriving for the first time got his special care and at meals were regularly placed near him, just four feet away, so that he could make them feel at home.

Framji Dorabji told the story of bringing his teen-age son for the first time to have Bhagavan's darshan. The two sat opposite Bhagavan at breakfast. Not familiar with idlies, on tasting them, the boy was evidently not keen on this staple South Indian breakfast dish. And this fact did not escape Bhagavan's notice. But the following day when the boy came for breakfast, Bhagavan quietly gave instructions to the kitchen staff and when idlies were served this time, the child was astonished to see that his were smeared in ghee and covered with lots of sugar, a modification that dramatically altered his opinion of them<sup>4</sup>.

### Young Kitchen Staff

Even the needs of young children did not go unnoticed by Bhagavan. In 1940 when TNV's second son, Ganesan was just three or four years old, he felt the irrepressible urge to be part of the serving in the dining hall. The serving vessels were quite large for his small frame, so his request was denied. And when

<sup>4</sup> *Moments Remembered*, p. 54.

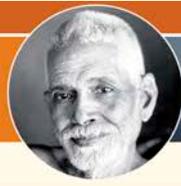
## Wordwise: Karuna

## करुणा

*Karuna*: compassion, kindness, mercy, pity, to feel or show pity; possibly cognate with Old Eng. *hreowan*, German *reuen*, from which derived Eng. 'rue' (regret), 'rueful'. Other words related in meaning are: *daya*, the desire to ease the sorrow of others, treating others as oneself; and *anukampa*, the condition of feeling the pain and suffering of another.

In his *Arunachala Pancharatnam*, Bhagavan uses the word *karuna* in the sense of grace. Elsewhere Arunachala gets the name *karunaamrita vaaridhi namah* (Nectarine Ocean of Compassion). Sri Bhagavan who has been called *karuna puma sudhabdhi*, once said that in 1916 at Virupaksha Cave, the word *karunaiyal* kept 'ringing' in his ears. Several times he tried to shake it off but it kept coming back until at last he uttered it, at which point the stream of a *viruttam* (a metrical composition) began to flow. Thus was born the *Sri Arunachala Padikam* whose first lines begin: *O Love in the shape of Arunachala! Now that by Thy Grace I have been claimed by Thee, what will become of me unless Thou manifest Thyself to me?* (See T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, *Mountain Path*, Jan 1966, p. 40 and T.R. Kanakammal's *Commentary on Arunachala Stuti Pañchakam*, p. 215.)





he protested, the lady-cooks, other inmates and those inside the kitchen were unsuccessful in appeasing him. But Bhagavan quickly landed on a ready solution: “Give him a very small cup full of salt and a tiny spoon. Let him put a little salt on each leaf.”

When Ganesan was given the cup, all his tearful laments turned to cheerful smiles and he went straight to Bhagavan who tenderly instructed him in how much salt to offer and where on the leaf to place it. The boy took up his newly-acquired duty in great earnest and started at Bhagavan’s leaf serving the prescribed amount. Bhagavan directed him to the others in the hall.

So here we can see that whether young or old, Bhagavan was atuned to the needs of all in his midst.<sup>5</sup>

### Feeding the Poor

Bhagavan was especially sensitive to the needs of the poor, who were often too timid to voice their wishes. Having lived among them on the Hill, by his vocation as a renunciate, he knew what it was like to live very simply, deprived of worldly comforts. The sense of comradery he felt for them was further heightened by the fact that many of them had shared with him the little food they had in those early days on Arunachala. The Upanishad says that food is Brahman (*annam parabrahma swarupa*). It also says that food is the stuff of us, our very body. So when one gives food to others, one is giving of one’s very self.

Once in February 1947, a poor villager came into the hall and said to Bhagavan, “Swami, I do not want anything but my stomach is burning with hunger. Please arrange to give me a handful of rice to satisfy this hunger.” Bhagavan’s glance toward his attendants indicated his desire. So one of the attendants took the man to the kitchen. After they left, Bhagavan looked at those in the hall and said, “Do you see that? He is a very poor man but has no desire except one and that is to fill his aching stomach. With that, he will be satisfied and will go and lie down under a tree and sleep happily. Where do we have the satisfaction that he has? We have any number of desires. If one is satisfied, another arises. Hence where is the chance for our desires to be fulfilled?”<sup>6</sup>

From the practical point of view, of course, caring for all those in need was no small task, especially on

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters*, 24th May, 1949.

crowded festival days, and tough decisions had to be made regarding the logistics of seating and feeding all who came to the Ashram for food. But Bhagavan often had a compelling way of communicating his desire, as the following incident illustrates.

Once on a festival day, it was announced that sadhus would not be allowed in the dining hall and that they must receive their bhiksha outdoors. After devotees were all seated in the dining hall, Bhagavan’s absence was keenly felt. Just as a search for Bhagavan was initiated, someone noticed him sitting beneath a distant tree. When they requested his attendance at meal, Bhagavan replied, “You don’t want sadhus in there. As I am a sadhu, I have left the place as per your desire.”<sup>7</sup>

### Origins of the Poor-feeding

By this time, it had become a regular duty for the kitchen staff to make balls of rice mixed with other preparations and send them out for distribution at lunchtime, either during the meal or soon afterwards. But one day, Bhagavan saw a poor man struggling under a tree unable to get his share of food. Feeling sorry for him, the following day when the lunch bell rang, Bhagavan went to the tree where the poor were gathered and stood alongside them. He said, “If you do not give them food first, I will not come to the dining hall at all. I will stand here beneath this tree along with these people, stretch out my hands like them and when I am given a ball of rice, I will eat it and then go straight to the meditation hall.”<sup>8</sup>

From that day onwards, it became the Ashram custom that the lunch bell be sounded only *after* all the poor had been adequately fed, a practice that continues to the present day.

### The Old Milkman

On another occasion in 1948 when the lunch bell rang, Bhagavan got up to go to the dining hall but moved slowly because of the discomfort caused by his arthritis. He gradually made his way toward the dining hall but just before entering, he noticed an old man from a nearby village with a pot hanging from his shoulders.

“Who’s that?” Bhagavan addressed the man, “Is it Chinnapaiyyan?” “Yes, Swami! It is I”, replied the

<sup>7</sup> *The Call Divine*, vol 1, p. 398.

<sup>8</sup> *Letters*, 24th May, 1949.





visitor. Bhagavan inquired tenderly, “How are you? Have you come to see me?” And pointing to the pot, “What have you brought in the pot? Is it porridge (*koozhu*)?” The milkman answered shyly, “Yes, Swami”. “Is that so, then please give me some!”

Bhagavan set aside his walking stick in order to cup his hands. The milkman poured the concoction carefully into Bhagavan’s cupped hands. Seeing Bhagavan drinking the mixture with such delight was a source of great joy for the villager.

Meanwhile, the dining hall had filled to capacity and as no food could be served till Bhagavan arrived, some were peeved at the delay. A devotee came out to find Bhagavan and seeing him, said somewhat impatiently, “What Bhagavan? We’re all waiting for you and you are drinking porridge and entertaining this man.” Bhagavan quipped, “Am I here only for your sake? Do I belong to you alone? When I lived on the Hill who were the ones that took care of me? It was this milkman and others like him that shared their food with me.”<sup>9</sup>

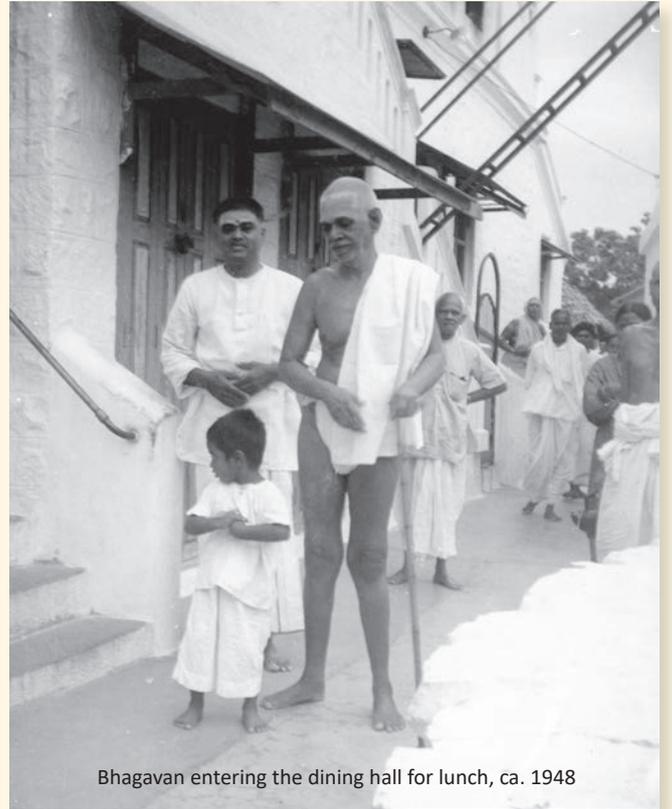
### Compassion for the Barber

No one escaped Bhagavan’s notice, even the humblest of souls. And Natesan, a simple man from Polur who had the honour of giving Bhagavan his monthly shave, was no exception<sup>10</sup>.

Natesan played *nagaswaram* for weddings and at festivals, so once when he was shaving Bhagavan, his uncle came with the message that he was needed in town for a music performance. Bhagavan brought it to the attention of the attendants saying, “It seems that Natesan has to go to town by noon and he has not taken any food since morning.” The attendants organised some lunch from the kitchen. Considering that tradition would have ordinarily expected the barber to wait to eat until after the other devotees had taken their food first, Natesan was moved by Bhagavan’s compassion. Recalling the incident years

<sup>9</sup> Freely adapted from *Power of the Presence*, vol. I, pp. 197-98.

<sup>10</sup> His uncle, Subbarayan, had had the same honour and shaved Bhagavan in the days at Gurumurtham. But Natesan attributed his good fortune, not to his uncle, but to the fidelity and faithfulness of his deceased father who lived a life of dedicated worship at Arunachala Temple. See *The Mountain Path*, July 1981, pp. 166-67.



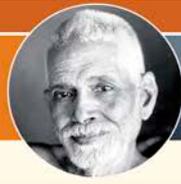
later brought tears to his eyes as he praised Bhagavan’s kindness, the way Bhagavan treated all equally and the way he always made sure that each received his food.

On another occasion Natesan came just the day before the full moon. While he was shaving Bhagavan, one of Natesan’s relatives came to inform him that his brother had just passed away and exhorted him to come urgently as he was required for the last rites. Bhagavan asked Ramakrishna Swami to arrange food and money. Natesan, overcome with sorrow, had no appetite but took three cups of coffee and graciously received the five rupees offered him for his homeward journey.

### Old Farmer on the Pradakshina Path

Another vivid example of Bhagavan’s care for the simple of heart took place in the early days when Bhagavan was still going for regular pradakshina. He and devotees had started off in the morning carrying with them cooking utensils and food items and stopped for lunch, cooked, ate and took rest. When they were ready to start again, they packed the remaining milk, sugar, buttermilk and started off. Upon reaching Adi Annamalai, Bhagavan suddenly veered off the main path and began following





a byway. Everyone naturally followed after him though they were not certain what he was up to.

After going along the path for about a hundred metres, they came to a tank where an old man covered with a blanket sat holding a small pot in his hand. Clues as to what Bhagavan was doing slowly began to reveal themselves: whenever this old man heard that Bhagavan was going for *giri valam*, he had the habit of waiting near the roadside till Bhagavan came so he could serve him something to eat. When Bhagavan did not see him at the roadside, he made this detour. Bhagavan called him by name and the old peasant prostrated before him. He then stood up with folded hands and remained silent.

“What’s the matter?” asked Bhagavan. “Why is it that I do not see you anywhere these days? Are the crops and cattle alright? How are the children?” Finally, noticing the pot in his hand, Bhagavan asked, “What’s in the pot?” Reluctantly the old man confessed his trouble.

“Swami, when I came to know that you were coming, I wanted to bring something as usual but there was nothing in the house. When I asked the lady of the house, she said, ‘There is ample old rice in the cook-pot; you can take it to them.’ Unable to decide what to do, I put some of the food into this small pot. But I was ashamed to face you with only this sort of food and so sat here confounded.”<sup>11</sup>

Bhagavan, very pleased, said, “Oh! Old rice, is it? That’s excellent. Why be ashamed? It will be very good. Let me have some.”

Though the old man was reluctant, Bhagavan took the pot from him, sat down under a tree and took out a vessel into which he put all the food, added

<sup>11</sup> The villager was of two minds about his offering knowing the strict Brahmin practice of not eating leftover food.

some water and mixed it into a paste with his hand. Then from another bag of food supplies, he took out limes and squeezed the juice into the mixture, added in some buttermilk, salt and dry ginger powder and made the whole thing into a liquid. Finally, he filled a tumbler with the concoction, drank it, and said, “Oh, it’s delicious!” Then looking at the others, he said, “All of you, mix some sugar with your leftover milk and drink it; our luggage will be that much lighter. I have this food; so what need have I for milk? This is first-rate food for me in this hot weather. It is also very nourishing and has many other good qualities too. But you need not take it if you don’t want it<sup>12</sup> and can drink the milk instead, if you prefer. Please give my share of milk to this kindly old man.”

They added sugar to the milk and, after giving some to the farmer, drank the rest. Bhagavan was meanwhile talking sociably with his elderly friend, drinking two or three tumblers of the concoction, saying how it tasted like nectar. At last Bhagavan said, “My stomach is full. I won’t be able to take more food tonight. Do take the rest home with you.” So saying, Bhagavan gave the remainder to the farmer, who accepted it as Bhagavan’s *prasad*. Wiping away the tears of joy welling up in his eyes, the old man took leave of them and went off to his cottage.

Once again Bhagavan highlighted for all gathered there that night the power of generous giving, in this case, simply by the gift of receiving.<sup>13</sup> —

(to be continued)

<sup>12</sup> Bhagavan does not insist that the others taste the mixture for the reasons mentioned in the previous footnote.

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from *Letters*, 30th November, 1947.

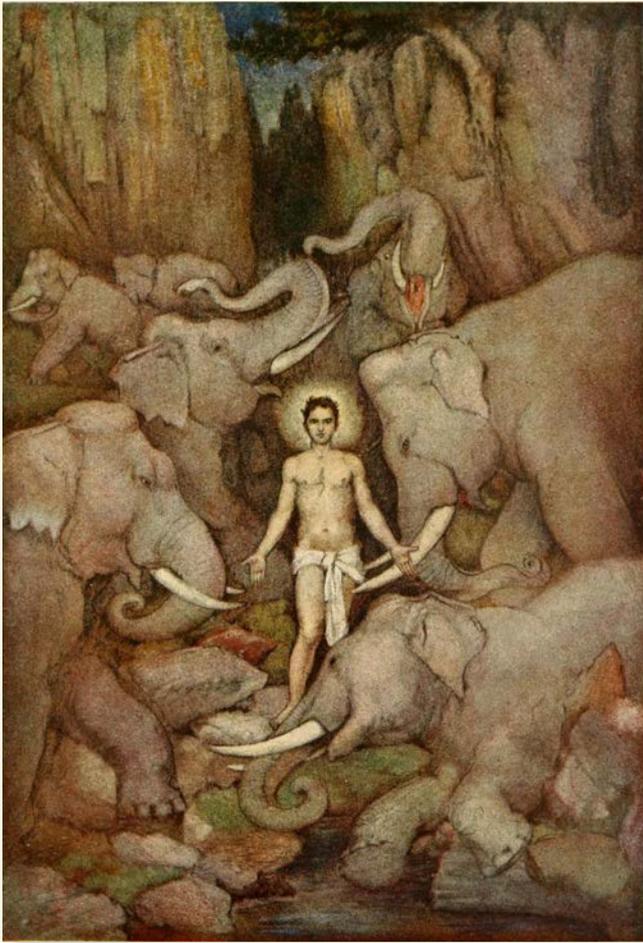
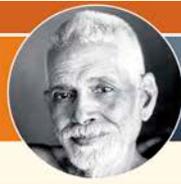
## Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi: God’s Mercy

D.: “How were we all in our previous births? Why do we not know our own past?”

M.: God in His mercy has withheld this knowledge from people. If they knew that they were virtuous, they would grow proud; [if they knew they were not virtuous], they would become depressed. [Neither is helpful]. It is enough that one knows the Self.

— Talks §553





## Favourite Stories of Bhagavan: Prahlada

*[Once when discussing detachment from the body as expressed in a verse in Devikalottara, Bhagavan said, "Our acts of commission and omission in past lives determine the course of this present life. The physical body has to go through certain pre-ordained experiences. Once it has undergone those, the body drops off automatically. There is no need for a person to feel frustrated about the difficulties in taking care of the body." Bhagavan then narrated the story of Prahlada. See Cherished Memories, pp. 175-77.]*

**H**iranyakasipu, king of the asuras, had received the boon that he could not be killed by anything born from a living womb, either man or animal, either during the day or at night, either indoors or outdoors, on land, in the air or in water, nor of any man-made weapon. Nearly invincible, Hiranyakasipu had subdued

the gods. His son, Prahlada, however, while still in the womb, had heard Narada chanting the praises of Narayana and was thus born with a deep devotion to Lord Vishnu. As the child grew, the asura-king resented his son's praise for his sworn enemy and so placed him in the care of the tutor Chandamarka. Chandamarka was instructed to root out the devious devotion. The loyal teacher tried his best, teaching the boy the mantra, *Om Namō Hiranyakashyapaya*. But Prahlada's worship of Lord Vishnu continued unabated. Because of his joyful, exuberant nature<sup>1</sup>, the other students began to follow Prahlada in worshipping the Lord. They were soon, however, sternly chastened by the master. One of the boys told Prahlada: "It is all very well for you to disregard the king's commands, you are a prince, the king's son, and need not worry". Prahlada smiled and said, "Did you come into this world with the king's permission? Does the king really have power over your life? You were born so that you could fulfil the decrees of Fate. Even before you were born, the entire course of your life was determined to the smallest detail. King Hiranyakasipu has power only in this land, whereas Lord Narayana rules the entire universe. The only way to break the chains of Fate is to gain the favour of Narayana. He alone has the power to free you from all bondage. Devote your life to earning His Grace, so that you can be free forever!"

In time, the king began forcefully to resist his son's disobedience and finally, made the decision to do away with him altogether. He first tried to poison him but when this proved unsuccessful, he sent a herd of giant elephants to trample him underfoot. When this failed, he had the youth thrown into a chamber of deadly snakes. But rather than harm the boy, the serpents merely made their bodies into a comfortable bed for him. Finally, the king's sister, Holika, who had the boon of not being able to be harmed by fire, was summoned. The king placed his son on the funeral pyre in Holika's lap, but it was Holika that perished in the flames while Prahlada remained unscathed.

Finally, Lord Narasimha came to the rescue. In the form of the man-lion, he placed the king on his thighs at the entrance to his home at dusk and with his sharp claws, dispatched the asura-king, having successfully evaded the protections of the demon's boon. —

<sup>1</sup> Prahlada means "filled with joy".





## In the Frame: Archival Listing GRO 07



Archival listing GRO 07 was taken on the Hill just above Ramanasramam around 1942. TNV's eldest son, Sundaram (the current Ashram President) stands at Bhagavan's right and his younger brother Ganesan, to Bhagavan's left. Madhava Swami is directly behind Sri Bhagavan while Tiruppani Kuppuswami stands to his right.



Madhava Swami was an attendant who served from the late 1920's nearly up till the end of his life. He was said to have been telepathic to Bhagavan's wishes. In the early 1940s, he died at Kumbakonam but was believed by some to have reincarnated as the Ashram's white peacock.

V. Ganesan: Bhagavan's grand-nephew, seen here at the age of approximately six.



## Announcements: Navaratri 2016

On Friday 30th September, 2016 around 6pm, Goddess Yogambika will be taken out in procession and installed in the Mantapam. Arati will be performed around 6.45 pm. The Navaratri Festival commences on Saturday the 1st October with evening Veda Parayana taking place each day from 4.45 to 5.30pm followed by Tamil Parayanam at 5.30 and Navaratri puja at 6.15pm. Music programmes will take place on the nights of the 1-2 October, starting at 8.10pm in the Library Auditorium. All devotees are invited to attend.



## Ramana Satsang on WhatsApp

Join Ramana satsang on WhatsApp and stay connected. Members will receive notification of important events, ashram photos and inspirational quotes from Sri Ramanasramam. If interested add 9442221896 to mobile contacts and send "RAMANA" as WhatsApp message to that number.

