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Day after Day in the Ashrama

By Paul Brunton

Day after day brings fresh indications of the greatness of this man. Among the strangely diversified company of human beings who pass through the hermitage, a pariah stumbles into the hall in some great agony of soul or circumstances and pours out his tribulation at Maharshi's feet.

THE Sage does not reply, for his silence and reserve are habitual; one can easily count the number of words he uses in a single day. Instead, he gazes quietly at the suffering man whose cries gradually diminish until he leaves the hall two hours later a more serene and stronger man.

I am learning to see that this is the Maharshi's way of helping others, this unobtrusive, silent and steady outpouring of healing vibrations into troubled souls, this mysterious telepathic process for which science will one day be required to account.

A cultured Brahmin, college-bred, arrives with his questions. One can never be certain whether the Sage will make a verbal response or not, for often he is eloquent enough without opening his lips. But today he is in a communicative mood and a few of his terse phrases, packed with profound meanings as they usually are, open many vistas of thought for the visitor.

A large group of visitors and devotees are in the hall when someone arrives with the news that a certain man, whose criminal reputation is a byword in the

little township, is dead. Immediately there is some discussion about him and, as is the wont of human nature, various people engage in recalling some of his crimes and the dastardlier phases of his character. When the hubbub has subsided and the discussion appears to have ended, the Maharshi opens his mouth for the first time and quietly observes:

"Yes, but he kept himself very clean, for he bathed two or three times a day!"

A peasant and his family have travelled over some hundred miles to pay silent homage to the Sage. He is totally illiterate, knows little beyond his daily work, his religious rites and ancestral superstitions. He has heard from someone that there is a god in human form living at the foot of the Hill of the Holy Beacon. He sits on the floor quietly after having prostrated himself three times. He firmly believes that some blessing of spirit or fortune will come to him as a result of this journey. His wife moves gracefully to his side and drops to the floor. She is clothed in a purple robe which flows smoothly from head to ankles and is then tucked

into her waist. Her sleek and smooth hair is glossy with scented oil. Her daughter accompanies her. She is a pretty girl whose ankle-rings click in consort as she steps into the hall. And she follows the charming custom of wearing a white flower behind her ear.

The little family stays for a few hours, hardly speaking, and gaze in reverence at the Maharshi. It is clear that his mere presence provides them with spiritual assurance, emotional felicity and, most paradoxical of all, renewed faith in their creed. For the Sage treats all creeds alike, regards them all as significant and sincere expressions of a great experience, and honours Jesus no less than Krishna.

On my left squats an old man of seventy-five. A quid of betel is comfortably tucked in his cheek, a Sanskrit book lies between his hands, and his heavy lidded eyes stare meditatively at the bold print. He is a brahmin who was a station-master near Madras for many years. He retired from the railway service at sixty and soon after his wife died. He took the opportunity thus presented of realising some long-deferred aspirations. For fourteen years he travelled about the country on pilgrimage to the sages, saints and yogis, trying to find one whose teachings and personality were sufficiently appealing to him. He had circled India thrice, but no such master had been discoverable. He had set up a very individual standard apparently. When we met and compared notes he lamented his failure. His rugged honest face, carved by wrinkles into dark furrows, appealed to me. He was not an intellectual man, but simple and quite intuitive. Being considerably younger than he, I felt it incumbent on me to give the old man some good advice! His surprising response was a request to become his master! "Your master is not far off," I told him and conducted him straight to the Maharshi. It did not take long for him to agree with me and become an enthusiastic devotee of the Sage.

Another man in the hall is bespectacled, silken-clad and prosperous-looking. He is a judge who

has taken advantage of a law vacation to pay a visit to the Maharshi. He is a keen disciple and strong admirer and never fails to come at least once a year. This cultured, refined and highly-educated gentleman squats democratically among a group of Tamils who are poor, naked to the waist and smeared with oil, so that their bodies glisten like varnished ebony. That which brings them together destroys the insufferable snobbishness of caste, and produces unity, is that which caused Princes and Rajahs to come from afar in ancient times to consult the forest Rishis – the deep recognition that true wisdom is worth the sacrifice of superficial differences.

A young woman with a gaily-attired child enters and prostrates herself in veneration before the Sage. Some profound problems of life are being discussed, so she sits in silence, not venturing to take part in intellectual conversation. Learning is not regarded as an ornament for Hindu women and she knows little outside the purview of culinary and domestic matters. But she knows when she is in the presence of undeniable greatness.

With the descent of dusk comes the time for a general group meditation in the hall. Not infrequently the Maharshi will signal the time by entering, so gently as occasionally to be unnoticed, the trance-like abstraction wherein he locks his senses against the world outside. During these daily meditations in the potent neighbourhood of the Sage, I have learnt how to carry my thoughts inward to an ever-deepening point. It is impossible to be in frequent contact with him without becoming lit up inwardly, as it were, mentally illumined by a sparkling ray from his spiritual orb. Again and again I become conscious that he is drawing my mind into his own atmosphere during these periods of quiet repose. And it is at such times that one begins to understand why the silences of this man are more significant than his utterances. His quiet, unhurried poise veils a dynamic attainment, which can

powerfully affect a person without the medium of audible speech or visible action. There are moments when I feel this power of his so greatly that I know he has only to issue the most disturbing command and I will readily obey it. But the Maharshi is the last person in the world to place his followers in the chains of servile obedience and allows everyone the utmost freedom of action. In this respect he is quite refreshingly different from most of the teachers and yogis I have met in India.

My meditations take the line he had indicated during my first visit, when he had tantalised me by the vagueness which seemed to surround many of his answers. I have begun to look into my own self.

Who am I?

Am I this body of flesh, blood and bone?

Am I the mind, the thoughts and the feelings which distinguish me from every other person?

One has hitherto naturally and unquestioningly accepted the affirmative answers to these questions but the Maharshi has warned me not to take them for granted. Yet he has refused to formulate any systematic teaching. The gist of his message is:

“Pursue the enquiry ‘Who am I?’ relentlessly. Analyse your entire personality. Try to find out where the I-thought begins. Go on with your meditations. Keep turning your attention within. One day the wheel of thought will slow down and an intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow that intuition, let your thinking stop, and it will eventually lead you to the goal.”

I struggle daily with my thoughts and cut my way slowly into the inner-recesses of mind. In the helpful proximity of the Maharshi, my meditations and self soliloquies become increasingly less tiring and more effective. A strong expectancy and sense of being guided inspire my constantly-repeated efforts. There are strange hours when I am clearly conscious of the unseen power of the Sage being powerfully impacted on my mentality, with the result that I penetrate a little deeper still into the shrouded borderland of being

which surrounds the human mind.

The close of every evening sees the emptying of the hall as the Sage, his disciples and visitors adjourn for supper to the dining room. As I do not care for their food and will not trouble to prepare my own, I usually remain alone and await their return. However, there is one item of the hermitage diet which I find attractive and palatable, and that is curds. The Maharshi, having discovered my fondness for it, usually asks the cook to bring me a cupful of the drink each night.

About half an hour after their return, the inmates of the hermitage, together with those visitors who have remained, wrap themselves up in sheets or thin cotton-blankets and retire to sleep on the tiled floor of the hall. The Sage himself uses his divan as a bed. Before he finally covers himself with the white sheets his faithful attendant thoroughly massages his limbs with oil.

— I take up a glazed iron lantern when leaving the hall and set out on my lonely walk to the hut. Countless fireflies move amongst flowers and plants and trees in the garden compound. Once, when I am two or three hours later than usual and midnight is approaching, I observe these strange insects put out their weird lights. Often, they are just as numerous among the thick growths of bush and cactus through which I have later to pass. One must be careful not to tread on scorpions or snakes in the dark. Sometimes the current of meditation has seized me so profoundly that I am unable and unwilling to stop it, so that I pay little heed to the narrow path of lighted ground upon which I walk. And so, I retire to my modest hut, close the tightly-fitting heavy door, and draw the shutters over glassless windows to keep out unwelcome animal intruders. My last glimpse is of a thicket of palm trees which stands on one side of my clearing in the bush, the silver moonlight coming in streams over their interlaced feathery tops.

— *The Maharshi and His Message*

The Clearest of the Clear: Tennyson's Experience of the Self

By Swaminathan Venkataraman

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 - Oct 6, 1892) is usually remembered as a great poetic voice of Victorian England — a poet of faith and doubt, a man struggling to reconcile religion with science, and of moral earnestness. Yet beneath the public laureate lived a deeply inward soul — one who had repeated experiences of the infinite, natural state of the Self, and which influenced his writings as well.

FOR those drawn to Bhagavan's teachings, encountering Tennyson can feel unexpectedly intimate. Few westerners, at least among those with no knowledge of Hindu spirituality, left such explicit testimony to states of transcendental awareness. Without knowing Advaita Vedānta, without practicing a formal spiritual discipline, he touched the same ground of experience: the dissolution of the ego and the discovery of boundless, deathless Being.

An Inward Life Formed Early

Alfred Lord Tennyson was born in 1809 in the small village of Somersby, Lincolnshire, into a large clerical family. Tennyson grew up surrounded by the Bible, Anglican liturgy, and English Romantic poetry, but also the rhythms of nature. Although his public life followed a conventional English path — early poetic talent, Cambridge, literary fame, and eventually recognition as Poet Laureate in 1850, succeeding William Wordsworth—his life was shaped from the beginning by intensity, solitude, and a deep engagement with ultimate questions.

A central figure in Tennyson's early formation was his father, George Clayton Tennyson, an Anglican clergyman of considerable learning and sensitivity. The Tennyson household was not one of superficial religiosity. Scripture was read seriously, even fiercely. He is recorded to have told friends that religion in his childhood was something "awe-inspiring and even terrifying, not consoling". Questions of the soul, death, and the infinite were emotionally real, not abstract.

At the same time, George was also a troubled man who suffered from emotional instability, depression, and alcoholism, which made family life unpredictable and often painful. Tennyson was reticent about exposing private family matters. What we have are scattered

remarks and observations recorded by others, especially Tennyson's son Hallam. Tennyson acknowledged that his father was intellectually gifted and deeply religious, but also emotionally unstable. According to the *Memoir of Alfred Lord Tennyson (Memoir)*, written by Hallam, Tennyson mentioned his father's violent temper and inner darkness, and that his father's temperament cast a long shadow over the family, causing the children to live in a state of nervous alertness.

This environment fostered in Alfred a strong inward turn. As a child, he spent hours by himself, wandering in nature, reflecting silently, and writing poetry. Thus, on the one hand, his father sparked his love of poetry, gave him a deep familiarity with Scripture, and encouraged intellectual seriousness. On the other, his father's personality also drove him inward.

The Clearest of the Clear

Tennyson hasn't spoken much about his deepest spiritual experiences, but when he did, he did so with striking clarity. The *Memoir* includes a letter that he wrote to the American philosopher Benjamin Blood on May 7, 1874, wherein he describes a state that had come to him repeatedly since boyhood. This letter was read out to Bhagavan: *"I have never had any revelations through aesthetics, but a kind of waking trance I have frequently had,*



quite from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were, out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest of the clear, the surest of the sure, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life."

Irish physicist and friend John Tyndall gives a similar account that is included in the *Memoir*: With great earnestness Tennyson described to me a state of consciousness into which he could throw himself by thinking intently of his own name. It was impossible to give anything that could be called a description of the state, for language seemed incompetent to touch it. It was an apparent isolation of the spirit from the body. Wishing doubtless to impress upon me the reality of the phenomenon, he exclaimed, "*By God Almighty, there is no delusion in the matter! It is no nebulous ecstasy, but a state of transcendent wonder, associated with absolute clearness of mind.*"

There is no reference I could find that pointed to exactly when these experiences started beyond that he had had them since boyhood, nor any specific outer circumstances that led to them other than that of "repeating my own name". There also is no record of how he came upon the method of repeating his own name. In later life, Tennyson was certainly aware of eastern traditions, including Lao Tsu and Zen Buddhism. He moved in Cambridge circles that included Max Mueller and he was friends with Sir Alfred Lyall, a civil servant in India with whom, the *Memoir* records, he discussed "the possibility of a religious revival in India". But there is no evidence there was an eastern influence in Tennyson's childhood. His father went to Cambridge as well, and whether any of these techniques was mentioned by him must remain in the realm of conjecture.

For devotees of Bhagavan, and of the Advaita Vedanta tradition in general, this experience needs little interpretation. It mirrors exactly what Bhagavan points to when he said that when the ego is sought, it disappears, and what remains is the Self — ever-

present, self-luminous, and untouched by birth or death. The fact that this phenomenon was consciously studied for millennia and actively sought by sadhakas in India, while Tennyson presents it as a clear, yet inscrutable, experience suggests that he probably was not familiar with Hindu tradition and simply stumbled upon this experience. However, the ultimate outcome, namely "*the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction but the only true life.*" is like Paul Brunton's experience:

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

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

M: "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."

Some things are clear: he had a technique of repeating his name, there does not seem to be an effort to reach anything specific, at least not the first time. Tennyson makes no attempt to *control* the experience, nor does he claim that he could produce it at will, although it has indeed occurred several times. It "came upon" him, briefly, suddenly, and then faded away. He even alludes to holding on to his sense of the individual self after coming back from these experiences in the letter to Benjamin Blood:

"I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words? But in a moment, when I come back to my normal state of 'sanity,' I am ready to fight for mein liebes Ich (my dear self), and hold that it will last for aeons of aeons."

In the poem *In Memoriam*, he expresses his frustration at how painfully impotent 'words' are to describe the experiences he had:

Vague words! but ah, how hard to frame

In matter-moulded forms of speech,

Or ev'n for intellect to reach

Thro' memory that which I became.

(to be continued)

Margo Martin Returns to Arunachala

ON January 17, 2024, Margo Martin, a longtime resident of Arunachala Ashrama, New York, was absorbed in Arunachala. Tributes, ceremonies, obsequies, and remembrances of her life in the Ashram by all who knew her followed. Even today devotees who visit the New York Ashrama remember her with fondness.

One such devotee from Tampa, Florida, who we often see here in the New York Ashrama is Annie Troutman. Annie is Margo's daughter and a keen devotee of Bhagavan who expresses her devotion daily by visiting the Tampa Old Hall

replica, maintaining its pristine cleanliness while conducting her sadhana. In March, for the first time, Annie made a pilgrimage to Sri Ramanasramam, carrying her mother's ashes to be deposited in her final resting place – Arunachala.

Those who accompanied her on this visit were inspired to observe how she readily immersed herself in the Divine Presence in full measure while residing in Bhagavan's abode.



Annie Troutman on the Holy Hill

Devikalottara On the Heart Center

41. sarvâmbanasoonyam cha dhârayitvâ manohridi |
yatgnânam jâyate spashtam tadabhyâsaparo bhavet ||

Dispelling all attachments completely, and fixing that mind in the heart firmly, persist in your practice always in order to strengthen the awareness which then shines forth with great effulgence and clarity.

46. hritsarojehyham roopâ ya chitirnirmalâ'chalâ |
ahankâra parityâgât sa chitirmokshadâyino ||

The consciousness which shines as 'I' in the Heart-lotus is pure (flawless) and perfectly steady (without a trace of movement). By destroying the ego, which rises (from that consciousness), that consciousness itself bestows the supreme joy of liberation. Be sure about it.

59. anâdivijnânamajam purânam guhâsayam nishkalamaprapancham |
niranjanam nishpratimam nirîham adrisyamagrâhyamachintyaroopam ||

The beginningless Consciousness is unborn, whole, and residing forever in its natural home of the Heart-cave, is without form, world or impurity. It is beyond comparison and completely unattached. It cannot be comprehended by the mind, nor can it be seen or felt by the senses.

Questions and Comments

Emptying of Consciousness

My doubt is, if the self is the eternal subject, then an enquiry in the form of 'To whom are these thoughts? To me. Who am I?' seems it must (as per Bhagavan Ramana's 'Who am I?' method) amount to 'Neti, Neti.' And since emptying of consciousness is the goal to reveal the subject, the practice seems necessary till there are no thoughts and the subject is all that remains.

Yet Bhagavan himself seems to have admitted that the true enquiry is when one is off the mental waves. If that is true then it begs the question, what if one is unable to remain in 'being' due to his vasanas, or simply confusion as to how one can remain in the 'being', the 'beingness' being antecedent to the mind and the mind being the only working tool that we have? Thanks in advance. — from Texas

There is some confusion about what the objective of the 'Who am I?' inquiry is. It is not for 'emptying consciousness.' Consciousness is what, in truth, we are. Limiting the consciousness to the body and mind is the cause of all suffering and the cycle of birth and death. We do Self-enquiry to experience our true state of pure consciousness. Turning within, holding on to the individual consciousness and tracing it to its source is the purpose of Self-enquiry. The source from which the ego springs forth is pure consciousness. That is our real Self, not this ego self.

If an aspirant dedicates his or her life to the ideal of Self-realization and persists in the practice described above, help in the form of grace is felt. By committing ourselves to this spiritual path, pursuing it wholeheartedly with the light vouchsafed to us, success is certain. Bhagavan said, "Those who have succeeded owe their success to perseverance."

Find Someone Similar

Namaste. I'm not sure if this is the right place to ask this question, but I just wanted to get some advice. Please redirect me as needed to the right people.

I'm deeply interested in religion/spirituality, especially Advaita Vedanta and would really like to find someone similar for marriage, but I'm not sure how and where to look for such a girl. I wanted to see if you could please help me in any way in terms of guidance, connections, etc.

About me – I'm a 24-year-old guy from a devout Telugu Brahmin family. I was born in the US but spent half my life between US and India, so I'm culturally both and speak natively fluent Telugu. I'm a Software Engineer 2 at Amazon and well-settled financially. I'm looking to marry soon if I can find the right partner. It would be great to find someone as close to my background as possible. I'm flexible on location as well – anywhere in US/Europe/India – I can potentially transfer within Amazon.

Please let me know if you have any suggestions, guidance, or advice. I would really appreciate it!

About your inquiry concerning a partner, I cannot tell you much except that when we are born into this world the book of our life comes out of the womb with us. In that book is recorded the script concerning all the activities that are to take place in this janma (birth):

The Ordainer controls the fate of souls according to their karma (prarabdha). What is not meant to happen will not happen, no matter how hard you try, and what is meant to happen will happen, no matter how hard you try to prevent it. Therefore, the best course is to remain silent. – Sri Ramana Maharshi

Then the question of "What free will do we have?" will naturally arise. To understand that we must follow "the best course" prescribed above. This means that your life's ideal will have to be dedicated to the ultimate goal and purpose of human life, which is to know your true Self.

Our home page: arunachala.org / Events can be found on our events page: arunachala.org/events Ramana satsangs in North America: arunachala.org/satsangs / Overnight guests are required to make prior arrangements at either the New York City (ashrama@arunachala.org) or the Nova Scotia, Canada Ashrama (nova-scotia@ashrama.org)

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