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From the Early Days

The following article was first published in the September 1931 monthly magazine called PEACE, the journal of Swami Omkar's Shanti Ashrama in Andhra Pradesh. It was later reprinted in the April, 1966 issue of The Mountain Path.

It describes Paul Brunton's first visit to Sri Ramanaswamam and one of the dialogues he had with the Maharshi. In this article, his former name "Hurst" was used. He later adopted Paul Brunton as his pen name which he ultimately made his permanent name.

It is interesting to note what an event a visit from a foreign journalist to the Ashrama was in those far-off days — something to be written about in the newspapers.

Sitting on a chair when the Mahashivratri will be celebrated

My past visits to the abode of the Maharshi were filled with memorable events. Every minute of the stay was filled with observable occurrences, but this time, why wasn't I feeling anything? In fact, I was acutely aware, on the physical level, of all the noise, the crowds and the routine of life at the ashramam. I sat in the Old Hall, observed the pupils to Bhagavan's left, the devotees to the Hindu, to the Tamil, parayana, aadiyil around in the *Mahabhaaratam Script* and did the giripradakshina on Mahaswamiah night. But I couldn't understand why all these activities lacked the emotional intensity that I had always experienced and now expected.

IT WAS half past four in the afternoon and the disciples were sitting before the Maharshi in the hall and were talking about a notification that had appeared in the dailies [newspapers] to the effect that a film star and a Buddhist Bhikshu were intending to visit the Ashrama. The clock struck two and there entered the hall a man in European costume, bearing a plate of sweets and followed by a Buddhist monk. The visitors offered the sweets to the Maharshi and then, after making obeisance in the Eastern way, they both squatted on the floor before him. These were the visitors of whom the disciples had been talking. The man in English clothes was R. Raghavl Hurst *[Paul Brunton]*, a London journalist who was then on a visit to India. He was keenly interested in the spiritual teaching of the East and thought that by an intelligent study and appreciation of it the cause of cooperation between East and West might be greatly promoted. He came to Sri Ramanaswamam after visiting many other ashrams. The Bhikshu who came with him was also an Englishman by birth. He was formerly a military officer but was known as Swami Pranjanananda. He was the founder of the English Ashrama in Rangoon. Both visitors sat spellbound before Maharshi and there was an all-drop silence. The silence was broken by the person who had brought the visitors, asking them if they would like to ask any questions.

They were, however, not in a mood to do so, and thus an hour and a half passed. Mr. Hurst then stated the purpose of his visit. In a voice of intense earnestness he said that he had come to India for spiritual enlightenment. "Not only myself," he added, "but many others also in the West are longing for the Light from the East."

The Maharshi sat completely unmoved and paid no attention. One of those who were sitting there asked them if they had come to the East for a study of comparative religions. "No," the Bhikshu replied, "we could get that better in Europe. We want to find Truth; we want the Light. Can we know Truth? Is it possible to get Enlightenment?" The Maharshi still remained silent and inhaled, as did the visitors who seemed to take a walk, the conversation ended and all dispersed.

Sri Pranjananda, the Maharshi and Paul Brunton (Hurst) in the front row

Early next morning the visitors entered the hall and put some questions to the Maharshi with great earnestness. The conversation reproduced below is from rough notes taken while it was going on.

Bhikshu: How have travelled far and wide in search of Enlightenment. How can we get it?

Maharshi: Through deep enquiry and confident meditation.

Hurst: Many people do meditation in the West but show no signs of progress.

Maharshi: How do you know that they don't make progress? Spiritual progress is not easily discernible.

Hurst: A few years ago I got some glimpses of the Bliss but in the years that followed I lost it again. Then last year I again got it. Why is that?

Maharshi: You lost it because your meditation had not become natural (sahaja). When you become habitually immersed the enjoyment of spiritual beatitude becomes a normal experience.

Hurst: Might it be due to the lack of a Guru?

Maharshi: Yes, but the Guru is within; that Guru who is within is identical with your Self.

Hurst: What is the way to God-realization?

Maharshi: Vichara, asking yourself the 'Who am I?' enquiry into the nature of your Self.

Bhikshu: The world is in a state of degeneration. It is getting constantly worse, spiritually, morally, intellectually and in every way. Will a spiritual teacher come to save it from chaos?

Maharshi: Inevitably, when goodness declines and wrong prevails He comes to reinstate goodness. The world is neither too good nor too bad; it is a mixture of the two. Unmixed happiness and unmixed sorrow are not found in the world. The world always needs God and God always comes.

Bhikshu: Will he be born in the East or the West?

The Maharshi laughed at the question but did not answer it.

Hurst: Does the Maharshi know whether an Avatar already exists in the physical body?

Maharshi: He might.

Hurst: What is the best way to attain Godhood?

Maharshi: Self-enquiry leads to Self-realization.

Hurst: Is a Guru necessary for spiritual progress?

Maharshi: Yes.

Hurst: Is it possible for the Guru to help the disciple forward on the path?

Maharshi: Yes.

Hurst: What are the conditions for discipleship?

Maharshi: Intense desire for Self-realization, earnestness and purity of mind.

Hurst: Is it necessary to surrender one's life to the Guru?

Maharshi: Yes. One should surrender everything to the Dispeller of Darkness. One should surrender the ego that binds one to this world. Giving up body-consciousness is the true surrender.

Hurst: Does a Guru want to take control of the disciple's worldly affairs also?

Maharshi: Yes, everything.

Hurst: Can he give the disciple the spiritual spark that he needs?

Maharshi: He can give him all that he needs. This can be seen from experience.

Hurst: Is it necessary to be in physical contact with the Guru, and if so, for how long?

Maharshi: It depends on the maturity of the disciple. Gurupowder catches fire in an instant, while it takes time to ignite coal.

Hurst: Is it possible to develop the path of the Spirit while leading a life of work?

Maharshi: There is no conflict between work and wisdom. On the contrary, selfless work paves the way to Self-knowledge.

Hurst: If a person is engaged in work it will leave him little time for meditation.

Maharshi: It is only spiritual novices who need to set aside a special time for meditation. A more advanced person always enjoys the Beatitude whether he is engaged in work or not. While he hands are in society he can keep his head cool in solitude.

Bhikshu: Have you heard of Meher Baba?

Maharshi: Yes.

Bhikshu: He says that he will become an Avatar in a few years.

Maharshi: Everyone is an Avatar of God. "The kingdom of heaven is within you," Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Krishna, all are in you. One who knows the Truth sees everyone else as a manifestation of God.

Bhikshu: Will the Maharshi make a statement about Meher Baba?

Maharshi: What statement? That the existence of an outer **Avatar** is a question which seekers of Truth need not consider.

Bhikshu: Will the world be rejuvenated?

Maharshi: There is One who governs the world and it is His business to look after it. He who has created the world knows how to guide it also.

Bhikshu: Does the world progress now?

Maharshi: If we progress the world progresses. As you are, so is the world. Without understanding the Self what is the use of understanding the world? Without Self-knowledge, knowledge of the world is of no use. Dive inward and find the treasure hidden there. Open your heart and see the world through the eyes of the true Self. Tear aside the veils and see the divine majesty of your own Self.

The 25th Anniversary Celebration
At The Nova Scota Ashrama

You, your family and friends are warmly invited to attend the 25th anniversary of Arunachala Ashrama, Bhagwan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center in *Nova Scotia, Canada* at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday 31 August 1997. The program will consist of puja, bhajans, talks, arati and prasad (meal).

101st Anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's Advent at Arunachala
At the New York Ashrama

In New York you are cordially invited to join us in celebrating the 101st anniversary of Sri Ramana Maharshi's arrival at the holy Sri Arunachala Hill. The program will start at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 31, 1997.

Arunachala Ashrama
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Center

Brazilian Devotees Commemorate A Silver Jubilee

For more than two decades we have had the good fortune of occasionally meeting, but more often, hearing from members of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista, a Center dedicated to Sri Ramana Maharshi in Boa de Esperanca, Brazil. The president of this Center, Nelson Lara dos Reis, will invariably visit our New York Ashrama whenever he travels to the U.S. on business. He called us from Brazil on the day of their 25th Anniversary celebration and also visited the Ashrama in New York on July 21. On that day he personally delivered the following letter:

Dearest Brothers:

The year of 1997 is a very important milestone for Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi Brazilian devotees. A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista completes twenty-five years of existence.

Daura Silva Franc, after years of work and dedication to the Arunachala Group in Brazil, finally succeeded in founding an Ashrama in Rio de Janeiro on May 3rd, 1972. She fulfilled her mission with forty-nine friends who signed the Articles of Association of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista.

Since that day, our "House," as we gently call the Ashrama, has been proclaiming Maharshi's teachings. The Advaita doctrine, through Self-enquiry (Vichara) as an instrument for realization, is the focus of our prayers and meetings.

In addition to the Ashrama, our Center also maintains a house to serve the aged, named "Casa de Ramana" (Ramana House for the Old People). At present, seven elderly ladies reside there.

The Ashrama is part of the Silver Jubilee Commemoration of the Ashrama led us to the recollection and memories of the July 1982 issue of *The Mountain Path* magazine. In this issue, the Ramana devotees of the world were informed of the existence of the Ramana Center in Rio de Janeiro. This is the reason why we are once more writing to you in Arunachala Ashrama. We would be glad if through your newsletter we could share with devotees the happiness of this milestone in the history of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista.

We pray to Ramana that His Grace may remain with us and that we may be blessed to commemorate many more 25-year anniversaries.

As our Master praised Lord Arunachala, we devotees in Brazil, living our pure ion its graceful eyes, repeat His verses:

Whoever can find You? The eye of the eye is Thou, that without eyes can see me, Oh Arunachala!
Even from none Thou have me and save, penetrating into my Heart, Thou have brought me within Yourself. So great is Thy Grace, Oh Arunachala!

Sincerely,
Nelson Lara dos Reis
President

My Reminiscences

By *N.Balarama Reddy*

In 1993, two years before his passing, *Balarama Reddy* dictated these reminiscences to a devotee. It is the inspired story of his early life and an inner quest which eventually brought him under the watchful eye of Sr.Ramana Maharshi in the year 1937. Our readers will remember reading these reminiscences serialized in *The Mahavishnu Path* magazine. In this issue, the Ramana devotees of the world were informed of the existence of the Ramana Center in Rio de Janeiro. This is the reason why we are once more writing to you in Arunachala Ashrama. We would be glad if through your newsletter we could share with devotees the happiness of this milestone in the history of A Luz no Caminho-Associacao Espiritualista.

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Sincerely,
Nelson Lara dos Reis
President

My Reminiscences