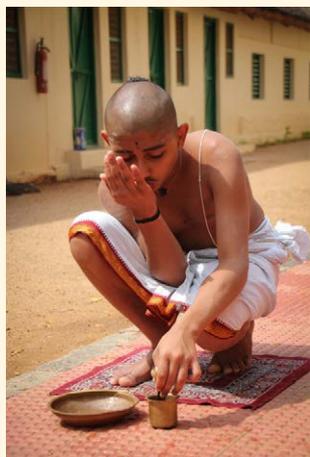
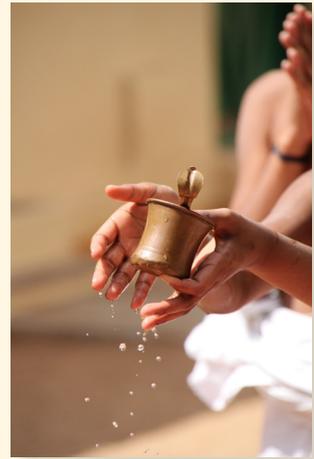


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

MAY 2018  
VOL. 12, NO. 5



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## Saranagati



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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Following the Gregorian calendar, the Ashram celebrated Bhagavan's Aradhana with a gathering outside the Nirvana room and the chanting of *Aksharamanamalai* on 14th April (see p. 8) while the main Aradhana Day observances are yet to be held (13th May.) Chitra Poornima fell on 29th April and brought lakhs of pilgrims to Tiruvannamalai. The Ashram fed about 8,000 on Poornima Day morning.

In this issue, we include an excerpt from a book by Ella Maillart, describing her years at Sri Ramanasramam (starting on p. 3). There is also a photo montage of the Ashram Vedapatasala on p. 7 and the cover insert by Chris James Dade at <[www.chrisjdade.com](http://www.chrisjdade.com)>.

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

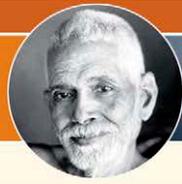
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

13th May (Sun) Bhagavan's 68th Aradhana  
19th May (Sat) Punarvasu  
29th May (Tues) Full Moon Day  
7th June (Thurs) Mahapuja  
16th June (Sat) Punarvasu  
24th June (Sun) Cow Lakshmi Day  
27th June (Weds) Full Moon Day

13th July (Fri) Punarvasu  
27th July (Fri) Guru Poornima/Full Moon  
9th August (Thurs) Punarvasu  
25th August (Sat) Full Moon Day  
1st September (Sat) Bhagavan's Advent Day  
2nd/3rd September Sri Krishna Jayanti/Gokulashtami  
6th September (Thurs) Punarvasu





## Ella on Life with Bhagavan

### Translated Excerpts from the French Edition of *Cruises and Caravans*

Editor's note: *While living at Sri Ramanasramam, Ella Maillart wrote and had published her memoir Cruises and Caravans, presenting the first copy to Bhagavan in February 1943. Accompanying the book was the following type-written letter: "Dear Bhagavan, here is the book you helped me to write during the summer before last. It is a 'war production', intended for young readers, and you may remember that the publishers had sent me, as a sample of that series, a book by the mountaineer Smythe. Once more I form the deep wish that after so many years spent in dealing with the external world—as you may see by gleaning through my autobiography—I shall make swift progress in discovering the inner life leading to You. — Yours, Ella. [Sri Ramanasramam, 9-2-43.]"*

*This original English edition is still available in the Ashram library with the accompanying note pasted on the inside of the front cover. In 1951, it was translated into French and published by Editions du Seuil under the title Croisieres et Caravanes<sup>1</sup>. At the end of this later edition, Ella had added a chapter entitled 'South India' in which she recounted her years at Sri Ramanasramam. It seems only fitting that the supplement to the book which Sri Ramana 'helped' Ella write should be made available to devotees, especially considering that the English edition is long out of print.*

*The following excerpts taken from the chapter in question are translated from the French by Marye Tonnaire.*

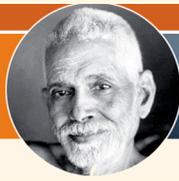
Since book learning never really suited me, my idea was to take some time living with a sage whose behaviour would oblige me to grasp what eluded me intellectually. I learned about two seemingly genuine spiritual masters from French friends who were familiar with India, one a doctor and the other who worked at 'La Societé des Nations'. True, the world was at war, but due to my nationality and lack of qualification, it seemed unlikely that I would be pulled into the fray. Of course, it was important to win the war and keep our freedom. The same thing had already happened in 1918. But most of us who came out of it safely didn't know what to do once we had become masters of our lives again.

The intense thirst for knowledge that many of us feel springs up from the very depths of our being; we are compelled to understand the meaning of life because it is not our destiny to remain ignorant.

There are three enigmas facing us: the world, ourselves and God. The world attracts us by its marvels and by its adorable beauty even before we start to feel that indeed it has a hidden meaning. We begin to study it; we go off to conquer it, looking for whatever satisfaction it could bring to our deepest desires. But none of the multiple aspects of the world can give us the fundamental answer. That can only come from God, and where else is God other than within us. Everyone has to discover this (fundamental) truth on their own.

<sup>1</sup> *Payot et Rivages* republished the 1951 French edition of the book in 1993 and again in 2003. They are contactable at Editions Payot et Rivages, 18 Rue Séguier, 75006 Paris, France, or at their website: <[www.payot-rivages.fr](http://www.payot-rivages.fr)>.





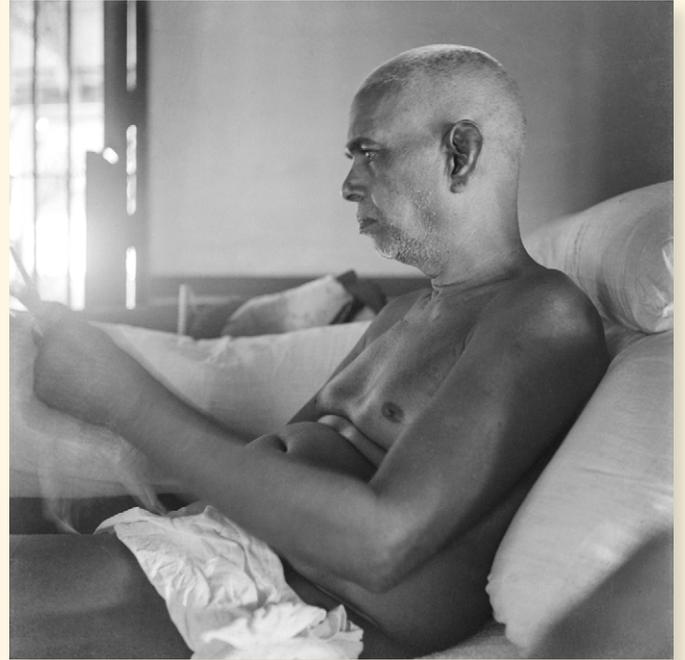
The spiritual being, hidden within us, is the living source of our deepest aspirations, and those aspirations will never be fulfilled unless (the deeper being) is liberated. In many of us, it is impotent, paralysed because it has been neglected, and the power to bring it back to life lies within the heart and not in the brain. I am not saying all this because someone taught it to me, but because I have experienced the truth of it on my own. It is in my view the most important truth that has emerged from everything that I have seen or understood; it is the sum of all my discoveries. Today I feel fulfilled, and even though I live alone, never again will I suffer from loneliness.

India for me was the beginning of a completely new voyage that would lead me to the full and harmonious life that I was instinctively looking for. To undertake this journey, first I had to understand the 'unknown lands' of my own spirit.

I was lucky enough to make a few hundred rupees from the screening of my film on Afghanistan in Bombay. I had taken leave for eighteen months so I could try to live like a Hindu in the south of this great country. That would give me enough time to decide whether Hindu wisdom suited me. I made several brief trips to Pondicherry where I went to visit Sri Aurobindo twice, but for a few minutes only and among several hundred disciples. The rest of the time the master would retire to his room on the first floor of a large, grey house surrounded by a flowery courtyard. This was not what I was looking for, and his method seemed too difficult for me.

On the other hand I wanted to prolong my stay near the sage Ramana Maharshi. His life was public. Anyone could approach him, ask him questions and enjoy the benefits of his presence that radiated goodness, distinction and immutable peace. And there, each one of us was free to do whatever we wanted, because, with the exception of meals, there was no set of rules for community life.

I got into the routine of staying for two hours each morning and each evening in the hall where around twenty people of both sexes were seated on the ground, legs crossed in silent meditation. I read

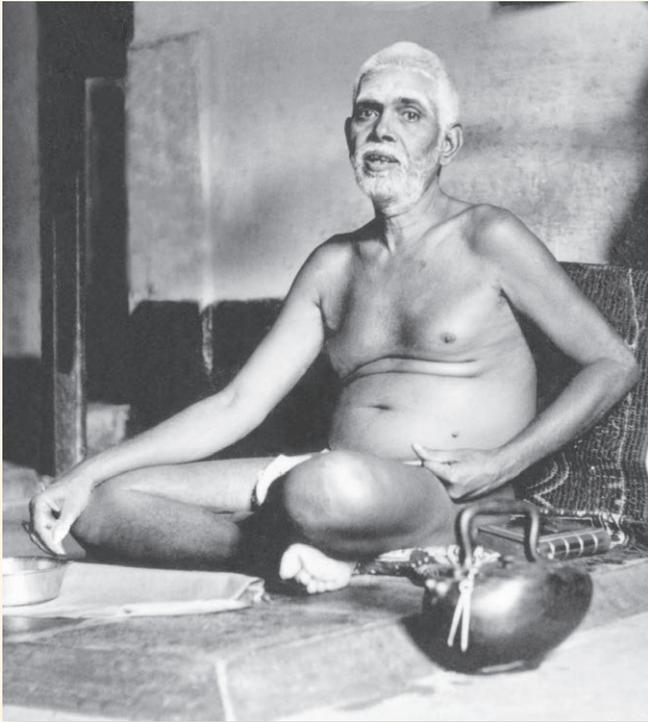


the little brochures where the main responses of the sage had been collected over the course of some thirty years. His function was to inform seekers about the nature of ultimate reality. And I tried to see if his replies corresponded with something I felt in myself.

I was continuously distracted by the spectacle around me that was so new and so different. Apart from the workers (who were taking care of the garden, the refectory, the kitchen and the stable) and the Ashram inmates (around twenty or so Indian disciples and four or five Europeans), there was also an incessant (flow) of poor, Tamilian farmers, both men and women, accompanied by their children, coming to bow before the Maharishi who was reclining on his sofa – the men, almost naked, laying flat on the floor in full prostration, the women kneeling, draped in their saris, their heads touching the ground; they offered the master either a few fruits or some sweets. An attendant would then return part of the consecrated offering to them.

While reading his mail or the newspapers, correcting proofs, fanning himself or meditating, the Maharishi would sometimes look at us or would smile at the astonished children who stood there frozen in front of him. He would often give nuts to the agile squirrels perched on the top of his sofa, or else his favourite cow would drop in to ask for a banana.





Every morning and evening, a group of Brahmins chanted the holy scriptures. At a fixed time the sage would take a short walk in the surrounding area, and it was on these occasions that we could speak to him in private. At eleven o'clock we would all eat in his presence, curry-rice served on banana leaves spread out on the red-tiled floor. The right hand alone was used to carry the food up to the mouth. According to the rules of caste, the Brahmins ate apart, separated by a screen. The Maharishi was seated so as to see everyone; he had been born a Brahmin but, because he was a sage, 'liberated while alive' as they say in India, he was beyond all caste observances.

The Ashram was about fifteen minutes from the little town of Tiruvannamalai where I had rented a tiny room for five rupees a month. At night I would unroll my sleeping bag on the terrace, since my room was stifling due to the hot sun of the day.

It was quite close to the big temple dedicated to Shiva, built in the Dravidian style particular to South India. There were three square courtyards one inside the other, and in the middle of each wall arose a gopuram, an immense, truncated, pyramid covered with sculptures representing the Hindu pantheon.

The most important feature of my landscape was the sacred Hill, Arunachala, a great heap of granite

blocks whose steep slopes came to an abrupt halt some fifty metres from my place. This Hill was venerated as the symbol of the god Shiva in his aspect of divine fire, the destroyer or the one who grants supreme liberation. The summit of the Hill arose some 500 metres above the town; the view and the breeze that one enjoyed there was well worth the exhausting climb in such an unbearably hot, tropical climate. It was the name of this famous Mountain that drew the Maharishi, aged sixteen at the time, from the town of Madurai to Tiruvannamalai.

Although he was a normal schoolboy, particularly skilled in sports, it happened that one fine day he began to question not only the utility of his studies but also, more importantly, what is death. After lying down on the ground, and with the extraordinary power of concentration particular to Hindus, he enacted the death of his body and of his mental activities. He then entered into a state beyond words – Unlimited Being, where death no longer exists. Afterwards he tried to express this revelation conceptually in saying that the pure and immobile 'I' finally could radiate in all its dazzling glory.

After this incident he stopped identifying with his thoughts or with his body which he sometimes called 'this thing'. Then, a few weeks later he left Madurai for the holy Hill, Arunachala. There, without intention, and for several months, he was totally absorbed by the limitlessness of his being while good people would come and force food into his mouth to nourish him. Later on his relative being seemed to take up normal life again. He had learned how to see clearly into himself; he could reply to the questions people asked him in a way so overwhelmingly truthful and rich from his own direct experience that philosophers and pundits came to ask him to explain obscure passages in the sacred Scriptures.

Surrounded by those who became his first disciples, he lived for a long time in the caves on the Mountain before the buildings were constructed where I came to meet him at the foot of this same mountain. Each day I would leave the town and go to the Ashram, sheltering myself from the blazing sun under a black umbrella like a well-to-do Hindu. Each day I meditated, listened to the telegraphic answers given by the sage or else just





noticed that some of my problems were disappearing even before I could formulate them. It was as if they were resolving themselves. I often consulted two of the disciples who knew English very well when I wanted to understand a classical text or again to clarify some statements that appeared to be contradictory. We can never know that by which we know. However, that is the only immovable element underlying all of our changing experiences. It is that which allows us to feel the fullness of a mysterious reality within. If we fear that the world of the senses is either going to fascinate us or disappoint us, there is no use in becoming an ascetic who renounces everything through sheer will power. No, armed with patience we must, on the contrary, continue to live a normal life and at the same time enquire into the nature of this 'I' that surges up each time we say: "I think", "I ask", "I feel", "I am".

One can't say that this investigation is egotistical because it contributes to the destruction of our ego—the false entity that divides and separates us from our true being—and we can try to define the latter by the words 'love' and 'light' [or] 'unlimited consciousness'. By constantly unmasking this false entity we will be able to establish ourselves in our true being. The implacable division of our world into subject and object will disappear; then there will be only absolute unity and all our problems will go. Life will seem to go on as usual by itself, but the relative life will be completely transformed by our absolute knowledge.

This is why the Maharishi was able to behave in a totally different way from his attendants and followers when they were attacked by thieves—categories, divisions, oppositions, possessions, didn't exist for him, and he had the same right attitude towards all who crossed his path. Everyone was completely overwhelmed by his presence.

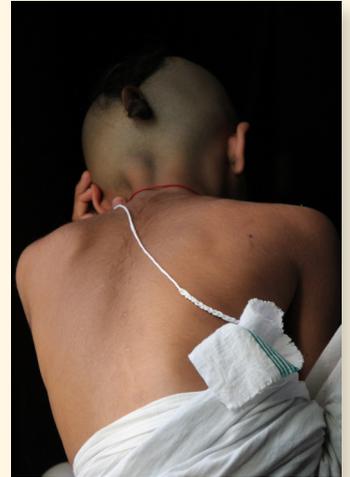
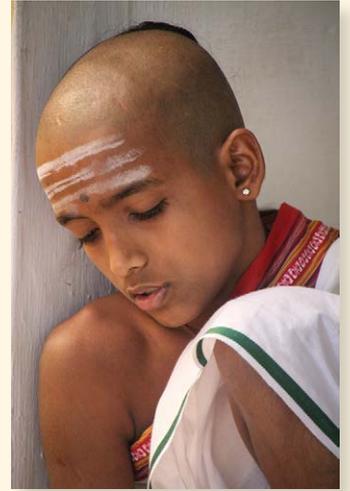
We should not seek the immutable peace that we yearn for in the relative world around us, a world that exists by virtue of opposing principles that are in perpetual conflict—life and death, night and day, hot and cold, evolution and involution. This peace lies within us, in the part of us that transcends and precedes the existence of the relative world, that

which permeates the three states of our lives—the waking, dream and deep sleep states.

I was reading lots of other things but they didn't help me enough. What counted above and beyond everything else were the eyes of the Maharishi when he looked at me, a look so noble and so magnificent that one had to ask oneself what was he seeing! So something cracked in my heart, my thoughts stopped, almost and a grateful certitude accompanied by a wave of love flooded my chest. Finally I was able to love without any restriction ... to love without asking for anything in return ... to love for the joy of loving.

These brief and rare moments gave way to dry and critical thoughts, but they also gave me patience and courage. However, there were many unanswered questions that remained in me: I knew that the Maharishi did not take all this into consideration and furthermore his explanations in English were never very long ... The questions are defence mechanisms that we should know how to demolish so as to liberate the reality which has always been latent in us. In fact, if reality is a result that is to be gained by a specific action, it could also be lost! This 'demolition' or transformation of our criticism or objections can take more or less time according to the person. The work is as vast as life itself since it includes the analysis of our being which is physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The same ultimate principle of unlimited consciousness underlies all the aspects of our being; and only the rare person who is established in this supreme consciousness is capable of guiding us effectively. But here is not the place to go into a lengthy explanation of this method. All I had managed to understand was that for most westerners, harmony, love for one's neighbour and wisdom are inaccessible as long as the most important part of us continues to be ignored or else smothered by our secular lives which are focused solely on obtaining a security that cannot exist on the material level. For the first time I can accept this without fighting it, because I have started to understand the absurdity of our world and the absurdity of the efforts that up to now I had blindly made to try and reach deep harmony. —





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## Ashram Veda Patasala (part I)

For millennia, the four Vedas were recited and transmitted orally, never finding their way into written form. Even today, *sruti*—meaning ‘that which is heard’ or ‘inner hearing’—is the name for Vedic scripture and underscores the oral nature of their transmission.

The Rishis of ancient times sought ways to ensure preservation of the purity and sanctity of the sastra and thus devised various *pathas* or modes of recitation to guarantee accurate transmission across the generations.

At Ramanasramam, the Vedic school founded in 1934 has flourished over the decades and now houses more than two dozen Vedic students whose days are filled with recitation of the Krishna Yajur Veda. —





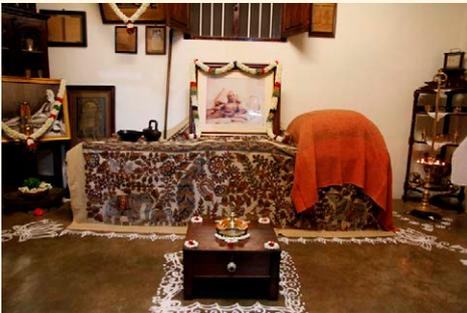
## Ashram Heritage Sites: The Nirvana Room

The Nirvana Room was originally funded as a bathroom for Sri Ramanasramam's lady devotees by Janaki Matha, a devotee from Pudu Gramam, Palghat, who later built her ashram in Thanjavur. The bathroom lay to one side of the building and the other was used as linen storage and as a changing room. As construction of the Mother Shrine neared completion, it was decided that the New Hall should be added at the front of it (which is why the Mother's Shrine gopuram is situated midway through the Mother's Shrine-New Hall complex). Now, with the structure extending outwards, it was agreed that the bathroom should be demolished. But before this happened, a much more important use was found for it.

After Bhagavan's fourth surgery in August 1949, the high stone step at the entrance to the New Hall presented a formidable logistical challenge, as not only his frailty from the sarcoma and related surgeries, but also the rheumatism in his left knee had continued to worsen, making climbing the steps difficult. Around Navaratri time in October, Bhagavan went into the bathroom and, emerging from it, sat down in the small linen storage room, not having the strength to go any further. Thus, it was decided that he should be spared the trouble of negotiating the steps any longer, especially during the night, and should take his rest in the storage room itself. This meant that Bhagavan only had to cross the New Hall steps during the day. In time, even this proved too much for Bhagavan who eventually took up residence in the linen room, from where he continued to give darshan. Each day the blinds were raised and devotees would file past since the room was too small to admit large numbers of devotees. —



## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nirvana Room Chanting



On the morning of 14th April, 2018, devotees celebrated the Tamil New Year with the reading of the *panchangam* ('almanac') in Bhagavan's Shrine in the early afternoon. Kramaparayana began at 4.30pm in observance of Masasivaratri which was celebrated with special puja at 6pm. Sri Chakra Puja was scheduled early in order for all to gather at Bhagavan's Nirvana Room at 8.15 pm to sing *Aksharamanamalai* in devout remembrance of Bhagavan's earthly departure at 8.47 pm on 14th April, 1950, when the bright shooting star transited the sky overhead. —





## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Spiritual Sharing by Sri V. Ganesan



We are happy to announce that Sri V. Ganesan will be holding regular “Spiritual Sharing” sessions in the morning within the Ashram premises. President V. S. Ramanan inaugurated the event on 27th April, 2018 to be held daily from 9.30 am to 10.45 am. The sessions are being conducted in the Old Mountain Path office room, adjacent to the Ashram Archives. —

## Best Shot: The Play of Light in the New Hall



This was captured by Dev Gogoi last September. He recalls the moment: *Quietly, and without fanfare, twice every year, as the planets align and, if the morning weather is clear, the sun pours directly into the Mother’s Temple, illuminating the New Hall in this striking manner. It was a perfect Ramana moment when a devotee walked into the frame, paused at the threshold, and raised a namaskaram to the deity within. No time to think, only to act. Instantly tapped the shutter release button. Such is luck!* —

## Announcements: Ashram YouTube Channel

Sri Ramanasramam has its own YouTube channel and is regularly posting videos of events. Please visit us at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam>

