

# Saranagathi



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## In this Issue

Dear Sri Bhagavan Devotees,

It is with a heavy heart that we write this. On 14<sup>th</sup> August 2010, Ravi Ramanan, the leading member of our Editorial Team and youngest son of the Ashram President Sri V. S. Ramanan, was absorbed in Arunachala. Ravi faced his two year battle against brain cancer with remarkable courage and dignity. The passing on was peaceful, a sure sign of Sri Bhagavan's boundless Grace! As we work on this issue of Saranagathi we can feel Ravi's quiet presence guiding and encouraging us to continue doing 'Bhagavan's Work'.

The Attendants Series continues with an article about T.P. Ramachandra Iyer, a native of Tiruvannamalai who had the good fortune of serving Sri Bhagavan during the last two years of His bodily existence. This is followed by Sri V Kameswara Rao's 'How I came to the Maharshi' culled from the

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Mountain Path archives. Finally we have Reports from Sri Ramanasramam.

Please send your emails to [saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org](mailto:saranagathi@sriramanamaharshi.org)

In Sri Bhagavan

The Editorial Team

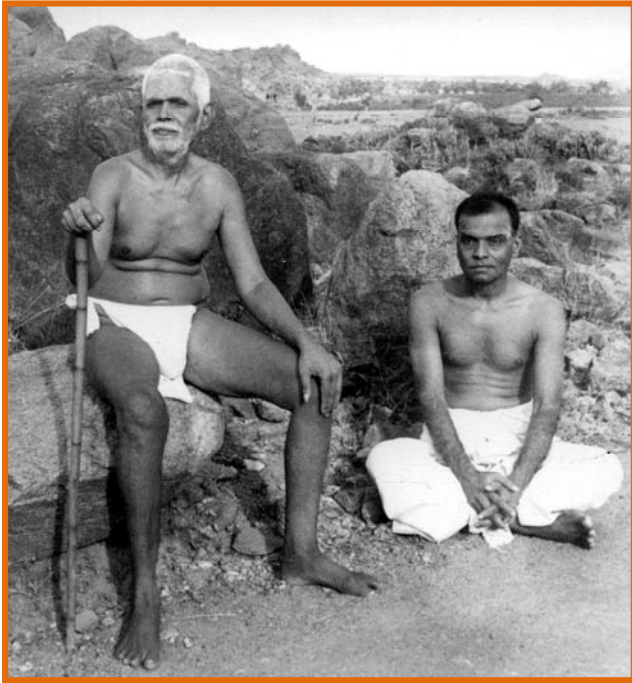
## The Essence of Instruction

*That is true knowledge which transcends  
Both knowledge and ignorance,  
For in pure knowledge  
Is no object to be known.*

– Upadesa Saram by Sri Bhagavan (Verse 27)

## T. P. Ramachandra Iyer

*T.P.Ramachandra Iyer was a native of Tiruvannamalai. His interest in religion and philosophy led him to Sri Ramana in the 1920s. As a lawyer in Madras, he handled much of the Ashram's legal work. He also served as an interpreter and as an attendant in the Maharshi's hall. The following article was published in the July 1966 issue of The Mountain Path.*



Sri T. P. Ramachandra Iyer whose native home is Tiruvannamalai itself, has been an earnest devotee of Sri Bhagavan from very early times. He hails from an ancient orthodox Brahmin family who for generations were well known in Tiruvannamalai for their traditional learning, discipline and piety. Endearingly known and called merely as 'TPR' by Sri Bhagavan and others, he has lived as one of Sri Bhagavan's 'family' here for decades. Unobtrusive by nature and silent in disposition, his has been an austere life of service and surrender at the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan in whom he found his refuge and guide which was the haven of his desire. This he attributes to his *purva-samskaras* and the spiritual tradition of his ancestors.

Sri Bhagavan has narrated an incident of 1896, the year of his arrival in Tiruvannamalai, when he was staying in the precincts of Sri Arunachala Temple. TPR's grandfather, an elderly and pious person who used to visit him daily, one day, out of affection and regard, conducted him to his house and gave a

ceremonial meal in the householder's manner. This was the only house which Sri Bhagavan entered to take *biksha* in the usual way after he had left his Madurai home. This information was given in full detail by Sri Maharshi himself.

Apart from the advantages of his traditional and parental discipline, TPR also received an English education which equipped him for the profession of law. This was far from his natural aptitudes or reflective bent of mind; however, in later years it proved a blessing in disguise as, from 1933 for over 10 years, some disgruntled persons embarked upon a spate of litigation against the Ashram and TPR unstintingly devoted himself and his time to defending the interest of the Ashram as an act of service till successful conclusion. This activity gave him still greater opportunities for close associations with Sri Bhagavan.

In his early days TPR ever felt a burning desire to come upon one who could truly harness his entire Being and guide him to greater strength. His learning and ancestral disciplines could not help understand the dilemma of life's activities — the pleasures of ordinary life and activity on the one hand and fear and misery of death seen all around on the other. He had come into contact with a few persons such as a Swami of the Ramakrishna Order, Dr. Annie Besant and later Sri Kavyakanta Ganapathi Muni, who voluntarily gave him a mantra for japa, which he never used. It was in this state of mind, prompted by a close relative who was already a permanent inmate of the Ashram, that he inducted himself to Sri Bhagavan's presence. He had seen Sri Bhagavan many a time as a boy, when Sri Bhagavan was in his Hill abodes, but then prompted by simple curiosity or youngster's desire for the sugar-candy or plantains

freely distributed in his presence. He had questioned a relative of his such as whether Sri Bhagavan would read into his mind and see into his past, present and future and so on. His relative bade him go to the Swami and ask him all these.

Then in TPR's own words: "I entered Sri Bhagavan's hall in this frame of mind and looked at him. That is all. Sri Bhagavan very graciously looked at me in all expectancy as it were, and full of benign compassion — yes, he looked into the very core of my Being. He was sensing my entire Being. I fell flat in prostration to him with an experience as totally consuming as it was convincing. A discovery that 'He' whom I was hankering for, all these years, who could sway my entire Being and guide my energy, was here. So great, yet so simple was this. I rose up and Sri Bhagavan smiled again and bade me be seated. All the emotions, thoughts, surging doubts were nowhere! I felt, I had found my refuge, which was the greatest fortune of my life. It was a conviction born of instant experience by His grace."

The present Ashram, almost from its inception has grown and developed to his knowledge and he has been actively associated with every branch of its growth, while maintaining close contact with Sri Bhagavan and depending on him for guidance. Few have had this privilege of moving with Sri Bhagavan for so many years with the ease and freedom of a devoted son to an affectionate parent. This gave him ample opportunities of receiving instruction, and guidance directly or indirectly from Sri Bhagavan. In later years, it also led to his being helpful in interpreting Sri Bhagavan's utterances to some of the western devotees and those who did not know Tamil.

He has a precious collection of books, including all Sri Bhagavan's writings from their earliest stages in manuscript form to the revised printed editions. Most of them bear Sri Bhagavan's touch and some contain entries in his own hand, by way of addition, alteration and correction. TPR was also instrumental in seeing through the press a few editions of Sri Bhagavan's

early works, particularly the 3rd edition of '*Sri Ramana Nool Tkirattu*' ('The Collected Works of Sri Maharshi' in Tamil).

It was during the period 1935 to 1945 that TPR had the best of his life at the Ashram, constantly benefiting from Sri Bhagavan's uplifting influence. Indeed, he felt by then that there could be nothing more important or useful for his future than to serve Sri Bhagavan till the end. When Sri Bhagavan's fatal physical affliction appeared for the first time, ending in an operation, and then recurred, TPR made up his mind and wound up his practice and interests in Madras. Thereafter he was fortunate enough to join the small band of attendants who looked after Sri Bhagavan's personal comforts and needs. During the whole two years the illness lasted, he stayed permanently with him and the opportunities of service he had are treasured by him. He was helpfully assisting the doctors in attendance during the anxious months preceding the 14th April 1950 by his instructive guidance and meticulous attention to prescribed routines.

When asked to put in clear terms what he meant by the impact of Sri Bhagavan's grace on him, TPR said: "I am not left with any sense of want or void in internal strength. This is the direct result of a conviction instilled by experience by the Grace of Sri Bhagavan and it should be so with everyone who has sought his Grace."

Like other old devotees of Sri Bhagavan, TPR shuns publicity. But anyone coming in contact with him will immediately perceive how great his devotion to Sri Bhagavan is and how deep his understanding of his teaching. It is our good fortune that he resides here making himself available to all those who want to have a glimpse of what Sri Bhagavan is and what the word 'Grace' can really mean!

*(Sri T.P.Ramachandra Iyer attained the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavan on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1976 in Bangalore.)*

## How I came to the Maharshi

By V. Kameswara Rao (From 'The Mountain Path', April 1966)



I had a dream one night many years back in which a saintly old man with a short white beard blessed me with his benign and radiant smile and beckoned me to him. Sunrise put an end to sleep and dream alike and I woke to find myself back in the dull routine of life. I went into the kitchen to tell my wife of my happy experience, but I could not identify the saint I had seen. Could it be Ramana Maharshi, about whom I had read in a book called 'Self -Realization'? I asked a friend of mine who often went there whether he would take me with him and he agreed. We set off that very day, arriving at Tiruvannamalai next morning.

I found the Ashram a quiet place with a few cottages and a meditation hall. We went straight into the hall and there on a couch sat the Maharshi, the saint of my dream, clad only in a loincloth. I felt that I was in the presence of a god. I fell prostrate before Bhagavan (for this was the name my friend used in addressing him). A group of silent men and women were seated on the floor on either side of him. Close to him an elderly bearded man was sitting binding a small book by hand.

Bhagavan asked me whether I had had my coffee, so I went out and had a bath and breakfast. When I got

back I found that Bhagavan himself was stitching the book. I wondered why he should do it, and then I noticed how carefully he worked at it and showed the bearded man how to do it. God is all perfection. When a man realizes Godhead he also attains perfection, he also pays full attention to every detail. That was the thought that came to me when I saw Bhagavan binding a book.

When we went for lunch Bhagavan sat facing two groups of devotees, Brahmins to his right and non-Brahmins and non-Hindus to his left. I heard him tell the server that the rice was not well cooked. I was told that he himself was a good cook and had often worked in the Ashram kitchen.

As a government servant I had to pass an examination in a second language within a prescribed period. The term was only a few months off. I decided to take it in Tamil, although I knew very little of the language. I was a bit worried about it, so I told an older devotee that I would like to have Bhagavan's blessings for my success. He took me to Bhagavan late in the evening and I prostrated and told Bhagavan my trouble and asked for his blessing. He replied "*parava illai*", "don't worry", which made me feel very happy. He advised me to take the little book *Nan Yar* (Who am I?) printed in English, Tamil and Telugu (my own language) and read it with the help of a Tamil tutor.

I woke early next morning and felt happy, waiting till sunrise should enable me to buy the books at the Ashram bookstall. The night I first dreamed of Bhagavan sunrise seemed to come too soon, but now I could hardly wait for it.

Bhagavan passed outside the cottage where I was staying next morning. I went and prostrated before him and asked his permission to leave. He gave it but asked why I was in such a hurry. My friend expressed a doubt whether I should be able to go that day, in view of what Bhagavan had said; but I had to get back. So after I had bought the books we

went to the station in the Ashram bullock-cart. When we got there, however, I was told that there was a two-day strike on the railway, so we went back and told Bhagavan. He smiled. Two days later I again asked for leave to go and he said "very well". This time we walked to the station and a cart followed us with our baggage. When we arrived the train was already in but the cart was not yet in sight, so I thought I would surely miss the train. But Bhagavan had, said "very well" so I felt I should stop the train and indeed travel very well. I therefore went to the station master and told him that this was my second attempt to leave the Ashram and asked him to detain the train for a few minutes till my baggage arrived, and he agreed.

Once I was in the train I fell to pondering. When Bhagavan had asked me why I was in a hurry to leave I couldn't leave although I tried. When he gave the all clear the train was stopped to take me. It worked both ways. He had also assured me of success in my Tamil test although I knew scarcely a word of the language and the test was to be held in a few months. I felt that it was hardly worthwhile engaging a tutor, but experience told me that Bhagavan was dependable. The train journey was sufficient proof. So when I got home, I engaged a tutor and stayed at home during the summer recess of the law-courts, reading 'Who am I?' in Tamil. The written test came along. I had to translate an English speech into Tamil, and somehow I passed. Then there was the more frightening oral test in Madras, but it was made very easy and I passed that too.

From one point of view this whole test seemed to me useless, since there was no likelihood of my ever serving in Tamilnad; but from another point of view it was a very necessary experience, since it confirmed my faith in Bhagavan. I could only judge him on my own level and in the light of my own experience, even if it was nothing more than a train journey or a Tamil test.

In February 1949 my eldest son had a severe attack of smallpox. After a few days the doctor warned me

that many people were dying of it and the chances of recovery were slight. I sat at the boy's bedside reading religious poems so as to keep his mind on God, since he was not expected to live. Then, on February 4th, the idea suddenly came to me to ask Bhagavan for his blessings, as we were in great distress. So I wrote to him:

*Beloved Bhagavan,*

*I pray for your blessings on the suffering child and his parents.*

*Ever at your feet,  
V. Kameswara Rao.*

Early next morning my sister, who had been taking her turn sitting by the boy during the night, told my wife and me that she had had a vision of Ammavaru (the spirit of smallpox) leaving our house and asking her to take care of the boy. She gathered from that, in accordance with popular belief, that the boy would recover and no one else in the house get the disease. A few hours later a friend came in and gave me some sacred ashes from Sri Ramanasramam. Another good omen. We all began to feel hopeful. On the 8th I received the following letter from the Ashram:

*Dear Sri Kameswara Rao,*

*We have your letter of the 4th inst. and the same was perused by Bhagavan. Prasadam (sacred ash) is herewith sent with Sri Bhagavan's gracious blessings for your child laid up with pox.*

*Sri Bhagavan and bhaktas are well.*

*Venkataraman, for Sarvadhikari.*

The letter thrilled me, but how did Bhagavan know that my son had smallpox? Why ask? How could I know how Bhagavan knew? Anyway, my son survived and is in good health.

*(To be continued...)*

## Reports from Sri Ramanasramam

### Kunjuswami Day

Sri Kunjuswami's Samadhi day was observed solemnly at the Ashram on Saturday 7th August 2010. At 7.30 a.m. Upadesa Saram, Bhagavad Gita Saram and Sad-darshanam of Sri Bhagavan in Malayalam were recited. At 10 a.m. Sri Bhagavan's Aksharamanamalai was recited by a large number of devotees including those who came all the way from Palghat, Kerala after which puja was offered to the lingam at Swamiji's Samadhi. At its conclusion Prasad was distributed.



### Ravi Ramanan

A Satsang was held at the Ashram President's residence on Saturday the 21st of August 2010 on the eighth day of Ravi Ramanan's Absorption in Bhagavan. Sri V.S. Ramanan, Susila Ramanan, Ranjani Ravi Ramanan, her mother Mangalam, daughters Rasika and Raksha, and many relatives and other devotees of Bhagavan were present. Nochur Sri Venkataraman spoke on the occasion when he expressed his heart-felt feelings to Ranjani and other bereaved members of the family and proceeded to explain how devotees of Bhagavan may effectively face such a crisis in the light of Bhagavan's teaching. He began by saying that he knew the mental agony of one who loses a dear one, especially at a young age. His sister's husband passed away young last year and the agony lingers in his heart. However, as devotees of Bhagavan we have no choice but to listen to his words and live by them and attain the highest goal of life. Bhagavan's own life and his teachings give us very precious insights into the phenomenon of death.

In fact, Death is the most important happening in Sri Bhagavan's life. About the middle of July in the year 1896, young Venkataraman, not yet 17, took on Death, as it were, vanquished It and came out of the experience as a Deathless One. No more, to him, the sense of identity with the body, no more the personal I, no more duality. From that moment, the timeless time, he abided as the Self uninterruptedly throughout the

rest of his life. After the Death Experience, he remained in form without form (*vadivilaavadivaanavan*) to show us in the most dramatic and telling manner that there is no death. The body may go, but “are we the body?”

Kathopanishad, one of the most important Upanishads, is in the form of a dialogue with death, the dialogue of young Nachiketa with Lord Yama. This Upanishad may be called a brief biography of young Ramana. Nachiketa asked Yama to tell him how death may be conquered and Yama taught him how to conquer it with the (Nachiketa) fire. Venkataraman conquered Death with the fire of *Jnana Vichaara*.

Bhagavan is the supreme symbol of *jnana* and peace. Peace is our real nature and Bhagavan is our own true nature. In that supreme state, there is neither joy nor sorrow. Bhagavan has said that peace is itself *mukti*, liberation. If we live by Bhagavan’s words, peace is inevitable. For one who has found that supreme inner peace, what can health and ill-health matter? For these pertain to body and mind whereas peace is the very nature of Self. Death and birth are only moving shadows on the screen of the Self. By doing Self-enquiry or by surrendering to Bhagavan, we can conquer the fear and sorrow of death once and for all.

Bhagavan has poured his Grace on Ravi like a torrent. Ravi was totally devoted to Bhagavan and identified himself with the interests of the Ashram. It is for us to realize that Bhagavan’s ways cannot be comprehended by our finite minds and accept whatever happens. His basic teaching “Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it,” is like a *mantra*, which, when followed in actual practice, is sure to give us peace. Bhagavan’s basic teaching, quoted above, is a Cosmic Law and death and birth happen in nature strictly according to that Law. Ravi’s illness and death were according to that Law. But Bhagavan’s *arul* (Grace) made it so sacred that his own parents and his wife could feel its sacredness and maintain an amazing inner calmness and composure at the moment of the happening and afterwards. This shows how deep was Ravi’s devotion to Bhagavan and how abundant is Bhagavan’s Grace on the whole family.

What is death? Well, it can aptly be viewed as an acronym of Divine Eater And Teacher of Humanity. Devotees of Bhagavan, of course, see it as Absorption in Arunachala Ramana. How can we be afraid of or mourn such Absorption? We were all, of course, praying for Ravi’s complete cure. However, the way it has happened, the way he faced the challenge over a period of two years and the incredible calmness and dignity with which he left his body must awaken us all to the real meaning of death and the purpose of life. In other words, we should take Bhagavan’s teachings ever more seriously and live by them. Bhagavan never minced matters, certainly not on the subject of death. He told everyone, young or old, devotee or a visitor, that “Body is another name of death”. So long as we nurse the idea that “I am the body”, we are wedded to death. The only way to deathlessness, to immortality is by realizing the Self which is ever bodiless, ever free, ever blissful, eternal and of the very nature of peace.