

The Maharshi



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Sri Ramana Maharshi, The Sage of Tiruvannamalai

By Dr. G. H. Mees (Cantab)

***D**URING the four years that I have been traveling in India I have visited many yogis and sadhus in villages and in jungles, sometimes even in towns, in all parts of this vast continent. When I heard of some man who was considered to be holy or wise I always went to visit him, often to be disappointed, though occasionally to find what I had expected. However, those that really mattered I always met 'by chance', as the expression goes, and to this rule Ramana Maharshi forms an exception. I suppose the Maharshi is the only one of the living maharshis who does not mind leading a public life. The sacrifice of this publicity must be enormous, though one has to remind oneself again and again that there is nothing which either troubles or disturbs him.*

His Daily Life

The life that the Maharshi leads would drive any other man mad within a short time, for practically every moment of his existence he is a center of public interest. Not even a moment is he alone. His is the life of a sacred animal or a god.

After a sleep of some hours, which cannot be called sleep in the ordinary sense of the word, the Maharshi gets up, goes to the simple kitchen of the Ashram and occupies himself for some hours in cutting and preparing the vegetables of the simple, purely vegetarian meals of the community. In this work he is helped by the others who happen to be awake at such an early hour. At half-past six, after his bath, breakfast is taken – coffee with cakes made of rice flour. After that, the Maharshi sits practically all day on his couch in the hall of the Ashram, to leave it only for meals at eleven and at eight o'clock and for the small walks he takes on the slopes of the sacred hill.

At sunrise and at sunset Brahmin priests of the orthodox Vedic school come to recite hymns from the Yajur Veda while seated at the feet of the sage. More correctly it may be described as a half-singing, half-reciting of the sacred hymns. It is a most impressive and solemn procedure.

All day visitors come and go, greeting the Maharshi with divine honour by prostrating themselves on the floor at full length with hands folded above the head. These demonstrations of homage do not make any more impression on the sage than the ordinary greetings of any other person. It is the classical Indian tradition thus to honour sages, and the Maharshi leaves people complete freedom to express themselves as they please. Visitors sit for hours at the feet of the Maharshi in the hall, in which nothing else is found than the couch of the sage and some bookcases. They meditate, sing religious songs, very often hymns in glory of Arunachala

Shiva – and sometimes they ask Maharshi questions concerning religious or philosophical problems.

As a rule the Maharshi is silent, but sometimes he may give lengthy explanations if he thinks that such might be of any use. And he is always ready to speak some pleasant words to visitors, especially to the children who come to see him. He is always normal and natural in his attitude and behavior. I may say without the slightest hesitation that he is the most natural and unconstrained person I have ever had the benefit to know. He completely lacks any pretense. To use a phrase of Analytic Psychology: he is a man without a person. Because of his total absence of pretense, his personality, paradoxically, leaves an overwhelming impression. Many sadhus and yogis might wish to convince visitors and devotees of their wisdom, holiness or spiritual powers, yet the slightest attempt to impress at once takes away for me the possibility of an authentic or true impression.

It is extremely difficult to describe the atmosphere that emanates from this extraordinary man. Contradictions meet in him. One is struck at once by his childlike simplicity and also his noble wisdom, by the familiar and by something strikingly uncommon.

Though the Maharshi spent a large part of his life in seclusion on the sacred hill of Arunachala, he has never said that seclusion is better than a life in the world, or that it is essential for obtaining enlightenment. He says that a man who comes to Self-realization can live anywhere without being disturbed or influenced in any way by his surroundings. One of his sayings runs: “Renunciation is not the discarding of externals, but the cancellation of the uprising of the ego. To the true sannyasin there is no difference between solitude and an active life.” In his own life, which is entirely public, he gives a demonstration of this. One feels, one knows, that there is nothing that can touch him. One feels also, especially during the time of the temple festival in Tiruvannamalai when for several weeks thousands come to him daily and policemen have to regulate the traffic, that superhuman powers are necessary to enable a man to make such a total sacrifice of any vestige private life.

Enlightenment

There is much talk about samadhi, a state of consciousness corresponding to nirvana, or the nirvana of the Buddhists, and I have seen in several Indian sages such a state of spiritual abstraction or absorption, trance – if one likes to call it so. There are several kinds of samadhi, every one with its own technical terms. Here it does not matter very much what those terms are. In the Maharshi alone I feel that I see the highest state of absolute consciousness. The fascinating element in it is formed by the fact that one has to recognize that at one and the same time he is absorbed in a state of consciousness which defies description and is yet conscious of the very ordinary things of daily life around him. The ‘highest’ and the ‘lowest’ are united for him and in him – perhaps not only ‘united’, but realized as one in essence. God and the world and his deepest self are, to him, one.

The Teachings

His doctrine is that of Philosophical Idealism in its highest flights. It is Advaita Vedanta, the monistic philosophy of the Hindus embodied in a human being. In a few words it comes down to the following: the individual subject and the divine subject are one in essence. This is the only truth and reality. The world, apart from this, is a changing dream, a world of appearance from the point of view of that Reality. The process of creation which takes place within every man is maya.

To the man who lives in the world (and that every man does) maya is not an ‘illusion’ but a state of affairs which has to be taken into account and from which one cannot run away. The reproach of many Western thinkers, based on this maya conception, is that Hinduism is averse to the world and negates it, but this is unfounded. Hinduism has a large measure of ‘practical sense’, perhaps rather too large to measure! Maya is the play of the Lord. Maya is necessary for Self-realization. One should accept it completely. Its acceptance is part of the spiritual path.

The Master’s Guidance

The Maharshi sees through life’s illusions. His message is that of all the great rishis of India, and is striking only by new comparisons. His presence, his being, forms the liberating element. He is, as it were, a vast magnet for humanity – one that attracts not to

bind men but to liberate them from the burdens and problems which they carry along with them. Other teachers often bind their visitors or disciples with new bonds. Because people feel this intuitively, they tend to keep at a distance from such teachers. As regards the Maharshi, however, they know intuitively that he does not want anything from them. And therefore all experience a sense of freedom in his presence. And moreover, they feel that the great experience of the presence of the Maharshi does not consist in the Maharshi's entering into their own soul, but that in their soul their own inner Maharshi is awakening.

Though the Maharshi is a sage, a Jnani, and not an ecstatic bhakta like Sri Ramakrishna, yet he is full of warm human interest and advocates bhakti or the path of love. His conception of religion and service in the world finds expression, for instance, in such lines as the following:

“If we just but recognize this universe
Of eight-fold form as form of God Himself,
And serve in adoration all the world,
This is, of God, most excellent worship.”

—*Upadesa Saram*, v. 5

Meditation has been for the Maharshi only a systematic striving towards Self-realization. As he says, it is not a particular posture of the body, nor closing of the eyes, nor something for a particular time of the day (though, of course, all these things are of help in this system), but it is an attitude of life for all hours of the day and night, for all stages of activity and rest in life. “The best form of meditation is that which continues not merely in the waking state but extends to the dream state and the deep sleep state of the aspirant. One's meditation should be so intense that it leaves no room for the conscious idea ‘I am meditating.’”

He counsels anyone who comes to him with an open heart seeking his advice, but he does not allow people to call themselves his disciples openly or to set him up as their Guru. His relationship with people is an inner one that is far too subtle and too sacred a subject for conversation. Very often the pith of his advice is to stimulate his visitors to search for their real I. Where is the basis of consciousness? People have to discover that jiva, the individual I, and Shiva are in essence one. It is not of much value to come to this conclusion through mere reasoning. If there is no



Dr. Mees sitting behind Niranjanananda Swami and to the right of Pascaline Mallet

realization to that effect, it may even do harm.

Visitors to the Maharshi

Many Europeans have already been to visit the Maharshi and have written about him. It is almost a pity that the life-giving element in this remarkable man is not in the first place his words or deeds, but in the simple fact of his presence, since only a few people in the world can benefit from that. Some Europeans I spoke with after they had visited the Maharshi considered that it had been more than worthwhile to go all the way to India for this visit alone.

An officer of high rank in the English Army [Major A. W. Chadwick] came to India some years ago just to see the Maharshi and he has remained in the Ashram ever since, something which is quite an achievement for a European – and especially for an Englishman – in the rather strange South Indian surroundings.

In conclusion, here are some verses selected from the Maharshi's works, translated together with Maharshi by the Englishman referred to above:

No matter to what form or name you pray,
'Tis but a means of finding the Supreme
Who transcends name and form. Grow, then, aware
Of your true Self in Him, Immaculate,
And merge in That, the Beatific Peace!
For thus is perfect Realization found.

The pairs of opposites, the trinities,
All have their source in something that is real.
Seek out this basis in the depths of mind;
The basis found, then these will disappear.
To find it is to realize the Truth
And rest unmoved within the Ultimate.

For him who thinks the body is the Self
 The thoughts 'I am not this' and 'I am That'
 Are helpful in the search. But why should one
 Be even dwelling on this, 'I am That'?
 Is there a person who thinks 'I am a man'?
 One's ever That alone without the thought.

Who else is there apart from one's true Self?
 What matters it what other people say?
 'Tis just as if one praised or blamed oneself.

So never feel that thou are separate,
 Nor swerve from That, thine own Reality,
 But always stand thou steadfast in the 'I'.

Let me proclaim with no uncertain voice
 The essence of Vedanta and the pith
 Of all the other schools. Let ego die
 And let thyself be That! There then is left
 Pure Consciousness, the Self that is the 'I',
And this is all that there remains of Truth.

Paul Brunton Speaks to Seekers

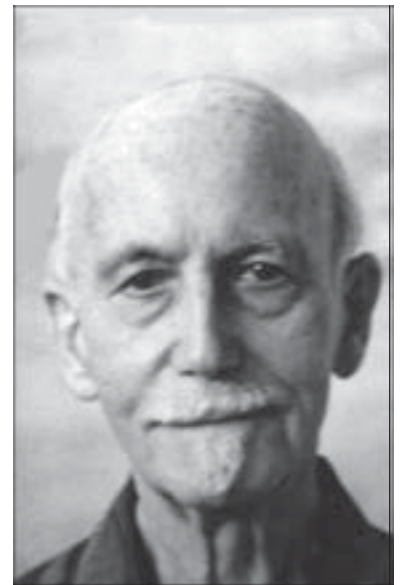
This transcribed talk by Paul Brunton (1898-1981) is believed to have been recorded on an audio cassette in Switzerland in the mid-1970s and sent to Anthony Damiana, the founder of Wisdom's Goldenrod Center for Philosophic Studies in the United States. At the following web address you can hear this recording: <http://arunachala.org/elibrary/audio/paul-brunton-recording/>

TONY has asked me to speak a few words to those of you who have read some of my books. If I agree, as I do, it is only on the condition that I am not to be taken as a Guru. My job is writing down ideas which I have gathered in the course of a lifetime's study of world literatures, and particularly Asiatic literatures, and talks with teachers themselves. If any of you find some of these ideas are helpful to you, as they certainly have been helpful to me, you are welcome to them. But beyond this communication, I make no claims and have no disciples. I live in retirement and semi-solitude.

There is a danger in these studies that you may tend to over-emphasize the intellectual elements, to regard them as another branch of academic work. This would be a mistake. In attempting to understand these books, it is important to avoid such a wrong emphasis and to secure a proper balance instead. This must be a balance between the interests of the heart and the interests in the head. That is to say, the feelings must be brought into play, just as much as the reasoning intellect. It is only by establishing a fine balance between the two that you can come to the verge where intuition may be awakened, the intuition which will lead you to a higher truth.

Of course, you probably know by now that another important, most important, process of awakening this

kind of intuition is the practice of meditation. This has been very much misunderstood and there are, even in the Orient, all sorts of misconceptions and superstitions about it. Yet the essence of it is very simple. You are all victims of a machine which is producing thoughts continuously, and you have lost control of the machine. Meditation is a process to regain this control, and then the biggest obstacle in your way can be cleared. These thoughts make a screen between you and the rest of your inner self, and in that inner self lies the best part of yourself, the higher self, the over-self. Now all the different systems of yoga that you have heard about are mainly devices to bring the mind into concentration and to turn this concentration inwards so that you are able to withdraw attention from the world outside and learn to



listen within. That is the basic principle of all yogas. When the mind is sufficiently quieted, then and only then can this higher part of your nature begin to make itself palpable to you. But it is necessary to point out that meditation, because it offers so much in the end, requires you to give so much. What you have to give is time and practice, and even more than anything else, is patience. Without patience, you cannot hope to learn meditation. There is no fixed time in which it can be learnt, because each of us is an individual, and with some, the pace is quicker and with others it is slower. It is also a matter of the circumstances in which you happen to be placed at the time. They will either hinder or help your learning meditation. But patience is needed, and many people, I have noticed, get discouraged in their earlier efforts because they do not see any progress coming. And that is a mistake, to give up prematurely. But with patience, there will come its rewards in the end. Part of this reward is the new inspiration you will receive, inspiration for whatever work you do and especially for those of you who are connected with the arts, inspiration in intellectual matters, and inspiration in the dealing with your daily life. Certainly for the artist, technique is only part of the game — he needs to become inspired as well, and meditation is one of the ways of getting inspired.

Another topic which is constantly being brought up is the necessity of a Guru. Of course, an instructor in any subject is a help to students of those subjects, of that subject. But the fact remains that there are few competent instructors in the pursuit of Truth who have themselves realized the Truth. It is not hard to find those who have promoted movements, founded societies, created organizations along this line, but their reliability and competence is another matter. Generally

they have something to give, but it is usually mixed with opinions and interests which may not be so desirable.

There are, finally, two other points. The first is, bring to this quest a feeling of worship because, after all, you are seeking a communion with a Higher Power, with something above, beyond, and transcendence of yourselves. You cannot approach it as you would approach your professor. There is something sacred and holy around the very concept and you must try to awaken this attitude — that it is like entering a church which you really respect.

And the last point is that the world outside you and around you, the world of other people, is not much interested in the line you have taken and may even be hostile to it. They may try to discourage you or to oppose you. This is understandable. Their past histories made them what they are just as your past history has made you the seeker that you are. I suggest therefore, that you should not try to make your pursuit of the Truth a conspicuous affair. After all, it is something that does not really concern others except in its indirect consequences. It is something which concerns you and your Higher Self only. So don't make a public show of it, or any fuss about it, or make any mention of it. Keep it to yourself. Only where someone else has strong doubts and is beginning to seek and approaches you, can you profitably discuss it, and even then, one should not discuss it more than necessary. The last words of the Buddha before he dies were, "Be a lamp unto yourselves."

Well, goodbye, and may the peace and tranquility which already lies deep within you, covered up by your ego and its thoughts, may that reveal itself to you. Peace, peace, peace.

The 64th Aradhana of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

You, your family and friends are invited to join us in observing Sri Ramana Maharshi's 64th

Mahanirvana Day

27 April 2014

Sunday, 11 A. M.

Arunachala Ashrama

86-06 Edgerton Blvd., Jamaica Estates, NY 11432 / ashrama@arunachala.org / 718.560.3196

Conference on Things Sacred

Peter Berking, an ardent devotee and annual pilgrim to Arunachala, sent the following announcement. To contact him, please write to "pberking@verizon.net".

A conference titled "Sacred Geographies, Religious Cultures, and Popular Practices" will be held at the Government Arts College in Tiruvannamalai, June 26-28, 2014. All are invited to attend or to present a paper. There are modest fees (\$100 for foreigners, which includes food and accommodations). See the conference web site at <http://tvmalaihistoryconference.org> for details.

The conference covers a range of multi-disciplinary themes centered on religious and cultural history, traditions, practices, and events. This includes physical monuments and artifacts as well as people, literature and arts. It is especially but not exclusively focused on Tiruvannamalai. The aim of the conference is not only to share information, but to convey an increased awareness of the need for preservation of sacred and historic items such as those presented at the conference (this includes, of course, places near and dear to us as devotees, such as Arunachala, Sri Ramanasramam, the Giripradakshina Path, etc.). For those interested in presenting papers, many of the conference themes inferred by the conference title could be explored through the lens of Bhagavan and Arunachala. The College also welcomes collaboration beyond submitting and presenting papers, including having devotees conduct tours of Sri Ramanasramam, Giripradakshina, etc., for conference attendees. Contact the conference staff at <http://tvmalaihistoryconference.org/contact.php> if you are interested.

The conference staff kindly request that you forward the link to the conference web site to anyone who might be interested in it. Help support their mission to put Tiruvannamalai on the map as a center of study for sacred institutions, places, and people.

Letters and Comments

A Prayer Unlike Any Other

TODAY is Bhagavan's Jayanti according to the English calendar. By the boundless Grace of Bhagavan I can say from the bottom of my heart that this is the best ever Bhagavan Jayanti celebrated by me. Here is how it came about.

Many days ago during a casual conversation Sushila Manni suggested that I should do Akhanda Parayanam of "Akshara Mana Malai". Akhanda parayanam is a twelve-hour recitation. Today being Bhagavan's birthday we decided to do the parayanam

from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The original expectation was that I would do most of it alone with help from T. V. Chandramouli filling in at lunch and tea breaks. We thought of using Bhagavan's small bathroom so that we could quietly do the parayanam without disturbing anyone. But that was not to be. The parayanam was arranged in New Hall itself with the full support of the Ashram.

When we started at 6 a.m. we had about 15 people chanting. The number peaked to over 50 and the lowest it fell to was about 10. I cannot

describe the joy of group chanting in front of the huge picture of Bhagavan in the New Hall where also a special picture of Arunachala was placed. Many foreigners participated. About six children joined and chanted very fluently. We invited every participant for lunch.

I have plans of doing a similar 12-hour session in each of the Ashta Lingams around the Hill and also in

the major temples on the Giri Pradakshinam road. I wonder if there has ever been a 12-hour chanting of “Akshara Mana Malai” like this before. We initially chose the day because it was Bhagavan’s birthday, but it also turned out to be Monday (a special day for Shiva worship) and Pradosham (very special for Shiva). All in all it was a great success.

– T. S. Vaidyanathan, Sri Ramanasramam

Ramana Satsangs

Regular satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation are conducted in or near large cities. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please contact the individuals below for more information.

Atlanta Area — Mangalam Kalyanam (678-546-0378 / smoothcutter@hotmail.com)

Ann Arbor, MI — Nirupama & Ramesh (574-514-4766 / neeru_2@hotmail.com)

Birmingham, AL — Sai Kand (205-441-6859 / kandsai@yahoo.com)

Boston, MA — David & Anna (617-928-1487 / annaklegon@gmail.com)

Chicago Area — Jean-Luc & Rita (719-480-3530 / blueskyvalley@mac.com)

Connecticut Area — Aruna & Ram (860-284-0078 / rsankaran2000@yahoo.com)

Chapel Hill, NC — Ranjani Ramanan (919-338-2551 / ranjani1@yahoo.com)

Dublin, Ohio — Abilash & Madhavi (614-789-9058 / mungamuru@hotmail.com)

Ft. Lauderdale Area — David & Janet Rubinson (954-755-4758 / arunahill@gmail.com)

Houston, TX — Kumar Saran (832-435-3761 / saran01@earthlink.net)

Los Angeles, CA — Natarajan & Indira Venkatesan (310-473-9441 / nvenky30@yahoo.com)

New Jersey, Pennington — Nandini (609-730-8447 / nandinikapadia@yahoo.com)

Ottawa, Canada — Anantha Padmanabhan (613-733-8250 / padmanabhan_ananth@hotmail.com)

Puerto Rico — Rosa & Scott Mathewson (787-531-5295 / rosilinn@hotmail.com)

San Francisco Area — Karthik & Sunita (510-656-2752 / sunita_parasuraman@yahoo.com)

San Francisco Area — Subadra & TKS (925-373-6909 / subadra2001@yahoo.com)

Tampa, Florida — Rohit ((813-632-7843 / rohitkvaidya@yahoo.com)

Toronto, Canada — Thiru (416-876-1942 / thirusivasamy@hotmail.com)

Vancouver, Canada — Akash (778-321-4499 / eternalshiva@hotmail.com)

Washington, D.C. Area — Uma & Santosh (301-528-5526 / uma_santosh@hotmail.com)

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