

Special Article to Newsletter Volume 5

Days with Guruji at the Hospital

By Kalpagam Sarma and Deepti Ahuja

Note:

The following article is a compilation of brief notes made by us during the days spent with Guruji while he was in the hospital being treated for a critical illness and for a few days after the discharge. Each of us separately had a chance to observe him closely during his illness and this was a period of tremendous learning for us.

Brief Notes

During the first week of April 2014, Swamiji started having a swelling on his right hand. On the morning of 5th April 2014, Saturday, I [Kalpagam] reached Tiruvannamalai as usual for my weekend visit. I knew he was unwell but until I saw his arm could not believe the extent of his illness. His right hand was twice the normal size and was extremely painful. That morning, Mr. Murali from Pondicherry was scheduled to visit Swamiji at Tiruvannamalai. Considering the seriousness of the situation, on an immediate basis Swamiji was taken by Mr. Murali to East Coast Hospitals in Pondicherry. I travelled with Swamiji and Mr. Murali to Pondicherry. He could barely walk and his speech was a little incoherent. On our drive to Pondicherry, Swamiji asked us to read some portions from the book *Eternal Companion* (a book very close to his heart). Given his state and incoherence of speech after reading a few pages, he spoke with full vigour and passion about the highest truth or reality. Guruji in his inimitable style gave us a mini capsule about the absolute.

After reaching East Coast Hospitals, which is one of the biggest private hospitals in Pondicherry Swamiji was diagnosed initially with Cellulitis and very soon it turned into Septicemia, a serious, life-threatening infection that gets worse very quickly. The devotees attending to him were informed that this illness was very serious and his life was in danger. The entire body including intestines, kidneys, liver, hands, etc. were all infected badly. The infection was severe and difficult for redemption.

Although his original plan was to be there for one day, he ended up spending three long weeks at the hospital. Dr. Murugesan was the Chief Doctor and several specialists and hospital staff and nurses attended on him night and day.



Immediately after he arrived at the hospital, I [Deepti] had asked Guruji a question while I was in Bombay. I did not expect any immediate reply since I knew he was unwell. However, the moment he heard the question from Kalpagam, he gave a reply in which he spoke for more than half an hour. Many of the people around him were moved to tears for the compassion he showed inspite of all his serious ailments and mouth sores [which he himself mentioned was as painful as a hundred scorpions biting into his mouth]. Similar thing happened when Mrs. Geetha Padmanabhan asked Guruji what is Divine Love? He immediately, in the hospital room itself dictated an article to her on this subject.



He was attended to constantly by Mr. Murali, Dr. Bhat, Anuradha, Kalpagam, her mother Uma and many others. Infact, Uma alongwith Kalpagam's grandmother left

their family and moved to Pondicherry for the entire period of the stay of Swamiji to ensure that home cooked food was given to him regularly. They continue to attend to him in Tiruvannamalai during his period of convalescence.

In the first one week of his illness which was said to be very critical, he would suddenly wake up at 1 am in the night and sit for meditation. When asked Swamiji what he wanted to do, he told me, "I just want to think about my mother Bagavathy" and that nothing else matters. Even though he could hardly move his right arm or had any strength to move at all; he would get out of bed with great difficulty and steady himself on a chair and sit for meditation. He spoke with great love about the Divine Mother at all times. He said many times "It is she who gave me the illness. Let her do as she pleases with me. It is her play. It is all she." He acted like a bhakta full of love and surrender at all times with the least concern towards the outcome of his treatment or the physical pain he was in.



Inspite of all the illness, Swamiji was always cheerful and happy. His sense of humour was intact no matter what the health condition was! We remember him cracking jokes even at midnight. Since the visit of the nurses was several times in a day, he kept the atmosphere lively by sharing some stories and jokes with them.



He would take a lot of care of everyone, whether they were attending to him in Pondicherry or outside. Like a loving mother treats her children, Guruji ensured that everyone who came to him was taken care of properly. He would inquire regularly about the smallest details in relation to their care and ensured that they had been fed well and had accommodation to stay. Even though he could not talk due to severe mouth ulcers he would still speak a few words when devotees were desperate to reach him. The depth of his compassion and love for one and all cannot be comprehended in words. Even though he was wincing in pain, he was oozing love and compassion towards all at all times.

His routine of morning meditation continued as usual. He had very little sleep in the hospital and had to get up very frequently. During the time he was awake, he shared several insights, experiences and clarifications to people who used to spend time with him like Mrs. Geetha Padmanabhan, Ajata and others. Although his routine was to be awake and get ready very early by 2.30am, he would not disturb the nurses until 4.30-5.00am.

Prior to his illness, over the last six months he was working on a book titled "Sadhanas from Guru Vachaka Kovai". The original book based on which Swamiji had written this book is an authentic compilation of the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana. The final proof reading remained incomplete by Swamiji and was required prior to printing the book. The commitment to tasks already undertaken and on hand was so high that Guruji completed the proof reading in the hospital. Since he did not have a suitable posture to read the proof copy, he used to hear the reading of the book line by line and suggest corrections.



For me, the nights in the hospital were spent having the benefit of satsang from Guruji. He would allow me to read Gospel by Sri Ramakrishna or and Selected Gems from Ashtavakra written by him and he would provide elaborate explanation on various slokas. I [Deepti] still have vivid memories of listening to him and some of my best days have been the ones spent with him in the hospital.

All along in parallel, beneath the calm surface, his body was experiencing severe pain. We recall several incidents where the doctors and everyone were surprised how he managed to remain still and calm despite the pain. There was pain all throughout and on one such instance when his puss was being extracted by an extremely painful process, someone asked Swamiji whether there was pain. He replied, "There was such a severe pain for about 5-7 minutes. There was terrific pain in the arm when they were taking out the puss with a very fat needle. If left to myself I would have shouted and could have brought the roof of the hospital down with the pain. But did you notice that I was looking up at the ceiling all the time. I was telling my Divine Mother over there that this is your problem and not mine. This body is not mine. I did not say a word or utter a sound."

Swamiji would constantly kept checking the time on his wrist watch; one night I [Kalpagam] asked him why he keep checking the time and he replied, "You conquer time by adhering to time." Keeping time is the one of the most important values in spirituality. He adhered to time even when he was swinging between life and death.

With great difficulty and personal care and concern of the Director and the Chairman and the other specialists / doctors, after a number of tests and special treatment Swamiji was brought out of the critical condition. Dr. Murugesan and the hospital were very kind to offer a thumping concession and night and day attention.



While being treated, since the infections were manifold, he was given multiple antibiotics [around eight or nine different antibiotics] during the entire period of his hospitalisation and subsequently as well. On some occasions, Swamiji was extremely irritable due to the acute weakness. Actually in the first one week his speech was incoherent and he had to repeat instructions several times for people around him to understand; this made him further weak along with the existing weak state. His explanation for this was, "When a Guru gives an instruction or says something we might not understand it in its entirety; we need to follow it as he sees it from several perspectives that we cannot perceive." Another interesting observation was that he would be irritated only for a few minutes till the task was completed and would immediately get back to his usual self and would not point out at our mistakes we made at earlier times.

The illness made him extremely weak for several weeks after his discharge [his weakness continues even now] with significantly low physical energy. It is very interesting to note that the day he reached Tiruvannamalai, when he was barely in a

position to walk even two steps, he first walked to the shrine of Bhagavan Ramana to offer his pranams and thereafter went to his room.



One day Guruji remarked that being self reliant is a hallmark of a true sanyasi. It was so true in action. In the hospital, he started walking twice everyday in the long corridors of the hospital, many a time after midnight. On returning from Pondicherry, he started walking twice daily, all by himself to the shrine of Bhagavan. In spite of being extremely weak, Guruji started to do all his activities by himself and lived alone at nights without any attendant.



This was a second time after his heart attack in August 2009 that Swamiji escaped from the jaws of death by a hair's breadth. We bow and eternally thank the Divine Mother, Bhagavan Ramana and the Universe for being kind to all of us by allowing us his continued grace and for giving him back to us.

A brief summary of the key learning for us:

1. Compassion never stops for great mahatmas – whatever be the circumstance and however difficult it may be.
2. This body is not mine.
3. “Let the Divine Mother do as she pleases” –a complete surrender in the most painful situation.
4. Responsibility to the truest sense. Whatever work we have undertaken, need to be completed.
5. Whatever work we do, there are three sine qua nons:
 - a. Dedicate the work to the Lord saying from the heart, “Something makes me do these karmas. I am not doing them and you will be doing them. I shall only be a witness and I don't want the result of those actions whether they are good or bad.”
 - b. Do the work without an attachment to it.
 - c. Whatever may be the obstacles that may come, you need not be bothered as all the obstacles are left to the Lord to be dissolved or not.
6. Never forget the Lord, in your happiest or painful moments.
7. Before starting your routine, always bow to the Lord.
8. You conquer time by adhering to time.
9. Never forget being happy and having a sense of humour even in adversities.

