

T e s t i m o n y o f I s l a m t o B h a g a v a n ' s L i f e a n d T e a c h i n g s

THE GREATNESS OF Ramana Maharshi's unique life and teachings consists in the fact that he was unacquainted with the scriptures of the world and yet after his Self-realization the knowledge of Infinity was open to him. To quote a line from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, "When an unlettered person's mind is made one-pointed, the inner and outer knowledge is revealed to him. He comes in direct contact with the supreme Source of his Being."

The devotees of Ramana are acquainted with his simple and uneventful life. He lived a plain life to the end. He was without any pose or pretensions. Not only that he was a great teacher and lived in a high plane of his own but he was utterly human in every day life. He had love and sympathy for every living creature as a true Brahmin should have. He mended his own stick, took part in the cutting of vegetables and cooking some food now and then. His sense of unity and equality of mankind was so great that he never accepted anything prepared for himself but had it distributed equally to all persons present in his hall. Men of every race, caste, creed, sex, high and low, rich and poor, visited him and to him all were alike. He never showed any preference to men of position or looked down upon a pariah or a *panchama*. To him all were accessible.

So was the Prophet of Islam. He believed in the brotherhood of man and treated all men alike. He used to say to his followers, *Ana mislakum*, that is "I am one like you". To him Jew or gentile, Muslim or non-Muslim were alike. Whenever a non-Muslim visited him when he was sitting in his mosque engaged in prayer he would at once rise up from his seat, spread his own cloak and seat him respectfully. He mended his own shoes and patched up his own worn-out garment. Nothing was left in his household for the morrow. All that he received during the course of a day was distributed to the needy and the poor. He often said *Al faqr fakhri*, that is to say, 'poverty is my pride'. He took keen interest in the welfare of human beings and used to retire to a cave for spiritual meditation. Thus we see there is a close similarity between his life and that of our beloved Maharshi.

We all know how Maharshi repeatedly enjoined us to surrender completely to God's will and be at peace with all, sink and bury our differences. In fact once he said, "Burn them and turn to the abode of peace, your own heart." Islam is derived from the root *Salama* which means peace, tranquillity and finally surrender of oneself to the Divine. 'The word Islam', says Deutch, a German writer, 'implies absolute submission to God's will'. Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph, the son-in-law of the Prophet said that "No one can have any conception of God unless he knows his own Self." Thus confirming Bhagavan's repeated teachings in all his well known books.

One mystic poet says, "What I have done with myself, no one has ever done it for himself. Within my own house (body) I have lost the owner of my house (that is my own self)". Does it not bear testimony to Bhagavan's inspiring words?

Further it is said in the Quran, "We are of God and to Him shall we return" (*Quran*, Chapter II, verse 156). This clearly indicates whence we came and whither we are going. Man's inherent divinity is expressed in these unequivocal words of the *Quran*. "God breathed His own breath in the nostril of man. Man was created after the face of God."

In the Ghaznavids and Early Saljuq's period there was a great philosopher-poet *Nasir-e-Khusrau*, who was acknowledged as a mystic of a great order. In his poem *Raushani nama* on Self-knowledge he writes, bearing full testimony to Bhagavan's well-known teachings:

Know yourself; for if you know yourself

You will also know the difference between good and evil.
First become intimate with your own inner being,
Then become the commander of the whole company.
When you know yourself, you know everything;
When you know that, you have escaped from all evil.
you are like this;

You don't know your own worth, because

You see God Himself, if you see yourself.
The nine spheres and seven stars are your slaves,
Yet you are your body's servant: that's a pity!
Don't be fettered to bestial pleasures
If you are a seeker of that supreme blessedness.
Be a real man and abandon sleep and fasting;
Pilgrim-like, make a journey into yourself.
What are sleep and fasting? The business of brute beasts;
It is by knowledge that your soul subsists.
Be wakeful for once: how long have you been sleeping?
Look at yourself: you're something wonderful enough.
Reflect now; regard from where you've come
And why you are now in this prison.
Break the cage; depart to your own celestial station;
Be an idol-breaker like Abraham, Azar's son.
You were created after this fashion for a purpose;
It will be a shame, if you neglect that purpose.
It is a shame for an angel to take orders from a devil;
It is a shame for a king to be servant to a doorkeeper.
Why must Jesus be blind?
It is wrong for *Karun* to be one-eyed.
You have snakes coiled over your treasure:
Kill those snakes, and be free of pain.
But if you feed them, you will become fearful,
You'll have nothing of that boundless treasure.
There's a treasure in your house, yet you're a beggar;
You have a salve in your hand, yet your heart is wounded.
You are asleep; how will you reach journey's end?
You weave charms, and are heedless of the treasure. Quick, break the charm and take the treasure:
Take a little pain, and rid yourself of pain.

Jalaluddin Rumi, prince of mystics, quoted by R.A. Nicholson in his *Rumi, Poet and Mystic*, says:

Jalalu'l-Din was asked, "Is there any way to God nearer than the ritual prayer?" "No," he replied, "but prayer does not consist in forms alone. Formal prayer has a beginning and an end, like all forms and bodies and everything that partakes of speech and sound; but the soul is unconditioned and infinite: it has neither beginning nor end. The prophets have shown the true nature of prayer. . . . Prayer is the drowning and unconsciousness of the soul, so that all these forms remain without. At that time there is no room even for Gabriel, who is pure spirit. One may say that the man who prays in this fashion is exempt from all religious obligations, since he is deprived of his reason. Absorption in the Divine Unity is the soul of prayer."

"When a fly is plunged in honey, all the members of its body are reduced to the same condition, and it does

not move. Similarly the term *istighraq* (absorption in God) is applied to one who has no conscious existence or initiative or movement. Any action that proceeds from him is not his own. If he is still struggling in the water, or if he cries out, 'Oh, I am drowning', he is not said to be in the state of absorption. This is what is signified by the words *Ana'l-Haqq*, 'I am God'. People imagine that it is a presumptuous claim, whereas it is really a presumptuous claim to say '*Ana'l-'abd*', 'I am the slave of God' and '*Ana'l-Haqq*', 'I am God', is an expression of great humility. The man who says, '*Ana'l-'abd*' 'I am the slave of God,' affirms two existences, his own and God's, but he that says '*Ana'l-Haqq*' 'I am God' has made himself non-existent and has given himself up and says, 'I am God,' i.e. 'I am naught, He is all: there is no being but God's.' This is the extreme of humility and self-abasement."

These two quotations bear fullest and clearest testimony to Bhagavan's teachings as embodied in his books *Self Enquiry* and *Who am I?* and others.



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R a m a n a M a h a r s h i ' s S p i r i t u a l P h i l o s o p h y o f L i f e

It is only the sage who has realised the Truth Eternal that keeps the flame of spiritual wisdom alive. He is the perennial source of inspiration to the earnest aspirant on the path of spiritual development. Without him the world would not have had the light of the spirit to dispel the darkness of material existence.

Of such wisdom is sage Sri Ramana, who embodies in himself the Truth that is beyond time and space, who stands supreme in the realm of spiritual attainment and who is the true benefactor of the whole of the human race. In him we see that glorious realization which at once, includes and transcends all religions through the revelation that the only true religion is the religion of the heart. His teachings give the clearest expression to that one, inexpressible, universal, spiritual experience, seeking which, every earnest aspirant treads the path of inward spiritual development. To such an aspirant the Maharishi's teachings are a revelation of that Truth Eternal which ever resides as one and is identical with himself.

The nature of the world — Reality — whatever it be — is no hurdle to one who follows the path pointed out by the Maharshi. His insistence is not so much on deciding the unreality of the world as on discovering the Self. In one of the books published some years ago by the Ashram, the Maharshi brings out his point of view in a striking manner in reply to a question as to whether the objectivity of the world is not an indisputable fact of sense perception and whether this objectivity is not itself proof positive of the world's reality. Here is the Maharshi's answer: "The world, which you say is real is really mocking you for seeking to prove its reality, while of your own Reality you are ignorant." Even if we are of the world, the Maharshi wants us to see things in their proper perspective. Discussions about the Reality or otherwise of the world, should be of secondary importance to the earnest seeker whose one aim should be to seek the Self, the 'I' of which he can have the least doubt and the quest whereof, can alone lead him to the one that alone is real.

That Reality requires no proof, for it is Self-evident. It requires no proof, for it is Self-existing (*Svata-siddha*). It requires no scholarly exposition, for it is Self-luminous (*Svaprakasa*). What is required is not the proof or refutation of anything, but the poise in and the realization of the ever-existent, unchanging Self or the *Atman*.

It would be interesting to note in this connection what the Maharshi says regarding the true nature of sleep, for this will give us an idea as to what the state of pure consciousness would be in relation to life as we know it. One is not really enveloped in ignorance, says the Maharshi, when one is actually asleep. Sleep is not a state of non-existence nor mere blankness as we suppose it to be. It is a pure state. And what we call the waking consciousness does not necessarily contribute to true knowledge.

It is really a state of ignorance, because as a rule we are forgetful or unaware of our real nature. The Maharshi uses a striking paradox in order to impress on us the all-comprehensive nature of pure consciousness. He says, "There is full awareness in sleep and total ignorance in the waking state," and adds, "The Self is beyond both knowledge and ignorance." To put it briefly, sleep, dream and waking are only different modes of our higher consciousness.

ETERNAL AWARENESS: What then is realization? What is the relation between our life experience of ignorant existence and the state of realization which is all-embracing? The Maharshi's exposition on this point is most illuminating. "Realization", he declares, "is here and now. It is nothing to be gained afresh. The Self is not 'reached', you are the Self."

Most of us are prone to think we have not yet realized the Self, that we are *ajnanis*, but the Maharshi reminds us that this is merely our own thought about ourselves and that is the real obstacle in the way. It is not some objectified Self that is declared to be eternal. Our awareness of the Self is itself eternal. They are one and identical. In the words of the Maharshi there has never been a time when we are not aware of That, the Self. It is the never-ending, timeless state and it is in It that we live, move and have our being.

CLEAREST DEFINITION: Elucidating further the same point Maharshi says that the happiness the mind feels when agreeable things are presented to it is nothing but the happiness inherent to the Self. On these occasions it is verily into the Self that one dives. But the association of ideas is responsible for foisting the inherent bliss in us on things extraneous, because the plugging into the Self was unconsciously done. If you do so consciously, with the conviction that comes from experience that you are identical with that happiness which is verily the Self, the only Reality, you call it realization. That is the most realistic definition of Self-realization, and shorn of all mystery it is the clearest one you can have on the subject.

A SHACKLE: Answering the question from the particular point of view of the individual who has to do some specific work, the Maharshi reiterates in his own words what Sri Krishna taught five thousand years ago. "Work performed with attachment is a shackle, whereas work done with detachment does not affect the doer who may be said to be in solitude, even while he is free from attachment and has no desire."

Just as renunciation is not retirement into the forest, solitude is not seclusion from life. The Maharshi considers that solitude is related more to the inner working of the mind of man than in keeping away from the active life of the outer world. Solitude is of the mind, not of the body. It is the attitude of supreme serenity with which one views the flow of events in life and does not signify from the highest point of view living in seclusion and retirement.

One of the finest definitions of renunciation ever given is vouchsafed to us by the Maharshi, who says, "The Self alone is permanent. Renunciation is the non-identification of the Self with the not-Self. When the ignorance which identifies the Self with the not-Self is removed, the latter ceases to exist and that is true renunciation."

This definition, so simple yet so profound, is at once concise and comprehensive.

One enquirer was puzzled as to what would be the effect of his daily actions, right or wrong, in afterlife. The ideal *Vedantin* that the Maharshi is, his answer is pregnant with meaning, revealing to us an insight into the philosophy of life as taught by the ancient *rishis*. "The Self of man has no beginning and no end. It is never born

and It never dies.” If this truth is accepted, no question of birth and death can arise. What is subject to birth and death is the earthly vesture of man, whose essential being is deathless.

WHAT IS MIND? To the aspirant on the path of Self-realization, there is no question so puzzling and so vital as that of mind control. Many are the methods and remedies suggested and most of them have been practised with varying degrees of success, but Maharshi’s solution to this age-long problem is all his own and sheds new light on this apparently hopeless problem. The Maharshi says that, as a matter of fact, there is no mind to control, if the Self is realized. The Self shines when the mind vanishes. In the realized man the mind may be active or inactive, but the Self alone exists. For the mind, body and the world are not separate from the Self. They cannot remain apart from the Self. Can they be other than the Self? When one is aware of the Self and has fully established oneself in it, one has no reason to worry about these shadows which cannot in the least affect the serenity of the immutable Self.

In order to have a clear grasp of the Maharshi’s unique teachings on this point, the question has to be considered in a little more detail. According to him the problem of mind control ceases to be a problem when the mind seeks its source within.

What is mind? Does it exist apart from the thoughts that come and go? What is the ‘I’ with which the mind identifies itself? What is the one basis of the entire thought activity? It is the endeavour, made here and now, to gather in and converge the mind at its source, to attune it to the Self which is the support of all thought activity. This is the most natural, direct and immediately effective method of controlling the mind. Every other conceivable practice has this fundamental defect, namely it tries to control the mind by sustaining it. These other methods of practice retain the veil of the mind and can therefore never reveal the Self. When one dives within, seeking the source of thought and has a glimpse of the Self, one knows the true nature of the mind as nothing but an unreal manifestation of the one Reality, the Self.

NO SUCH THING: The two essential aspects of this question of mind control, which the Maharshi seeks to impress on the earnest aspirant are (1) that from the true and ultimate point of view of the one Reality — the Self — there is no such thing as the mind, and (2) that the endeavour to control the mind on the contrary assumption that there is really something called the mind to be controlled, is bound to prove futile. Because the mind, considered as real, will never allow itself to be controlled, just as the thief will never allow himself to be caught by turning himself into a policeman. Under the pretentious garb of a policeman, he would elude his own arrest all the more effectively. Even so, if we give the mind the garb of reality we would never be able to control it. The Maharshi, therefore, expects us to disregard all limitations, which pertain only to the mind, and plunge headlong into a dauntless search for the real Self in us. When our attention is fully riveted to the Self as the source of thought, the mind is subdued and controlled quite naturally and without any effort.

This in short, is the direct and right way to what is called peace of mind. Maharshi’s method of approach to the control of mind deserves fullest consideration and sincere efforts if we have failed in trying other methods of mind control.