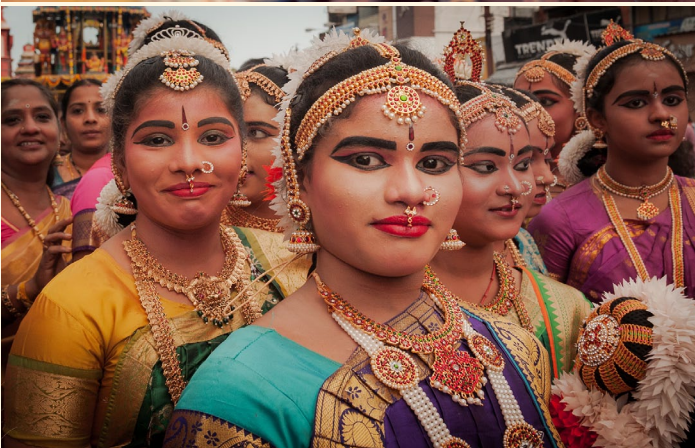


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

DECEMBER 2024  
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Dev Gogoi



SRI RAMANASRAMAM





## Saranagati



NOVEMBER 2024  
VOL. 18, NO. 12

IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

In this December issue, we get an exuberant preview of Karthigai Deepam as the Big Temple and municipal authorities carried out a trial run of the newly renovated big chariot.

In this issue, we have unpublished conversations between the American, Sam Rappold who lived in the Ashram from January 1948 until after Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana in 1950.

In *Ramana Reflections*, we look to the symbolism of the Narakasura story as recounted at Deepavali to see what lessons it holds for devotees seeking to come free of egoic delusion through Bhagavan's self-inquiry.

And in the obituary of Smt. Ramana Sundari, we can see a new photo of Bhagavan, taken on her wedding day.

For videos, photos and other news of events:  
<<https://sriramanamaharshi.org>> or write to us at:  
<[saranagati@gururamana.org](mailto:saranagati@gururamana.org)>. For the web version:  
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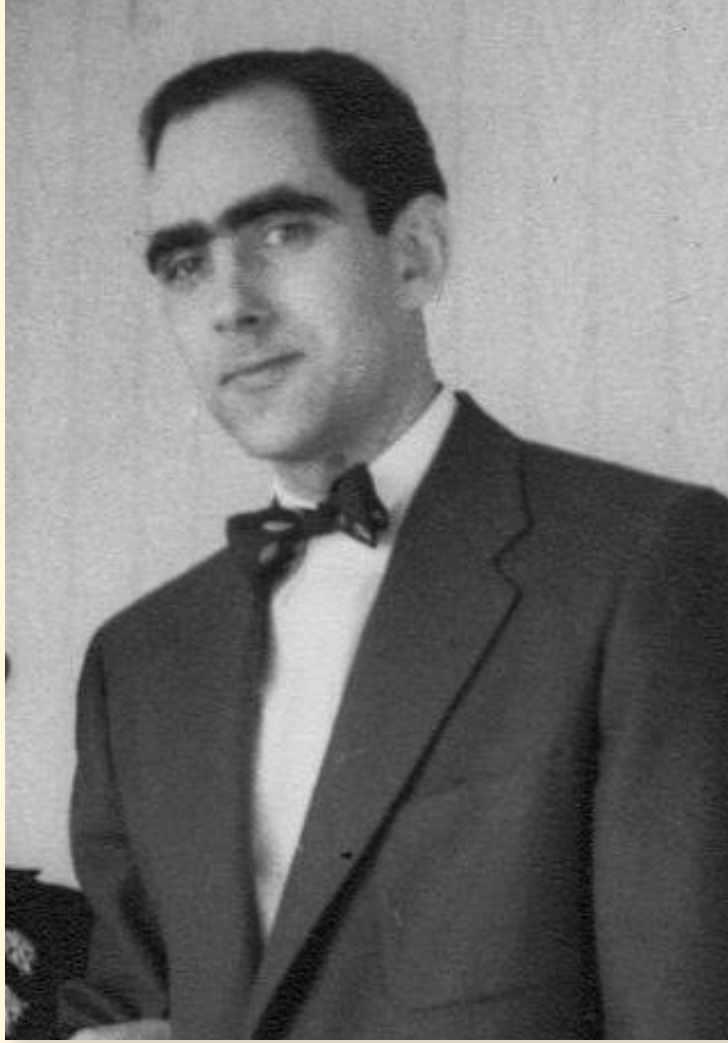
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*Saranagati*

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## Calendar of Ashram Events

1st Dec (Sun) Karthigai Sarva Amavasya	17th Dec (Tue) Sri Bhagavan's 145th Jayanti
4th Dec (Wed) Karthigai Deepam Festival commences	18th December (Sat) Sw Ramanananda's Day
13th Dec (Fri) Maha Deepam, Pradosham	11th Jan (Sat) Pradosham
14th Dec (Sat) Full Moon Day	13th Jan (Mon) Full Moon/Ardra Darshan
15th Dec (Sun) Arunachaleswara Procession	14th Jan (Tue) Punarvasu/Pongal
16th Dec (Mon) Dhanur Masa Puja commences	15th Jan (Thu) Maattu Pongal





## CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI BHAGAVAN

### Sam Rappold

The reader may remember Sam Rappold from the series we did in 2018 on Thelma Benn who would later become his wife. Born in 1905 in Akron, Ohio, Thelma was the eldest of three daughters. After traveling the globe with her sister, she faced challenges in the aftermath of World War II and resolved to travel to India in September 1947 in search of a guru. In Pondicherry, she met Dr. Hafiz Syed, who encouraged her to visit

Bhagavan Ramana. Upon meeting Bhagavan, she knew instantly he was the teacher she had been seeking.

In January 1948, Sam Rappold, an American from the West Coast, arrived at Sri Ramanasramam. Having embraced the life of a meditating sadhu, he was more reserved than Thelma, dedicating himself to meditation. Thelma described her first impression of him in her diary:

*When I returned to the meditation hall Mr. Rappold came up and introduced himself. His clear-cut features and high forehead remind me of someone from ancient Greece or Rome. He is from the Los Angeles-San Diego district, 6'2" tall, broad shoulders, wears his hair in a long braid down the back of his neck. He has been here only two months and is a puzzle to all who meet him. He has different reasons to various ones as to why he wears his hair long. One is to keep the girls away. Another explanation is that it is a mark of an ascetic.*

Despite his quiet nature, Rappold actively engaged with Sri Bhagavan in the Hall, posing heartfelt questions to which Bhagavan responded in English or Tamil, often with the help of a translator. The following collection of conversations between Rappold and Bhagavan were probably recorded by Thelma who began noting down interactions in the Hall in late 1947. Some may have been recorded by other chroniclers and later collected by the Rappolds. Most of them have never been published before.

### Exchanges with Bhagavan

On 8th July 1948 Thelma noted the following:

*Only the birds were on hand at parayana this morning to chant the Vedas. Proceeded to the rocking-chair rock for further meditation. Hurried back to the hall in time to hear Rappold ask Bhagavan a series of questions. Always Bhagavan comes back to the same "Who Am I" and "There is nothing. Just BE".*

On the morning of 17th August 1948, Sam Rappold asked Bhagavan, what a devotee should do at the time of death:

*Bhagavan: A devotee never dies, he is already dead. (Bhagavan stops and waits for a competent translator. Devaraja Mudaliar enters. Bhagavan completes his response:) What should a devotee do at the time of death? What can he do? Whatever a man thinks in his lifetime, so he does in his last moment: the worldly man thinks of his worldly affairs and the devotee of devotion and spiritual matters. But a Jnani having no thoughts of any kind, remains the same. His thoughts, having died long ago, his body as himself also died with them.*





*Therefore, for him there is no such thing as death. Again, people fear death because they fear to lose their possessions. When they go to sleep, they do not have such fears. Although sleep resembles death in leaving all possessions behind, it causes no fear in their hearts because of the knowledge that the next morning they will take up their possessions once again. The Jnani, having no sense of possession, is entirely free from the fear of death. He remains the same after death as before it.*

S.S. Cohen who met Rappold upon his arrival, described him as 'a young farmer'. It is not clear what that assessment was based on, but Rappold's queries came across as very insightful, suggesting that he had undergone formal education:

*Rappold: The book Who Am I? says the mind generates thoughts through a unique power (shakti). What is that shakti?*

*Bhagavan: It is the mind itself. Kill the mind and thoughts cannot arise, for without mind there are no questions, no arising of self, world or Ishwara.*

*Rappold: Then, is Ishwara also a creation of the mind?*

*Bhagavan: There is no thought of 'another' without the thought 'me'.*

*Rappold: Then, I am the beginning and the end? Is there nothing save what is seen by the mind itself?*

*Bhagavan: Yes, I am the beginning and the end. He who sees the Self, sees the Self of all and does not heed differences, which is duality.*

*Rappold: Does the wise man, the fully enlightened Sage have thoughts of his own?*

*Bhagavan: Yes, the only difference between the wise man and the fool is that in doing the same actions, the Sage knows who he is and what is happening, while the fool does not.*

## On Realization and the Supreme Reality

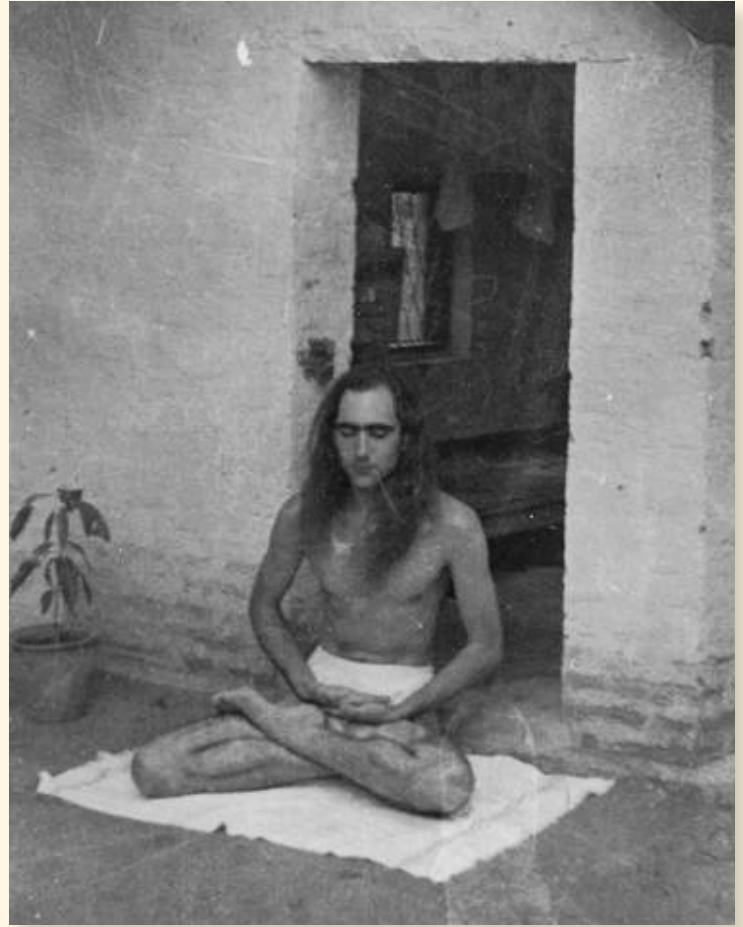
On another occasion, Rappold probes the Maharshi on the ultimate status of the Supreme, unaccustomed as he is to the advaitic vision:

*Rappold: Is Brahman also a creation of the mind*

*Bhagavan: Jiva, Ishwara, Brahman are all creations of the mind, maya. When the mind is still there is Brahman. There can be no creation without mind. Realization is complete cessation of the mind, brought about by vichara. Brahman is repose in Itself (abidance). It is not realized at some future time but is ever NOW. When the process of vichara reaches its culmination, it is seen that one has never been the mind, but only THAT. The seer is in the world but not of it. Of that state, it cannot be written, for publication is by sadhana with commentary by mounam.*

Rappold later reflects and comments:

*Words are but attempts to name and describe conditions, and most have no meaning in Reality. All things are resolved in the pure mind. All things are in Brahman, thus formless. Maharshi's way is to realize*



Sam Rappold in Ramanasramam, 1948

*now what is and has ever been, ever-present. Hold fast to THAT which does not move, sattva. This is the Self. In sadhana put aside all sense of 'I', for you are THAT.*

The following exchange reflects the foregoing:

*Rappold: Yogis say the word is the nada.*

*Bhagavan: "Nada, OM, Pranava, all are symbols of THAT which the jnani IS"*

*Rappold: Then, I AM THAT I AM? is the beginning and the end?*

*Bhagavan: Yes, the jnani IS THAT.*

## On Turiya and Turiyateeta

Rappold raises questions about the turiya state, traditionally referred to as the 'fourth state' or pure consciousness beyond dualities:

*Rappold: Bhagavan has said turiya, the fourth state is the abidance as the Heart and turiyateeta the fifth state follows. How is the turiyateeta brought about?*

*Bhagavan: Turiya pertains only to the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep, to the one who experiences them as successive states, as the changing pictures on the cinema screen.*







*Turiyateeta is the screen which ever persists. You are THAT. It is the natural state. Turiya and turiyateeta are the same, and there is really no 5th state. Words are for explanation and philosophical convenience. Only for the ignorant are there the different states, for the jnani there is but his one, ever-present state, changeless, Silent, Being, which cannot be differentiated. The Jnani does not identify himself with the apparent changes.*

*Rappold: Is the intellect obliterated in that state?*

*Bhagavan: No, being THAT does not mean being lunatic. The realized one no longer has an intellect, but is all things merged in his Oneness, Being, and do not stand separately as his possessions or attributes.*

Rappold asks about the advaita bhava of Ulladu Narpadu Anubhavam, v. 39:

*Bhagavan: Advaita is always a thought (bhava) to the sadhaka, is an attribute of the Heart, and is to be beheld within, but never to be observed with regard to the guru. Though advaita bhava is a thought for the sadhaka, jnani is advaita, Being. Advaita is not to be expressed in life's activities, for it would upset those activities and make a jnani's life relations unnecessarily difficult. Distinctions are to be made, indeed, the jnani is like the actor or professional mourner who plays grief more than the grieved, while maintaining advaita in the heart, and remains unaffected, secure in THAT.*

## On Love and the Self

*Rappold: Is love merely an experience of the mind?*

*Bhagavan: Bhakti (devotion) and jnana (knowledge) are one in Oneness. To the bhakta, THAT is love; to the jnani, THAT is the Self and bliss.*

Rappold probes the Maharshi about *kaivalya*, traditionally understood as 'absolute aloneness,' signifying ultimate liberation freed from all attachments to the material world:

*Bhagavan: Kaivalya is Oneness. But even this term implies duality of some sort. THAT cannot be adequately described by words. To speak of It as unity, salvation, or integration implies duality. It is beyond duality.*

*Rappold: Does Kaivalya mean the same as advaita?*

*Bhagavan: Yes.*

## Samadhi and Ananda

*Samadhi*, said to be the state of complete absorption in pure awareness, transcending mind and ego, reveals the true nature of the self as infinite consciousness. Bliss (*ananda*) arises naturally, not as an emotion, but as the essence of this realisation:

*Rappold: Bhagavan has said bliss and the self are identical. In Mandukyopanishad it says, mind should not be allowed the bliss of the samadhis.*

*Bhagavan: Bliss is all the same. Samadhi which changes has six stages and is for the sadhaka and is a necessary preliminary. Samadhi pertains to the mind. The real bliss is beyond these samadhis and is perpetual.*

*Rappold: Will Bhagavan please say something about the stages of samadhi?*

*Bhagavan: Samadhi is one but is said to have six stages. Two main divisions are savikalpa and nirvikalpa. Savikalpa is with effort, is with thought. Nirvikalpa is effortless, is the boundless Ocean without thought. There are four stages of savikalpa and two of nirvikalpa.*

## On Surrender and Ego

Surrender (*prapatti*) is the complete offering of oneself to the Divine, relinquishing ego and control. Rooted in trust and devotion, it dissolves resistance and aligns the individual with grace, unveiling the innate unity with the Supreme Self (Brahman). Rappold asks what the place of Bhagavan's teaching on surrender (*prapatti*) plays in the life of *vichara* practice?

*Bhagavan: Prapatti and vichara merge in Self-realization. To surrender is to inquire into the source of the ego and abide as the Self.*

*Rappold: Bhagavan has said, "What is inside must come out." Should one allow these inner tendencies to rise fully?*

*Bhagavan: The vasanas will arise in sadhana but must be cut off by returning attention to their source. Do not engage with them; hold fast to Oneness.*

*Rappold: What is the relation of ego to prakerti (substance) and pralaya (dissolution)?*

*Bhagavan: Ego arises from prakerti, all is dissolved in pralaya.*



## In Focus: November Edition

For the November edition of *In Focus*, copy the following URL into your browser:

[https://youtu.be/JLWpBE\\_Es60?feature=shared](https://youtu.be/JLWpBE_Es60?feature=shared).





*Rappold: Then all things arise from prakerti?*

*Bhagavan: Only when the question is asked. These terms are for answers to questions in a discussion on Existence. You are the screen whether there are pictures on it or not. Existence IS and IS your nature.*

Rappold asks about the difference between one's own individual nature and the vasanas that seem to arise:

*Bhagavan: They are the same. Without the vasanas, there is no individuality; when they are obliterated there is nothing left but your Real nature. That is found by vichara.*

And what is the most important thing to be gained spiritually from meditation, he asks:

*Bhagavan: Why do you want to be spiritual and not just be yourself as you are?*

*Rappold: Bhagavan has said, until realisation there must be two indispensable sadhanas: hold to the self and reject extraneous thoughts.*

*Bhagavan: They are the same, abiding as the pure self.*

*Rappold: Is this subtle mind?*

*Bhagavan: It is the collection of impressions from which the gross mind arises as a reflection. But there is no distinction. It is all mind and thus not really a reflection.*

*Rappold: Is the subtle mind feeling and the gross mind thought?*

*Bhagavan: In a sense, yes. But they co-arise and function as mind and cannot exist separately. The cinema must have darkness and light projected in illusory forms for there to be cinema.*

*Rappold: Bhagavan has said that mind has two aspects—veiling and projection, light and darkness. Is darkness veiling, and projection thought?*

*Bhagavan: Yes, it is mind; it is not the Reality.*

*Rappold: How then do we realize that supreme reality?*

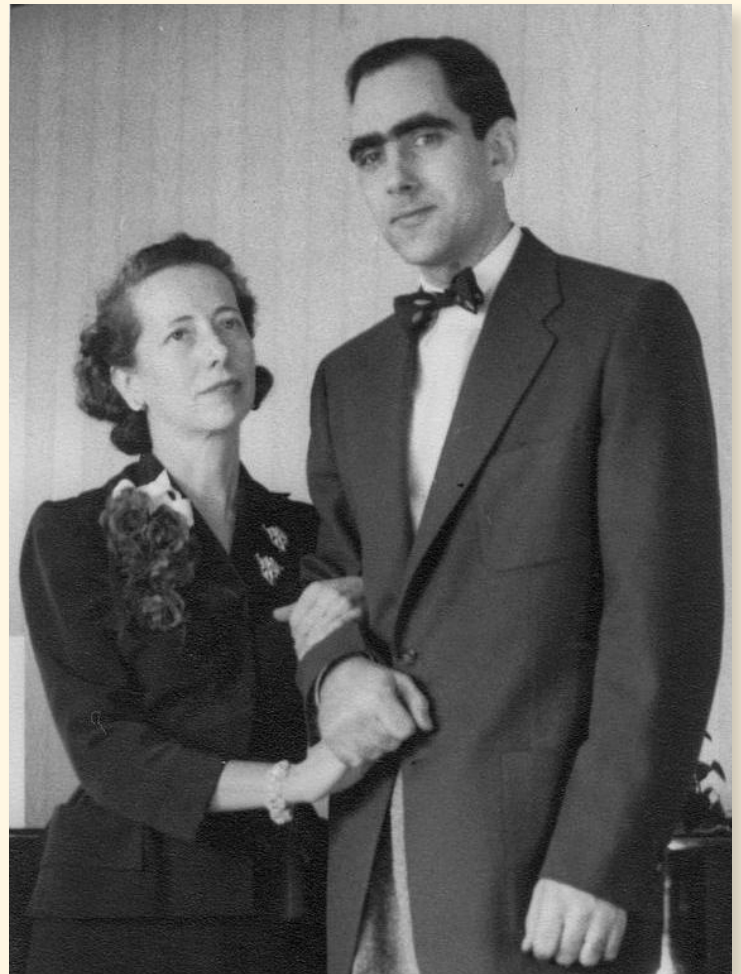
*Bhagavan: Why do you call it supreme? It is your nature. There is really no realization, there is only Being: that alone always persists by Itself when mind ceases as in deep sleep or in samadhi; as satchitananda—existence, consciousness, Bliss. That is the real T' and that is bliss.*

*Rappold: Is that real T' what Bhagavan calls T-I'?*

*Bhagavan: Yes. Abide only as yourself. Don't be afraid of that state, you will not cease to exist, for it IS itself Existence.*

Rappold reports on Maharshi answering questions from a French doctor named Godel. Bhagavan says:

*T' is Being, existence, ever-present, without limits. Ego is the I-thought, limited, imperfect. Do not regard the I-thought as T'. There will always be T', which never dies. Giving up the I-thought and ever being T', i.e. giving up the unreal for the Real, what is ever there? The T'-thought persists because of habit. With*



Sam and Thelma Rappold, ca. 1960

*the arising of the T'-thought, all else arises. The T'-thought is ignorance (avidya) and does not really exist. The T'-thought is the light that lights-up all the world, is darkness and is substratum of both. There really is no transcendence; there is only Existence.*

The questioner is born in the West, and so asks how advaita can help one to love one's neighbour:

*Bhagavan: There is no neighbour— 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Self is bliss, love, God. One loves because one loves oneself.*

And what is the effort to realize the Self?

*Bhagavan: The effort to realize the Self is the giving up of all other effort.*

*Rappold: Bhagavan, what is Consciousness?*

*Bhagavan: (In English): Awareness of what exists, of what IS.*

*Rappold: What is conscience?*

*Bhagavan: (In English): It is mind, but pure mind, sattva. (And then translated from Tamil): It is the purest state of mind bathed in purity. But still mind, an operation of mind. Without individuality, the T'-thought, there is no mind. Conscience is the inner voice, the voice of Atman, an inner urge or idea, persisting when ego is annihilated.*







*It still belongs to the relative plane but is the purest form of relativity.  
Whatever is going on there, the Light remains unaffected.*

If karma theory posits that every action generates consequences, shaping future experiences, then it governs rebirth and samsara. Rappold then asks if it is dangerous to try to live the karma of another?

*Bhagavan: It is dangerous to try to live the karma of another.  
Just be yourself, as you are.*

*Rappold: What is fullness or perfection (purnam)?*

*Bhagavan: To remain without thought is fullness. Be still. Be not like the train passenger who, after climbing onboard and being seated on the train (self) puts his luggage on his own lap thus suffering discomfort. Put the luggage down on the floor and sit comfortably, after all, the train carries the weight anyway.*

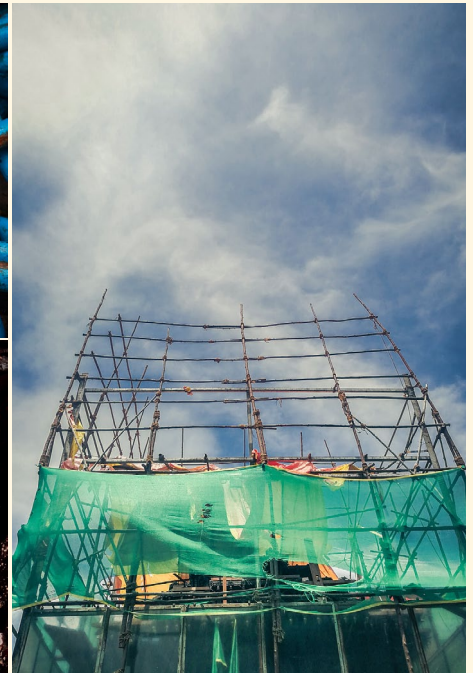
## Conclusion

Rappold and Thelma remained at Ramanasramam until after Bhagavan's *mahanirvana* in 1950. They married in Varanasi in 1951 and later returned to California, where they had a son, Ramana.

Their lives, shaped by their time with Bhagavan, were a testament to his teachings. Rappold's questions and reflections highlight his sincere quest for understanding, offering insights into the timeless wisdom of Sri Ramana Maharshi.<sup>1</sup> —

<sup>1</sup> The above is adapted from an unpublished manuscript called, *Wandering Through India*, Thelma Rappold, pp. 183-196.

## Events in Tiruvannamalai: Vellotam: A Trial Run for the Big Chariot



The ten-day Karthigai Deepam festival at the Big Temple starts with the flag-hoisting ceremony on 4th December. The big chariot procession is scheduled for 10th December. In preparation for the big event, extensive restoration of the temple's *pancharatha* were carried out, including to its decorative pillars, sculptures, wheels, and hydraulic brakes. Engineers from Bell Company and the Public Works Department inspected and certified the stability of the restored chariot, work being done for the first time in fifty years. The *maharatham* got a test run along Maada Veethi where nearly 2,000 police personnel cleared roadside encroachments and supervised as residents and students enthusiastically pulled the chariot ropes. Adding to the joy of that auspicious Friday, it was observed that the day was also a *muhurtham* day with weddings in progress. —





## Iconography of the Mother's Shrine: Lord Arunachaleswara

### Lord Arunachaleswara



A legend tells of a time in the ancient past when Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma, two principal deities, engaged in a contest to prove their supremacy. Lord Siva manifested as a massive, radiant pillar of fire (*tejolinga*), and challenged them to discover its origin. In their attempt to locate the source of the column of light, Brahma transformed into a swan (*hamsa*)

and flew upwards, seeking the top of the column, while Vishnu assumed the form of a boar (*varaha*), and dug downward to find its base. They searched for one hundred years and eventually wearied of the task before them. Vishnu humbled himself and sat in meditation. He realized that the top or bottom of the pillar of fire could never be known because the column of light is the source of awareness itself. Brahma, however, in his desire to win, falsely claimed to have discovered the column's pinnacle, hoping to outdo Vishnu.

Siva, seeing Brahma's deceit, became enraged, and severed one of his five heads, condemning him for his pride and falsehood.

The story highlights the futility of ego and the importance of humility.

This *lingodbhava* is depicted on the western wall of the *sanctum sanctorum* in the Mother's Shrine. —

## Sadhu Natanananda's Upadesa Ratnavali § 14

### *Omniscience appears true only from the standpoint of the ignorant*

*Instead of knowing himself as one who merely exists, he mistakes himself as the knower who, by distorted [seeing], sees omniscience as a flood [of relative knowledge]. A Jnani, however, free of such delusions, [sees] omniscience as nothing but a crazy man's knowledge. — GVK §928*

The illusion of objects causes people to abandon their nature of Being and imagine themselves as mere seers of objects. However, the objects of the world appearing before them, no matter how real they may appear are only the result of *maya*. Similarly, omniscience appears real to those caught in the net of ignorance but not for those who have conquered ignorance and seen the truth as it really is. Why is this? Because objects arising in the empirical world, [arise and pass away] without any enduring qualities and thus are impermanent. If one considers oneself a knower and possessor of mere limited knowledge, one might imagine that there should be something that is omniscient. To overcome this distorted perception, one should realize one's true nature (*svarupa*) to eliminate false notions. That which is self-effulgent and of the nature of Being has no room for limited knowledge nor the need for omniscience. —

*The siddhis possessed by munis will only yield fanciful things, but will they yield Realization? — Kaivalya Navaneetham*







## RAMANA REFLECTIONS

### From Naraka's Hell to the Festival of Light

During Deepavali puja in Bhagavan's Hall on the morning of 31st October, devotees sang verses from *The Garland of the Guru's Sayings* which included:

*In fear of hell, people tremble who know not that hell is the ego's fault.*

*Those who know what causes hell find their way to the heaven of truth.*

*The one who imagines this wretched body to be himself is Naraka. However, the one inquiring as to whence this demon rises,*

*And sets about to slay him once for all, is Narayana, And bathes in the pure waters of Awareness.<sup>1</sup>*

These verses capture the essence of the spiritual battle to overcome *debatmabuddhi*, the false identification with the physical body. They frame the journey of *atma-vichara* as a heroic effort, likened to that of Lord Krishna—or Narayana—defeating Narakasura. The Deepavali story, celebrated as the triumph of light over darkness, symbolizes the victory of awareness over ignorance.

Narakasura's error—mistaking the body for the true Self—mirrors the delusion that creates the hell we all inhabit. For Bhagavan, hell is not a place but a state of mind, one rooted in the ignorance of our true nature.

In an exchange in the hall on 13th March 1936, a devotee asked about the nature of the *jiva* taking human birth. Bhagavan responded:

*Let us first know what we are. We do not understand what we are, and until we know what we are, there's no room for such a question.<sup>2</sup>*

Another devotee pursued a similar line of inquiry, prompting Bhagavan to respond:

*The quest for the Self means that the 'I am-the-body' idea (debatmabuddhi) must vanish.<sup>3</sup>*

Bhagavan emphasized that *atma vichara*, the inquiry into one's true nature, is the most direct path to uproot *debatmabuddhi*. He taught that false identification was the primary obstacle to spiritual progress.

The term *debatmabuddhi* combines *deba* (body), *atma* (self), and *buddhi* (sense or intellect), signifying the mistaken idea that 'I am the body.' This ignorance traps us in desires, fears, and attachments, tethering our personal identity to the body's needs. It tricks us into alternating cycles of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. Bhagavan warned that bodily identification confines us to finite experiences, obscuring the boundless consciousness that underlies all phenomena.

#### The Prison-house of Transience

In ignorance, we cling to what is tangible. Yet, as the Upanishads remind us, all created things are impermanent. Clinging to the transient is futile and only deepens our suffering.

<sup>1</sup> Verses 180-182.

<sup>2</sup> Talks §186.

<sup>3</sup> Talks §186.





Not only do we attach to the physical body but also to mental constructs—the ‘handgrips’ of the mind—that we mistake for security. These include compulsive thinking and endless mental chatter. This misplaced search for solidity exacts a heavy toll.

*Dehatmabuddhi* acts as a stand-in for our true refuge—peace and harmony. We yearn to resolve life’s unpredictability—its uncertainties, losses, and the inevitability of death—yet our attempts to find solace in impermanent things, from material possessions to mental defences, leads to frustration, worry, and despair.

Bhagavan’s teaching aligns with psychological insights into defence mechanisms. Painful thoughts and feelings outside our control cause stress, prompting us to employ mechanisms like denial, repression, projection and rationalization.

Denial allows us to reject unpleasant truths, while repression buries them in the subconscious. Projection deflects our shortcomings onto others, and rationalization justifies unflattering behaviours. While these may temporarily cushion the ego, they reinforce attachment to the small self. Rumi offers a hopeful note:

*Don’t get lost in your pain but know that one day your pain will become your cure.*<sup>4</sup>

We might be tempted to make use of these tactics to smooth over life’s rough edges, but all the while, we suspect they will bring side effects. After all, defence mechanisms involve an element of double-dealing and manipulation, which weigh on the heart. Self-inquiry (*vichara*) serves as a tool to uncover the motivations behind our defences, helping us dissolve the false identifications that keep us ensnared.

## The Persona and the Mask

The persona, the mask we wear to navigate the world, is intricately tied to *dehatmabuddhi*. Over time, it feels less like protection and more like a prison. What once provided strength, begins to feel hollow, leading to self-doubt and vulnerability.

To fit societal expectations, we tailor our behaviour, seeking acceptance. Yet, this adaptation becomes ever

<sup>4</sup> Rumi also said: “The cure for pain is in the pain.”

more confining, after all, we’ve hitched our wagon to what is untrue.<sup>5</sup> If we guard our self-esteem by denying our flaws or exaggerating our achievements, it is because of the deep insecurity that comes with bodily identification. Here we find ego inflation alternating with vulnerability, self-doubt, and hypersensitivity, all stemming from the root delusion.

If the persona signifies a complex relationship between the individual and society, it also functions as a mask—designed on the one hand to make a specific impression on others and on the other, to conceal our authentic nature.<sup>6</sup>

I-am-the-body thinking perpetuates chronic stress, keeping the body in a state of heightened arousal. We might ask what mechanism underlies this process. What if *dehatmabuddhi* itself is a defence mechanism, arising from primordial anxiety?<sup>7</sup>

In contemporary terms, this could be linked to the sympathetic nervous system’s default *fight or flight mode*, where constant impulses lead us to view the world as threatening. This we term stress or anxiety, often assuming it is confined to cognition. But what if this confusion also affects more fundamental systems deeper in the body? When anxiety appears somatically—through rapid heartbeat, shallow breathing, or muscle tension—we often attribute it to cognitive control, symptoms of a deeper spiritual misalignment with truth. Yet, unease in the body may stem from a primordial *samskaric* condition embedded in the nervous system. If so, this helps explain why we cannot simply “talk ourselves out of” *dehatmabuddhi*.

Bhagavan emphasizes the necessity of radical interventions to uproot inherited tendencies persisting over generations—or even lifetimes. *Vichara* compels the heart and mind to probe deeply into bodily-held memories. Bhagavan advises inquiry because he knows we will have to work intimately with all we have inherited from the past. Without such efforts, how can we breach the fortress encasing the spiritual Heart?

<sup>5</sup> *The Untethered Soul*, ch 14: “Letting Go of False Solidity”, Michael Singer.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Jung, C. W. vol. 7: *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*.

<sup>7</sup> Traditionally talked of as *klishthavritti* or ‘coloured thoughts’ i.e. mental impressions carrying a negative charge, such as, fear, anxiety, or ill-will.







## All That's Solid Melts into Air

Simply put, the body is the repository of *samskaras*. *Atma vichara* is the method for observing them. To claim, “I am the body” is to declare “I am my karma, *samskaras*, and defilements.” Yet, Bhagavan assures us we are the uncreated—the timeless and eternal. Therefore, we cannot be the body, karma, or *samskaras*, since all these came into being in time. Nevertheless, clearing the path to the Heart requires addressing these defilements.

If *all that is solid melts into air*, then form itself is largely empty space. This is straightforward enough. But if the body gives rise to the mind, the body is just one of myriad forms on the Screen of Pure Awareness.

For centuries, philosophers have conflated the formful self and the Formless Self. Many languages link the word for “earth” to concepts like “existence” or “Being.” An ancient sage highlighted this confusion:

*If an unskilled person perceives earth as earth, conceives himself in earth, conceives himself as earth, or conceives himself apart from earth, he conceives the earth to be ‘mine’ and delights in it.*<sup>8</sup>

The issue lies in *conceiving*, namely, constructing an absolute model of reality that positions us outside the model. Bhagavan reminds us that no such model can help us.

## Body as an Outcropping of Karma

We recruit the saying, *you-are-not-the-body*, as a defence mechanism to avoid the challenges posed by *samskaras*. If the body represents karmic conditions from the past, invoking the *you-are-not-the-body* mantra can seem like a way to sidestep painful afflictions. The non-dual saying, *to become zero you have to become one*, implies

<sup>8</sup> *Majjima Nikaya*, ch 1. Here *earth* could be translated as ‘extension’.

that overcoming *debatmabuddhi* necessitates addressing these obstacles. The solution lies not in rejecting the body but in deeply investigating its mechanisms: involuntary mentation, delusions, and beliefs that support the ego. To transcend ego, we must uproot these defilements and integrate them into awareness. Overcoming *I-am-the-body* thinking paradoxically requires embracing the body, rather than prematurely dismissing its reality. Then, after this work is done, we are enabled to say emphatically, “I am not the body,” understanding that the body is not our home, not our place of freedom.<sup>9</sup>

## Loneliness and Shallow Longings

*I-am-the-body* thinking carries with it fears of inadequacy. When in need, we are disabled from giving to others. We lack empathy simply because we are caught up in our own struggle. Body, form, and the material world dominate our lives, causing intense loneliness. Shallow desires drown out the faint cries of the heart, buried under the desperation fuelling our empty pursuits. Ignorance stems from the heart’s entrapment beneath the layers (what Bhagavan calls, *avarana*) leaving us confined to interactions lacking depth or fulfillment.

A slogan recently spotted on a car’s windshield epitomizes such a life: *Make money, not friends!*

This motto reflects the regressive tendency to prioritize ego over authentic human connection. Bhagavan’s life offers an illuminating contrast.

<sup>9</sup> Here we see the potency of *advaitic* language but also the risks. *Advaita* operating at the word-level only allows us to bypass the rigorous demands of inner work, but at a cost. A blend of cleverness and wishful thinking, theoretical *advaita* and its platitudes only serve to displace the difficult work of inquiry.

## Similes from Bhagavan: Enemies within the Fortress

As long as there are impressions of objects in the mind, so long is required the inquiry, “Who am I?”. As thoughts arise, they should be destroyed then and there in the place of their origin through inquiry. If one resorts to contemplation of the Self unremittingly until the Self is gained, that alone would do. As long as there are enemies within the fortress, they will continue to sally forth; if they are destroyed as they emerge, the fortress will fall into our hands. — *Who Am I?* §15





## Freedom from Fear

Freed from body-based identities, Bhagavan interacted meaningfully with everyone who approached him. His profound steadiness and peace calmed others' inner turmoil, enabling them to glimpse—if only briefly—the stillness within themselves. Bhagavan's equanimity mirrored the latent peace residing in us all.

Bhagavan's interactions with animals on the Hill highlight his transcendence of *dehatmabuddhi*. On one occasion, a snake slithered over his body without disturbing his calm. On another, two scorpions crawled over him, yet he remained unperturbed.<sup>10</sup> When asked about his composure near man-eating leopards, he explained that he neither feared them nor instilled fear in them. His fearlessness disarmed the predator-prey dynamic, fostering harmony with wild creatures.

Animal behaviourists observe that predators rely on prey's fear response. A calm prey confuses the predator, which perceives it as an ally. Bhagavan's calmness, arising naturally through freedom from bodily identification, neutralized this instinctual dynamic, demonstrating that liberation from *dehatmabuddhi* transforms not only the individual but also their environment. Conversely, *dehatmabuddhi*—intended to shield us from fear—often heightens it.

<sup>10</sup> *Nondi and the Monkeys of Arunachala*, 4th ed., p. 10.

Bhagavan's serenity was not deliberate but flowed naturally from his detachment, demonstrating the profound effects of transcending bodily identification. The disappearance of fearfulness in Bhagavan was a natural consequence of overcoming this identification. His tendency to react fearfully had vanished, and the natural world responded in kind.

## The Jnani and the Body

When asked if he felt physical sensations, Bhagavan said:

*There is a sensation [when an insect bites] and there is also dehatmabuddhi. The latter is common to both the jnani and the ajnani, but with one key difference: the ajnani thinks, 'Only the body is myself' (dehaivatma), whereas the jnani knows, 'All is the Self' (atmamayam sarvam). If there be pain, let it be there—it is also part of the Self. The Self is poorna (perfect).<sup>11</sup>*

The *jnani* knows how to answer the call of nature. In other words, there is awareness of a body but not beset with anxiety, identification, and attachment. Here we recall a line from the *Gita*:

*Just as the soul passes through this body, through childhood, youth, and old age, so also it passes into another body. The wise are not deluded by this.<sup>12</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> *Talks* §383.

<sup>12</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, ch. 2, v. 13.

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Deepavali, the Festival of Light

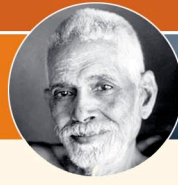


On early morning of 31st October, devotees gathered in Sri Bhagavan's Shrine to celebrate Naraka-chaturdasi, the fourteenth *tithi* of the dark half in this month which commemorates

the slaying of the demon Naraka. Following puja, Ashram staff put on a fireworks display, among the most impressive in Tiruvannamalai. —







## Escaping Naraka's Clutches

In the Deepavali story, Narakasura represents ignorance, attachment, and the unchecked ego—the very qualities that create hell. His defeat by Lord Krishna represents liberation from ignorance. Similarly, Bhagavan's teaching on self-inquiry point the way to freedom.

The *Brihadaranyaka* reminds us:

*You are what your deep, driving desire is. As your desire is, so is your will. As your will is, so is your deed. As your deed is, so is your destiny.*

By letting go of *debatmabuddhi*, we transcend the cycles of desire and fear that bind us to *samsara*. Through self-inquiry, we recognize that we are neither the body nor the mind but Formless Awareness.

## Conclusion

Overcoming *debatmabuddhi* allows us to rest in stillness—the unchanging centre of awareness.

Where blame, shame, and aversion once prevailed, we find surrender, acceptance, and a deep capacity to truly listen. No longer possessing boundaries to defend, we are enabled to offer ourselves wholly. Gradually, as the masks fall away, we witness life as it is, celebrating its fleeting beauty without attachment. Instead of inhabiting thoughts or emotions *as* self, we observe them as transient phenomena. With time, the need to be in control dissolves, along with the sense of being a small self, tied to a body. Each moment becomes a celebration of light, a perpetual Deepavali, and the luminous truth of Being shines unobscured.

Bhagavan shows us that in Narayana's victory over Naraka, we come to know the Self in its infinite glory, fulfilling Bhagavan's ultimate teaching, namely, to know oneself as pure, unbounded Awareness. —

## Obituary: Smt. Vennelaganti Ramana Sundari



Smt. Ramana Sundari, born on 13th May 1930 in Nellore, was the eldest daughter of Sri Griddalur Subba Rao and Smt. Adilakshmi, a family of devoted Ramana *bhaktas*. Her name was bestowed by Bhagavan himself, and childhood visits to Ramanasramam profoundly shaped her spiritual life. Affectionately named Sundari or Sundaratha, she was loved for her kindness and devotion. In 1944, Sundari married Dr. Vennelaganti Prahlad, Additional Director of Medical and Health Services, Andhra Pradesh. The couple had the privilege of receiving Bhagavan's blessings and a photograph with him after their wedding. Later, during a critical illness, Dr. Prahlad was miraculously healed by Bhagavan, who appeared disguised as a sadhu, a vision Dr. Prahlad initially mistook for a dream. Tragically, Dr. Prahlad passed away in an accident in 1972, leaving Sundaratha to raise their six daughters. Her unshakable

faith in Bhagavan sustained her through this challenge. A devout practitioner, she regularly meditated and chanted *Aksharamanamalai* and *Upadesa Saram*. Even in her final years, as she suffered from Alzheimer's, her devotion to Bhagavan remained steadfast. She often gazed at his image and recited his teachings until the day of her peaceful passing on 26th September 2024, surrounded by family members chanting 'Arunachala Siva'. Sundaratha's life was a testament of unwavering faith and love for Bhagavan. —

[Photo of Bhagavan at right is previously unpublished and unknown to Ramana devotees.]



With Bhagavan on her wedding day, 1944





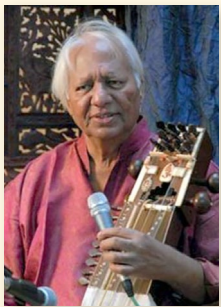
## Best Shot: Veda Patasala Students



Dev Gogoi

The slanted light of an early morn, warm and mellow, illumines a quotidian scene that cycles down the millennia. Veda Patasala students, deep in conversation, head briskly to their daily practice, chanting the Vedas that have been handed down orally from generation to generation, uncorrupted, and as close as humanly possible to hearing the breath of God.—

## Obituary: Pandit Ram Narayan



Pandit Ram Narayan, the legendary sarangi maestro, passed away in Mumbai on 9th November, 2024, at the age of 96. A pioneer in Hindustani classical music, Panditji transformed the sarangi into a celebrated solo concert instrument, elevating its status globally. Born near Udaipur on 25th December, 1927, Pandit Narayan came from a lineage of musicians, playing sarangi from the age of six. After initially working as an accompanist at *All India Radio*, he performed in Indian cinema before establishing himself as a solo artist in 1956. His international debut in 1964 marked the beginning of a global legacy, with concerts and teaching engagements across Europe and America. He captivated audiences with his meditative and emotive performances. He was admired for his innovative fingering techniques and profound mastery of ragas. His influence extended through his students, including his daughter, Aruna Narayan, the first woman to give a solo sarangi concert, and his grandson, Harsh Narayan, who continues his legacy.

Pandit Narayan's exceptional contributions earned him numerous accolades, including the Padma Vibhushan (2005), Padma Bhushan (1991), and Padma Shri (1976). Ramana devotees remember him from his cherished performances at Sri Ramanasramam. He is mourned by his family, disciples, and music lovers worldwide.



Pandit Narayan introduced by J Jayaraman in Sri Ramanasramam, ca. 1993

