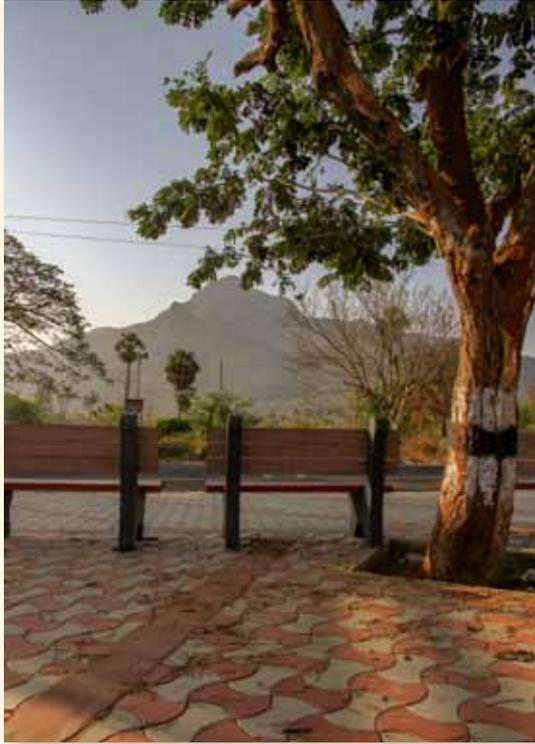


Saranagati



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Dr. Carlos Lopez and D. Thiyagarajan



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ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

Guests are still being requested to postpone their intended visit to the Ashram owing to the severe water shortage. Tiruvannamalai has had no consequential rain since November of 2017, last year's monsoon having failed. In recent days after persistent light and moderate rains, we see some collection of water in Pali Theertham thanks to rain-water harvesting practices within the Ashram premises. Now the earth is well-soaked and with an eventual heavy downpour, the mountain stream will flow to fill the tank.

In this issue, we continue with the life of Swamini Atmananda (Blanca Schlammm) who lived the last fifty years of her life in India and spent six weeks with Bhagavan in the summer of 1942. (see p. 3)

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

In Sri Bhagavan,
The Editorial Team

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

14th August (Weds) Full Moon
27th August (Tues) Punarvasu
1st September (Sun) Bhagavan's Advent Day
13th September (Fri) Full Moon
23rd September (Mon) Punarvasu
29th September (Sun) Navaratri Festival commences
7th October (Mon) Saraswati Puja

8th October (Tues) Vijayadasami
13th October (Sun) Full Moon
21st October (Mon) Punarvasu
27th October (Sun) Deepavali
12th November (Tues) Full Moon
17th November (Sun) Punarvasu
1st December (Sun) Karthigai Festival commences





Encounters with Sri Bhagavan: The Memoirs of Swamini Atmananda (part two)

In 1918, at the end of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed and Blanca's native Vienna lay inert, exhausted and bankrupt. Two years later at the age of 16, amid this broken world, Blanca had an experience that would change her life. She was walking through one of the city's neglected, dilapidated parks when, all of a sudden, everything around her—the trees, rocks, the sky and water—were transformed in her sight, became vibrantly alive, and were filled with shimmering light. She found she had disappeared, no longer remaining a separation between her and her world, “between the seer and the seen”, but instead, only a unitive vision of a perfect order of divine love.

This experience was so compelling that it propelled her toward a search that eventually led her to India.

Blanca had already been religiously minded since her earliest childhood, having suffered the confusion of loss with the death of her mother at the age of two. At school she learned about her family's Jewish faith and, as she once jovially said, “I became very Jewish”, even telling her grandmother, “I can't stay here, you don't keep orthodox rules — I'm going away!” “All right!”, her grandmother said, “but where will you go?” She later commented: “I was 7, so I began to think I'd better wait a little while.”¹

By the age of ten, Blanca had proclaimed herself an atheist, but at 14 she was reading with great interest Tolstoy's existential forays into the life of faith.

Following the park experience, Blanca began to read Theosophy, and when she read J. Krishnamurthi's *At the Feet of the Master*, she was so affected that she couldn't eat meat anymore. So persistent was her determination in abstaining from flesh foods that other family members followed suit. Her sister became a vegetarian the next year, followed by her father, and finally, her grandmother.²

Blanca had always demonstrated an interest in India and one time as a schoolgirl when first hearing the names of India's two great epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, she walked home from school ‘repeating the two titles like a mantra’.

It was first in 1925 at the age of 21 that Blanca got to make her initial trip to India (for the Jubilee Convention at the Society's International Headquarters in Adyar). Ten years later she returned and settled in Benares to teach school, and as it turned out, would never leave India again.³

Her enthusiasm for Theosophy had ended up being mostly towards J.K. alone but in Holland in 1929 at an annual camp for the Order of the Star of the East, J.K. dissolved the organisation, proclaiming ‘truth as a pathless land’:

I maintain that truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any

1 *New Lives: 54 Interviews with Westerners on Their Search for Spiritual Fulfilment in India*, ed. Malcolm Tillis < http://www.newlives.freeola.net/interviews/8_bramachrini_atmananda.php >

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.





sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path.⁴

Blanca followed J.K. in this pathless path as best she could but in time, became disillusioned. She mused to herself: if truth cannot be spoken of, and if there are no teachers, then on what basis does J.K. himself offer teaching and proclaim to know the ultimate status of reality?

Her visit to India had already revealed the depth of spiritual wisdom that had accumulated down through the centuries and millennia on the subcontinent. Blanca began to view the extreme claims made by J.K.—the one crowned by the Theosophists as ‘the World Teacher’—as vain and haughty. Cracks formed in her Theosophical world-view and though by now she was well established as a teacher in the Krishnamurti school at Rajghat on the outskirts of Varanasi, a follower of J.K. to boot, she increasingly found herself restless.

Meanwhile, J.K. took up life in America and on his infrequent visits to Rajghat, she sparred with him in public, defending the Indian tradition she was coming to know and love. Nevertheless, she was ambivalent, feeling, on the one hand, a loyalty to the teacher who had done so much for her, and on the other, an invariable pull towards Hindu dharma in its classical form. She found herself in a quandary.

Things came to a head in 1942 and she mustered the courage to take leave and make the journey to Tiruvannamalai. It was as though she was testing her deeper instincts about the ‘pathless land’, and Bhagavan Ramana was the one who would unwittingly adjudicate her scepticism about J.K.’s iconoclastic rejection of Indian tradition and its teachers:

I had to leave... because I knew I should break or go mad if I continued to follow J.K. and yet [he] still [held] me.⁵

Blanca arrived at Ramanasramam in the middle of May 1942, took her place in the darshan hall, listened to the

⁴ *Dissolution Speech*, 3rd August 1929, Ommen, Holland.

⁵ Remembering the year 1939 in her diary entry of 1st October 1945, *Death Must Die*, p. 80.



Atmananda with Rajghat School faculty, late 1930s
(photo by Sw. Nirvanananda)

words of the Maharshi and pondered his silences. The conundrum that J.K. had become was the first thing that needed clarifying before she would be able to fully arrive at the feet of the legendary sage of South India:

It is not Theosophy that twisted me, or J.K. that broke me by tearing me away from it. The twist in my mind, which has caused this powerful false identification with the physical rather than with the true self, began much earlier — either in my childhood or else I was born with it. But Theosophy did nothing, or nothing fundamental, to clear this error. The centre was merely shifted from one thing to the other within the dream of life. The shock which J.K. gave me was so great that I was knocked out completely for these 14 years; but what does it matter. Maharshi told how he tried to get away from the Ashram and food and so went into the woods for a day, but he met so many devotees and was offered so much food that he was worse off than before.⁶

Blanca began to take responsibility for her quandary and with the Maharshi’s spiritual support, began to feel confident in eliciting a cure that would involve some self-deprecation:

I identify myself with the mind. I love myself, i.e. the mind, and therefore get more and more imprisoned in mental constructs and become self-centred, so that I can’t really love others. By living in His presence continually, the mind is bound to become clarified. If one lives completely in the present, one cannot hold any theories,

⁶ *Death Must Die*, 17th June 1942, p. 91.





opinions. So, you can only live in the present when all these concepts which constitute the mind are destroyed.⁷ The mind itself is not the illusion, but rather the mind that sees itself as separate.⁸

Clarity began to emerge and soon she saw that the answers to her many questions already lay within her when once the attitude of the mind was put right:

'I don't really see anything; it is habit that sees. I don't know anything for myself and until I do everything is dead. What a strange thing to discover! How exciting life becomes when one begins to think for oneself, to question every-thing, to try and find out about everything that one has taken for granted – like a child, coming to everything new. Who would still want to go to the cinema or to any amusement when he has got this eternal amusement within himself all the time?'

She was initiated into the style of questions and answers in the hall and readily adapted, boldly posing her questions:

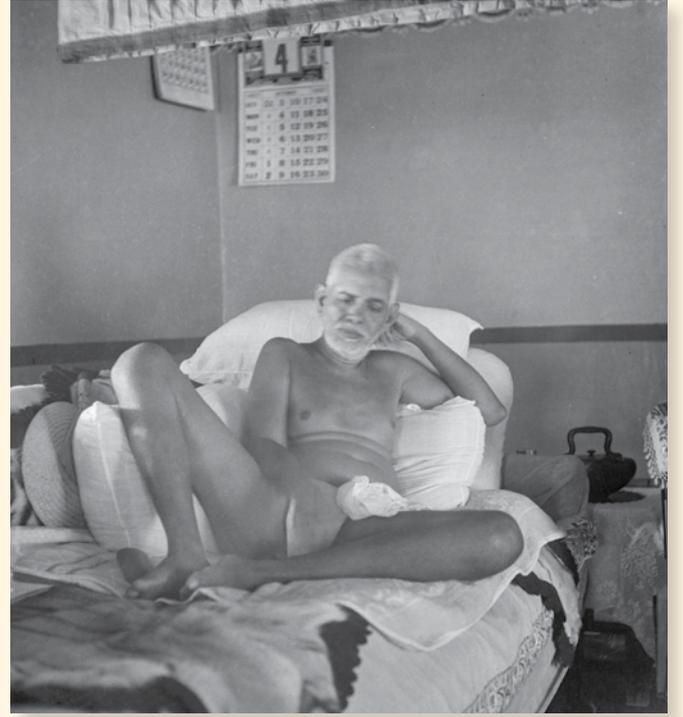
Question: When I asked you how to solve the problems of life, you said 'self-surrender'. How can one [safely] surrender [awaiting] Self-Realisation [without the mind creating] its own God to surrender to? The cruellest things in the world are done in the name of God.

Maharshi: The mind and all of its creations come from the same source. Self-inquiry and self-surrender are the same. As you proceed in Self-inquiry you automatically surrender (as you become nearer to the Divine Source). The person that surrenders to a mind-created God will have to bear the consequences of his actions and suffer for them. But even the thought of God, however false, will take you to the Supreme

⁷ Ibid, 9th June 1942, p. 88.

⁸ Ibid, 10th June 1942, p. 88.

⁹ Ibid, 15th June 1942, p. 89.



Truth of the Self ultimately. The man who has realised knows that the thought of a separate God is utterly false. But until then one cannot help it. When you are totally still, you are the Self. When we think, we are forgetting God. Self-inquiry leads back to Him (who is none other than the Self).

Question: Ultimately, but it may take a long time!

Maharshi: There is no time, you may have it even now.

Someone else's question: If the Self is one, why is it necessary to approach a Guru?

Maharshi: In reality it is not necessary, but because we are dreaming on the physical plane, the presence of the realised man is necessary to wake us up—to remind us of ourselves.

Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai: Desika Padigam §6

காரிய நோன்பும் கவிரிய கற்பும்
கலங்கிடச் செய்யும் கடுங்கோலன்
ஆரிய நாட்டில் அரசியல் வழிக்கே
அமைதியாய் பற்பல சமயா
சாரியர் ஒருங்கே சார்ந்து உழைத்திடுதல்
சற்றும் ஆகுது அறிந்திலை கொல்லோ
சீரிய வதற்கென் செய்துளை கொல்லோ
தேசிக ரமண மா தேவே

While purposeful tapas and chaste spirituality,
Are shattered in this country
Because of politics and political movements,
You remain undisturbed by such diversions
To which many religious heads fall prey,
What have you done to remain thus
un-distracted,
O Guru Ramana, the great God. —





When the proud elephant dreams that a lion comes, he gets a shock and wakes up suddenly. As we are all dreaming, the help of the Guru within this dream is necessary in order to force us to wake up. The eyes of the Guru disperse the dream.

Question: The physical eyes?

Maharshi: There are only 'eyes', not physical or otherwise.

Ethyl Merston: From where does the 'resolve' come to start Self-inquiry?

Maharshi: From the mind, like all other thoughts. But by having only one single thought, this thought finally also gets absorbed. You need not follow your thoughts. The more you think, the more thoughts there will be. But rather take each thought back to its source; that is surrender and enquiry at the same time.¹⁰

The Bliss of Ramana's Tiruvannamalai

The world Atmananda had stumbled upon amazed her. It was as if the ripples from the Maharshi's illumined presence imbued and filled the environment on and around the mountain touching every seeker and sadhu, each endeavouring to follow the radical path to freedom the young Ramana had forged all those many decades earlier:

This evening Mrs. Sujata Sen took Miss M. and me to see 'Siva-Siva' Sadhu. He lives in the woods near Durga Seva Ashram in a tiny house of stone near a pond. He has not spoken a word for twelve years. What eyes, what a smile, what a face! Body tall and thin. I remember the Theosophical saying about [such ones]: "In his holy Presence every wish fades away except the one to be like him".¹¹

The sadhu drew a circle on the ground with a dot at the centre and rays coming out from it like the spokes of a wheel, and said, "All the rays represent different ways, but [we] remain in the centre. All letters are derived from 'OM' only. [We must] dwell in that."

¹⁰ Ibid, 17th June 1942, pp. 90-92.

¹¹ Ibid, 10th June 1942, p. 88.

Blanca comments on these words in her journal:

All knowledge is in the eyes, [of the one] that has gazed within for years. That is the whole secret. We think food, air, sun, freedom of movement, etc. are necessary for health and mental development when in reality it is only God that we need and nothing else.

She explored the mountain and its environs, all the while absorbed in the basic inquiry that lay before her:

The mind forgets its own Nature in activity. This evening I went to Skandasramam, Virupaksha cave and some other caves where the Maharshi lived. What an atmosphere at Skandasramam. I was very deeply moved on entering these caves where such great beings have received illumination. They are awesome. The yogis and mahatmas live here without air, sun, water, food, books, art, nature, clothes; and we make millions of people sweat to provide the 'necessities' of life. And then we complain that there are Hitlers and misery and war. In a glimpse I saw the whole madness of our lives. And then we have the cheek to talk about God, profundity and to criticise the Maharshi and others who know, when we haven't even done with the mere surface of life. We think ourselves superior in our sophisticated nescience and look down on the simple coolie, who has at least the sense to humble and prostrate himself before such a sublime being.¹²

She went for her first pradakshina:

Walked round Arunachala by myself. Wherever we may go, whatever we may do, as long as we move within the mind, what is the use? What we need is a "shock" to push us out of that vicious circle, a shock of beauty, a shock of pain, any shock. Even nature seems merely an escape that gives me only a momentary satisfaction. The longer I am here, the smaller I get. When shall I stop existing altogether? Wish I could burn up soon.¹³ —

(to be continued)

¹² Ibid, 21st June 1942, p. 92.

¹³ Ibid, 20th June 1942, p. 92.

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: H.C. Khanna Day



H.C. Khanna Day was observed at his samadhi on Tuesday morning, 23rd July with family members and devotees in attendance. —





Bhagavan's Favourite Stories: Nammalwar

[Nammalwar, born in Alwartirunagari in Tamil Nadu, is fifth in the line of twelve alvar saints, known for their devotion to Lord Vishnu. Along with the Nayanars, Appar, Sundarar and Sambandar, the Alvar saints exerted a powerful influence over the ruling Pallava kings and brought them back from Buddhism and Jainism to traditional South Indian religion and worship. The Alvars, 'those who dive deep into the ocean of the countless attributes of God' are known for their legendary verses in praise of the Lord, compiled as Nalayira Divya Prabandham. Considered the greatest among the twelve, Nammalwar composed 1,350 of the collection's 4,000 verses.

Bhagavan once talked about Nammalwar. The Saint had said, "I and You — what do they mean? Before I knew myself, I

went in search of 'You' to several places. I realize now who I am, You and I are the same". Is there any reconciliation between this explanation and Vishishtadwaita?

Nammalwar's statement is explained in a roundabout way to align it with his own stand. (Talks, 13th April 1937)]

Tirukkuruuur (present Alwartirunagari), on the bank of the river Tamraparni is a famous pilgrim centre. Kariyar and Udayanangaiyyar were a couple greatly devoted to Lord Vishnu. They led their lives with complete devotion, training their minds on Adinadha, the principal Deity of the place. As a fruit of their devotion, they were blessed with a son who possessed divine attributes. He was named Maran and was raised in love and affection. As he grew up though, Maran's behaviour and attitude caused anxiety to his parents and the boy was taken to the Sannidhi of the Lord. Maran sat under a tamarind tree in the precincts of the temple and refused to move from there. He went into a deep trance in no time. The parents found it impossible to move him.

The boy's concentration lasted sixteen long years. Attracted by the radiance of his austerity, the Vaishnava devotee Madhurakavi, took him as his master and sought protection and guidance from him. Madhurakavi's reverence for his Guru moved Maran and awoke him from his trance. The disciple questioned him, 'When the atom takes refuge in the inert body, what does it eat and where does it sleep?'

Maran broke his silence and said, 'It eats the inert body and sleeps on the corpse'. This reply reflected Maran's transcendental experience. He came to be known as Nammalwar, meaning 'our own' Alvar.

Nammalwar sang out his divine experiences in chaste Tamil. His poetry, sanctified by the feet of Lord Vishnu, throbbed with life and flowed like the mother Ganga in four tributaries. They became famous as the four Vaishnava Vedas — *Tiru-vayumoli*, *Tiru-virutham*, *Tiru-vachiriyam* and *Periya Tiru-vantaadi*.

The Vaishnavaites delighted themselves by regarding him as Kulapathi — the head of their clan. He was revered as the incarnation of Adishesha.

The realized soul accepts such loving accolades with indulgence but knows in his heart that he is Himself. —





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Vedapatasala Pariksha



On the evening of the 28th July, Vedic students from around South India arrived at the Ashram to undergo three days of examinations (29th-31th) in Krishna Yajur Veda, Rig Veda and Sama Veda. Mulam, Kramam and Sambhita, were among the examinations given. Pariksha is the ancient means for ensuring faithful transmission of the various Veda pathas across generations. Certificates affirm and authenticate a Vedic student's training and ability. —

Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Ramanasramam Pharmaceuticals



Sri Ramanasramam now has its own brand of select medications due to the efforts of a devotee. This brings down the cost of the medications by 90% which is the

post-manufacturing price mark-up. We hope to bring out more medications in Sri Ramanasramam brand soon. —

Obituary: Smt. Dharmambal



Smt. Dharmambal of Tipparajapuram had the darshan of Sri Bhagavan when she was eight years old. Her father and all her relatives used to regularly visit the Ashram already from Bhagavan's Virupaksha days. Her father Rama Iyer of Koneri Rajapuram and her father-in-law Krishnaswami contributed to the renovation of Pali Tirtam (adjoining the ashram) to facilitate water supply needs of the early days of Ramanasramam in the 1920s. Dharmambal had the rare opportunity of serving devotees of Bhagavan like Muruganar, Ramanatha Brahmachari and others when they came to visit her house in Tipparajapuram (near Kumbakonam). On April 14, 1950 at 8.47pm, Dharmambal and her mother-in-law saw a bright light shining forth from the family photo of Sri Bhagavan. Shortly after that they got the news that Sri Bhagavan had left the body. By such an experience they were convinced that Bhagavan was ever with them. Her husband Balasubramanyam too started visiting the Ashram from the age of eight (from 1934) and the entire family—sons, grandsons and great-grandsons—continue to visit the Ashram to this day. Dharmambal was absorbed in Bhagavan on 28th July 2019 at the age of 85. She is survived by her husband and three sons. —

