

Arunachala Mt. article (*extract*) 20 years ago by John Seed

One of the many projects that I had helped initiate in the previous decade was the reforestation of this very mountain. I was drawn to this project by the opportunity it afforded to bring together the ecological and spiritual dimensions of existence. It had always seemed to me that the line that was drawn between these aspects of life was artificial and arbitrary. In Hindu tradition this mountain, Arunachala, was the very embodiment of the supreme God, Shiva. It was said that in the far-distant past, the other gods had remonstrated with Shiva that his form as a column of light that stretched from infinity to infinity, was dazzling them beyond endurance. So Shiva in his compassion, embodied Himself as Arunachala and that has been His form ever since. Consequently, pilgrims by the millions have thronged there for century after century and more than a thousand years ago one of the largest temples in India was built at the foot of the mountain.

During this time many sages have set up their abode on Arunachala and when Ramana arrived there as a God-intoxicated teenager in the early years of the 20th Century, the mountain was still clothed in a mighty jungle where even tigers could be met walking along the flanks. But by the late 1980's, driven by population growth and grinding poverty, all that remained there was thorns and goats. When someone invited us the Rainforest Information Centre to help restore the mountain, one of the things that attracted us was the opportunity to blur the lines between Ecology and Spirit - we would help to reweave Shiva's robes!

In 1995 this project was 6 years old and we had twice received funding from the Australian government to help plant hundreds of thousands of trees on the mountain and defend them from grazing and fire.

I went to see Papaji whose many devotees believed that he, like Ramana before him, was a fully enlightened master. Some hundreds of us from all over the world crowded the meditation hall, handing him letters with our spiritual questions which he would read and answer. Behind him on the wall were portraits and photos of Ramana and Arunachala.

While with Papaji I was exploring the relationship between the human spiritual quest and the ailing Earth upon which it is carried out. As long as people in India for example, look on the Earth as Maya, illusion, and as an obstacle to realization, how could we find the intense spiritual will necessary to make the tremendous changes in our values, lifestyles, and institutions, in our very consciousness, that would prevent the continued destruction of the Earth?

I wrote to Papaji twice about these concerns. The first time his answer was mostly mysterious to me and it left me unsatisfied. So I plucked up my courage and wrote again a couple of weeks later:

Dear Papaji,

Lakshmana Swami once said that, since God had chosen to manifest as the world and everything in it, one could worship God by having respect for the world and all the life forms it contains.

For many, many years, Papaji, it has been my privilege and joy to worship God in this manner, to feel the living Earth play my life like a musical instrument. A couple of weeks ago, when I first wrote to you at sat sang, you said this: To the man speaking of Mother Earth I say: "To help Mother Earth means you stand and shout at the top of your lungs!"

I have shouted long and hard, Papa. I shouted in front of bulldozers and was thrown in jail. I made films and a book, which was translated into 10 languages, and conducted workshops around the world, donating the proceeds to the work, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for the protection of Nature from the Amazon to New Guinea to the reforestation of Arunachala.

For the last 15 years Papa, the Earth worked through me and I was tireless and full of joy, but eventually the impurities of ego and the conditioned mind began to rise again until, a couple of years ago, the Earth asked me to hand over what I had been doing to others and purify myself for the next task that she has for me. And here I am.

This time Papaji looked directly at me. When you take care of your mother, he said in his deep voice, then you will get some prize. When you are helping the Earth, then you are helping everybody who's living on the Earth - plants, animals, and men..

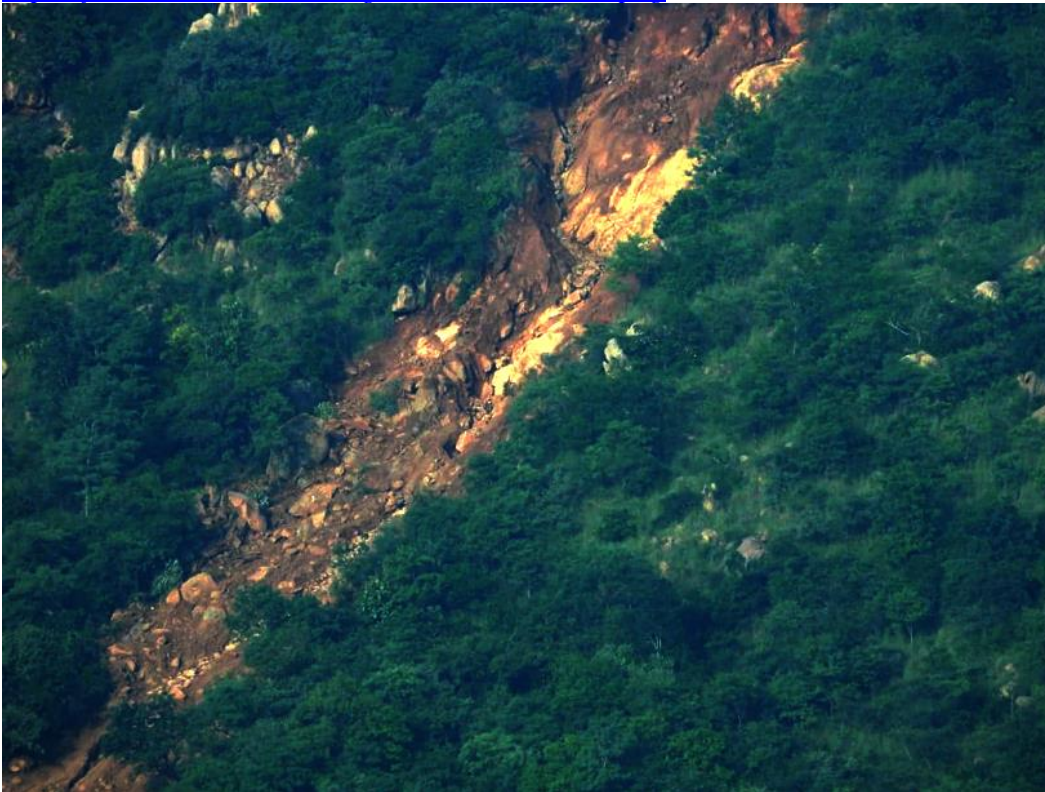
So, my dear friend, he continued, your work is very good. I bless you for this task that is in hand, and let me tell you, both sides can happen simultaneously: Work for the good of the Earth and the people. And for your own good do something else. They needn't interfere with each other. Stay for some time before sleep and in the morning and sit quietly for five or 10 minutes. The rest of the time you may give for the world, help those who need your help.

What a blessing it was to feel Papa rekindle the flame inside me which had been wavering and doubtful. I could not yet know how, but I knew that from this turning point it would begin to flare forth once more.

Now, approaching my 60th birthday, I feel the spiritual and the ecological drawing together in my life, blurring, refusing to be relegated to their separate compartments. "The spiritual heights of which our species are capable are among the finest flowers of the extraordinary fecundity and goodness of the Earth. It is only fitting that compassion and praise, gratitude and caring pour back from these spiritual heights to nourish the biological fabric from whence they sprang."

Here is a picture of one of the landslip scars on Arunachala's flanks from earlier this month.

<https://johnseed.net/assets/images/ArunachalaScars.png>



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