Writings from Arunachala
Dedicated to Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi
This little book is the beginning of a humble attempt by someone who loves Ramana Maharshi. It is a work in progress. The idea is to collect writings, stories, pictures, illustrations and all forms of expression about Bhagavan, Arunachala, and Tiruvannamalai. They’re all the one and all is already said but this collection is for the satisfaction of this person named Jubin who’s still more often than not veiled by personhood.

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The little girl and the little plant were sitting together, just past the tent; the plant contained, for now, in a tiny sack that held the tiniest piece of earth. People said that she came from the seed of a ‘kashi bilva’ tree. The girl and her little friend ‘kashi’ were on a journey towards this mountain ‘arunachala’.

Sometimes they walked, sometimes they hopped, sometimes they sat together in silence and sometimes they talked. One time they rode on a bus and one time on a train, one time on a bullock cart and one time they danced their way in the rain.

But then it rained and rained and rained, with thick clouds always covering the sky, the sun and the moon. They made home in a small hut by the ocean and it was fine but then the little plant needed light of the sun too, for it was her food.

One day, two days, three days and the girl noticed that the leaves of the plant had begun to un-green, turning a bit yellow. This made her worried because the plant needed green leaves to gather sunlight and stay healthy. The girl wished her love was sunlight and it seems her love did have a lot of light, more than the sun, because the plant didn’t un-green for the next two days and then the winds took the clouds to another city. It was time for them to leave too and they started the journey again. This time the little girl never stopped to rest in the shade, she would sit in bright sunlight holding her little ‘kashi’ in the lap. The girl so wanted to add the light of love to the light of sun.

Soon the plant was green again, all four of her leaves and the girl and the plant journeyed on happily. They passed mountains, forests, rivers and little villages. They met insects, animals, people and other trees. One day as the girl bent to say goodnight to kashi, she saw the tiniest of a stick stuck to one of the leaves…’hmmm, I wonder where the stick came from, there are no trees immediately around’, she thought…

Next morning, she went out, ‘good morning kashi…’, as she started to express her happiness of a new day to the little plant she saw that the tiny stick had become bigger and half the leaf of the plant had disappeared, someone had nibbled it away.
and then the growing stick moved and nibbled some more and the girl realized that the stick is a caterpillar. Maybe he will go by evening, thus thinking she went away to play with her friends. Evening however revealed a different story, now one full leaf of the little plant had gone and the caterpillar had grown even bigger.

Why doesn't kashi ask the caterpillar to go, she wondered. If this continues, kashi can die. Kashi looked happy though, so the girl let the thought go and it went away.

Next day, the caterpillar was even bigger and little kashi was half a leaf lesser.

Now the girl was really worried, the caterpillar had become really big revealing a beautifully patterned body which was the colour of kashi's leaves. Every time she looked she found the caterpillar actively nibbling away a leaf and soon the second leaf also became part of the caterpillar.

Should she remove the caterpillar and put him on a tree or leave him on the earth so he can go to another tree...but will he die, but then will kashi die... Neither could she think bad thoughts for the caterpillar, for he was alone too, nor could she rid herself of the fear about kashi. Soon tears were rolling from her eyes. ‘What should I do’, she thought helplessly, ‘what can I do’, as she was thinking she saw a lamp lit far off into the distance and she remembered she could pray.

Soon as she was awake she ran out to meet kashi and she saw that kashi now had only one and a half leaves left, but where was the caterpillar?

That's when she saw the cocoon, the caterpillar was resting in the cocoon and he won't need any more food! But what will happen to kashi, is one and half leaf enough for her to gather sunlight for food? Of course she can and will add the light of love, thus thinking she held kashi delicately and as she kissed the leaves she noticed something bright growing out of the nodes in the stem, tiniest, brightest, little leaves were beginning to appear. The little girl laughed and cried in happiness and made thank you prayers.

Few days had passed and kashi now had new leaves and the cocoon was almost transparent giving a peek into very many colours, like a rainbow. Soon the most beautiful butterfly emerged from the cocoon, painted in the freshest colours, he sat resting on a leaf drying his wings in the
gentle light of sun and then he was ready to fly. He kissed kashi once and circled her three times and then he kissed the little girl and circled her the same and flew off towards the stream.

Kashi and the girl continued their journey and a few days into the journey ‘arunachala’ was in sight. The girl and the plant both had reached home. The girl ran with her little plant towards arunachala and in a beautifully soft spot planted her. She smiled and kissed kashi, her little plant, who seemed happy. It was evening and the first stars were making an appearance through the light of the setting sun.

As she looked up to arunachala, she heard her father call out to her “Kashi, see, a shooting star”
Your own Self-Realization is the greatest service you can render the world.

- Ramana Maharishi
On a Pilgrimage

Dec 2016, Thiruvanamallai

It is late in 2016, a full 100 years after Ramana Maharshi moved from Virupaksha cave to Skandashram cave where his mother had come to join him. Probably the most comfortable time in terms of weather, the winters in Thiruvanamallai are pleasant with temperatures averaging around 25 degrees celcius. In the caves up on Arunachala Hill though, the temperature and intensity is palpably higher. The entire town of Thiruvanamallai has a sense of piety to it and Ramana’s Ashram is still full of his presence even after the master left his body 66 years ago, in 1950.

There is a whirlpool of questions as we walk the 14km periphery of Arunachala Hill on the auspicious Maha Deepam day. More than 2 million devotees have arrived in the small town which had been making special arrangements for the festival from two months. What prompted Ramana at the age of 16 to drop everything and come to Arunachala? Is it still possible in our age to find a place where you can drop everything and just be? Even the Himalayas have become crowded! Isn’t the number of sadhus also too high? Was following a spiritual path a little bit simpler in the olden times?

Walking upto the caves, one can see the sprawling town of Thiruvanamallai which is growing in all directions! If you were to ask Ramana, the answer of course is easy: An intense self-inquiry asking ‘Who am I?’ Who is asking all these questions?

It is the ‘I’ and once that realization dawns,
everything else stops to matter. But that road is long. The mind still says that even Ramana had to come to Arunachala, even though at the age of 16. There was a pull to come somewhere and be. It is very hard for the mind to accept the juicy dryness of Vedanta which eventually comes down to the realization that there is nothing but the mind is still at peace. You’re not giving power to any of the senses for external pleasure but at the same time are at ease with the extreme simplicity of enlightenment.

It’s amusing how if you look at the time frames, 1940’s in India must have been full of the freedom movement. But at the Ramana Ashram, even the British took refuge in Ramana for showing a way towards deeper self-inquiry. Many records of his talks are with westerners who have come to Thiruvanamallai seeking the nectar of Ramana. Fast forward to today, so much has changed but nothing has changed! Thiruvnamallai has changed beyond recognition and the ‘development’ of the town is just beginning. Age old traditions are going away, food habit are changing (fortunately, at a much slower pace than North of India) but man’s purest search is still the same. There are still people from all over the world who pour into the Ashram to find solace. The trees and the Ashram premise stand testimony to that eternal peace that pervades through the Ashram (I am inclined to write ‘and partly throughout the town’ but something stops me from doing that).

We are looking at a 150 year time frame but even if once extrapolates and takes in a 1000 year view, this view stands true. Ever since the human form started taking its current avatar, the only constant has been this search for enlightenment, this search for the life force where man and universe becomes one, where there is perfect harmony! And if you look at Ramana Ashram where even dogs, cows, crows and monkeys attained Nirvana, this pursuit through self-inquiry is the only quest of a life form.
It's 8am. I've just opened my eyes. The first thought that crosses my mind is that there was an alarm for 5.15am but there's absolutely no registration of the fact that that alarm went on and must have been turned off by my unconscious self. I have been on a fast the previous two days, taking in only water and tulsi whenever required. The idea being to come closer to god, towards our own self, our own true nature. Something happens, something definitely happens but I need to go on.

Saints have always maintained that a barometer for if you're meditating correctly is that your sleep will become lighter but in my case, I sleep like a dead log. The sleep is so deep that nothing can bring me out of it, it is beautifully deep, no thoughts, no dreams remain. And on the other hand, I also know that forceful effort takes you away from your true nature of happiness. Why can’t I accept that I sleep deep and long? So be it. Who is it in me that wants to be this meditator? But there’s also recognition of the fact that ‘So be it’ is not for now, that is for a state later on. There’s faith in a state when actually everything is seen as it is. But for now, relax, there’s no need to be so hard.

Enjoy.

How? I give myself a nice melon, some exercise and a couple of idlis after an hour or so. Open the computer, get in some external stimulus. What's happening in the world? The mouth hasn't verbalized from 2 days (a lot of things have been spoken though), strike a conversation with someone. Step out of the observation mode.

All this seems hard but these are the only meaningful or useful things that remain to be done. What else can one chase? If not knowing the true self. Everything else looses shine. Little ambitions of doing something in the world, achieving this or that, all this is secondary. These questions of the self are primary. And they have to be answered by experience. For experience, experiments are needed. For experimentation, one needs to be hard on the self sometimes. Also, someone once said, it'll be hard if you want it to be hard; the moment you drop the glorification, it'll be easy. Like fluid.

While I was giving myself a melon, I cut through my thumb and blood started oozing out. Deep, dark red, the colour that tells you that the blood is coming from somewhere really deep. I put the thumb in my mouth, there’s more blood. Now, it’s dripping, this looks a little serious. I look around, grab a handkerchief and hold it tightly. In a few seconds, I open the wound to see if there’s any clotting but that cut has become only clearer, a small stream of blood oozes out. The make-shift bandage goes back to the thumb, tightly. I think of someone to turn to? Partner? Friends? Parents? I go upstairs to Sharan (an acquaintance I made a couple of days ago) and he points me to a pharmacy.
close by. Some sense prevailed and I decide to take care of the situation myself.

And now I think of healthcare, and it’s need. Luckily, I’m in Tiruvannamalai and close to the Sri Ramana Maharshi Ashram which is frequented by many people, including a lot of westerners. Owing to this inflow, good facilities have developed in this small religious town. I’m trying to be the observer and not get drawn into the emotions of the pain. The fast is probably making things more heady. I stepped out into the street and smile. The weather is warm but there’s a nice breeze. There are women selling Yelanir (coconut water) and many other things... I walk past them in search for a dispensary.

The other night, I had walked passed the Ramana Maharshi Ashram Dispensary and there’s no doubt that there’s where I need to head. Walking on the National Highway which goes around the Arunachala Hill (Shiva) on the foothills of which the Ashram was built, there is traffic but the vibe is tranquil. One can feel the presence of the Mahatama. I walk into the dispensary and there are a lot of patients already waiting to be seen. The man at the reception looks at me, greets, ‘Arunachala’ and assesses the situation calmly. I’m pointed to a nurse who moved quickly and after looking at the cut, called for the doctor.

A tetanus injection was given and I am asked a few questions. They consult within themselves in Tamil and come to a conclusion that stitches will be needed. I’ve been gently loosening blood and my head was becoming lighter. I looked at the wound, got a nauseating feeling for a few seconds and then I was trying to register what the doctor was telling me but my consciousness gave up and I fell to the hospital bed. The last few thoughts were trying to observe the situation, a strand of thought was going in the direction of who would take care of me? A longing for human security? A face appeared and then the thought stream went somewhere else and died. After a few seconds or a few minutes, I got back to consciousness. I was given Electrol and I seemed to have regained some composure. Divinity of lightness.

I had to come out of the headiness. Sharan, the acquaintance I had made appeared at the door and asked me to eat something. He’s right. I head out again, get some coconut water, eat a dosa and have some much needed coffee. I proceed to meet a friend and her son, at a park nearby. I see all the children, and look at Arunachala. I sense some kind of a return to life. Return to doing some things. Lives of seekers have always been of interest and how speaking can be a rather lower form of communication. All writing, this writing, is only for expressing myself. Nothing else.

It’s time to go back to the dispensary. Time to get the stitches done. Anaesthesia. In goes the sutures. Like joining cloth, the silk thread is pushed in and taken out. 3 big stitches with Ramana’s chant on the lips. Always. Ramana Maharshi sat through in bliss while insects and small creatures gnawed through his thighs, such was the divinity. Not to look at as a aim but can’t you endure a little pain? Smile through it, be grateful for the life we’ve received. Time passes by and I keep returning to the world. There is only one world, there is no this and that. Think of documenting Ramana Ashram and around in pictures.

This is July 2018.
Ashram grounds, by the samadhi of Cow Lakshmi

The grand Banyan tree, by the samadhis
The every evening Dhuni, by the shrine

Bhagwan’s abundant peacocks
Emptiness. We try and fill it up with so many things, feelings and emotions. What I feel right now sitting here in the ashram, listening to the bells ringing and looking the aarti, that we need to fill it up with just these ....

- Fire- puja, or warmth or love
- Water- jal, just plain water
- Wind- breathing consciously
- Earth- food that we take
- Space - quiet time with oneself

That’s all there is to living. Everything else needs to be witnessed, observed like a movie. Do get affected yet not involved. This emptiness is the core, that’s what needs to be accepted and seen. There is nothing else but this seeing.
When the pot breaks

Sahaj state - this is the state of feeling the space or the emptiness. Knowing we are emptiness.

I am not this body that I deck up...
I am not the feelings and the emotions...
Yet I feel and express and that is the emptiness within.
Remembering Kabir dad's ulat bani...

Everything is there yet there is nothingness

It is a place or space where there is no ending or beginning...

There is no living or dying because it is all the space within.
The emptiness in the pot is what makes it the pot. And yet we try our whole lives to fill this pot with things feelings, relationships, memories and then say or try to be a pot. The pot is not what it is because of the things kept in it or it is filled with, it is a pot because it is empty.

When the pot breaks.. What happens? The space merges into the space. The emptiness...

How much we focus on this emptiness and we are so uncomfortable with it, that we are trying our whole lives to fill it, but never realized that when the pot breaks, everything within or inside is going to go. Only the space and emptiness merge.

And we cry over the breaking of the pot. Where as that’s what it is meant to be. Most natural. There is no feeling when the leaf withers, it has to. So also this pot or our body. Why fear or sadness? Its very natural. Thank you Bhagavan.
“Though this peacock is white, it is the other peacocks that are really beautiful,” someone said. Pointing to the peacock, Bhagavan said, “If it is like this, it has a beauty of its own. Those peacocks have many beautiful colours. This is pure white without the mixture of any other colours. That means it is suddha satva (pure self) without the mixture of other gunas (attributes). See, in Vedantic language, the peacock also can be taken as an example. Even the other peacocks do not have so many colours at birth. They have only one colour. As they grow up, they get many colours. When their tails grow, they have any number of eyes. See how many colours and how many eyes! Our mind also is like that. At birth, there are no perversities. Subsequently, there will be many activities and ideas, like the colours of the peacock.”

(Bhagavan in ‘Letters from Sri Ramanasramam’ 112)
I hold my breath and I look at my laptop screen. Nothing but a blinking cursor on a white background. My words don’t flow. I so desperately want them to flow, but somehow, they don’t. They haven’t been flowing for weeks and now I am about to miss the deadline, disappointing my friend’s friend. He asked me to write about my love for Arunachala and my devotion to Sri Ramana, which are actually my favorite topics to talk about. Ever since I’ve been back in Amsterdam, I have been raving on and on about Bhagavan to everybody who wanted to listen.

But now, my words seem to have all dried up.

I breathe out deeply and look up, out the window. It’s only 4:30 PM, but it’s already getting dark. December days are short on this end of the globe. On top of that it’s raining. Maybe that’s why nobody seems happy? I see people rushing down the street, most of them by bike, some of them clenching an umbrella. All are pedaling like their lives depend on it, thinking they have places to be, goals to achieve, expectations to fulfill - their minds endlessly racing. In this urban jungle, it’s each man to himself.

This is where I grew up.

A city famous for its freedom, with plenty of opportunities for men and women alike. It lies embedded in a society that values the mind over the heart. A society that has forgotten that, as human beings, our evolution is a spiritual as well as a Darwinian one. A society where it’s more common to look for happiness outside than in, creating a huge drive to create material wealth. I guess I just have a different definition of freedom.

This is probably why I never truly felt like I belonged. I remember early adulthood, trying to make myself fit in, pursuing a career. It felt like I was pushing a square shaped object through a circular opening. At 28 I collapsed. Was this what life was supposed to be? A deep, deep sadness nearly got the better of me. It was then when an Angel introduced me to yoga. She is now a close friend. After all these years, I found a place where
everything I had intuitively known and that I had been pushing away was allowed to exist. I learned to feel my body and then I learned I’m not the body, opening my heart more and more with each class I took. I had - and still have - the most loving teacher one could wish for. She goes by the name of Ganga. On the wall of her small studio in the heart of Amsterdam, she had a photo of an old man put up. It was in black and white, and the man was wearing nothing but a linen cloth on his lower body and an extremely friendly look on his face. Ganga had us close our eyes and meditate on the question ‘Who am I.’

I was intrigued. But it wasn’t until last September until it finally clicked. It was three months after my 36th birthday. Having been away from Amsterdam for eight months, I had been spending seven days at Bhagavan’s ashram, completely mesmerized by his image. Many hours I just sat there, quietly immersed in his presence. In that silence Bhagavan spoke to me. Although he used a language beyond words, my heart instantly understood. It grew, it grew, and it grew until it exploded, covering the entire Universe in joy. My upper body dropped to the floor, arms stretched out in surrender. Tears, salty and thick, dripping down my cheeks, onto the floor. So much love, so much love, so much love, so much love.

I was home. I had always been. And apparently the well of my words was never dry.
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