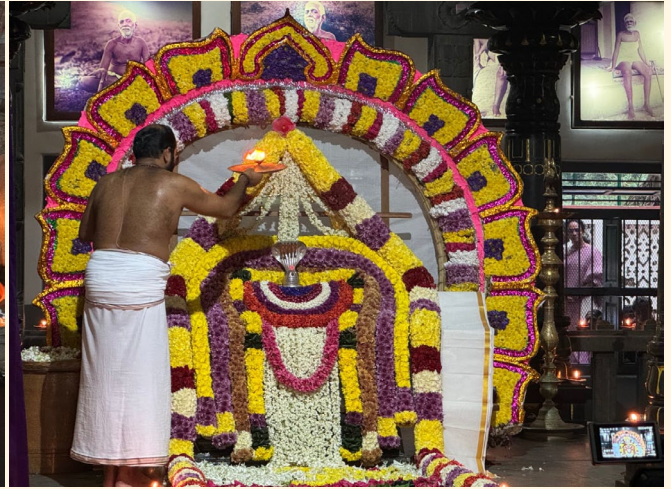


Saranagati



SARANAGATI
SRI RAMANASRAMAM

EXTENDED JAYANTI/KARTIGAI DEEPAM ISSUE
JANUARY 2025 VOL. 19, NO. 1



D. Thiyagarajan



Saranagati



JANUARY 2025
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IN THIS
ISSUE

Dear Devotees,

The month of December brought the dual spectacle of floods and flame, a vivid interplay of nature's abundance and the divine's radiance. The temple tanks brim with life, their overflowing waters a testament to the season's generosity. However, the season was not untouched by heartache, too (see p. 13). Meanwhile, devotees' hearts were kindled by the nightly glow of the Deepam flame atop Arunachala's sacred peak, a beacon of hope and inner illumination.

In this issue, we explore Sam Rappold's profound experiences with Bhagavan in the Hall (p. 3). In Ramana Reflections, we look at the striking contrast between the ever-changing world of forms and desires and the unshakable stillness of being, found in the heart of Tiruvannamalai (p. 9).

For videos, photos and other news of events: <https://sriramanamaharshi.org> or write to us at: saranagati@gururamana.org. For the web version: https://www.sriramana.org/saranagati/January_2025/.

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Saranagati

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Calendar of Ashram Events

11th Jan (Sat) Pradosham	25th Jan (Sat) Chinnaswami Day
12th Jan Sivaprakasam Pillai Day	27th Jan (Mon) Pradosham
13th Jan (Mon) Full Moon/Ardra Darshan	29th Jan (Wed) Thai Amavasya
14th Jan (Tue) Punarvasu/Pongal/Ramaswami Pillai	31st Jan (Fri) Swami Rajeswarananda Day
15th Jan (Wed) Maattu Pongal	10th Feb (Mon) Punarvasu/Pradosham
16th Jan (Thu) Arunachaleswara Pradakshina	11th Feb (Tue) Thai Poosam/Full Moon





ENCOUNTERS IN THE HALL

Sam Rappold

Sam Rappold, an American sadhu, arrived at Sri Ramanasramam in late 1947. Immersing himself in meditation and dialogues with Bhagavan Ramana, he became an integral part of ashram life. Thelma Benn, a fellow devotee present at the time, noted Sam's enigmatic presence in her diary.

A few unpublished interactions in the Hall, preserved by Thelma and others, were not included

in the segment on Sam's conversations with Bhagavan in the December issue. In this issue, Sam Rappold recalls the late 1940s in the Ashram.

Arrival at the Ashram

Sam's first encounter with Bhagavan left an indelible impression. He recalled:

When I first arrived at Sri Ramanasramam at 8am on 27th December 1947, I was fed at the Ashram dining hall. Breakfast for the day was just over. All then went with Ramana Maharshi to the pandal outside the old hall and sat for the day's darshan. I went forward, near Maharshi's couch, prostrated on the floor at his side and as my head touched the floor my legs disappeared. It was three days before I could feel the ground beneath me again.

The Gaze of the Master

A few weeks later, while sitting in the Hall, Rappold contemplated undertaking a pilgrimage to Tibet, inspired by a group of devotees who had just returned from such a journey. Reflecting on this desire while sitting in the Hall before Bhagavan, he experienced an unforgettable moment:

Just then I felt Maharshi's strong gaze upon me. Looking up, I saw him staring intently, his expression stern. Instantly, my resolve to go to Tibet dissolved, disappearing from my mind altogether. His inscrutable power instructed me in silence, binding me to his path. I gave no further thought to leaving his side. Such was the inscrutable power exercised by Maharshi and experienced by those dedicated to following his path.

Bhagavan's Care and Compassion

One day, after returning from a trip into town, Rappold presented fruit as an offering to Bhagavan in the Jubilee pandal adjacent to the Old Hall. Bhagavan's response revealed his deep concern for Sam's well-being. Rappold writes:

After prostrating, I took a place alongside devotees sitting at Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan then said to T. P. Ramachandra, serving as a personal assistant at that hour, "Why does he bring me fruit. He needs it more than I do."

I had been struggling to prepare proper meals, begrudging the time away from Bhagavan, and was living very simply. T. P. Ramachandra came over to me and said that someone had told Bhagavan I was living on raw cabbage and therefore, Bhagavan was concerned about my health. I then got up and went over to Bhagavan sitting on his couch and said: "Bhagavan, Subramanya is cooking for me now". His expression turned to that of a pouting child. He said, "Oh, I didn't know until now." That





simple expression melted my entire being. In that moment, his love bound me to him with bonds stronger than steel, with a simple heart-enrapturing expression, with a glowing smile, a penetrating look of profound clarity. All I could mumble at the moment from my heart was, "I'm sorry Bhagavan" and stumbled unsteadily to my sitting place again.

Words, Words, Words

Rappold was very enthusiastic about queries he made to Bhagavan in the Hall. But his enthusiasm for philosophical discussions sometimes bordered on verbosity. One day, after he had questioned Bhagavan at length about philosophies and their relevance for sadhana, questions which Bhagavan graciously and patiently answered, Bhagavan responded with gentle humour:

"Words, words, words," he said in English, signalling that it was time to end the discourse. Sam took the hint, deciding to remain silent before Bhagavan for the next several weeks. When he resumed asking questions, he did so with greater discernment.

The Mob Incident

On January 31, 1948, the day after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, civil unrest erupted across India. Tiruvannamalai was no exception. In town, a rumour spread that a Muslim hotel keeper upon hearing the news of Gandhi's death commented: "If the Mahatma has been killed, I will pass out sweets." It is unclear whether anyone had ever actually said this or not. But so great were the tensions that every opportunity became an excuse to visit vengeance upon the opposing faction.

One morning at about 10 am, Arthur Osborne, Rappold, and two other devotees were sitting alone with Bhagavan in the Old Hall along with two of Bhagavan's attendants. Just then a shouting mob approached the Ashram. Sam vividly recounts the scene:

The Maharshi was seated as usual on his couch and the steel-barred windows were hastily shuttered from the inside while the two doors were barred. Swami Satchitananda and T.P. Ramachandra made ready to protect Bhagavan from any harm. As the howling mob beat on the barred doors, Bhagavan sat unperturbed on his couch, unconcerned. What a tremendous lesson this was to us.



Rappold's photo of the seventh day Kartigai Deepam, 1st Dec 1949

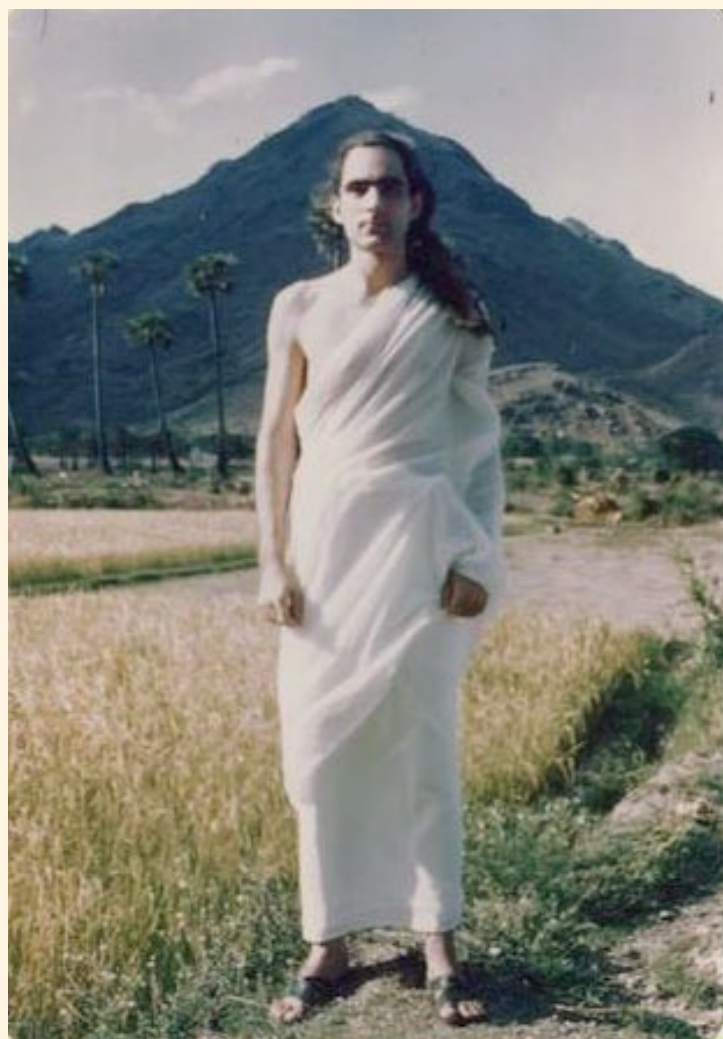
Osborne and I, less enlightened, sprang into action to protect our guru, who would do nothing whatsoever to resist the multitude coming toward him. We seized two heavy straight-back oak chairs that might serve as clubs if circumstances demanded them. The door was only a few feet wide and thus no more than two persons could squeeze through at a time, so that two men armed with those powerful club-like chairs could well hold off a surging mob of fanatic frenzy. However, after perhaps two minutes of grim readiness, Osborne and I relaxed, lowering the chair-clubs as the mob moved on.

Later that day, Tiruvannamalai was ablaze. By 5pm, the Indian Army moved in and by 7pm, they imposed a curfew on the entire town and environs, which included Ramanasramam. The curfew lasted ten days.

A Troubled Devotee

In March 1948, a German Jewish woman named Lisa Ilsa Lowenstern arrived at Ramanasramam for a





Sam Rappold at the foot of Arunachala in 1949

month-long holiday from her teaching in Bangalore. Thelma Benn discusses her in her biography, telling how they became friends, went many times on *pradakshina* together and once climbed the hill with other devotees in an all-day outing.

Ilsa was a Holocaust survivor. Though deeply drawn to Bhagavan, her profound psychological scars periodically manifested, particularly toward the end of her previous stay in 1946. At that time, Raja Iyer, who was in charge of Ashram accommodations, told Ilsa to leave the Ashram. Around this time, she was offered a teaching job in Bangalore. She took the letter to Bhagavan so that he could help her decide what to do. She got no verbal answer, but those who looked on said Bhagavan wanted her to go. Raja Iyer had once said that she was unbalanced and it turned

out to be true. As the situation became more serious in April of 1948, Bhagavan asked Sam Rappold and Thelma Benn to care for her. Rappold reports the following:

So great was the psychic power of the Maharishi that minds with great weaknesses could not bear the pressure. Ilsa came from a Jewish family and had seen the Nazis kill her entire family and relatives. She and an aged Rabbi were the only ones spared. She was subject to bouts of depression, and now, as Bhagavan stated: "Whatever is inside will come out in sadhana, and the coming out process is full of surprises".

In the spring of 1948, her mental episodes became unpredictable and often extreme. By the fourth week of her visit, she had become erratic and deeply distraught, sometimes stripping off her clothes and wandering naked. The police frequently intervened, detaining her in protective custody until arrangements could be made for medical care. Such interventions often involved bureaucratic delays and additional challenges for those who cared for her. Rappold writes:

Daily I would report Ilsa's welfare and progress to Bhagavan. On one occasion our efforts on Ilsa's behalf reached an impasse and I went to Bhagavan and in an apologetic way explained the situation and became very frustrated. Bhagavan just waved with a downward sweep of his hand as if to say, 'Well, that's the way it is!'

Bhagavan displayed compassion toward Ilsa, understanding that her mental upheavals were part of the 'process' he described as inevitable during spiritual practice. Sam Rappold and Thelma Benn faced immense challenges in managing her erratic behaviour, which included violent outbursts. At times, she locked herself in her room and created a chaotic scene by mixing and scattering her possessions, including food, clothing, and household items. In one episode, she poured sugar, water, and other substances over her belongings, attracting hordes of ants. On another occasion, she appeared at the construction site of the Mother's Shrine, dancing wildly on the seat designated for Bhagavan and shocking onlookers, including visiting dignitaries. Rappold and Thelma, along with other members of the Ashram community, worked tirelessly to help her,





often in coordination with local police and hospital authorities. Once, at the hospital, six men were required to feed her through a tube, as she believed her food was poisoned. Hospital staff were eager to discharge her, unable to manage her behaviour. On another occasion, when Ilsa became violent, Sam and Thelma had to transport her to the police station for protective detention. The journey was not without incident:

Ilsa had to be shackled hand and foot while transported from the Ashram to the police station holding cell. We made the two-mile journey in a two-wheeled cart drawn by a miniature pony. Thelma held Ilsa around the shoulders and I held her shackled legs. Somehow Ilsa got one arm loose from the arm-restraints, whirled around and socked Thelma in the mouth with her fist loosening one of her front teeth.

Ilsa's periodic episodes of distress were challenging for us and other devotees, but Bhagavan's compassion remained unwavering.

Ilsa's story is both tragic and inspiring. It reflects the profound impact of trauma and grief on the human psyche and the challenges of integrating spiritual practice with deep psychological wounds. Yet it also illustrates the power of compassion, as Bhagavan and the Ashram community sought to provide support despite the immense difficulties. For Ilsa, the Ashram was both a sanctuary and a crucible, a place where her inner struggles were laid bare in the presence of a teacher whose compassion knew no bounds.

Bhagavan's Humility

Late in 1949, Bhagavan's condition became very frail owing to the cancer and his rheumatism. This happened after the inauguration of the new temple complex, which included the newly constructed Mother's Shrine and the adjacent New Hall where Bhagavan was now giving darshan. Bhagavan walked

with a cane and three attendants followed, one on each side and one behind. Shortly before the 11 am dinner bell rang, a crippled man on a small-sized mattress was brought in for darshan and was placed on the floor right next to Bhagavan's stone couch:

When the lunch bell rang, Bhagavan, with his usual promptness rubbed his rheumatic legs, got off the stone couch, stood and tried to walk out in the six-inch space remaining between the now-vacated mattress. He tottered as if about to fall. Devotees stood respectfully as usual for Bhagavan's exit, but no one sought to remove the obstruction in his path. So, I, standing directly in front of the couch and perhaps six feet from the mattress, swooped over, gathered up the mattress in one quick motion. Bhagavan rebuked me on the spot with the following words, "Did you come all the way from California to make me comfortable?" Startled, I dropped the mattress like a hot potato, realizing the profound lesson in his words. Bhagavan then negotiated the very narrow passage, and unsteadily went out of the New Hall toward the dining hall, complaining how too much fuss was being made over him. Swami Satchidananda, the slight, short ascetic, walked behind Bhagavan, ever alert for a possible tumble or faltering step.

Rappold tells how the New Hall door sill at that time was a large stone slab perhaps 6" x 6" and had to be stepped over with due care:

It was quite an obstacle for Bhagavan to cross, and so some loving devotees fashioned two fine thick pink cushions, which were placed on each side of the sill as Bhagavan approached and removed after he had passed. On several occasions with severity Bhagavan said, "That should not be put there for just one man". He thus took extra pains not to step on the cushions but would step over the obstacles only with great difficulty. In time the cushions were removed and not put out again. Such was Bhagavan's desire not to appear special or different from others even though in this state of physical debility. —

Announcement: Sri Chakra Puja Live Streaming

Sri Ramanasramam is live streaming the Ashram Sri Chakra Puja on the first Friday of each month. Daily live streaming Mon to Sat from 8 to 9.30 am and 5 to 6.45 pm IST continues and includes the Vedaparayana, puja and Tamil Parayana. (No streaming on Sundays) To access videos, go to: <<https://youtube.com/@SriRamanasramam/videos>>





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Bhagavan's 145th Jayanti



Bhagavan's 145th Jayanti celebrations began at 4 am on 17th December with "Mangala Isai" by Sri T. R. Pichandi, followed by Dhanurmasa Puja and recitation of *Vishnu Sahasranamam*. Devotees sang Manikkavachakar's *Tiruvembavai*, Andal's *Tiruppavai* and Muruganar's *Ramana Tiruvembavai* followed by Bhagavan's works while, in the Mother's Shrine, *purohita* chanted *Mahanyasa Ekadasa Rudram*. Puja to Sri Ramaneswara Mahalingam began around 10 am culminating in Mangala Aarti at 11am. Evening celebrations began at 3 pm with *abhishekam* and puja. —

Sadhu Natanananda's Upadesa Ratnavali § 15

Omniscience and other siddhis only serve to strengthen the ego

If an aspirant treading on the path of Liberation develops a liking for siddhis, his ego will increase and hence his bondage will become denser. — GVK §222

Omniscience and other *siddhis* serve to strengthen *vasanas* already in place. Unsteady-minded *siddhas* are unable to overcome the *vasanas* of senses, fostered by their limited egoic knowledge which is nothing but ignorance. Their ambition to become omniscient is like feeding the *vasanas* that already exist, that is, with the help of outwardly-focused minds. Savouring the apparent joy, which is suffering, would only lead them to plunge into a deep abyss. The natural and authentic bliss that comes from having an inwardly-focused mind will not be obtained with the assistance of *siddhis*. —





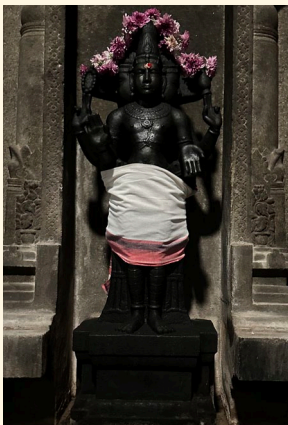
Introducing the Kendras: Sri Ramana Maharshi Center of Sonoma



The Sri Ramana Maharshi Center of Sonoma, Sebastopol, California, serves devotees of Sri Ramana Maharshi. This dedicated space, part of a residential house with a separate entrance, offers open meditation hours, retreats, and events like film nights and introductory presentations about Bhagavan's teachings. Designed to accommodate local and out-of-town devotees, it includes overnight visitor facilities, with plans to expand. Situated amidst Sonoma County's natural attractions, the center provides a serene retreat environment. Affiliated with Sri Ramanasramam and Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage, activities are tailored to both experienced practitioners and newcomers, promoting spiritual exploration in a welcoming, dharmic space. See <<http://maharshicentersonoma.org>>. —

Iconography of the Mother's Shrine: Lord Brahma

Lord Brahma

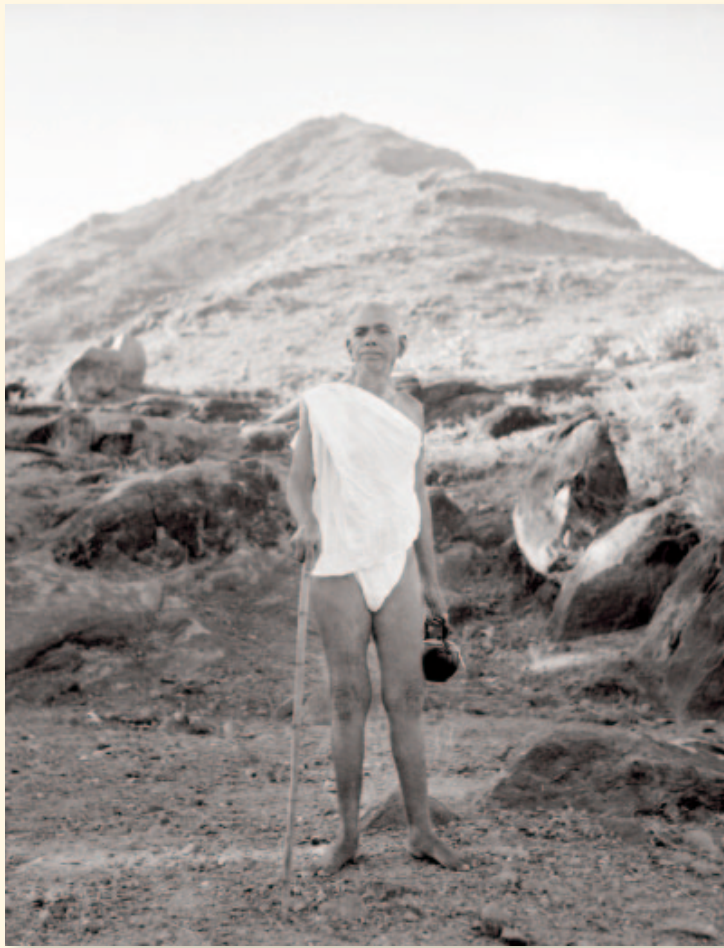


Lord Brahma, one of the *trimurtis* alongside Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva in the Puranic literature, is associated with creation, knowledge, and the Vedas. He features prominently in the story of the golden embryo, *Hiranyagarbha*, from which he is said to have emerged. In Vedic literature, Brahma is identified with Prajapati, the deity of creation.

He is represented as a red-complexioned figure with four heads symbolizing the four Vedas and seated on a lotus, with a swan (*hamsa*) as his mount. Brahma and Sarasvati are said to have created children from their minds, earning their children the title Maanasaputras.

As we saw in the last segment on Lord Arunachaleswara, Brahma had attempted to deceive Lord Siva by saying that he had reached the apex of the pillar of fire. Lord Siva became enraged and severed one of Brahma's five heads (leaving only four), condemning him for his pride and falsehood. Hence, the Lord declared that Brahma's worship thenceforward would be minimal compared with Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva. Thus, few temples are dedicated to him, with the Brahma Temple in Pushkar, Rajasthan, being the most notable. —





RAMANA REFLECTIONS

Placelessness and the Pillar of Being

Throughout history, seekers have yearned for stability amidst the uncertainties of earthly life, grappling with the profound challenges posed by human mortality. *Sanatana dharma* (the eternal law) offers a stabilizing framework by illuminating the principles of *dharmā* (righteous living), *karmā* (actions and their results), and *moksha* (liberation). The root *dhṛ* in *dharmā*, meaning ‘to uphold’ or ‘firm,’ contrasts sharply with

the flightiness and estrangement caused by *samsara*, a world dominated by desires, attachments, and fleeting remedies. The tension between the human longing for divine union and the stark reality of disappointment and loss is as ancient as humankind itself.

We recall the story of Dhruva, the young prince and son of King Uttanapada and Queen Suniti. After being humiliated by his stepmother Suruchi, the five-year-old Dhruva undertook penance with unwavering determination. His efforts earned him an eternal place as the North Star—the unmoving cosmic axis around which the universe revolves¹. Dhruva’s journey, born of early life suffering, led to the ultimate stability: alignment between heaven, earth, and the underworld. Symbolizing steadfastness amidst the chaos of earthly life, he is a bridge between human aspirations and divine grace.

The primeval tension between *dharmā* and *samsara* is more pronounced than ever in today’s world. An emerging sense of rootlessness would seem to be threatening the very foundations of civilization. While exile from the Self has long been humanity’s existential dilemma, modernity amplifies this condition. The present generation—immersed in a world of rapid change—longs for a home it can no longer recognize. The more we accumulate material possessions, achievements, and knowledge which includes the inundation of unlimited digital information, the deeper our yearning grows. The external world, perceived as separate and often hostile, becomes the stage of our quest for completeness. Yet the solutions we pursue outwardly are ephemeral, feeding cycles of longing and dissatisfaction. If egoism and the delusion of separateness blinded earlier generations, people of today find themselves strangers in their own skin. Why?

Too Much, Too Fast

The pervasive sense of placelessness stems from a world changing too quickly for us to keep pace. If life is increasingly perceived through a fragmented lens, where belonging and meaning seem perpetually out of

¹ The scholar-linguist Rene Guenon points out that the *dhṛ* in Dhruva, the North Pole star, is the same as of that in *dharmā*.





reach, we may feel as though we are skimming the surfaces unable to touch the depths of our lives.

A significant driver of the sense of dislocation is a growing dependence on technology, particularly the omnipresent infusion of machine intelligence. In the pervading digital landscape, the stories that once united us have begun to fray. Curated algorithms create the illusion of engagement, but the digital experience as a whole fails to provide the genuine connection the soul yearns for. This may be because genuine human connectivity depends on subtle facial and auditory cues from three-dimensional face-to-face interactions, much of which is lost in two-dimensional screen exchanges.²

The internet bombards us with an overwhelming diversity of media where no two individuals consume the same blend of content. This makes it increasingly difficult to be 'on the same page'. Hyper-individualized device consumption can bring a sense of isolation, leaving us yearning for more meaningful connections. Virtual communities displace traditions, customs, and the rituals that once provided a sense of continuity, and communal bonding gets diluted in a world where immediacy is prioritised and everything is rapidly exchanged.

As humanity gravitates toward websites, social media platforms, and virtual online communities, we become simultaneously connected *to* and disconnected *from* others. Here, we digital *samsaris* find ourselves strangers within a vast virtual network, struggling to understand where or how we belong to one another.

² Neurologists point out that the social engagement system (governed by the *ventral vagal complex*) manifests partly in the orbital muscles of the eyes and the muscles of the middle ears (which allow for human speech recognition) and is crucial for a sense of well-being given its capacity to autonomically down-regulate fear and anxiety.

Seeking the Stability of Being

That said, it should be noted that the fragility we are experiencing in the 21st century is not the fault of technology on its own. The ego is very opportunistic and endeavours to overcome feelings of vulnerability. If we are invested in the ego, something that, according to Bhagavan, does not even exist, then it is easy to understand why we might make use of high-powered information systems as compensation for feelings of insufficiency.

If we feel inclined to take the egoic project to the next level using rapid-fire information exchange, it may be because ego gains a sense of solidity through high-speed stimulation. Speed is a key component in the lack of grounding we are registering. This could be because the sympathetic nervous system interprets rapid shifts in attention as threat.³ Placelessness and mental itineracy may be nothing more than rapid shifts in attention. Through this lens, we can account for the sharp rise in anxiety among youth today.

What is Placelessness?

Placelessness is a kind of psychological transience, a vagrancy of the heart, where no single place feels like a stationary centre, like a home, or anything lasting. When we place all our hopes in the next sense experience (and it is the next one that we count on to bring relief to the present unpleasant feeling state), we are prone to enlist the digital hyper-sphere as a means for obtaining fresh attentional objects. Each one promises to free us, so to say. But each invariably becomes stale like the previous one.

The ego imagines that digital connectivity will solve the shelf-life problem of sense experience. But the ego just keeps replenishing one experience after the other—interminably. This drives the compulsion

³ When speaking of anxiety from a purely neurological point of view, researchers observe rapid shifts of attention. Slow down the rapidity of shifts, they say, and the symptoms of anxiety dissipate.



In Focus: December Edition

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

<<https://youtu.be/ypPMrwLntDU?feature=shared>>.





to click ever anew, a *samsaric* treadmill that brings no lasting benefit. The antidote for placelessness is gaining awareness about the treadmill and developing the strength of character to regulate its use. Here is the first step toward the unshakable foundation within.

Awareness of compulsions is the means for curing them. This is not a new idea but one echoed in the great teachings of the past, not least of all, in those of Bhagavan Ramana, who urged us to turn inward to enquire into the nature of the 'I'. The endless replication of the 'I'-thought is of course itself a compulsion, but tracing the 'I'-thought back can help reveal the Great Anchor within.

Man's Predicament is God's Opportunity

The difficult position we moderns find ourselves in can serve as the segway to a new way of living. Bhagavan emphasized the Self as the ultimate stability. In the unchanging Self, one finds a refuge that transcends the illusions of separation, the turbulence of *samsara*, and the feeling of rootlessness born of virtual living. Stated simply, inner anchoring through enquiry can heal the fragmentation of contemporary life, revealing the indivisible unity of all existence.

Reclaiming Connection

Reconnecting with our innate sense of belonging begins with embodied, localised, and contextualised forms of interaction. Embracing the spontaneity of direct personal exchange allows us to access the depth of human relationship that digital mediation flattens.

Dhruva's story offers a powerful clue. Direct contact with the spiritual heart is the foundation of a meaningful life. Dhruva undertook *tapas* in order to attune himself to the whispers of the Divine. Transforming his body, mind, and heart into finely tuned instruments of discernment, he cultivated embodied awareness. This involves engaging the senses to perceive the subtle cues provided by the immediate environment—internal and external. The resulting stillness is symbolised by Dhruva as the Pole of Being, the still point around which the cosmos rotates.

Such a practice leads us to become 'one big ear', capable of listening to the entire world, and lead us toward Bhagavan's *vichara*. *Vichara* begins with *enquiring into the source of the 'I'-thought*.⁴ When we slow down and tune in to the turmoil of the heart and the rhythms of

⁴ *Self-Enquiry*, p. 22.

the body, opening ourselves up to the inner richness, we enlist the mind as a sensory receptor, where internal listening dissolves the distance created by disconnection. Here, Bhagavan tells us:

*The mind enquires into the constitution and source of everything, which, on examination, is found to be its own projection.*⁵

Reintegrating what had been cut off, we cultivate accessibility through listening. Bhagavan's words resonate:

*It is said that hearing helps the intellectual understanding of Truth, that meditation makes the understanding clear, and finally that contemplation brings about realisation of the Truth. [But] there are those who affirm that hearing alone will suffice, because a competent person who had already—perhaps in previous incarnations—qualified himself, realises and abides in peace as soon as he hears the Truth only once.*⁶

Traditionally, *samsara* has been understood as the transient, unsatisfactory nature of worldly existence. All possessions and external attachments ultimately fail to satisfy because they belong to one *dispossessed of his or her own heart*. Such dispossession—the inability to reside fully in one's own being—renders even the grandest acquisitions hollow. While material wealth and achievement may temporarily distract us from inner emptiness, they cannot fill the void left by alienating our own Heart. Muruganar clarifies:

*The goings-on of the empirical world, beguiling in the mind's borrowed light, are nothing but illusions in the bright light of pure Awareness. But this world, which seems like a sea of sorrow, is transformed into an ocean of bliss if one's defective vision is corrected and one sees it fresh with the clear eye of true Awareness. Then one shall live like a sun unsetting in the blissful peace Eternal.*⁷

⁵ *Self-Enquiry*, p. 22.

⁶ *Talks* §21.

⁷ *Guru Vachaka Kovai* §70, 53, 452.





The Pillar of Light

Following Dhruva's example, we turn toward the motionless centre of the heart, setting aside time free from the digital life-scape. Simply put, the inner Pillar we seek is our own being, a refuge born of our inherent link with all of reality. On the other hand, if we are separated from the 'pole' within, we remain strangers to ourselves and to one another.

The inner Pillar is the internal *mulasthanā*, the foundational base, origin and locus of the spiritual and material worlds, simultaneously personal and cosmic:

*Standing motionless, higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the lowest abyss...[this Pillar is] the sign of Siva, who IS before anything else comes to be, and who still IS when everything has been consumed and forgotten. The Pillar cannot be shaken—achala—and nothing can move it, since it has the stability of Being itself. It sheds light on all sides and at the same time consumes all that comes into contact with It.*⁸

⁸ Secret of Arunachala, p. 133.

What is this Pillar?

It is that which does not move. It is immortal light, a column of brightness that existed before time began. The light shines to guide those lost in *samsara*—including the expanded *samsara* of modernity—and points them back to their true home.

Where can the Pillar be found?

Each year on Kartigai Deepam, devotees at Sri Ramanasramam celebrate this pillar, bowing before Holy Arunachala, the fire-crowned Hill. They chant Bhagavan's *Aksharamanamalai* with impassioned cries for absorption in Him, stirring their hearts to the depths.⁹ At this sacred hour, the inner and outer worlds merge in a single outpouring of devotion, attracting all the beings of the cosmos:

*Suns and Moons, the bhairavas, vidyaadaras, devas, those in charge of the Eight Directions, the nagas, tapasvins, munis and Brahmas and Vishnus gather in such proximity that there is no place left to prostrate. And so, their wave-like cry, 'Hara, Hara!', drowns even the roar of the oceans!*¹⁰

If sages of old reminded us that a meaningful life cannot be built on the transient things of a fast-moving world, i.e. money, status, material possessions, worldly knowledge, sensory pleasures, or the endless accumulation of data¹¹, the Pillar of Being stands as the embodiment of that which gives true and lasting life.

But someone who is aged and lives at a distance from Holy Arunachala, unable to make the trip to Tiruvannamalai for the Kartigai Deepam festival owing to ill-health, or to any other thing—what about them?

Bhagavan responds emphatically:

*Be advised that this pure bright world of God is not a place to go to. [It is nowhere else] but in your heart.*¹²

The Purana concurs:

*All the spheres of the vast universe are located in It. It contains all in Itself. It is neither Isvara nor the jiva but the inmost non-dual Reality. It can be realised only by the Self. It is the Self. And there is nothing apart from It.*¹³

⁹ Self-Realisation, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Glory of Arunachala, p. 219.

¹¹ Arunachala: Ramana Maharshi and the Hill of Fire, p. ix.

¹² Gurn Vachaka Kovai §194.

¹³ Glory of Arunachala, p. 7.





Conclusion

The sense of placelessness can only be cured by reclaiming one's heart, by coming home to oneself. To possess one's heart means to live rooted in the truth of one's being. It requires a willingness to turn inward and confront the illusions of separateness and the feeling of exile.

The key to this homecoming lies in aligning, like Dhruva, with *sanatana dharma*, with the universal order, and embracing the call to Bhagavan's inquiry. Living in accordance with *dharmic* truth helps us nurture the wholeness of belonging—not geographically—but psychologically, spiritually, and cosmically. Bhagavan reminds us:

*Providing space for that bright world of Siva and lighting up its marvels, you alone are the self-luminous, perfect Being. To know it, know Yourself. Within you is the Kingdom of the Lord. Siva is but Awareness absolutely still, abiding in the Heart.*¹⁴

Reclaiming the Heart is not about acquiring or achieving anything but about releasing—shedding attachments, illusions, and false identifications. It is through this process that one discovers the wholeness within, a completeness that renders external possessions secondary and the ache of digitally driven placelessness a distant memory. —

¹⁴ *Guru Vachaka Kovai* §195.

Rains and Floods in Tiruvannamalai: Cyclone Fengal



Cyclone Fengal made landfall on Saturday afternoon, 30th November near Chennai, bringing torrential rains and widespread flooding to Tiruvannamalai. The relentless downpour which, by some local measures, was 66cm in 36 hours, reached its peak on Sunday 1st December. The immense weight and force of the runoff from the sacred slopes of Arunachala proved too much to contain, overwhelming two walls of the Ashram.

Around the same time, tragedy struck near the foot of the hill, not far from Ramanasramam, where a landslide claimed the lives of five children and two adults. The volume of water cascading through the area was staggering. To illustrate the force of the floods: a car was seen being carried away down Osborne Road, swept along like driftwood.

The sheer scale of the aftermath is further evident in Korangu Thottam, where the sand deposited by the floodwater run-off from the Hill is estimated to be enough to fill ten lorries. Cleanup efforts are ongoing both within the Ashram and across the city. —





Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Swami Ramanananda Aradhana Day



Swami Ramanananda (Venkatoo) was a key figure in transitioning the Ashram from the difficult times following the passing away of his father, the Ashram Sarvadhikari, Chinnaswami, in 1953, which came on the heels of Bhagavan's Mahanirvana in 1950. Venkatoo's tenacity of spirit was instrumental in making the Ashram what it is today. Venkatoo's Samadhi Day was observed on the morning following Bhagavan's 145th Jayanti, 18th December, attended by Ashram President Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan, and other devotees. —

Similes from Bhagavan: In the Jaws of a Tiger

God and the Guru will only show the way to release but will not by themselves take the soul to the state of release. In truth, God and the Guru are not different. Just as the prey which has fallen into the jaws of a tiger has no escape, so those who have come within the ambit of the Guru's gracious look will be saved by the Guru and will not get lost, yet, each one should by his own effort pursue the path shown by God or Guru and gain release. One can know oneself only with one's own eye of knowledge, and not with somebody else's. Does he who is Rama require the help of a mirror to know that he is Rama? — *Who Am I?* §20

Events at the Ashram Dispensary: Allergy Camp



On Thursday 19th December, the Bangalore immunologist Dr. Anand Peldakur arrived with a lab team to conduct a three-day allergy camp at Ramanasramam. The group conducted pulmonary function tests (PFTs) to determine overall lung health of patients and test treatment options making use

of a nebuliser. The specialist said that asthma is on the rise around the world due to lifestyle changes. They hope to conduct these free camps every three months. —





Events in Sri Ramanasramam: Kartigai Deepam



The purificatory power of pilgrimage to Arunachala is so great, the Puranas declare, that one need only see the Hill from a distance to be assured of liberation in this lifetime. Lord Siva proclaims, “The moment you set eyes on It, your ignorance is destroyed! Its glory gives sight to the blind, the ability to walk to the lame, progeny to the childless and speech to the dumb. Arunachala confers all siddhis, cures all diseases, destroys all sins and grants all boons. Every year, during Kartigai, I shall appear on the summit of this Hill in the form of fire [...]. Those who see that fire and meditate upon it, shall realise the great light within themselves.”

This year, Kartigai Deepam day fell on 13th December, when Ashram devotees gathered to view the lighting of the flame atop the Holy Hill. At 6 pm, with the summit occluded by mist and clouds, the sacred fire was lit and as devotees chanted Bhagavan’s Arunachala Stuthi Panchakam, they got periodic glimpses of the holy flame. Over the ten nights that followed, darshan of the holy light was perfectly visible on most nights. —

Events at Sri Ramanasramam: Sri Arunachaleswarar Giripradakshinam

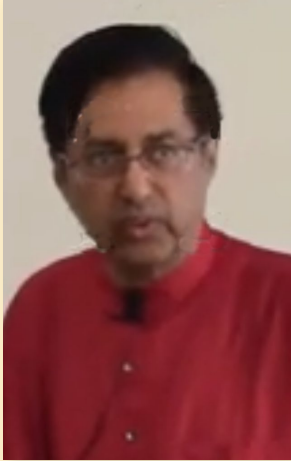


On 15th December, Arunachaleswarar went for pradakshina. The procession included the Lord of Adi Annamalai Temple and halted at Sri Ramanasramam around 9am. Dr. and Mrs. Venkat S. Ramanan offered garlands, dhotis, coconuts and fruits on behalf of Bhagavan’s devotees. The accompanying temple priests performed arati and distributed prasad amid a very large gathering of devotees and pilgrims on this full moon morning. —





San Francisco Bay Area's Jayanti Celebrations on 7th Dec 2024



Sri Ramanasramam President, Dr. Venkat S. Ramanan, addressed the Bay Area Satsang's Jayanti celebrations on 7th Dec 2024, marking Bhagavan's 145th Jayanti. The President highlighted the role of *satsangs* in sharing Bhagavan's teachings and offering a personal

connection with his grace, fostering spiritual growth amidst the challenges of modern life.

Dr. Ramanan praised the efforts of Sri Ramana Maharshi Heritage (SRMH), which supports Ramanasramam's projects globally. He shared updates on Ramanasramam's recent advancements, including sustainable initiatives like biogas-fuelled

cooking, solar panels, and eco-friendly guestroom expansions. The Ashram has also launched digital initiatives, including live streaming of the Sri Chakra Puja and AI-driven apps for devotees' guidance. He emphasized that these efforts align with Bhagavan's ideals of simplicity and self-sufficiency.

Focusing on Bhagavan's uniqueness, the Ashram President outlined six key points: Bhagavan's path is accessible to householders, the sole purpose of life being self-realization, the revival of the ancient practice of self-inquiry, and the emphasis on self-effort over shortcuts, the necessity of dissolving the "I"-thought, which is the root of all delusion, and an unparalleled explanation of happiness as the natural state of the Self.

Dr. Ramanan concluded with a call to practice, reminding us that Bhagavan's grace is ever-present, guiding all toward the realization of their true nature. —

[See: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pR-xc92i6g>>]

Best Shot: Kartigai Deepam Waters



Dev Gogoi

After early December rains, the Samudram Lake continued to overflow, bathing the land in abundance. Meanwhile, for eleven nights, the Deepam flame atop Holy Arunachala shone like the North Star, a steady brilliance piercing darkened skies. Fire and water, primal opposites yet eternal companions—the roaring flame embodying the spirit's ascent, the floodwaters symbolizing life's fertile depths—mirrored a timeless exchange between the soul's yearning and Mother Earth's nurturing embrace. —

