



## The Old Hall

December 29 – 11:00 to 1:00 P.M.

1. Welcoming comments to the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Ramana Jayanti Retreat in Tampa Florida
2. Aksharamanamalai
3. Reading number 1
4. Upadesa Sarah and Arunachala Pancharatna
5. Reading number 2
6. Bhaje Ramana Namam Songs
7. Reading number 3 & 4
8. Silent Meditation
9. Lunch at 1 P.M.
10. 3:00 P.M. Ramana Jayanti Puja at the Temple

Raphael Hearst was a journalist and a book seller in England before traveling to India in search of enlightenment. His bookstore sold Eastern and Occult literature, so he was well read in the field of his search before reaching the Indian subcontinent at the age of 32 in 1931. He took 'Paul Brunton' as his pen name to his most famous and bestselling book, *A Search in Secret India*, which did more than any other book to introduce the Maharshi to the World.

Paul Brunton has provided us with a graphic, authentic description of the Maharshi, his Ashram and his teachings from his first visit to the Ashram. The following passages are culled from this book, *A Search in Secret India*.

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We are approaching the Maharishi's hermitage. We turn aside from the road and move down a rough path which brings us to a thick grove of coconut and mango trees. We cross this until the path suddenly comes to an abrupt termination before an unlocked gate. The driver descends, pushes the gate open, and then drives us into a large unpaved courtyard. I stretch out my cramped limbs, descend to the ground, and look around.

The cloistered domain of the Maharshi is hemmed in at the front by closely growing trees and a thickly clustered garden; it is screened at the back and side by hedgerows of shrub and cactus, while away to the West stretches the scrub jungle and what appears to be dense forest. It is most picturesquely placed on a lower spur of the hill. Secluded and apart, it seems a fitting spot for those who wish to pursue profound themes of meditation.

Two small buildings with thatched roofs occupy the left side of the courtyard. Adjoining them stands a long, modern structure, whose red-tiled roof comes sharply down into overhanging eaves. A small veranda stretches across a part of the front.

The center of the courtyard is marked by a large well. I watch a boy, who is naked to the waist and dark-skinned to the point of blackness, slowly draw a bucket of water to the surface with the aid of a creaking hand windlass.

The sound of our entry brings a few men out of the buildings into the courtyard. Their dress is extremely varied. One is garbed in nothing but a ragged loin-cloth, but another is prosperously attired in a white silk robe. They stare questioningly at us. My guide grins hugely,

evidently enjoying their astonishment. He crosses to them and says something in Tamil. The expression on their faces changes immediately, for they smile in unison and beam at me with pleasure. I like their faces and their bearing.

"We shall now go into the hall of the Maharishee," announces the holy man of the yellow robe, bidding me 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 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 Maharishee.

My guide approaches the divan, prostrates himself prone on the floor, and buries his eyes under folded hands.

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 odor 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, but the pungent perfume is quite different.

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 Maharishi'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-colored, 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.

The couch is covered with white cushions and the Maharishi's feet rest upon a magnificently marked tiger skin.

Pin-drop silence prevails throughout the long hall. The sage remains perfectly still, motionless, quite undisturbed at our arrival. A swarthy disciple sits on the floor at the other side of the divan. He breaks into the quietude by beginning to pull at a rope which works a punkah-fan made of bamboo matting. The fan is fixed to a wooden beam and suspended immediately above the sage's head. I listen to its rhythmic purring, the while 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. I find this scene strangely reminiscent. Where have I seen its like? I rummage through the portrait gallery of memory and find the picture of the Sage Who Never Speaks, that recluse whom I visited in his isolated cottage near Madras, that man whose body seemed cut from stone, so motionless it was. There is a curious similarity in this unfamiliar stillness of body which I now behold in the Maharishee.

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 passes by 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.

My guide has given me no warning that his master will receive me as I had been received by the Sage Who Never Speaks. It has come upon me abruptly, this strange reception characterized by complete indifference. The first thought which would come into the mind of any European, "Is this man merely posing for the benefit of his devotees?" crosses my mind once or twice, but I soon rule it out. He is certainly in a trance condition, though my guide has not informed me that his master indulges in trances. The next thought which occupies my mind, "Is this state of mystical contemplation is nothing more than meaningless vacancy?" has a longer sway but I let it go for the simple reason that I cannot answer it.

There is something in this man which 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.

How small seem those questions which I have asked myself with such frequency! How petty grows the panorama of the lost years! I perceive with sudden clarity that the intellect creates its own problems and then makes itself miserable trying to solve them. This is indeed a novel concept to enter the mind of one who has hitherto placed such high value upon intellect.

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. And then, little by little, a new question takes the field of consciousness.

"Does this man, the Maharishee, emanate the perfume of spiritual peace as the flower emanates fragrance from its petals?"

I do not consider myself a competent person to apprehend spirituality, but I have personal reactions to other people. This dawning suspicion that the mysterious peace which has arisen within me must be attributed to the geographical situation in which I am now placed, is my reaction to the personality of the Maharishee. I begin to wonder whether, by some radioactivity of the soul, some unknown telepathic process, the stillness which invades the troubled waters of my own soul really comes from him. Yet he remains completely impassive, completely unaware of my very existence, it seems.

Comes the first ripple. Someone approaches me and whispers in my ear, "Did you not wish to question the Maharishee?"

He may have lost patience, this quondam guide of mine. More likely, he imagines that I, a restless European, have reached the limit of my own patience. Alas, my inquisitive friend! Truly I came here to question your master, but now . . . I, who am at peace with all the world and with myself, why should I trouble my head with questions? I feel that the ship of my soul is beginning to slip its moorings; a wonderful sea waits to be crossed; yet you would draw me back to the noisy port of this world, just when I am about to start the great adventure!

There are moments unforgettable which mark themselves in golden figures upon the calendar of our years. Such a moment comes to me now, as I walk into the hall of the Maharishee.

He sits as usual upon the magnificent tiger-skin which covers the center of his divan. The joss-sticks burn slowly away on a little table near him, spreading the penetrating fragrance of incense around the hall. Not today is he remote from men and wrapped up in some trance-like spiritual absorption, as on that strange occasion when I first visited him. His eyes are clearly open to this world and glance at me comprehendingly as I bow, and his mouth is stretched in a kindly smile of welcome.

Squatting at a respectful distance from their master are a few disciples; otherwise the long hall is bare. One of them pulls the punkah-fan, which flaps lazily through the heavy air.

In my heart I know that I come as one seeking to take up the position of a disciple, and that there will be no rest for my mind until I hear the Maharishi's decision. It is true that I live in a great hope of being accepted, for that which sent me scurrying out of Bombay to this place came as an absolute command, a decisive and authoritative injunction from a supernormal region. In a few words I dispose of the preliminary explanations, and then put my request briefly and bluntly to the Maharishee.

He continues to smile at me but says nothing.

I repeat my question with some emphasis.

There is another protracted pause, but at length he answers me, disdainingly to call for the services of an interpreter and expressing himself directly in English.

"What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple's standpoint. To the one who has realized the true self there is neither master nor disciple. Such a one regards all people with equal eye."

I am slightly conscious of an initial rebuff, and though I press my request in other ways the Maharishirefuses to yield on the point. But in the end, he does say: "You must find the master within you, within your own spiritual self. You must regard his body in the same way that he himself regards it; the body is not his true self."

It begins to voice itself in my thoughts that the Maharshi is not to be drawn into giving me a direct affirmative response, and that the answer I seek must be found in some other way, doubtless in the subtle, obscure manner at which he hints. So, I let the matter drop and our talk then turns to the outward and material side of my visit.

I spend the afternoon making some arrangements for a protracted stay.

The ensuing weeks absorb me into a strange, unwonted life. My days are spent in the hall of the Maharishi, where I slowly pick up the unrelated fragments of his wisdom and the faint clues to the answer I seek; my nights continue as heretofore in torturing sleeplessness, with my body stretched out on a blanket laid on the hard-earthen floor of a hastily built hut.

This humble abode stands about three hundred feet away from the hermitage. Its thick walls are composed of thinly plastered earth, but the roof is solidly tiled to withstand the monsoon rains. The ground around it is virgin bush, somewhat thickly overgrown, being in fact the fringe of the jungle which stretches away to the west. The rugged landscape reveals Nature in all her own wild uncultivated grandeur. Cactus hedges are scattered numerous and irregularly around, the spines of these prickly plants looking like coarse needles. Beyond them the jungle drops a curtain of scrub bush and stunted trees upon the land. To the north rises the gaunt figure of the mountain, a mass of metallic-tinted rocks and brown soil. To the south lies a long pool, whose placid water has attracted me to the spot, and whose banks are bordered with clumps of trees holding families of grey and brown monkeys.

Each day is a duplicate of the one before. I rise early in the mornings and watch the jungle dawn turn from grey to green and then to gold. Next comes a plunge into the water and a swift swim up and down the pool, making as much noise as I possibly can so as to scare away lurking snakes. Then, dressing, shaving, and the only luxury I can secure in this place - three cups of deliciously refreshing tea. During the ensuing days I endeavor to get into closer contact with the Maharshi but fail. There are three reasons for this failure. The first arises naturally out of his own reserved nature, his obvious dislike of argument and discussion, his stolid indifference to one's beliefs and opinions. It becomes perfectly obvious that the sage has no wish to convert anyone to his own ideas, whatever they may be, and no desire to add a single person to his following. The second cause is certainly a strange one, but nevertheless it exists. Since the evening of that peculiar dream, I feel a great awe whenever I enter his presence. The questions which would otherwise have come chattering from my lips are hushed, because it seems almost

sacrilege to regard him as a person with whom one can talk and argue on an equal plane, so far as common humanity is concerned. The third cause of my failure is simple enough. Almost always there are several other persons present in the hall, and I feel disinclined to bring out my private thoughts in their presence. After all, I am a stranger to them and a foreigner in this district. That I voice a different language to some of them is a fact of little import, but that I possess a cynical, skeptical outlook unstirred by religious emotion is a fact of much import when I attempt to give utterance to that outlook. I have no desire to hurt their pious susceptibilities, but I have also no desire to discuss matters from an angle which makes little appeal to me. So, to some extent, this thing makes me tongue-tied. It is not easy to find a smooth way across all three barriers; several times I am on the point of putting a question to the Maharishee, but one of the three factors intervene to cause my failure. My proposed week-end quickly passes and I extend it to a week. The first conversation which I have had with the Maharshi worthy of the name is likewise the last. Beyond one or two quite perfunctory and conventional scraps of talk, I find myself unable to get to grips with the man. 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 affect any worth-while personal contact with the Maharishee. I look around the hall and feel a slight despondency. Most of these men speak a different language, both outwardly and inwardly; how can I hope to come closer to them? I look at the sage himself. He sits there on Olympian heights and watches the panorama of life as one apart. There is a mysterious property in this man which differentiates him from all others I have met. I feel, somehow, that he does not belong to us, the human race, so much as he belongs to Nature, to the solitary peak which rises abruptly behind the hermitage, to the rough tract of jungle which stretches away into distant forests, and to the impenetrable sky which fills all space.

Something of the stony, motionless quality of lonely Arunachala seems to have entered into the Maharishee. I have learnt that he has lived on the hill for thirty years and refuses to leave it, even for a single short journey. Such a close association must inevitably have its effects on a man's character. I know that he loves this hill, for someone has translated a few lines of a charming but pathetic poem which the sage has written to express this love. Just as this isolated

hill rises out of the jungle's edge and rears its squat head to the sky, so does this strange man raise his own head in solitary grandeur, nay, in uniqueness, out of the jungle of common humanity. Just as Arunachala, Hill of the Sacred Beacon, stands aloof, apart from the irregular chain of hills which girdles the entire landscape, so does the Maharshi remain mysteriously aloof even when surrounded by his own devotees, men who have loved him and lived near him for years. The impersonal, impenetrable quality of all Nature - so peculiarly exemplified in this sacred mountain - has somehow entered into him. It has segregated him from his weaker fellows, perhaps forever. Sometimes I catch myself wishing that he would be a little more human, a little more susceptible to what seems so normal to us, but so like feeble failings when exhibited in his impersonal presence. And yet, if he has really attained to some sublime realization beyond the common, how can one expect him to do so without passing beyond man, without leaving his laggard race behind forever? Why is it that under his strange glance I invariably experience a peculiar expectancy, as though some stupendous revelation will soon be made to me?

Yet beyond the moods of palpable serenity and the dream which stars itself in the sky of memory, no verbal or other revelation has been communicated to me. I feel somewhat desperate at the pressure of time. Almost a fortnight gone and only a single talk that means anything! Even the abruptness in the sage's voice has helped, metaphorically, to keep me off. This unwonted reception is also unexpected, for I have not forgotten the glowing inducements to come here with which the yellow-robed holy man plied me. The tantalizing thing is that I want the sage, above all other men, to loosen his tongue for me, because a single thought has somehow taken possession of my mind. I do not obtain it by any process of ratiocination; it comes unbidden, entirely of its own accord.

"This man has freed himself from all problems, and no woe can touch him."

Such is the purport of this dominating thought.

I resolve to make a fresh attempt to force my questions into voice and to engage the Maharshi in answer to them. I go out to one of his old disciples, who is doing some work in the adjoining cottage and who has been exceedingly kind to me 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. The disciple smiles compassionately. He leaves me and soon returns with the news that his master will be very pleased to grant the interview.

### 3

I hasten back 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 Maharshi turns to a Brahmin disciple of courtly countenance. The latter translates his answer to me.

"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. From the square-framed and barred hole in the wall which does duty as a window, as it does in so many Indian buildings, I obtain a fine view of the lower slopes of the sacred hill. Its strange outline is bathed in the early morning sunlight.

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 drink 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."

"Even the wicked, the brutal and the criminal?" I ask.

"Even they sin because they are trying to find the self's happiness in every sin which they commit. This striving is instinctive in man, but they do not know that they are really seeking their true selves, and so they try these wicked ways first as a means to happiness. Of course, they are wrong ways, for a man's acts are reflected back to him."

"So, we shall feel lasting happiness when we know this true self?"

The other nods his head.

A slanting ray of sunshine falls through the unglazed window upon the Maharishi's face. There is serenity in that unruffled brow, there is contentment around that firm mouth, there is a shrine-like peace in those lustrous eyes. His unlined countenance does not belie his revelatory words.

What does the Maharshi mean by these apparently simple sentences? The interpreter has conveyed their outward meaning to me in English, yes, but there is a deeper purport which he cannot convey. I know that I must discover that for myself. The sage seems to speak, not as a philosopher, not as a pundit trying to explain his own doctrine, but rather out of the depth of his own heart. Are these words the marks of his own fortunate experience?

"What exactly is this self of which you speak? If what you say is true, then there must be another self in man." His lips curve in a smile for a moment.

"Can a man be possessed of two identities, two selves?" he makes answer. "To understand this matter, it is first necessary for a man to analyze himself. Because it has long been his habit to think as others think, he has never faced his 'I' in the true manner. He has not a

correct picture of himself; he has too long identified himself with the body and the brain. Therefore, I tell you to pursue this enquiry, 'Who am I?'"

He pauses to let these words soak into me. I listen eagerly to his next sentences.

"You ask me to describe this true self to you. What can be said? It is That out of which the sense of the personal 'I' arises, and into which it shall have to disappear."

"Disappear?" I echo back. "How can one lose the feeling of one's personality?"

"The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought in the mind of every man, is the thought 'I.' It is only after the birth of this thought that any other thoughts can arise at all. It is only after the first personal pronoun 'I' has arisen in the mind, that the second personal pronoun 'You' can make its appearance. If you could mentally follow the 'I' thread until it leads you back to its source, you would discover that, just as it is the first thought to appear, so is it the last to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced."

"You mean that it is perfectly possible to conduct such a mental investigation into oneself?"

"Assuredly! It is possible to go inwards until the last thought 'I' gradually vanishes."

"What is left?" I query. "Will a man then become quite unconscious, or will he become an idiot?"

"Not so! On the contrary, he will attain that consciousness which is immortal, and he will become truly wise, when he has awakened to his true self, which is the real nature of man."

"But surely the sense of 'I' must also pertain to that?" I persist.

"The sense of 'I' pertains to the person, the body and brain," replies the Maharshi calmly. "When a man knows his true self for the first time, something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the kingdom of heaven, others call it the soul, still others name it Nirvana, and we Hindus call it Liberation; you may give it what name you wish. When this happens, a man has not really lost himself; rather, he has found himself."

As the last word falls from the interpreter's lips, there flashes across my mind those memorable words which were uttered by a wandering Teacher in Galilee, words which have puzzled so many good persons: *Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and*

*whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.* How strangely similar are the two sentences! Yet the Indian sage has arrived at the thought in his own non-Christian way, through a psychological path which seems exceedingly difficult and appears unfamiliar.

#### 4

The Maharshi speaks again, his words breaking into my thoughts.

"Unless and until a man embarks upon this quest of the true self, doubt and uncertainty will follow his footsteps throughout life. The greatest kings and statesmen try to rule others, when in their heart of hearts, they know that they cannot rule themselves. Yet the greatest power is at the command of the man who has penetrated to his inmost depth. There are men of giant intellects who spend their lives gathering knowledge about many things. Ask these men if they have solved the mystery of man, if they have conquered themselves, and they will hang their heads in shame. What is the use of knowing about everything else when you do not yet know who you are? Men avoid this enquiry into the true self, but what else is there so worthy to be undertaken?"

"That is such a difficult, a superhuman task," I comment. The sage gives an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders.

"The question of its possibility is a matter of one's own experience. The difficulty is less real than you think."

"For us, who are active, practical Westerners, such introspections?" I begin doubtfully and leave my sentence trailing in mid-air.

The Maharshi bends down to light a fresh joss stick, which will replace one whose red spark is dying out.

"The realization of truth is the same for both Indians and Europeans. Admittedly the way to it may be harder for those who are engrossed in worldly life, but even then, one can and must conquer. The current induced during meditation can be kept up by habit, by practicing to do so. Then one can perform his work and activities in that very current itself; there will be no break. Thus, too, there will be no difference between meditation and external activities. If you meditate on this question, Who am I? - if you begin to perceive that neither the body nor the brain nor the

desires are really you, then the very attitude of enquiry will eventually draw the answer to you out of the depths of your own being; it will come to you of its own accord as a deep realization."

Again, I ponder his words.

"Know the real self," he continues, "and then the truth will shine forth within your heart like sunshine. The mind will become untroubled and real happiness will flood it, for happiness and the true self are identical. You will have no more doubts once you attain this self-awareness."

He turns his head and fixes his gaze at the far end of the hall. I know then that he has reached his conversational limit. Thus, ends our last talk and I congratulate myself that I have drawn him out of the shell of taciturnity before my departure.

I leave him and wander away to a quiet spot in the jungle where I spend most of the day among my notes and books. When dusk falls, I return to the hall, for within an hour or two a pony-carriage or bullock-cart will arrive to bear me away from the hermitage.

Burning incense makes the air odorous. The Maharshi has been half-reclining under the waving punkah as I enter but he soon sits up and assumes his favorite attitude. He sits with legs crossed, the right foot placed on the left thigh and the left foot merely folded beneath the right thigh. I remember being shown a similar position by Brahma, the Yogi who lives near Madras, who called it 'The Comfortable Posture.' It is really a half-Buddha posture and quite easy to do. The Maharshi, as is his wont, holds his chin with his right hand and rests the elbow on a knee; next he gazes attentively at me but remains quite silent. On the floor beside him I notice his gourd-shell water-jug and his bamboo staff. They are his sole earthly possessions, apart from the strip of loin-cloth. What a mute commentary on our Western spirit of acquisitiveness!

His eyes, always shining, steadily become more glazed and fixed; his body sets into a rigid pose; his head trembles slightly and then comes to rest. A few more minutes and I can plainly see that he has re-entered the trance-like condition in which he was when I first met him. How strange that our parting shall repeat our meeting! Someone brings his face close to mine and whispers in my ear, "The Maharshi has gone into holy trance. It is useless now to talk."

A hush falls upon the little company. The minutes slowly pass but the silence only deepens. I am not religious, but I can no more resist the feeling of increasing awe which begins to grip my mind than a bee can resist a flower in all its luscious bloom. The hall is becoming

pervaded with a subtle, intangible and indefinable power which affects me deeply. I feel, without doubt and without hesitation, that the center of this mysterious power is no other than the Maharshi himself.

His eyes shine with astonishing brilliance. Strange sensations begin to arise in me. Those lustrous orbs seem to be peering into the inmost recesses of my soul. In a peculiar way, I feel aware of everything he can see in my heart. His mysterious glance penetrates my thoughts, my emotions and my desires; I am helpless before it. At first this disconcerting gaze troubles me; I become vaguely uneasy. I feel that he has perceived pages that belong to a past which I have forgotten. He knows it all, I am certain. I am powerless to escape; somehow, I do not want to, either. Some curious intimation of future benefit forces me to endure that pitiless gaze.

And so he continues to catch the feeble quality of my soul for a while, to perceive my motley past, to sense the mixed emotions which have drawn me this way and that. But I feel that he understands also what mind-devastating quest has impelled me to leave the common way and seek out such men as he.

Again and again, I am aware that the Maharshi's mind is imparting something to my own, though no words may be passing between us. Spiritually my life is nearing its peak. I enter the hall and straight away assume my regular meditation posture. An intense interiorization of consciousness comes with the closing of eyes. The Maharshi's seated form floats in a vivid manner before my mind's eye. Then the picture disappears leaving me with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of his intimate presence.

Tonight, I flash swiftly to a pin-point of concentration. Some new and powerful force comes into dynamic action within my inner world and bears me inwards with resistless speed. In the next stage, I stand apart from the intellect, conscious that it is thinking, and watch thoughts with a weird detachment. The power to think, which has hitherto been a matter for merely ordinary pride, now becomes a thing from which to escape, for I perceive with startling clarity that I have been its unconscious captive. It is strange enough to be able to stand aside and watch the very action of the brain as though it were someone else's and to see how thoughts take their rise and then die, but it is stranger still to realize intuitively that one is about to penetrate into the mysteries which hide in the innermost recesses of man's soul. I feel like some Columbus about to land on an uncharted continent.

Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The mind takes its rise in a transcendental source. 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. With it arrives an amazing new sense of absolute freedom, for thought is like a loom-shuttle which always is going to and for, and to be freed from its tyrannical motion is to step out of prison into the open air. I find myself outside the rim of world consciousness. The planet, which has so far harbored me, disappears. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. The latter, I feel rather than think, is the primeval stuff out of which worlds are created, the first state of matter. It stretches away into untellable infinite space, incredibly alive. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. I have drunk the Platonic Cup of Lethe, so that yesterday's bitter memories and tomorrow's anxious cares have disappeared completely. I have attained a divine liberty and an almost indescribable felicity. My arms embrace all creation with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remolded in rapture.