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The Recollections of N.Balarama Reddy

Introduction

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SOON AFTER Sri Ramana Maharshi's Mahasamadhi in 1950, a committee was formed to collect written reminiscences from the Master's devotees. Committee members approached those devotees who were intimate with Bhagavan, had a first-hand experience of his ways and understood his teachings. Arthur Osborne and S.S.Cohen, who were members of the committee, met with N.Balarama Reddy and wasted no time in requesting him to write his reminiscences. Balarama Reddy declined. He told them he mostly sat silently meditating in Bhagavan's presence and never took notes of what he heard or saw.

This does not mean that Balarama Reddy had nothing to relate. On the contrary, he had plenty to tell, and over the years he did convey bits and pieces of it to devotees who sincerely questioned him. But, because of his humble and reticent nature, he never agreed to put his stories down in writing to be published; and it must be added, that during the last forty-five years since the Maharshi's passing, Balarama Reddy was often requested to do so.

During a visit to Sri Ramanasramam in 1993, my name was added to the list of devotees who entreated him to write. After all, he was then in his eighty-fifth year, and how much longer could he delay? I reasoned with him, explaining that where would be the Christ of the Christians if not for Mathew, Mark, Luke and John? I pleaded and said that it was only through his eyes that we, the second generation of devotees, can see and know about the personality that captivated his heart; the same personality that would undoubtedly captivate the hearts of countless future generations. "After you go, this wealth within you will be lost. You must write now while you are still able," I beseeched him.

Balarama Reddy is a kind man, intelligent and wise. If he didn't exactly agree with my argument, he sympathized with my sincerity, and in his goodness agreed - not to write, but to relate to me whatever stories about his life and experience with the Maharshi he could remember. These stories went on to include meetings with Ananda Mayi Ma, Swami Ramdas and other personalities. He fixed a time, between 6:30 and 7:30 in the evening, to meet with me. So I began meeting with him in his room every day for the purpose of hearing his reminiscences. After we met I would put down a few brief notes on the topics of our conversations, and in the morning, following breakfast, I would sit at the small desk in my room and use these notes to recall all I had heard the previous night.

I found this daily exercise to be an exhilarating experience, as I would be so caught up in the flow of the incidents relating to Bhagavan, that I felt as if they were taking place before my own eyes. Balarama Reddy has the power to draw out from his memory, like a spider drawing out its web, the dynamic personality of the Maharshi's presence. He easily caught me in this web, and I sincerely hope these recorded recollections catch many others.

I bow to Balarama Reddy and thank him a million times for kindly dipping into his storehouse of memories and scooping out glassful after glassful of this nectar for me, and all, to drink.

Dennis J.Hartel – 1 September 1994
Nova Scotia, Canada

N.Balarama Reddy's First Meeting with the Maharshi

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ON A SUNNY SOUTH INDIAN morning in the month of March in 1933 I first walked into Sri Ramanasramam. It was just before breakfast and I was immediately welcomed and lead into the dining room. Of course, the dining hall wasn't the large structure we see now, but a single-room thatched building just south of the Old Hall, which also served, by turns, as the kitchen, office and the Maharshi's bathroom. I was asked to sit behind a certain leaf plate. Other visitors and inmates were seating themselves, some behind a wall panel (the brahmins) and others near me. To my surprise, I found myself seated immediately next to the Maharshi, on his right. I felt blessed and fortunate to be given this seat and looked on the whole scene, wondering at the intimacy and informality of it all. But what I felt most, amidst the quiet and orderly movements of the ashramites, was the penetrating silence of the atmosphere. A deep penetrating silence seemed to be pushing my mind deeper and deeper into my inner being.

The food was served and the Maharshi turned his head to the right and nodded - a gesture indicating that he should begin eating. That nod, or gesture, had the effect of prompting my mind to sink even deeper into silence. Meals finished, I went and sat in the hall and waited for the Maharshi to return. He generally went out for walks after rising early in the morning, after his noon meal, and at 5 p.m. I had read and heard from others that he rarely put questions to visitors. Therefore, I was not disappointed when he returned to the hall, sat and remained silent. I also did not feel like asking questions or breaking the silence with words.

At 11 a.m. I was called for lunch. Once more I witnessed the same intimacy, informality, quiet orderliness and the nod from the Maharshi to begin eating. After lunch I once again returned to the hall. About 1 p.m. an old and long-standing devotee of Maharshi arrived at the ashrama from some distant place. He walked into the Old Hall, saluted the Master and lay down on the floor near Bhagavan's couch. Within moments he fell sound asleep. I sat wondering: "This Maharshi is accessible at all hours; his presence evokes a deep inner stillness; everything is so serene, natural and informal." I concluded that there was something here clearly unique.

At 5 p.m. I had to leave to catch the train back to Pondicherry. I stood up and approached the Maharshi to take leave. He asked me where I had come from. I told him and, since he had on his own began talking with me, inquired of him if I could ask a couple of questions. "Yes, of course," he said.

Now, after the passing of sixty years, I can recall only one of the two questions I first asked him. I said, "There is a teacher and his disciples. The teacher gives the same instruction to all the disciples sitting before him. How is it that some disciples hear the teachings, put them into practice and make fast progress, while others hear and apply the same teachings and make little or no progress?"

The Maharshi replied: "Some must have followed that line of teaching in their previous lives, while others may have just begun. Also, some are born more advanced and fit than others."

That was my first visit to the Maharshi in 1933 when I was 24 ½ years old, and although that visit made a deep impression on me, I didn't arrange to go back until two years later. I now believe that during those two years the Maharshi's force was silently working on me from within, without my being aware of it.

Bhagavan, as we usually called the Maharshi, often quoted this stanza of *Saint Thyumanavar's* in praise of the Guru: "*Oh Lord! Coming with me all along the births, never abandoning me and finally rescuing me!*" I find this stanza truly reflects the way I feel about Bhagavan.

Early Life

I cannot say anything about my previous births, but in this birth I have been spiritually inclined since my childhood. You could say it is because of the legacy passed down to me from my father and my own inherited tendencies.

My father was a serious *sadhaka*. He practiced austerities in his youth, studied the scriptures and even observed *mouna* (silence) for one year. He also went on a pilgrimage to the holy places in North India, visiting ashrams and sacred shrines in the Himalayas. After this pilgrimage he decided to take up the life of a *grihastha* (a householder). But in spite of marrying, having a secular occupation and raising a family, my father always cherished spiritual ideals. A life centered on God as the ideal was the essential element of our daily life in my father's house.

I was born on October 30, 1908. From my birth, my father was eager that I should imbibe spiritual values, and he was very concerned that secular studies might smother my spiritual inclinations.

In my teens, I was inspired by the life and ideals of *Mahatma Gandhi*. I regularly read his monthly magazine, *Young India*, and molded my life accordingly. Gandhi introduced the "*Salt Satyagraha*" in 1930, and this caused a great stir throughout the country. I was then a post-graduate student at the Hindu University in Benares. Later, during the summer break when I was at my home in Andhra Pradesh, the police arrested the president of our Nellore District Congress Committee. The committee met and decided to ask me to take over the position of president. I accepted and, when this fact was published in the newspapers, the police wasted no time in arresting me. For four months I remained incarcerated.

At that time I had an idealistic view of politics, *Mahatma Gandhi's* goals, and the volunteers who worked to achieve them. I was under the impression that all those selfless workers arrested in the freedom struggle were naturally endowed with saintly characteristics, much like their leader, Gandhiji. In prison I had a disappointing awakening to the real nature of many of these jailed nationalists. I soon became disenchanted with the ideal of political activity for attaining freedom, especially when I arrived at the understanding that spiritual freedom, or Self-realization, was the highest goal of life and political freedom would not actually change us spiritually.

When I was studying in the Benares University, the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna also exerted considerable influence on my spiritual ideals. By the time I was in the middle of an M.A. degree in Benares, I began to seriously question the use of all these degrees in the light of an ever-deepening desire to follow wholeheartedly the spiritual path. I concluded that the purpose of life was not to attain material goals, but rather to realize God and experience the truth of a universal, underlying Reality. When this conviction became firm, I decided to leave the university and dedicate my life to the spiritual ideal.

In all the scriptures, I read that a *guru* was necessary to guide one on the spiritual path. I thought that I should also find a *guru* to lead me to liberation. In search of one, I first travelled to North India, visiting all the celebrated saints and yogis. I would spend some days or weeks at their ashramas and then move on to the next one. Throughout this trip I was unable to find any teacher that captivated my heart and mind to the extent that I could honestly surrender myself as a disciple.

I remember being asked by the disciples of the leader of Radhasaomi Movement to take initiation from their *guru*. I had been residing at their Centre for three days. I expressed my disinclination, stating that I didn't believe the time had come for me to choose a *guru*. When this information was passed onto the head of the ashrama, he entirely agreed with me, saying that it had taken him twenty years to choose his *guru*.

Aurobindo Ashrama

In 1931, after reading about Sri Aurobindo, and also hearing about him from others, I made my way to his ashrama in Pondicherry. Immediately upon my arrival I was struck by the spiritual atmosphere of the place. On August 15th of that year, I had my first *darshan* of Sri Aurobindo. This was one of three times in a year that he gave *darshan*. I found Sri Aurobindo and Mother to be powerful spiritual personalities, as they seemed to have the ability to work on the development of their disciples in a silent and invisible manner. All of Aurobindo's philosophical writings cannot convey his or the Mother's power as spiritual embodiments.

In his ashrama I pursued the same spiritual ideals that I had already formulated. I was required to do two hours of work every day and selected garden work from the options available. We would daily have *darshan* of the Mother and sit before her in meditation. But since the Mother's schedule would sometimes fluctuate, this routine varied at times. Generally we were left to ourselves to study Aurobindo's writings and pursue our spiritual practices, although we normally had to take permission of the Mother when doing anything out of the ordinary.

At the three annual *darshans*, Mother and Aurobindo would sit side by side on a couch and we would approach them, one by one, and touch their feet. I made it a practice not to miss any of these *darshans* and would sometimes visit my village between these events. In my village, I lived in a hut built in a garden about two hundred meters from the main house. Whenever I resided there my family regularly sent me food and gave me freedom to pursue my *sadhana* in solitude. In this manner, traveling between Pondicherry and my village, I earnestly was engaged in spiritual practice year round.

Second Visit to Sri Ramanasramam

While I was in Aurobindo Ashrama I met *Kapali Sasitriar*, the esteemed disciple of both Aurobindo and Ganapati Muni. As he was now and then visiting Sri Ramanasramam, he would describe to me the Maharshi and his ashrama. His intriguing descriptions, along with the reading of *B.V.Narasimha Swami's biography of the Maharshi*, is what prompted my first visit to Ramanasramam in 1933.

When I visited Sri Ramanasramam the second time in March of 1935, I decided to make it a three-day visit. In those days there was no bus transportation between Pondicherry and Tiruvannamalai and travellers had to go by train. I boarded the train at Pondicherry at 9 p.m., got down in Villupuram Junction and then waited a few hours before catching the train to Tiruvannamalai. Though the total distance to travel was only sixty-five miles, the whole trip took me nine hours. I arrived in Tiruvannamalai at 6 a.m., made my way to the ashrama and was provided accommodations in the small room next to the well.

Soon after my arrival I saw Yogi Ramiah. He was a close disciple of the Maharshi whom *Paul Brunton* wrote about in his book, *A Search in Secret India*. Yogi Ramiah, being from the same area of Andhra Pradesh that I was from, somehow immediately recognized me. He took me to Bhagavan and formally introduced me to him. Though the Yogi was then observing silence, with him gesturing and me filling in the words, we were able to convey to Bhagavan our connection. I later discovered that Yogi Ramiah knew my father very well and had even stayed overnight at my family's house on some occasion.

Before this second visit to Ramanasramam I once again read Bhagavan's biography. In it I found a passage relating to the possibility of changing one's *guru*. I had a doubt about this and addressed it to the Maharshi. He told me, "Yes. Certainly. One can change his *guru*. What of that?"

In Aurobindo Ashrama our daily life, to a large extent, was spontaneous and controlled. For instance, even to take a simple trip into town we had to obtain permission. In contrast, here in Ramanasramam it was totally different. I experienced a liberating feeling of freedom, informality and spontaneity. Everything was so natural and at the same time elevating.

Also, in Aurobindo Ashrama, disciples were generally permitted to visit all other saints and ashramas, with the exception of the Maharshi and Sri Ramanasramam. It was believed that the Maharshi had the power to undo years of spiritual preparation that the Mother and Aurobindo were effecting on the psyche of their followers. In other words, they considered the Maharshi too powerful an influence. Bhagavan was aware of this and once when I was alone with him he told me, "Yes, I know of that place. They are afraid of me."

On this second visit I would sit daily in the Maharshi's serene presence. I was again struck by his deep penetrating silence. I lost all interest in everything but the Maharshi and his presence. I somehow felt by merely sitting near him all my aspirations could be fulfilled.

At the end of this three day visit I began to feel that perhaps my place was there with the Maharshi. The idea of having Bhagavan as my *guru* and Ramanasramam as my home began revolving in my mind.

Taking leave of the Maharshi, I approached him while he was sitting on his couch, which was then positioned outside on the verandah. His feet were softly resting on the ground. He had just returned from an afternoon stroll, following the midday meal. I fell to my knees and bowed before his holy feet. I was aware of the ashrama rule that prohibited devotees from touching Bhagavan's body, so I kept a slight distance. But, as I lowered my head near his feet, in the twinkling of an eye, Bhagavan's feet ever so gently raised from the ground and the large toe of each foot somehow very lightly touched the closed eyelids of each of my eyes. It happened all in an instant; no one even noticed. I was thrilled.

(continued in the *May/Jun issue*)

Someone asked, "It is stated in the scriptures that the Self will reveal itself only to one whom it chooses. Then what is the use of our effort?" Sri Bhagavan replied: "The Self will draw unto itself an aspirant only when he becomes introverted. So long as he is extroverted, Self-Realization is impossible. Many people try to define the Self instead of attempting to know the Self and abide in it."

— Sri Ramana Reminiscences

Viveka-Chudamani

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India in the eighth century AD was a honeycomb of conflicting sects. Also during this period, Hinduism was finally reasserting itself over Buddhism, which had become plagued with decadence and disorder. At this critical juncture, Shankara appeared on the scene and provided the needed leadership and inspiration to resurrect the Vedic culture of the land and re-establish the supremacy of the Non-dualistic Vedanta.

While traversing the country, discussing and establishing monastic centers, he took the time to write commentaries, compose treatises and hymns. His written work serves as the foundation rock upon which rest the present-day '*Sanatana Dharma*,' the Eternal Religion of India. One of Shankara's major philosophical works is his *Viveka-Chudamani* (The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination).

Not too long after Sri Ramana Maharshi arrived at Arunachala as a boy-sage he was shown this text by one of his disciples, who, in all likelihood, asked him to elucidate certain points not understood. The Maharshi found the text so much agreed with his own experience that he made a Tamil prose rendering of the *Viveka-Chudamani's* 580 Sanskrit verses. The English translation of this work can be found in the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*. Most of the serious students of the Maharshi's teachings are aware of this fact. What is not so well-known, is that out of the 580 verses in the *Viveka-Chudamani* the Maharshi selected ten that appealed to him most. These he translated and reset. They clearly mirror the Maharshi's own experience and provide direct guidance to mature seekers.

Verses From Sri Sankara's Viveka-Chudamani

Selected and Reset by Sri Ramana Maharshi

31. Among all the means for Liberation pre-eminent is Devotion: and the quest for one's own Reality (the Self is called Devotion.)
351. The Supreme Self, the eternal, indivisible, non-dual Consciousness, the Witness of buddhi and the rest, is other than Sat and asat, and is the ultimate significance of the notion conveyed by the term 'I'. It is the immediate Reality, the Bliss Incarnate.
135. The Supreme Self of pure Consciousness, different from prakriti and its modifications, shines as the 'I-I', the direct Witness of buddhi during the wakeful and other states, and lights up this entire manifestation of Sat and asat.
217. That which clearly manifests itself within during the wakeful, dreaming and sleep states, which is directly perceived within as the 'I-I' of continuous awareness, which perceives the ego, buddhi, etc., that are of diverse forms and modifications, and which reveals itself as the Atman of Eternal Consciousness-Bliss - know thou this, thine own Self, within the Heart.
136. By direct experience know thou this, thine own Self within thyself, as "This is I", with the mind regulated and the intellect pure and clear; (thereby) cross the boundless ocean of samsara of which the waves are the (succession of) births and deaths: thy aim thus fulfilled, be established as the Absolute.
380. In the sheath of intelligence shines eternally Atman, the self-effulgent Witness of all. Making that thy lakshya, which is quite different from the unreal - enjoy it by experience, through unbroken awareness, as thy own Self.
360. Extremely subtle is the Truth of the Self Supreme, and it is not discernible to the gross vision (of the mind). It is knowable to the noble minded of perfectly pure intellect, through very subtle Self-awareness during Samadhi (the State of Transcendental Peace).
362. When the mind, qualified thus through incessant practice, is merged in Brahman, then the Samadhi getting rid of its savikalpa character leads of its own accord to the Experience of Bliss of Oneness (i.e., of Nirvikalpa Samadhi).
363. By the Samadhi are destroyed all the knots of vasanas and all karma is destroyed. There remains, within and without, everywhere and at all times, the effortless manifestation of one's Swaroopa, the Self.
266. In the cave of the buddhi is the Supreme Brahman, one without a second, distinct from Sat and asat. For him who abides in this cave as verily that Self, there is no rebirth.

115th Jayanti Celebration at the New York Ashrama

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On January 7, 1995, a small group gathered at Arunachala Ashrama, 72-63 Yellowstone Boulevard in Queens, New York to celebrate the 115th birth anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi. To a casual passerby, the gathering was no more than a random group of people, but to everyone there from the 4-year-old grandson of Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata (the 82 year-old founder of Arunachala Ashrama) and up, this was a special day charged with the power and presence of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The remarkable quality of Sri Bhagavan is that when anyone sits down in His presence with mindfulness and devotion, He electrifies the atmosphere and permeates it with a peace and joy that can only be felt, but never described.

This year's celebration began with a group recitation of "*Aksharamanamala*" - the Maharshi's 108-versed "*Marital Garland of Letters*." The voices of thirty people singing in unison brings everyone closer to the glory of Arunachala. The mood of this recitation was maintained and carried further by the young devotee Radha Ramaswamy, a 7-year-old with a crystal clear voice and equally transparent devotion to match it. She led everyone in a *bhajan* to Sri Ganesha, followed by a simple song in praise of Bhagavan, arranged and also sung by her mother, Savithri Ramaswamy.

Mr.&Mrs. P.E.Narasimhan from Boston and their daughter Jyoti, led by "*Ganesha's Pancaratnam*," adding a particular fervor to the celebration. When Indira and Jyoti sing, it is a feast for the ears and the soul. The spiritual offerings concluded with the group singing "*Shiva Stuti*" by Tulsidas, recited by the *Parekh family*. With *arati* the worship was ended and *prasad*, along with a full meal, was served to all the devotees.

Many devotees from far and near were able to attend this year's Jayanti Celebration. The presence of Jim Hartel from Franklin, NY, the Narsimhan family, Dr. Raj and others is yet further proof of the far-reaching pull of Sri Bhagavan. The gathering restated and reaffirmed the mission of this small, quiet Ashrama - to maintain a sacred place for seekers to gather, reflect and meditate in the presence of Bhagavan, while treasuring the *satsang* of fellow *sadhakas*.

— by Geeta Bhatt

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 bookstall. 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	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.
Evening 5:15 - 6:00 : Evening Veda Parayana	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.
Night 7:30 - 9:00 : Recitations, Chanting and Silence, followed by a short reading	
For-more information please write or call:	
Arunachala Ashrama 72-63 Yellowstone Boulevard Forest Hills, Queens, New York 11375 Tel: (718) 575-3215 E-mail: eric@phys.columbia.edu	Arunachala Ashrama Rural Route 1, Bridgetown Nova Scotia, Canada BOS 1C0 Tel: (902) 665-2090 E-mail: nashram@fox.nstn.ns.ca

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, images, videos and audio CDs* on Sri Ramana Maharshi can also be found in the *eLibrary*, the *On-line Bookstore* pages and the Ashrama's *YouTube* channel.

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