



Mar / Apr 1995	THE MAHARSHI	Jul / Aug 1995
May / Jun 1995	ॐ नमो भगवते श्री स्वामीय	Produced & Edited by Dennis Hartel Dr. Anil K. Sharma
Vol.5 No.3		
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The Recollections of *N.Balarama Reddy*

Part II

Third visit to Sri Ramanasramam

(continued from the *Mar/Apr issue*)

Wb2

About a year later, in April of 1936, I had to leave Aurobindo Ashram and return to my village in Andhra Pradesh for two months. My plan was to travel to Ramanasramam at the end of those two months and stay there for seven weeks.

In June of 1936, I arrived at the Maharshi's ashram for a third visit. I was accommodated in the cottage next to Yogi Ramiah's. This cottage is on the west side of the ashram near Palakothu and was built by one of the Yogi's disciples with my namesake - Balarama Reddy. This same Reddy was also responsible for building Yogi Ramiah's cottage.

One afternoon about 2:30 p.m. I casually strolled out of the north gate of the ashram and onto the hill. Observing the majesty of the Holy Hill and studying the summit, a desire arose in me to climb up and see it. I was new in the ashram and had no idea how difficult this endeavor would be, especially since I decided to climb straight up from where I was.

I mentally drew a straight line over the rugged slope and began my ascent. When I reached about halfway up, I met a group of ladies carrying firewood on their heads. They asked me where I was going. After hearing of my plan they tried their best to dissuade me, saying, "The wind is very strong on the upper slopes and you will be blown off and fall to your death, or at least be seriously injured. No one frequents that area of the hill and so you will not be found or saved. Please go back."

I listened to their warnings, which they offered in all sincerity, but as I was still a young man and felt strong, and as I had already climbed more than halfway up, I was loath to turn back in spite of all the dangers they described. Needless to say, after the ladies left I continued my climb.

It wasn't too long before the slope became very steep and, while it slowed me down, this did not discourage me in any way. I came to one point where I had to pull myself up on a narrow ledge. Sitting on that ledge facing the Maharsi, with all his majestic dignity and grace, was a force I could no longer resist. The thought that I might later regret such a move carried little weight when I contemplated the accessibility and spiritual power of the Maharsi. I thought to myself that even if it turns out to be a great mistake, I must not miss this opportunity. I became convinced that my place was there with the Maharshi. I then decided to return to Aurobindo Ashram, wrap up my affairs, obtain the blessings of Mother and Aurobindo, and return to Ramanasramam as soon as possible.

Leaving Aurobindo Ashram

I had been with the Mother and Aurobindo for five years. During those years they showered me with kindness and love, while guiding me on the spiritual path. My gratitude and regard for them compelled me to obtain their permission and blessings before leaving. This turned out to be much more difficult than I imagined.

In Aurobindo Ashram, it was the practice of the disciples who had doubts or questions to write them in the form of a letter to Sri Aurobindo. All the letters were daily collected and taken to Aurobindo, who would sit with the Mother during the nights and promptly answer them in writing. Sometimes we would see the lights burning all night as they were engaged in this work.

Upon my return from Ramanasramam I wrote a letter stating my desire to receive their blessings and permission to live at Ramanasramam. In the letter to Aurobindo I wrote that since your yoga begins with Self-realization, kindly permit me to go to Ramana Maharshi who emphasizes only Self-realization, a state I have not attained, or may not even be worthy of attaining. Aurobindo's reply was affectionate, but negative in regards to my leaving his ashram. He wrote, "Both Self-realization and the supra-mental state can be simultaneously developed and achieved here. There is no need for you to go there."

I was extremely disappointed at his response and consequently became frustrated, restless and discouraged. I soon began to have sleepless nights and felt distraught. I then wrote a second letter to Aurobindo with the same request. Again I was denied permission. It took a long five months and a third letter before Aurobindo and the Mother finally agreed, giving me their permission and blessings. Perhaps they realized I was determined to go and they saw no other recourse but to grant my request.

In Aurobindo's final letter to me he wrote, "Since you are determined to follow a path in which you can achieve only partial realization, we give you our blessings, though we believe it would be better if you stayed on here and pursued your *sadhana* where both the Mother and I can help you."

It was the rule in Aurobindo Ashram that any letter written to or received from Aurobindo should not leave the ashram premises. So, to comply with this rule, I burnt all my letters, except the final letter I received from Aurobindo. This I kept with the view of showing it to Bhagavan.

Settling at Sri Ramanasramam

On January 5, 1937 I finally arrived at Sri Ramanasramam for good. This happened to be the day after the Maharshi's fifty-seventh birthday was celebrated. As there was still a crowd gathered there for the festivities, I was accommodated with many others in the common guest room for men. Soon after, when nearly all the guests dispersed, I was given Yogi Ramiah's cottage to use. I then thought that I would use this cottage while the Yogi was absent from the ashram, which was most of the time, and find other accommodations during his visits. This seemed to me to be a convenient arrangement. After all, I had now come to settle down there permanently with the Maharshi as my *guru*. But after only one month had passed, the ashram management informed me that though they didn't want me to leave Bhagavan's holy presence, it was not the practice of the ashram to accommodate devotees permanently. They respectfully requested me to find a place outside and gave me a fifteen day extension to arrange it.

During the early years there were no houses anywhere near the ashram, as it was mostly jungle or forest. I eventually found an upstairs room in a brahmin's house near the Arunachala Temple in town. For my meals I would sometimes cook small items in my room, sometimes obtain food from somewhere outside, and somehow manage without feeling inconvenienced.

Daily I would rise at about 3 or 4 a.m., walk to the ashram, stay in the hall with Bhagavan until 10 a.m., return to my room, come back again to the ashram at 3 p.m. and stay there until 8 p.m. It went on like this during the first year. If possible, I would always sit close to Bhagavan so I could hear all of his precious utterances.

Soon after settling in Tiruvannamalai and surrendering to Bhagavan as my *guru* I wrote in English, on legal-size paper, a rather long, detailed history of my life and handed it over to Bhagavan. In that letter of several pages I poured out my heart to Bhagavan, withholding nothing. He carefully read through all the pages and then returned them to me.

For the first few months after my arrival Bhagavan would frequently start up conversations with me. With no apparent reason he would start explaining to me a verse, some aspects of a certain philosophy, or a certain spiritual practice. This went on to such an extent that S. S. Cohen, in a light way, complained to me, saying, "Why do you always make Bhagavan laugh? I think I am getting jealous."

I naturally protested, "I am not making him talk. For some reason or other he simply looks at me and starts talking."

Often during these discussions Aurobindo's philosophy would come up. And on some occasions Cohen and Chadwick would also join in and try to dismiss any validity to Aurobindo's path. To my surprise, I would find myself defending his philosophy and easily crushing their arguments*. With them I had an easy time, but with Bhagavan it was a different matter. Whatever he would say on the matter was nearly impossible to dispute.

* S. S. Cohen, after repeatedly hearing about Sri Aurobindo, decided that the Yogi from Pondicherry must have some greatness. Consequently, one day he travelled to Pondicherry and while there wrote a note to Aurobindo describing who he was, what he wanted from life (Self-realization) and where he was then residing (Sri Ramanasramam). Cohen later showed me the reply he got from Aurobindo. It said, in brief, that all his aspirations could be fulfilled at Sri Ramanasramam, where he was then living.

I remember during my second visit to Ramanasramam the Maharshi was one day reading a lengthy book review from a newspaper. The book being reviewed was Aurobindo's *Lights on Yoga*. The reviewer was *Kapali Sastri* and the editor of this newspaper was Bhagavan's devotee, S.M.Kamath. Bhagavan seemed to take great interest in the review and would occasionally stop reading and comment on what he had just read to those sitting around him. When he had concluded reading it, someone who was aware that I had that very book with me, said to Bhagavan, "This man has come from the Aurobindo Ashram and he has that book with him." Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Oh, is that so? Let me have a look at it."

I went back to my room, fetched the book and handed it over to Bhagavan. Immediately Bhagavan began reading it intently. He kept on reading it well into the night, with the help of a small oil lamp, until he finished it.

When I came into the hall the next day he began discussing the book with me, telling me that a certain term used in the book might look like something new, but it is actually the equivalent of this other term used in such and such ancient text, etc. Like this, he went on discussing and comparing Aurobindo's philosophy for some time. So Bhagavan thoroughly understood Aurobindo's philosophy both intellectually and also from the standpoint of experience.

One evening I said to Bhagavan that the major attraction of Aurobindo's teachings is that it professes that immortality of the body can be achieved. Bhagavan made no comment.

The next day, as soon as I walked into the hall and sat down, Bhagavan looked at me and began saying, "In *Kumbhakonam* there was one yogi, C. V. V. Rao, who was proclaiming to all, his doctrine of the immortality of the body. He was even so bold as to declare that Dr. Annie Besant (a distinguished public and spiritual personality in India) would have to come to him to learn how to make her body immortal. But, before he had a chance to meet Dr. Annie Besant, he died." This brief story clearly illustrated his point.

On another day, not too long after settling near Sri Ramanasramam, I approached Bhagavan when no one was in the hall and showed him that last letter I had received from Aurobindo. Bhagavan asked me to give it to him to read. I told him he would be unable to decipher Aurobindo's handwriting, as it was very illegible and only those who have studied it for sometime could read it. He said, "Give it to me. Let me try."

After looking into it and realizing he could only make out a few words, he returned it and asked me to read it out. I began reading it and when I came to the sentence, "Since you are determined to follow a path in which you can achieve only partial realization . . .", Bhagavan stopped me and said, "Partial realization? If it is partial, it is not realization, and if it is realization, it is not partial."

This was the final blow that silenced all my doubts. I then destroyed this letter, like all the rest. And because of all the discussions I had had with Bhagavan I soon felt perfectly established in his teachings, having a clear understanding of where the Maharshi's path and Aurobindo's path diverged and went the different ways. When all the clouds of doubts and distractions dispersed, so did our discussions. Bhagavan then knew that I understood and the foundation work had been done. The purpose of all our discussions were served and so they stopped automatically.

(continued in the *Jul/Aug issue*)

Talk in Jagannath Puri

Wb3

The following is an informal talk given to a gathering in Jagannath Puri by Arunachala Bhakta Bhagawata, the 82-year-old founder of Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in New York and Nova Scotia. Arthur Coucouvitis, who accompanied Bhagawata on a pilgrimage to India last year, recorded and transcribed this address, given on July 1, 1994.

When the land became filled with the dense darkness of delusion and doubts, dissension, debates and dialectics, Sri Bhagavan took pity on the land. And then He appeared.

Sri Arunachaleswara Shiva picked up a sixteen year old boy in Madurai, named Venkataraman, and gave him the death experience in July, 1896. The boy thought he was going to die, but only the body was going to die. The body will be cremated, but the I-I-I-I-I-I is eternal. It remains. He became a Self-realized boy.

Soon after, one Saturday morning, August 29th, 1896 he wrote a letter for his brother, took three rupees and went to the Madurai railroad station to catch the train. He was late. Fortunately, the noon train was also late. He bought the ticket and got on the train. In Villupuram junction, near Madras, he got down. He went to the town, stood before a hotel and looked. Food was not ready at the hotel. The hotel owner saw him; he served him food at noon; the boy tried to pay him - two or three annas. The hotel owner was touched by the youth's face or appearance, his innocence or simplicity, his approach and attitude. He refused payment.

Venkataraman walked and walked on the railroad track. Somewhere he came during the night to a temple; he stayed; he saw the Arunachala Mountain shining twenty miles away in Tiruvannamalai. He was hungry; he was tired. The priest, the temple worshipper, wouldn't serve him food. The priest crossed the river and went to another temple to do the worship. The boy followed him. The temple drummer took pity on him and gave him his share of food. He ate, and while walking fell down. He was tired. In the morning he got up, approached a door of a house. It was Lord Krishna's birthday. The lady thought Sri Krishna had appeared! She fed the boy. The boy was wearing gold ear rings. He mortgaged both gold earrings with the man of the house. The man wrote down his name and address so the boy could redeem the earrings later. Venkataraman took the change and went to the railway station on the night of Monday, 31st August, 1896. Early Tuesday morning, September first, 1896 he arrived at the Tiruvannamalai railway station.

He was not walking; he was not thinking; he was being blown like a dry leaf in a heavy wind, typhoon or tempest, whatever you may call it. He approached the great temple early in the morning. The whole town, the whole world was asleep. He found the gates unexpectedly open. He walked in. He went to the *sanctum sanctorum* of the Lord Arunachaleswara. Even the doors there, unattended, were open. He went, presented himself: "At Thy command, Oh my father, I have come." On that day the boy threw away all his clothes, except the loin cloth. The money, the earring slip - everything - he threw in a tank. The barber saw him: "Hey! Hey, boy! You want to be shaved? Come on!" His head was shaved. After the shave and while walking back into the temple, a heavy rain came down. So in this way, he bathed and was washed. From then on for two years he remained in the Arunachaleswara Temple, in the underground *<atala Lingam*, or in other solitary places outside the temple. Children threw stones at him. His body became the home of insects, blood, pus and other things. Then someone picked him up from the underground cellar, began to look after him, began to serve him the *prasad* (the milk that was known to the Lord). He became known as the Brahmanaswami.

His father, Sundaram Iyer, was a very famous lawyer in Tiruchuzhi, which is about thirty miles from Madurai. He was offered as a pious lawyer. Even when the robbers and thieves would see him riding in his bullock cart, they would leave him alone. His wife, Azhagammal, kept her home open for all people, providing food and shelter. Sundaram Iyer passed away in 1892 while Venkataraman was still a student.

For two or three years after Brahmanaswami came to Arunachala his mother did not know where he was. Then some visitor from Madurai saw him talking, discoursing, teaching *Vedanta, Bhagavadgita*. He said, "Oh! This boy! He is just a boy, and he is talking so high! So deep! Without the least hesitation!" He reported the good news to his mother.

The Mother came, wept, entreated, and wept, "Come back." Maintaining silence he refused. Someone nearby watching the scene was moved and requested the Brahmanaswami to at least say something to Mother. He wrote:

"The Lord controls the whole thing . . ." He soon moved onto the Sri Arunachala Mountain. This is the oldest mountain - I cannot say in the whole world - in India. Very old. Scientists and others have tried to examine its stone and have come back declaring it very old. This Mountain is Lord Shiva Himself, appearing so that people can worship Him and abide in Him. Around that area there was a Ganapati, a Ganesha, named *Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni*. As a five year old boy, his father named him Ganapati. He became a treasure house of the Vedas, the *Upanishads* and other Sanskrit literature, and Sanskrit poetry was on the tip of his tongue. He had done plenty, plenty, plenty of *mantras, japa, tyaga, tapasya*. Still, he was discontented, not at peace.

He had met Brahmanaswami on the southern slopes of Sri Arunachala. One day he was assailed by pains, troubles, doubts. He remembered that Brahmanaswami was on the hill, and at midday, a little after noon, he climbed and found Brahmanaswami sitting outside, alone. He prostrated and said, "All the scriptures that have to be read, I have read. All the *mantras* and *japa* that have to be done, I have done. Still I have no peace. Please save me." The Brahmanaswami took a little time. For at least fifteen minutes he silently gazed at him. Then in Tamil, he spoke. The English translation is simple, "If one watches whence the notion 'I' arises, the mind is absorbed in That; that is *tapas*. When you recite a *mantra*, watch where the sound is coming from, within you; when you sing a song or prayer, watch where it is emanating from: your Heart. Put your attention on Arises. That is *tyaga*, that is *tapasya*, that is *al*." All his doubts and delusions were washed away that day.

From the attendant *Ganapati Muni* inquired about the Swami's former name, Venkataraman. He cut out Venkata, added Mahashari and thus renamed him Sri Ramana Maharshi, or Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

Sri Bhagavan's teaching is simple: Ask "Who Am I? (Mai Kaun Hun?)" Put your attention on that. In whatever land, whatever name, to whatever clime, club, caste, creed you belong, there is something within you when you speak, you breathe, you talk, you think. That comes from the Heart, the spiritual Heart on the right side. Do your duty, do your work, but put your attention on That.

It is said that when the forests of darkness covered the land, Adi Shankara, Bhagavan Sri Shankaracharya, was born to lift India from that grave of darkness. And so in the 19th Century Lord Arunachaleswara brought Sri Brahmanaswami into the world to teach. Not by preaching! Not by talking! Simply by sitting, calm and quiet. He welcomed people. He did talk to them, removed their doubts. People for whatever reasons, from whatever levels, came to Him. He gave to all.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi emphasized, "Take one Name. Whatever Name you take, concentrate on that. Whatever form of God you worship, God will appear to you in that form!" What more! You don't have to retire to the forest or renounce your work.

Out of the seven hundred verses Lord Sri Krishna gave the world through Arjuna, Sri Bhagavan has given me this: Hey Arjuna! What! Wake up! March! Move! Don't sit idle! What to do? "*Tasmat sarvesu kalesu, mam anusmara yudhya* ca. . ." So, at all times, remembering me, march on, work on, move on. There is no time to spare. That is the whole meaning, the gist of the *Bhagavadgita*. There is no time to sit idle, to cry, to waste time. That is it.

So, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi came to REMIND mankind to "Wake up!"

Sri We are in Sri Jagannathi Puri, the holy city where that Englishman lived who showered light, plenty of light on India, who has written books on India, on *Bharata Shakti, Bharata Dharma*, on *Tantra* - the *Tantra* which had become a black magic, a black discipline. He worked as a chief justice of the Calcutta High Court during the British rule. But in his private life he quietly studied and translated the ancient text on *Tantra*, Mother worship, a path he himself devoutly followed. And all Indians should be very proud and feel very fortunate to read his writings. He travelled all over Europe and England. The Britons resented him and tried to prevent him from talking about the heights of spiritual life in India. And here he was, Sri John Woodruffe, in Sri Jagannathi Puri. He declared, "India is the Heart of the world. Look at the map!" he said. "India is the Heart; India is the Spiritual Centre." The whole world has branched out, but this is the root, this is the centre from which it grows. Why say so? So many invasions came. They cut down peepul trees, they demolished temples and other structures, but *Satanana Dharma* is like the grass we call *dhal*. No typhoon, no tempest can wash it away. It is stuck! Stuck to the ground. It remains like the faith. In India, it remains stuck that way with people, with the villagers, with all.

Then the incarnation of *Gandhiji* came to liberate India from foreign rule. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi said on the death of Gandhiji: "You know, when the time came, Lord Rama was reminded, 'Now Sir, your mission is up! You should return!' The same happened with Sri Krishna. So, also with Gandhiji. The time came and he was born for the liberation of India. And also the time came when there was no more purpose, no meaning for him to be in the body. Then the Lord called him back to His place."

There is a story about my father. I am now already eighty-one-years old. I remember my mother used to talk in my childhood of how the pilgrims would come walking to Sri Jagannathi on foot from my home in Bihar. Once they were returning home to Bihar when my father suffered from diarrhea and fell down. Mother used to say that the large vultures would fly around those pilgrims who fell down and, even if they were still alive, they would pounce on them and eat them up! I remember hearing this from my mother very clearly in my childhood. She told me the father felt unconscious, but the Divine Mother slapped him. In Hindi we say, "*He tapar mara*." He fell down unconscious but the Mother brought him back, gave him energy and he rejoined his fellow pilgrims. That is how he was returned to us in Bihar. She also used to say, "Jagannathi brought him back!"

Recently, I read a children's book to my grandchildren - Saraswati is ten years old. The other girl is named Parvati; she is six and a half years old. The third is a boy, Sri Ramachandraj; he is three and a half years old. From the age of one, he would sit with us in the shrine with his eyes closed. He never looks to me like a child or a boy! All these things these three are in America, they hear stories of the *Mahabharata*. They always talk and ask questions. They will ask many questions of me when I return.

So this visit to Sri Jagannathi is not a tour for us. He pulled us here from New York. Without knowing anything we came. Jagannathi is not a stone or a statue for me. People go on thinking very much and talk about God. In a simple way I say: "What! Are you dead? You are talking about God? What makes you think? Where does that power come from?" In a simple way, not in an angry way do I say this. Sri Bhagavan says, "*Ajanascha ashraadhanascha samshayatma vinashayati*..." "The ignorant man without faith goes to destruction."

Shradadha, faith. So it is Sri Jagannathi who has brought us here. We never speak much. We are not used to talking. My friends say that it is very difficult to make me talk. But they also say, it is very difficult to stop me from talking once I start. No storm, no hurricane, can stop me. East or west, north or south, it does not matter what goes on in all directions I continue... Done.

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.

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 Satsangs 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 e-mail. 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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