



THE MAHARSHI

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Here Lies The Heart

It is not uncommon to hear from those who had the good fortune of visiting the Maharshi, that their visit, however brief it may have been, was the most outstanding event in their lives. This may not have been true with everyone, but it was certainly true for a good percentage of earnest seekers who came to him for spiritual guidance and grace.

Mercedes de Acosta, a Spanish born American, made only a three-day visit to Sri Ramanasramam in November of 1938. She was at the time a Hollywood socialite and script writer for films, who was passing through both middle age and a series of disappointments in her career, life and marriage.

Near the end of her eventful life she wrote an autobiography, which was published in the United States by Reynal & Company, Inc. in 1960, and was titled Here Lies the Heart. In 1962, twenty-four years after she met the Maharshi, she sent the book to Sri Ramanasramam, inscribing it as an offering to Bhagavan. On the first page of the book, the formal printed dedication reads:

To Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi The Only Completely Egoless, World-Detached, and Pure Being I Have Ever Known

Continuing, she writes about a fascinating life, hobnobbing with the elite of Hollywood, famous artists, writers and celebrities of her day. The intimate accounts of her friendship with Greta Garbo and a few other famous actresses probably provided the publisher with the incentive to take on her book.

But what may seem curious to most readers - though logical to others who are alert to look beyond the superficialities of life - is that after intimately knowing many celebrated personalities of her day, travelling the world and experiencing what most people can only dream about, it was the Maharshi and her three day visit to him that remains in her memories as the most valuable experience in her life.

At one of the regular social dinners she attended in Hollywood, she met Paul Brunton. He presented her with his book, A Search in Secret India, which made a profound impression on her. Taking excerpts from Here Lies the Heart, we will let Mercedes de Acosta tell us what happened next.

A SEARCH IN SECRET INDIA had a profound influence on me. In it I learned for the first time about Ramana Maharshi, a great Indian saint and sage. It was as though some emanation of this saint was projected out of the book to me. For days and nights after reading about him I could not think of anything else. I became, as it were, possessed by him. I could not even talk of anything else. Nothing could distract me from the idea that I must go and meet this saint. From this time on, although I ceased to speak too much about it, the whole direction of my life turned toward India and away from Hollywood. I felt that I would surely go there, although there was nothing at this time to indicate that I would. Nevertheless, I felt I would meet the Maharshi and that this meeting would be the greatest experience of my life.

I had very little money, far too little to risk going to India, but something pushed me towards it. I went to the steamship company and booked myself one of the cheapest cabins on an Indian ship, the S. S. Victoria, sailing from Genoa to Bombay toward the beginning of October. In the meantime I flew to Dublin to see my sister.

I had booked passage to Ceylon intending from there to cross over to southern India and go directly to Tiruvannamalai, where Ramana Maharshi lived. But when the ship called at Bombay, Norina Matchabelli came on board to see me with a message from Meher Baba saying that Consuelo [a lady travelling companion who was a follower of Meher Baba] and I must get off the ship and come to see him in Ahmednagar, about two hours from Bombay. I did not want to do this as my real purpose in India was to see the Maharshi, and I was impatient to get to him.

[The author had met Meher Baba in California and for some time evinced considerable respect for him. However, her faith in him waned prior to coming to India, and once there, it all but evaporated. At Meher Baba's request - one of the few she consented to - she first made a tour of India, delaying her visit to the Maharshi.]

In Madras I hired a car, and so anxious was I to arrive in Tiruvannamalai that I did not go to bed and travelled by night, arriving about seven o'clock in the morning after driving almost eleven hours. I was very tired as I got out of the car in a small square in front of the temple [Arunachaleswara Temple]. The driver explained he could take me no farther. I turned toward the hill of Arunachala and hurried in the hot sun along the dust-covered road to the abode about two miles from town where the Sage dwelt. As I ran those two miles, deeply within myself I knew that I was running toward the greatest experience of my life.

When, dazed and filled with emotion, I first entered the hall, I did not quite know what to do. Coming from strong sunlight into the somewhat darkened hall, it was, at first, difficult to see; nevertheless, I perceived Bhagavan at once, sitting in the Buddha posture on his couch in the corner. At the same moment I felt overcome by some strong power in the hall, as if an invisible wind was pushing violently against me. For a moment I felt dizzy. Then I recovered myself. To my great surprise I suddenly heard an American voice calling out to me, "Hello, come in." It was the voice of an American named Guy Hague, who originally came from Long Beach, California. He told me later that he had been honourably discharged from the American Navy in the Philippines and had then worked his way to India, taking up the study of yoga when he reached Bombay. Then he heard about Sri Ramana Maharshi and, feeling greatly drawn to him, decided to go to Tiruvannamalai. When I met him he had already been with the Maharshi for a year, sitting uninterruptedly day and night in the hall with the sage.

He rose from where he was sitting against the wall and came toward me, taking my hand and leading me back to a place beside him against the wall. He did not at first speak to me, allowing me to pull myself together. I was able to look around the hall, but my gaze was drawn to Bhagavan, who was sitting absolutely straight in the Buddha posture looking directly in front of him. His eyes did not blink or in any way move. Because they seemed so full of light I had the impression they were grey. I learned later that they were brown, although there have been various opinions as to the colour of his eyes. His body was naked except for a loincloth. I discovered soon after, that this and his staff were absolutely his only possessions. His body seemed firm and as if tanned by the sun, although I found that the only exercise he ever took was a twenty-minute walk every afternoon at five o'clock when he walked on the hill and sometimes greeted yogis who came to prostrate themselves at his feet.

He was a strict vegetarian, but he only ate what was placed before him and he never expressed a desire for any kind of food. As he sat there he seemed like a statue, and yet something extraordinary emanated from him. I had a feeling that on some invisible level I was receiving spiritual shocks from him, although his gaze was not directed toward me. He did not seem to be looking at anything, and yet I felt he could see and was conscious of the whole world.

"Bhagavan is in samadhi," Guy Hague said.

I looked around. Squatting on the floor or sitting in the Buddha posture or lying prostrate face down, a number of Indians prayed - some of them reciting their mantras out loud. Several small monkeys came into the hall and approached Bhagavan. They climbed onto his couch and broke the stillness with their gay chatter. He loved animals and any kind was respected and welcomed by him in the ashram. They were treated as equals of humans and always addressed by their names. Sick animals were brought to Bhagavan and kept by him on his couch or on the floor beside him until they were well. Many animals had died in his arms. When I was there he had a much-loved cow who wandered in and out of the hall, and often lay down beside him and licked his hand. He loved to tell stories about the goodness of animals. It was remarkable that none of the animals ever fought or attacked each other.

After I had been sitting several hours in the hall listening to the mantras of the Indians and the incessant droning of flies, and lost in a sort of inner world, Guy Hague suggested that I go and sit near the Maharshi. He said, "You can never tell when Bhagavan will come out of samadhi. When he does, I am sure he will be pleased to see you, and it will be beneficial for you, at this moment, to be sitting near him."

I moved near Bhagavan, sitting at his feet and facing him. Guy was right. Not long after this Bhagavan opened his eyes. He moved his head and looked directly down at me, his eyes looking into mine. It would be impossible to describe this moment and I am not going to attempt it. I can only say that at this second I felt my inner being raised to a new level - as if, suddenly, my state of consciousness was lifted to a much higher degree. Perhaps in this split second I was no longer my human self but the Self. Then Bhagavan smiled at me. It seemed to me that I had never before known what a smile was. I said, "I have come a long way to see you."

There was silence. I had stupidly brought a piece of paper on which I had written a number of questions I wanted to ask him. I fumbled for it in my pocket, but the questions were already answered by merely being in his presence. There was no need for questions or answers. Nevertheless, my dull intellect expressed one.

"Tell me, whom shall I follow - what shall I follow? I have been trying to find this out for years by seeking in religions, in philosophies, in teachings." Again there was silence. After a few minutes, which seemed to me a long time, he spoke.

"You are not telling the truth. You are just using words - just talking. You know perfectly well whom to follow. Why do you need me to confirm it?"

"You mean I should follow my inner self?" I asked.

"I don't know anything about your inner self. You should follow the Self. There is nothing or no one else to follow."

I asked again, "What about religions, teachers, gurus?"

"If they can help in the quest of the Self. But can they help? Can religion, which teaches you to look outside yourself, which promises a heaven and a reward outside yourself, can this help you? It is only by diving deep into the spiritual Heart that one can find the Self." He placed his right hand on his right breast and continued, "Here lies the Heart, the dynamic, spiritual Heart. It is called Hridaya and is located on the right side of the chest and is clearly visible to the inner eye of an adept on the spiritual path. Through meditation you can learn to find the Self in the cave of the Heart."

It is a strange thing but when I was very young, Ignacio Zuloaga said to me, "All great people function with the heart." He placed his hand over my physical heart and continued, "See, here lies the heart. Always remember to think with it, to feel with it, and above all, to judge with it."

But the Enlightened One raised the counsel to a higher level. He said, "Find the Self in the real Heart."

Both, just at the right moment in my life, showed me the way.

People would say to Bhagavan, "I would like to find God." His answer was:

"Find the Self first and then you won't have to worry about God." And once a man said to him, "I don't know whether to be a Catholic or a Buddhist."

Bhagavan asked him, "What are you now?"

He answered, "I am a Catholic."

He then said, "Go home and be a good Catholic and then you will know whether you should be a Buddhist or not."

Bhagavan pointed out to me that the real Self is timeless. "But," he said, "in spite of ignorance, no man takes seriously the fact of death. He may see death around him, but he still does not believe that he will die. He believes, or rather, feels, in some strange way that death is not for him. Only when the body is threatened does he fall a victim to the fear of death. Every man believes himself to be eternal, and this is actually the truth. This truth asserts itself in spite of man's ignorant belief that the body is the Self."

I asked him how to pray for other people. He answered, "If you are abiding within the Self, there are no other people. You and I are the same. When I pray for you I pray for myself and when I pray for myself I pray for you. Real prayer is to abide within the Self. This is the meaning of Tat Twam Asi - That Thou Art. There can be no separation in the Self. There is no need for prayer for yourself or any person other than to abide within the Self."

I said, "Bhagavan, you say that I am to take up the search for the Self by Atma Vichara, asking myself the question Who Am I? May I ask who are you?" Bhagavan answered, "When you know the Self, the 'I' 'You' 'He' and 'She' disappear. They merge together in pure Consciousness."

Noticing one time what I thought were some evil-looking priests who had come from the temple, I remarked on them to Bhagavan. He said, "What do you mean by evil? I do not know the difference between what you call good and evil. To me they are both the same thing - just the opposite sides of the coin." I should have known this. Bhagavan was, of course, beyond duality. He was beyond love and hatred, beyond good and evil, and beyond all pairs of opposites.

To write of this experience with Bhagavan, to recapture and record all that he said, or all that his silences implied, is like trying to put the infinite into an egg cup. One small chapter cannot in any way do him justice or give an impression of his enlightenment, and I do not think that I am far enough spiritually advanced - if at all - to try to interpret his supreme knowledge. On me he had, and still has, a profound influence. I feel it presumptuous to say he changed my life. My life was perhaps not so important as all this. But I definitely saw life differently after I had been in his presence, a presence that had by merely "being" was sufficient spiritual nourishment for a lifetime. It may have been that when I returned from India, undiscerning people saw very little change in me. But there was a change - a transformation of my entire consciousness. And how could it have been otherwise? I had been in the atmosphere of an egoless, world-detached, and completely pure being.

I sat in the hall with Bhagavan three days and three nights. Sometimes he spoke to me; other times he was silent and I did not interrupt his silence. Often he was in samadhi. I wanted to stay on there with him but finally he told me that I should go back to America. He said, "There will be what will be called a 'war,' but which, in reality, will be a great world revolution. Every country and every person will be touched by it. You must return to America. Your destiny is not in India at this time." Before leaving the ashram, Bhagavan gave me some verses he had selected from the Yoga Vasishtha. He said they contained the essence for the path of a pure life.

"Steady in the state of fullness, which shines when all desires are given up, and peaceful in the state of freedom in life, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Inwardly free from all desires, dispassionate and detached, but outwardly active in all directions, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Free from egoism, with mind detached as in sleep, pure like the sky, ever untainted, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Conducting yourself nobly with kindly tenderness, outwardly conforming to conventions, but inwardly renouncing all, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

"Quite unattached at heart but for all appearance acting as with attachment, inwardly cool but outwardly full of fervour, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!"

I sorrowfully said farewell to Bhagavan. As I was leaving he said, "You will return here again." I wonder. Since his physical presence has gone I wonder if I shall. Yet often I feel the pull of Arunachala as though it were drawing me back. I feel the pull of that sacred hill of which he was so much a part and where his mortal body lies buried.

— continued in the Nov / Dec issue

Extracts from Talks, #583, #587 22,24 November, 1938
#583 - 22 November, 1938
Mr.V.Ganapati Sastri showed Sri Bhagavan a letter from a Spanish lady, Mercedes De Acosta [sic], saying she would be coming here the next day. Sri Bhagavan remarked: "See the trouble to so many because I am here."
#587 - 24 November, 1938
The Spanish lady and her lady friend have come. They asked: "You say the Heart is on the right. Can you explain how it is so?" Sri Bhagavan handed over the extract from the Psychological Review of Philadelphia for her to read. He also added the Heart is the place wherefrom the 'I'-thought arises.
D.: So you mean the spiritual Heart as distinguished from the physical heart ?
M.: Yes. It is explained in Chapter. V of Sri Ramana Gita.
D.: Is there any stage when one might feel the Heart?
M.: It is within the experience of everyone. Everyone touches the right side of the chest when they say 'I'.
Both the ladies kneeled before Sri Bhagavan, one after another, and asked for blessings. Then they left for Pondicherry on their way to Colombo.
Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi

Roaming and a Death Experience in 1912 by Arthur Osborne

There was a time when Sri Bhagavan used to roam the hill frequently as well as climbing to the summit and making Pradakshina (circuit), so that he knew every part of it. And then one day, when he was wandering alone, he passed an old woman gathering fuel on the hillside. She looked like a common outcast woman, but she addressed the young Swami fearlessly, as an equal. Beginning with the rough cursing common to such people, she said: "May you be put on the funeral pyre! Why do you wander about in the sun like that? Why don't you sit quiet?"

"It can have been no ordinary woman," Sri Bhagavan said when he told the devotees about it: "Who knows who she was?" Certainly, no ordinary outcast woman would have dared to speak to a Swami like that. The devotees took it to be a manifestation of Arunagiri Siddha, the Spirit of Arunachala. From that time Sri Bhagavan gave up roaming the hillside.

When Sri Bhagavan first went to Tiruvannamalai he sometimes moved about in a state of trance. This did not completely end until about 1912 when there was a final and complete experience of death. He set out from Virupaksha Cave one morning for Pachaimman Koil [1], accompanied by Palaniswami, Vasudeva Sastri and others. He had an oil-bath there and was nearing Tortoise Rock on the way back when a sudden physical weakness overcame him. He described it fully afterwards.

"The landscape in front of me disappeared as a bright white curtain was drawn across my vision and shut it out. I could distinctly see the ground process. There was a space when I could still see a part of the landscape clearly while the rest was covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing a slide across one's view in a stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking lest I should fall. When I cleared I walked on. When darkness and faintness came over me a second time I leaned against a rock until it cleared. The third time it happened I felt it safer to sit, so I sat down near the rock. Then the bright white curtain completely shut off my vision, my head was to be dead and held my circulation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death hue and it got darker and darker. Vasudeva Sastri, in fact, took me to be dead and held me in his arms and began to weep aloud and lament my death.

"I could distinctly feel his clasp and his shivering and hear his words of lamentation and understand their meaning. I also saw the discoloration of my skin and felt the stoppage of my circulation and breathing and the increased chilliness of the extremities of my body. My usual current of awareness still continued in that state also. I was not in the least afraid of felt no sadness at the condition of the body. I had sat down near the rock in my usual posture and closed my eyes and was not leaning against the rock. The body, left without circulation or respiration, still maintained that position. This state continued for some ten or fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed suddenly through the body and circulation revived with enormous force, and breathing also, and the body perspired from every pore. The colour of life reappeared on the skin. I then opened my eyes and got up and said, 'Let's go.' We reached Virupaksha Cave without further trouble. This was the only fit I had in which both circulation and respiration stopped."

Later, to correct wrong accounts that began to be spread, he added: "I did not bring on the fit purposely, nor did I wish to see what this body would look like after death, nor did I say that I will not leave this body without warning others. It was one of those fits that I used to get occasionally, only this time it took a very serious form."

What is, perhaps, most striking about this experience is that it was a repetition, heightened by actual physical demonstration, of that certainty of endurance through death which had constituted Sri Bhagavan's spiritual awakening. It recalls the verse from Thyumanavar, the Tamil classic which Sri Bhagavan often quoted: "When overpowered by the wide Expanse which is without beginning, end or middle, there is the realization of non-dual bliss."

It may be that this marked the final completion of Sri Bhagavan's return to full outer normality. It is hard to give any impression of how normal he was in his mode of life and yet it is necessary, for the description of his previous austerity may leave the idea of someone's return and forbidding. On the contrary, his manner was natural and free from all constraint and the newcomer immediately felt at his ease. His conversation was full of humour and his laughter so infectious, so like that of a child, that even those who did not understand the language would join in.

— From "Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self Knowledge"

An Invitation

We take pleasure in inviting you, your family or friends to join us in celebrating Sri Ramana Maharshi's ADVENT AT ARUNACHALA

on Sunday September 4, 1994

at 11:00 a.m.

Arunachala Ashrama Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center

In Nova Scotia: 1451 Clarendon Road R.R.1, Bridgetown Nova Scotia B0S 1C0 tel: 902 665-2090

In New York City: 72-63 Yellowstone Blvd. Forest Hills, Queens New York, 11375-4132 tel: 718 575-3215

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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