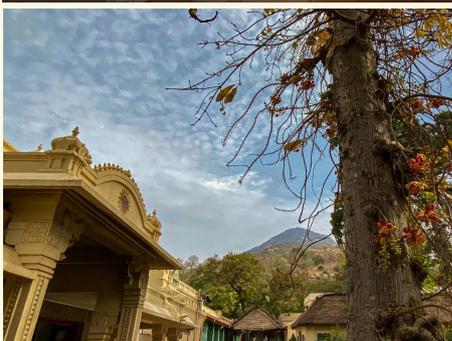


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

MAY 2022 EXTENDED EDITION
VOL. 16, NO.5



D. Thiyagarajan and Michael Highburger



Saranagati



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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

In the recent weeks of preparation for various upcoming functions, the Ashram got a makeover with cleaning, polishing and painting. Sri Vidya Homa took place on the 8th April, followed by Rama Navami on the 10th, the Tamil New Year on the 14th, Chitra purnima on the 16th, Major Chadwick Day on the 17th and Bhagavan's 72nd Aradhana on the 28th.

In this *May 2022 Extended Aradhana Edition*, we continue the life story of T.R. Kanakammal in this her centenary year.

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
Saranagati

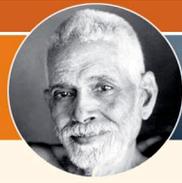
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Calendar of Ashram Events

7th May (Sat) Punarvasu Day
13th May (Fri) Pradosham
15th May (Sun) Full Moon
24th May (Tue) Mahapuja
3rd June (Fri) Punarvasu Day
12th June (Sun) Pradosham
13th June (Mon) Full Moon

30th June (Thu) Punarvasu
10th July (Sun) Cow Lakshmi
12th July (Tue) Pradosham
13th July (Wed) Guru Purnima
26th July (Tue) Pradosham
27th July (Wed) Punarvasu
11th August (Thurs) Full Moon





IN PROFILE

T.R. Kanakammal (Part II)

In the first segment we saw how young Kanakammal struggled to manage family expectations regarding marriage. Tradition dictated that she follow the rules laid down by her elders. But God sometimes intervenes and upsets traditional expectations of how things should be. If *ego is a legalist*, as has been said, and is keen on imposing strict interpretations of social norms, ego is also content to keep one from following God's call.

We remember Bhagavan recounting the story of Sakkubai¹ whose mother-in-law became infuriated

¹ *Talks* §83

about her daughter-in-law's unceasing devotion to the Lord. When Sakkubai wanted to go to Pandaripur for darshan, her mother-in-law tied her to a pillar in the family home. But the Lord, knowing of his devotee's devotion, entered the house late at night and untied Sakkubai so that she could proceed to Pandaripur. Only when Sakkubai merged with the Lord of Pandaripur did her mother-in-law understand her greatness.

In Kanakammal's case, the Lord was Ramana, and the one that would bind her to the pillar of household life was her mother. If there was a standoff between the calling of God and the decrees of Kanakammal's mother, her father stepped in to settle the matter. He knew how Bhagavan had often reminded devotees, including his own mother, Alagammal, not to be overly attached to tradition. This is not to say that Bhagavan was an iconoclast or would ever urge devotees to abandon tradition outright. He understood that both flagrant neglect of tradition and fanatical adherence to it served ego's purposes equally well. Bhagavan understood that the task of the virtuous is to follow the mid-line between the two, namely, honouring tradition as much as possible, but making exceptions if the Lord intervenes to invoke some higher principle.

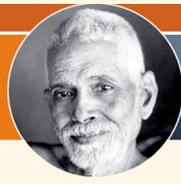
Kanakammal spent her youth in prayer and could verify that Bhagavan's call on her life was genuine. The challenge for her had been demonstrating it to her parents. Once this was accomplished, her struggle was over and, as we saw in the last issue, her father allowed her to come to settle in Tiruvannamalai—albeit under one condition:

*Just before I left home, my father said to me, 'You are going to Ramanasramam to follow your spiritual calling under the guidance of Bhagavan. You have my blessings. But before you go, I would like you to promise me something. If ever I send for you, you should not hesitate to come home.' I knew that my father's affection and concern for me were the reason for his extracting such a promise from me. So I agreed to his condition, and left for Tiruvannamalai.*²

After years of dreaming of this day, Kanakammal's fervent prayers had at long last been answered and she made her way to Ramanasramam. Now that her

² *Cherished Memories*, p. 69.





dream had become a reality, her heart was bursting with anticipation, so much so that once in Bhagavan's presence, she was overcome with shyness and could hardly look directly at her chosen master:

*In those days, Bhagavan was sitting in the Jubilee Hall. I would enter from the Old Hall and Bhagavan could see me only after I turned into the Jubilee Hall. A wall would obstruct his view until then. In the Old Hall, I would muster courage and resolve that I would speak to Bhagavan on that day, but the moment I entered the Jubilee Hall, all my courage would evaporate. I almost felt something tangibly dropping away from me, as if something were being emptied out. My gait would slow considerably. Beyond a point, I would practically have to drag myself towards Bhagavan. To compound matters, on such days Bhagavan would look directly at me. I could not bear it when Bhagavan looked directly at me. The intensity of his gaze would push me inwards. In such situations, I would just prostrate and sit down quietly, not even bothering to go up front near him. Bhagavan's look would push me inside and I would sit quietly there for the whole day. This is what happened to me again and again in his presence.*³

Kanakammal observed devotees like Devaraja Mudaliar, G. V. Subbaramayya, Sambasiva Rao and others conversing freely with Bhagavan and wondered why she could not do the same. She continues:

Eager to talk to Bhagavan I sought the help of Anandammal, who often sat next to me. 'I want to talk to Bhagavan,' I told her, 'but I am unable to bring myself to do so. However, despite the absence of words, I still get peace and satisfaction. What should

³ *The Maharsi*, Mar/Apr 2000, Vol.10 No.2.

I do?' Anandammal smiled and remained silent. The next day I wanted to go for a pradaksbina around Arunachala. As I could not go alone, Anandammal agreed to accompany me. When I went to take Bhagavan's permission at about 5 am, no one else was present. I thought that this was my opportunity. As I prostrated before him, I thought, 'What do I ask him?' On such occasions I would think, 'What do you know? What will you ask this divine being at whose sight you become tongue-tied?'

All my questions would then remain bottled-up inside me. On that day, somehow mustering courage, I managed to say, 'Bhagavan! I am going for pradaksbina.' I did not know what else to say. Bhagavan, who was reclining on the sofa, leaned forward and said, 'Uh! What?' I then realized that although I requested permission to go for pradaksbina, no sound had come from my mouth. Only my lips had moved. Again, I tried telling Bhagavan, with the same result. Bhagavan then said, 'Oho! So you are going for the pradaksbina? Who is accompanying you?'

Anandammal, who had come to the hall by then and was standing beside me said, 'Bhagavan, I am going.' Bhagavan said 'Very good! Very good!' and gave a beatific smile. Thus, despite several opportunities to do so, I was never able to speak to Bhagavan. So how could I ask him anything? And what was I to ask?'⁴

The Jubilee Hall

Not long after Kanakammal's arrival, preparations for the Golden Jubilee of Bhagavan's advent to Arunachala were underway:

On the 1st of September 1946, the 50th anniversary of Bhagavan's arrival in Tiruvannamalai was celebrated with a grand function to mark the occasion. Special pujas were performed.

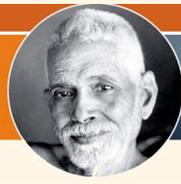
⁴ *Ibid.*

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sw. Ramanananda Memorial Guest House



On the morning of 6th April, Bhumi puja for the new *Swami Ramanananda Memorial Guest House* was performed by Ashram priests with Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan and Mrs. Nitya Ramanan in attendance. To be constructed in Osborne Lane, the new compound will have 21 double rooms and should go a long way to resolve the Ashram's accommodation shortage. The new compound is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2023. —





A large hall with a thatched roof was constructed and served as the venue for all the functions connected with the celebrations. This hall, situated next to the Old Hall, came to be known as the Jubilee Hall.

After the Golden Jubilee celebrations, Bhagavan used to spend a large part of the day in this hall. This was because the old hall had become too cramped. Sri Ramanasramam was attracting more and more people every day and sometimes, the Old Hall just could not accommodate all the visitors. Some had to sit in the outer verandah, or just outside the window on the western wall. The Jubilee Hall, being large and spacious, could accommodate many people. Moreover, Bhagavan's special friends—peacocks and monkeys, squirrels and dogs—could come and visit him much more easily!⁵

Incensing the Swami

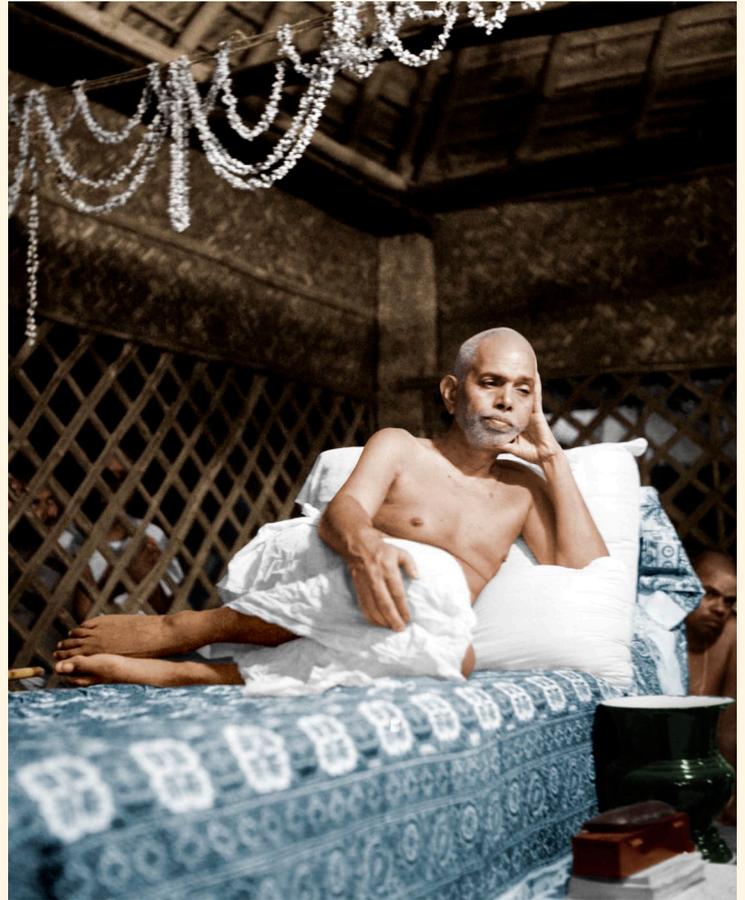
The winter of 1946 was quite cool and since the Jubilee Hall was an open-air pandal, the cold damp morning air came right in. During the month of Margazhi (December-January), Tamil Parayana began at 4 am (just prior to Vedaparayana) and consisted of Muruganar's *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai* as well as *Tiruppalliyezhuchi*, *Tiruvenbhavai*, *Tiruvammanai* and *Tirupallandu* and portions of Manickavachakar's *Tiruvachakam-Tiruvembhavai*. Bhagavan was seated by 3.30 am. Kanakammal describes the scene:

*Since the Jubilee Hall was open on all sides, the cold was really biting. Yet Bhagavan would wear only a shawl, which covered his head. Incense was burnt and when sprinkled on the live charcoal, the smoke would spread, freshening the entire atmosphere. The urn with burning charcoal stood on a stool near Sri Bhagavan. Occasionally he would spread out his palm and fingers over the fire and enjoy the warmth. His doing so was a beautiful sight! Sometimes when an overenthusiastic attendant offered a lot of incense, waves of thick, heavy smoke gushed out and smothered Bhagavan's face and he could hardly breathe. Bhagavan laughed and said: 'Pour more and more of it on the fire. Who is affected? Only Swami is affected! In temples too, the Swami is thus smothered'. After a pause he would add: 'Perhaps that is why in temples the Swami is always made of stone! Otherwise, how troublesome would all this worship become for him. I am troubled only once a day. Imagine the predicament of the temple God. For him it is six times a day; sometimes even more!'*⁶

Around this time, just before Bhagavan's Jayanthi

⁵ *Cherished Memories*, p. 66.

⁶ 'Paramount Ramana', *The Mountain Path*, Jan 1986, p. 27.



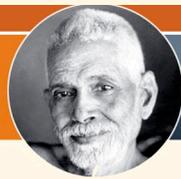
Bhagavan in the Jubilee Hall, 1946

day, Bhagavan was returning to the Jubilee Hall from the gosala. At the entrance to the men's guest room next to the stores a lady had drawn *kolam* of a peacock. The peacock design had come out so well and life-like that the Ashram's white peacock was stunned looking at it and took it to be another of his species. Bhagavan observed that he would not eat the grain that had been scattered there for him but only stared at the lifelike image. Kanakammal narrates Bhagavan's conversation with this grand white bird:

*'What? Are you feeling that a competitor has come to confront you?' After Bhagavan said this, the white peacock, as if understanding his retort, gave up his staring and started eating the grain. Bhagavan commented: 'The greatness of a piece of art lies in another artist of the same calibre appreciating it wholeheartedly. If you stitch a cloth and if a tailor appreciates it then it must be really first rate. Likewise, if a peacock looks at and appreciates a drawing of a peacock, it proves the excellence of the artwork.'*⁷

⁷ 'Noble Ramana', *The Mountain Path*, Oct 1985, p. 266.





Important Visitors

Kanakammal apprenticed herself to life in Bhagavan's Ashram by simply observing the master's actions in and around the Ashram and his interactions with devotees in the hall. She noticed how ordinary standards were revised in this unique world at the feet of the sage and the common rules regarding social standing did not seem to hold sway in the presence of this penniless sadhu clad in a kaupinam. Kanakammal comments:

Several prominent personalities and people of high social standing, wealth and prestige visited Bhagavan. Seated inside the hall, when I observed them coming to meet Bhagavan, I could see that they were very conscious of their status, position, and power. Their walk and bearing displayed such a consciousness. However, the moment they crossed the doorway into the hall and walked into Bhagavan's presence, there would be a remarkable transformation in their behaviour, almost like from that of a tiger to a kitten. Without being told anything, they would automatically fold their hands and stand bowing in respect before Bhagavan.

We may see a form sitting on the couch, but the real Bhagavan is the spiritual force that radiates everywhere and subdues every ego as they enter his presence. Everyone leaves their ego outside, as it were, and just sits quietly in Bhagavan's presence.⁸

It was not just those of worldly accomplishments but those of repute in the religious domain who also felt chastened in the sage's company. Krishna Prem, a renowned Vaishnavite, became meek as a schoolboy at the feet of Bhagavan. Kanakammal describes the exchange:

⁸ *The Maharshi*, Jan/Feb 2010, Vol.20 No.1.

Sri Krishna Prem said that 'Everything is pervaded by Lord Vasudeva' and asked Bhagavan: 'Is this not the highest ideal?' Bhagavan said, 'Yes, yes! It is an exalted state of consciousness. Vaishnavism is based on this. Yet, who is it that thinks, 'All that is perceived is Vasudeva'? Is it not you, yourself? Do any of the things perceived come forward announcing themselves as Vasudeva? While seeing the earth, trees, and plants as Vasudeva, don't you wish to see yourself as Vasudeva? If you who see everything as Vasudeva learn to see yourself as Vasudeva, you will become Vasudeva. After that there will be no need to perceive everything as His Form. If he who sees is transformed into Vasudeva, then that which is seen automatically becomes Vasudeva!'⁹

A Message from Home

A few months after her arrival, Kanakammal, who had completely forgotten the world beyond the confines of Ramanasramam, received a telegram. It was from her father who was not well. He wrote to ask her to return home. The news was shocking, and she did not know how to respond. She had not forgotten the promise she made before leaving home. She went to see Appu Sastri, a family friend who was close to both her father and her uncle. When Appu Sastri showed the message to Bhagavan, Bhagavan asked, 'Who will take her to the station and put her on the train?' Appu Sastri replied, 'I will see to the arrangements myself, Bhagavan.' Bhagavan appeared satisfied with this. All was arranged and the train was scheduled to leave Tiruvannamalai at 6 pm:

I reached the station, caught the train, and travelled to Katpadi. At Katpadi, I had to get off and catch another train to reach our

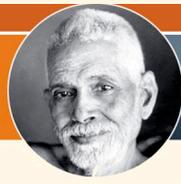
⁹ *Cherished Memories*, p. 112.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Nirvana Room Celebration



On New Year's Day, 14th April, devotees gathered in the hall in the afternoon to hear the reading of the *panchangam* for the coming year. Later that evening, all gathered at Bhagavan's Nirvana room for the singing of *Aksharamanamalai*. This tradition was started more than 20 years ago when T.R. Kanakammal proposed it to former President V.S. Ramanan. The gathering during this year's Nirvana Room recitation was the largest to date. —





hometown. When I reached home, I was relieved to find that my father's condition had improved considerably. He was now out of danger and was gradually regaining his strength.

Unknown to her, as soon as she left the Ashram, a second telegram arrived: 'Father better. You need not come now.' Bhagavan was keen that someone go and intercept Kanaka at the station, but it was too late. The train had already departed:

Appu Sastri wrote me a letter giving all these details and enquiring about my father's health. When I read that letter, I was overcome by emotion. I was moved by Bhagavan's concern for me. I felt thrilled that Bhagavan had made such kind enquiries about me, and I longed

*to get back to the Ashram immediately. I showed Appu Sastri's letter to my father. After reading it, my father said, 'Oh! I am very sorry. I should not have been so hasty. But the situation really appeared quite bad and that is why I wanted you to come at once. But after despatching the telegram, there was some improvement. I thought I should save you the trouble of coming all this way. So, I arranged for the second telegram to be sent, hoping it would reach you before you left the Ashram. But it seems to have arrived too late. My dear girl, now that you have come, please stay with us for a few days. We would all love to have you with us for a while.'*¹⁰ —

(to be continued)

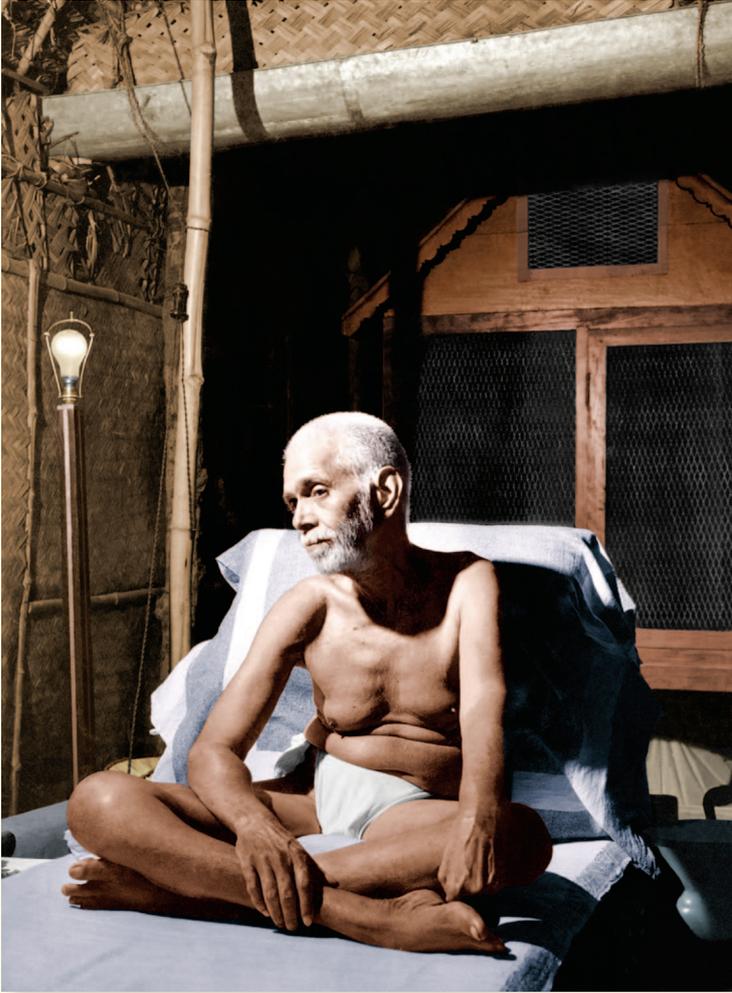
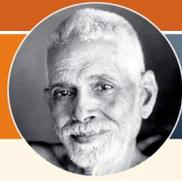
10 *Cherished Memories*, p. 70.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Bhagavan's 72nd Aradhana



Sri Bhagavan's 72nd Aradhana was observed Thursday the 28th April with abhishekam starting around 8 am and final arati at 10.30 am. Three thousand devotees received Bhagavan's prasadam from six buffet stations, two in the pandal behind the dining hall, two in a tent erected behind the dormitories, one in the large dining hall and a sixth at the site of daily Narayana Seva. Smt. Ambika Kameshwar offered a musical feature on Bhagavan in the evening. The following day, RMCL hosted the *Ramana Pada Pancha Ratnam* with verses from Sivaprakasam Pillai set to the five ghana ragas of St. Thyagaraja's famous Pancharatna Kritis. —





up his emaciated form in darshan so that devotees might receive a parting blessing. Bhagavan once commented on the challenge of being constantly sought after:

*Swamibhood is very difficult. You cannot imagine it. I am speaking from fifty years of experience.*¹

It is hard for most devotees to picture what it would be like to be in the public view around the clock. How many of us could bear that kind of exposure even for a week much less decades on end? But then, one wonders where the need for privacy comes from. What underlies the need to be out of view? Who is this one that wants to avoid scrutiny? Who is this one that fears being seen? The English word *shame* means 'to cover.' But what is it we are covering?

In the *Bereishith*, the first of the five books of the Jewish *Torah*, is a fabled scene where God enters the garden and not seeing Adam and Eve asks, 'Why are you hiding?' They replied, 'Because we are naked.' 'Who told you that you are naked?' In other words, *who told you that you were separate from God, separate from one another? Who told you that you should say I?* God then asks, 'Did you eat of the tree I forbade you to eat of?'

Prior to this Adam had lived in the innocence of the garden, at one with the garden, at one with his created nature in God. By eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, however, he gained the sense of duality, the sense of self and other. Through the self-concept he had become an actor in the world and had begun to see himself as one apart from creation. Here we have an allegorical representation of the birth of ego, the birth of separation.²

It is the sense of separation that brings shame, and shame invariably causes us to want to hide. Imagining a small self within that is imperfect and flawed, we may want to conceal it. The need to hide from others comes from the fear of being seen. As one is, *one is not enough*, says shame. But in Bhagavan's case, this illusion had evaporated entirely and there was no longer any confusion, no little man within, but only the Self. What need did Bhagavan have to hide? What could he ever be ashamed of?

¹ *Day by Day*, 28-12-45 Morning.

² The English *sin* is cognate with 'sunder' (from Norse *synd* and German *Sünde*) which means 'apart' or 'separate'.

RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Flaws in the Wood

Among the outstanding features of Bhagavan's life is how available Bhagavan was to the public. Reading the chronicles of life in the hall, we see how day and night he was in the public view, living out every detail of his life before an audience, his every action observable by onlookers. We see in Bhagavan a being that was absolutely transparent, concealing nothing. In the night when he laid down to rest, he was not alone, as unvaryingly several devotees would take their rest in the hall as well. Even some of the surgical procedures in the dispensary in the late 1940s were performed before a small group of onlookers and on his last day, he offered





As stated above, shame means ‘to cover’, but in its toxic form it can be seen as a projection of a negative self-image where we imagine we know what ‘they’ think of us. In other words, toxic shame (as opposed to healthy moral shame) is a kind of self-directed condemnation that makes use of others as surrogates for the all-seeing Eye, for God, who we fear would negatively estimate our ultimate worth. Stated another way, shame is inwardly directed blame (as opposed to scapegoating which is blame that is outwardly directed) and we may imagine shame as a form of self-correction and a sign of our humility. But actually, shame is a form of false humility that only more deeply entrenches our narcissism. Outward approval is the compensatory mechanism for the sense of lack caused by shame. Traditionally referred to as fame, this is the need ever to be acknowledged and affirmed by others. Yet, no matter how much acknowledgement is gained from without, it can never fill the hole within. Bhagavan was keenly aware of this feature of the egoic complex and addressed it once when commenting on the gifts of the talented artist:

For [a gifted artist,] Self-enquiry and realisation would be very easy to attain. But unfortunately, such people do not show much interest in the quest for truth... [Instead] the urge will always be to attain perfection in the artistic ability, and not to seek the perfection within.³

Regrettably, each of us is the artist, at least in one significant respect, namely, in fashioning an illusory separate self and trying to beautify and embellish it before the eyes of the world. Each of us is creating, re-creating, and sustaining this illusion moment by moment. Outer approval gives short-term relief for the sense of lack born of the illusion. But the gnawing sense of lack always returns, and one must perform attention-seeking behaviours afresh.

Shame is an inverted form of narcissism arising out of the need to improve. But to improve what? A non-existent entity? Indeed, our sense of insufficiency is well-founded—not because we are an ego that is imperfect but because we are not an ego at all, says Bhagavan. The ultimate insecurity comes in identifying with something that is non-existent. Then we magnify the dilemma by seeking to conceal this root insecurity. While our artistic creation is unreal, the pain it brings is tangible.

³ T.R. Kanakammal, *Cherished Memories*, p. 119.

The Veiling Impulse

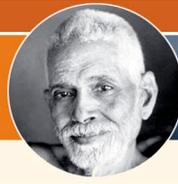
Theravadin monastics have a saying, *to become zero, you have to become one*. What does this mean? It means that to dissolve the ego, we must make whole the loose ends of the egoic nexus. We must first identify, uncover, and openly acknowledge them. To bring this about, there should be a willingness to see ourselves as we are and allow ourselves to be seen by others. But the drive to concealment precludes such an uncovering. ‘Putting our best foot forward’ or ‘being on our best behaviour’ are common idioms for legitimizing this veiling impulse. Here we actively avoid being seen as we really are, fearing that if we were to do so, our peers would turn away from us in disgust. We conceal what we perceive as our flaws to protect our public persona. Embellishment, exaggeration, secrecy, and outright fabrication may be brought in to moderate the fear of humiliation and feelings of insecurity.

Colleagues and acquaintances, if unconsciously making use of similar strategies, are often unable to identify the motive behind our vigorous efforts at public-image management. They may imagine that the desire to conceal ourselves from them means we distrust them. What had been intended to ensure meaningful connection and safeguard our acceptance by society may turn out to confuse others and set us apart from them.

If ego has extended its tentacles throughout the worldwide web in the hyper-digitized era, social anxiety has become an epidemic. Strategies to calm the fear and discomfort concerning our place in the overall scheme of things may include self-deception. Self-deception is tricky because, by definition, we cannot be aware of it at the time of its arising.

Plato wrote, *everything that deceives can be said to enchant*. What did he mean? Enchantment is the willingness to be deluded for personal benefit, and denial invariably pushes the delusion further down into the unconscious. Of course, these mechanisms can be appealing in the short term, but if *our secrets make us sick*, as goes a common therapeutic saying, what we hide away hurts us. Why? Because concealment stems from shame and what would not otherwise be blameworthy appears so by the act of concealing it.





Most of what we attempt to conceal is not blameable at all but originates from a diminished sense of self-worth. The saying *sin thrives in darkness* really just means that consigning anything to the shadows of the unconscious makes it darker.

Of course, sadhakas throughout the ages have prized seclusion for the sake of following the path to God, and indeed, everyone has the right to privacy. But how we use it and our motivations for it are key. Rudolf Steiner once wrote that *a single lie causes kundalini to close up*. That is, transgressions, which would include the attempt to appear to others as more than we are, cut us off from the spiritual heart. Very often the need behind concealment and misleading behaviours is quite innocent. It is just the need to belong, to be accepted, and to that end, to present ourselves in the best possible light. However, only straightforward speech and action can help us discover what needs care and attention. If we use falsehood to conceal our pride stemming from a sense of lack, then we have no means of healing it. Concealed conceit is hazardous while revealed conceit, pride that is openly acknowledged, is benign.

Forests of the Heart

While walking in the woods, we invariably find trees that are knotty, crooked, and ill-formed. Beneath the bark, the tree's inner make-up is likewise asymmetrical. Swirls in the grain twist about here and there. Nevertheless, we accept every tree no matter how distorted its shape and patterning. We understand it as nature's way. How is it then that we are unwilling to grant similar license to the inner forests of the heart? If regions within us appear irregular and disfigured, we deem them unacceptable. Here begins the chain of *samsara* and here, Bhagavan's vichara proves to be out of reach and his surrender, inaccessible. A fractured ego cannot be let go of. Fragmentation carries with it the longing for wholeness and anything we loathe has the power of continuance. What we wish away is hidden from view, amplifying our troubles. If ego comes from the impulse to resist, vichara thrives by the opposite instinct, namely, the willingness to differentiate the real from the hidden, the innate from the adventitious, and to behold conditions as they truly are. In taking the small step from refusal to acceptance, the habit-forces



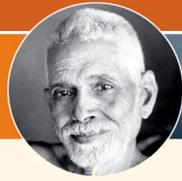
surrounding our denial lighten and the occluding veil of shame begins to disperse. Bhagavan says:

*The seeker of liberation realizes his real nature by distinguishing the eternal from the transient, never swerving from his natural state. People think that moksha is somewhere yonder and should be sought outside. They are wrong. Moksha is only knowing the Self within yourself.*⁴

The blind spot in the old paradigm is two-fold. First, we imagine that banishing our impurities frees us from them. And second, we imagine that what is leftover is the Self. Both assumptions are mistaken. In exiling the unwanted parts of ourselves, we are not in any way free of them but are simply relegating them to the unconscious. Secondly, what remains leftover is not the Self but an idealised virtual self. Idealisation, born of the comparing mind, is the root mechanism in the narcissistic apparatus and simply means crafting a self that takes on the appearance of the Self. But no matter how pristine its appearance, the idealised self is still just the ego. To make matters worse, we have complicated things by driving orphaned fragments of the psyche out of reach. If we employ magical thinking to keep what is distasteful out of sight, we unwittingly cut ourselves off from the penetrating insight born of investigation. We never arrive at virtue because of our unwillingness to take stock of our non-virtue. On the other hand, if we befriend our non-virtue, we begin to see our imperfections impartially. In allowing ourselves to behold our non-virtue—in openly acknowledging

⁴ *Spiritual Instructions*, Chapter II, §1; *Talks* §31.





it and confessing it to ourselves and others—virtue begins to arise out of nowhere. How can that be? Virtue begins with disclosure, namely, bringing what is hidden into view. This might at first feel counter-intuitive because we really believe we are flawed and that the cure for our flaws is simply wishing them away. But when hidden behind the veil of denial, they work against us whereas if they are brought out into the open, we can work with them. Becoming intimate with the shadow by the light of our own simple awareness, the inner darkness is illuminated, and the urge towards concealment falls away on its own.

Dharmic Aikido

Ancient wisdom from cultures around the world tells us that greeting inner darkness and the chthonic forces of the unconscious leads to their purification. Fables from the West, for example, often centre on themes like the princess kissing the clammy wart-covered toad, an archetypal expression of assimilating what is ugly within us to make it beautiful. The kissed toad is transformed into a handsome prince, which here, symbolises the Self. Other themes may consist of a hero descending into a dark cave to battle a multi-headed dragon to rescue the captive princess. The cave represents the hidden realms of the heart, the dragon, unconscious egoic fears, and the princess, again, the Self. A line from Rilke speaks to this:

*Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that needs our help.*⁵

In the East we have the dramatic scene from the *Devi Mahatmyam (Saptashati)* where Durga takes the form of Kali and sets out to vanquish the demon Rakthabij

⁵ *Letters to a Young Poet.*

(‘blood-seed’) by making use of her long tongue to catch every drop of blood that spills from Rakthabij’s severed head. Overtly, we know that Raktheshwari does this to prevent any drops of blood from touching the earth lest a new Rakthabij spring up. But at the level of archetypal symbol, her action expresses a universal theme: the need to commune with what opposes you. You must befriend and become intimate with that which threatens you to overcome it, after all, whatever you pit yourself against, grows stronger, whatever you steadfastly resist, remains, and whatever you hate, gains authority over you.

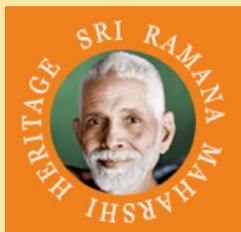
The universal law is *past actions bear fruit*,⁶ but when we resist the fruit-bearing within, it invariably comes to us from without. A revered Tibetan monk told that in Tibet it had always been part of the tradition to ceremonially appease the fiercest of the demons in a special annual puja. When the centuries-old practice was discontinued in the late 1940s, it was only a couple of years later that the Chinese invaded Tibet. For him, the two events were linked.

Blows from the Carver’s Hand

There’s a poem from the Welsh poet, David Whyte, set in Nepal. The poet comes to a temple guarded by the ‘fierce-figure’ Vajrapani (a half-male/half-female deity; *vajra*: ‘diamond’, *pani*: ‘water’) and upon entering the sanctum by lantern-light beholds on the temple ceiling ‘one hundred beautiful faces of Bodhisattvas carved in devotion’. He wonders at the monks who in some former century carved them, that they must have been made of the same ‘vibrant stillness’ otherwise how could they have brought out ‘such love in solid wood’. Then comes the following lines:

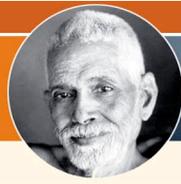
⁶ *Upadesa Saram*, v. 1.

Announcement: Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage



Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage (SRMH) is a newly created 501 (c) (3), registered non-profit in the United States. The organization’s purpose is to preserve Sri Ramana Maharshi’s heritage and to serve devotees who are drawn to the life and teachings of Bhagavan. The new entity’s objectives are aligned with those of Sri Ramanasramam in India. Devotees in the United States who wish to donate towards and participate in Sri Ramanasramam’s charitable initiatives in India can learn more by visiting the SRMH website: <https://www.srmh.org/> or by sending an email to: sriramanamaharshiheritage@gmail.com.





*If only our own faces
would allow the invisible carver's hand
to bring the deep grain of love to the surface.*

*If only we knew
as the carver knew, how the flaws
in the wood led his searching chisel to the very core.*

What the poet seems to be talking about here are the fault-lines within us, our flaws, disappointments, and regrets. Rather than things that need hiding away, they are the portals to lasting freedom and point to the very essence of us, to 'the very core'. Yet, many spend their lives covering them over, hiding them from others. The flaws that led his searching chisel have the power to guide us beyond the shoals of egoic delusion. Picking up with the previous line:

*If only we knew
as the carver knew, how the flaws
in the wood led his searching chisel to the very core,*

*We would smile, too,
and not need faces immobilized
by fear and the weight of things undone.*

*When we fight with our failing
we ignore the entrance to the shrine itself.*

*And as we fight
our eyes are hooded with grief
and our mouths are dry with pain.*

Fighting with our failing means being preoccupied with shortcomings, trying to appear as someone else, someone better, thinking we need something from outside to improve us. In fighting with our failing, we fall

into quantitative striving. In denying our vulnerability, we imagine our flaws are the cause of our suffering whereas in fact they are the golden string that would lead us out from it. If embraced, our flaws could show us who we are. But fighting with our failing is *ignoring the entrance to the shrine itself* because the shrine is the sanctuary for the orphans of the heart, and the deity there is called, 'Acceptance'. The poet concludes:

*If only we could give ourselves
to the blows of the Carver's hand,
the lines in our faces would be the trace lines of rivers
feeding the sea
where voices meet, praising the features of the mountain and the
cloud and the sky.*

*Our faces would fall away
until we, growing younger toward death
every day, would gather all our flaws in celebration
to merge with them perfectly,
impossibly,
wedded to our essence,
full of silence from the Carver's hands.⁷*

Gather our flaws in celebration? How would we ever celebrate what we most dislike in ourselves?

If overcoming illusory bondage finds its entry in investigating what is not yet perfected, the Ramana way begins with vichara. Vital and vibrant enquiry depends on a heart that is self-accepting. We gather all our flaws in celebration not just because they lead to the core of us—the Self—but in allowing ourselves to receive benediction, we are able to give benediction in return, thereby enlarging our capacity for acceptance.

If we extol a mother who cares for her children no matter how outwardly flawed they appear, why should we not extend the same kindness to ourselves? What has gotten into us that we imagine that shame and self-reproach can help us? The American poet, Galway Kinnell had this to say:

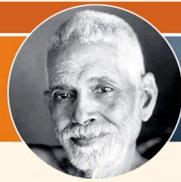
*Sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness, until it
flowers from within, of self-blessing.⁸*

Reteaching us to flower from within is Bhagavan's forté. Bhagavan is practised in getting devotees to favourably negotiate the fine line between heaven and

⁷ 'Faces at Braga'.

⁸ 'St Francis and the Sow'.





hell. He brings this about by reminding us of what is already there within us. Kanakammal illustrates this point in a story from the hall:

Muruganar had seen devotees come before Bhagavan who were distraught and who shed tears about their life. They would sit before Bhagavan, morose in their grief, hoping Bhagavan might relieve their distress. The poet addressed them in a verse:

'You are like ones digging a well on the bank of the Ganga crying out in thirst.' Then, in the following line, he corrected himself: No, you are like ones neck deep in the Ganga crying out in thirst.'

When Muruganar showed the verse to Bhagavan, Bhagavan said, 'You forgot one further correction: 'It is not that you are neck deep in the Ganga, rather, you are GANGA HERSELF, crying out in thirst.'"

Upon hearing and understanding the implication of these words from the Master, anyone in the hall suffering anguish at that moment would have found their difficulty dramatically diminished.⁹

Conclusion

Bhagavan's two-pronged teaching—surrender and vichara—is simple. Surrender is *disinterested action offered up to the Lord*,¹⁰ giving ourselves over to the hard knocks that come to us woven in the pattern of our destiny¹¹. Vichara is investigating the one that stands in the way of this giving-over. If the practice of enquiry demands great care, it is because self-deception asserts itself at every turn. But such care will stand us in good stead for by it we build a rapport within, and the light-bearing power of Bhagavan's enquiry can begin to illumine and restore all that lies hidden within us. As we penetrate

⁹ Various versions of this story have circulated. The details of this one come from Aparna Krishnamoorthy.

¹⁰ *Upadesa Saram*, v. 3.

¹¹ From Marcus Aurelius: *What could be more apt for our needs than that which comes to us woven in the pattern of our destiny.*

the veil of denial, we uncover the disquietude behind it. When we allow ourselves to rest in the discomfort, we learn the art of adjusting to conditions. Here surrender and vichara begin to work in tandem. The apparent flaws in our created nature now appear as nothing before the light of the Uncreated Self and we find we have no further need for shame, secrecy, and dressing ourselves up in the guise of someone better. If earlier we imagined that perfection is gained *when there is nothing left to add*, now we see it is gained *when there is nothing left to take away*. What is it that needs taking away? It is simply the illusion that we are separate from others and separate from God.

The astonishing fact in all this is how easy it is to make inroads into this corner of the egoic complex.

If we don't like what we see in ourselves or, for that matter, what we see in this strife-ridden world, then let us be the first ones to witness a new paradigm emerge within. Let the frequency of the higher vibration we manifest through Bhagavan's teaching be our silent contribution to the collective, trusting it will ripple out and have its effect. Let us be the change we want to see in the world, to quote Gandhiji, because the cynicism and bitterness we imagine we see in the world may only indicate a corresponding cynicism and bitterness unconsciously hidden away within our own hearts. Let us recover our innocence using the healing power of enquiry, knowing all the while that when we illumine the shadow within, we break the shackles of shame and self-judgment. If the shackles within get broken, the shackles in the collective begin to break up too, and we end up being of service to this poor suffering world trying against all odds to become whole. —



Ashram Gardens: Planting the Kashi Bilva

Recently the bhadam tree in front of Bhagavan's hall died and was removed. As a kashi bilva tree stands at the rear of Bhagavan's samadhi hall, it was deemed appropriate to plant the same species in the corresponding spot in front of Bhagavan's hall. Ashram President, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan planted the sapling on 25th April. According to the *Siva Purana*, the bilva is the manifest form of Lord Siva Himself. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Vidya Homa



After Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi, Chadwick began to solicit funds to initiate and support the Sri Chakra Puja. In March, 1953, under Chadwick's stewardship, the Sri Chakra Puja commenced and Sri Vidya havan was established as the annual rite to reconsecrate the Sri Chakra and the Mother's Shrine. This year, Sri Vidya Homa took place on Friday 8th April with Kalasasthapana, Lalita Sahasranamam, Trisathi, and concluding with poornahuti and arati. A procession into the Mother's Shrine with consecrated kalasas was followed by abhishekam, alankaram and deepaaradhana. The usual Friday evening Sri Chakra puja was performed in the Mother's Shrine the following morning. —

The Ashram Dispensary: Free Medical Camps



Medical camps with free treatment are being offered at the Ashram Dispensary. On the third Sunday of the month, the not-for-profit Sankara Eye Hospital of Coimbatore offers an eye camp with free medications and surgeries. Aravindh Herbal Labs of Rajapalayam sponsors an Ayurveda and Siddha Vaidyam camp on the last Sunday of the month with free Siddha and Ayurvedic medicine. An Orthopaedic camp is headed up by Dr Niranjan Rao, a devotee of Guntur who makes the 10-hour drive each month to conduct the camp. A Neuro camp is scheduled for early May, supplementing regular video consultation in neurology led by Dr. Sanjay Raghav of Australia. Additional camps are being initiated to meet the various medical needs of the local population. *[For information on dates and timings, please contact Mathavan at: +91-9600325724]* —

Announcement: Ashram YouTube Channel

To access Ashram videos, go to: <<https://www.youtube.com/c/SriRamanasramam/videos>>

To subscribe, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/c/sriramanasramam?sub_confirmation=1>





Obituary: Sri John Grimes



Born 1948 in Berkeley, California, John Allen Grimes was a sophomore at the University of Washington on a full tennis scholarship when he had an existential experience that led him to India. His father took up the Self-Realization yoga of Paramahansa Yogananda just as John was setting off for India. Once there, he met various spiritual masters and became one of the first Western devotees of Sri Satya Sai Baba. By the time of his second visit in 1973, his love for India had become so pronounced that he refused to wear sandals 'wanting to feel the soil of Mother India' under his bare feet.

John got his B.A. in Religious Studies from the University of California at Santa Barbara and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras. A gifted lecturer, John taught at numerous Universities in the United States, Canada, Singapore, and India. Among his numerous publications are, *The Vivekachudamani: Sankara's Crown Jewel of Discrimination*; *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy*; *Ganapati: Song of the Self*; *Problems and Perspectives in Religious Discourse: Advaita Vedanta Implications*; and *Quest for Certainty*. A staunch advaitan, John took to Bhagavan Ramana and in 2015, published *Ramana Maharshi: The Crown Jewel of Advaita*. John also wrote various articles for *The Mountain Path*, including a large number of 'Keywords' which have been compiled and are to be published soon by Indica Books, Varanasi.

Recently, John suffered a series of health set-backs, among them, a diabetic seizure and a small stroke. Five days before his demise, he stopped taking food, and two days later, stopped taking water. His sole occupation was japa recitation and silence.

On April 18th 2022 at 5:50 pm with his wife and son lovingly at his side, John merged at the Feet of Sri Bhagavan. His son performed the cremation rites that evening and on the following morning, consigned his father's mortal remains to the Bay of Bengal. John is survived by his wife Meera, his son Isa, and two grandchildren, Devan and Kiran. He will be remembered as gentle and kind by all who knew him. —

Obituary: Sri M. R. Bharathan

Sri M.R. Bharathan took retirement and came to the Ashram where he served in the Ashram library in the late 1990s, and afterward, for a time in the Ashram office. He found his place in the Ashram bookstall where he assisted in the parcel department. He was appreciated for his unassuming gentle nature. In recent years Bharathan suffered various health conditions. He fell sick during the Omicron outbreak in late January and was hospitalised with pulmonary complications. Released in February, he returned to the Ashram but continued to have lung issues and was eventually hospitalised in Pondicherry. He passed away peacefully on the 13th March 2022. —



Announcement: Sri Ramanasramam Centenary (1st September 2022- 28th December 2023)

Sri Ramanasramam's Centenary celebrations officially begin on the 1st September, 2022 and will be spread out over a 16-month period until Jayanthi Day, 28th December 2023. It is recorded in one place that Bhagavan came down the hill to stay permanently about one week before Jayanti which fell that year on 3rd January 1923. If so, this means the Ashram would have been established around this time in 1922.

