



A painted relief of Dakshinamurti above the southern gate of the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai

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The Recollections of N. Balarama Reddy

Part IX

(continued from the *May/June* issue)

MP1

IT WAS IN FEBRUARY of 1949 that a small growth was noticed just below the elbow on Bhagavan's left arm. When it was first noticed it looked similar to the size, color and shape of a black gram (pigeon pea).

At that time Bhagavan was sleeping outside on the couch which was placed north of the Old Hall and up near the fence that runs north and south, enclosing the flower garden. His couch was facing east and he would recline on it facing south. When devotees gathered around him during the day, the women would sit south of him, between the garden fence and the Old Hall and the men would sit east of him. During the nights, the white peacock was sleeping close to him in a cage.

Bhagavan's attendants told me that at night Bhagavan would sometimes get up, pass through the garden fence near his couch and relieve himself somewhere in the garden. While moving about in the dark, the attendants speculated, he must have bumped his left elbow on the fence, thus causing this growth to appear. />

The Maharshi was vigilantly watched and attended to twenty-four hours a day. Therefore, any irregularity in his health was closely scrutinized by his cadre of devoted attendants. But how and why the tumor began where it did cannot be established with any certainty.

When it was first noticed by the attendants, Dr. Shankar Rao, a retired district surgeon who was then serving as the ashram doctor, was summoned to examine it. Dr. Srinivasa Rao, another devotee living near the ashram, was also called. After consultation these two doctors decided that surgical removal of the small growth should be performed. Without much fanfare, and without the use of an anesthetic, the growth was removed. Perhaps everyone thought that this minor nuisance was now eliminated. The doctors did not realize then that they were tampering with a fatal type of cancer called sarcoma.

In March of 1949, the wound from the surgery seemed to be healing satisfactorily when another growth, a little higher up the arm, appeared. Dr. Raghavachari, an eminent surgeon from Madras, came to the ashram with all his instruments and removed the new growth on March 27. A local anesthetic was used. About a month after this surgery, when the doctors realized that the tumor was sarcoma cancer, radium treatments began. Also, in May, herbs prescribed by an ayurvedic physician were applied to the wound. During all these treatments Bhagavan's health was slowly deteriorating.

After the first surgery in February, I returned to my village. When the second surgery was performed and the tumor reappeared, Swami Viswanathan wrote me a letter, informing me of the situation and suggested that I should come back to the ashram immediately. I wasn't carrying on any previous correspondence with Swami Viswanathan and was a little surprised to receive his letter requesting me to return. I somehow felt Bhagavan's hand in his request and returned to the ashram without delay.

Bhagavan had then moved into the New Hall, which is connected to the Mother's Temple. What is now called the Nirvana Room had been built near the New Hall for Bhagavan to rest between darshan periods. A bathroom was also built onto the Nirvana Room, alleviating the strain he experienced by walking all the way to the latrine near the goshala. After his final surgery in December of 1949, the Nirvana Room became his full-time residence.

As time passed, Bhagavan was becoming increasingly weaker. Sometimes after getting up from the couch he would shake violently and everyone feared he would fall. At such alarming times, Bhagavan would make a light comment, such as, "Oh! Look at me. I am dancing." In this manner, he would soothe the anguish of his devotees. Never would he take his illness or weakness seriously, even though most of us did.

Also, we could never ask him about his health. If we did he would shout at us, saying, "What of that?" Consequently, we had no choice but to sit, silently looking on. At times it would happen, that some devotee seeing Bhagavan's extreme weakness, would approach him in tears, sincerely grieving over his condition. On such occasions the Maharshi would tenderly console the devotee and dismiss his illness as irrelevant.

Once the doctors were able to cut some tissues from the tumor so that testing could be done on them. When they were about to inject a local anesthetic to dull the pain, Bhagavan refused it and told the doctors to simply cut and take what they wanted. The doctors protested, explaining to Bhagavan that the pain would be severe without the use of the injection. But Bhagavan again refused and told them just to do it. They cut into the tumor and Bhagavan winced in pain. The doctors said, Bhagavan, we told you it would be painful.

Bhagavan replied, "Yes, the body experienced pain. But am I the body?"

When the Maharshi first arrived in Tiruvannamalai he was nearly always indrawn, lost to the outer world. He was unaware of whether he had eaten, slept, or even moved about. At that time, he could have dropped his body in the same manner without being aware of it. But his destiny, or God's will, dictated otherwise. And because of it we had before us a living example of how one can live always in the state of Self-absorption while still functioning in the world. Bhagavan lived for fifty-four years in full awareness of his pristine, immortal Self. Only by seeing this with our own eyes could we understand that such a state, or ideal, existed and was attainable.

From time to time, God, in his mercy, ushers into the world messengers to guide and awaken mankind to the ultimate goal of life.

One day, in July of 1949, I walked into the New Hall and saw Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar quietly sitting near Bhagavan's stone couch. Though he was at that time retired, he was still the most famous doctor in South India. He was renowned not only for his professional excellence, but also as a man of piety, charity, devotion and integrity. In Madras there is now a road named after him, and also a life-size statue of him can be seen at the Madras General Hospital.

I knew him from the time when I was a student living in a hostel next to his residence. Whenever I, or any other student was ill, we would go to him. I remember that as soon as we began explaining our symptoms, he would immediately interrupt us and say, "Stop!" Then he would write the correct prescription for the cure. He would never direct ask for payment either. A box was placed near the door, away from his view, and patients would put in it sums of money. Some patients put nothing. He never knew who put what.

Although he was then so distinguished, nobody seemed to have recognized him sitting in the hall. I approached Bhagavan and informed him of the famous doctor's presence. Bhagavan then asked me to go and inform Dr. Shankar Rao, the ashram doctor. I did, and the two doctors and myself met together in the dispensary, where Dr. Shankar Rao gave Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar a summary of Bhagavan's condition and treatment thus far.

Dr. Guruswamy Mudaliar said that it was a mistake to have cut the tumor in the first place. "Cutting with the knife drives the cancer inside," he said, "but now that the damage has been done there is no other solution than to try surgery again."

On August 7, 1949, a third surgery was performed in the dispensary. I have heard it said that these surgeries were done without the use of anesthetics, but this is not true. The standard anesthetics of the day were used on Bhagavan.

There was a large team of physicians attending to Bhagavan's needs during this surgery and throughout his illness. When so many specialists came to certain conclusions about his illness and took up procedures, surgical or otherwise, to cure him, Bhagavan normally went along with the treatment. But when the tumor appeared again after the third surgery, and the doctors concluded that only by amputating the entire arm would there be any hope of a cure, Bhagavan flatly rejected the option.

On the evening of December 19th, I was one among a group of devotees standing north of the Nirvana Room waiting to hear news about Bhagavan's condition. The fourth and final operation had been executed on that day, once again in the dispensary.

Doraiswamy Iyer, who had been influential in bringing together prominent physicians for the two major surgeries on Bhagavan, came to where we were standing and informed us about his condition. "Whether or not the surgery was successful, can be determined only after three months," he said. Bhagavan remained in the dispensary for eighteen days recovering from the operation. Then around midnight, he shifted to the Nirvana Room.

One day when he was still convalescing in the dispensary, Chadwick and I were standing outside nearby when one of Bhagavan's attendants accosted us and inquired if we wanted to come in and see Bhagavan. This was not the usual procedure of having a personal audience with Bhagavan while he was ill; nevertheless, we jumped at the opportunity. Moving quickly into Bhagavan's room, we stood at his bedside and simply rested our eyes on him. No words passed between us, but I can never forget those cool, compassionate eyes that opened and bathed us in peace and love.

This small event may seem insignificant to the onlooker. Yet, by that one look, soaked with immeasurable peace and grace, we felt complete security and the confidence that his blessings would always be with us. Even now, more than forty years after he left his body, I feel that this same grace is flowing, enveloping me, guiding me. How can it be described in words?

When Bhagavan was in the last stages of his illness he insisted on giving darshan twice a day. A reclining chair was placed in the small passage in front of the Nirvana Room. He would repose there facing west towards the verandah of the Mother's Temple, and the devotees would sit or stand on the verandah silently looking at him, or sit meditating with closed eyes. Those devotees who were permitted to have a bedside meeting with him would come around from east of the Nirvana Room and enter. At this time, because of the severity of his illness, the Sarvadhikari rarely gave permission for separate meetings with Bhagavan. And, during this difficult period, I also thought there was no need of troubling Bhagavan by requesting a personal meeting with him. After all, what did I have to ask of Bhagavan, or what need was there for him to speak to me?

In February of 1950, a new cancerous growth appeared. Many devotees began to lose all hope that his life would be spared. On the other hand, there were others that resolutely declared that Bhagavan would never die from this disease, as if it was inadmissible that a sage like Bhagavan could succumb to a common mortal affliction.

One day I received a message from the office that I should accompany the doctors to Bhagavan's room when they go again to clean his wound and change his bandages. I do not know why I was asked to do this. Perhaps Bhagavan didn't see me at darshan time and inquired about me, or possibly for some other reason the Sarvadhikari felt I should go to Bhagavan in his room.

When I walked into the Nirvana Room Bhagavan simply rested his benevolent gaze on me and said nothing. Then he slowly stretched out his left arm and the doctors began their work. The bandage was drenched with blood, the wound was large and pitiful to look at, the pain must have been extreme. Bhagavan calmly turned his head to the side and the doctors went about their business. I was amazed to observe his total detachment. It seemed to me that he looked on this painful affair as if it was happening to a body other than his own. I can never forget that sight. Bhagavan always told us that he was not the body. During his last days, in the midst of tremendous suffering, he demonstrated it.

About this time, my sister visited the ashram with her husband and baby child, who was then just seven months old. I asked permission from the office to take them to meet Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room. Although very few visits were permitted, I was allowed to take my sister and her child to see Bhagavan. My sister's husband had to stay behind.

Bhagavan was then in a dreadfully weakened state. I stood before him near the foot of his couch and introduced my sister. Then my sister sat her baby down on the floor alongside Bhagavan's couch and prostrated near the foot of his couch. The baby began to cry. With evident difficulty, Bhagavan leaned his head over to his left and looked down on the crying child, making endearing sounds with his lips, just as a mother would. I was astonished at the tenderness and grace he radiated, in spite of his severely debilitated condition.

Bhagavan's tumor had grown to the size of a cauliflower, blood was oozing between the buds and his whole arm was blackened. A doctor friend, who was experienced in all aspects relating to this type of cancer, told me that the pain associated with it at this stage of Bhagavan's illness would be similar to the suffering experienced if a fully-loaded lorry ran over your arm.

On another occasion during this period, a government minister from Madras, Sitarama Reddy, arrived for a visit to the ashram. This was his first visit and, since he was known to me, I was asked by the management to personally take him to visit Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room.

When we walked into Bhagavan's presence I noticed a peculiar radiance, or a strange kind of soft splendor, pervading the room. I thought because of my devotion to Bhagavan I was seeing this. Rationalizing it in this manner, I even tried to dismiss it.

As soon as we came out of the room the minister turned to me and asked, What was that brilliance, or radiance, pervading the Maharshi's room? When he said this, without any probing from me, I thought there must be something to it. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered Ganapati Muni's second verse from his *Chaturvarṇas*:

गणराजमुखसुरिसभागुरुणा गुणसञ्चयरत्नमहोदधिना ।
घनगुहसहस्रकरेण यथा तनुकञ्चुकगुप्तमहामहसा ॥ २ ॥

Who is the Master and Guide of the whole group of learned scholars beginning with Ganapati, Who is the repository of all the highest virtues, Whose beatific effulgence is hidden by the sheath of the gross body, like the blazing sun hidden behind the clouds;

Now that his mortal sheath is breaking down, I thought, it seems that this beatific effulgence is being released, or is escaping, from his physical form.

On March 15, several allopathic doctors met in the cottage west of the dispensary. After discussing Bhagavan's condition, they concluded that he had only one more month to live. This prognosis was correct, for exactly one month later at 8:47 p.m., on the night of April 14th, 1950, Bhagavan left his body.

At this meeting the doctors also decided that Bhagavan should be allowed to eat whatever food he desired. Throughout the course of his treatments, each discipline of medicine he was under had certain dietary restrictions. Often Bhagavan was required to consume items he would not ordinarily eat, or prefer to eat. But in spite of the doctors' decision about his diet, Bhagavan was not allowed to eat the iddies and chilly powder he requested during the last month of his life.

Out of all the doctors attending on Bhagavan, it was only the allopathic doctors that didn't boast they could cure Bhagavan. The doctors from other disciplines would confidently announce that Bhagavan could be cured. Of course, during the final stages of his illness, when all hope was lost, there was little boasting. All the different systems of medicine, all the best doctors and surgeons and all of the latest medical treatments and technologies failed. Throughout it all, Bhagavan remained what he always was: a spectator in this world drama, ever reveling in the Self.

During his last few days, news of his expected demise spread through newspapers and by word of mouth. Thousands were flocking to Ramanasramam to have their final and in many cases their first darshan of the sage. The ashram could hardly cope with the overwhelming crowd.

On April 14th, a bulletin was released to the news service from the office, stating that Bhagavan was no longer giving darshan. By broadcasting this information the management thought the pressing throng of devotees would disperse. When this news reached Bhagavan, he immediately ordered the Sarvadhikari to withdraw the bulletin. In no way would he discontinue giving darshan. Even on this last day, when Bhagavan was in the throes of death, he insisted on giving darshan as usual between the hours of 5 and 6 p.m. He demanded that the devotees should not be prevented from seeing him.

Dr. Lt. Col. P. V. Kamachandani, the district medical officer, was then present. Seeing Bhagavan's critical condition on April 14th, he went to Vellore to bring his wife. The Doctor told me: I had a great desire to offer orange juice to Bhagavan. As the fruit was not available here, we purchased a few at Vellore, which my wife, with great devotion, made into juice. This we took with us to the ashram. Sri Bhagavan was by then declining all liquid, as movement to and from the bathroom was so troublesome to him. Twice he declined the offer, but asked for water instead. I was feeling sorry for my wife's unfulfilled longing. So this time, with all the earnestness of my soul, I conveyed a mute prayer to the Maharshi to spare my wife from a heart-breaking disappointment. Bhagavan at once said, "Give me orange juice." And when I offered it he drank it.

It was nothing but total compassion on Bhagavan's part to have asked for the orange juice, simply to fulfill the desire of a devotee.

On the final evening, thousands were cramped into the ashram grounds around Bhagavan's room. A gloomy mood enveloped the area, as Bhagavan's end was anticipated at any moment. The fan being waved over Bhagavan's body by the attendant was visible through the door, and all eyes were fixed on it, knowing that when it ceased moving, Bhagavan's heart had ceased beating.

Mrs. Telyarkhan, an influential devotee with the administration in those days, obtained permission to go into the Nirvana Room and have her last darshan of Bhagavan at 7 p.m. At this sad juncture, she approached me and asked me to join her. I quietly stood there thinking, and then replied, "No, you please go ahead. I cannot go." During this past year I had seen Bhagavan's body suffer enough. There was no need for me to see more.

Shortly after, the fan stopped, the famed meteor slowly floated across the heavens and it was all over. The light that illumined the earth as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi had now merged with the Eternal Light, the Source of all creation.

(concluded in the *Sep/Oct* issue)

MP2

"One's true birthday is when he enters That which transcends birth and death - The Eternal Being"

According to this definition of 'birthday' given by Sri Ramana Maharshi, his one hundredth birthday anniversary will fall somewhere in the month of July, 1996. About six weeks after this event he was irresistibly drawn to the holy hill of the Beacon light, Sri Arunachala. With his advent at Arunachala began an incomparable fifty-four yearlong demonstration of Self-abidance. It also commenced the imparting of a unique teaching imbued with a tremendous grace that is still available to sincere seekers.

To commemorate this special one hundredth anniversary, a small dedicated group of devotees from the U. S. and Canada will be travelling to India in August, 1996. They will spend the night of August 27th in Tiruchuzhi, the Maharshi's birthplace. The following night they will stay in Madurai. Then on Thursday, August 29th they will leave by train for Villupuram and follow the same route taken by the Maharshi to Sri Arunachala, arriving on the morning of Sunday, September 1, 1996, exactly one hundred years after Sri Ramana Maharshi first walked directly into the inner sanctum of the Sri Arunachaleswara Temple.

On Sunday, September 1, programs celebrating this event will be conducted at Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia, Canada. We hope that you can join us on this historic occasion.

Maharshi Ramana and N. Balarama Reddy Garu

MP3

Sri Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi, the author of the following article, had a forty-seven year long association with Sri N. Balarama Reddy. Sri Reddy was his friend and mentor, while he served him in all legal matters as his personal attorney. Now visiting his son in Chandler, Arizona, Sri Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi has kindly consented to relate some of his early memories of the Maharshi and N. Balarama Reddy.

IN 1948, when I was 24 years-old, I first visited Sri Ramanasramam. At that time I was very much inclined toward Communism. I was also very much depressed, owing to the death of my closest relative who suddenly died at the age of twenty.

My father had already visited Sri Ramana twice. He had gone to him with a list of doubts and twice all his doubts were cleared, without even a single word spoken. He experienced complete peace in the Maharshi's presence. Because I was depressed my father was urging me to visit the Maharshi. I was working as an attorney in the High Court of Madras when I was finally persuaded to travel to Tiruvannamalai and visit the Sage.

It was about 9 a.m. during the last week of April in 1948 when I first reached the Ashrama. I was asked by the management to stay in the Guest House for Gents, which was east of the well and near the kitchen. I entered the long guest house and placed down my bedding. As fate would have it, the late Sri N. Balarama Reddy was occupying the space next to me.

In addition to my work in the courts, I also wrote articles for various journals on Telugu literature, dabbled in poetry and to some familiarity with Sanskrit. Sri Reddy garu and I immediately struck up a conversation and, finding me interested in literature, he discussed with me the Ramayana and the character of Rama. He then took me to the kitchen and got me iddies for breakfast, as everyone had already eaten.

After eating he took me to where Ramana was reclining on a sofa and asked me to sit with my eyes closed. Although there was absolute silence in the hall, I could not sit with my eyes closed. I was restless and I felt as if the time was dragging slowly. My mind began to reflect on all my miseries, one after another. Every day, for three days, I accompanied Sri Reddy garu to the hall, and every time I sat down my thoughts would take off at high speed and my misery increased. So, on the evening of the third day, I told Sri Reddy garu that I had come to the Maharshi for peace but I was only experiencing an increase of pain and misery. Sri Reddy garu asked me to stay on for one more day.

On the morning of the fourth day, I was sitting in the hall with my eyes closed. At one point, I happened to open my eyes and saw the Maharshi looking at me intently. Suddenly, all thoughts vanished from my mind and I experienced a delightful blank, or void. Then a resplendent light enveloped me fully. I was empty of thoughts but full of immense happiness. I was one with that immense peace and resplendent glory.

After some time I again became aware of my body. This experience made me believe in God for the first time. In spite of all my theories of Marxism, dialectic materialism and atheism I could not deny the truth of this wonderful experience. This condition continued for three days. I witnessed my body go through its daily activities but I remained fixed in that immense peace. The Maharshi's look pierced into me when I sat before him and even when I was not before him. The eyes of the Maharshi are the kindest and most powerful energy of the universe, and it brings me to ecstasy remembering those first days with him in his Ashrama. I left the Ashrama after six days, but even after leaving I would suddenly go into meditation. Such was the effect of the Sage's presence.

This visit to Sri Ramana bound me to the Maharshi and also to Sri Reddy garu, with whom I maintained a close, lifelong association.

In October of 1949, I was married. My wife and I went to the Ashrama on the 16th day after our marriage. Sri Reddy garu took us before the Maharshi and told him about us. The Maharshi blessed us.

Since then I have been visiting Sri Ramanasramam and meeting with Sri Reddy garu both in and outside of the Ashrama. Whenever I met with Sri Reddy we would often sit and meditate together.



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The Archival Films The Archival Films

1935 To 1950

From 1935 to 1950, a number of visitors to Sri Ramanasramam shot films of the Maharshi and his environs. These films, taken mostly by his devotees, give us the remarkable opportunity to view a fully-enlightened sage who in the 20th century lived like an ancient rishi of yore. Two of the films were

professionally produced by the Indian Information Bureau as newsreels with soundtracks and shown throughout India in movie theaters.

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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, 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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