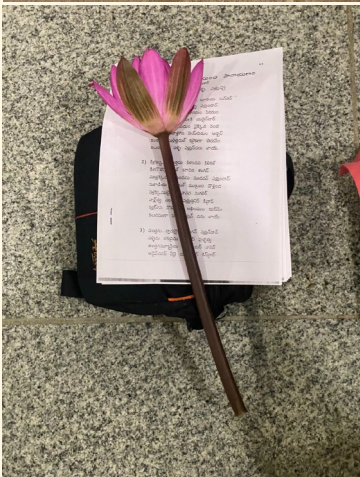
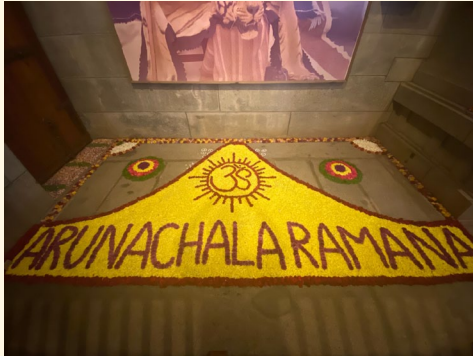


# Saranagati



SARANAGATI  
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

EXTENDED RAMANA JAYANTI ISSUE  
JANUARY 2024, VOL. 18, NO. 1



D. Thiyagarajan





## Saranagati



EXTENDED RAMANA JAYANTI ISSUE  
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IN THIS  
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

In mid-December, early morning Dhanurmasa pujas began each day and are to continue till Pongal. For many, this is a favourite time of year and devotees rejoice at gathering in Bhagavan's Sannidhi in the early morning hours to attend pujas and recite the *Vishnusahasranamam*.

In this *Extended Ramana Jayanti* issue we recall Anandamayi Ma's visit to Ramanasramam in November 1952 to lay the foundation stone for Bhagavan's Samadhi (see page 3).

Also in this issue, we present Bhagavan's teachings as depicted in the Upanishadic tradition. Every devotee knows that Bhagavan's spiritual liberation was direct without any reference to books or the oral tradition. But it was interesting for Bhagavan that much of what he uncovered internally had been written about in the Upanishads 3,000 years earlier (see page 10).

For videos, photos and other news of events, go to <<https://sriramanamaharshi.org>> or write to us at <[saranagati@gururamana.org](mailto:saranagati@gururamana.org)>. For the web version: <[http://sriramana.org/saranagati/January\\_2024/](http://sriramana.org/saranagati/January_2024/)> or <<https://saranagati.arunachala.org/web-issues/>>.

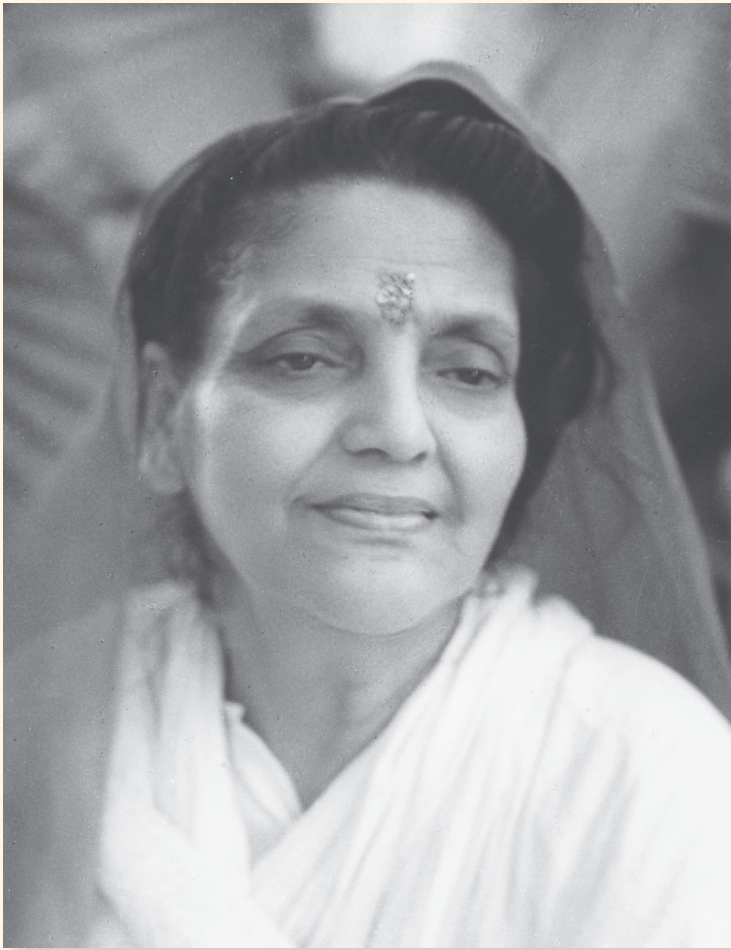
In Sri Bhagavan,  
*Saranagati*

<i>In Retrospect: Anandamayi Ma at Sri Ramanasramam</i>	3
<i>Spiritual Instruction §11</i>	4
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Ramana Vijayam</i>	6
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Lucy Ma Day</i>	8
<i>Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 144th Jayanti</i>	9
<i>Ramana Reflections: Bhagavan and the Upanishadic Fire</i>	10
<i>Obituary: Sri Jayendran</i>	15
<i>Sri Ramanasramam Calendar 2024</i>	15
<i>New Video: Sri Ramanasramam, Then and Now</i>	15
<i>Obituary: Smt. Uma Devi</i>	16
<i>Obituary: Smt. Lalitha</i>	16
<i>Obituary: Sri R. Murugaiyan</i>	16

## Calendar of Ashram Events

9th Jan (Tue) Pradosham  
12th Jan (Fri) Sivaprakasham Pillai Day  
14th Jan (Sun) Ramaswami Pillai Day/Bhogi  
15th Jan (Mon) Sankaranthi: Pongal  
16th Jan (Tue) Mattu Pongal  
17th Jan (Wed) Arunachaleswara Pradakshina

23rd Jan (Tue) Pradosham  
24th Jan (Weds) Punarvasu  
24th-25th Jan (Weds-Thurs) Pournami/Chinna Swami Day  
31st Jan Swami Rajeswarananda Day  
7th Feb (Wed) Pradosham  
21st Feb (Wed) Punarvasu/Pradosham



## IN RETROSPECT

### Anandamayi Ma at Sri Ramanasramam

In the years following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana, the Ashram faced numerous challenges—court cases, financial crises, and abandonment by most devotees who, in their despondency over Bhagavan's physical absence, simply left Tiruvannamalai. Chinna Swami and the management struggled to preserve Bhagavan's legacy, which according to Bhagavan's will meant in part daily performance of pujas in the Mother's Shrine and at Bhagavan's Samadhi shrine. There was a sense of urgency to build a *mantapam* over Bhagavan's

Samadhi, both for the prescribed daily Vedic worship as well as for devotees' meditation. The construction of the shrine, *mantapam* and eventually, the main hall, was to take place in successive stages but work progressed slowly owing to lack of funds.<sup>1</sup>

Somewhere in 1951, the Ramanasramam devotee, Feroza Taleyarkhan met Anandamayi Ma in Delhi and urged her to visit South India and Sri Ramanasramam. Little did anyone know that such a future visit would have an impact on an eventual *mantapam* over Bhagavan's shrine. Mrs Taleyarkhan insisted that if ever such a tour were to take place, she would be happy to make all the necessary arrangements. The following year, Anandamayi Ma did in fact decide to come and Mrs. Taleyarkhan lost no time in organising a reception committee in Madras. Consisting of local dignitaries and influential figures, the committee made recommendations for places of interest. Among those involved were Ethel Merston and S.S. Cohen. Cohen participated in the programme from start to finish and took copious notes which he later typed up into a brief chronicle of the twelve-day event.

When Anandamayi Ma arrived in Egmore Station at 8.45 am Monday morning, 27th October 1952, she was received by some of the most prominent citizens of Madras. Among those present were members of the welcoming committee which included Ramana devotees, among them Ethel Merston and S.S. Cohen. It had been a point of honour for Bhagavan devotees to give Anandamayi Ma the respect due during this visit to the Tamil land which would include several days at Sri Ramanasramam. No doubt her presence would help relieve some of the ache devotees were experiencing in these early years following Bhagavan's Mahanirvana.

A household name for some, Anandamayi Ma was an unknown figure for many in South India. Meeting her on this her first visit they understood the truth about the reputation that had preceded her.

Born in the year of Bhagavan's Advent to Arunachala, Nirmala Sundari was the daughter of an orthodox, Vaishnavite Brahmin family and came to

<sup>1</sup> See *Saranagati*, May 2013, p. 6; copy the following URL into your browser: <[https://sriramanamaharshi.org/saranagati/Saranagathi\\_eNewsletter\\_May\\_2013.pdf](https://sriramanamaharshi.org/saranagati/Saranagathi_eNewsletter_May_2013.pdf)>





be revered in North India as an incarnation of Durga. As a girl she was steeped in bhakti yoga, embodying divine grace, inspiring a spiritual culture centred on service, love, and the constant remembrance of the Divine. From her youth, she evidenced intense spiritual gifts which included thorough devotion to God and intermittent God-intoxicated states. Well-known saints of the day in East Bengal, the region of her birth (now Bangladesh), were astonished by her bright spirit and she eventually earned the epithet Anandamayi or 'joy-permeated one'. But most of her devotees called her Mataji.

When Anandamayi Ma or Mataji arrived in Madras with twenty of her devotees, she was brought to the Abbotsbury Bungalow in Mount Road, Teynampet. There the reception committee led by Mrs. Taleyarkhan had constructed a large *shamyana* out of mats and palm leaves, tastefully decorated and carpeted. Since Hindi was not widely spoken among Madrasis, there seemed at first to be a formidable language gap. The translators proficient in Hindi lacked a sufficient grasp of the subjects Anandamayi Ma was taking up. Conversely, many of those well-versed in such subjects lacked proficiency in Hindi. Consequently, some felt that many of the crucial aspects of her comments were not made clear. Despite this, Mataji's sincerity and enthusiasm prompted translators to do their very best in deciphering her meaning, and participants found no great handicaps owing to translation.

The packed schedule for the one-week stay in Madras included private interviews where she patiently fielded questions. On the night of 29th October and for the following five nights, she took questions in public after

9 pm when most had gone home. Those who remained, gathered into the anteroom of her newly constructed Madras residence in Mount Road, filling it to capacity. S.S. Cohen was on hand to note down the exchanges:

*A questioner asked when and at what age and through what sadhana had she attained enlightenment. Anandamayi Ma laughed in her characteristic child-like way and said that she was not aware of any date or time when she had attained enlightenment, that she knew of no sadhana deliberately performed, nor of any suddenness in spiritual illumination, which made a distinction between a life that had gone and a new one that had taken its place, that she was now as she had ever been.<sup>2</sup>*

This compelling response born of humility showed that Anandamayi Ma was neither making claims about herself nor denying her genuine understanding. In another question, she answered in words that Bhagavan might have used. The question centred on how to distinguish *purnata* from *apurnata*? Anandamayi Ma comments:

*You are purna, and so you ought to know. There is the veil of ajnana, but amid that, there is the door of jnana. You must find yourself. Of course, the guru will help you. You can begin from anywhere. What is required is ekagrata (one-pointedness). Enquire, "Who am I?" and you will find the answer. Having been born as humans we must not waste this opportunity. At least for a few seconds every day, we must enquire who we are. It is no use taking a return ticket again and again. Birth to death and death to birth is samsara. But really there is no birth or death. We must realise that.<sup>3</sup>*

A related question followed, "how do we know there is rebirth? There is the function of breathing in the body but as soon as it stops, we die. How can we say that we are born again?" Anandamayi Ma responds:

<sup>2</sup> S.S. Cohen, 'Ma Anandamayee in Madras and Tiruvannamalai' published in *Ananda Varta*, vol 1, no 2, p. 60

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

## Spiritual Instruction § 11

### *Destroying the Sense of 'I' and 'Mine'*

*How can it be said that the end of the path of knowledge (jnana) and the end of devotion (bhakti) are the same?*

Whatever the means, the destruction of the sense 'I' and 'mine' is the goal, and as these are interdependent, the destruction of either of them causes the destruction of the other; therefore in order to achieve that state of Silence which is beyond thought and word, either the path of knowledge which removes the sense of 'I' or the path of devotion which removes the sense of 'mine', will suffice. So there is no doubt that the end of the paths of devotion and knowledge are one and the same. —







*Yes, that is ignorance. Why go so far as rebirth? One does not know what will happen the next moment. Yet, there is knowledge. Those who have penetrated the veil of ignorance tell us that we are the eternal Atman. For my part, I am only a child and do not know how to lecture or give discourses. Just as a child, when it finds something sweet and good, takes it to his mother and father, so do I place before you what is sweet and good. You take whatever pleases you. Mine is only a child's prattle. In fact, it is you alone that question and you alone that answer. You beat the drum, and you hear the sound.<sup>4</sup>*

Another questioner asked “how is one to find God?” Mataji said, “Cry for him”. “And if tears do not come, if you do not long for Him, keep company with those who do — satsang.”<sup>5</sup> A lady questioner then asked, “how can our minds be free for prayer and meditation when we are so much burdened by work and family responsibilities, i.e. husband, children, and home? What should we do in that case?” Ma said:

*Let the work be done of its own accord without your exertion. Work without the feeling that it is you who are working. Take it as if it is God's work, done through you as His instrument. Then your mind will be at rest and peaceful. That is prayer and meditation.<sup>6</sup>*

On the first day following their arrival, Anandamayi Ma and her party visited the temple at Mylapore and three days later, on the 30th, the ancient shrines of Mahabalipuram. On their return to Madras, they climbed the world-renowned Tirukkazhugukunram mandir where two eagles come from afar each day at 11 am to receive offerings from the hand of the resident priest. Ma was able to witness this unusual ritual which is said to have occurred each day without break over numerous centuries, irrespective of weather conditions.

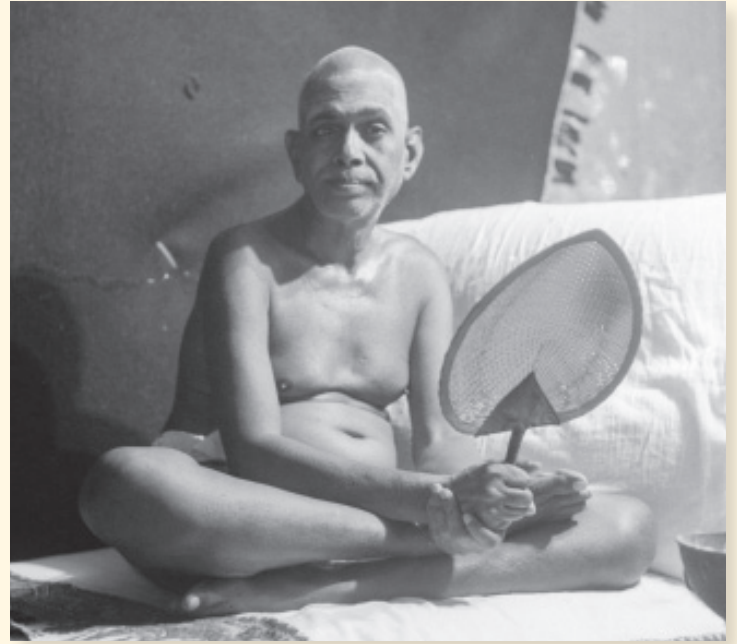
The 30th of October was a Thursday, and it was the custom among Ramana devotees in the area to gather in the house of P. S. G. Rao in Gandhinagar, Adyar and sing Ramana bhajans on the last Thursday of each month. Anandamayi Ma was invited to join. Cohen describes the scene:

*Anandamayi Ma sat on a sofa under floral decorations and facing her at the farther end squatted scores of Brahmins who*

<sup>4</sup> Cohen comments that Mother addresses every man as *pitaji* and every woman as *mataji*, *Ananda Varta*, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> Ethel Merston, *A Woman's Work*, by Mary Ellen Korman, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> *Ananda Varta*, vol 1, no 2, p. 57.



*chanted in rhythmic cadence the Veda verses which have been daily recited in Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai during and after the lifetime of the Master, followed by 'Upadesa Saram' in Sanskrit, the verses which Sri Bhagavan had himself composed. The very large audience spread out on the lawn, in the whole open space, and the verandas of the bungalow. With her presence, the large photograph of the Maharshi and his all-pervading influence, the Vedaparayanam and the incense, thrilled and uplifted all present.<sup>7</sup>*

On the evening of 1st November, Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, the Ramana devotee and head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Madras, undertook the difficult task of translating her answers. On the following day he gave a written record of the talk:

*Where questions arise, there is an answer too. Who questions whom? There is only one Atman everywhere: you are that. Where there is duality, there is misery. You are non-dual, eternal. You seek and desire truth, knowledge, bliss, because you are that. No one wants mrityu, ajnana, dukkha, (death, ignorance, sorrow). True, evil has a fascination for man, who, attracted by it, falls. This is due to vasana which means non-recognition (na) of the existence of God (vasa). To counteract it, one must be attracted towards God, one's true Self. You are complete (purna).<sup>8</sup>*

On 3rd November, the time for her departure from Madras came and admirers gathered to bid their

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.





farewells. Cohen observed the gathering with a keen eye and noticed a friend who had prior to the visit been wracked with despair over a certain personal condition. But when he looked at his friend's face that morning, he saw something very different. He writes:

*I now read in it a solemn, pensive emotion, which a month ago I could not have dreamt it was capable of feeling, and I heartily rejoiced. It was one of the miracles Anandamayi Ma had performed in the short space of only one week. She had relieved, the long pent-up sorrow of my friend.<sup>9</sup>*

Anandamayi Ma went to Pondicherry, and early the following morning, to Chidambaram. She was scheduled to arrive in Tiruvannamalai on the same day, 4th November at 12.30 midday. Cohen writes:

*Mrs. Taleyarkhan in concert with the trustees of the Arunachaleswara temple and the local officials prepared to receive her with temple honours. But at exactly 11 am, i.e. ninety minutes before the scheduled, time, her car quietly glided into Ramanasramam, thus, leaving trustees, officials, elephants, and priests cooling their heels in the shade of trees on the Chidambaram high road, waiting for her, totally unaware of her early arrival.<sup>10</sup>*

Mataji wandered here and there in the Ashram with the keen curiosity of a young girl, intent on seeing the places "sanctified by the holy presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana". Cohen narrates:

*Before the samadhi, she reverently stood with folded hands, and enquired about how the sacred body had been buried, and whether there was a lingam on the samadhi. (The lingam was not visible because it was covered with flower garlands.) Then she entered Matrubbuteswara Shrine which was built over the remains of the Master's mother and climbed to the sanctum sanctorum where she*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*was shown the Sri Chakra and the sacred lingam. At 5 pm she attended the usual Vedaparayana near Sri Maharshi's samadhi, and at 7 pm a bhajan programme.<sup>11</sup>*

On the following day, Bhagavan's devotees and members of the managing committee who had come from Madras, gathered in Sri Ramanasramam at 9 am, the 5th November for the high point of Ma's visit to South India, namely, the ceremony of laying the foundation stone for a structure over Sri Bhagavan's samadhi. This was no small occasion for Chinna Swami and Venkatoos who hoped that they might generate interest and gain the wherewithal to do the needful for Bhagavan's samadhi. As it would turn out, Anandamayi Ma would be the catalyst for an 18-year project to construct in gradual stages a *mantapam* and large hall that would become the centre of life in Sri Ramanasramam and for devotees around the world.<sup>12</sup> It would begin with the laying of a single stone. Devotees recalled the words and gestures of Anandamayi Ma that morning while she faced Sri Bhagavan's Samadhi:

*Here is the sun; we are all the stars in daytime.<sup>13</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Initially, a simple bamboo structure with a palm-leaf matted roof was erected over the Samadhi. In 1952, the foundation stones were laid. By July 1964 the central structure of the shrine with its polished black granite pillars was in place. In August 1966 the Gopuram above the Samadhi and a second granite exterior around the Samadhi were inaugurated. Kumbhabhishkam was performed in June, 1967, but work on the final stage of constructing a hall around Bhagavan's Samadhi still remained. Work proceeded right up to 1970 when, on the 3rd May, coinciding with the 20th Anniversary of Bhagavan's Brahma Nirvana, the Samadhi Hall was inaugurated (*Saranagati*, May 2013, p. 6).

<sup>13</sup> *The Mountain Path*, Oct. 1982; copy the following URL into your browser: <[https://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/resource\\_](https://www.sriramanamaharshi.org/resource_)

## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Swami Ramanananda Day



On Friday, 29th December, the day after Bhagavan's 144th Jayanti, devotees gathered at Swami Ramanananda's Samadhi for a memorial celebration of the life of the Ashram's second President. —







For Chinna Swami and Venkatoo, Anandmayi Ma had come specially to Sri Ramanasramam to lay this stone and to initiate the great task of establishing a proper Samadhi *mantapam* and hall over Bhagavan's Samadhi. At least symbolically, the construction began with her this day:

*Those present recollect the meticulous and measured way she handed over brick after brick to lay the foundation. When the traditional purna kumbha was offered to her at the entrance of the Ashram, Ma graciously remarked: "Why all this? Do you do all these when a daughter comes to her father's house?"*<sup>14</sup>

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Anandamayi Ma approached the foundation stone and the additional stones now in place and strewed flowers over them as a final blessing.

With this work done, Anandmayi Ma could enjoy Bhagavan's realm, visiting the sites of importance in the life of Sri Bhagavan as well as having a peek into the lives of his devotees. That afternoon she visited the Bose compound where Ethel had been living for many years. She then went on pradakshina around the Holy Hill by car. The following morning she was called on to answer questions at a darshan gathering. Cohen records the remarks of the questioner:

*The other day in Madras you said that if one has no tears to shed in the search for God, one should resort to satsang. I have had satsang for many years, and yet, I see no appreciable*

[centre/publications/mountain-path/>.](#)

14 Ibid.

*improvement in myself. She responded: Your being here now and your asking the question are tears. By tears is meant perseverance in the search with devotion. How can you say then that you have not benefited by those years of satsang? But for them you might not have reached even so far.*<sup>15</sup>

That night, Ma was asked to lead bhajans for Bhagavan's devotees and for about ten minutes, she sang the name of Bhagavan repeating, 'He Bhagavan', 'Ha Bhagavan'<sup>16</sup> changing the "modulations of the tune and the words of the appeal at each call. She also sang 'Satya Jnanam Anantam Brahma' from *Taittiriya Upanishad*.<sup>17</sup> Cohen describes the moment:

*Her delicate, pure voice has the youthful timbre of that of a girl in her teens, which makes the glory of Her spiritual state even more captivating.*<sup>18</sup>

The following morning, Ethel was on hand with her car and had the honour of chauffeuring Mataji to Tirukoillur where they went to Kilur temple and Aragandanallur, the temple where Bhagavan spent time while en route to Tiruvannamalai as a boy in 1896, and where Saint Jnanasambandar had experienced jyoti darshan. At 5pm that afternoon, Ethel took Ma to Arunachaleswar temple where 'Khuki' (Ethel's familiar epithet for Anandamayi Ma) was given 'a tremendous reception, elephant, band and all.'<sup>19</sup>

Ethel drove Ma for other temple outings in an entourage that included Mrs. Taleyarkhan, Rani Mazumdar, S.S. Cohen and other Ramana devotees.

On the last night in Ramanasramam the bhajans ended earlier than usual as K.K. Nambiar wanted to show films of Sri Bhagavan that he had shot with a 16 mm camera he purchased while in the US, among them some colour footage. Made from December 1948 up until November 1949, the films shown to Anandamayi Ma included footage of Bhagavan on his way to supervise the *bhiksha* feeding on his 69th Jayanti day. There was footage of his coming and going to the *gosala* on given days or encountering the white peacock (which

15 This question may have come from Devaraj Mudaliar. See *Ananda Varta*, vol 1, no 2, p. 62.

16 <<https://www.anandamayiy.org/mmedia/mp/Mahebhag.mp3>>.

17 *Taittiriya*: 2.1.1; see Merston, p. 202; for Ma's singing voice: <https://www.anandamayiy.org/mmedia/mp/Masatyam1.mp3>

18 *Ananda Varta*, vol 1, no 2, p. 62.

19 Merston, pp. 203-204.





many devotees knew as Madhava). There was footage of Bhagavan entering the Dining Hall with two attendants, and other footage at various locations in the Ashram where devotees looked on as he passed by. Among them were T.P. Ramachandra Iyer, Eleanor Noye, Viswanatha Swami, Aravind Bose's daughter, Maya, Appu Sastri, Raju Sastri, K. Natesan, and T.N. Venkataraman with his three sons, Sundaram, Ganesan and Mani. We also see KK Nambiar's sister, Madhavi Ammal prostrating to Bhagavan.

Another day's footage captured Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar, the First Chief Minister of the Madras Presidency on a visit to the Ashram. There were also scenes from Arunachaleswara Temple at the time of the inauguration of the newly renovated Patala Lingam with Mrs. Taleyarkhan and Alamelu Ammal, Bhagavan's sister, leading the group to the Patala Lingam entrance along with Framji wearing his signature Fez hat. In some of the footage, Anandamayi Ma would have been able to discern Bhagavan's increasing debility owing to conditions that began to plague him by the time these films were made.<sup>20</sup>

As Anandamayi Ma's visit to Ramanasramam was almost over, a member of the Managing Committee approached her following the archival films and with folded hands, urged her to visit the Ashram again, to which she smilingly replied:

*I am not going anywhere. I am always here. There is no going nor coming—all is Atman.*<sup>21</sup>

This no doubt resonated with devotees who had heard these very same words from Bhagavan's lips in the New Hall just three years earlier.

<sup>20</sup> From *The Archival Films*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ananda Varta*, vol 1, no 2, p. 62.



## Parting

At 5 am the following morning, 7th November, Mataji made ready to leave. Cohen narrates:

*Anandamayi Ma stood under the arch at Sri Ramanasramam's front gate in clear moonlight with Sirius brilliantly twinkling overhead. She looked around and, seeing the small circle of Ramana bhaktas gathered to see her off, affectionately bade them farewell, then entered the car and sped away in the direction of the Southern Cross, extremely satisfied at the reception given to her here, and at the peaceful atmosphere of Ramanasramam. Her devotee Sri Hari Baba expressed a wish that their stay might have been a month instead of only three days. His quietness and his very kind heart endeared him to those of Bhagavan's devotees who got to know him.*

Cohen concludes his chronicle saying:

*Farewell, beloved Mataji, and, to speak the language of men, God be with you in your holy mission to bring peace and good cheer to the thousands. "God, after all", say they then, "does exist, and not only in some remote world in this far-flung universe, but here and now".*<sup>22</sup> —

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63. For a video of Ma's program in Madras in January 1972, copy the following URL into your browser: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8S5aq9M\\_FnY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8S5aq9M_FnY)>.

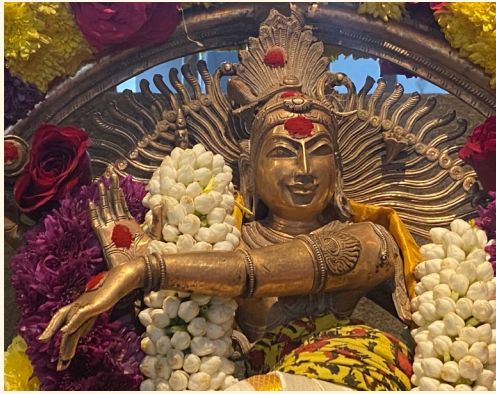
## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Lucy Ma Day



On Sunday, 31 December, devotees gathered at Lucy Cornelissen's samadhi for puja and prasadam on her annual remembrance day at the end of the year. —





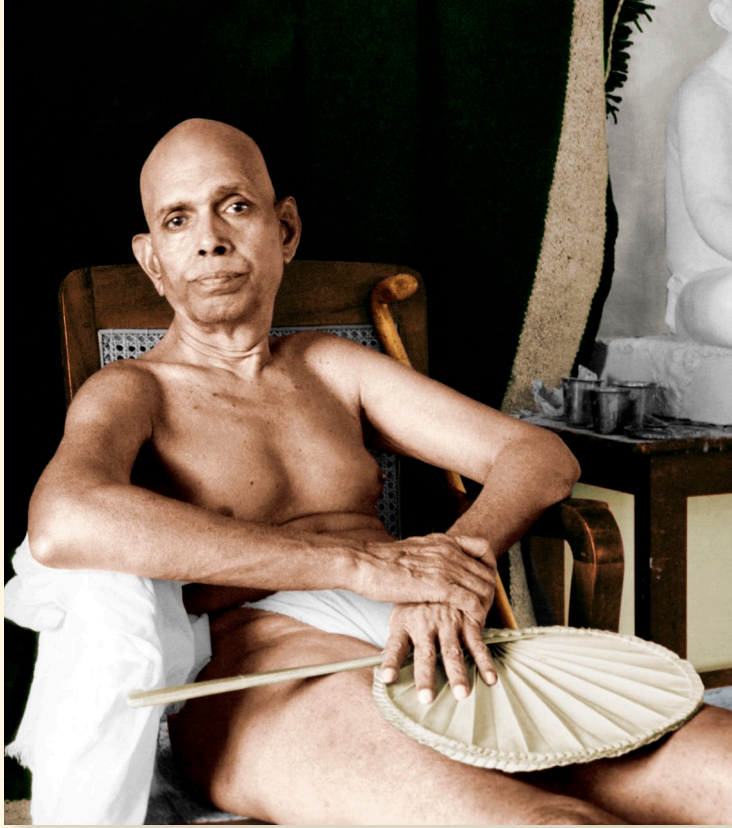


## Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Bhagavan's 144th Jayanti Celebrations

**B**hagavan's 144th Jayanti celebrations commenced with preliminary functions on 27th December with *Vishnusahasranamam* and Dhanurmasa puja in Bhagavan's Shrine followed by Natarajar Abhishekam (Aarudra Darsanam) in Mother's Shrine and a small puja to Lord Arunachala at the anterior portion of the Shrine. On 28th December the main Jayanti celebration began with Nadaswaram music by Sri T. R. Pichandi while decorations were still being put up. Next came Dhanurmasa puja and the recitation of verses from Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvembavai*, Andal's *Tiruppavai* and Muruganar's *Ramana Tiruvembavai*. *Vishnusahasranamam* was chanted after the early morning puja followed by Bhagavan's works. A formal book release ceremony took place and several new titles including the new Centenary Souvenir (more in next issue) were presented to dignitaries and contributors. Puja and abhishekam to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam culminated with songs in praise of Bhagavan by numerous respected artistes including Ilayaraja and Deeparadhana which took place at 10.30am. The afternoon programme included a special abhishekam and puja at Sri Bhagavan's Shrine. All were invited to Jayanti breakfast, lunch and dinner which, combined, made Bhagavan's prasadam available to 10,000 devotees and pilgrims. —







## RAMANA REFLECTIONS

### Sri Bhagavan and the Upanishadic Fire

Human history could be divided into two parts, the time before the Upanishads and the time afterward. The appearance of the Upanishads in India three thousand years ago began with the gradual revision of traditional religion. Till then orthodox religious rites centred on worship through the *yagna*, the fire-sacrifice of Agni who is the mediator between the earthly and heavenly realms. The *agnibotri* was the only one who could perform efficacious worship to the Divine and employed a highly sophisticated and detailed liturgical repertoire of mantras, recitations, sacraments, and mudras to bring the desired effect. He was the specialist on whom the faithful depended to make their petitions to God. By contrast the Upanishads declared that the *havan* fire, which till then

had been the sole vehicle and portal to the divine, in fact burned just as brightly within the individual human heart.

If the Upanishads speak of Brahman as a bridge between 'here and the beyond' (*iba/para*), contemporary seekers often imagine that it is only the beyond we are looking for, whereas in reality we are striving to become the bridge between the two. What does this mean? It means that there is a beautiful paradox at the centre of the non-dual vision. The link between instantiation in a world and the transcendence beyond it is the domain of the sage:

*A mantra in the Upanishads says, "He who is in the sun, is also in the man!"...The Heart of the Upanishads is construed as Hridayam, meaning, "this (is) the centre". This is where the mind rises and subsides. It is the seat of Realisation. When I say that it is 'the Self', people imagine that it is within the body. But the name of the centre is 'the Heart' [and should not be confused] with the physical organ.<sup>1</sup>*

If some have said that we need a body in order to support consciousness, Bhagavan adds, we are not the body, nor is there a world, and thus, we are not confined to incarnate existence which is only an appearance:

*The Heart is not physical; it is spiritual. Hridayam = brit + ayam. That is the centre. It is that from which thoughts arise, on which they subsist and where they are resolved. The thoughts are the content of the mind and, they shape the universe. The Heart is the centre of all. Yatova imani bhutani jayante (that from which these beings come into existence) etc. is said to be Brahman in the Upanishads. That is the Heart.<sup>2</sup>*

The cells of our biology carry the memory of our ancestry which would also include our evolutionary past in chronological time. Our hearts carry the memory of a karmic history born of past births, according to the traditional understanding. What is the root? Upanishadic Ramana comments:

*An astronomer discovers a new star at immeasurable distance and announces that its light takes thousands of years to reach the earth [travelling at the speed of light]. Well, where is the star in fact? Is it not in the observer? People wonder how a star larger than the Sun at such a distance can be contained in the brain of a man. But space, the magnitudes and paradox: are all in the mind only.<sup>3</sup>*

The Upanishads upset former assumptions about the Divine as dwelling in a distant place and advise us to look within. Bhagavan points out that the external and internal are not two. Bhagavan's Upanishad and

<sup>1</sup> Talks, §201, §474.

<sup>2</sup> Talks, §97.

<sup>3</sup> Talks, §474.







Vedantic thinkers down through the ages say there is a place prior to both:

*By means of all created things, the divine assails us, penetrates us, and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, when in fact we live steeped in its burning layers.<sup>4</sup>*

If the sense organs draw our attention outward, the inner sense organ of the mind and its identifications can likewise trap us. We recall the dictum, *know the truth and the truth will set you free*,<sup>5</sup> and could imagine it to mean that there is something objective in the world that needs to be seen and known for us to be free. But *the Self is not attained by instruction*,<sup>6</sup> says the Mandukya. Bhagavan points out that fixed positions and absolute views cannot help us because they lie without in the externals of the ruminative mind while the Self lies hidden within the innermost chambers of the heart.<sup>7</sup>

The *Mandukya* continues, *when one knows the Absolute, everything is known*.<sup>8</sup> That is where our freedom lies. Dogmas and formulas can never carry us the distance. The *mahavakyas* of the Upanishads and Bhagavan's teaching are not directed toward acquiring a formula for spiritual success but are rooted in insights born of stillness beyond words and letters. Teachings in words function not as doctrinal cocoons to be inhabited but as sparks of divine intuition that allows for the heart to open. Paradoxically, the *samadhi* of words is the purest silence. But what is the *samadhi* of words? It is a temporary suspension of the intellect and its ruminations mediated through a spontaneous absorption in sacred words and phrases. A stillness beyond material silence, it takes us to the edge of thought and points us to something further on. It is born of the contact between the *mahavakya* and an empty Heart. The words do not act conceptually but give rise to a current of vibrant spiritual bounty,

<sup>4</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> John 8:32.

<sup>6</sup> *Nayam atma pravachanena labhyo* (*Mandukya*: 2.2.9). In the *Chandogya Upanishad*: 8.12.3: *The eye does not go there, nor speech, nor the mind. We do not know, we do not understand, how anyone can teach it. It is different from the known and also it is above the unknown.*

<sup>7</sup> *The Self-existent pierced the senses to turn outward. Thus, we look to the external world, not within. A sage, however, turned his eyes inward and beheld the Self within.* *Katopanishad*: 2.4.

<sup>8</sup> *Yasmin vijnate sarvam idam vijnatam bhavati*, *Mandukya Upanishad*: 1.1.7.

dynamizing the Heart and causing it to blossom. In such moments, the psyche is led to a threshold state of 'in-betweenness' wherein the labelling mind becomes pliable and flexible. Such threshold awareness is the quality of ambiguity that occurs between a previous way of structuring our identity, and a new way which is yet to be fully discovered. Here nothing is to be clung to and conceptual grasping dissipates and yields to a more fluid, malleable state.

The Upanishads—the song of the ages, the essence of all religions—beckon us beyond the thinking mind to 'ponder' what mind is. Here we find we can hold whatever complexity the immediate surroundings present us with. The impulse to pare things down to their lowest common denominator, namely, to compulsive sequential thought, drops away, at least momentarily.

The *Mandukya* talks of the twin aspects of the mind and of modes of living—the worldly and the supramundane—likening them to *two birds, inseparable companions, perched on the same branch. One eats the fruit, and the other looks on*.<sup>9</sup>

If we formerly treated the vital pulsation of Divine Being as something graspable, the Upanishadic bridge closes the gap between time-bound, concept-bound ideation and the depth of a psyche unencumbered by worldly longings. The *sphurana* born of deep insight that replaces it is outside of time.

Of the two birds, one is proficient in perfecting what is already known and operates within a closed loop of self-referential knowledge. But he rearranges and refines existing knowledge without necessarily being able to break free of pre-existing frameworks. The other bird by contrast sits back and watches panoramically and takes in all she sees with a broad intuitive gaze. While she is not great on details, her non-structured way of engaging the world allows for novel insights and fresh experiences beyond pre-existing templates of thought. Both serve their respective functions but the second knows and observes the actions of the first while the first is ignorant of the second and anything beyond the task immediately before him.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Mandukya Upanishad*: 3.1.1.

<sup>10</sup> Renowned neuropsychologist Prof Iain McGilchrist of Oxford University takes up this discussion in his *The Master and the Emissary*.





If formerly we got caught up in familiar loops of the thinking mind that names and defines objects of the world, we made the mistake of imagining that we should make them our home, restricting ourselves to living like the first of the two birds. But here we recall the invitation of a poet from bygone days:

*There's a field beyond wrong and right, beyond polarities. I'll meet you there.*<sup>11</sup>

What does the poet mean? There's a place in the heart beyond names, forms, dogmas, identities, narratives, and chronological time. If we meet there, we come to recognise ourselves and one another as we truly are. If earlier we prized the fruits of the intellect, now we see how much they pale in comparison with that field.

The Upanishad comments:

*Anyone who has even once drunk his fill of nectar, will never again wish to savour even the finest draught devised by the wit of man.*<sup>12</sup>

The etymology of the word 'Upanishad' is to 'sit nearby, below'.<sup>13</sup> This suggests a posture of humility, i.e., sitting at the feet of the guru, and tells us something about Upanishadic wisdom. It is not gained through book learning but through a shift in awareness which most readily comes when in the presence of one who has already made such a shift. Bhagavan's upadesa, like the Upanishads, are there to help us lay the ground for this transition.

The Upanishadic vision is not linear or static, does not lean on dogmatic certitude, presuppositions, or assumptions, but embraces uncertainty, vulnerability, and a complete openness to the unknown, gained through direct experience. It resists trying to predict much less dictate the future. Dynamic and processual, infused with the wisdom of the divine, its flame ignites the spiritual heart. Unravelling clung-to notions, it gets at the inner entrenchments born of fear and the impulse to return to some former state of ease. Sympathetic and compassionate, it is the drive toward wholeness, integration, and freedom. With legs to walk, it is mobile, at liberty to move about like the wayfaring sages of old who meandered from

<sup>11</sup> Rumi

<sup>12</sup> See Abhishiktananda's *The Secret of Arunachala*, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> It comes from the Sanskrit root, *shad* (to sit), *upa* (near), and *ni* (beneath, below). From 'The Upanishads are True, I know it!' by Vinaya Chaitanya in *Witness to the Fullness of the Light*, p. 133.

the hallowed riverbanks of the Kaveri to the exalted heights of Gangotri.

When the Upanishadic gale blows through the heart of the seeker, the complexion of things changes, and we find former troubles no longer so troublesome. Exalting in its exuberant fresh air, we are no longer fazed by the loops of the thinking mind, the endless repetition of rumination that formerly kept us circling back again and again in a perpetual replay of thoughts and images. The impulse to repeat gives way to continual renewal born of the surge and flow of the divine's revitalising power. Soon, *everything and everyone is understood as one's own Self, and one's Self is seen in everything*<sup>14</sup>. The former obsession with externalities begins to slacken as the awareness of inner spaces expands. From this vantage point, Sri Ramana is met with more intimately. Bhagavan comments:

*Each one knows the Self but is yet ignorant. The person is enabled to realise only after hearing the mahavakya. Hence the Upanishadic text is the eternal Truth to which everyone who has realised owes his experience. After hearing the Self to be the Brahman the person finds the true import of the Self and reverts to it whenever he is diverted from it. Here is the whole process of Realisation.*<sup>15</sup>

The two birds are a simile for the two modes of consciousness. Both are required but we very often become compulsive about the one and forget the other. In his life, Bhagavan demonstrated a balance between the two. The first directs the activities of the body while the second serves as the source for global awareness and intuitive wisdom. Imbalance between the two comes when the first craves nutriment which includes not only food but ideas, experiences, possessions, and various forms of sense stimulation and forgets the one 'just looking on'. The worldliness of the first refers to the habit of ever seeking to have our immediate experience be an enjoyable one and avoiding any hint of unpleasantness. Worldliness is just the name we give to the deep attachment to the pure sensation of the moment and is related to addiction, which also includes the compulsion to sequential thought, rumination, conceptualization, and reverie. Disconnected from full range understanding, it focuses on the narrow field of vision that lies before it, assuming that is all there is. This is traditionally called ignorance owing to the lack of

<sup>14</sup> *Isa Upanishad*: 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Talks*, §647.







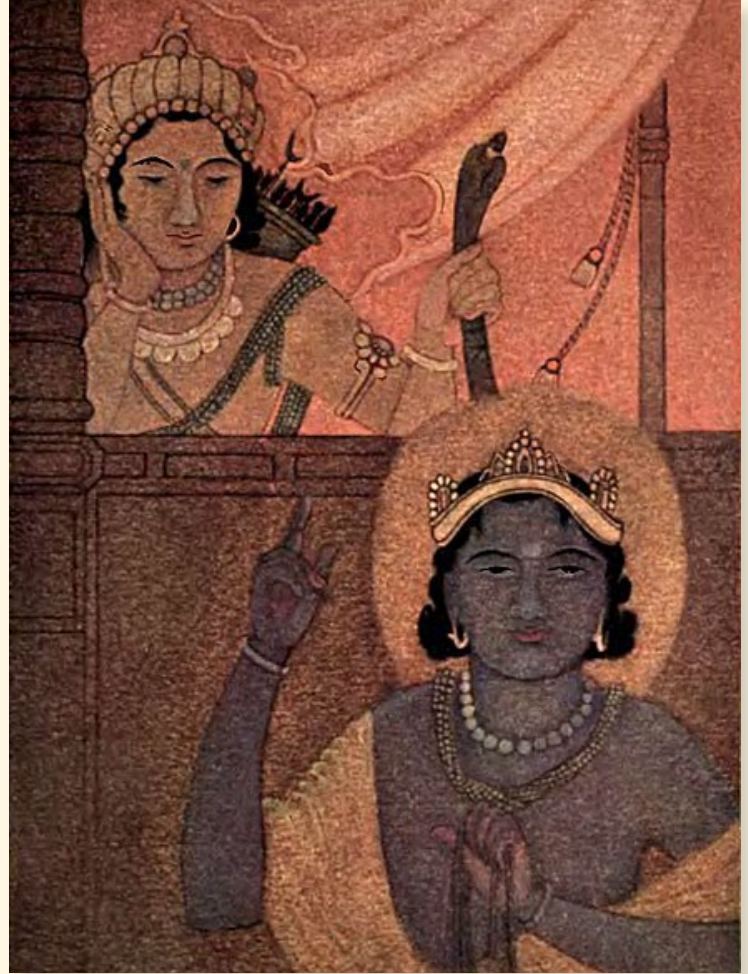
(self) awareness regarding the limited nature of its frame. It is fearful of the prospect of abandoning itself to the mercy of destiny failing to recognise that by such giving over—namely, to the totality of human experience—we find the path to freedom.

A ship taking on water at sea requires a wise response. Polishing the brass railing of the vessel's otherwise shiny deck is not one such response. Rather, plugging the large holes in the ship's hull and pumping out the water that has flooded the ship's hold are the required actions. We live our lives not recognising that the ship of the Heart is taking on water, after all what happens deep below in the ship's hold is easily overlooked. If fire breaks out in a remote area of our house, we might not notice at first, busy as we are with other things. Identifying the signs and putting out the fire is the first order of business, not least of all, because the babies are asleep in the bedroom.

In getting caught up in an outwardly directed sense world and its pursuits, we miss seeing what is being asked of us moment by moment.

In this connection, we recall a story from the *Kathopanishad* when Nachiketa challenged his wealthy father for his lack of genuineness in making offerings at the *yagna*. His father, Vajasravasa, grew angry and banished his nine-year-old boy to Yamaraja. Nachiketa went of his own accord to find Yamaraja and seek his advice. When at last Nachiketa came to the dwelling of the God of Death, he found that Yamaraja was out on business and so waited outside the gates of Yamaloka without food, water, or shelter for three days. When Yamaraja at last returned and met the youngster, he was so impressed with the boy's sincerity that he gave him three boons. Nachiketa's first wish was for the welfare of his father; the second, to know the ways by which one can reach heaven; and finally, he asked Yamaraja to teach him about the mystery of death. Yamaraja did not want to grant this third wish and instead offered Nachiketa land and riches, kingdoms and palaces. But Nachiketa was steadfast. Yamaraja finally gave him the requested knowledge and Nachiketa was enlightened.

This is a story about the two birds, the one grasps at whatever excites the eye in a futile effort to be free of inner dissatisfaction. The second with its unselfish nature and purity of heart avoids the temptation to grasp at worldly consolations and instead dives ever more deeply within to solve the knotty problem of earthly existence.



Nachiketa and Yamaraja

All human endeavour is unconsciously directed toward solving the core mystery and yet, we get lost in the by-ways of worldly longings, which may be satisfying in the short-run, but do not grant lasting peace. We scale up our efforts to crack the riddle of mortality by making use of science and medical technology, not recognising that deathlessness is born of a turn of the Heart within. A contemporary poet comments:

*Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then humanity will have discovered fire.*<sup>16</sup>

What is this fire? It is the Promethean fire of the Atman. Lying at the innermost *prakara* of the Heart, it contains within itself the entire universe, each person possessing it as his or her innate endowment. All of one's body and all the visible objects of the external world are but appearances on the screen of awareness

<sup>16</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*, 1936, XI, 86-87.





indwelling the inner space of this Heart-Fire. If we are *made in the image and likeness of God*,<sup>17</sup> as has been said, it is so not by virtue of anything we possess outwardly but by virtue of the brightness of this flame within:

*The [Upanishadic] fire emits rays of blessedness, spiritual beauty, and eternal bounty. The flaming Godhead, without whom fire would be unable to burn aright in the altar of the ascending Spirit, is force and light, the knower of births, the possessor of divine wisdom, the immortal in mortals, the divine power in man, and the energy of fulfilment through which he does his work. God in the form of Light, ever visible to Hearts that thrill with faith, is vividly brought home by this fire.*<sup>18</sup>

If the world arises by our beholding it, when beholding it free of personal preferences, it and, we along with it, are seen to be nothing but Brahman. But what is Brahman?

*The Self is Brahman, the Brahmic-Fire, the all-absorbing flame whose head is heaven, and whose eyes are the Sun and Moon. He*

<sup>17</sup> Genesis: 1.26.

<sup>18</sup> *Arunachala: Ramana Maharshi and the Hill of Fire*, p. 95, taken from *Self-Realisation*, p. 4 and the *Call Divine*, vol. 4, p. 515, vol. 14, p.537.

*is the great Truth-Light blazing out on us for a vision of the supreme beatitude. He is in the Heart and can be meditated on as the Heart-Self, and in fire, as the Fire-Self.*<sup>19</sup>

It has been said that the eye cannot see without sunlight and the mind cannot see without Self-Light, that is, the Light that illumines everything, i.e., pure awareness, for everything shines by virtue of That. *The sun, the moon, the stars and fire shine [because] the Self-God shines.*<sup>20</sup>

The mantra which opens the Upanishads belongs to the *Isa Upanishad* as its invocatory verse:

*That is full, this is full/From that fullness comes this fullness/ when fullness is taken away from fullness/ only fullness remains.*<sup>21</sup>

Fullness comes with knowing that ‘great Person’, shining like the sun, beyond darkness [by whose acquaintance,] one passes beyond death.<sup>22</sup> Sorrow, doubt and delusion can no longer touch the one who has discovered it. The *Isa* adds:

*It moves, it does not move. It is very close, and it is far away, within all, outside of all. Thought cannot catch up with it nor can any of the gods. Without moving, it runs faster than all. Knowing and not-knowing, both alike it has gone beyond, and having passed through death, it attains to immortality.*<sup>23</sup>

If the *yagna* had once been the only means of accessing the Divine, the light of the Upanishadic Fire pointed to the *yagna* of the Heart and changed everything. Indeed, religion and the life of faith would never be the same. Although this momentous event took place some 3,000 years ago, many are only learning of it after waiting a very, very long time. Now enabled to take the first step in glimpsing the true shape of things, they direct their gaze upward toward the gates of heaven and cry out in exaltation:

*Swing open, O ye doors Divine, and give us easy passage for our expanding; lead us further and further on and fulfil our sacrifice. O Ray, be born in us and dwell there, harmonising your knowledge with the flame of the blazing Life-God!*<sup>24</sup> —

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 92, taken from the *Call Divine*, vol. 13, pp. 12-13; vol.14, p. 536, vol. 15, p. 534.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 93; taken from the *Call Divine*, vol. 13, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> This oft-recited verse reads: *Purnam adah, purnam idam/ purnat purnam udachyate/ purnasya purnam adaya/ purnam eva avashishyate.*

<sup>22</sup> *Svetasvatara Upanishad*: 3.8.

<sup>23</sup> *Isa Upanishad*, from *Guru and Disciple*, Abhishiktananda, p. 75.

<sup>24</sup> *Arunachala: Ramana Maharshi and the Hill of Fire*, p. 97.







## Obituary: Sri Jayendran



Sri Jayendran was born 2nd June 1965 to a Nair family of Kottakkal, Kerala. He grew up in Bangalore where he completed his degree. As a child, he was a lover of animals and though many around him ate non-veg food, he would only eat vegetarian dishes and continued this practice his entire life. When he was about 28, the family tried to get him married two or three times, but he resisted every attempt. After seeing his horoscope, the family astrologer said his life would revolve around temples and holy pilgrimage sites. Jayendran followed JK from 1983 after which he worked as a journalist with the Press Trust of India. Later he worked in Central Food Research and Technology Institute, Mysore, for ten years. He then took up a post at TIFR, Bombay and IIM, Indore but resigned when he temporarily lost his voice and could not attend further job interviews. Bhagavan would not allow him to work further and Jayendran decided to honour the spiritual calling since his early years. Hence, he settled in Tiruvannamalai and spent the hot summer months in the Himalayas where he did sadhana on the banks of the Ganga.

For more than 23 years in Tiruvannamalai, he passed each day in Ramanasramam and though a serious sadhaka, sported a light hearted cheerfulness. When he was ten years old, his deeply spiritual father drew a picture of Sri Bhagavan, ever inspiring the youngster. Jayendran once commented that his father's drawing 'brought out Bhagavan's inner beauty'.

Jayendran was absorbed in Bhagavan on 7th December 2023 following the last day of Deepam. Jayendran is survived by two elder brothers, one of whom is a monk of Chinmaya mission, and his elder sister. —

## Sri Ramanasramam Calendar 2024

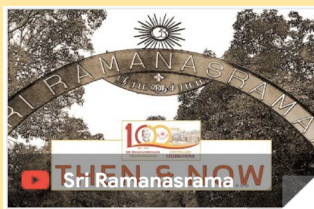


### SRI RAMANASRAMAM SPECIAL DAYS 2024

Festival/Function	English Date	
Pongal	15-01-2024	Monday
Chinnaswamigal Aradhana	25-01-2024	Thursday
Sundaram Iyer Day	29-02-2024	Thursday

Maha Sivaratri	08-03-2024	Friday
Sri Vidya Havan	15-03-2024	Friday
Telugu New Year	09-04-2024	Tuesday
Tamil New Year	14-04-2024	Sunday
Sri Rama Navami	17-04-2024	Wednesday
Bhagavan's 74th Aradhana	06-05-2024	Monday
Maha Puja	31-05-2024	Friday
Cow Lakshmi Day	18-06-2024	Tuesday
Guru Poornima	21-07-2024	Sunday
Bhagavan's Advent Day	01-09-2024	Sunday
Navaratri Festival commences	03-10-2024	Thursday
Saraswati Puja	12-10-2024	Saturday
Vijayadasami	12-10-2024	Saturday
Deepavali	31-10-2024	Thursday
Karthigai Festival commences	04-12-2024	Wednesday
Deepam	13-12-2024	Friday
Bhagavan's 145 Jayanti	17-12-2024	Tuesday

## New Video: Sri Ramanasramam: Then and Now



A new video-film celebrating Sri Ramanasramam's Centenary can be found at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReIjwXlANU&ab\\_channel=SriRamanasramam](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReIjwXlANU&ab_channel=SriRamanasramam).

For the December *In Focus*, go to:

[https://youtu.be/cUQAzNwxL58?si=74KToL\\_HMBijllRS](https://youtu.be/cUQAzNwxL58?si=74KToL_HMBijllRS).





## Obituary: Smt. Uma Devi



Smt. Uma Devi, born on 26th October 1940 in Trichy on the festival day of Deepavali, was the only daughter and the auspicious outcome of her parents' visit to Bhagavan in 1938, having come to seek his blessings for a child. Proficient in dance, singing, and acting, she showcased her talents in films such as *Avvaiyar*. Alongside her artistic pursuits, she earned a master's degree in economics and dedicated herself to teaching until her retirement in 1998. Subsequently, she resided with her son, Dr. M. Giridhar, Bhatnagar award-winner, serving in the publication department of Sri Ramanasramam.

She maintained a deep spiritual connection regularly seeking the divine darshan of Deepam atop Arunachala. Her love for *Aksharamanamalai* was evident and she regularly chanted the hymn multiple times a day. Suddenly on 26th November 2023, the auspicious Kartigai Deepam day, she collapsed while reciting the hymn and watching the celebrations by live telecast on the Ashram's YouTube channel. Though she was admitted to the ICU, she never regained consciousness. On 1st December 2023, the Punarvasu day, Giridhar placed his hand on her right chest, reciting *Aksharamanamalai*. As the recitation concluded, she drew her last breath, leaving no doubt that she had been absorbed at the Feet of Arunachala Ramana. —

## Obituary: Smt. Lalitha

Born on 13th October 1950 to Ramamrutham and Meenakshi, Smt. Lalitha was the last of ten children. Exhibiting intense faith from her girlhood, she married at the age of 18. Even in married life she remained simple and orthodox, spending her days in puja and parayanam according to instructions given to her in a dream by Kanchi Mahaperiyava. A Srividya upasaka, she was initiated to *vinayagar agaval* in a dream. Following her husband's demise, she came to Tiruvanmalai in 2004 at the age of 54 and lived out her days surrendered to Bhagavan. She served sadhus, played the Veena and composed devotional songs. When Lord Muruga took on for her the form of Bhagavan Ramana, her devotional compositions were directed to Bhagavan. As the end of her life drew near, her daughter sang *Aksharamanamalai* with the Master's photo by her mother's side. Sri Lalitha merged at Bhagavan's Feet on 20th November, 2023, 6.30 pm fully conscious, chanting the names of Ramana and Muruga. She is survived by her son and daughter and will be remembered for her exceptional faith, loving nature, soft speech, poised sense of humour, and a life lived by inspiration and intuition, ever modelling genuine spiritual values for all who had the benefit of knowing her. —



## Obituary: Sri R. Murugaiyyan



Sri Ramanadoss Murugaiyan was born 4th November 1968 to Ramadas and Thilakavathy who belonged to the family of Cuddalore Sri Somasundaram Pillai who were ardent devotees of Sri Bhagavan. Sri Somasundaram Pillai's daughter, Smt. Murugaiya Pankajakshi Ammal, was a devotee of Sri Bhagavan and composed soulful songs on him and Lord Muruga. Following his service as Sri Bhagavan's attendant, Kunju Swami was provided accommodation for a time in the compound given Murugaiyan's family by the Sofa gounder until Kunju returned to the Ashram.

Sri Murugaiyan served in Shantimalai Trust for 31 years and was a key link between Ramanasramam and the Trust. A frequent visitor to Ramanasramam and the Big Temple along with his family, each year he offered a large garland to Kunju Swami's Samadhi on his absorption day, 7th August. During the past year Murugaiyan suffered a kidney infection due to uncontrolled diabetes which ultimately led to sepsis. While at Thanjavur hospital for treatment and surgery, he suffered a sudden cardiac arrest and eventually passed away on 9th November 2023. He is survived by his wife Vidya, daughter Aiswarya and son Ramaneswar. —

