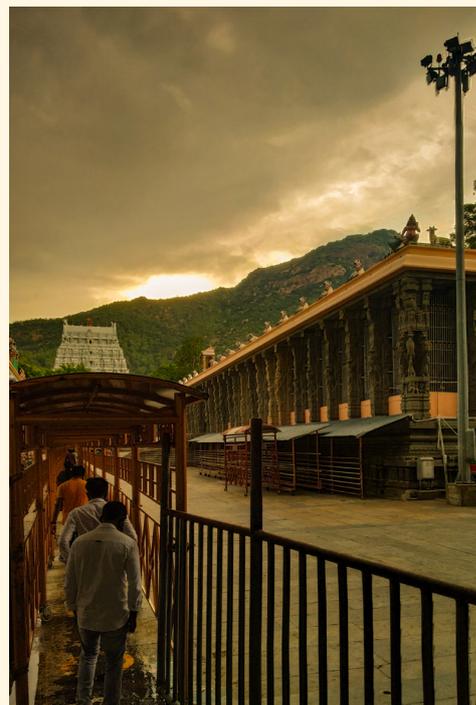
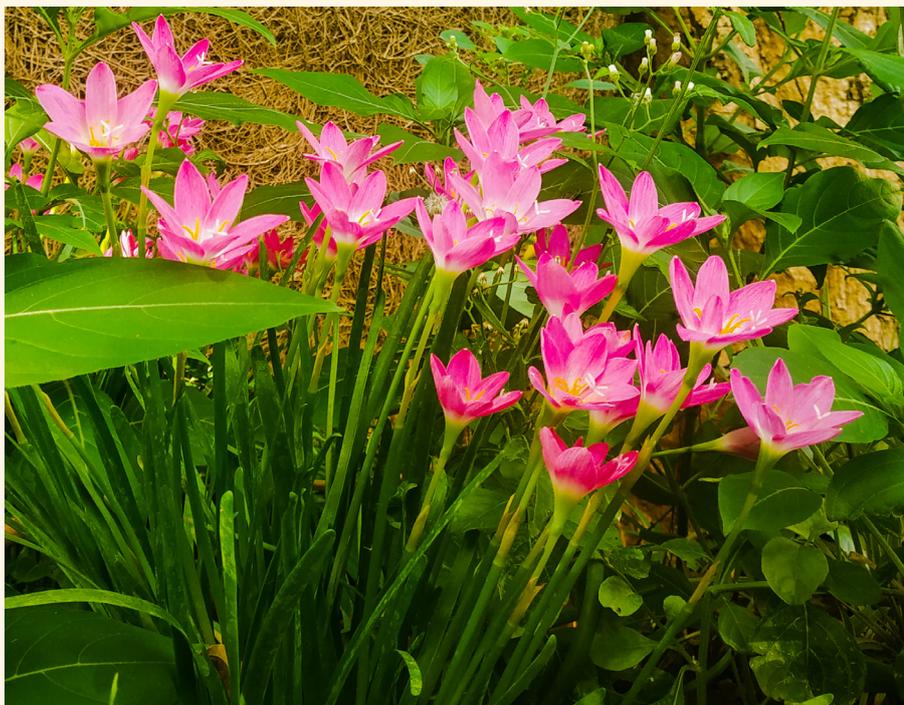
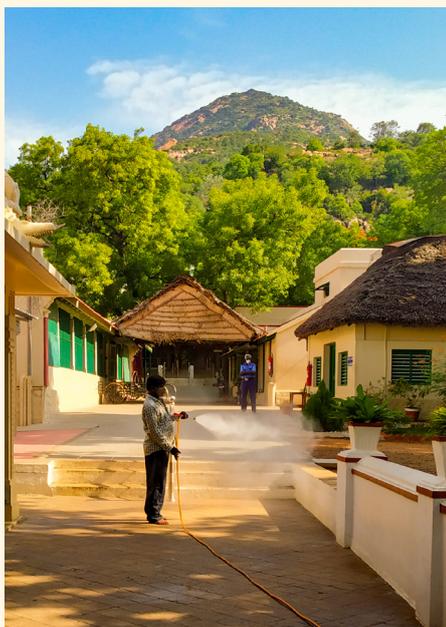


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

ADVENT, SEPTEMBER 2020
VOL. 14, NO. 9



D. Thiyagarajan



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The Ashram's 124th Advent celebrations on the morning of 1st September were upbeat in contrast to the trials the Ashram faced in the month of August, which included the loss of one of its volunteer staff members to Covid-19. The virus seems to have come to Tiruvannamalai in earnest and residents everywhere are encouraged to practice social distancing and mask-wearing at all times. But if the world is showing signs of lockdown burn-out, this is no less true for Tiruvannamalai as residents scramble to have things get back to normal with the Big Temple reopening, even if only in a limited way. Health officials are communicating the danger just now and for the coming weeks as the numbers have never been worse.

In this issue of *Saranagati*, we remember the life of Swami Satyananda, Bhagavan's attendant in the late 1940s, as well as look at the impact of Covid-19 on devotees.

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

The Editorial Team

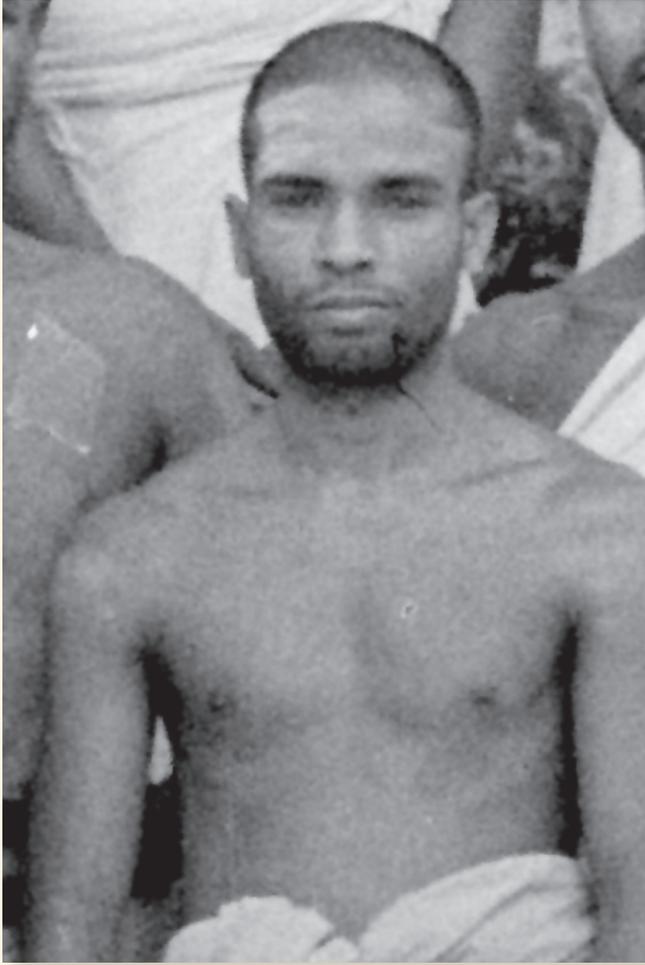
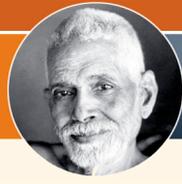
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Calendar of Events Celebrated at Home (for the time being)

1st September (Tues) Bhagavan's 124th Advent Day
2nd September (Weds) Full Moon
13th September (Sun) Punarvasu
2nd October (Fri) Full Moon
10th October (Tues) Punarvasu
17th October (Sat) Navaratri Commences
25th October (Sun) Saraswati Puja

26th October (Mon) Vijayadasami
31st October (Fri) Full Moon
6th November (Fri) Punarvasu
14th November (Sat) Deepavali
20th November (Sat) Deepam Festival Commences
29th November (Sun) Kartigai Deepam Day/Full Moon
31st December (Sun) Bhagavan's Jayanti





IN PROFILE

Swami Satyananda

[It had been Narayana Rao, living at Kalaiyar Koil mutt (near Mana Madurai), who directed Satyananda Swami to visit Bhagavan during Satyananda's pilgrimage to Kalaiyar Koil.

Satyananda came to Tiruvannamalai at the age of 22 and lived on Arunachala for his first eight years. In 1946, he moved down to Palakotthu where he got the unique opportunity of his life, serving Bhagavan as personal attendant. In this role, he had nearly continuous darshan of the Master from 1946-April 1950, spending long hours through the day and many a night with Sri Bhagavan. Kunjuswami once spoke at length about the unique experience and great honour of being continuously in Bhagavan's presence. He writes:

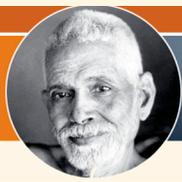
"Bhagavan used to sleep on the sofa in the hall while I and a few other attendants used to sleep on the floor near it. Regularly at half past three in the morning Bhagavan got up and went out for his ablutions. As soon as he got up from the sofa one of us would give him the torch which was kept for his use. But not once was it necessary for Bhagavan to call us by name or wake us up and ask for the torch. The moment he got up, we also used to wake up without any special effort on our part. Bhagavan's look in our direction produced a sense of brilliant light in us and we used to wake up at once. Bhagavan never ordered his servants about. He preferred to do everything for himself, but the attendants would always anticipate his wishes and do what was necessary."

In the 1940s, Madhava Swami took up the job of attending on Bhagavan, and when Bhagavan's health showed a decline, Krishnaswami, Rangaswami and Sivanandam joined him, taking turns. During the later years when a tumour appeared on Sri Bhagavan's left arm, it was Satyananda, Dr. Srinivasa Rao, Dr. Ananta Narayana Rao, T.P. Ramachandra Iyer and Venkataratnam who took care of Bhagavan. The following is an account from Swami Satyananda given after Bhagavan's Mahanirvana.]

I was born in 1916 in a village named Mavelikara in South Kerala. My mother was of a pious disposition and used to serve sadhus and was happy to help them in various ways. Her piety made me turn to the spiritual path when I was only eighteen. I ran a small school for children on the veranda of our house. After four years I went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram in the company of some sadhus. In the course of my pilgrimage, I halted at an abode of sadhus called Pandikkan Mazhi Matham situated between Madurai and Manamadurai. This matham was managed by one Narayanaswami who had stayed at Sri Ramanasramam for some time. He was the first person who spoke to me about Sri Bhagavan and his greatness. He wrote out the full address of Sri Ramanasramam on a piece of paper and gave it to me.

From Rameswaram I came directly to Tiruvannamalai. This was in 1938. I was overcome with joy when I saw Arunachala. After spending a few days at Virupaksha Cave, I came down to Sri





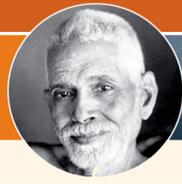
Ramanasramam in the company of a sadhu. When we arrived, Sri Bhagavan had just returned from his afternoon walk and was sitting in the hall alone. He looked at us and smiled. I could never forget that smile. After sitting in his presence for some time, I returned to the cave. Thereafter I used to visit the Ashram daily and have Bhagavan's darshan. I changed my abode from Virupaksha Cave to Mango Tree Cave and Skandaramam from time to time and spent seven years in this manner, begging my food in the town. I then obtained, by Sri Bhagavan's Grace, the good fortune of serving him as his personal attendant from 1946 till his final Nirvana on 14th April 1950. One day Sri Bhagavan described to me how one Sadguru Swami from Kerala, under the influence of some intoxicating drug, kept on embracing him tightly saying, "You are a good boy. It is a pleasure to see you." Sri Bhagavan acted the part of the sadhu

in his inimitable way while narrating the incident. I was alone with him at the time and still remember the scene with joy.

I was present when the tumour on Sri Bhagavan's arm was operated upon in 1949. Although I cannot stand the sight of blood, I managed somehow to control myself. On the evening of the 14th of April 1950, we were massaging Sri Bhagavan's body. At about 5 o'clock, he asked us to help him sit up. Precisely at that moment devotees started singing *Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva*. When Sri Bhagavan heard this his face lit up with radiant joy. Tears began to flow from his eyes and continued to flow for a long time. I was wiping them from time to time. I was also giving him spoonful's of water boiled with ginger.

The doctor wanted to administer artificial respiration, but Sri Bhagavan waved it away. He also wanted to give some fruit juice, so I begged Sri Bhagavan to agree to this and when He graciously consented the doctor gave it to him. Sri Bhagavan's breathing became gradually slower and slower and exactly at 8:47 p.m.





subsided quietly. The most dramatic moment was the physical demise of Bhagavan. There was no physical movement of any kind, no visible change, not even a flutter. It was as if the human frame in which Bhagavan was, turned into a statue instantaneously. At that very moment, as is well known, devotees who were outside saw a big, bright meteor in the sky. I observed silence from 1950 to 1963. I have all these years been feeding the peacocks, monkeys and squirrels, a job which was always pleasing to Sri Bhagavan. I also look after the room in which Sri Bhagavan attained Nirvana. I wish to end my life doing this service. —

[Postscript: When Satyananda returned to Palakotthu from the interment ceremony on April 15th, 1950, a fellow

resident described the moment: “Swami Satyananda, one of my neighbours in Palakottu, assisted in the burial. I saw him returning to Palakottu at about 8.30 that evening, his whole body covered in vibbuti. I naturally asked him how he had got into such a state.

‘ I put Bhagavan’s body in the samadhi pit,’ he said. ‘Since devotees had put a lot of vibbuti there, I inevitably got covered with it. Can you give me some water for a bath?’

Before I gave him the water, I embraced him tightly in an attempt to cover my own body with this vibbuti. Since it had touched Bhagavan’s body, I regarded it as his final prasada.”

Swami Satyananda lived out his days in Palakotthu, taking care of the Nirvana Room and the Ashram library. He died in 1989.]

Sri Muruganar’s Irai Pani Nitral, §7

மீட்டும் மீட்டும் வெம்பிறப்பில்
வீழ்த்தி எனது நல்லுயிரை
வாட்டும் பழைய வல்வினையை
மாய்க்கும் பரிசென் வழங்கென்றேன்
நாட்டும் பண்டை நன்னெறிதான்
ஞானா னந்த நாதன்அருள்
கூட்டும் படிக்கே கூடென்றான்
கோல ரமண குருமணியே

I cried: ‘Tell me how to end
The strong inveterate deeds
that torment me and force me back
Into the torrid current of births!’
Said Ramana, best and brightest of Teachers:
‘Walking the straight path fixed of old,
Join and be enjoyed by
The grace of the Lord of joyous awareness’.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Kunjuswami Day



Kunjuswami came to Bhagavan in January 1920 and would spend the remaining 72 years of his life in Bhagavan’s Ashram. Known for his prodigious memory, Kunjuswami was loved, among other things, for his detailed storytelling of life with Sri Bhagavan in the early days.

On the morning of 7th August 2020, a handful of devotees gathered for Kunjuswami Day at his Shrine near the back gate. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Chasing the Sucrose Gradient
in the Age of Pandemics

For more than a century, microbiologists have observed the movements of single-celled organisms under microscope and noted their preference for certain areas of a given medium. Motile single-celled (or multi-celled) organisms, even when lacking anything that could be called a cerebrum, are able to detect chemicals in their environment and adjust their movements. Bacteria, for example, gather around an attractant such as sucrose, and move away from a repellent such as phenol or other toxins. Non-scientists might look at seeking the sucrose gradient in a medium as a kind of microbial ‘intentionality.’

Indeed, such behavioural responses to chemical stimuli, known as *chemotaxis*, make one wonder about the origins of consciousness. At a human scale, we might ask if human wanting and desire have their roots in cell biology?

This may not be such a crazy idea. The fossil record reveals that microbial life has existed on earth for about 3.5 billion years while advanced life only came much later in Earth’s history. With that deep ancestry, it would be hard to rule out the possibility that such phenomena in nature play a role in human psychology. So while chasing the sucrose gradient is a matter of survival for microorganisms, in more recent human history, it may be about something quite other than mere survival.

Spiritual teachers have warned about transient pleasures and the persistent drive to seek them. Microbial chemotaxis gives us a metaphor for understanding such impulses in the human heart as the root mechanism in samsara. It is not that seeking pleasurable experiences is wrong, only that depending on them to save us brings hardship and disappointment. Bhagavan says:

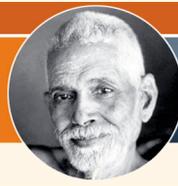
Pleasures do not form happiness ... When there is contact of a desirable sort or memory thereof, and when there is freedom from undesirable contacts or memory thereof, we say there is happiness. Such happiness, [however,] is relative and is better called pleasure. But people want absolute and permanent happiness. This does not reside in objects, but in the Absolute. It is Peace free from pain and pleasure. It is a neutral state.¹

Raj Raghunathan’s recent book challenges the reader in the title itself: *If You’re So Smart, Why Aren’t You Happy?* The reason is quite simple: cleverness cannot bring happiness. Smarts may help us work out strategies for getting to the sweet spot—*sukham* means ‘sweet’ or ‘pleasurable’—but the familiar disappointment crops up every time as the pleasure of each new dose of sweetness fades away.

The French novelist Guillaume Appollinaire once said tongue-in-cheek, *Now and then it’s good to pause in our pursuit of happiness and just be happy.* But if these had been Bhagavan’s words, they would have meant *give up seeking*

¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §27, §28.





pleasures from without and rest in the bliss of the Self within, for the search without is the very cause of our unhappiness.

For Bhagavan, sense pleasures centre on the unconscious seeking of short-lived experiences, whereas the first steps to the bliss of the Self involve inquiring into the futility of seeking short-lived pleasures. Indeed, the chase is futile for it never delivers on its promises. Chasing the sucrose gradient is what the Middle-age Christian mystics warned against in respect of *taking refuge in worldly consolations*, i.e. pinning hopes for true happiness on the fleeting joys of egoic achievements. The egoic project is all about stringing together as many moments of satisfaction as possible. In time, an entire personal identity and worldview is erected around this mechanism and a person's every hope hangs on obtaining a shot of *sukham* followed by the run-up to getting another shot. Working the treadmill to keep these conditions in place amidst the changing circumstances of a changing world is however a source of anxiety. As internal and external environmental conditions change, the effort needed to repeatedly reestablish and maintain the illusion of okayness becomes wearisome and can even enervate the system in the long run. It is not that Bhagavan is opposed to *sukham*, on the contrary, he is guiding us to the true *sukham*. *Sukham* sought outside only increases wanting and enhances the sense of unfulfillment while spiritual *sukham* found in faith, sadhana, prayer and meditation brings lasting happiness. If, as Shakespeare once said, *it is a bitter thing to look into happiness through another man's eyes*, for Bhagavan, the 'bitter thing' is looking for it anywhere except within oneself. Looking within includes being present to the conditions and circumstances of daily life in each moment, with neither grasping nor rejecting anything. This is the path to peace. Bhagavan says:

*[Everyone] wishes to rush out. There is no limit to going out. [But] happiness lies within and not without... You do not acquire happiness. Your very nature is happiness. Bliss is not newly earned.*²

For Bhagavan, there is no ego. Rather, ego is the name we give to the futile search for happiness through incessant wanting—wanting what we do not

² *Talks*, §229, §290.

have and wanting to be free of what we have that causes us displeasure. We assume if there is wanting, there must be a 'wanter'. But Bhagavan asks us to inquire into the wanter. When we bring attention to it through inquiry, the wanter or what we commonly call the ego disappears because ego has no reality of its own:

*Let us search for the root of the ego. Where from does this pseudo-I arise? At the end of this quest we shall find that the ego disappears letting the eternal Self shine. So the best discipline is the inquiry: 'Who am I?'*³

Freedom from wanting is true freedom. This is counter intuitive because the logic of the consumer age is that freedom is born of the freedom *to* want, whereas Bhagavan teaches us that true freedom is born of freedom *from* want.

The word 'I' means 'looking outward', it means, 'I want'. What does it want? It wants the sucrose gradient in every instant. The I is born anew with each moment of wanting. When we are free of wanting, when the mind is empty, free of thoughts, there is no I. The drives behind chasing the sucrose gradient congeal into a nexus of unconscious wanting, taking the name I, ever longing to depart the here and now to find something else, something better in the next thing, in the next future moment.

Practitioners of inquiry often assume that the inquirer is the Self. But Bhagavan says no. The Self is altogether beyond desire, intention, and every strategy of self-improvement.⁴ The inquirer is at root the wanter.⁵ What makes the inquirer useful is that in the desire to know, it inadvertently uncovers the game of incessant wanting and the vacuity of its own identity—this is where Bhagavan brings in the image of the stick used to stir the funeral pyre.

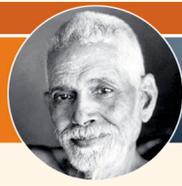
If chemotaxis of the heart, the perpetual chasing after the sucrose gradient, is unconscious, reflexive, and automatic, then the seeker is enjoined to bring awareness to the process by inquiring into it. When

³ *Talks*, Foreword.

⁴ One of the definitions of *samskara* is 'volition'.

⁵ What Bhagavan says about the witness when asked if 'the Self is the witness only', could also be said of the inquirer: '*Witness*' is applicable when there is an object to be seen. Then it is duality. *The Truth lies beyond both.* (*Talks*, §466)





revealed for what it is, the inquirer begins to replace *unconscious wanting* with the *awareness of wanting*. Through the healing power of awareness born of vichara, we see the unreality of what we habitually long for day in and day out. We learn to unravel age-old habits of striving outwardly and begin to make peace with the ‘neutral state’, i.e. neither chasing after the wanted nor running from the unwanted, allowing what is in each given moment to be as it is. This is what Bhagavan calls *surrender*.

Surrender is no small matter and when we practice inquiry in earnest, we are often shocked to uncover deep-seated unconscious habit forces governing our mental life. We are led to inquire into the motivations behind our actions in daily life, especially the need to get on our cell phones and send an SMS or an email, or to surf the web, to check *Facebook*, to scroll through our phone messages, to phone someone up to chat or to make a trip to the cupboard to have a snack. If we inquire honestly, we will begin to see that most of these actions are not born of genuine needs. We further discover that most of the impulses of daily life are so deep-seated and unconscious that we are no longer in touch with what our true needs actually are. This is because we have become very proficient in covering up our discomfort and suffering. Bhagavan tells us that suffering can help us if we do not push it away.

Devotees may remember Bhagavan’s response when someone asked, “Why does God permit suffering in the world? Should He not with His omnipotence do away with it at one stroke and ordain the universal realisation of God?” Bhagavan replied, “Suffering is the way for Realisation of God.” “But,” the questioner persisted, “should He not ordain [it] differently?” Bhagavan responded, “[Suffering] is the way”.⁶

Chasing the sucrose gradient is a means to escape suffering. But it is not a cure for suffering, rather only a temporary stopgap measure. Accessing the sucrose gradient cannot save you, says Bhagavan, but abiding in the space before the chase.

Of course, the system has reasons for chasing the sucrose gradient. As an organism, the human body

⁶ *Talks*, §107.

self-regulates when environmental conditions are adverse. And still, we must sometimes override the impulses of the reptilian brain which is capable of misreading threats in the environment, internal or external. The body seeks to regulate dysfunction in order to adjust to conditions and find the place of ease. In the modern world, however, seeking the place of ease can be done to an excess and can become compulsive. Here are the beginnings of obsessive behaviours. Developing the capacity to distinguish between harmful and benign conditions, between maladaptive needs and genuine needs is one of the touchstones of authentic living.

Sucrose means ‘sugar’ and comes from *sukham*. But the craving for excessive sugar, like chasing the sucrose gradient, betrays an underlying unease. Some research shows that sugar can be as habit-forming as cocaine. Sugar releases opioids and dopamine which can lead to compulsion. There’s no mystery in this. There are multiple ways, however, we medicate emotional discomforts, not just chemically, but behaviorally, even at the minute scale of compulsive thinking, the greatest addiction of all, Bhagavan argues. Living our lives vicariously through unremitting thinking, Living our lives vicariously through unremitting thinking, the virtual reality it engenders disconnects us from people and life in the world in real time..

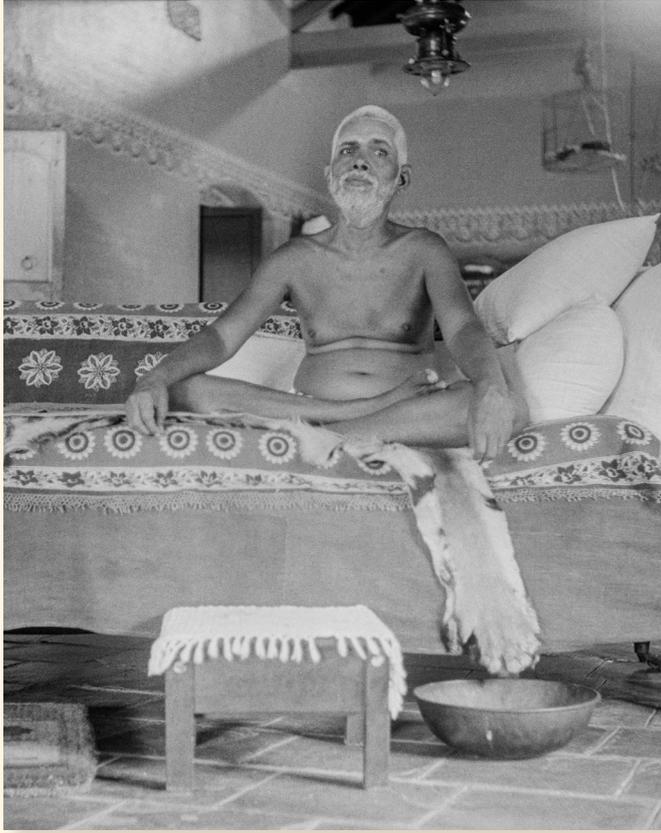
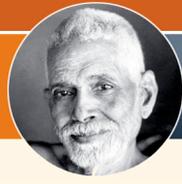
Any compassionate view of addiction would have to consider the plight of human existence, namely, being born with the instinct for self-preservation while possessing self-awareness and the knowledge of our eventual physical demise.⁷ The angst this generates can push us toward seeking respite through diversion of one sort or another. Crisis times, such as the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, bring the sucrose gradient into sharper focus, and make clear how it is used as a means for down-regulating existential anxiety. Bhagavan suggests a different approach:

*As long as one is confusing the body with the Atman, Atman is said to be lost and one is said to seek for it, but the Atman itself is never lost.*⁸

⁷ A basic tenet of Terror Management Theory.

⁸ *Talks*, §186.





Alone in a Room

The reader may remember this line of Blaise Pascal: *All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.* Sitting in a room alone requires discipline, patience and even courage. When sitting in a room with our cell phones switched off, we mark the inescapable pull of the sucrose gradient. We become acutely aware of how we inhabit a culture that has normalised chasing the sucrose gradient at high speed, and how difficult it can be to distinguish a genuine

need to do a simple task online from the compulsive cell phone use that has become the norm in the hyper-digital age. The courage to sit in a room alone *without* a cell phone is the first step toward bringing the chase into the light of awareness. If Terror Management Theory argues that pervasive anxiety is born of the ongoing awareness of our mortality, Bhagavan might well reply, "That's not quite the whole of it". The real source of our anxiety is not just the anticipation of our physical death but the egoic self-view born of illusion, namely, that *we are the body that dies*, that we are the wave that got separated from the ocean, so to say. He adds:

All are in the Self. It is wrong to imagine that there is the world, that there is a body in it and that you dwell in the body. If you are the body, why do they bury the corpse after death? [You come to] see that you are really formless; but you are at present identifying yourself with the body... You are not physical. Why worry about what you are not. The Self has no form, therefore it is immune from contact with things.⁹

Conclusion

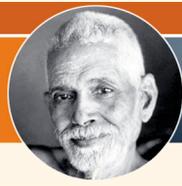
If our lives have been disrupted by extended home confinement during pandemic lockdowns and quarantines and if this has increased domestic conflict and emotional distress, we may find ourselves gravitating toward the internet and to our cell phones, performing e-actions reflexively. This would be completely understandable. While it is not to be condemned, such trends provide us with unique opportunities for inquiry. We might nudge ourselves toward awareness of internal conditions and rather

⁹ *Talks*, §121, §106, §164.

Wordwise: Sukham

Monier-Williams tells us that *sukha* is Sanskrit for 'happiness', 'pleasure', 'ease', 'joy' or 'bliss'. The etymology is *su* ['good'] + *kha* ['aperture'] and originally meant 'having a good axle-hole'. Bhagavan openly wonders: *Being of the nature of Bliss why does one continue to crave for happiness? To be rid of craving is itself salvation... All the sastras are meant to make a person retrace their steps to the original source. They need not gain anything anew. They must only give up their false ideas and useless accretions. Instead of doing that, they try to catch hold of something strange and mysterious because they believe their happiness lies elsewhere... There is no limit to going out. [But] happiness lies within and not without. (Talks, §227, §229) —*





than addressing unconscious anxiety by indulging in the sucrose gradient, we instead inquire into the impulse itself.

When the virus spreads and ends up on our doorstep, we will be in an optimal position to inquire into our clinging—clinging to this body and to the world we knew before SARS-CoV-2. If someone in our midst, not even 70 years old, contracts COVID-19 and dies within a week's time and then is denied traditional funeral rites because of the risk of contagion, we will feel deeply the tragedy of it. But we may think to ourselves, "Well, this won't happen to me." And we could actually believe this, either because of the statistical unlikelihood of it or because we are younger than the person in question or because we are invested in a self-narrative that assumes in advance our protection born of merit we imagine we have accumulated in this or in former lives, a kind of

'salvational fantasy' that exempts us from such a fate. But this line of thinking is born of the logic of the sucrose gradient. If we resist taking that route and instead, bear the brunt of the discomfort and the uncertainty, we have a chance to penetrate and see through the fundamental delusion that has plagued us our whole lives. Bhagavan repeats emphatically, *you are not the body; you are not the one who dies*. By extension, you are not the corpse that undergoes cremation or burial, with or without rites.

Indeed, COVID-19 can kill the body and with it, the personality, its wants, desires, and fears. But COVID-19 cannot kill the space in the Heart of the Lotus, imperishable and immortal, for *the Self has no form, and is therefore immune from contact with [all] things*,¹⁰ including SARS-CoV-2. —

¹⁰ *Talks*, §164.

Obituary: Sri G. Kannan (1952 - 2020)

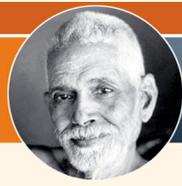


Sri G. Kannan, known to all devotees as one who energetically served rice in the Dining Hall, was born in Karaikudi on 18th August 1952. He took a B.A. in Economics in Tirupattur and got married in September 1980. He began his career as a clerk in ING Vysya Bank and worked his way up to Manager. He used to take care of Ramana devotees' banking requirements, extending them 'Room Service,' i.e. saving them the trouble of going to the bank in person. After his retirement in 2010, he devoted himself to voluntary service in the Ashram, mainly in the Dining Hall. He was particularly good in controlling the crowds during the feeding of thousands at Jayanti and Aradhana celebrations. Serving in the Ashram was sort of gene embedded as his father Ganapathiraman and his mother Ananthalakshmi were grandchildren of Bhagavan's mother Alagammal's brother Ramachandra Iyer. Ganapathiraman, after retirement from banking services, impeccably served as Cashier in the Ashram from 1983 to 2007, till the last day of his life. Much earlier, Kannan's grandfather

(Ganapathiraman's father) Srirama Iyer, who had knowledge in legal matters, did valuable service for more than a decade supporting President T.N. Venkataraman then battling multiple court cases..

On the 14th of August, Sri Kannan was hospitalised and diagnosed with Covid-19. It is not known how he contracted the virus but some speculated that it may have been while giving leftover Ashram food to the poor in the poorer districts of Ramana Nagar. His condition quickly deteriorated, and he was put on a ventilator, given only a 30% chance to survive. Finally, at 2.30 am on 20th August, just two days after his 68th birthday, he merged at the Feet of Sri Ramana. He is survived by his wife Radha, who though also affected by the virus, has since been released from the hospital and is recovering. He is also survived by his daughter Ramya, living in London, happily married to Vasana and blessed with a son and daughter. —





Local Covid-19 Update



As the tally for worldwide reported coronavirus cases crosses 2.4 crore and with reported deaths nearing 10 lakhs, India is now experiencing 70,000 new cases per day while the total number of reported cases in the country crosses 32 lakhs. Positivity rates in India are declining as the pace of testing increases and Covid-19 recoveries exceed active cases by 3.5-fold. Tamil Nadu is experiencing outbreaks as is Tiruvannamalai District, whose reported cases are approaching 10,000.

Meanwhile, phase II of the human trial of the Oxford vaccine begins in Bharati Hospital in Pune, where volunteers for the Serum Institute's vaccine have been given their first test inoculations. Recent reporting from around the world raises the prospect of recurring infection, that is, people diagnosed with Covid-19 being re-infected after only a few months. If this became the trend, it would cast doubt on the viability of a fully reliable vaccine anytime soon. But experts are not unduly concerned at this point as such cases are not widespread.

New saliva testing is set to be initiated in the coming weeks and months which can match the accuracy of nasopharyngeal swabbing, the current form of testing. Saliva testing can be performed much more easily and less painfully with faster results. Even more hopeful

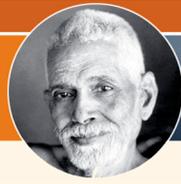
are recently published articles raising hopes that Sars-CoV-2, the cause of Covid-19, is in fact not a 'novel' virus after all but may have been preceded by cousin corona or cold viruses in the past giving a modicum of natural resistance among the general population.

Dr. Beda M. Stadler, director of the Institute for Immunology at the University of Bern cited a research article by 30 authors led by Andre Thiel at Charite Berlin that found "cross-reactive T cells in about 34% of the [unexposed] population of Berlin" (see recent article in Science: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/early/2020/08/04/science.abd3871>). This would help explain the heterogeneity of Covid-19's disease process, i.e. the variability of symptoms from the asymptomatic to fatality. If what is now being referred to as the XYZ hypothesis continues to gain traction, then herd immunity or at least herd immunity-like effects might be felt at 20-40% or even less, rather than the previously assumed 70-80% (see Newsweek: <https://www.newsweek.com/herd-immunity-slowing-virus-us-1525089>).

This encouraging data could change the perception regarding the future of the ongoing spread of Sars-CoV-2 whose spike chart drop-offs are similar in countries all over the world, irrespective of social behavioural interventions such as containment measures and quarantines. This tends to indicate that in combination with other factors, certain internal laws within the Sars-CoV-2 genome are governing the spread of the disease beyond human interventions. Data suggests that first-wave spikes do not repeat in the same local populations. This is not to say that countries are not at risk of second waves but only that 'second waves' occur in parts of the country that have not yet been hit. For example, Lombardy, Italy was severely hit by Covid-19 in March and April but now in the month of August is relatively stable, reporting only about 70 new

*The jnani does save devotees, but not by will or intention,
which is non-existent in him, but only through his [abiding] presence. ~ Padamalai*





Local Covid-19 Update (cont.)

cases per day while other regions in Italy of comparable population size are reporting 300 new cases per day. This is significant since only a relatively small percentage of the population of Lombardy has been exposed and no true herd immunity can be said to have occurred, and yet, herd immunity effects are being felt (see www.peakprosperity.com). When graphed, nearly identical patterns can be seen in divergent conditions around the world where outbreaks have occurred. Though more data and more time is needed, what this might mean for India and Tamil Nadu as rural areas become infected is that similar spike pattern drop-offs will occur here as well, especially in the hardest hit places such as Chennai and Delhi. This

already seems to be taking place in Mumbai's 2.5 sq. km. slum of Dharavi with 2,680 reported COVID-19 patients thus far. Of these 2,340 have recovered and new cases in the slum have dropped to about four per day. While this data may not predict an early return to normalcy for the country as a whole, especially as the infection moves to areas not yet hit, it would seem to suggest a less catastrophic outcome long term, both for India and for the rest of the world. Researchers warn, however, that we should only be cautiously optimistic, as the current research climate is producing Covid-19 data in such volume that very often standard peer-review of it lags far behind the reporting of it. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic



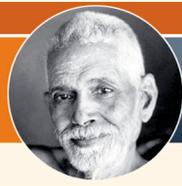
The month of August was dramatic and eventful for Tiruvannamalai as segments of the town got hit with infections and the district's case count climbed to 10,000. A nearby community had a small outbreak followed by Ramanasramam when one of its volunteer devotees was hospitalised, diagnosed with Covid-19 and died in the third week of the month. A second Ashram inmate was hospitalised with Covid-19 about the 15th of August. After contact tracing and testing, a third person was diagnosed with Covid-19. It can be imagined how it was for devotees in the Ashram during these days following the loss of

one of its members. The trepidation was magnified by the prospect of further spread as the community awaited test results. Prayers for one another and for the Ashram were intense and sincere in the hope that the Ashram might be spared further infection. Fortunately, testing samples showed the infection not to be as widespread as feared. Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan issued the following statement at the end of the month:

Following the directives of the Government of India, the Ashram has been in lockdown since 22nd March. Visiting devotees returned to their home countries. The routine activities of the Ashram, including daily puja and Narayana Seva are going on as usual. Strict implementation of social distancing, wearing of face masks and twice-daily spraying anti-infective natural chemicals are being implemented. Unfortunately, one of our volunteer devotees, Sri Kannan, contracted the virus and passed away from its complications. Afterward, strict contact tracing measures were implemented and fortunately, only two cases were detected, who were then quarantined.

The reopening of the Ashram will happen only when it is safe for devotees to come to the Shrine with social distancing protocols. The Ashram will follow the guidelines of WHO and the governments of India and Tamil Nadu in respect of policy changes. The health of devotees comes first, and we are endeavouring to exercise the greatest care to that end. —





In the Kendras: Simultaneous Online Advent Celebrations Across US and Canada



First of its kind, on Sunday, 30th August, various Satsang Groups in USA and Canada joined from 8 am. to 8 pm EST for online celebrations of 124th Anniversary of Bhagavan's Advent to Arunachala. Using Arunachala Ashrama's YouTube Channel for the Live coverage, the Satsang groups represented 14 cities from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Boston, Washington DC, Ohio, Detroit, North Carolina, Georgia, Tampa, Houston, Austin, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver, each of which shared for 30min to an hour starting and finishing with Arunachala Ashramam. Others participated from India as did Dr. Anand Ramanan, President of Sri Ramanasramam, who spoke from Tiruvannamalai around 7.15 pm EST. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 124th Advent Celebrations



Each year, the Ramana Mandiram comes from Madurai to commemorate Bhagavan's Advent Day. But this year it was not possible owing to Covid quarantines. However, on behalf of the Madurai devotees, two got permits and walked from Mambalapattu Railway Station to Tirukoillur in commemoration of Bhagavan's journey 124 year ago.

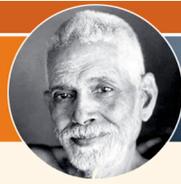
On the morning of the 1st September Bhagavan's 124th Advent Celebrations took place in Bhagavan's Shrine with President Venkat S. Ramanan and V. S. Mani in attendance. Following the puja, a new Telugu book, *Tirumarur Kamalalayamu*, by Arunachala Madhavi was released.—

Obituary: Smt V. Rakshaben

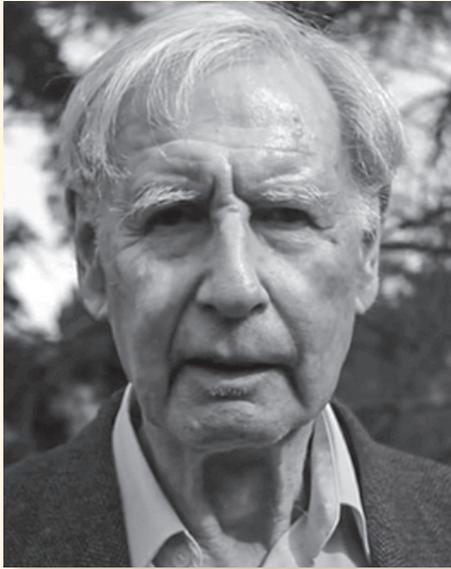


Born 16th May, 1947, in Ahmedabad, Rakshaben got her education in nursing and lived for a number of years in the US where she worked as a nurse. She returned to India in 2012. She was a bhajan singer and once in her youth, sang in *All India Radio*. She subsequently became a deep devotee of Sri Bhagavan. She had a particular interest in reciting the Sanskrit works of Bhagavan, *Sundara Kanda* and *Vishnu Sahasranama*. Raksha, as she was familiarly known in the Ashram, passed away from a heart condition in the early hours of 28th August, in Ahmedabad. She is survived by her husband Dr. T. S. Vaidyanathan. Soft-spoken, sweet-natured and unassuming, she will be missed by all. —





Obituary: Sri Alan Jacobs (1929 - 2020)



Born into a religious Jewish family on 9th September 1929, Alan demonstrated a spiritual bent from an early age and went to the Synagogue every week with his father. At boarding school, he enthusiastically attended Christian services and became a ‘truly spiritual Christian’. He went to school at Malvern College in Worcestershire, and after leaving school, did his two years National Service in the Army Intelligence Corps. In 1953, he married his childhood sweetheart, Claire Mendoza, a journalist. After the painful loss of his father in 1969, he took over the family’s retail outlets, the Times Furnishing homeware stores and the menswear chain Willerby’s. Subsequently, he and his wife entered the art world and began dealing in Masterpieces of the late 17th century school of Dutch landscape painting, opening a gallery in London’s West End. Alan wrote a book on the subject, *17th Century Dutch and Flemish Painters: A Collectors’ Guide*, published in 1976, which became a best-seller. He and his wife joined the Gurdjieff Society and in 1967, both came under the influence of J. Krishnamurti. But one time when Alan fell ill and was recovering in bed,

Claire brought him a yoga journal with a picture of Ramana Maharshi in it. This was the beginning of a new chapter in his life. He started a small Ramana group which in turn formed the nucleus of the present Ramana Foundation, London. Unfortunately, Claire died of a brain haemorrhage in 1981 which was a terrific blow to him. He took solace in Bhagavan and poured his energies into Ramana satsangs. In August 1990, the Group was put on an official footing and the Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK was inaugurated at a meeting in the Bharata Vidya Bhavan, West Kensington, presided over by V. Ganesan. In 1993, Alan became the Foundation’s second chairman, following the retirement of the first chairman, Squadron leader Nair Vasudevan. In 2005, he stepped down as Chairman in order to live out his remaining years in Tiruvannamalai. But as fate would have it, he fell sick within the first year and was forced to return to London. He edited *Self-Enquiry* and wrote articles for the *Mountain Path* and other journals. He authored several books, among them *The Element Book of Mystical Verse* (1997), *Peace of Mind: Words of Wisdom to Comfort and Inspire* (2010), *The Wisdom of Marcus Aurelius* (2003) and *Thoreau: Transcendent Nature for a Modern World* (2012) as well as a book on Gandhi and another on the Dalai Lama. He also wrote and published poetry.

Alan passed away peacefully at 10.45 pm on Saturday 25th July. He is remembered for his quiet humility, accessibility, and willingness to help in any personal situation. He is survived by his three children, Laura, Keith and Graham and six grandchildren. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Muruganar Day



Muruganar Day was celebrated on the 18th August at his Shrine with the chanting of *Aksaramanamalai*. Owing to Covid quarantines, only four devotees were able to attend along with the Ashram President, Venkat S. Ramanan. —

