

[A Beggar Who Owns The World](#)

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A Beggar Who Owns The World

He chain smokes, eats out of a cracked coconut shell, wields a giant palm-leaf fan and beds on store verandahs, in temple compounds or beneath the starry sky. But Yogi Ram Surat Kumar is no vagrant. He holds degrees from three of India's greatest "universities" - Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharishi and Sri Ramdas. But at 71, the student is now a teacher himself, and his "students" range from Tamil savants to simple servants. They come from as far away as Arizona, USA, for a few golden moments. His teaching is simple and obscures a lifetime of inner study: "Feel the Presence of the Father within and all about you and the Divine guidance in all your acts. God is not far away; He is here, right where you are."

His haunt is the town of Tiruvannamalai, at the foot of Arunachala Hill, South India, where legends says Siva appeared as a column of fiery light. He wakes to crow cacophonies or the hungry whines of stray dogs that come to him for alms - and get them. Devotees seek him out from early dawn to late night. Invariably, he curtly asks them why they come to him and repeats, "I am a beggar. What do I have to give you?" They insist on staying. He laughs, enjoying their invincible faith, and in his laugh, blessings commence.

But seeing him is not guaranteed. Nowadays, you have to get invited through a little dilapidated iron gate outside the simple room he occupies. For first-timers it's more imposing than the four-story temple entrance tower down the street. But just when it seem he's not in - or your fear you are not worthy enough - he appears. He may stand there with his odd-shaped, thatched fan in one hand and wave the other as though etherically pushing away whatever burden you secretly brought, then smile and send you away. Or he may invite you in.

Author Ma Navaratnam and husband Thiru had such fortune and made these notes: "Under the Punnai tree, amidst heaps of newspaper bundles, dried twigs, faded leaves and rotten refuse, we met him for the first time. He is playing with his fingers as if rolling the rosary and his lips whispering 'Sri Ram Jay Ram, Jaya Jaya

Ram.' We begin to sense a great wave of joy in the presence and realize the luminous Reality touching our consciousness. The yogi laughs, jokes, enjoys his smoking and in his own joyous freedom enables us to free ourselves from the grip of desires, demands, fears, stress and weakness."

Though two-way discussion is rare, teenager Kumari Nivedita one day innocently hit a sensitive nerve when she doubted his beggar's identity. "So you don't believe I'm a beggar!" he challenged. "If you say so," she quickly demurred. "Then what do you think of me?" "I think you are a great yogi," she said flatly. "What do you mean by a yogi?" he asked. "'You are not affected by pleasure and pain, praise and condemnation...'" she quoted from the Gita. "But this stone here is also like that. Is it a yogi?" he demanded. "You are not a stone; the stone will break when it is hit with hammer," she insisted. "So will my leg," he replied. "No," she argued, "You are not the body; therefore you will not be affected." "But how do you know I am such a yogi?" he baited. "You told Dr. Radhakrishnan that whosoever thought of you in whatsoever manner, you appeared to them like that. I think of you as a great yogi and therefore you appear to me as a great yogi." He gave up and laughed.

The Turning Point: Death of a Bird

Yogi Ram Surat Kumar was born in 1918 on the banks of the Ganges near Benares. As a boy he befriended the area's colorful sadhus, sages and mendicants, spending his every free moment - and many nights - with them before the dhuni fire, spellbound by their wondrous tales of Gods and yogic visions. In the daytime he would lead them to his home and feed them.

One day when fetching water, the rope of his pail flung loose and killed a small bird perched inside the well. He felt crushed. He carried the lifeless creature down to the Ganges, performed a final ritual, floated it his cheeks, swore that compassion would be his lifelong guide.

It appears he received a good cottage education but it failed to interest him. He gravitated back to his old sadhu friends on the banks of the Ganges. One night one of them told him about two South Indian saints - Sri Aurobindo and Ramana Maharishi. The young God-seeker set off at once, found them and secured profound awakenings during this period. Then in 1950, while moving high in the snow-clad

Himalayas, he heard that his two teachers had died. He immediately charged back down south to the ashram of a third, and living, great soul, Ramdas. He had twice before reached the steps of Ramdas; ashram and prematurely left. Now he was determined not to lose another "golden opportunity of keeping company with the great masters." Ramdas received him, initiated him into the great Ram mantra and after some time, sent him off on mission with secret blessings. For seven years he wandered India, performing one sadhana - seeing the within and the without illumined by the same light. In 1959 he arrived in Tiruvannamalai, the same place where his master Ramana Maharishi had meditated for decades.

Aggressive Hinduism

Yogi Ram Surat Kumar has no organization but his voice echoes loudly in the pages of Tattva Darsana journal published by Professor Rangarajan, founder of Sister Nivedita Academy and the yogi's only initiated disciple. The Academy's ambitious yogi Ram Surat Kumar Youth Wing often gets the yogi's jovial scolding: "Our real work is not to produce engineers and computer scientists - our goal is higher. If man depends on the computer, the mind will deteriorate."

HINDUISM TODAY, via Professor Rangarajan, was able to catch the yogi for a few candid thoughts. He quickly warned: "Aping false values which do not fit into the Indian environment" is Hinduism's biggest challenge today. Resonating tradition, he asserted, "Humility, selflessness and respect for others in the discharge of duties is the highest spiritual quality, and children - raised properly, physically and mentally - are any culture's greatest asset." Though his skin is wrinkled and hair is white, this yogi has fire in his eyes and when he launches into "the need for the day is 'aggressive Hinduism,'" you realize this is not a beggar begging; this is a king giving orders.

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