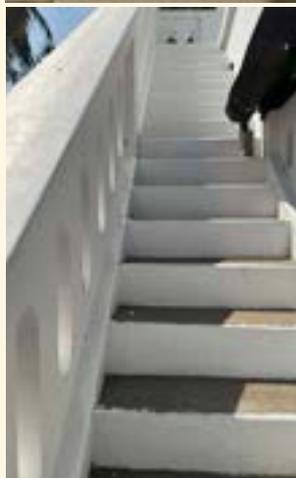


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

MARCH 2026
Vol. 20, No. 3



Saranagati



MARCH 2026
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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear devotees,

In Ramanasramam, spring is underway and the warm summer months are just around the corner. The dense crowds of the high season peaked with the Mahasivaratri celebrations on the 15th February.

The Ashram kitchen is under repair and the Dispensary staff is moving to the newly established facility in order for renovations to take place in the existing facility.

In this issue, we hear about the renowned British-American anthropologist, Colin Turnbull who met with Bhagavan as a young student at the end of 1949 (see p. 3).

In *Ramana Reflections: The Self and the Non-Self*, we explore the age-old question about the relationship between the Unconditioned Divine and the fleeting, conditioned world that appears and disappears in time, and how Bhagavan reframes this ancient riddle (see p. 10).

For videos, photos and other news of events: <https://gururamana.org> or write to us at: saranagati@gururamana.org. For the web version: https://sriramana.org/saranagati/March_2026/.

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Saranagati

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Calendar of Ashram Events

1st Mar (Sun) Pradosham

8th Mar (Sun) Sundaram Iyer Day

16th Mar (Mon) Pradosham

19th Mar (Thu) Telugu New Year (Ugadi)

20th Mar (Fri) Sri Vidya Havan

27th Mar (Fri) Punarvasu

30th Mar (Mon) Pradosham

2nd Apr (Thu) Jagadisha Swami Day

14th Apr (Tue) Tamil New Year/Nirvana Room Day

15th Apr (Wed) Bhagavan's Aradhana





IN PROFILE

Colin Turnbull



Devotees of all walks of life appeared at Bhagavan's feet seeking solutions to life's many challenges. Some only passed through, receiving in one, two, or a few meetings all they needed to carry them along life's way.

This brings to mind the young British police officer, Frank Humphreys who was stationed in India and, with the help of Pravananda and Ganapathi Muni, was able to meet with Bhagavan in 1910 when the Maharshi was still living on the slopes of Arunachala.

Nearly forty years later, another young Britisher came to Bhagavan. His single visit was brief but impactful. Colin Turnbull, later to become the world-renowned anthropologist, came to see Bhagavan in the New Hall in late 1949, just before Bhagavan, owing to declining health, was confined to the Nirvana room.

A young student at the time, Turnbull had taken up the spiritual search which he combined with his academic interests, studying Indian religion and philosophy at Banaras Hindu University.

Born to an upper-class family in London in 1924, Turnbull was educated at Westminster School and went on to study politics and philosophy at Magdalen College, Oxford. During World War II he served in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. The war experience proved traumatic and a tranche of existential questions would accompany him throughout his life, leading him ultimately to be ordained in his 60s as a Buddhist monk, taking the name, Lobsang Ridgol.

Once having come to India, he had a life-changing experience at the feet of Anandamayi Ma. Not long after this he travelled south to meet Bhagavan. A year later, in 1951, he completed his studies at Benares, earning him a master's degree. He then travelled to the Belgian Congo with Newton Beal, an American schoolteacher he met in India. The trip inspired him. During this period, he took on an unusual "odd job" in support of film producer Sam Spiegel: assisting in building and transporting a boat used in on-location production for *The African Queen* (1951).

Turnbull then spent a year in Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories of Canada working as a geologist and gold miner. He returned to Oxford in 1954, shifting his scholarly focus decisively toward African anthropology. Fieldwork followed—especially in the Congo in 1957–58, and later in Uganda—and he completed a doctorate in anthropology at Oxford in 1964.

Turnbull's first major success came with *The Forest People*, a deeply sympathetic account of the Mbuti pygmies of the Ituri Forest¹ of the Belgian Congo. Published in 1961, it was written in vivid, accessible

¹ An ethnography of this Congolese tribe.





prose and portrayed the people he had studied as egalitarian and spiritually attuned, living with skill and joy amid the forest's challenges. Based on three years of immersive fieldwork, the book became a bestseller and long remained assigned reading in schools and universities.

The Forest People describes daily life, rituals, and music, highlighting the Mbuti's humanity, and wisdom. The book celebrated a vanishing world while blending scientific insight with profound emotional understanding. It also contributed to a popular, mid-century view of certain foraging societies as relatively harmonious and morally instructive, counterpoints to Western industrial life.

Turnbull's Diary

During formative years in Banaras (1949–1951), Turnbull kept a journal while residing at Anandamayi Ma's ashram in Shivala, along the banks of the Ganga. What struck him first was the sharp contrast between the ashram's modest surroundings—busy, narrow lanes teeming with activity—and the deep quiet that prevailed within. At the back, a terrace opened onto the river, creating a space of calm and beauty, where people of all backgrounds gathered around the saint.

When Turnbull first beheld Anandamayi Ma, he felt an immediate inward stillness. Troubled by the thought that his journey to India might signify a rejection of the family tradition and his duty to his parents, he sought her counsel. She gently assured him that while filial duty is sacred, the quest for truth stands above all—a reassurance that strengthened his resolve.

Though he did not understand Bengali, he felt inwardly compelled to remain. Anandamayi Ma gave him the name Premananda (“bliss of love”), by which he became known. She discouraged any formal conversion, instead emphasizing the deeper unity underlying all paths.

Despite her inclusive vision, the ashram largely followed Brahmin customs, and Westerners were often regarded as outsiders. Yet a few, including Turnbull and the Austrian devotee Atmananda, were allowed to stay.

Atmananda—a concert pianist who came to India in 1925 as a spiritual seeker and teacher at the Krishnamurthi school in Rajghat, lived out her monastic



Turnbull with the Mbuti in the Congo in the 1950s

vocation as a devotee of Sri Anandamayi Ma. She acted as Turnbull's interpreter and companion, recording in her diary his sincerity, simplicity, and spiritual openness. Ma once quietly urged Atmananda, “Look after him”.²

Under Ma's influence, Turnbull came to appreciate both the shared essence of humanity and the richness of its cultural expressions. Social distinctions, Ma demonstrated, were ultimately superficial. At times she even asked Brahmins to serve others as a gesture of equality. Her teaching emphasized inner discovery—that identity is fluid, and that truth and beauty can emerge from the most ordinary conditions.

This vision profoundly shaped Turnbull's later anthropological approach, in which he sought to immerse himself fully in other cultures.³

Turnbull maintained a lifelong devotion to Ma, keeping her photograph beside his mother's and later enshrining it in his home.

In the “Acknowledgements” section of his renowned work, *The Forest People*, he placed Anandamayi Ma at the top. Though he met other spiritual figures, none influenced him as deeply. By the time he met Bhagavan Ramana, he had already pledged his loyalty to Anandamayi Ma.

² *Death Must Die: Shree Anandamayee Ma and The Guru-Disciple Relationship: A Devotee's Journey*, p. 379.

³ This section is freely adapted from a summary of the diary: <https://www.anandamayi.org/ashram/Turnbull.pdf>





Meeting at Sri Ramanasramam

This very readable (and as yet unpublished) diary⁴ narrating Turnbull's experiences in India in his mid-20s centres on the spiritual search and his encounter with Anandamayi Ma. It is the source by which we come to know the details of his brief encounter with Bhagavan Ramana. This took place only some months before the Maharshi's Mahanirvana, hence Turnbull had been aware of the sage's declining health.

The account is rich and colourful and the reader can see from the beginning that this is someone destined to become a writer. The narrative about his trip to Ramanasramam begins with a reference to one "David" which could possibly refer to David McIver⁵, then living just opposite the Ashram. Turnbull begins:

It was quite dark when we reached Tiruvannamalai. When the bus stopped David and I transferred into a small covered cart known locally as a "jet", because of the lightning speed with which the one old bullock pulls it. We left the town and skirted the foot of the hill for a couple of miles before coming to the ashram. It was too late to think of disturbing anyone that night so David volunteered to put me up in his room. This was on the other side of the road from the Ashram compound, and was at the end of a small, low building. Tired by the hot and wretched journey, it did not take long for me to get to sleep.

When I woke in the morning I was completely refreshed. Even the great bulk of Arunachala seemed more friendly, and my delight knew no bounds when I emerged from the room and walked over to the Ashram, for here was something which might well have been the Ashram of one of the ancient sages. A pleasant stone temple in the middle of a shady compound was surrounded by thatched huts, and nowhere was the hand of modern civilisation to be seen. The trees waved, the birds sung and even old Arunachala seemed to smile in the morning sun.

⁴ See "The Flute of Krishna", a manuscript housed in Boston University's archives, <<https://tinyurl.com/jkmc5ehf>>).

⁵ Or it refers to David Mirer, an American who Colin knew from Ma's ashram and who spent time in Tiruvannamalai around this same period. Only David McIver, however, is known to have stayed long-term in Tiruvannamalai (from 1938-1950).

McIver is said to have been instrumental in bringing the Osborne family to Bhagavan. He sent Arthur a photograph of Ramana Maharshi and two of Bhagavan's books when the Osbornes were living in Bangkok. (From Osborne's *My Life And Quest*, p. 67 and private conversations with Kitty Osborne.)

Turnbull was led to the rear of the Ashram where three huts stood, each consisting of a single room. He continues:

One of these was to be mine while I stayed at the Ashram, and going inside I found a simple square room with a wooden bed standing on a tiled floor. Nearby was the dining room with kitchens attached. Orthodoxy again intervened; a partition down the centre of the dining hall divided Brahmins from non-Brahmins. I was taking coffee from a brass bowl when a message came that the Maharshi was in the main hall and would see me.

As I left the dining room and crossed the gravel yard towards the temple, knowing that the Maharshi spoke some English, I framed to myself the way in which I would greet the sage, and the questions I would ask. I was led through an immense stone doorway to the hall, and then left there alone. To one side a small area was railed off, and in this was a large stone couch with a bed in front on which lay the Maharshi. A brazier burned on a stand beside him, and from this a stream of incense smoke trailed up to the ceiling. Two attendants gently massaged the limbs of the old [sage], who still continued to look away from me.

I was about to take a step forward, when the Maharshi turned his head and looked at me with an expression which I have never seen before nor expect to see again. There can be no comparing of the degree of greatness of these spiritual giants, but the quality in all of them seemed different. Anandamayi, Sivananda, Krishnamurthy, Aurobindo, and now Maharshi.

Maharshi turned his grey head and gave a smile of greeting which was at the same time warm and empty. The warmth lay in its sincerity; the emptiness in the fact that the Maharshi was utterly detached from the world around him [...]. His arm twitched with pain, but his expression remained unaltered, sublime. As soon as I could pull myself together, I turned tail and made my exit as quickly as possible without even so much as uttering one of the fine words I had prepared.

Second Darshan

Not long after this, the public were admitted into the hall, and this time Turnbull slipped in at the rear and sat down inconspicuously, leaning against one of the pillars. His account continues:

One side of the hall opened into the temple, and from there came the sound of priests chanting Vedic hymns. This continued to the end of the allotted hour when we were all ushered out.





We had to remain outside until evening, when once again the doors were opened for an hour.

In the evenings the Maharshi was awake and would look around the hall or gaze outside through the open doors to the countryside beyond. He seldom looked at anyone directly and seldom spoke, and while he was awake his expression never changed.

Sri Ramanasramam seemed an ideal place for quiet meditation and it seemed to derive this atmosphere from the rugged hill behind and from the ancient temple, [and no doubt, from the Maharshi himself]. Those wishing to lead a life of contemplation came for this reason and also because they received strength and help from the presence of the Maharshi.

The Maharshi gave no instructions, and the host of books available were reports of the sayings of the sage. In earlier days he had frequently talked with disciples, but now he was [ill] and spoke to [few] except his oldest followers.

Third Darshan

The day before leaving, Turnbull asked if he could meet with Bhagavan before his departure, and the next morning, one of the attendants signalled to him to remain behind after the others had gone out of the hall:

I went up to the couch and sat down beside it. Without thinking I rested my arm on the coverings, and the disciple who was massaging the Maharshi made to move me further away. Perhaps he was jealous that a newcomer should be accorded the privilege of an interview, or he may have been annoyed that anyone should disregard the doctors who had advised against any more private discussions. But the Maharshi made it plain that I was to come as close as I wished, and he then talked to me for half an hour, sometimes in English and sometimes in Tamil which was translated for me. It was a [fractured] conversation, for each time I used the words “you” and “I”, the sage would smile and ask:

“Who is ‘I’? Who are ‘you’?”

For him there were no such distinctions; he could see only the one Self, the Divine Presence in all. That, he said, was the reality; the differences and distinctions which make up every minute of our waking lives are self-created, illusory, the result of ignorance. By constant meditation, constant inquiry into the true nature of things, he said, this one Self becomes apparent, and when that happens there is no need for conversation.



Ordained as the Buddhist monk (Lobsang Ridgol), here seen holding a friend's child

I asked him why he allowed his body to suffer if, having reached this state of spiritual development, he had the power to heal it. He replied that the body was a shell; in the light of the ultimate reality, it was an illusion. There was no point in his interfering—he felt no pain. All this time his body was twitching and jerking, yet his face betrayed no symptoms of suffering. I [pleaded]:

“Even if you feel no pain yourself, is it fair to allow those who [revere] you to suffer, as they do just through seeing your body in this condition?”

He looked at me with a smile [as if he had not understood me].

“What are all these ‘you’s’ and ‘me’s’.”

I [did not know how to answer] if these pronouns were to be [omitted], but the Maharshi put out his hand to touch me and told me it was no good his trying to explain in words matters which were beyond description. He said that the only way to know that state was to experience it, and to experience it, one had to get rid of





all false notions of difference between individual “selves.” It does not matter whether we lose ourselves through contemplation of the problem as such or through a merging of ourselves with the image of our beloved. As soon as we finally lose all sense of identity, then the great Truth becomes apparent and That alone exists.

Conclusion

During this short visit, Turnbull says he was not in the position to benefit fully from the comments made by Bhagavan:

When I left, I was conscious only of his beaming smile and his extraordinary selfless character. It was disappointing not to have received more concrete instruction, I thought, from such a renowned sage. He sank back on the cushions, and lay there, gazing out of the open doors and over the Ashram compound, to the country beyond. His eyes saw I know not what but I felt it was not the same as what my eyes saw. For the Maharshi there

was no conflict or opposition, joy or sadness, life or death. At that time, I did not fully understand this apparent emptiness.

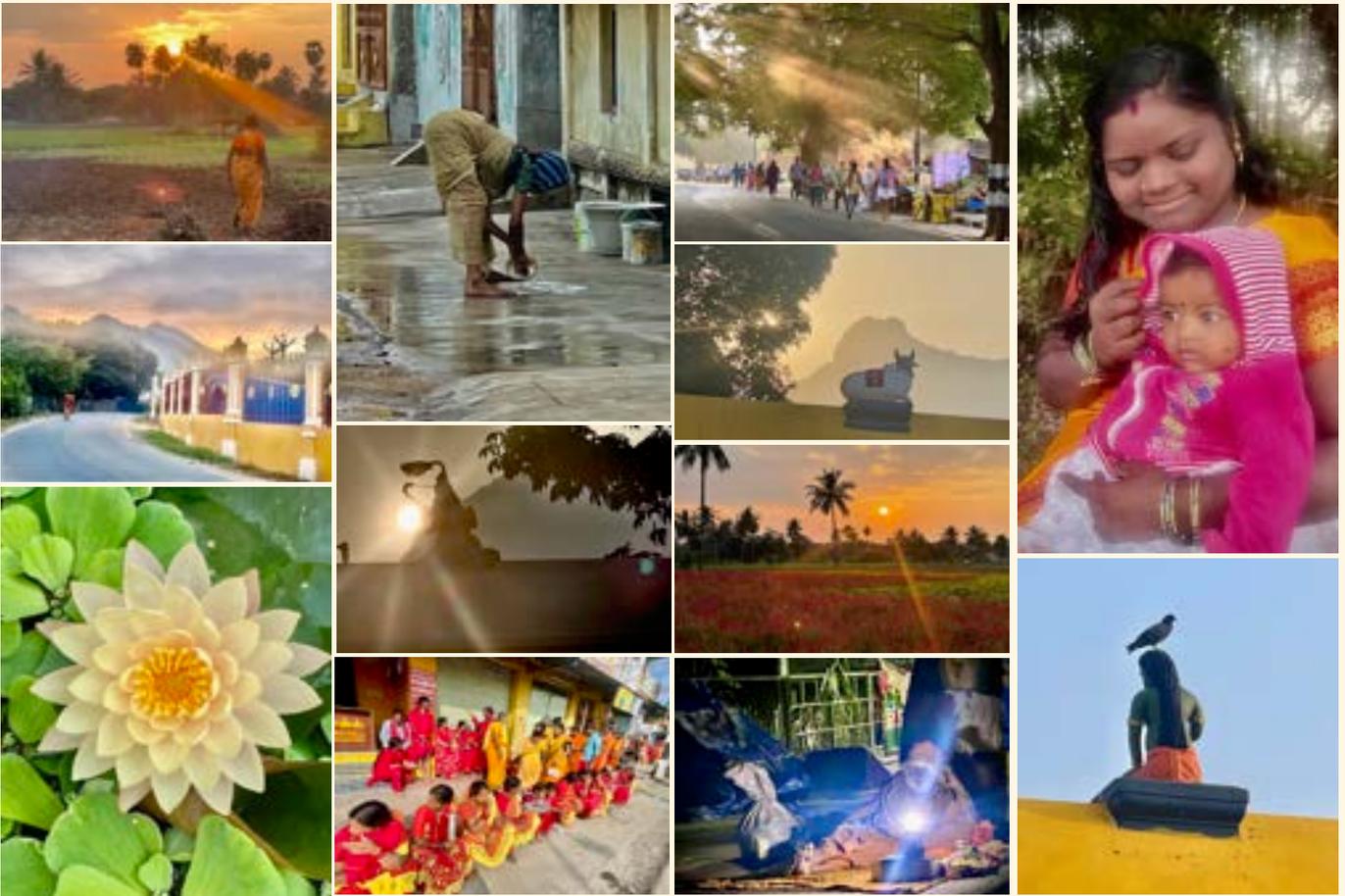
I took my leave and left the sage on his couch, smiling into the temple hall, attendants massaging his arms and legs.

Not many months later he “died”, if one can use such an expression. He is probably as much there as he ever was, only now there is no body to tempt one into judging him as a common mortal.

Out in the courtyard I put my bedroll into a cart and bade my farewells, and was carried slowly out into the blazing sun and down to Tiruvannamalai. Even when I was on the train I was unwilling to go, and leaned out of the window until the Holy Mount of Siva was out of sight and the shrine below but a memory.⁶ —

⁶ See also, *In the Arms of Africa: The Life of Colin M. Turnbull*, Prof. Roy Richard Grinker, Anthropology and International Affairs, George Washington University.

Faces of Arunachala



Dr. Carlos Lopez





ORIGINS



Skandasramam Annamalai Swami

Skandasramam Annamalai Swami, though little known to later devotees, played an important role during Bhagavan's early years on the Hill. He served as a close attendant to Bhagavan and assisted Mother Alagammal, who was deeply affected by his untimely death during the bubonic plague outbreak of 1921–22.

Annamalai Swami hailed from Aarani and first visited Bhagavan at Virupaksha Cave. He later spent time at Kovilur studying Tamil scriptures before returning to Skandasramam. He composed devotional songs with

strong Advaitic themes, which came to be revered and were sung annually on his death anniversary.

Tiruvannamalai had already faced plague outbreaks in 1905 and 1908, during which many residents fled the town. On those occasions, Bhagavan and his small group, assisted by Dr. Narayana Iyer, temporarily shifted to Pachaiamman Kovil. A third outbreak occurred around 1921, alongside a wider cholera epidemic across India.

When the plague returned in 1921, many at Skandasramam left the area. This time, however, the disease reached directly into the community. Bhagavan remained, along with a few devotees, even as conditions worsened.

A poignant account of this period comes from Kunju Swami, whose arrival at Skandasramam coincided with Annamalai Swami's passing on 2nd February 1922. He later wrote:

The plague had driven away most of the inhabitants of the town and consequently visitors to Sri Bhagavan were few. I was, therefore, left alone with Sri Bhagavan.

Kunju Swami's arrival marked the beginning of a lifelong association. Upon reaching Skandasramam, he had his first darshan of Bhagavan. Shortly thereafter, he heard wailing and learned that Annamalai Swami had died that very morning. Ramakrishna Swami and Perumal Swami had gone to arrange for the burial.

In a nearby room, an elderly woman wept. Turning toward her, Bhagavan pointed to Kunju Swami and said: *Why are you all so upset? Another son has come here to fill his place.*"

Only later did Kunju Swami realise that the grieving woman was Mother Alagammal, and the man beside her was Niranjanananda Swami.

Reflecting on the day, Kunju Swami later wrote that Annamalai Swami's passing coincided with his own "new birth," as it marked his first darshan and total surrender at Bhagavan's feet. Each year thereafter, he observed the day as a personal spiritual anniversary.

Annamalai Swami's memory continued to be honoured. His brother and family members would gather at his samadhi, perform *abbisheka* and puja, sing his compositions, and distribute *bhiksha*.

The following year, Muruganar came to Bhagavan. Though he had resolved to compose only on





Bhagavan, he wrote a prefatory verse for a collection of Annamalai Swami's 36 verses—an indication of the regard in which Annamalai Swami was held. Notably, Muruganar, a strict adherent to Tamil poetic conventions, set aside such concerns in this instance.

A later recorded account from 6th February 1946 (Uttara Bhadra, Annamalai Swami's Guru Puja day) provides further insight. After Tamil parayana, Bhagavan enquired whether food offerings had been given to Annamalai Swami's relatives who had come for the observance. When informed they had not yet been served, he explained:

There was one Annamalai Swami when I was at Skandasramam. He died in Thai month of 1922 (Uttara Bhadra) and was buried near Esanya Math. This is his Guru Puja. His relations come every year, feed the poor, and leave offerings here. We give them our prasadam. It is usual to sing his songs on such days along with our Tamil parayana.

When asked who Annamalai Swami was, Bhagavan pointed him out in a group photograph and added:



Annamalai Swami with Bhagavan, Alagammal and Chinnaswami, ca. 1919.

Mother used to be very fond of him. He died in Thai. She passed away in Vaikasi. —

*[Editor's note: recitation of Annamalai's songs on the calendar day of the above recorded discussion with Sri Bhagavan in the Hall in 1946 took place 80 years later on 6th Feb 2026 in the Asbram library auditorium.]**

*From *Day by Day*, 6th Feb 1946, *Talks*, §463 and *Saranagati*, June 2020. Video of the recent event at: <<https://shorturl.at/dZpSH>>.

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Kitchen Renovations



Bhagavan's kitchen is being renovated. Cooking equipment has been removed for a complete overhaul including resurfacing and painting and equipment update. Kitchen staff regrets not being able to serve devotees iddies over the next few weeks. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

The Self and the Non-Self



Across the centuries, religious and philosophical traditions have wrestled with a single, persistent question: How does the Uncreated relate to creation? How are we to understand the relationship between the Unconditioned Divine and the fleeting, conditioned world that appears and disappears in time? Mind and matter, form and spirit, God and man—these seem opposed, with no obvious link between them.

Many thinkers throughout the ages concluded that direct interaction between form and the Formless is

logically impossible. Two utterly different orders of reality—one absolute, the other contingent—seem to admit no bridge.

The ancients answered through symbol and myth. In the Rig Veda, Agni—the sacred fire—carries offerings from earth to heaven, mediating between human and divine.¹ In another register, the Upanishads speak of the breath (*prana*) as the living link between inert matter and conscious life. One ancient text says that *God formed man out of clay and then breathed life into his nostrils.*²

Three thousand years ago the Upanishads introduced a radical shift: the axis of inquiry was turned inward. The altar of God was not merely external—it was discovered in the Heart (*hridaya*). The question was no longer how God relates to the world, but *how the Self appears as individual.*

The doctrine of the Ether in the Heart describes the human body as the “city of Brahman” i.e. Brahmapura. A well-known image from the *Chandogya Upanishad* speaks of a “small lotus in the heart” within which the entire universe resides.³ The Infinite is not elsewhere—it is the very ground of our being.

We recall the Puranic legend of Lord Siva directing his two sons to go for *pradakshina* around the entire universe so they might gain wisdom. Subramanyam, the younger, dutifully takes up the task and spends the next several decades circumambulating the cosmos on his peacock. Ganesha, however, simply walks prayerfully around his Father, saying that the entirety of reality is contained within Him.

Here he is reiterating the Upanishadic wisdom of the inner space containing both heaven and earth, fire and air, sun and moon, lightning and stars.⁴

¹ Agni’s role as messenger (*duta*) and carrier of oblations (*havyavaahana*) from earth to heaven is foundational to the *Rig Veda*, e.g. *Rig Veda* 1.1, *Agni Suktam: Agni, the perfect sacrifice which thou encompassst about / Verily goeth to the Gods.*

² *Genesis* 2:7.

³ *Chandogya* 8.1.3: *As great as the infinite space beyond is the space within the lotus of the heart. Both heaven and earth are contained in that inner space, both fire and air, sun and moon, lightning and stars.*

⁴ *Ibid.*





The Child Who Entered the Heart

At 16, young Ramana enacted this same Upanishadic insight directly. Faced with a sudden fear of death, he turned inward and asked: “Who dies?” What followed was not philosophy but discovery—the body may perish, but the underlying Awareness remains untouched.

The Trickster Ego

Tradition often personifies illusion through stories. In the *Yoga Vasistha*, a king dreams he is a beggar and suffers greatly—only to awaken and discover that both king and beggar were appearances in consciousness.⁵

Likewise, the ego is a kind of dream-figure—convincing while it lasts, but without independent substance. Bhagavan describes it as a “ghost” that arises between the body and the Self. It borrows its seeming reality from Awareness, just as the moon borrows its light from the sun.

The ego’s arising may be a simple error born of grammar—the grammatical subject, the first-person pronoun ‘I’ is invoked as an agent for the action of the verb. Each generation rashly accepts this formal feature of language as representative of something actually existing. Bhagavan tells us rather that the ego is only a reflection of the Self:

*When one turns within and searches whence this ‘I’-thought arises, the mind subsides.... Where this ‘I’ notion ceases, there arises the One, the very Self, the Infinite.*⁶

Bhagavan presses further:

*Reality is simply the loss of the ego. Destroy the ego by seeking its identity. Because the ego is not an existing entity, it will automatically vanish and Reality will shine forth by itself.*⁷

Here we have a hint as to how to solve this metaphysical puzzle. Upon examination, the ego is found to be insubstantial—like a phantom seen in dim light. Bhagavan reframes the problem: it is not a question of how the Infinite contacts the finite, but *how the unreal comes to appear as real*.

A helpful metaphor is that of a still lake reflecting the night sky.⁸ Ripples on its surface create the illusion

⁵ Book 3, “On Creation” (*Utpatti Khanda*).

⁶ *Upadesa Saram*, verses 19-20, from *Collected Works*, p. 112.

⁷ *Talks*, §145, 23rd January 1936.

⁸ From talks by the contemporary Dutch philosopher, Bernardo Kastrup.

of broken moons and shifting stars. Yet the depths remain undisturbed.

So too, a vibrating string produces sound—but when the vibration ceases, where does the sound go? The string and its vibration are not separate. Likewise, objects are not apart from the space they “occupy.” They are simply space appearing as form. The apparent distinction between “space” and “form” is born of the overlay of language. We say “table” and imagine it as something optically distinct from the space around it, whereas its “objectness” is rooted in a conceptual label. In the same way, the ego is an appearance in the Self. What appears as “non-Self” is only the Self mislabeled.

The Mirror and the Cosmos

If dust covers a mirror, it obscures the reflection without altering the mirror. Mistaking the dust for reality, we miss what lies beneath. This is the condition of the *samsarin*. Bhagavan expresses this insight in subtle metaphysical language:

*What is the world? It is objects spread about in space. Who comprehends it? The mind. Is not the mind, which comprehends space, itself space? The space is physical ether (bhootakasa). The mind is mental ether (manakasa) which is contained in transcendental ether (chidakasa). Thus, the whole universe is only mental.*⁹

Echoes in Modern Thought

Interestingly, modern science has begun to gesture—tentatively—toward similar insights. The 2022 Nobel Prize in Physics highlighted work showing that at a fundamental level, reality does not behave like solid, independent matter. Even space-time may not be ultimate. Something deeper underlies both.

Yet where science asks *what* that ground is, the Sage Ramana asks *who* is aware of it. From a spiritual standpoint, our inquiry must turn toward the ego—the root of ignorance and the very illusion that sustains the apparent division between Self and world. When the ego is examined, the ancient dichotomy between the divine and the manifest dissolves, Bhagavan tells us. As he reminds us:

*There is no greater mystery than this: being ourselves, we seek to gain Reality.*¹⁰

⁹ *Talks*, §450, 3rd February, 1938.

¹⁰ *Talks*, §146, 26th January, 1936.





The Cinema Screen

Bhagavan often used a simple analogy:

*The world is like a cinema show. The screen is real; the pictures are mere shadows. If there is fire on the screen, does it burn the screen? If there is a cascade of water on the screen, does it wet the screen?*¹¹

This oft-used metaphor shows us that the ego, too, is just one of these moving images—convincing only until examined. Awareness is unaffected by the changing scenes of life.

The Return to the Heart

What then is practice? It is the steady turning inward—tracing the “I” back to its source. This is not an intellectual exercise but a lived inquiry:

*When the non-self disappears, the Self alone remains.*¹²

This is Bhagavan’s direct method—not something we take on faith, but something we uncover directly through inquiry.

Manikkavachakar sang of the Lord hidden in the Heart, closer than breath, yet overlooked.¹³ The search, then, is not outward but inward—into the very core of one’s being.¹⁴ This is not annihilation but clarity—not loss but awakening to what has always been present. Bhagavan comments:

*Why is [God], who is formless [and] shines as pure Awareness, oft mistaken for some poor object apprehensible by the senses? [It is] because of [the] failure to enquire “Who am I?” and find the Self within!*¹⁵

¹¹ *Talks*, §316, §313, §244, §199, §177, etc.

¹² *Talks*, §245, 8th September 1936

¹³ *Tiruvachakam*.

¹⁴ Kant spoke of the *Ding an sich* (thing-in-itself) as the limit of human knowledge. We cannot know reality as it is in itself (noumena), Kant argued, but only as it appears (phenomena), shaped as it is by the mind’s structures of space, time, and understanding. The thing-in-itself must exist, yet remains unknowable in principle. A few decades later, however, Arthur Schopenhauer argued that the thing-in-itself is not entirely inaccessible: it can be known—inwardly—because we are it.

¹⁵ *Guru Vachaka Kovai* §741.

The deception is born of an error in seeing. The defect arises from the unquestioned assumption about an “I” at the centre. When the dichotomy is removed, the complexion of things is fundamentally altered:

*All that appears outside is in reality inside; hence all forms are mental and have no enduring substance. But if all that appears outside is inside, then where and what is this thing we call ‘inside’? If all that appears outside is inside, then ‘outsideness’ itself must be inside; if this be so, then how can one talk of an ‘inside’? Fundamentally, there is only this. But what is This? And where—and indeed to whom—does It appear?*¹⁶

Deciphering the Riddle

The resolution of this question is often dramatized in the Puranas as a cosmic upheaval—a complete overturning of our habitual world. We fear such a plunge, imagining it to lead into darkness or loss. Yet the real danger lies in continuing to cling to what is unreal.

A striking image appears in the story of Lingodbhava, that is, Lord Siva as the pillar of light. When Brahma and Vishnu tussled with one another, ruled by pride each proclaiming their supremacy, a boundless column of light arose between them, shattering all certainties. As the infinite revealed itself beyond all forms and measures, the cosmos seemed to tremble:

*Stars in their constellations fell from the sky, the Gods and Rakshasas fainted away at the sound, the Elephants of the Eight Directions vomited blood believing the Sun had melted. Growing upwards through the earth, the Pillar of Light expanded through all the realms of the Gods, bursting through the lofty vault of lotus-borne Brahma’s sphere. Then, eclipsing the ruddy glow in the sky, the Three-Eyed One appeared, his radiant red form all covered in white ash.*¹⁷

¹⁶ *The Mountain Path*, Jayanti 2008, p. 20.

¹⁷ *Arunachala Purana* §107, §109-11, §119-20, §142, §157-59; (trans. Robert Butler); *Mountain Path*, vol. 44.3; vol. 48, 2&3.

Announcement: Ashram’s WhatsApp Channel

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What is the pillar of light but Awareness itself—limitless, unmoving, and absolute. It cannot be grasped, measured, or surpassed. It is the very ground of Being.

In a similar way, the insight that dawned in young Ramana at Madurai overturned the entire structure of assumed reality. What we take to be solid—the body, the world, the ego—is revealed as transient. Wealth, status, and sensory pleasures promise security, yet cannot deliver it. The root of suffering lies not outside us, but in our misplaced identification—above all, in the belief that we are the centre of experience.

Conclusion

The difficulty in speaking of these matters is that the truth lies beyond language and thought. Stories and images serve only as pointers, helping to loosen our certainties. Words, however refined, cannot carry us beyond their domain. For this reason, Bhagavan's teachings are not *descriptive* but *prescriptive*.

In the modern world, we rely heavily on thought, assuming that clarity of reasoning will resolve our deepest questions. Bhagavan directs us elsewhere—beyond thought, into the Heart, through direct inward inquiry. Practically, this means an honest examination of the “I”—its intentions and motivations—naming and confessing any unwholesomeness as a means to bring to light the subtle tendencies, fears, and identifications that sustain the notion of a separate self.

It is a process not of acquisition, but of uncovering, not of constructing, but dissolving. Bhagavan comments:

*Listen closely. There is no reaching the Self! If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not here and now but that it should be gotten anew. What is gotten afresh will also be lost. What is not permanent is not worth striving for.*¹⁸

Inquiry may appear as if it involves striving. The mind resists exposure and prefers analysis, interpretation, and endless conceptualization. Yet from the standpoint of *sadhana*, these are just distractions. The real work is quieter and more exacting: to remain with the source of “I” and allow all that is false to fall away so that we may see clearly. Bhagavan tells us where to place the emphasis:

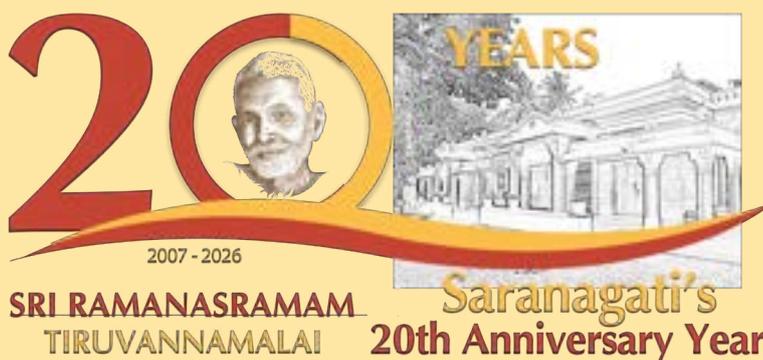
*Those [who see] with physical eyes see God in beautiful objects; yogis see Him in the heart-lotus [while] priests see Him in the sacred fire. But the wise have a thousand eyes and see Him everywhere.*¹⁹

The ancient philosophical impasse finds its resolution not in theory, but in direct seeing—born of *vichara*. The bridge between the Formless and form is not external—neither ritual, symbol, nor concept—but a simple recognition. When appearances subside, nothing is gained and nothing is lost. The question itself dissolves. What remains, Bhagavan tells us, is what has always been—silent, luminous, and whole. —

¹⁸ *Talks*, §251.

¹⁹ *Guru Vachaka Kovai* §347.

Announcement: *Saranagati's* Upcoming 20th Year



On 1st September 2026, *Saranagati* e-magazine begins its 20th year of publication. Marking this event, among other things, the publication will be launching a website in response to requests to make *Saranagati* articles and content more accessible. The site will include a complete catalogue of *Saranagati* issues published thus far for free downloading. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Mahasivaratri, 15th February



Mahasivaratri is the favourite night of Lord Siva and takes place on the 14th *tithi* of the dark half of the lunar cycle during the Tamil month that falls between mid-February and mid-March. Each year on this night following the first *kaala puja* in Bhagavan's Hall, the Ashram priests take the arati flame in procession from Bhagavan's hall to the *gosala*. There a large fire is ignited. The material to burn is made up principally of dried cow dung formed in the shape of balls, nested within a large heap of dried paddy husks. The husks are lit with camphor and burn and smoulder for one week until exhausted, leaving the cooked balls which have now been transformed into *vibhuti*. Vibhuti is the sacred ash used for the coming year in the Ashram pujas and distributed as *prasad*. How beautiful this ancient rite that closes the circle and exemplifies what Bhagavan always said about the created realm, that nothing should be wasted. In this case, the cow is seen as the embodiment of the 33 crore deities and every aspect of her is divinity itself. So, the ash of her dung is among the most coveted items in the sacramental life of the community. —

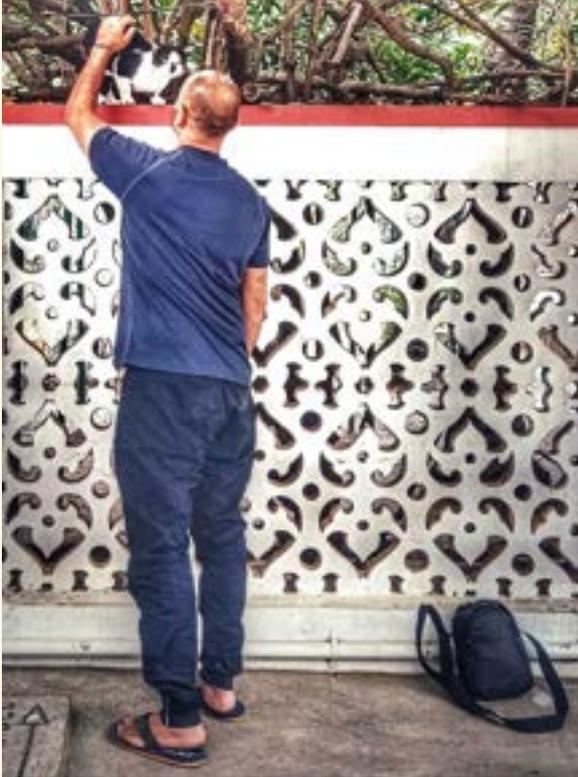
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Around the Ashram: 'Gainst the Wall of Knowledge



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*'Gainst the wall he sets his eye
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.*

— Pangur Bán, 9th century

Behind the Old Hall, a devotee tenderly pets the 'tuxedoed' Ashram cat sitting atop the garden wall featuring intricate cut-out decorative designs. His black sling bag rests on the ground nearby. The silent exchange between them mirrors the stillness in the Hall.

Pangur Bán is a famous 9th-century Old Irish eight-stanza poem written by an anonymous monk at Reichenau Abbey in Germany, comparing his quiet intellectual pursuit of enlightenment to his cat's skilled hunting of mice, and highlighting a shared love for their respective crafts. —

Obituary: Smt. Elsa van den Muyzenberg (1947-2025)



Elsa van den Muyzenberg was a devoted and regular visitor to Sri Ramanasramam over several decades. During her stays, she participated actively in Ashram life, especially the evening Tamil parayanam, and spent long afternoons in quiet meditation on the Hill. She also rendered valuable service to the Ashram through her translation, from French, the Ashram book published under the title: *A Pilgrimage in South India in 1845: Tiruvannamalai*.

Elsa visited the Ashram in the years before Covid, but then owing to poor health, was unable to return. She developed a lung condition and shortly before passing away, completed a full rereading of all the *The Mountain Path* issues published to date. On 10th October 2025 at the age of 78, she merged with the Holy Hill in Ontario, Canada. Ian Martin who she met at Ramanasramam was her husband of twenty-five happy years and was at her side, chanting "Arunachala Siva" as she took her final breaths. —

