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<div>1. <i>The Recollections of N.Balarama Reddy, part 3</i> 2. <i>Surrender, Grace and Effort</i> 3. <i>World-Wide-Web</i> 4. <i>Thayumanavar</i> 5. <i>Arunachala Ashrama, New York & Nova Scotia</i></div>		

The Recollections of N. Balarama Reddy

Part 3

(continued from the *May/June issue*)

MP 3

Entering upon the third installment of Sri N. Balarama Reddy's recollections, we are sad to announce the news of his sudden passing on May 11 in Bangalore. Sri V.S. Ramanan, the President of Sri Ramanasramam, informed us that for two months prior to his death Sri Reddy was saying that he did not feel well and had already lived long enough, being in his eighty-eighth year. Sri Reddy's relatives came to the Ramanasramam and took him to Bangalore on April 24. There he underwent many medical tests, and on May 10 a doctor reviewed all the results and said that Mr. Reddy was quite fit and could easily live for four more years. On May 11, the very next day, Balarama Reddy was absorbed into his Master, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

When I had observed Bhagavan closely for some time I discovered that he would never openly say that he was our *guru* and we were his disciples; in fact, he would sometimes say things that sounded contrary to this. But for us close devotees there was never a doubt that he was our *guru*. He loved us like a mother, protected us like a father, guided us like a teacher and moved with us like a friend. We constantly felt his guidance and grace.

Where do we read in the annals of the spiritual history of India about a sage like Bhagavan, living in one place for fifty-four years, making himself available at all times and embodying such divine qualities? We would sit in the hall and meditate with our eyes closed, or just rest our vision on his form, which we believed to be the form of God. He would teach us orally, or in silence, or again by deed; sometimes in subtle ways, and at other times directly.

When I initially came to Tiruvannamalai and was living in town I would come to the ashram very early in the morning. When the attendant first opened the doors of the hall I would be waiting there. His opening of the door meant that Bhagavan had risen and was about to come out. Before Bhagavan had a chance to come out I would walk into the hall and find him on the sofa preparing to leave. He would often cover himself with a shawl at night and when I would see him removing his shawl I would take it from him and fold it. He was kind enough to allow me this little service.

In those days I was coming to the hall and sitting before Bhagavan in both the mornings and afternoons. During the late afternoons larger crowds were coming into the hall for *darshan* and causing some disturbance. I then discovered that I could meditate in my room with less distraction in the afternoons and, consequently, began omitting my afternoon visits to the ashram.

One afternoon G. V. Subbaramayya arrived at the ashram and not seeing me in the hall inquired from Bhagavan where I was. The next morning when I was folding Bhagavan's shawl he mentioned about what G. V. Subbaramayya had asked him on the previous day. By this comment I could understand that Bhagavan wanted me to resume coming to the hall in the afternoons, though he did not say so explicitly. In spite of this, I still remained in my room that afternoon.

The next morning when I entered the hall and went over to Bhagavan to take his shawl and fold it he didn't give it to me. He quietly folded it himself. I then realized Bhagavan was admonishing me in this way. After this I saw my error and resumed the afternoon visits to the ashram. From this I realized that Bhagavan wanted us to benefit from his company. But how could he say it openly?

In the first year of my settling in Tiruvannamalai, I remember one afternoon I was sitting in the hall and Bhagavan was explaining to me some particular point on a spiritual matter. During the discussion he asked me to go to one of the two almshouses that were up against the west wall, open it and bring him a certain book. I searched for the book but was unable to find it. I returned to Bhagavan and informed him of my failure to locate the book and then again sat down against the south wall facing him.

Presently, I saw Bhagavan alight from his couch, slowly and majestically walk over to the almshouse, open it, and immediately pull out the book he asked me to find. He closed the almshouse and, to my surprise, instead of walking back to the couch, he came and sat on the floor right next to me, on my left. He opened the book to the page he wanted me to read and, holding it in his right hand, held the opened book before my face and asked me to read the particular passage.

Attendants of Bhagavan had earlier told me that Bhagavan's body was like a furnace. Only then, when he sat so close to me, could I understand what they meant. I felt like there was an electric dynamo of spiritual power emanating from his body. I was thrilled to the core of my being.

I believe the most unique characteristic of Bhagavan was the power of his presence. Much of what he taught had already been transmitted to the masses down through the ages. In Bhagavan we found a being that was surcharged with the Reality to such an extent that coming into his presence would effect a dramatic change in us. This Divine Power of his presence was something remarkable, entirely outstanding in this century. But why just this century? It must be so for many centuries.

I always felt there was something tangibly distinct in Bhagavan's hall. When we walked into it and sat down we immediately felt like we had just entered a different sphere of existence. It was like the world we knew did not exist there - Bhagavan's presence, his other-worldliness, would so envelop the atmosphere. When we again walked out of the hall we were confronted with the old world we knew all too well. Nowadays we see many spiritual teachers opening schools, hospitals and the like. All this philanthropy has a purpose, no doubt, but Bhagavan never asked us to do such things. He wanted us to do one thing only, that is to know who we are, to know the Self. He believed this to be the panacea for all human suffering and the goal of life. But how many of us are adequately earnest to seek the Self alone? We are continually diverted and distracted by what we call "helping the world". Where is the world? And who are we? This is what we should be looking into.

In January of 1938, after staying with the Maharshi for one year, I returned to my village. I was planning to go again to the ashram after a couple of months, but before returning I decided to make a trip to North India.

After hearing very favourable remarks about *Sri Krishnaprem* from Dilip Kumar Roy in Aurobindo Ashram, I had a desire to visit him at his ashram in the Himalayas. He lived about eighteen miles from Almora.

I left my village and travelled by train to Delhi. From there I immediately boarded another train for Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, where I changed to another train that took me north to Kathgodam. I was advised to get down at Haldwani, one stop before Kathgodam, and board a bus for Almora. Following this advice, I arrived at Almora in the evening and spent the night in a *dharmashala*. About 8:30 a.m. I hired a coolie to carry my luggage and then began the eighteen mile trek through the forest and hills to *Sri Krishnaprem's* ashram in Mirtola. We covered about two miles every hour and reached the ashram by 4:30 p.m.

Approaching the ashram I could see from a distance his tall figure standing outside. I had not written him prior to this visit, nor did he have any idea who I was or where I was coming from. Nevertheless, he greeted me warmly, asked me to take my things to an adjacent guest room and then return to him for refreshments.

Krishnaprem was living there with his guru, Yashoda Ma. When Swami Vivekananda was still an unknown wandering monk, he chose the young daughter of a gracious host at Ghazipur for symbolic worship in *Kumari Puja*, as observed in Bengal. That same little Brahmin girl would one day become Yashoda Ma, the *guru* of Krishnaprem.

Krishnaprem's pre-*sannyasa* name was Ronald Nixon. He was a brilliant graduate of Cambridge, who came to India drawn by a spiritual thirst unquenched in England. He taught English literature at the universities of Lucknow and Benares before renouncing and becoming a Vaishnava monk. Krishnaprem spoke fluent Hindi and Bengali, and he was also a serious student of Sanskrit and Pali.

Their ashram building had a shrine room, kitchen, library and a couple other rooms on the ground floor. One additional room was built upstairs. The land they bought was three miles in circumference. *Krishnaprem* told me that the broker who arranged the purchase deceived them on some details. They, however, decided to make the best of it and appeared to be quite settled when I made this visit in May of 1938. To me the ashram was like an isolated oasis, surrounded by trees and hills, and far removed from the scorching summer heat I had just experienced in the plains.

I had brought with me two sapota fruits from my village garden, which I offered to them. They had never seen this variety of fruit and became extremely interested to know all about it. After eating the fruit they saved its black seeds with the intention of planting them in their garden. I saw that they were growing many fruits and vegetables and, I was told, had even tried their hand at starting a tea garden, but because of the excess of humidity in those hills it failed.

When *Krishnaprem* and Yashoda Ma came to know that I had spent five years in Aurobindo Ashram and one year in Sri Ramanasramam they became keen to hear all about Bhagavan and Aurobindo. I had planned on staying with them for only three days, but when I started telling them stories about Bhagavan and Sri Ramanasramam they decided I should stay a month - so intrigued were they on hearing about the Maharshi. I was not prepared to make a longer stay and so left them as scheduled.

During this short visit I was able to observe that they were living an exemplary life of one-pointed devotion and intense spiritual practice. Apparently, the weather of this mountain retreat favoured Yashoda Ma's health, whereas the weather near the sea favoured her husband's. Thus, for health reasons, they lived separately. Yashoda Ma's daughter was also then living at the ashram, and Yashoda Ma had so much faith and trust in *Krishnaprem*, she had given her over to his care. He, on his part, looked after her like his own ward.

When *Krishnaprem* asked Yashoda Ma to initiate him and make him her disciple, she said, "Yes, I will. But there is one condition. That is, that you never complain about your spiritual progress." He consented and till his end was fully satisfied with the stature and grace of his *guru*.

Many years after this visit I received a letter from him wherein he wrote that we were both blessed: me, because I had Bhagavan as my *guru*, and he, because he had Yashoda Ma.

I stuck to my plan and left their ashram after the third day, returned to Almora and then travelled to Dehra Dun. From there I boarded a bus for Rajpur, which is just seven miles south of Mussoorie. A one mile walk up the hill from Rajpur was the ashram of Dr. K.D.Sastri. In 1931, after leaving my studies in Benares, I visited this ashram. Even when I had come here seven years earlier, its founder was already deceased and his American wife was managing the institution. It was founded for the purpose of teaching young people spiritual traditions, Indian History and other cultural subjects. When I first went there in 1931, T. L. Vaswani was a resident teacher. He was then a popular author of many respected books, an acclaimed public speaker and an esteemed spiritual personality in his own right. Prior to teaching in this ashram he was the chancellor of a college, a job he resigned for the purpose of becoming a *sadhu*; a title which later became a prefix to his name - Sadhu Vaswani. He was not teaching in this ashram when I came there this second time.

Soon after arriving at Dr. K.D.Sastri's ashram someone asked me if I had met the Bengali mystic-saint who lived just four miles south of there. I had not, and so was encouraged to again take the return bus and get down at Kishenpur, which was just halfway between this ashram and Dehra Dun.

Alighting there I inquired and soon found the house of the saint. I was met at the entrance and escorted to a room where I was asked to enter and take a seat on the floor. Before me sat a remarkable looking woman, clad in a white sari, sitting on a white sheet that was spread over a thin mattress laid on the floor. Her spiritual charm and the cool breeze of peace and harmony that she radiated had an extraordinary effect on me. I almost felt as if I was sitting before the Maharshi himself. And in many ways similar to the Maharshi, glowing with warmth and illumination, sat a rare spiritual personality of the twentieth century, Ananda Mayi Ma. She was then 42-years old.

In an endearing manner she made kind inquiries about matters concerning my life. As we were talking the room slowly filled up with visitors. I told her that I had just come from *Krishnaprem's* ashram. After hearing that she said that Krishnaprem and Yashoda Ma had created an Uttara (north) Vrindavan in Almora.

When I looked around the room again I saw many devotees had gathered. Some were meditating, some were talking quietly among themselves and others began questioning Ananda Mayi Ma on certain matters. Everything seemed to be going on spontaneously in a natural manner. There appeared to be no enforced code of behaviour in Ananda Mayi Ma's presence, which immediately reminded me of the Old Hall at Sri Ramanasramam.

At about noon the saint stood up and walked out of the room. A few of the devotees followed her and I decided to do likewise. She walked to a doorway of another room and stood there looking in. I also looked into that room and saw a bearded, middle-aged man lying on the floor writhing in pain. I was surprised to have recognised this man from an incident that occurred two days earlier, while I was travelling to Rajpur:

When I was in Dehra Dun and boarded the bus for Rajpur, this same bearded man had entered the bus and sat next to me. The bus was nearly full and, although it was the scheduled departure time, the bus driver and ticket collector had not yet made their appearance. Consequently, most of the passengers began to show signs of impatience, especially this bearded gentleman seated beside me. He went to the point of getting off the bus and shouting out loud for the driver, imagining that he was in some building nearby neglecting his duties. I later discovered that this might have been true. Probably for financial reasons, dictated by the bus owner, the bus personnel were notorious for not showing up till the bus was filled to capacity, regardless of the scheduled departure time. Eventually the driver appeared, the passengers grumbled a bit and we left Dehra Dun.

Standing in the doorway, seeing this same bearded man terribly ill, I was told that he was the husband of Ananda Mayi Ma. How Ananda Mayi Ma happened to marry him, the relationship they had together and how they came to move from Dehra Dun to this place makes quite an interesting story.

I was later informed that on the day of my first visit to Ananda Mayi Ma, her husband was ill with smallpox. Knowing this, Ananda Mayi Ma asked her mother and a resident disciple known as Didi to leave the house and live elsewhere. Of course, they objected. She then told them if they did not leave, she would. Ultimately, they were persuaded to leave and Ananda Mayi Ma was left alone to attend to the needs of her sick husband.

Her husband was a good man, loved by all of Ma's followers. He was even looked upon as a father figure in the ashram and, although he was well served by his wife during this illness, he eventually succumbed to the disease. Perhaps she had anticipated this and wanted to be alone with him during his last days. Just before dying he joined his palms together in salutation and said to his wife, "You are my Mother." There is little doubt that Ananda Mayi did more than attend to just his physical needs during those last days. The time she spent alone with him certainly must have brought him far along on his spiritual journey.

In the afternoon I returned to Dr. K.D.Sastri's ashram. A younger American sister of K.D.Sastri's widow was also in the ashram at this time. She was interested in studying music and was taking lessons in Lucknow. She was also quite interested in coming to Tiruvannamalai to meet Bhagavan. Before leaving there I told her to write to me and come to Ramanasramam when I was present in the ashram. She somehow came when I wasn't present, stayed in the Motel Guest House and was relieved of over four hundred rupees by a thief. She had no idea of what security precautions to take. In due time she left India and returned to America.

After a two or three day visit to the Rajpur Ashram I left for Vrindavan. I had no special desire to visit Vrindavan at that time, but *Krishnaprem* made me promise that I would stop there while returning south. Yashoda Ma's guru, a *sannyasi*, lived there and they wanted me to meet him. Also, they wanted me to visit a few of Krishnaprem's disciples who lived in a house they owned in Vrindavan. When I arrived I immediately went and visited the *sannyasi* and disciples and was able to board a departing train the very same day. Although I was then feeling eager to return to Ramanasramam, I decided I would break my journey once more before reaching Tiruvannamalai.

(continued in the *Sep/Oct issue*)

"As often as one tries to surrender, the ego raises its head and one has to try to suppress it. Surrender is not an easy thing. It is only when God Himself by His Grace draws the mind inwards that complete surrender can be achieved. But such Grace comes only to those who have already, in this or previous lives, gone through all the struggles and *sadhanas* preparatory to the extinction of the mind and killing of the ego."
— *Day by Day with Bhagavan*

World-Wide-Web

Dr.Peter Reese of British Columbia has made all the back issues of *'The Maharshi'* available on his World-Wide-Web facilities, in addition to his Gopher site. Those on the internet with WWW software can access this web-page at
dragon.comsun.bc.ca/~amber

The Gopher site can be accessed at
Humanities/Religion & philosophy/Silence/Ramana-Maharshi

Thayumanavar

MP 3

Although *Thayumanavar* lived less than 300 years ago and remains the most popular Tamil poet-saint, there is no authentic record of his date of birth or death. What is known to have transpired between these two events can be summed up briefly:

At an early age he began working in the service of a king. When the king died he left this work because of the amorous advances of the king's widow. He then travelled in search of a *Guru*. At Tiruchilapalli he met Mouna Guru Arulananda Sivachari. He asked to be taken as a disciple, but the saint answered '*chumma iru*', meaning 'be still' or 'be quiet' or 'just be' (a phrase which Ramana Maharshi also used on a number of occasions).

However, the saint said that when the time was ripe he would initiate him.

Thayumanavar then returned home and married. Soon after his wife delivered their first child, a boy, she died. That again prompted Thayumanavar to leave home in answer to his spiritual calling. He once more approached Arulananda Sivachari and, true to his word, the guru fulfilled his promise and initiated Thayumanavar into *sannyas*.

Thayumanavar followed the discipline of silence (*mouna*), which he describes as: "that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego." He says: "It is a state beyond light and darkness, but it is called light, since language is inadequate to express it. The ego disappears and 'I' spontaneously manifests in full glory." The Maharshi particularly singled out this verse of his for admiration.

Thayumanavar was equally great as a saint and a poet. Often he would retire to the forest or public gardens and remain absorbed in the bliss of the Self for days. Legend has it that he was sitting still, immobile in *samadhi* in a public garden in Ramnad when the gardeners, not noticing him, piled a heap of dry leaves and twigs about him and set fire to it, and thus his body was consumed and he merged in the Supreme.

His mystical and devotional lyrics continue to inspire devotees and aspirants. The profundity of their meaning is matched by their beauty of form, so that they appeal to simple and learned alike. Although no English translation can do justice to the Tamil original, a careful reading of the following will at least reveal the great depths of *Thayumanavar's* experience. Ramana Maharshi was often heard quoting from his exquisite verses. The following are *ten verses* especially selected by the Maharshi:

- 1 & 2. The individual ego known as "I" having manifested and troubled everyone, the universal Maya, the diversifying agency, spontaneously follows in its wake. Who can possibly describe the vast ocean of misery consequent upon it? It appears as the flesh, the body, the senses, interior and exterior, as the all pervading ether, air, fire, water and earth, as mountain, forest, huge visions like hills physical and subtle, as forgetfulness and memory, and so on, rising up wave after wave and beating against man, bringing pleasure and pain, which are the result of his past actions, and also their remedies known as creeds, religions, God-Seeker, and the testimonies and sanctions found in various sciences, and explained by logic. All these are more numerous than even the fine grains of sand on the seashore.
3. Unaccountable troubles crop up spontaneously, sheaf upon sheaf. How to root them out wholesale, even as burning up a hill of camphor without residue in a vast blaze of fire? In order to achieve this miracle, and to enlighten me, Grace took shape. In every respect, like my self, eating and sleeping, suffering and enjoying, bearing a name and born somewhere, it appeared as the Silent Guru, like a deer used to decoy another of its species.
4. And claimed my body, possessions and life itself and consistently with the process of elimination, signified "you are not the five senses nor the five elements, nor the limbs, nor the mind, nor their attributes, nor all these collectively, nor the body nor knowledge nor ignorance. You are pure consciousness, unassociated like a crystal, but reflecting the background to lookers-on; whereas we (*guru*) are only the inherent nature revealing the truth on finding you ripe for it."
5. "If eager to reach Consciousness-Bliss-Eternity innermost in all, which is also the inner abode of refreshing Grace, listen to the course I indicate. May you reach the Pure Heart and abide there forever! May dense ignorance vanish for you! May you attain to Bliss-Consciousness! May bondage cease for you!" Communicating thus,
6. "And dispensing the true knowledge of the Natural and Unique Silence which destroys all bondage and where there is no meditation nor the ego, no space, no time, no direction, no association, no elimination, no differentiation, no expression, no phenomena of night and day, no end, no beginning, no middle, no interior or exterior, nor an aggregate of all these."
7. (The Guru indicated further) that, though all these are eliminated, "I" is not void, but is Natural, Eternal Be-ing inexpressible by words, not manifesting as ego, but is the Reality engulfing all, having swallowed all living like day covering night, and thereby unhindered all else is put out, metamorphosing the person into Itself. It shines in Silence. Self-effulgent;
8. With its emergence, it prevents any other from appearing; and all knowledge is met out suddenly like burning camphor blown away without residual flicker or glow; and in its place it shines beyond the senses, and apart from the knower, known and knowledge; and yet it is there, though who can speak of it and to whom? For if it arises, the individual is metamorphosed; It will assert Itself (*Literally: It Speaks Itself*).
9. (And further on), if it is said to be "It," the question arises "which," though such doubt about the non-dual One is illogical; so transcending it also, King Janaka or Suka and others remained like the bee intoxicated with honey in that state. (The same Guru's) blessing helps me to reach it. Grace is needed in order to reach the *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and attain absolute Bliss. I will not rest nor attend to my wants until I attain it.
10. On the "I" idea of the individual ego vanishing, there springs up within me a current of "I-I" endless indeed. This confers bliss engulfing all my knowledge, unique and transcendental, ending in Silence! How then can Silence be expressed?

— reproduced from "*Verses of Thayumanavar*" pamphlet published 05 May 1959 by *Sri Ramanasramam*"

Arunachala Ashrama Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center

Arunachala Ashrama is a non-profit religious organization founded in New York City in 1965 by Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata. In 1972, a retreat and residential ashrama was established in Nova Scotia, Canada, and in 1975 a temple, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, was consecrated at the Nova Scotia ashrama.

At the New York Ashrama, meditation is conducted every evening from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Over eighty different books relating to the life and teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi are available at the bookstore. Also, there are black and white photographs of the Maharshi and a documentary video on his life and teachings. A mail-order catalogue, providing a description of each publication, is available upon request.

IN NOVA SCOTIA, retreat facilities are offered for individuals and families. Those interested in short or long-term residence should write to the manager.

The daily services in the Nova Scotia temple are as follows:

Morning 4:30 - 5:15 : Morning Veda Parayana 5:30 - 6:00 : Reading 6:00 - 6:30 : Sri Lalita Sahasranam Stotram 6:30 - 7:15 : Silence, followed by a short reading Evening 5:15 - 6:00 : Evening Veda Parayana Night 7:30 - 9:00 : Recitations, Chanting and Silence, followed by a short reading	Sri Chakra Puja Under the direction of the President of Sri Ramanasramam, a Sri Chakra was made and consecrated in the Matrubhuteshwara Temple in India. It was then sent to the Nova Scotia temple in 1976 for installation. Sri Chakra Puja is performed every Friday and Full Moon from 5:15 to 8:00 p.m.
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For-more information please write or call:

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Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please see the *Sri Ramana Satsang online* pages.

"*The Maharshi*" is a free bimonthly newsletter distributed in North America by *Arunachala Ashrama*, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center. You can subscribe to this newsletter's announcements by email. All back issues are available as *html pages* and in *Acrobat PDF* format from 2000 to the present. *Books, videos and audio CDs* on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found in the *Online Bookstore* pages and the Ashrama's *YouTube* channel.

May / Jun 1995

Choose Web-page Issue
top of page

Sep / Oct 1995