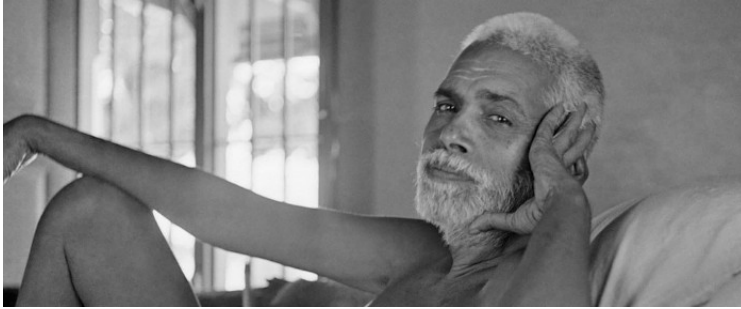


Who is Ramana Maharshi?

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<https://www.nodualidad.info/textos/quien-es-ramana-maharshi.html>



Introduction (from no-dualidad.info)

In India, Ramana Maharshi is considered a Sage. The concept of Sage varies greatly from the East to the West. In the East, Sage is the human being who has attained spiritual wisdom, the one who has attained Liberation, the one who has freed himself from ignorance, the only cause of evil, since evil and good are concepts created by us and do not exist by themselves: they are the product of our false identification with the physical body, with the "ego" and the result of a feeling of duality that is not real. "I am my body, I am this or that, I experience sensations, sufferings, joys, etc.". All this disappears when duality is resolved in Unity. Then there remains only the Self, the Pure Consciousness, the Divine, Eternal and Real Being. And the individual separate consciousness merges with the Absolute Consciousness, call it God, Pure Consciousness, Reality or whatever you like. This transcends the mind and is inexplicable, for the vehicle to explain it can only be the mind itself, and the mind itself is in the field of duality, and duality can never explain the Unity which is nevertheless experientable. Well, he who is on the way to attain this experience, who has even had glimpses of it, is regarded in India as a "Saint"; and he who is permanently established in that State, is the one who is called a "Sage" (Jivanmukta).(1)

When Ramana Maharshi realized the Self (Atman) he was a 17 year old brahman belonging to a middle class family in South India. He was still a high school student and knew nothing about spiritual disciplines or even spiritual philosophy. Normally, to reach that "state" requires some kind of study followed by hard training that often lasts a lifetime and even longer. The sages say that it depends on the spiritual maturity of the person. According to Hindu traditions this can be compared to a pilgrimage, and a day's pilgrimage to the life of a being. When we reach the goal or how close we get to it depends partly on the energy with which we work and partly on the distance one is at the moment of starting life. In very rare cases, as was the Maharshi's, it is only necessary to take one last step.

To say that the Maharshi realized the Self (Atman) does not mean that he learned a new doctrine or acquired a higher state or miraculous powers, but that the "I," which understands or does not understand a doctrine and which does or does not possess powers, consciously identified itself with the Atman, Universal Self or Spirit. Maharshi himself described in his simple and picturesque style how this happened:

"It was about six weeks before I left Madura for good when this big change in my life occurred. It happened all of a sudden. I was alone, sitting in a room, on the second floor of my uncle's house. I had hardly ever been sick and that day I was perfectly well. Suddenly I was seized with a violent fear of dying. There was nothing in my health to make me think of it. I did not even ask myself questions about the reason for my fear; I just had this feeling, 'I am going to die,' and I began to think about what I should do at that moment. It didn't occur to me to consult a doctor, or my relatives, or my friends. I felt that I had to solve the problem myself, there and then. This shock turned my mind inward and I thought without really dwelling on the words, 'Now comes death. What does it mean? What is it that dies? This body dies. I immediately

dramatized the fact of death. I lay down, with my limbs stiffened, and imitated a corpse to give more reality to this investigation. I held my breath and closed my lips. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'this body is dead. It will be taken to be burned and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am I dead? am I the body?' It remains silent and inert and yet I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of my 'I' within me, apart from my body. So I am spirit and transcend the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it is not affected by death. This means that I am immortal Spirit."

"All this was not a mere thought; it was a light in me, vividly felt. It was a living Truth which I perceived directly, almost without mental process. The 'I' was something very real, the only real thing in my present state, and all my conscious activity was centered in that 'I'. From that moment on, the 'I', the Self (Atman), fixed its attention on itself with powerful fascination. The fear of death had disappeared once and for all and the absorption in the Self continued without interruption. Other thoughts, like notes of music, may come and go, but the Self continues as the 'Sruti', the fundamental note which is the base and with which all other notes merge. Even if the body was talking, reading or acting, I was always centered in that Self."

An experience of identity such as that of the Maharshi is not always resolved in permanent Liberation. It may occur, but the tendencies of the "ego" will again obscure it, even though the memory and the undoubted certainty of what the true "state" is, even if one does not live permanently in it, is retained from it. The miracle, in this case, was that in the Maharshi the experience was permanently embodied without his ever again suffering any relapse into ignorance, but, on the contrary, he remained from then on completely identified with the Self (Atman), that is, with Reality.

For several weeks after this experience he lived with his family his student life. In appearance everything remained the same, but external values had lost their meaning for him. He did not care what he ate, accepting with indifference whatever was offered to him. His lack of interest in everything affected his school activities, so, realizing that his relatives resented the fact that he lived as a sadhu and at the same time enjoyed the benefits of a family life, he secretly left home and moved to Tiruvannamalai, a place he never left and where he was to remain for more than fifty years. And there, on the sacred hill of Arunachala, symbol of the teaching by Silence, seat of Siva and center and path where physical contact with the Guru is not necessary, and where it is Silence that speaks directly to the heart, the Maharshi taught those who came from other parts of India and many others from East and West, the path of the Knowledge of the Self or "Self". And he was called "the Maharshi" because it means "the Great Sage", a title traditionally given in India to one who initiates a new spiritual path.

The realization of the Self supposes a constant and conscious "realization" of identity with the Atman (the Absolute, the Spirit). It is the state that Christ expressed when he said "I and my Father are One". That is why the Maharshi was also called "Bhagavan", which means God.

When Bhagavan arrived at Tiruvannamalai, neither disciples nor teachings had yet arisen. He remained uninterested in the world, immersed in that experience of the Self, which means integral knowledge and ineffable bliss. He did nothing to maintain his body. Some people, full of admiration for that young man, provided him daily with some food, and sometimes they even had to give it to him directly, because he remained totally oblivious to the world around him. It was very gradually that he returned to participate in the activities of life, perhaps moved by compassion for the beings around him.

Something similar can be said of his philosophical studies. He did not need any theoretical confirmation of his wonderful Reality, in which he was established, but his followers asked him for explanations. If he read books it was in order, in turn, to read them to them, and so he became a scholar without seeking or giving value to scholarship. There was never a change in his teachings. He taught the doctrine of non-duality or Advaita, in which all other doctrines are absorbed: that the Self is One; that it manifests itself in the Universe and in all its creatures without ever changing its eternal and unmanifested Being, just as in a dream the mind creates facts and characters without losing anything by their creation and without gaining anything by their reabsorption. Some find this very incomprehensible, taking it to mean that the world is unreal, but the Maharshi explained that the world is only unreal as a world, that is, as an entity subsisting by itself, but that it is real as a manifestation of the Self (Atman), just as the scenes projected on the cinema screen are unreal in that they are not living, but are nevertheless real if considered as a spectacle of shadows. Some feared that this doctrine would deny the existence of the personal God to be adored, but precisely because it transcends the idea of the personal God, it does not deny it, since in the end the one who adores is absorbed in the Union with the Adored. The human being who worships, the worship and the adored God have reality only insofar as they are manifestations of the Self.

The Maharshi gave very little importance to theory in his dealings with disciples. The theory he expounds throughout his work is expounded with the sense of guiding towards a practical purpose of helping to experience the Knowledge of the

Self that is beyond the "ego" or mind. Questions he was asked out of mere curiosity, he brushed aside. If he was asked about a person's posthumous state, he would answer: *"Why do you want to know what you will be after death before you know what you are now? First find out what you are now."* In this way he made the questioner replace his merely intellectual inquiry with a spiritual quest. However, when he was sincerely consulted on how to accomplish the task of discovering the Self, he showed great patience in all his answers.

The method of self-inquiry that he taught goes beyond philosophy or psychology, for it is not about inquiring into the qualities of the "ego", but into the resplendent, qualityless "Self" that exists for us when the "ego" ceases to act. What the mind has to do is not to try to find answers, but simply to keep still so that the true answer can arise. It would not be correct to numb the mind by force of repeating "Who am I?", which was the formula he (*Vichara*) advised. What was to be done was to ask this question only once and then concentrate, trying to find the source of the "ego", preventing the appearance of thoughts. Finding the source of the "ego" implies concentration on the spiritual center of the body ("the heart on the right side"), as the Maharshi explained, and thus, by concentrating and preventing the appearance of thoughts, no answer had to be suggested. The "true" one would appear by itself; no answer that the "ego" could give would be the true one.

The Maharshi method for the search for the Self embraces *Karma-marga* as well as *Jnana-marga* (the path of action and the path of Knowledge), for this method is to be used not only as meditation but also during the knowledge of life, attacking the manifestations of egoism, constantly asking to whom good or bad fortune, triumph or failure, etc., befalls. In this way, the circumstances of life, far from being an obstacle to *sadhana*, become its instruments. Therefore he always discouraged those who asked him whether they should abandon the worldly life; on the contrary, he encouraged them to fulfill their tasks in life unselfishly and renouncing the fruits of their actions.

His teachings also embrace the path of Love and devotion. He said: *"There are two ways: ask yourself, 'Who am I?' or more precisely, 'What am I?', or give yourself up. Both lead to the same goal. God, Guru and Self are not different entities, but only one. Those who follow the path of Self-knowledge seek the Self internally, while those who strive on the path of Love, surrender to the externally manifested Guru, or God. But the two paths are the same."* In this way the Maharshi opened a new path, since the old path of Self-knowledge (*Jnana-marga*) was only followed by hermits devoted to meditation, and what Ramana did was not only to restore the old path, but to create a new one adapted to the conditions of our time, which can be followed in a city, having formed a family, and both in a forest and in a hermitage, being able to alternate daily periods of meditation with daily activities.

The Maharshi wrote very little. He taught mainly through Spiritual Silence, which does not mean that he refrained from answering questions put to him; he would answer and write as long as he felt that the questions were sincere and not the product of mere curiosity. However, silent influence was his essential teaching.

Except for the introduction, the text is a translation of the Preface of the book "The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi" by Arthur Osborne, published by Sri Ramanasrnanan, Tiruvanninalai, S. India.