A South Indian Master

(135-1)[136] Paul Brunton, whose books on India's true spiritual life have won wide acclaim, sends to Inner Culture readers this fascinating account of his great Hindu guru. Swami Yogananda visited both the Maharshi and Paul Brunton during his recent tour of India.

(135-2) It is timely to supplement the description of the Maharshi[137] in my book, A Search in Secret India, as given in the concluding chapters, because so many Western people ask me for further details about his life, personality and teaching.

This is a theme which pleases my pen well, for with none other of the adepts and yogis whom I have encountered during my travels in Africa and Asia have I been in touch so long: eight years have passed since my first intrusion into his divine presence.

The Maharshi does not fit easily into any ready-made classification. You may call him a sage, a yogi, a recluse, a saint, a philosopher, or what not, but I do not think these terms describe him accurately. For he is unique. And in that uniqueness lies his special appeal. When, in no distant period, Western travellers will gaze meditatively on his shrine and lightly observe, "Ha, another Hindu saint!" they will make a mistake. The Maharshi is not Hindu, not a saint, nor anything else so rigid. He belongs to the universe. He is a phenomenon in Nature.

You may understand this sage of South Indian better when you understand something of his life. Hence I shall relate a few stories. When he was a young man he spent some years in a pitch-dark cave high up on the lonely rocky hill of Arunachala, near the small town of Tiruvannamalai. For three years he never spoke a word to anyone, for he was enwrapped in the profoundest meditations which drew his consciousness into that inner world over whose face there is thrown a veil for ordinary men. For his food he went down twice a week to the town, carrying a begging bowl, but very soon an old widow insisted on fetching his food to his cave, so[138]

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[136] This para begins with an introductory insert in the bottom right corner of the text, then returns to the main body of the article in the next para.

[137] "Maharishee" in the original.

[138] The paras on this page continue on page 139.

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[140] The word is cut off by the left margin. Only "-R" is visible in the original.

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(139-1)[142] The Maharshi illustrates perfect power in repose. Not once during his hours of quiet sitting does he betray the slightest sign of impatience. Once I asked him whether he would like to visit Madras City with me and see a cinema, a telephone and an electric tram, three inventions he has never yet seen. He replied "I find the universe within me: why then do I need to go to Madras?"

(139-2) that he was saved the trouble of the journey.

The sage's mother came to live with him during the last six years of her life and became his disciple. On her death-bed, he placed his right hand on her head and his left on her solar plexus and remained in that position for twelve hours. When asked why he was doing so, he answered: "Her spirit is already witnessing the scenes of the past and the tendencies toward the material world are struggling within her. I am lifting her spirit steadily towards Nirvana, so that she shall not have to reincarnate again on earth, but attain everlasting happiness."

MIRACLES NOT GOAL

(139-2) The Maharshi does not approve of performing miracles because that will increase one's vanity and egoism. He says that they will come of their own accord very often if one realises the Self; in that case it is the Higher Power which performs them, not the personal. Hence he never displays one consciously, but all the same they keep on happening. Thus when his mother's corpse had to be washed previous to cremation, according to Hindu customs, it was the height of midsummer and no water was available in sufficient quantity without sending to a considerable distance. The sage quietly walked to a spot nearby and said, "Dig here!" His instructions were followed and about two feet from the surface water was found, and a well has since been made

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[142] The paras on this page follow the paras on page 135, though again, the first para is an unconnected insert in the body of the next.

there. Nevertheless, he says that the occult powers are not the chief thing to gain; we must find the kingdom of heaven first.

He has not left his hermitage for forty years, even to visit the nearest village. He welcomes everyone, although always maintaining the reserve to be expected from one who has surpassed all human attainment. He enjoys perpetually the state which all intelligent Yogis seek, the state called samadhi or continuous superconsciousness. Whereas most Yogis have to enter into a profound trance in order to experience this unique condition, the Maharshi

(continued from the previous page) has now this great good fortune without appearing in any way abnormal and without the necessity of entering external trance.

And now I shall report, in the form of questions and answers, unpublished conversations I had with him eight years ago and which I have kept in a private diary.

"Maharishi, do you teach that we are born again and again until we realise perfection?"

"What is it that is born? Not the true self. Once we are born into that it is final. All others are but fleeting incarnations of the vasanas" (tendencies of feeling, thought and action).

"Many yoga postures are impossible for a European to adopt. What do you advise?"

"The best posture is to rest the mind in the Self! However, if one finds that sitting in a chair, or even walking, is easiest for meditation, that is the right posture for him. But Hatha Yoga (body control) is for beginners. Look for the Self and you will not be concerned with postures."

"How is it that all the Vedas (scriptures), the systems of occultism and theosophy describe the psychic words, the cosmogony of the universe et cetera, and you remain silent about them?" The sage replied, "The main object or central teaching of these systems is the attainment of Supreme Spirit, the divine reality. But as all sorts of aspirants have to be reached and appealed to, the beginners and the advanced, the dull and the keen alike, a graded cosmogony is given which can be easily followed up to a point even by the materialistic. Thus, the spiritual world is shown as giving birth to the mental world, the latter to the astral, and this again to the physical world. But to the advanced aspirant who thirsts for Absolute Reality, all this is unnecessary; he has only to keep his mind fixed on the Self and he will have no need of studying what is lower. If happiness is his real goal, he will have ultimately to come back from all these diversions with astral experience and so on. It is not true that one must travel through

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these experiences in every case; one gets what one seeks. The meditation on the Self is the quickest, most direct route to realisation, as well as the easiest, whereas the methods of occultism and theosophy are roundabout and circuitous, but of course they arrive at the same goal."

CONTROLLING THE MIND

(141-1) "But Maharishi, everyone complains that the mind is fickle and wandering. How do you control it?"

"If you once direct your attention to the question who is the individual to whom this fickleness occurs, the tossing of the mind will begin to cease. Keep up the questioning attitude. And of course this can be done outside of meditation during ordinary life."

One day I went to the Sage and told him that during meditation I had found thoughts to die away and stillness to reign within me. Within that stillness I became aware of a tiny atom or point in my breast

(143-1)[144] The Maharshi does not talk much with the visitors who come to him. Hours often pass by before he utters a word in response. But when he does indulge in the luxury of a conversation with an inquirer or spiritual aspirant he usually adopts the Socratic method. There is probably no more powerful or effective method of compelling a man to think, to exercise his own reason, instead of repeating parrot-like phrases, than this of thrusting question after question at him.

(143-2) upon which all my attention was centred. I asked him if this was the Self he talked about. He replied:

"Yes, that is the Self, but you will have to go deeper still in order to perfect your realisation. Hold on to it. Do not lose the current by having the wrong idea, 'I am meditating on the Self.' At such a point try to remember that you are the Self, that this is your natural condition – not that you are practising meditation. Watch vigilantly that you do not fall away from that."

On the journey home to Europe after my first visit to India, I rested at Colombo and later caught a homeward-bound Orient liner from Australia. The second evening out to see I swooned and fell on the bed of the cabin. Within a few hours a mild attack of the fever which I had somehow kept at arm's length until then, was upon me.

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[144] The paras on this page follow the paras on page 141. Again, the first para is an unconnected insert in the body of the next.

Followed a troublous time. But through it all, and through the intense physical weakness caused by Indian fever, as soon as my burning brain could shape a thought, a picture appeared ever and again before my sight. It was the pleasant, placid face of the Maharshi; the close-cropped head with a few days growth of beard upon the chin: above all, his wonderful eyes that shone with such brilliance beneath a lofty brow, upon which rested the lofty composure of a true philosopher. This mysterious Maharishi had touched something in my nature which responded eagerly. The image of his enigmatic face constantly obtruded itself upon my mind. At unexpected moments and in incongruous places I found myself thinking of him. I formed the impression that he was calmly but powerfully radiating the subtle aura of his personality into my own orbit. The sense of his actual nearness to me was sometimes overpowering, so that my visual evidence of his absence would prove unconvincing. It was an inexplicable phenomenon, this awareness of another being by my side.

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A SOUTH INDIAN MASTER
Controlling the Mind

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A SOUTH INDIAN MASTER
Visions of the Master

(continued from the previous page) Thus, it came about, that some deep change within me moved to birth and finally found expression until I could never wander from the Way nor surrender myself to a purely animal life without seeing his enigmatic face as in the distance. At first the vision was so ethereal, so unusual, that I turned around with puzzled mind and wondered if I saw aright, or whether I was merely the victim of some visual auto-suggestion. The passage of time, however, established the thing as a veridic experience, for it also came at critical moments, to offer tangible inspiration, a wisdom better than my own, and higher strength. So when, later in France, Switzerland and Egypt, he appeared quite clearly before me and gave me messages at critical periods, I thought that this was enough to constitute discipleship.

But not so. The truth was not revealed to me until some time later, when I lived on the Tibetan border, among the Himalayan Mountains, whither I had gone at his telepathic request.

There, one day I found that the picture of the Sage disappeared and his true Spirit, his Self, entered into me as though I were a spiritualist medium. Of course, at first it did not remain permanently, but left me soon. However, this experience repeated itself many times. When I returned to his hermitage and sat before him again, he told me telepathically that this was the true way to find the Master.

A Yogi friend who came down from his secluded sanctuary in the Himalayas near Almora, said to me apropos of the Maharshi, after his first meeting: "How like the Himalayas he is! What richly harmonious and yet dynamic Life-silence! Yes, the Maharshi towers above us all, and has solved the supreme secret; but like the vast peaks he can keep his silence well."

"What," I once asked the Maharshi, "is the purpose of God creating our

universe?"

(145-1) "God has no purpose for himself," he replied. "There is a purpose, however for the individual souls. For their sake He creates this evolution in a universe. But God has nothing to gain by it. He just looks on, like the sun. But the individuals evolve and benefit by it. Those who say that God is trying to become self-conscious through man, are ignorant. He is already fully conscious."

Among his last words was a warning: "Do not tell this path to everyone, but only to the few who manifest an anxiety to know the Absolute Truth and an eagerness to find it. With others, be silent."

The Maharshi has now risen rapidly to fame throughout South India – a matter which makes not the slightest difference to his personal modesty – and so this once quiet hermitage under Arunachala, the Hill of the Holy Beacon, has become a noted place of pilgrimage.

Know Thyself – And Know Truth

(147-1) The Maharshi, the subject of this article, passed away this year. Dr Paul Brunton wrote this special introduction when he heard of the death of his beloved teacher: –

One night in spring this year, at the very moment that a flaring starry body flashed across the sky and hovered over the Hill of the Holy Beacon, there passed out of his aged body the spirit of the dying Maharishi. He was the one Indian mystic who inspired me most, the one yogi whom I revered most, and his power was such that both Governor-General and ragged coolie sat together at his feet with the feeling that they were in a divine presence.

Several factors combined to keep us apart during these past ten years, but the inner telepathic contact and close spiritual affinity between us remained and remains – vivid and unbroken. Last year he sent me this final message through a visiting friend: "When heart speaks to heart, what is there to say?"

(147-2) We are approaching the Maharshi's hermitage. We turn aside from the read 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 my cramped limbs, descend to the ground, and look around.

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