

The Power of Arunachala

MICHAEL JAMES

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The Thought of Arunachala

By seeing Chidambaram, by being born, in Tiruvarur, by dying in Kasi, or by merely thinking of Arunachala, one will surely attain Liberation.

The supreme knowledge (Self-knowledge), the import of Vedanta, which cannot be attained without great difficulty, can easily be attained by anyone who sees the form of this hill from wherever it is visible or who even thinks of it by mind from afar.¹

Such is the assurance given by Lord Siva in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* about the power of the mere thought of Arunachala, and this assurance has received striking confirmation from the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.

In the second line of the first verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* Sri Bhagavan tells us that from his very earliest childhood, when he knew no other thing, Arunachala was shining his mind as the ‘most

¹ This verse is the fifth of the seven verses which Sri Bhagavan selected from the *Arunachala Mahatmyam* and translated into Tamil.

great'. And this thought of Arunachala so worked in his mind that at the age of sixteen a great fear of death arose in him and turned his mind Selfwards to drown forever in its source.

In his writings Sri Bhagavan has repeatedly confirmed the mysterious power that the thought of Arunachala has over the mind. In his Tamil *Collected Works*, under the picture of Arunachala, there is a verse that can be considered as his *dhyana sloka* (verse of contemplation) upon his *Sadguru*, Arunachala Siva; in this verse he sings, "This is Arunachala-Siva, the ocean of grace that bestows liberation when thought of". In the first verse of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* (The Marital Garland of Letters) he sings, "O Arunachala, you root out the ego of those who think of you in the heart as 'Arunachala'". In the 102nd verse of *Aksharamanamalai*, he sings, "O Arunachala, the moment I thought of Arunai [the holy town of Arunachala] I was caught in the trap of your grace. Can the net of your grace ever fail?" And in the last line of the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai* ('The Necklet of Nine Gems') he sings, '*Mukti Ninaikka varul Arunachalam*' meaning, 'Arunachala, the mere thought of which bestows liberation'.

But only in the tenth verse of *Sri Arunachala Padikam* does Sri Bhagavan actually reveal how the thought of Arunachala works in the mind to root out the ego. In this verse he sings:

"I have seen a wonder, a magnetic hill that forcibly attracts the soul. Arresting the activities of the soul who thinks of it even once, drawing it to face itself, the One, making it thus motionless like itself, it feeds upon that sweet [pure and ripened] soul. What a wonder is this! O souls, be saved by thinking of this great Arunagiri, which shines in the mind as the destroyer of the soul [the ego]!"

The words '*oru tanadu abhimukhamaha irttu*,' 'drawing it to face itself, the One,' used here by Sri Bhagavan are a mystic way of saying 'drawing the soul to turn inwards and face Self, the one reality'. Thus in this verse Sri Bhagavan reveals how the thought of Arunachala works within the mind to arrest its activities, to attract its attention towards Self and thereby to make it still. In other words, Sri Bhagavan assures that the thought of Arunachala will lead the mind to the path of Self-enquiry, the 'direct path for all', as indeed happened in his

own case. Knowing from personal experience this unique power of Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan confidently advises us in the last line of this verse, “O souls, be saved by thinking of this great Arunagiri, which shines in the mind as the destroyer of the soul!”

The Form of Arunachala

Sri Bhagavan has said that Arunachala is the supreme Self that shines as ‘I’ in the Hearts of all living beings. In other words, Arunachala is truly the non-dual reality that transcends time, space, name and form. Hence, many of the verses in *The Five Hymns to Arunachala*, being very mystic in nature, can well be interpreted as applying to the nameless and formless Self, rather than to the name and form of Arunachala. For this reason, some devotees tend to view Sri Bhagavan’s revelation about the power of Arunachala as being purely allegorical, and a few even ask, “When Arunachala is the Self, why should we attach any particular importance to this hill.”²

In order to understand more fully the importance that Sri Bhagavan attached to the name and form of this Hill, it is necessary for us to take a broad view of his teachings. In verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu* (‘The Forty Verses on Reality’) Sri Bhagavan says, “If oneself is a form, the world and God will also be likewise.” That is, they will also be forms. In the first line of the third verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* he addresses Arunachala and sings, “When I approach you, regarding you as having form, you stand here as a Hill on earth.”

That is, so long as we identify the body as ‘I’, it is equally true that this Hill is God. Indeed, Sri Bhagavan used to say that because we identify the body as ‘I’, Lord Siva, the Supreme Reality, out of his immense compassion for us, identifies this Hill as ‘I’, so that we may see him, think of him and thereby receive his grace and guidance. “Only to reveal your [transcendent] state without speech [i.e. through silence], you stand as a Hill shining from earth to sky,” sings Sri Bhagavan in the last line of the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*.

² In *Talks* No. 273 (p. 228) it is recorded that Dr. Syed once asked a similar question to Sri Bhagavan, who in reply pointed out that the Hill had attracted to Itself all the assembled devotees, including Sri Bhagavan Himself, and that *the power of the Hill therefore could not be denied*.

So long as we feel the name and form of our body to be ‘I’, we cannot conceive God as being anything but a name and form. Even if we think that God is formless, that very thought about God itself is a form – a mere mental conception. This is why Sri Bhagavan says in the second line of the third verse of *Ashtakam*, “If one tries to think of your nature as formless, he is like one who wanders throughout the world to see the sky.”³

Being the perfect spiritual Master that he was, Sri Bhagavan knew well how important and necessary is the form of God for the human mind, which is ever attached to forms. And from his own personal experience he knew the unique power of the form of Arunachala, a power that cannot be found in such abundance in any other form of God, namely the power to turn the mind towards Self and thereby to root out the ego.

In verse eleven of *Sri Arunachala Padikam* Sri Bhagavan exclaims with joy and wonder, “Lo! How many are there like me who have been destroyed by thinking this hill to be the Supreme...,” thereby assuring us that if we regard this hill as God, our egos will surely be destroyed. Though Arunachala appears outwardly as a hill of mere insentient rock, the true devotee understands it to be the all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful Supreme Lord, who is guiding him both from within and without at every step and turn of life, leading him steadily and surely towards the goal of egolessness. “What a wonder! It stands as if an insentient hill [yet] its action is mysterious – impossible for anyone to understand,” sings Sri Bhagavan in the first line of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*.

The Name of Arunachala

Of all the names of God, the name dearest to the heart of Sri Bhagavan was Arunachala. Every one of the 108 verses of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* ends with the name Arunachala, and the refrain is ‘Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala Siva, Arunachala!’ From the great love that Sri Bhagavan had for this name, it is clear that he regarded it as being no less powerful than the form of Arunachala. This fact is confirmed in verse seventy of *Aksharamanamalai* in which Sri Bhagavan sings, “O Arunachala, the very moment I thought of your

³ The futility of trying to conceive God as being formless when we are unable to know ourself as the formless Self, is well illustrated by a dialogue that Sri Bhagavan once had with some Muslims, which is recorded on p. 28 of *Maha Yoga* and in *Talks* No. 121.

name, you caught me and drew me to yourself. Who can understand your greatness?”

There are many incidents in the life of Sri Bhagavan that illustrate his great love for the divine name Arunachala, but perhaps the most striking occurred during his last moments. About twenty-five minutes before he left his body, the assembled devotees began to chant *Aksharamanamai*. Hearing the name of his beloved Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan opened his eyes, which shone with love, and tears of ecstasy rolled down his cheeks.

Though Sri Bhagavan never gave *mantra-diksha* nor formally accepted anyone as his disciple, many devotees believe that Arunachala is the *nama-mantra* that he has bestowed upon the whole world. When a Guru formally gives a mantra to his disciple, he explains to him the meaning and significance of each letter of the mantra and tells him the fruit to be gained by meditating upon that mantra. In the same manner, in the second verse of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai* Sri Bhagavan has explained the meaning of each syllable in the name Arunachala and he has declared that mere thought of this name will bestow liberation. From this we can infer that Arunachala is the *jnana-panchakshari*, the five-syllable mantra that bestows *jnana*. Moreover, tradition tells us that when a mantra is given by a *jnani* and when he explains the significance of each syllable of that mantra, he is actually putting his own power into that mantra. Therefore, if any devotees of Sri Bhagavan wish to have a mantra, they can very well take Arunachala to be the mantra openly given to them by him.

The power of the name Arunachala was once directly confirmed by Sri Bhagavan. In 1948 a certain devotee came to him from Bombay, and with him he brought a notebook in which he had written the name ‘Arunachala Siva’ many thousands of times. On the last page of this notebook the devotee wrote a prayer to the following effect, “O Bhagavan, in the life of Sarada Devi [the wife of Sri Ramakrishna] it is written that she has said that if even an animal dies in Kasi it will attain liberation. Therefore, graciously bestow upon be the boon of death in Kasi,” and gave the notebook to Sri Bhagavan.

Bhagavan looked through the notebook and when he came to the last page he read out loud the devotee’s prayer: at once he expressed the greatest surprise and exclaimed, ‘*Smaranat Arunachalam!*’

The words ‘*Smaranat Arunachalam*’ mean ‘by remembering Arunachala’, and they occur in the very same Sanskrit verse that says that by dying in Kasi one will attain liberation. Bhagavan then turned to the revolving bookcase by his side and took out a book, probably the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*. Opening it as if at random, he read out a sentence in Tamil that said, “One ‘Arunachala’ is equal in power to one crore ‘Om Nama Sivaya’.” (‘Om Nama Sivaya’ is believed by Saivas all over India to be the most sacred and powerful mantra). After reading out a few other portions of this book that emphasized the unique greatness and power of Arunachala, Sri Bhagavan finally laid it aside and explained to the devotee that, not everyone can see Chidambaram, not everyone can be born in Tiruvarur, and not everyone can die in Kasi, but anyone, and everyone, can think of Arunachala from wherever they may be, and thereby they will surely attain liberation.

From this incident we can understand how unhesitatingly Sri Bhagavan encouraged devotees to have absolute faith in Arunachala. If devotees of a sceptical frame of mind came to him and asked him how mere thought of Arunachala could bestow liberation, he used to explain the allegorical significance of this saying, since that alone would satisfy their mind⁴. But if devotees came to him with simple, child-like faith, he would strengthen their faith and confirm the literal meaning of this saying, since he knew from personal experience the great power of the name and form of Arunachala.

The Unique Sanctity of Arunachala

In India there are countless holy places (*kshetras*) that are sacred to Lord Siva or to some other name and form of God, and many of them are more well-known and popular than Arunachala. Yet there is a verse in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*, which has been selected and translated into Tamil by Sri Bhagavan, that says:

Arunachala is truly the holy place. Of all holy places it is the most sacred! Know that it is the heart of the world. It is truly Siva himself! It is his heart-abode, a secret *kshetra*. In that place the Lord ever abides as the Hill of light named Arunachala.

⁴ An example of how Sri Bhagavan used to give this type of explanation can be found in *Talks* NO. 473 (p.448).

Whenever Sri Bhagavan asked about the special sanctity of Arunachala, he used to explain that other holy places such as Kailas, Kasi and Chidambaram are sacred because they are the abodes of Lord Siva whereas Arunachala is Lord Siva himself.⁵ However, as the above verse of *Arunachala Mahatmyam* says, Arunachala is a secret *kshetra*. Because it is this place that bestows *jnana* and because most people have so many other desires and do not truly want *jnana*, Arunachala has always remained comparatively little known. But to those few who seek *jnana*, Arunachala always makes itself known through some means or other.

The unique sanctity and power of *Arunachala-kshetra* was once confirmed by an incident that happened in the life of Sri Bhagavan. Because of his great love for Sri Bhagavan, a certain devotee wanted to take him to his native place, Chidambaram. But rather than directly ask Sri Bhagavan to come to Chidambaram, he began to ask him if he had ever been to see Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram Temple. When Sri Bhagavan replied that he had not, the devotee began to describe the greatness of Chidambaram, saying that it was the most sacred *Siva-kshetra* in South India, that so many saints and sages had lived there and had sung in praise of Lord Nataraja, and so on and so forth. Sri Bhagavan listened to all he said with patient interest, but showed no signs of wanting to visit Chidambaram. Seeing this, the devotee at last said, "Chidambaram is even greater than Arunachala, because among the *panchabhuta*-lingams [the lingams representing the five elements] Chidambaram is the space-lingam while Arunachala is only the fire-lingam.⁶ Since the four elements, earth, water, air and fire, finally have to merge in space, space is the principal element."

Hearing this, Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, "All the five elements come into existence only when Sakti seemingly forsakes her identify with Lord Siva, the Supreme Self (*Paramatman*). Since the five

⁵ See similar comments recorded in *Talks* No. 143, and *Sri Ramana Reminiscences*, p. 37

⁶ Though Arunachala is generally considered to be one of the *panchabhuta*-lingams, Sri Bhagavan used to point out that It is truly not a lingam of ordinary fire, which is one among the five gross elements, but is a lingam of the Fire of knowledge (*jnagnani*), the Fire that burns the ego to destruction.)

elements are thus only the creations of Sakti, she is superior to all of them. Therefore, more important than the place where the elements merge, is the place where Sakti herself merges. Because Sakti is dancing in Chidambaram, Lord Siva has to dance before her and thereby make her become motionless. But in Arunachala Lord Siva remains ever motionless (*achala*), and hence Sakti automatically and effortlessly merges in him through great love. Therefore, Arunachala shines as the foremost and most powerful *kshetra*, because here Sakti, who has seemingly created all this manifold appearance, herself merges into the Lord. So for those mature aspirants who seek to put an end to the false appearance of duality, the most powerful help is to be found only in *Arunachala-kshetra*.”

Subsequently, on 24th June 1928, Sri Bhagavan summarised this reply of his in the form of a verse, which later became the first verse of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai*. In this verse he says:

Though he is truly motionless by nature, in the court [of Chidambaram] Lord Siva dances before Sakti, thereby making her motionless. But know that [in Tiruvannamalai] Lord Arunachala shines triumphant, that Sakti having merged in his motionless form.

The Gurutvam of Arunachala

Arunachala has always been renowned as the bestower of liberation, the destroyer of the ego, the remover of the false notion ‘I am the body’ – as the *jnana-Guru* par excellence.

When Brahma and Vishnu began to quarrel, being deluded by pride and egoism, Lord Arunachala Siva appeared before them in the form of a column of fire, thereby vanquishing their egoism and teaching them true knowledge. When Sakti, Goddess Parvati, wished to attain a state in which she could do no wrong, Lord Siva sent her to Arunachala, where she merged and became one with him. Thus, even to Brahma and Vishnu, Arunachala was Guru, and to Parvati it was the place where she lost her separate individuality.

Throughout the ages saints and sages have sung verses in Sanskrit, Tamil and other Indian languages extolling the unique power of Arunachala to root out the ego and to bestow Self-knowledge. All the four great Saiva sages of Tamil Nadu, Manickavachakar, Sundaramurti, Appar and Jnanasambandar, have sung in praise of Arunachala. In

one verse often pointed out by Sri Bhagavan, Jnanasambandhar described this hill as being *jnana-tiral*, a dense mass of *jnana*. And Sundaramurti, singing in Tiruvanaikka, remembers Arunachala and sings, “O Annamalai, you can be known only to those who give up the attachment to the body”.

These *puranic* stories and songs of ancient sages all confirm the fact that Arunachala is the supreme *jnana-Guru*. But this fact has received its most striking confirmation from Sri Bhagavan. In verse nineteen of *Aksharamanamalai* he explicitly states that Arunachala shines as the form of his Guru; and in the same verse he reveals the function of the real Guru, namely to destroy all our defects, including the root-defect, the ego, to bestow all good qualities upon us and to rule over us.

In many of his other verses Sri Bhagavan has clearly indicated that the role of Arunachala is the role of the *Sadguru*. For example, in *Aksharamanamalai* he sings that Arunachala roots out the ego of those who think of it (verse 1), that it annihilates those who approach it as God (verse 48) and that it destroys the attachment of those who come to it with attachment (verse 77). He also reveals that Arunachala instructs through silence (verse 36), and that it teaches the path of self-enquiry (verse 44); and he shows us the way of praying to Arunachala to bestow *jnana* (verse 40), to reveal Self as the reality (verse 43), and to make us give up the attachment to the body (verse 75). He has also confirmed, from his own experience, the power of Arunachala as Guru. In verse eight of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai* he sings that, in order to put an end to his sufferings in the world, Arunachala ‘gave me his own state’. In verse nine he describes the wonder of Arunachala’s grace saying, “You entered my mind, drew me and established me in your own state.”

All that Sri Bhagavan has said about the power of Arunachala tallies exactly with what he has said about the power of the Guru. In verse 268 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* (The Garland of Guru’s Sayings) he says that the Guru is he who possesses the supreme power to make any soul who comes to him merge into Self, the knowledge beyond all speech. The Guru works in many ways to make the disciple merge into Self. “He gives a push from ‘without’ and exerts a pull from ‘within’, so that you may be fixed in the Centre,” says Sri Bhagavan in *Maharshi’s Gospel*, p. 36. From ‘without’ the Guru gives verbal instructions to

turn the disciple's mind towards Self, and he also enables the disciple to have association (satsang) with his form, and thereby to gain the necessary strength and love to turn within and attend to Self. To give verbal instructions it is necessary for the Guru to be in human form, but to give satsang and subtle inner guidance he may be in any form.

Sri Bhagavan has come as the Guru in human form to give us all the necessary verbal instructions, and he has revealed that Arunachala is the Guru in the form of a Hill with which we can always have satsang. Like any human body, the human form of the Guru will inevitably pass away one day, whereas the form of Arunachala will always remain. Thus, though Sri Bhagavan has left his human form, he has provided us with all the requisite outward help: he has left us with a permanent record of his verbal teachings, and he has shown us a form with which we can always have satsang. Therefore, for the devotees of Sri Bhagavan there will never be any need to search for another outer Guru, because all the necessary help and guidance is ever available for us in the form of the teachings of Sri Bhagavan and the satsang of Arunachala.

The power of the satsang of Arunachala was often confirmed by Sri Bhagavan. Dr. T.N. Krishnaswamy records in the *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*, p. 7 that Sri Bhagavan once said to him:

“The whole Hill is sacred. It is Siva himself. Just as we identify ourselves with a body, so Siva has chosen to identify himself with this Hill. Arunachala is pure wisdom (*jnana*) in the form of a Hill. It is out of compassion to those who seek him that he has chosen to reveal himself in the form of a Hill visible to the eye. *The seeker will obtain guidance and solace by staying near this Hill.*”

Arunachala-pradakshina

Arunachala is the physical embodiment of Sat, the reality, and hence to have contact with it in any manner is satsang. To think of Arunachala is satsang, to see Arunachala is satsang, and to live near Arunachala is satsang. But one very special way of having satsang with Arunachala is to do *Arunagiri-pradakshina*, that is to walk barefoot round the hill keeping it to one's right side.

The great importance that Sri Bhagavan attached to *giripradakshina* is well known to all the devotees who lived with him. He himself did

pradakshina countless times, and he actively and spontaneously encouraged devotees to follow his example.

“Bhagavan, who scarcely ever gave advice to devotees unless asked, wholeheartedly encouraged their going round the hill as conducive to progress in sadhana,” writes Lucia Osborne in *The Mountain Path*, January 1974, p. 3.

Devaraja Mudaliar records that the importance of *pradakshina* became evident to him “from the frequent references by Bhagavan himself to its great significance, and from the fact that thousands of people do it, including almost all the close disciples of Bhagavan, even those who may be considered the most advanced among them.” (*My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*, p. 64)

Though comparatively little has been recorded of what Sri Bhagavan used to say about the power of *pradakshina*, there is no doubt that he considered it to be an act having great spiritual efficacy. In fact, he used to say that the benefits which can be gained by meditation and various other forms of mind-control only after great struggle and effort, will be effortlessly gained by those who go round the hill.

“Bhagavan often said that those unable to meditate would succeed in their endeavour by circumambulating Arunachala,” writes Suri Nagamma in *My Life at Sri Ramanasramam*, p. 144.

Kunju Swami records on p. 108 of *Enadu Ninaivugal* that Bhagavan once told him, “What is better than *pradakshina*? That alone is sufficient.”

While extolling the spiritual efficacy of *pradakshina*, Sri Bhagavan sometimes used to narrate the story of King Vajrangada Pandya, which is told in the *Arunachala Mahatmyam*. Vajrangada Pandya was a powerful monarch who ruled over most of South India, but one day he was told by some celestial beings that in his previous birth he had been Indra, the ruler of heaven, and that if he worshipped Arunachala he could regain his former position. On hearing this, he at once renounced his kingdom and, with the intense desire to become Indra, he began to worship Arunachala by going around the hill three times a day. After three years of such worship, Lord Siva appeared before him and offered him any boon he wished to pray for. Though his original ambition had been to become Indra, his mind had been matured by doing so many

pradakshinas, he now realised that it was worthless to pray for such a transitory pleasure. He therefore prayed to Lord Siva for the eternal happiness of Self-knowledge. This story thus aptly illustrates that even if a person begins to do *pradakshina* for the fulfillment of worldly desires, his mind will in time be matured and he will gain proper discrimination (*viveka*), desirelessness (*vairagya*) and love for Self (*swatma-bhakti*).

Generally, whenever sages or scriptures prescribe any form of dualistic worship, whether for the fulfillment of worldly desires or for the attainment of Self-knowledge, they always say that it must be done with faith. But Sri Bhagavan used to say that the power of Arunachala is such that even if one does *pradakshina* with no faith, it will still have its effect and will surely purify the mind. Devaraja Mudaliar records on p. 64 of My Recollections that Sri Bhagavan told him, “For everybody it is good to make circuit of the hill. It does not even matter whether one has faith in this *pradakshina* or not; just as fire will burn all who touch it whether they believe in it or not, so the hill will do good to all those who go round it.”

Because Arunachala is the ‘fire of knowledge’ (*jnanagni*) in the form of a hill, the outgoing tendencies (*vasanas*) of the mind are automatically scorched when one goes round it. When damp wood is brought close to a fire, it will gradually be dried, and at a certain point it will itself catch fire. Similarly, when the mind which is soaked with worldly tendencies goes round the hill, the tendencies will gradually dry up and at a certain point the mind will become fit to be burnt by the fire of *jnana*. That is why Sri Bhagavan said to Kunju Swami, “This Hill is the storehouse of all spiritual power. Going round It benefits you in all ways”. (*The Mountain Path*, April 1979, p. 75)

The spiritual benefits of *pradakshina* have been described by Sri Sadhu Om in one of his Tamil poems, *Sri Arunachala Pradakshina Manbu*. In verses six and seven he says, “A cow grazing round and round its peg, does not know that the length of its rope is thereby decreasing. Similarly, when you go round and round Arunachala, how can your mind know that it is thereby subsiding? When the cow goes round more and more, at one point it will be bound tightly to its peg. Similarly, when the mind lovingly goes more and more round Annamalai [Arunachala], which is Self, it will finally stand still in Self-abidance, having lost all its movements [*vrittis*].”

In verse eight he says, “It is a well-proven truth that the minds of those devotees who ever go round Annamalai achieve great love to turn within towards Self. Annamalai is the blazing, wild Hill of fire [the fire of *Jnana*] that burns all our worldly desires into ashes.” And in verse nine he gives the simile of a piece of iron being rubbed against a magnet; just as the scattered atoms of iron are all aligned by the magnet to face in one uniform direction, thereby transforming the iron into a magnet, so, when a person goes round Arunachala, the divine magnet, his scattered mind, is turned towards Self and is thereby transformed into Self.

Sri Muruganar, who was a great sage and one of the foremost disciples of Sri Bhagavan, was noted as a staunch lover of *pradakshina*. In the days of Sri Bhagavan he used to write to any friends who were coming to see him, “You will find me either in Bhagavan’s hall or on the *giripradakshina* road,” and it is said that at one time he even used to go round the hill daily. How he first came to know about the greatness of *giripradakshina* is related by Kunju Swami in *The Mountain Path*, April 1979, p. 83, as follows:

“Sometime after he came here, Sri Muruganar asked Bhagavan about the spiritual benefit of going round the hill (*giripradakshina*). Bhagavan asked him to go round it first and then come to him. Sri Muruganar followed his advice and told Bhagavan that he lost his *dehatma buddhi* [sense of identification with the body] after a while and regained it only after reaching Adi Annamalai [a village on the way]. He reported to Sri Bhagavan that the experience was unexpected and unique. Sri Bhagavan smiled and said, ‘Do you now understand?’”

This incident proves very clearly the power of *pradakshina*, and it shows that mature souls can even lose their sense of identification with the body by going round the hill. It also illustrates what Sri Bhagavan meant when he used to say that while going round the hill one can experience *sanchara-samadhi*, a thought-free state of bliss while walking.

Though such a thought-free state is not experienced by all devotees when they go round the Hill, that does not mean that their *pradakshina* is not yielding fruit. The main benefit of *pradakshina* is that the tendencies (*vasanas*) are slowly made to lose their grip over the mind, but just as a child cannot easily perceive its own growth, so the mind cannot easily perceive the weakening of its own *vasanas*.

However, one very notable feature about *pradakshina* that can be perceived by anyone and which clearly indicates its spiritual efficacy is the extraordinary power of attraction it exerts over the minds of devotees. For no special reason one feels attracted to go round Arunachala again and again.

“Go round the hill once. You will see that it will attract you,” said Sri Bhagavan to Devaraja Mudaliar (*My Recollections*, p.65).

“Bhagavan used to say that if one went round the hill once or twice, the hill itself would draw one to go round it again. I have found it true. Now this is happening to Dr. Syed,” writes Devaraja Mudaliar in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 19th December, 1945.

In *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, volume 2, letter 98, Suri Nagamma records Sri Bhagavan as saying, “The dhyana [meditation] that you cannot get into while sitting, you get into automatically if you go for *pradakshina*. The place and atmosphere here are like that. However unable a person is to walk, if he once goes round the hill he will feel like going again and again. The more you go, the more the enthusiasm for it. It never decreases. Once a person is accustomed to the happiness of *pradakshina*, he can never give it up.”

Just as the mind is automatically attracted to the Guru, knowing intuitively that he can bestow eternal bliss, for the same reason, the mind feels automatically attracted to *giri pradakshina*.

Arunachala-Ramana

To understand the power of Arunachala, it is first necessary to understand the relationship that existed between Arunachala and Bhagavan. To Bhagavan, Arunachala was Mother, Father, Guru and God – it was his all in all, his own Self.

Sri Bhagavan often said, “God, Guru and Self are one and the same”, and to him Arunachala was all three of these. In verse forty-eight of *Aksharamanamalai* he refers to Arunachala as his God, in verse nineteen as his Guru, and in verse five of *Atma Vidya Kirtanam* (The Song on the Science of Self) as “Annamalai, my Self”.

Truly, Arunachala is Ramana and Ramana is Arunachala. The two are inseparable. Arunachala is Ramana in the form of a Hill, and Ramana is Arunachala in human form. The oneness that Sri Bhagavan felt with Arunachala is disclosed in many of his verses.

When a devotee enquired about his true nature, he replied, “Arunachala-Ramana is the Supreme Self who blissfully abides as consciousness in the Heart-cave of all souls beginning with Hari (Lord Vishnu)...”

The same name, ‘Arunachala-Ramana’, which he used while referring to himself, he also uses while addressing the hill in the last verse of *Aksharamanamalai*, and in verse ninety he calls the hill ‘Ramana’. When Sri Bhagavan composed *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* (The Five Gems) in Sanskrit, a devotee composed a concluding verse in which he said that these five verses were an Upanishad revealed by Srimad Ramana Maharshi. Later, when Sri Bhagavan translated this hymn into Tamil, he adapted this concluding verse and substituted the name ‘Arunagiri-Ramana’ for the name ‘Srimad Ramana Maharshi’, thereby indicating that it was Arunagiri (Arunachala) itself in the form of Ramana who sang this hymn. From all this, it is clear that Sri Bhagavan experienced no individuality or existence of his own separate from Arunachala.

Though Bhagavan Ramana has left his human form, he will always remain shining here in the form of Arunachala, giving guidance and solace to his devotees. Therefore, the power of Arunachala is the power of Ramana – the power of the *Sadguru*’s grace.

O Arunachala, Ocean of Grace in the form of a Hill,
bestow Grace upon me!

– *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*, verse 17.

