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The Recollections of N.Balarama Reddy - Part VII

Collecting Funds

(continued from the *Jan/Feb issue*)

Sometime during the late 1940s a group of devotees felt there was a need to acquire land and construct a separate building to accommodate lady devotees. The Sarvadhikari decided that a piece of land just west of the ashram could be purchased and a building constructed on it. To accomplish this project he had bought a train ticket for Bombay where he was planning to go and meet devotees who might be willing to help finance it. Of course, he didn't want to undertake this journey or pursue his plans without Bhagavan's approval. He knew if he got Bhagavan's consent to the idea, there would be little trouble collecting the necessary funds.

Anticipating a reproach from Bhagavan, he enlisted my assistance, along with that of Devaraja Mudaliar, T. P. Ramachandra Iyer and a couple of others. The evening meal was over and Bhagavan had returned to his couch, which was then outside in what was then called the Jubilee Hall. Together, as a group, we approached him and stood by his side. Bhagavan straight away took in the situation, turned his head away from us and gazed into space. The Sarvadhikari was standing at a distance, near the well, and I have no doubt that Bhagavan saw him standing there; I also have no doubt that he knew that we had been sent by him. What were we to do now? We waited. Eventually, Bhagavan took pity on us, turned our way and asked, "What is it?" With some hesitation we explained as best we could the present need and what his brother, Chinnaswami, was proposing to do about it.

Then Bhagavan, looking straight at us, said, "We are supposed to be *sadhus* depending on God. Have we no shame? Must we stretch out our hands and ask for money like common beggars?" He then went on expressing disgust for the whole scheme. The Sarvadhikari had no recourse but to cancel his trip.

From this it would seem that Bhagavan was definitely opposed to collecting money for any cause. But from my experience it is not so, as is demonstrated from the following example.

Early in 1949, before the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Mother's Temple was celebrated, Chinnaswami became worried that the funds required to celebrate it were insufficient. Toppayya Mudaliar had been invited to the ashram by Chinnaswami to help direct the consecration ceremonies. He was a large man of childlike nature, always bubbling with enthusiasm. I believe he spent most of his time traveling around, visiting various mahatmas and serving them to the best of his ability.

When Chinnaswami expressed his doubts about having adequate funds for the consecration ceremonies, Toppayya Mudaliar told him that one of his close relatives, a lady in the Tanjore District, would assist the ashram in its present need. He said that we need only to approach her, and to do that we have to take the aid of a lady devotee from here. The customs of this relative's family didn't permit a man to meet her for this purpose.

Knowing that I was a friend of Mrs. Telyarkhan, Chinnaswami requested me to go to her and discuss Mudaliar's proposal and secure her consent to travel to Tanjore with Mudaliar to collect the funds. When I met Mrs. Telyarkhan she readily agreed. Then Chinnaswami decided that I also should accompany them to Tanjore. But now we had to face Bhagavan, inform him of our plan and obtain his permission. Naturally, we had some trepidation in approaching Bhagavan with this plan to collect funds.

It is well-known that during a period in Bhagavan's youth he begged for food. It is probably less known that he would never beg, or permit his followers to beg, for any special variety of food. They would only take food that was freely given and would never request any special item, let alone think of asking for money; Bhagavan never even touched it.

Knowing this, T. Mudaliar, Mrs. Telyarkhan and I went and sat before Bhagavan. He was reclining on the couch outside on the verandah. We began explaining the whole situation to him, adding how T. Mudaliar remembered his relative, whom he believed would be happy to help the ashram if only she was informed of the need. Bhagavan listened, and then began to inquire about our travel arrangements, the length of our absence, etc. From this line of talk we could infer he had no objections to the plan. This was Bhagavan's way. We decided to proceed with the trip. D.S. Sastri offered to drive us to Villupuram, where we could catch the train to Tanjore. T.Mudaliar expected that his relative would help with a one thousand rupee donation, but to his surprise the kind lady offered three thousand. Upon our return, Bhagavan was keenly interested to hear all the details concerning our travels and if the trip was a success.

In this particular case it is apparent that, though Bhagavan generally opposed any funds being solicited for the ashram, he did not object in all cases.

Krishnaprem visits the Ashram

After my visit with *Krishnaprem* in 1938, I had corresponded with him a few times. In each of his letters he promised that he would soon be coming to see the Maharshi. But he never came and I began to think that he would miss his chance to have darshan of Bhagavan. This all changed on a December morning in 1948.

I was sitting with my eyes closed next to Bhagavan, outside on the verandah. When I opened my eyes, who did I see sitting before me but Krishnaprem. I said to him, "You have finally come. Why didn't you write and let me know you were coming?"

He said, "After writing to you so many times and promising to come, but didn't, I was embarrassed to write you again."

His three day visit to the ashram caused considerable excitement among some devotees. *Krishnaprem* was a tall man, with a keen intellect, sincere heart and mature devotion. He was then famous and respected throughout India. After lunch I proposed to take him to Skandasaramam. As I knew Krishnaprem would like to have *Swami Viswanathan* come along with us, I asked Viswanathan to accompany us. Also, the versatile writer, poet and musician, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya was requested to join us. When we were leaving, Bhagavan called me to him and said that I should report to him about the visit to Skandasaramam when we returned. It was unusual for Bhagavan to make such special requests, and that is probably the reason why I remember it. We walked up to Skandasaramam, stayed there for about two hours reciting hymns, singing *bhajans*, etc., and then returned.

In the evening, *Krishnaprem* was asked to sing some *bhajans* before Bhagavan. He requested the use of a harmonium. One was found and brought to the verandah where Bhagavan was resting on the couch. About seventy-five devotees gathered outside to hear him sing. He began singing his songs with deep, genuine devotion, even pronouncing the words of the song with an Indian accent. Naturally, all were impressed and moved by his renditions. After Krishnaprem had finished, Harinath Chattopadhyaya was eager to display his singing talent and harmonium playing. No one really asked him to do so, but that did not stop him. He began playing and singing, exhibiting copious skills, but all his talent fell flat in comparison to the natural talent that sprung from the devotion of Krishnaprem. Bhagavan later commented, "Here is one Westerner who embodies the intensity and devotion of a true Indian *Bhakta*."

During this visit, *Krishnaprem* handed over his small Gopala Krishna idol to Bhagavan. Bhagavan tenderly turned it this way and that, looking at it intently, and then returned it to Krishnaprem. In other places it has already been recorded about Krishnaprem's vision and inner experiences while sitting before Bhagavan in the Old Hall.

From Sri Ramanasaramam he travelled to Sri Arubindo's Ashram. After staying there a few days we planned that he and I would rendezvous at the Villupuram train station, from where we would depart together and travel south, visiting several famous temples and holy places. My train from Tiruvannamalai was scheduled to leave at 1 P.M. So, immediately after lunch I approached Bhagavan to take leave of him. He had just then finished his meal and was massaging his rheumatic knee joints – in his old age he had to do this prior to walking. I prostrated before him and informed him of my departure. He already knew all the details relating to this trip, and he also knew I was planning on visiting Kanyakumari. He said to me, "These people (meaning the management) have written to an advocate-devotee of Nagercoil to send us the three different-coloured sands that are available at Kanyakumari. These are needed for the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the *Matrubhuteswara Temple*. So far, he has not sent them." Though Bhagavan did not say specifically that I should bring those sands, I naturally understood what was on his mind. In fact, he often employed this manner of speaking, asking us indirectly, when he wanted something done. Before leaving he also asked me to write and send him details about the pilgrimage.

When I arrived in Kanyakumari I discovered that the government had enforced a law prohibiting the removal of any sand from the beaches of Kanyakumari. Uranium, the mineral used for making atomic bombs, had been found in some of the sand. Nevertheless, I thought I should take my chances and stealthily proceeded to gather the three different sands. I filled three bags with the sands and concealed them in my bedroll. At the train station I hired a man to carry my bedroll and luggage and moved on towards the station gate. Standing at the gate, I saw the ticket collector and two policemen. The ticket collector was checking tickets and the policemen were checking baggage for illegal sand. I asked my man to stop and we both stood there momentarily as I contemplated the situation. Pondering over my next move, I mentally prayed to Bhagavan, "You wanted me to bring this sand. Now look at this – police! What am I to do?" As soon as I had prayed thus, the policemen, for some unknown reason, turned and looked in a certain direction and walked away from the gate. I immediately told my man, "Let's go," and we passed through the gate and boarded the train.

When I returned to the ashram and brought the bags of sands to Bhagavan, he called everyone around to come and look. Later, the sands excepted from the advocate arrived by post, but the bags had broken en route and the three varieties of sands mixed, making them useless. When Bhagavan heard that he remarked, "If *Balarama Reddy* had not brought the sands, how could we have gotten a fresh consignment on time for the consecration ceremony?" *Krishnaprem* finally returned to North India after his tour of the South. Later I was told that for some time, wherever he went, he enthusiastically talked to others about Bhagavan.

— continued in the *May/Jun issue*

Bhagavan and His Family

Bhagavan took immense interest in the construction of the temple built over his mother's grave. Some may think that the construction of this temple was conceived and executed solely by his brother. We, who were there at the time, cannot help but have a different opinion. Whenever the temple architect was unable to decide on some matter relating to the temple construction, the Sarvadhikari would send him to Bhagavan. Bhagavan would keenly listen to all the related details, discuss the matter and then advise him accordingly. He took interest in every step of the construction.

Sages like Bhagavan are of a different order than the regular *sadhus* and swamis we often see. He could have closed family members living with him without being affected in the least. Take the instance of Bhagavan's mother. She once came and visited him on the hill in 1914, and during that visit she fell ill. When her condition turned critical, Bhagavan composed four stanzas supplicating Arunachala to save her life.

Rama also looked after the welfare of all his subjects, as well as the welfare of his near relatives. A Rama, or a Bhagavan, can do this without falling into the snares of Maya. They are above Maya, but they still serve mankind and their families.

Bhagavan wished to save his mother from future births and give her liberation. Her faith in him was firm. She believed that only her son, the Maharshi, could save her, and in her old age refused to leave him even for a single day. And he did sit by her and guide her to illumination during the final hours of her life. But see how natural everything was. Bhagavan's mother came, his brother came and his sister would often visit. On occasions he even looked after his brother's son, T. N. Venkataraman, when he was just a small boy. He would attend to the boy's needs, just like any other uncle would. But did he think he was an uncle, a son, or a brother? No. He knew he was the Self alone. That is the essential point.

Buddha once found himself in similar circumstances. His mother had died when he was young, so his mother's younger sister raised him. She also married his father, making her his stepmother. After Buddha's enlightenment his stepmother and his wife wanted to join his order or *Sangha*. Buddha at first refused to have a woman in the *Sangha*. His trusted disciple Ananda quietly moved near him and said, "How can you refuse the request of the very person who lovingly cared for you and raised you?" Buddha then softened his stand and accepted her, as well as some other members of his family.

There is no doubt that Bhagavan had a special affection for his mother, and he also showed a particular interest in the affairs of his brother's family. He never said that he was a renunciate and detached himself from his family members. He had affection for his relatives in the same way he had affection for others, whether a child, a man, a monkey, or a cow. His actions were spontaneous and natural, and by watching him we learned how we should live in the world. His example was the greatest teaching, and his divine presence far out weighed a lifetime of strenuous *sadhana*. Just to think of him, or sit in his presence, used to raise us to higher levels of beatitude.

— *N. Balarama Reddy*

On the other hand he (the Maharshi) did not limit his teaching to the one question "Who am I ?". He invariably adjusted his advice to the needs of the devotee. He would say: "Sooner or later, the question 'Who am I?' will have to be faced. All that leads to this question is good, By itself nothing else is fully effective, for Self-Knowledge comes only through *Self-enquiry*. But other methods purify the mind and help it to see its own limits. When the mind comes to the end of its resources and stands baffled before the unanswerable question then a Higher Power takes charge of the mind and the Self stands revealed, the Real, the Wonderful

— *Ramana Smriti*, "The Bhagavan I Knew," by Krishna Bhikshu

Obituaries

In Remembrance of John Flynn

BORN on March 7, 1914, *John Flynn* lived through a period of world change unprecedented in the history of mankind. And in this fast-paced society of the 20th Century he rode a wave of fortune and fame that sometimes lifted him upwards and sometimes threw him tumbling down.

From Hollywood contracts in the 1940s and 1950s, to television and radio work up until the mid-1990s, John's artistic performing talents were always in demand. We, his friends during the last thirteen years of his life, will remember him most for his moving narration of the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi, heard in the *Sage of Arunachala* video.

After the death of a dear friend in 1980, John turned his attention to a sincere search for the meaning and purpose of life. In 1982, still seeking a firm spiritual footing, he walked into Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, holding in his hand the Christian classic, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Upon seeing photos of the Maharshi and reading briefly about his life and teachings, John not only quickly grasped the practical implications of the enquiry "Who am I?" but also understood and accepted the continued guiding presence of Sri Maharshi with full faith and devotion.

John's mother was born in Nova Scotia and from his childhood he would make trips to this Maritime Province of Canada every year. After discovering Arunachala Ashrama in Nova Scotia, he increased his visits and proportionately reduced his work load.

During the last twenty years of his life, John worked mostly as a narrator, providing the voice on television for documentaries produced by the Discovery Channel, the National Geographic Society, the National Parks Service and other production companies. He was a lover of language and of learning in general and, although not formally educated, John was more learned in more subjects than anyone we ever knew. In his mid-seventies we saw him study relentlessly to learn Spanish, and then after learning it, volunteering to teach English to Spanish-speaking migrant workers from South America living in the Washington, D.C. area.

John was uniquely endowed with a soft and kind heart that embraced and assisted whomever he found in need. His last television job as a narrator, broadcasted in December of 1994, was the Discovery Channel's special on the history of Santa Claus. He so naturally embodied this saintly personality that the television producers insisted on John doing the job, though he had turned it down because of his declining health.

John visited Sri Ramanasaramam in December of 1989. We were then planning to produce a documentary on the Maharshi's life. John, of course, wanted to narrate it. He told me that although he was not too enthused about making the trip to India, he knew that he had to visit Arunachala once, not twice, but just once.

One day in Sri Ramanasaramam, when I was walking on a little-traveled path to the Maharshi's tomb (the path running east and west, couched between the *Palitirtham Tank* and flower garden), I saw John standing still on that path, looking quite besides himself. Coming near I noticed tears streaming down from his eyes. I asked, "Are you all right, John?" He replied, "Yes, for perhaps the first time I am really all right. And now I know why I had to come here."

During the last eight years of John's life he suffered from recurring bouts of cancer. After every surgery or treatment he would bounce back to his old self, or nearly his old self. Few knew of his illness or what he was going through. John was optimistic throughout, turning with greater intensity to the Maharshi's teachings.

On January 1, 1996, residing in the home of his son Michael in Frederick, Maryland, John left his body. We will always remember him as a sincere friend and father-like figure, a kind man who wished happiness for all in his quest for spiritual fulfillment.

We express our sincere sympathy to his children, with whom we also share this great loss.

— Dennis Hartel

Georgina Halmagyi

Georgina emigrated to Brazil from Hungary in 1957. There she met Tibor Halmagyi, who was also a Hungarian national living in Brazil. It was from Tibor, whom she later married, that Georgina first heard of Sri Ramana Maharshi.

In 1966, they moved to the United States, settling in East Haven, Connecticut. Being subscribers to *The Mountain Path* magazine from its inception, they were aware of the Arunachala Ashrama in New York City. Not long after arriving in the USA they contacted the ashram and, though they moved to California in 1968, kept up a warm, friendly relationship with the devotees of Arunachala Ashrama in New York and Nova Scotia all these years.

Georgina would send special packages of food to the New York and Nova Scotia ashrams every year at Christmas time. Occasionally, she would write to us, and her letters were always a clear expression of her deep devotion and faith in Sri Bhagavan and his teachings. She was a steady devotee of the Master whose life of devotion and faith was an inspiration to us all. Everyone in the Ashrama will miss her kind and gracious presence, a presence that was not physically near, but always felt with warm, affectionate singleness of devotion to the Sage of Arunachala, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

At the age of 73, Georgina was quietly absorbed in her Master on March 18, 1995.

Lex Hixon

In 1974, a year before the construction of the Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram in Nova Scotia, Lex Hixon and his son made a flying visit to this relatively-new outpost dedicated to the Sage of Arunachala. Lex had recently completed his Master's thesis on the teachings and philosophy of Sri Ramana Maharshi, and he was happy to see a center established in the Sage's name. The following year, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram was built in Nova Scotia and Lex Hixon came forward as the major contributor. It would not be out of place to briefly relate a dream one of the Nova Scotia ashram residents had about Lex at this time.

In 1974 a trust was formed in Halifax, Nova Scotia by a friend who had taken the initiative to have the temple built. His efforts to raise the initial \$15,000 necessary to begin the project met with very little success. This would not have been a problem except for the fact that the ashram was instructed to go ahead with the construction and refurbishing of the school house bought and moved to the ashram site. (It was later discovered that this school, which is now the temple, was built in 1879, the very year of the Maharshi's birth). Many supplies were ordered, work was well on its way and debts mounted up to nearly \$15,000 when we heard the news that very little money would be coming in through our Halifax friend's efforts. We were in a dilemma as to how to pay the debt, and if the amount was not paid, according to stipulations in the trust agreement, the ashram would have to surrender land and property. It was at this juncture of events when an ashram resident had the following dream of Lex Hixon.

Going into the temple, then under construction, the dreamer saw a group of rowdy visitors carousing inside the building. He was in a fix as how to remove them and restore order. Going back out and standing near the entrance he sees Lex walking straight into the temple, grabbing one ruffian after another and tossing them out the door until the hall is cleared. After this job was done, Lex left without saying a word, while the dreamer looked on in amazement. It was just three days after this dream that a large check, equal to the amount required, was received from a generous benefactor who, in this instance, was no other than Lex Hixon.

In New York City, from 1971 to 1984, Lex Hixon hosted a weekly radio program "In the Spirit," in which he interviewed representatives from all the world's religions, among them the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa. He earned a Ph.D. in comparative religion from Columbia University in 1976. Thereafter he lectured, wrote books, gave seminars and dedicated himself to teaching and imbibing a greater understanding of the world's religious traditions.

On November 1, 1996, at the age of 53, Lex quietly passed away at his home in Riverdale, New York.

Jayanti Celebrations in New York

ON Saturday, January 6, 1996 the observance of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi's Jayanti took place at Arunachala Ashrama on Yellowstone Blvd. in Queens, New York.

The celebration, as is our tradition, began with the *Marital Garland of Letters*, sung in unison. Following Ganesh Stuti, Dennis Hartel and Evelyn Saphier offered a few words of welcome to the several friends, both old and new, who filled the modest meditation hall to overflowing. Next, Margo Martin read the wonderful story of Sri Bhagavan's birth, as told by *Arthur Osborne in Ramana Maharshi, The Path of Self Knowledge*.

Geeta Bhatt and Chhaya Tewari (sisters) offered worship, reciting the *108 Names of Bhagavan Ramana*, composed by *Viswanatha Swami*, while the children in attendance, led by Henaz Bhatt, placed offerings of flowers.

Once again, Radha Ramaswami, our youngest singer – just 7 years – inspired the congregational singing with her transparent sincerity and devotion.

Especially inspiring was the talk of Virat Bhatt, who told of an unusual incident that occurred during his recent visit to Sri Ramanasaramam. His sincere narration brought the sacred Arunachala Hill and its environs alive before our mind's eye.

Swami Prakashtmayananda of Sri Lanka blessed this occasion with his gracious presence. He spoke movingly of his association with Sri Bhagavan during the 1940s. Then the Swami's bhajans overflowed spontaneously from his heart and swept all along in the powerful current of his devotional fervor.

Aarati was led by Geeta and Savitri Ramaswami. The many dishes, prepared by virtually all the ladies present, were then served to the devotees.

We were happy to have been joined by Aruna and Ramkumar, daughter and son-in-law of President V.S.Ramanan of Sri Ramanasaramam, and their two children.

How grateful we are to Sri Bhagavan for this occasion to recall his impeccable life of simplicity, renunciation and his sublime spiritual instruction of *Self Enquiry*: "Who am I?" May the occasion of the celebration of his birth inspire within us a fresh renewal of the spirit of devotion and practice, is the prayer we offer at his lotus feet on this day.

— Evelyn K.Saphier

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 1962, and in 1975 a residential ashrama was established in Nova Scotia. Canada, and a retreat and temple, Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram, was consecrated at the Nova Scotia ashrama.

p.m. New York Ashrama, meditation is conducted every evening from 7:00 to 9:00 a.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

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 Ramanasaramam, a Sri Chakra is made and consecrated 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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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 [!\[\]\(163219ff2ca744937cbbf530bd8fea80_img.jpg\)](#) channel.

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