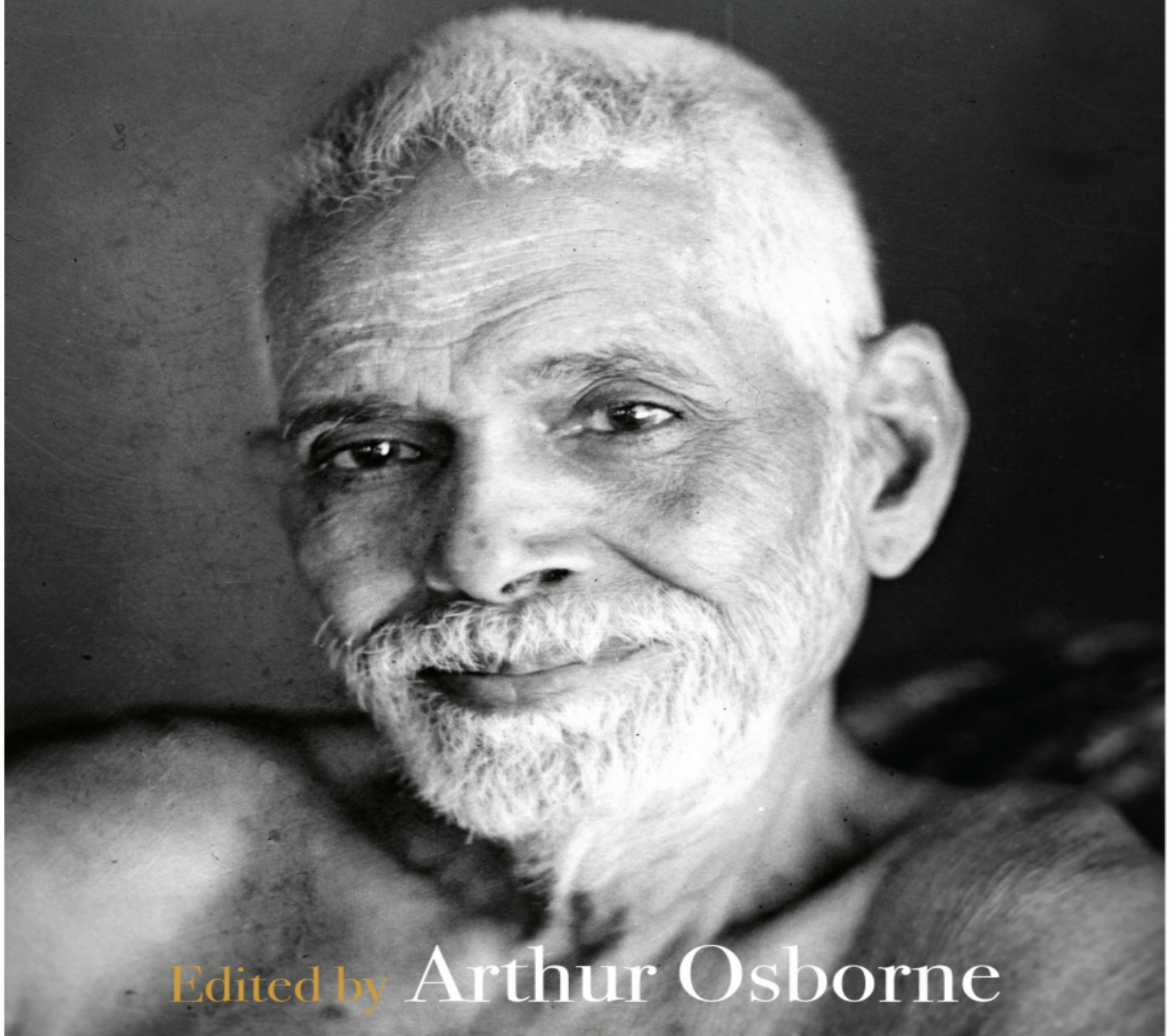


The Teachings of  
**Ramana  
Maharshi**

'Points to the possibility of finding true happiness'

*Eckhart Tolle*



Edited by **Arthur Osborne**

# CONTENTS

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Ramana Maharshi

Title Page

Preface by Alan Jacobs

Foreword by Carl Gustav Jung

Introduction by Arthur Osborne

1. THE BASIC THEORY

2. FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

3. LIFE IN THE WORLD

4. THE GURU

5. SELF-ENQUIRY

6. OTHER METHODS

7. THE GOAL

Endnotes

Index

Copyright

## About the Book

Sri Ramana Maharshi is regarded as one of the most important Indian sages of all time. At the age of sixteen, he experienced a spiritual awakening and travelled to the holy mountain of Arunachala, where a community grew up around him. From there, he touched the lives of influential writers, artists and seekers such as Carl Jung, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Somerset Maugham. Today, millions around the world continue to be inspired by his teachings.

Edited by his pupil Arthur Osborne, this classic work sets out Sri Ramana Maharshi's thoughts on such subjects as how to live in the here-and-now, on wealth, freedom, knowledge, and the essence of our true nature.

Self-enquiry is the key to liberation, Sri Ramana contends, as he invites us to detach ourselves from our illusions and set out on the path that leads towards enlightenment.

## About the Author

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi lived from 1879-1950. Thousands visited the community that grew up around him, including Paul Brunton, Carl Jung, Somerset Maugham and Henri Cartier-Bresson. His teachings on self-enquiry continue to inspire new and committed followers today.

By the same author

*Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*  
*The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*  
(Edited by Arthur Osborne)

The Teachings  
of  
Ramana Maharshi

Edited by Arthur Osborne



RIDER

LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND • JOHANNESBURG

## PREFACE BY ALAN JACOBS

Paul Brunton was a distinguished author who wrote on spiritual and metaphysical matters and whose most important book was undoubtedly his almost legendary *A Search in Secret India*. Published in 1931, it has now sold over 250,000 copies and soon made the name of the Great South Indian Sage Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi well known among the spiritually aware throughout the English-speaking world. During his journey in search of great yogis, Brunton consulted the famed Spiritual Head of Southern India, the Shankara Acharya of Kumbakonam, asking if he could direct him to a great Master, 'one who you know is competent to give me proofs of the reality of Higher Yoga'. The Acharya replied, 'I recommend you to visit a High Master whose abode is on Arunachala, the Mountain of the Holy Beacon.' Following his suggestion, Brunton travelled to Tiruvannamalai, where he met the Master. His visit was well rewarded by the wisdom Ramana Maharshi imparted to him, and all their exchanges are recorded for posterity in the book *Conscious Reality*, published by Ramana Ashram. Here Brunton wrote, 'In the presence of the Maharshi I felt security and inward peace. The spiritual radiations that emanated from him can never be reported. Face to face with the Maharshi, sometimes I felt in the presence of a visitor from another planet, at other times with a being of another species.'

A good friend of Paul Brunton at that time was the celebrated novelist Somerset Maugham. When Brunton told Maugham about his discovery of the Great Sage, it inspired Maugham to consider writing a major novel based on such a discovery. Maugham then took the journey to India

himself, to meet Ramana for purposes of research. The result of his visit inspired him to write his masterpiece *The Razor's Edge*, telling of a young man's spiritual journey, ending in a meeting with a Great Guru based on Sri Ramana Maharshi and his ashram. The novel was later made into a highly successful motion picture and has been remade since.

Once it became generally known that the Sage on whom Maugham based his novel was Sri Ramana Maharshi, it further added to his ever-increasing reputation in the West. Maugham later studied Advaita Vedanta, the high Non-Dual teaching which was taught by Ramana Maharshi (following in the tradition of the Great Philosopher Sage Adi Shankara), and later wrote a series of essays that were published.

Many visitors from Europe and America were subsequently inspired to visit Tiruvannamalai and all returned home with glowing reports, some even stayed and eventually reached the blessed state of Self-realization through his teaching and presence.

So Ramana Maharshi, widely known, became a World Guru, the highest ranking among spiritual Indian masters. Since those pre-war days his worldwide reputation has widened even more. Ramana Ashram has published over 70 books on his teachings, written by numerous highly literate devotees. All the answers to the questions asked by devotees, during his 50 years of teaching, were recorded and translated into English and checked for his approval. (He was fluent in English, having received his earlier education in an American mission school in his home town of Tiruchuzhi.) All these extensive publications led to his growing reputation as a Great Spiritual Master or Jnani, and led to more and more people visiting his ashram, where his presence can still be felt. After the Second World War and the release of the Fascist and Communist grip on



Europe, many flocked from Russia, Germany and the Middle European countries too.

Arthur Osborne, an Oxford University scholar, lecturer, author and editor, settled down in Ramana Ashram as a committed and leading devotee. His masterly book *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi In His Own Words* soon became a popular, easy-to-assimilate introduction to his complete teachings, and remains today as a great classic in post-war spiritual literature.

Since the Maharshi's passing there has been a surge of interest in his spiritual message, which has led many to the blissful state of Self-realization. At the time of writing, on Facebook alone there are numerous Ramana Maharshi pages, but the main one has over 188,000 adherents. A video of me reading one of his talks, which was published on YouTube, has received over 525,000 viewings since it was first made and released.

What more is there to say? Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is today universally acclaimed and acknowledged as a Great World Guru and ranks among the highest spiritual teachers of modern times, all of which has made him extremely influential around the world. In India there are study centres in the main cities, as well as several in North America, Europe and elsewhere. Arthur Osborne's fine book eloquently and painstakingly shows us why and how Ramana Maharshi's influence has spread worldwide like a blazing forest fire burning up the woods of ignorance and spiritual apathy in the world today.

ALAN JACOBS  
President of the  
Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK

## FOREWORD BY CARL GUSTAV JUNG

The carrier of mythological and philosophical wisdom in India has been since time immemorial the 'holy man' – a Western title which does not quite render the essence and outward appearance of the parallel figure in the East. This figure is the embodiment of spiritual India, and we meet him again and again in literature. No wonder, then, that Zimmer<sup>fn1</sup> was passionately interested in the latest and best incarnation of this type in the phenomenal personage of Shri Ramana. He saw in this Yogi, the true Avatar of the figure of the Rishi, Seer and Philosopher, which strides, as legendary as it is historical, down the centuries and the ages.

Shri Ramana is, in a sense, a *hominum homo*, a true 'son of man' of the Indian earth. He is 'genuine' and on top of that he is a 'phenomenon' who, seen through European eyes, has claims to uniqueness. But in India he is merely the whitest spot on a white surface (whose whiteness is mentioned only because there are so many surfaces that are just as black). Altogether, one sees so much in India that in the end one only wishes one could see less: the enormity and variety of countries and human beings creates longing for complete simplicity. This simplicity is there too: it pervades the spiritual life of India like a pleasant fragrance or a melody. It is everywhere the same, but never monotonous, endlessly varied. To get to know it, it is sufficient to read any Upanishad or any discourse of the Buddha. What is heard there is heard everywhere; it speaks out of a million eyes, it expresses itself in countless gestures, and there is no village or country road where that broad-branched tree cannot be found in whose shade the

ego struggles for its own abolition, drowning the world of multiplicity in the All and All-Oneness of Universal Being. I was then absolutely certain that no one could ever get beyond this, least of all the Indian holy man himself; and should Shri Ramana say anything that did not chime in with this melody, or claim to know anything that transcended it, his illumination would be false. The holy man is right when he intones India's ancient chants, but wrong when he pipes any other tune.

Shri Ramana's thoughts are beautiful to read. What we find here is a purest India, the breath of eternity, scorning and scorned by the world. It is the song of the ages, resounding like the shrilling of crickets on a summer's night, from a million beings. This melody is built up on a great theme, which, veiling its monotony under a thousand colourful reflections, tirelessly and everlastingly rejuvenates itself in the Indian spirit, whose youngest incarnation is Shri Ramana himself. It is the drama of ahamkara, the 'I-maker' or ego-consciousness, in opposition and indissoluble bondage to the atman, the Self or non ego. The Maharshi also calls the atman the 'ego-ego' – significantly enough, for the Self is indeed experienced as the subject of the subject, as the true source and controller of the ego, whose (mistaken) strivings are continually directed towards appropriating the very autonomy that is intimated to it by the Self. This conflict is not unknown to the Westerner: for him it is the relationship of man to God.

To the Indian it is clear that the Self as the originating ground of the psyche is not different from God, and that, so far as a man is in the Self, he is not only contained in God but actually is God. Shri Ramana is quite explicit on this point. The goal of Eastern religious practice is the same as that of Western Mysticism: the shifting of the centre of gravity from the ego to the Self, from man to God. This means that the ego disappears in the Self, and man in God. It is evident that Shri Ramana has either really been more

or less absorbed by the Self, or at least has struggled earnestly all his life to extinguish his ego in it. If we conceive the Self as the essence of psychic wholeness, i.e., as the totality of conscious and unconscious, we do so because it does in fact represent something like a goal of spiritual development. This formula shows the dissolution of the ego in the atman to be the unequivocal goal of religion and ethics, as exemplified in the thought of Shri Ramana. The same is obviously true of Christian Mysticism, which differs from Oriental Philosophy only through having a different terminology.

Shri Ramana's words, which Heinrich Zimmer has bequeathed to us, in excellent translation, bring together once again the loftiest insights that India has garnered in the course of the ages, and the individual life and work of the Maharshi illustrate once again the passionate striving for the liberating 'Ground'. The wisdom and mysticism of the East have, therefore, very much to say to us, even when they speak their own inimitable language. They serve to remind us that we in our culture possess something similar, which we have already forgotten, and to direct our attention to the fate of the inner man, which we set aside as trifling. The life and teaching of Shri Ramana are of significance not only for India, but for the West too. They are more than a document humane: they are a warning message to a humanity that threatens to lose itself in unconsciousness and anarchy. It is perhaps, in the deeper sense, no accident that Heinrich Zimmer's last book should leave us, as a testament, the life work of a modern Indian Prophet who exemplifies so impressively the problem of psychic transformation.

CARL GUSTAV JUNG

---

fn1 This foreword is extracted from C.G. Jung's long introduction to Heinrich Zimmer's book on the life and work of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi in

German and translated from English Publications of Sri Ramanasramam,  
Tiruvannamalai, India.

## INTRODUCTION BY ARTHUR OSBORNE

During the half-century and more of his life at Tiruvannamalai, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was visited by a constant stream of people from all parts of India and by many from the West, seeking spiritual guidance, or consolation in grief, or simply the experience of his presence. He wrote very little all these years, but a number of records of his talks with visitors were kept and subsequently published by his Ashram. These are mostly in diary form, with little arrangement according to subject. The purpose of the present book is to build up a general exposition of the Maharshi's teachings by selecting and fitting together passages from these dialogues and from his writings (published as *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* by Messrs. Rider & Co., in England and by Sri Ramanasramam in India). The editor's comments have been kept to a minimum and are printed in smaller type to distinguish them clearly from the Maharshi's own words. No distinction is made between the periods at which the Maharshi made any statement, and none is needed, for he was not a philosopher working out a system but a Realized Man speaking from direct knowledge. It sometimes happens that one who is on a spiritual path, or even who has not yet begun consciously seeking, has a glimpse of Realization during which, for a brief eternity, he experiences absolute certainty of his divine, immutable, universal Self. Such an experience came to the Maharshi when he was a lad of seventeen. He himself has described it.

'It was about six weeks before I left Madura for good that the great change in my life took place. It was quite sudden. I was sitting alone in a room on the first floor of my uncle's house. I seldom had any sickness, and on that day there was nothing wrong with my health, but a sudden violent fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it, and I did not try to account for it or to find out whether there was any reason for the fear. I just felt "I am going to die" and began thinking what to do about it. It did not occur to me to consult a doctor, or my elders or friends; I felt that I had to solve the problem myself, there and then.

"The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: "Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? The body dies." And I at once dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out stiff as though *rigor mortis* had set in and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, so that neither the word "I" nor any other word could be uttered. "Well then," I said to myself, "this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body I? It is silent and inert but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the "I" within me, apart from it. So I am Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit." All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. "I" was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that "I". From that moment onwards the "I" or Self focussed attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on.'<sup>1</sup>

It is the last sentence that is the most remarkable, because usually such an experience soon passes, although the impression of certainty that it leaves on the mind is never afterwards forgotten. Very rare are the cases when it remains permanent, leaving a man thenceforth in constant identity with the Universal Self. Such a one was the Maharshi.

Soon after this change occurred, the youth who was later to be known as 'the Maharshi' left home as a sadhu. He made his way to Tiruvannamalai, the town at the foot of the

holy hill of Arunachala, and remained there for the rest of his life.

For a while he sat immersed in Divine Bliss, not speaking, scarcely eating, utterly neglecting the body he no longer needed. Gradually, however, devotees gathered around him and, for their sake, he returned to an outwardly normal life. Many of them, craving instruction, brought him books to read and expound, and he thus became learned almost by accident, neither seeking nor valuing learning. The ancient teaching of non-duality that he thus acquired merely formalized what he had already realized. He has explained this himself.

'I had read no books except the *Periapuranam*, the Bible and bits of *Tayumanavar* or *Tevaram*. My conception of Ishvara was similar to that found in the Puranas; I had never heard of Brahman, *samsara* and so forth. I did not yet know that there was an Essence or impersonal Real underlying everything and that Ishvara and I were both identical with it. Later, at Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to the *Ribhu Gita* and other sacred books, I learnt all this and found that the books were analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name.'<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps something should be said about the Maharshi's way of answering questions. There was nothing heavy or pontifical about it. He spoke freely and his replies were often given with laughter and humour. If the questioner was not satisfied, he was free to object or ask further questions. It has been said that the Maharshi taught in silence, but this does not mean that he gave no verbal expositions, only that these were not the essential teaching. That was experienced as a silent influence in the heart. The power of his presence was overwhelming and his beauty indescribable and yet, at the same time, he was utterly simple, utterly natural, unassuming, unpretentious, unaffected.

For the sake of uniformity, the questioner has been referred to in the dialogues in this book as 'D.', standing for devotee, except in cases where the name is given or where,



for some reason, the word 'devotee' would not apply. The Maharshi has been referred to as 'B.', standing for Bhagavan, since it was usual to address him by this name and in the third person. Actually, it is a word commonly used to mean 'God' but it is used also in those rare cases where a man is felt to be, as Christ put it, 'One with the Father'. It is the same as the name for the Buddha commonly translated into English as the 'Blessed One'.

So far as is possible, Sanskrit words have been avoided, and it usually has been possible. The purpose of this is to make the book easier to read and also to avoid giving the false impression that the quest of Self-realization is some intricate science that can be understood only with a Sanskrit terminology. It is true that there are spiritual sciences that have a necessary technical terminology, but they are more indirect. The clear and simple truth of non-duality, which Bhagavan taught, and the direct path of Self-enquiry that he enjoined can be expounded in simple language; and indeed, he himself so expounded them to Western visitors, without having recourse to Sanskrit terminology. In the rare cases where a Sanskrit term has seemed necessary or useful in this book its approximate meaning has been indicated in brackets, so that no glossary is necessary. It may also be remarked that the English words Enlightenment, Liberation and Self-realization have all been used with the same meaning, to correspond with the Sanskrit words *Jnana*, *Moksha* and *Mukti*.

In places where the English of the source quoted seemed infelicitous, it has been altered. This implies no infidelity to the texts since the replies were mostly given in Tamil or other South Indian languages and later rendered into English. The meaning has not been changed.

ARTHUR OSBORNE

# 1

## THE BASIC THEORY

Readers of a philosophical turn of mind may find it strange to see the first chapter of this work entitled 'The Basic Theory'. It may appear to them that the whole work should be devoted to theory. In fact, however, the Maharshi, like every spiritual master, was concerned rather with the practical work of training aspirants than with expounding theory. The theory had importance, but only as a basis for practice.

*D.:* Buddha is said to have ignored questions about God.

*B.:* Yes, and because of this he has been called an agnostic. In fact Buddha was concerned with guiding the seeker to realize Bliss here and now rather than with academic discussions about God and so forth.<sup>1</sup>

*D.:* Is the study of science, psychology, physiology, etc., helpful for attaining yoga-liberation or for intuitive understanding of the unity of Reality?

*B.:* Very little. Some theoretical knowledge is needed for Yoga and may be found in books, but practical application is what is needed. Personal example and instruction are the most helpful aids. As for intuitive understanding, a person may laboriously convince himself of the truth to be grasped by intuition, of its function and nature, but the actual intuition is more like feeling and requires practice and personal contact. Mere book learning is not of any great use. After Realization all intellectual loads are useless burdens and are to be thrown overboard.<sup>2</sup>

Pre-occupation with theory, doctrine and philosophy can actually be harmful insofar as it detracts a man from the really important work of spiritual effort by offering an easier alternative that is merely mental, and which, therefore, cannot change his nature.

‘What use is the learning of those who do not seek to wipe out the letters of destiny (from their brow) by enquiring: “Whence is the birth of us who know the letters?” They have sunk to the level of a gramophone. What else are they, O Arunachala?

‘It is those who are not learned who are saved rather than those whose ego has not yet subsided in spite of their learning. The unlearned are saved from the relentless grip of the devil of self-infatuation; they are saved from the malady of myriad whirling thoughts and words; they are saved from running after wealth. It is from more than one evil that they are saved.’<sup>3</sup>

Similarly he had no use for theoretical discussions.

‘It is due to illusion born of ignorance that men fail to recognize that which is always and for everybody the inherent Reality dwelling in its natural heart-centre and to abide in it, and instead they argue that it exists or does not exist, that it has form or has not form, or is non-dual or is dual.’<sup>4</sup>

‘Can anything appear apart from that which is eternal and perfect? This kind of dispute is endless. Do not engage in it. Instead, turn your mind inward and put an end to all this. There is no finality in disputation.’<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, even the scriptures are useless.

‘The scriptures serve to indicate the existence of the Higher Power or Self and to point the way to It. That is their essential purpose. Apart from that they are useless. However, they are voluminous in order to be adapted to the level of development of every seeker. As a man rises in the scale he finds the stages already attained to be only stepping stones to higher stages, until finally the goal is reached. When that happens, the goal alone remains and

everything else, including the scriptures, becomes useless.’<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes, it is true, he expounded philosophy in all its intricacies, but only as a concession to weakness, to those ‘addicted to much thinking’, as he put it in Self-enquiry. I had thought of quoting such an explanation here, but found that it contained the passage:

‘The intricate maze of philosophy of the various schools is said to clarify matters and to reveal the Truth, but in fact it creates confusion where none need exist. To understand anything there must be the Self. The Self is obvious, so why not remain as the Self? What need to explain the non-self?’

And of himself he adds:

‘I was indeed fortunate that I never took to it (i.e. philosophy). Had I taken to it I would probably be nowhere; but my inherent tendencies led me directly to inquire “Who am I?” How fortunate.’<sup>7</sup>

## THE WORLD—REAL OR ILLUSION?

Nevertheless, some theoretical teaching is necessary as the basis for the practical work of spiritual training. With the Maharshi this took the form of non-duality, in complete accord with the teachings of the great Sage, Shankara. The agreement does not, however, mean that Bhagavan was, as a philosopher would put it, ‘influenced by’ Shankara, merely that he recognized Shankara’s teaching as a true exposition of what he had realized and knew by direct knowledge.

*D.:* Is Bhagavan’s teaching the same as Shankara’s?

*B.:* Bhagavan’s teaching is an expression of his own experience and realization. Others find that it tallies with Sri Shankara’s.<sup>8</sup>

*D.:* When the Upanishads say that all is Brahman, how can we agree with Shankara that this world is illusory?

*B.:* Shankara also said that this world is Brahman or the Self. What he objected to is one’s imagining that the Self is limited by the names and forms that constitute the world.

He only said that the world has no reality apart from Brahman. Brahman or the Self is like a cinema screen and the world like the pictures on it. You can see the picture only so long as there is a screen. But when the observer himself becomes the screen only the Self remains.<sup>9</sup>

‘Shankara has been criticized for his philosophy of *Maya* (illusion) without understanding his meaning. He made three statements: that Brahman is real, that the universe is unreal and that Brahman is the Universe. He did not stop with the second. The third statement explains the first two; it signifies that when the Universe is perceived apart from Brahman, that perception is false and illusory. What it amounts to is that phenomena are real when experienced as the Self and illusory when seen apart from the Self.<sup>10</sup>

‘The Self alone exists and is real. The world, the individual and God are, like the illusory appearance of silver in the mother-of-pearl, imaginary creations in the Self.<sup>11</sup> They appear and disappear simultaneously. Actually, the Self alone is the world, the “I” and God. All that exists is only a manifestation of the Supreme.’<sup>12</sup>

*D.:* What is reality?

*B.:* Reality must always be real. It has no names or forms but is what underlies them. It underlies all limitations, being itself limitless. It is not bound in any way. It underlies unrealities, being itself Real. It is that which is. It is as it is. It transcends speech and is beyond description such as being or non-being.<sup>13</sup>

He would not be entangled in apparent disagreements due merely to a different viewpoint or mode of expression.

*D.:* The Buddhists deny the world whereas Hindu philosophy admits its existence but calls it unreal, isn't that so?