

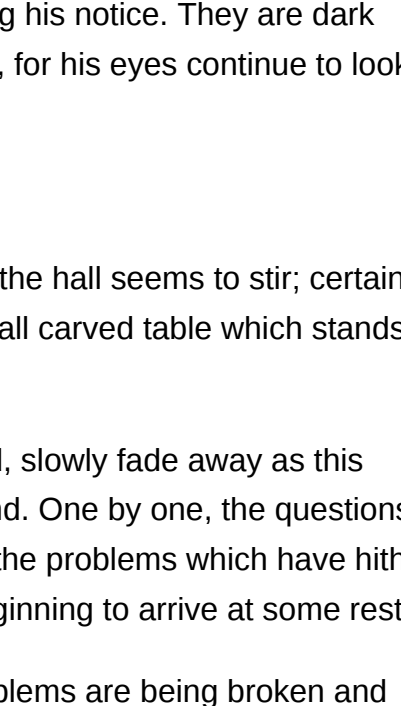
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As I Saw Him - No.7

Extracts from the works of Paul Brunton

When R. Raphael Hurst, a London journalist, first visited Sri Ramanasramam in 1931, he was sincerely seeking a direct experience of Truth. Up till then, all his travels, his meetings with holy men, yogis and occultists failed to satisfy the inner yearnings of his soul. The record of his search, culminating with an ecstatic glimpse of Reality while sitting in the presence of the Maharshi, was published in England in 1934. It was a sensation, an instant best seller enchanting thousands. A Search in Secret India, written under the pen name of Paul Brunton (a name he later adopted as his permanent name), did more at that time to propagate the spiritual grandeur of the Maharshi than any other medium. Now the world came to sit at the feet of the sage of Arunachala.

Let us follow Mr. Brunton on his first visit.



"We shall now go in the hall of the Maharshi," announces the holy man of the yellow robe, bidding me to follow him. I pause outside the uncovered stone veranda and remove my shoes. I gather up the little pile of fruits which I have brought as an offering, and pass into an open doorway.

Twenty brown-and-black faces flash their eyes upon us. Their owners are squatting in half-circles on a red-tiled floor. They are grouped at a respectful distance from the corner which lies farthest to the right hand of the door. Apparently everyone has been facing this corner just prior to our entry. I glance there for a moment and perceive a seated figure upon a long white divan, but it suffices to tell me that here indeed is the Maharshi.

The divan is but a few paces away from a broad high window in the end wall. The light falls clearly upon the Maharshi and I can take in every detail of his profile, for he is seated gazing rigidly through the window in the precise direction whence we have come this morning. His head does not move, so, thinking to catch his eye and greet him as I offer the fruits, I move quietly over to the window, place the gift before him, and retreat a pace or two.

A small brass brazier stands before his couch. It is filled with burning charcoal, and a pleasant odour tells me that some aromatic powder has been thrown on the glowing embers. Close by is an incense burner filled with joss sticks. Threads of bluish grey smoke arise and float in the air.

I fold a thin cotton blanket upon the floor and sit down, gazing expectantly at the silent figure in such a rigid attitude upon the couch. The Maharshi's body is almost nude, except for a thin, narrow loin-cloth, but that is common enough in these parts. His skin is slightly copper-coloured, yet quite fair in comparison with that of the average South Indian. I judge him to be a tall man; his age somewhere in the early fifties. His head, which is covered with closely cropped grey hair, is well formed. The high and broad expanse of forehead gives intellectual distinction to his personality. His features are more European than Indian. Such is my first impression.

Pin-drop silence prevails throughout the long hall. The sage remains perfectly still, motionless, quite undisturbed at our arrival. I look full into the eyes of the seated figure in the hope of catching his notice. They are dark brown, medium-sized and wide open. If he is aware of my presence, he betrays no hint, gives no sign. His body is supernaturally quiet, as steady as a statue. Not once does he catch my gaze, for his eyes continue to look into remote space, and infinitely remote it seems.

It is an ancient theory of mine that one can take the inventory of a man's soul from his eyes. But before those of the Maharshi I hesitate, puzzled and baffled.

The minutes creep by with unutterable slowness. First they mount up to a half-hour by the hermitage clock which hangs on a wall; this, too, puzzles and becomes a whole hour. Yet no one in the hall seems to stir; certainly no one dares to speak. I reach a point of visual concentration where I have forgotten the existence of all save this silent figure on the couch. My offering of fruits remains unregarded on the small carved table which stands before him.

There is something in this man that holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him. My initial bewilderment, my perplexity at being totally ignored, slowly fade away as this strange fascination begins to grip me more firmly. But it is not till the second hour of the uncommon scene that I become aware of a silent, resistless change which is taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I have prepared in the train with such meticulous accuracy drop away. For it does not now seem to matter whether they are asked or not, and it does not seem to matter whether I solve the problems which have hitherto troubled me. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me, that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest.

I surrender myself to the steadily deepening sense of restfulness until two hours have passed. The passage of time now provokes no irritation, because I feel that the chains of mind-made problems are being broken and thrown away.

Comes the first ripple. Someone approaches me and whispers in my ear, "Did you not wish to question the Maharshi?" The spell is broken. As if this infelicitous intrusion is a signal, figures rise from the floor and begin to move about the hall, voices float up to my hearing, and - wonder of wonders! - the dark brown eyes of the Maharshi flicker once or twice. Then the head turns, the face moves slowly, very slowly, and bends downward at an angle. A few more moments, and it has brought me into the ambit of its vision. For the first time the sage's mysterious gaze is directed upon me. It is plain that he has now awakened from his long trance.

The intruder, thinking perhaps that my lack of response is a sign that I have not heard him, repeats his question aloud. But in those lustrous eyes which are gently staring at me, I read another question, albeit unspoken.

"Can it be - is it possible - that you are still tormented with distracting doubts when you have now glimpsed the deep mental peace which you - and all men - may attain?"

The peace overwhelms me. I turn to the guide and answer: "No. There is nothing I care to ask now. Another time."

The midday meal is over. For once I am grateful that India is favoured with a climate that does not foster activity, because most of the people have disappeared into the shady groves to take a siesta. I can therefore approach the Maharshi in the way I prefer, without undue notice or fuss.

I enter the large hall and sit down near him. The Maharshi holds a folded manuscript book in his hands; he is writing something with extreme slowness. A few minutes after my entry he puts the book aside and calls a disciple. A few words pass between them in Tamil and the man tells me that his master wishes to reiterate his regrets at my inability to partake of their food. He explains that they live a simple life, and never having catered for Europeans before do not know what the latter eat. I add that I regard the question of diet as being far less important than the quest which has brought me to his hermitage.

The sage listens intently, his face calm, imperturbable and non-committal.

"It is a good object," he comments at length.

This encourages me to enlarge upon the same theme.

"Master, I have studied our Western philosophies and sciences, lived and worked among the people of our crowded cities, tasted their pleasures and allowed myself to be caught up into their ambitions. Yet I have also gone into solitary places and wandered there amid the loneliness of deep thought. I have questioned the sages of the West; now I have turned my face towards the East. I seek more light."

The Maharshi nods his head, as if to say, "Yes, I quite understand."

"I have heard many opinions, listened to many theories. Intellectual proofs of one belief or another lie piled up all around me. I am tired of them, skeptical of anything which cannot be proved by personal experience. Forgive me for saying so, but I am not religious. Is there anything beyond man's material existence. If so, how can I realize it for myself?"

He makes no verbal reply but appears to have dropped into some train of thought. Because there is nothing else to do and because my tongue has now been loosened, I address him for the third time:

"The wise men of the West, our scientists, are greatly honoured for their cleverness. Yet they have confessed that they can throw but little light upon the hidden truth behind life. It is said that there are some in your land who can give what our Western sages fail to reveal. Is this so? Can you assist me to experience enlightenment? Or is the search itself a mere delusion?"

I have now reach my conversational objective and decide to await the Maharshi's response. He continues to stare thoughtfully at me. Ten minutes pass in silence.

At last his lips open and he says gently:

"You say I. I want to know.' Tell me, who is that I?"

What does he mean? He has now cut across the services of the interpreter and speaks direct to me in English. Bewilderment creeps across my brain. "I am afraid I do not understand your question," I reply blankly.

"Is it not clear? Think again!"

I puzzle over his words once more. An idea suddenly flashes into my head. I point a finger towards myself and mention my name.

"And do you know him?"

"All my life!" I smile back at him.

"But that is only your body! Again I ask, 'Who are you'?"

I cannot find a ready answer to this extraordinary query.

The Maharshi continues:

"Know first that I and then you shall know the truth."

My mind hazes again. I am deeply puzzled. This bewilderment finds verbal expression. But the Maharshi has evidently reached the limit of his English, for he turns to the interpreter and the answer is slowly translated to me:

"There is only one thing to be done. Look into your own self. Do this in the right way and you shall find the answer to all your problems."

It is a strange rejoinder. But I ask him:

"What must one do? What method can I pursue?"

"Through deep reflection on the nature of one's self, and through constant meditation, the light can be found."

"I have frequently given myself up to meditation upon the truth, but I see no signs of progress."

"How do you know that no progress has been made? It is not easy to perceive one's progress in the spiritual realm."

"Is the help of a master necessary?"

"It might be."

"Can a master help a man to look into his own self in the way you suggest?"

"He can give the man all that he needs for this quest. Such a thing can be perceived through personal experience."

"How long will it take to get some enlightenment with a master's help?"

"It all depends on the maturity of the seeker's mind. The gunpowder catches fire in an instant, while much time is needed to set fire to coal."

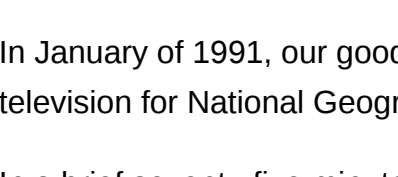
"Will the Maharshi express an opinion about the future of the world, for we are living in critical times?"

"Why should you trouble yourself about the future?" demands the sage. "You do not even properly know about the present! Take care of the present; the future will then take care of itself."

There is an abrupt pause. An attendant approaches and lights another incense stick. The Maharshi watches the blue smoke curl its way upwards and then picks up his manuscript book. He unfolds its pages and begins to work on it again, thus dismissing me from the field of his attention.

Feeling that our conversation is really at an end, I rise from the tiled floor, place my hands together in farewell, and leave him.

My proposed weekend quickly passes and I extend it to a week. The week passes and I extend it to a fortnight. Each day I sense the beautiful peace of the sage's mental atmosphere, the serenity which pervades the very air around him.



The last day of my visit arrives and yet I am no closer to him. My stay has been a tantalizing mixture of sublime moods and disappointing failures to effect any worthwhile personal contact with the Maharshi. I go out to one of his old disciples and tell him earnestly of my wish to have a final chat with his master. I confess that I feel too shy to tackle the sage myself. He leaves me and soon returns with the news that his master will be very pleased to grant the interview.

I hasten to the hall and sit down conveniently near the divan. The Maharshi turns his face immediately, his mouth relaxing into a pleasant greeting. Straightway, I feel at ease and begin to question him.

"The Yogis say that one must renounce this world and go off into secluded jungles or mountains, if one wishes to find truth. Such things can hardly be done in the West; our lives are so different. Do you agree with the Yogis?"

"The life of action need not be renounced. If you will meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities."

"What will be the result of doing that?"

"As you go on you will find that your attitude towards people, events and objects will gradually change. Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord."

"Then you do not agree with the Yogis?" I try to pin him down.

But the Maharshi eludes a direct answer.

"A man should surrender the personal selfishness which binds him to this world. Giving up the false self is the true renunciation."

"How is it possible to become selfless while leading a life of worldly activity?"

"There is no conflict between work and wisdom."

"Do you mean that one can continue all the old activities in one's profession, for instance, and at the same time get enlightenment?"

"Why not? But in that case one will not think that it is the old personality which is doing the work, because one's consciousness will gradually become transferred until it is centered in That which is beyond the little self."

"If a person is engaged in work, there will be little time left for him to meditate."

The Maharshi seems quite unperturbed at my poser.

"Setting apart time for meditation is only for the merest spiritual novices," he replies. "A man who is advancing will begin to enjoy the deeper beatitude, whether he is at work or not. While his hands are in society, he keeps his head cool in solitude."

"Then you do not teach the way of Yoga?"

"The Yogi tries to drive his mind to the goal, as a cowherd drives a bull with a stick, but on this path the seeker coaxes the bull by holding out a handful of grass!"

"How is that done?"

"You have to ask yourself the question, *Who am I?* This investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem, and you will solve all other problems thereby."

There is a pause as I try to digest his answer.

The Maharshi addresses me again:

"Will it be clearer if it is put in this way? All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow. They want to grasp a happiness which will not come to an end. The instinct is a true one. But have you ever been struck by the fact that they love their own selves most?"

"Well?"

"Now relate that to the fact that they are ever desirous of attaining happiness through one means or another, through dharma or through religion, and you are provided with a clue to the real nature of man."

"I fail to see . . ."

The tone of his voice becomes higher.

"Man's real nature is happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true self. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self. The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end."

"But the world is so unhappy?"

"Yes, but that is because the world is ignorant of its true self. All men, without exception, are consciously or unconsciously seeking for it."

*Editor's note: After this conversation, one by one, the hall empties. Paul Brunton sits alone facing the Maharshi. Brunton receives a piercing steady glance and begins to lose body consciousness; nevertheless, he breaks away and makes his departure. He eventually travels to Bombay and purchases his sea-voyage ticket back to England. But his two-week encounter with the Maharshi haunts him. He abandons his travel plans and returns to the Maharshi.*

Once there he settles in, builds a hut west of the Ashrama, and pursues the inner quest as taught by the Maharshi. And one day, his departure imminent, his health on the verge of collapse, he sits once again in the hall and attempts the inner quest. This time his efforts are quickly rewarded as the Maharshi turns his penetrating gaze on him.]

Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The intellect withdraws into its real ground, that is, consciousness working unhindered by thoughts. I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Yet my sense of awareness has been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublimely all-embracing. Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant self. For something that is far superior to the unimportant personality which was I, some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and becomes me. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. My heart is remoulded in rapture.

I return to this mundane sphere impelled by a force which I cannot resist. I discover I am still sitting in the hall of the Maharshi and that it is apparently deserted. My eyes catch sight of the hermitage clock and I realize that the inmates must be in the dining-room at the evening meal. And then I become aware of someone to my left. It is the ex-stationmaster, who is squatting close beside me on the floor.

"You have been in a spiritual trance for nearly two hours," he informs me.

I endeavor to make some reply, but discover to my astonishment that my power of speech has gone. Not for almost fifteen minutes do I recover it. Meanwhile the old man supplements with the further statement:

"The Maharshi watched you closely all the time. I believe his thoughts guided you."

With the fall of dusk I take my farewells of everyone except the Maharshi. I feel deeply content because my battle for spiritual certitude has been won. Yet when the Maharshi comes to the courtyard with me a little later, my contentment suddenly deserts me. This man has strangely conquered me and I quietly accept my feelings to leave him.

I raise my palms and close them together in the customary salutation and then mutter a brief goodbye. The sage smiles and looks at me fixedly, but says not a word.

One last look towards the Maharshi, one last glimpse by dim lantern light of a tall copper-skinned figure with lustrous eyes, another farewell gesture on my part, a slight wave of his right hand in parting, and we part.

Films from Sri Ramanasramam

Part 5

ON WEDNESDAY, the 11th of last December, Dr. Anil Sharma, co-editor of the MAHARSHI, flew from New York City for a three week visit to Sri Ramanasramam in South India. Only a few hours earlier he and Dennis Hartel were waiting in the office of John E. Allen, Inc. They quietly sat there at 10.00 a.m. anticipating the final-edited, 16mm, restored film to arrive by overnight delivery from California; they were, in fact, promised it would be there by 10.00 a.m. This day was the culminating point of a two year effort to collect, restore, edit and preserve all the films taken at Sri Ramanasramam during the years 1935 - 1950.

John Allen knew the project would take time. First of all, many of these films were suffering from acute triacetate base deterioration. That means that we were looking at reels of film with erratic distortions, twists, curls, shrinkage and loss of flexibility. This is the natural result of old acetate film being stored in uncontrolled conditions. Our films were a classic case of all that could go wrong in the storage of old films. Fortunately, there is a demand in this country for the restoration and preservation of old films and John E. Allen is the most competent filmologist on the East Coast.

Without delving into all the procedures, decisions, costs, companies sub-contracted and work involved prior to that anticipated day, we are happy to inform you that the final-edited film arrived from California as promised. Dr. Anil Sharma took it, along with all the old source films, with him to Ramanasramam, and on December 23rd, the 112th Jayanti Celebration of Arunachala Maharshi, this new, fifty-minute film was shown to a packed and enthusiastic crowd in the Samadhi Hall.

We have been informed that Ilaya Raaja, the famous South Indian music composer, has offered to take this film and make a video production from it. We have no indication as to when this will be completed or when it will be available here in North America. Of course, we will keep you informed.

The Video Biography

This documentary on the life of Ramana Maharshi is another project that has also been slowly evolving during the last two years.

The videographer, James Hartel, travelled to India with his brother Dennis over two years ago and shot all the required footage. This past January, more than two hundred hours were spent in a video-editing room in Buffalo, New York, and a seventy-five minute 'rough cut' on three-quarter inch tape was put together. This April and May, another editing session will probably be arranged in Buffalo. We hope to complete the project at this time and have it available at the New York Ashrama by the summer.

In January of 1991, our good friend *John Flynn* recorded the narration in a sound studio in Washington, D. C. Narrating films is his profession and his rich, articulate voice can often be heard narrating documentaries on television for National Geographic and on the Discoveries cable channel.

In a brief seventy-five minutes, we will take our viewers from the small, remote village of the Maharshi's birth, to his final days when the faithful masses press in from all sides to have one last look, a benediction, from the holy sage.

A panorama of scenes will pass over the screen: present-day views of all the places associated with the Maharshi's life; over fifty photographs, interspersed by many of the restored films from 1935 to 1950, and vivid interviews from some of the old devotees who have had intimate contact with him as early as 1916.

We are using every resource available to make this production tasteful and technically professional. All our friends, or anyone with the slightest interest in the life and teaching of Ramana Maharshi, will certainly value this visual life portrayal. We have been encouraged by, and received full cooperation from, the management of Sri Ramanasramam in South India. The final production will also be available through their Book Depot for distribution in India.

Sivaratri

ON March 2nd, the holy day of Sivaratri is observed throughout India. Devotees will fast during the day and remain awake the whole night performing worship, prayers and meditation.

At Sri Ramanasramam, many pious aspirants can be seen circumambulating the holy Arunachala Hill in the dead of night. Arunachala stands as a vibrant manifestation of Lord Siva, absorbing the hearts and minds of the devotees.

Sivaratri with the Maharshi

When T.K. Sundaresa Iyer was a boy of twelve he first visited the Maharshi on the Hill in 1908. That first meeting bonded him to Bhagavan for the remainder of his life and, consequently, he was a witness to many marvelous events in his Guru's presence. Here is one such incident on a holy Sivaratri night in Sri Ramanasramam, as recorded in his book, *At the Feet of Bhagavan*.

IT WAS SIVARATRI DAY. The evening worship at the Mother's shrine was over. The devotees had their dinner with Sri Bhagavan, who was now on his seat; the devotees at His feet sitting around him.

At 8:00 p.m. one of the *sadhus* stood up, did *pranam* (offered obeisance), and with folded hands prayed: "Today is the *Sivaratri Day*; we should be highly blessed by Sri Bhagavan expounding to us the meaning of the *Hymn to Dakshinamurthy (stotra)*."

Says Bhagavan: "Yes, sit down."

The *sadhu* sat, and all eagerly looked at Sri Bhagavan; Sri Bhagavan looked at them. Sri Bhagavan sat in his usual pose, no, pose. No words, no movement, and all was stillness! He sat still, and all sat still, waiting. The clock went on striking, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, one, two and three. Sri Bhagavan sat and they sat. Stillness, calmness, motionless - not conscious of the body, of space or time.

Thus eight hours passed in Peace, in Silence, in Being, as it is. Thus was the Divine Reality taught through the speech of Silence by Bhagavan Sri Ramana-Dakshinamurthy.

At the stroke of 4:00 a.m. Sri Bhagavan quietly said: "And now have you known the essence of the *Dakshinamurthy Hymn*?" All the devotees stood and made *pranam* to the holy form of the Guru in the ecstasy of their Being.

Jayanti Celebration in New York

The following report was submitted to us by Evelyn Kaselow Saphier, a longtime devotee from New York City.

THE NEW YORK FAMILY of devotees gathered at Arunachala Ashrama and celebrated Sri Bhagavan's *Jayanthi* on New Year's Day, 1992.

As usual, our celebration included *Ganesha Puja* performed by the attending children, a reading of the story of Sri Bhagavan's birth, the recitation and interpretation of *Kavyakantha Gananathi Muni's* verses on the Maharshi, numerous *bhajans* in several languages, the singing of *Alsharamanamalai*, *Upadesa Saram*, *Arunachala Pancaratnam* and the whole-hearted chanting of *Arunachala Siva*, *Arunachala Siva*, *Arunachala Siva*, *Arunachala*. This was followed by *Arati*.

After the ceremony we rejoiced in one another's company, and enjoyed a feast which had been prepared thanks to the devotion, love and affection of several lady devotees.

As ever, this sacred occasion afforded us an opportunity to ponder the extraordinary grace which has come to us. His grateful devotees, as a result of His birth and sojourn on earth. We pray that Sri Bhagavan may ever keep us at His lotus feet, inspiring us to remember Him and abide in Him always!

Arunachala Ashrama maintains year-round retreat facilities for individuals, families or groups in the picturesque Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia.

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.*