

Ramaṇa Maharshi:
Hindu and non-Hindu Interpretations of a Jīvanmukta

by

Dr. J. Glenn Friesen

© 2006

Introduction

Like many others, I have been fascinated by the life and teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi (1879-1950). More than fifty years have passed since his death (or *mahasamādhi*). But his *ashram* continues to attract devotees from all over the world. The *ashram* is in Tiruvannamalai,¹ one of the great temple towns in southern India. The grounds of the *ashram* are filled with flowers, and there seem to be monkeys and peacocks everywhere. There is a strong sense of spirituality. Priests chant the Vedas, and they make ceremonial offerings to Ramaṇa's image (*sīla*). Devotees meditate silently in the marble hall surrounding Ramaṇa's *samādhi* or tomb. Because he was a Hindu saint, Ramaṇa was not cremated, but buried. It is believed that there is great power associated with his tomb. Many pilgrims walk around the holy mountain of Arunāchala, and visit the caves where Ramaṇa meditated for so long.

The *ashram* publishes many works by and about Ramaṇa. It also maintains an excellent website² offering extensive information about Ramaṇa, photos of the ashram, and numerous works by various devotees.

¹ The word '*annamalai*' is Tamil form of Arunāchala, the holy mountain. '*Tiru*' is prefixed to show that it is holy place. See Lakshmana Sarma ["Who"]: *Maha Yoga or The Upanishadic Lore in the Light of the Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1961, first published 1937), 10 fn ['*Maha Yoga*'].

² Ramaṇa Maharshi: Website for Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi [<http://www.Ramaṇa-maharshi.org/books.htm>].

It is well known that the center of Ramaṇa’s teaching is his method of Self-Enquiry. He urged all those who questioned him to ask “Who am I? Who is the one who is asking the question?” According to Ramaṇa, when the true Self is found, all questions are resolved.

Cease all talk of ‘I’ and search with inward diving mind whence the thought of ‘I’ springs up. This is the way of wisdom. To think, instead, “I am not this, but That I am”, is helpful in the search, but it is not the search itself.³

If you keep to the thought of the Self, and intently watch for It, then even that one thought which is used as a focus in concentration will disappear and you will simply BE, i.e., the true Self with no ‘I’ or ego. Meditation on the Self is our natural state.⁴

But there are many interpretations of Ramaṇa’s teaching, and of the nature of Ramaṇa’s enlightenment experience itself. In this work, I will examine some of the interpretations of Ramaṇa. I will look at how Ramaṇa explains his own experience, and how he has been interpreted by both Hindus and by non-Hindus.

B.V. Narasimha Swami, an early devotee, already acknowledged this multiplicity of interpretations in his 1931 biography of Ramaṇa.⁵ Narasimha says that even at that time there were many different interpretations of Ramaṇa:

His works are cryptic and are capable of diverse interpretations. Saktas go to him and think he is a Sakta, Saivas take him for a Saiva, Srivaishnavas find nothing in him inconsistent with their Visishtadvaitic ideal. Moslems and Christians have found in him elements of their “true faith” (Narasimha, 197-98).

Another early devotee of Ramaṇa, Major Chadwick, was also aware of this problem. He said that Ramaṇa was like a mirror that seemed to reflect back your own feelings. If you

³ Ramaṇa Maharshi: “Forty Verses,” *The Collected Works of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, 7th ed. with revised translations (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 2001), 119 verse 29 [‘CW’]. This is a revision of the earlier *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997) [‘Os’].

⁴ Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Conscious Immortality* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1996, first published 1984), 67 [‘Conscious Immortality’].

⁵ B.V. Narasimha Swami: *Self Realization: The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai, 1993, first published 1931), 197-98 [‘Narasimha’].

were reticent and over-awed, he appeared stand-offish; if you responded naturally to the all-embracing love of his presence, he treated you as one of his own.⁶

We will later look at Narasimha's biography in more detail, as well as other biographies of Ramaṇa. For now, it is sufficient to note that Narasimha gives his own interpretation of Ramaṇa's method of Self-Enquiry. But he does not discuss in detail what the other different interpretations mean, the ideas on which the different interpretations are based, and the implications that they might have. Nor does he discuss any development of Ramaṇa's own understanding of his experience, and how his understanding may conflict with other traditions within Hinduism.

Most books about Ramaṇa have taken a traditional hagiographical approach—they tell Ramaṇa's story in a devotional way that emphasizes his saintly qualities. According to this traditional story, Ramaṇa's enlightenment was immediate, without the aid of a *guru* and without any influence from other sources.

The traditional account of Ramaṇa also emphasizes that Ramaṇa's teachings were entirely his own, although these teachings were “in accordance” with other Hindu teachings, and with *Vedānta Advaita* in particular. This traditional approach does not look for any differences between Ramaṇa's ideas and other Hindu thought. Contradictions or inconsistencies in Ramaṇa's teachings are explained as being due to the fact that his listeners were at different stages of spiritual development, and that Ramaṇa's ideas can be interpreted on different levels. This approach also assumes that there was no development or change in Ramaṇa's teachings.

I have attempted to go behind the traditional narrative of Ramaṇa's story in order to examine the different sources and traditions that have influenced both Ramaṇa and his interpreters. There is of course something very Western in this emphasis on different traditions in Hinduism, sources and influences, and in comparing various types of *advaitic* experiences. Devotees of Ramaṇa may therefore object to this analysis as just

⁶ Chadwick, A.W. (Sadhu Arunāchala): *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1994, first published 1961), 15. Excerpts online at [www.beezone.com/Ramaṇa/Ramaṇas_will.html] ['Chadwick'].

another attempt to impose Western ideas. How can the *advaitic* experience, which Ramaṇa says is beyond any conceptualization, be discussed at all?

But Ramaṇa himself discussed and wrote about his *advaitic* experience. There are extensive records of his discussions with his devotees and others who came to see him, both Hindu and non-Hindu. And even if Ramaṇa's *advaitic* experience was itself beyond conceptualization, this does not necessarily imply that his *seeking* of the experience was without any conceptual influences. Nor does it mean that we cannot look at the sources that Ramaṇa himself used to *describe* his experience.⁷ To understand Ramaṇa's life and teachings, we need to examine how he himself understood it. And we need to look at how others interpreted him, especially those interpreters within his own lifetime, who had experienced his living presence. We can also use comparative philosophy to better understand these descriptions and interpretations, and to test whether they are internally consistent, and consistent with other Hindu traditions.

I have divided up this study into the following sections:

1. I begin with a summary of the traditional story of Ramaṇa's life and teachings.
2. I then examine this traditional story more closely in order to point out certain problems that arise with respect to it.
3. The third stage of this study reviews several biographies and interpretations of Ramaṇa, both by Hindus and by non-Hindus. These interpretations of Ramaṇa are often inconsistent, and even in tension with each other.
4. The next stage of this study involves looking at various influences on Ramaṇa and the tensions among these influences: Traditional *Advaita Vedānta*, neo-Hinduism, *Tantra*, Christianity, and other western influences, such as western science and occult theosophical ideas.

⁷ I am aware that the distinction between experience and conceptualization is itself considered problematic. But is it not Western *hubris* to insist that no experience can go beyond conceptualization? To deny the possibility of a non-mediated experience is also contrary to Ramaṇa's own self-understanding of his experience. And what if our heart experience is the basis for all conceptualization?

5. I devote a special chapter to Gaṇapati Muni's influence on Ramaṇa.
6. I conclude with a summary of my findings. I hope that by better understanding Ramaṇa's experience, we can also better appreciate Ramaṇa's continued importance.

I. The Traditional Account of Ramaṇa's Life and Teachings

This summary of the traditional account of Ramaṇa derives largely from Narasimha's biography of him.

Ramaṇa was born in 1879 in Tiruchuzhi, Tamil Nadu (South India). Tiruchuzhi is a small village about thirty miles from Madurai. He was named Venkatarāman Ayyār; this name was later abbreviated to Ramaṇa. When he was 12 years old, his father died and Ramaṇa moved to his uncle's house in Madurai. He attended the American Mission High School in Madurai; this fact is important because he later makes parallels between his experience and Christian ideas. It is said that Ramaṇa was a poor student, more interested in sports than in his studies.

Narasimha reports that as a boy, Ramaṇa was such a heavy sleeper that no amount of shouting—and not even a beating—could wake him up (Narasimha, 20). This unusual fact should be taken into account in assessing Ramaṇa's later trances.

In 1896, when Ramaṇa was 16 years old, he was seized by “a sudden and unmistakable fear of death.” He then *enacted* the state of death. He lay down on his bed and he imitated the rigid position of a corpse. He held his breath, and kept his lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape. He then realized that, even if his body died, his self would survive. His “I” was something very real, and in fact it was the only real thing in that state. He felt that he became absorbed in this self or ‘I.’ His devotees believe that Ramaṇa was fully enlightened in this experience at the age of 16, without instruction from any *guru* or teacher, and that from then on, the Self was the focus of his attention.

After this experience, Ramaṇa lost all interest in friends, family or studies. He stopped being interested in sports, and he preferred to be left by himself. His schoolwork got even worse. A few months after his experience of enacting death, Ramaṇa's teacher gave him an extra assignment as a punishment for his poor studies. He sat in his room at home

for some time, but finally put his books away and began to meditate. His older brother made the exasperated comment, “Why should one, who behaves thus, retain all this?” This comment is interpreted to mean that if Ramaṇa really preferred meditation, why did he continue to stay in society and continue with his studies? In other words, why did he not renounce the world and become a *sannyāsī*?⁸ In fact, an uncle of Ramaṇa’s had been a *sannyāsī*. Ramaṇa therefore had some knowledge of how a *sannyāsī* would act.

Ramaṇa interpreted his brother’s question as the call of God, his “Father in Heaven.” This is a very Christian way of referring to God. It must be remembered that Ramaṇa was attending a Christian school. We will later look at these Christian influences in more detail.

Ramaṇa told his brother that he was walking to school. His brother said that if he was going there, he should pay certain school fees for him. He gave Ramaṇa five rupees for this purpose. Ramaṇa left home without telling anyone. He left only the following note:

I have, in search of my Father and in obedience to his command, started from here. THIS is only embarking on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore none need grieve over THIS affair. To trace THIS out, no money need be spent.

Your college fee has not yet been paid. Rupees two are enclosed herewith. Thus, ____.

Like a *sannyāsī*, Ramaṇa did not even sign his name to his note. Using three of the rupees, he traveled by rail and by foot to the temple town of Tiruvannamalai, because a relative had previously told him that the sacred mountain Arunāchala was located there.

Ramaṇa ate almost nothing on the way, and he seemed to be sunk into a trance. Narasimha refers to this trance as “the *samādhi* state.” In a temple along the way, Ramaṇa had what is described as a visual photism—a vision of dazzling light suddenly streaming forth and pervading the place. Narasimha refers to William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* in support of such a phenomenon. Obviously, Narasimha used western philosophy to try to interpret Ramaṇa’s experience.

⁸ A *sannyāsī* is one who has entered the fourth stage of life in Hinduism.

At another temple along the way, Ramaṇa asked for food. He was led to a nearby house for some water, and he fell asleep on his way. He continued walking in his sleep, but lost consciousness and fell down. For the last twenty miles, he took off his earrings and pledged them to raise the additional train fare.

Once he reached Arunāchala, Ramaṇa had his hair shaved off. He threw away all his clothes, except one piece that he kept as a loincloth. He also threw away the sacred thread that marked him as a Brahmin. These are all traditional indications of becoming a *sannyāsī*.

Ramaṇa lived in the temple in this trance state for about six months. During this time, other holy men or *sadhus* looked after him. Ramaṇa was known as the young *Brāhmaṇa Swāmi*. He was fed the temple offerings, such as the milk from the Goddess Uma's shrine. He remained in almost complete silence. Some other boys teased him and threw stones at him, so he moved to a dark pit in the temple known as the *Pātāla Lingam*, where he hoped to be left alone. There he was bitten by scorpions, mosquitoes and ants, and his body became full of open sores. But Ramaṇa seemed to be oblivious to any physical discomfort. It is said that this was due to the "intensity of his trance." Narasimha stresses the importance of this trance:

The fact that he was completely unconscious of this only goes to prove the depth of his absorption in the Infinite (Narasimha, 47).

Ramaṇa would sometimes sit for eight or ten hours without rising for a meal. Sometimes he had to be forced to eat. For about a month at the end of 1896, Ramaṇa was totally naked. Narasimha Swami reports:

As the Swami continued to neglect his comforts, and even cleanliness, he rose in popular esteem (Narasimha, 52).

After living in the *Pātāla Lingam*, Ramaṇa moved to the temple grounds, then to other nearby shrines. He continued to ignore his physical needs, and he had to be looked after by others. His first permanent attendant or disciple was Uddandi Nayinar. He saw Ramaṇa at the foot of a tree. Ramaṇa seemed to be in ecstasy and oblivious of his body. It is reported that Nayinar said, "Here indeed are realization and peace, and here must I seek them." Thus, Ramaṇa's trance state was important in obtaining this disciple. In

addition to looking after Ramaṇa, Nayinar recited works to him, such as the *Yoga Vāsistham* and *Kaivalya Navanitaam*. As we shall see, many of Ramaṇa’s teachings derive from the *Yoga Vāsistham*.

In February 1897, a later attendant, Annamalai Tambiran, convinced Ramaṇa to move to a shrine known as *Gurumūrtam*, in a suburb outside of Tiruvannamalai. Ramaṇa stayed there for a year and a half. During that time he remained in “rapt *samādhi*, disturbed only by the noise of visitors and the dinner cup” (Narasimha, 58). Tambiran used to sing hymns to him from the *Tevāram* (sacred songs of the three Tamil poet-saints, Appar, Sundaramurti and Sambandar).

One of the other people who looked after Ramaṇa was Paḷanisvāmī, who stayed with him for 21 years. In May 1898, he moved Ramaṇa to the adjoining mango grove; no one was allowed to enter without permission. They spent six months in this orchard. During this time, Paḷanisvāmī had access to the library in town, and he brought Ramaṇa Tamil books like the *Yoga Vāsistha*. Ramaṇa took each book from him, and “absorbed and memorized its contents.” He then told Paḷanisvāmī what the book was about. It is therefore clear that Ramaṇa was not at that time maintaining complete silence. It is also clear that Ramaṇa was learning many concepts from yogic and *tantric* traditions.

It is during this time, in 1898, that Ramaṇa’s family learned where he was. A relative tried to convince him to return home, but he refused.

Ramaṇa moved from the orchard to a nearby small temple, seeking to be absolutely alone. Ramaṇa’s mother Alagammal and his older brother visited him, and begged him to return home. Again Ramaṇa refused, despite his mother’s prayers and weeping. Ramaṇa did not even speak to her, but wrote:

The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds—their *prarabdhakarma*. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen,—try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course therefore, is for one to be silent (Narasimha, 66)

In other words, Ramaṇa told his mother that he was fated to act as he did. His mother returned home. Ramaṇa’s older brother died in 1900.

In 1899, after his mother's visit, Ramaṇa moved to a cave on Arunāchala. Narasimha says that Ramaṇa's personal history ended at this point; thereafter it was the history of those who came under his influence (Narasimha, 70). Ramaṇa lived in various caves on Arunāchala for 23 years. He spent most of his time in meditation (Narasimha, 70). However, Paṇanivāmī continued to bring him books. It was also during this time that Ramaṇa met Gaṇapati Muni, who was the first person to call Ramaṇa 'Bhagavan' ['Lord']. We will later look at the influence of Gaṇapati Muni on Ramaṇa in more detail.

In 1912, while still living in the caves, Ramaṇa had a near-death experience that was genuine (i.e., not merely enacted). This story is recounted in a separate Appendix to Narasimha's biography of Ramaṇa.⁹ It is entitled, "A Strange and remarkable incident in the life of Sri Maharshi." While he was walking back to his cave, Ramaṇa suddenly felt weak. He says that the landscape in front of him gradually was shut out, as if a curtain was being drawn across the line of his vision. He says it was "just like drawing a slide across one's view in the stereoscope." He fainted and blacked out three times. The bright white curtain completely shut off his vision, his head was swimming and his breathing stopped. His skin turned "a livid blue." His companion Vasudeva Sastri thought that he was dead. He held Ramaṇa in his arms and began to weep and to lament his death. Ramaṇa says he could feel his companion's clasp and hear his words. He also saw the discoloration of his own skin and felt the stoppage of his circulation and breathing, and the increased chilliness of his body's extremities. But his usual ability of thought (*dhyana*) continued as usual. He says this condition lasted for ten to fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed through his body with enormous force. His circulation and breathing revived, and he perspired from every pore. He opened his eyes and got up and said, "Let's go." Ramaṇa said that he did not bring on this fit on purpose, but that it was one of the fits he got occasionally, and that this one was more serious.

Ramaṇa's mother visited him occasionally. In 1914 she got ill with typhoid and Ramaṇa composed verses in her honour. Verse 3 says,

⁹ The same event is referred to in *Conscious Immortality*, 167.

Arunāchala! Thou blazing fire of Wisdom! Deign to wrap my mother in
Thy light and make her one with Thee. What need then for cremation?
(Narasimha, 125)

In 1915, when she was quite old and helpless, and in poverty, Ramaṇa's mother came to Tiruvannamalai to live near Ramaṇa. There was a lot of opposition to her coming, since people feared that Ramaṇa would then move away. The criticism was based on the view that a *sannyāsī* was supposed to have no family.

When his mother arrived, Ramaṇa moved from Virupaksha Cave to Skandasram at the foot of the mountain, where the first *ashram* developed. Ramaṇa's younger brother Nagasundaram also came.

Ramaṇa's mother cooked food for herself, her sons and visitors. This again caused some people to comment that Ramaṇa's life was really more like a householder than a *sannyāsī* (Narasimha, 127). We see here the conflict between the traditional view that a *sannyāsī* should aim to remove himself from life, and the *tantric* view of *jīvanmukti*—that one can be liberated in this life. We will later look at this conflict in more detail.

During this time, Ramaṇa wrote *Appaḷa-p-paṭṭu*, a song for his mother as she sat rolling flat puris made of black gram dal.

Take the black-gram, ego-self,
Growing in the five-fold body-field
And grind it in the quern,
The wisdom-quest of 'Who am I?'
Reducing it to finest flour.¹⁰

To show that he was not attached to his mother, Ramaṇa would sometimes refuse to talk to her, although he would speak to others. He said that all women were mothers to him. It is said that Ramaṇa was thereby assisting her religious education, and that in the six years she was with him before her death, she picked up all the important truths. She started wearing the *kashaya* robe of a *sannyāsī*. In her last years, she was ill, and Ramaṇa looked after her. In 1922, she became seriously ill. As she died, he placed his right hand

¹⁰ *CW*, 131. Another translation can be found online. It is the translation found in *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997). [<http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/M/MaharshiRama/SongofPoppad.htm>]

on her breast, and his left hand on her head. Disciples chanted the name of Rama, and parts of the Vedas were recited. Narasimha links this with the *Bhagavad Gītā* I,6:

Whatever a departing soul thinks of at the time it leaves this body, in that same form it is embodied in afterlife.

When his mother died, Ramaṇa rose and said to others to join him in eating a meal, and that there was no pollution. He seemed in fact “jolly.” One of the disciples records that this seemed to be due to the burden of care for his mother being lifted from him. Narasimha seems apologetic for this apparent “rejoicing” at his mother’s death. Ramaṇa quoted the *Gītā*, and said that death is only a change of form and not of substance.

After Ramaṇa’s mother died, there was an issue as to whether her body should be cremated or buried. The bodies of saints are buried, not cremated. Was his mother a saint? Gaṇapati Muni reminded Ramaṇa of his answer in 1917 to the question whether a woman-saint should be buried; it was decided to bury her body (Narasimha, 132).¹¹ It is not clear why no one remembered the poem that Ramaṇa had composed in 1914 when his mother was ill with typhoid, and where he says, “What need for burial?” It raises the issue of whether that poem was in fact composed before her death.

A monument was put over the mother’s tomb with a *lingam* on top. Since then, the mother has been identified with *Siva* under the name of *Matrubhuteswara*, and has been worshipped daily (Narasimha, 132). Plans were made in 1938 to consecrate a temple over her grave; the temple was only completed in 1949, the year before Ramaṇa’s own death.

In December 1922, Ramaṇa moved down to live at the foot of the mountain near her tomb. Another reason for the move was that litigation had developed over ownership of the *ashram* property that had been erected at Skandasram (Narasimha, 150). This litigation is very interesting, since a *sannyāsī* is not supposed to own any property. How then could the *ashram* claim title to it? Ramaṇa was himself cross-examined in these proceedings (see discussion below).

¹¹ The question is recorded in *Ramaṇa Gītā* (see below).

A new *ashram* started to form around the new location near the mother's tomb, although there was then only one thatched shed. In 1930, Ramaṇa's younger brother was appointed manager (*sarvadhikari*) of the ashram; he changed his name to Niranjananda Swami. Niranjananda Swami died in 1953. His son and successor is T.N. Venkataraman. He was brought up by Ramaṇa's sister, Athai. He arrived at the *ashram* in 1938.

In November 1948, a tumour was noticed on Ramaṇa's arm. Doctors, homeopaths and practitioners of the *siddha* system were called in (Narasimha, 258). It is said by some devotees that despite his pain, Ramaṇa never uttered a sigh nor made a grimace of suffering.¹² But Chadwick records that Ramaṇa did suffer:

He certainly appeared to suffer terribly; at night when he was unaware that anyone could hear him, he lay on his couch, groaning and calling out. At that time it was indeed difficult to realize that he, as a Jnani, did not feel pain in the same way as we do, but that he saw it as something apart from him, as a dream which could be regarded objectively. When Milarepa was dying he was asked if he did not feel pain, his agony was obviously great. "No," he replied, "but there is pain" (Chadwick, 21).

Ramaṇa's last evening was April 14, 1950. The famous French photographer Cartier-Bresson was there. So was a photographer from *Life Magazine*. Ramaṇa died at 8:47. There was a huge meteor, or shooting star in the sky (Cohen, 162). Ramaṇa was buried in what used to be the dining hall. The present *samādhi* (memorial over his tomb) was completed in 1967.

II. Questioning the Traditional Account

Some of Ramaṇa's own words bring into question this traditional account of Ramaṇa's enlightenment. We will examine the nature of his enlightenment, and the issue of whether it was as immediate as has been claimed. We will also examine Ramaṇa's subsequent interpretation of his experience.

¹² S.S. Cohen: *Guru Ramaṇa*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1993, first published 1952), 150 ['Cohen'].

A. Was Ramaṇa's Enlightenment Immediate?

According to Narasimha, Ramaṇa's enlightenment was not based on Scripture or on the study of other works. He says that at the time of his enlightenment at his home in Madurai, Ramaṇa's had not even heard of 'Brahman' or 'samsāra.' The only books he had read were the Bible, the *Periapurānam* (stories of 63 Tamil saints) and bits of the *Tayumānavar* (hymns of the saint Tayumanavar, 1706 - 1744), and the *Tevāram* (sacred songs of the three Tamil poet-saints, Appar, Sundaramurti and Sambandara). After his enlightenment, he read other books, and found that they "were analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name."¹³ It is said that Ramaṇa's enlightenment was therefore not due to these books, but that it was an immediate experience. It is also said that he had not engaged in any yoga or other spiritual disciplines prior to his enactment of death.

But Ramaṇa was at least influenced to *seek* the experience of enlightenment by these books that he had read before his experience. When he first read the *Periapurānam* he was inspired to emulate the experience of these saints:

That book [*Periapurānam*] gives a moving account of the sudden accession of faith, deep love of God, utter self-sacrifice, and sublime communion with Him which marked the lives of the sixty-three Tamil saints. As he read on, surprise, admiration, awe, reverence, sympathy and emulation swept over his soul in succession, that paying a momentary homage to the great ideals and ideas that had charmed the hearts and engaged the minds of his countrymen for centuries (Narasimha, 17).

Narasimha says that Ramaṇa's impulses and ideals disappeared. But even if Ramaṇa temporarily forgot about these stories, his subsequent enlightenment may have been inspired by them. It may not have been as spontaneous as has been supposed. Ramaṇa certainly remembered these stories after his enactment of death, since it is related that he then went to the temple in Madurai and prayed that he might become like one of these sixty-three saints. Narasimha says that Ramaṇa made frequent visits to the Meenakshi

¹³ Narasimha, 24. Also *The Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (Samuel Weiser, 1972, first published 1962), 11 ['Teachings'].

temple in Madurai, “where he would weep, and pray that his experience might become perpetual.”

I would stand before *Iśvara*, the Controller of the universe and the destinies of all, the Omniscient and Omnipresent, and occasionally pray for the descent of his grace upon me so that my devotion might increase and become perpetual like that of the sixty-three saints (Narasimha, 23).

If Ramaṇa’s enactment of death resulted in immediate enlightenment, it seems strange that he thus prayed to become like one of the saints. From this quotation, it appears that Ramaṇa himself was not certain that he had already achieved that state.

Ramaṇa may also have been inspired to seek a religious experience by his readings of the Bible at the mission school. In later life, Ramaṇa makes many references to the Bible and compares certain passages in it to the teaching of the *advaitic* experience. For example, he refers to the Bible’s admonition to “Be still and know that I am God.” We will later look in more detail at Ramaṇa’s understanding of the *Periapurānam*, the *Tayumānavar*, the Bible, and other texts.

Apart from what he read in these books, Ramaṇa also had some role models to emulate. We have already seen that one of his uncles was a *sannyāsī*. It was from this uncle that he had first heard about the holy mountain Arunāchala. Ramaṇa says that he did not know that Arunāchala was a real place. When he did learn that it existed, he left home. Prior to this, Ramaṇa was aware that Arunāchala was “Something supremely holy.” (*Maha Yoga*, 3).

In seeking enlightenment, Ramaṇa may also have been emulating his father. His father died when he was 12 years old. But during his lifetime, his father had practiced meditation. Chadwick says that Ramaṇa told him his father used a meditation belt but had not used it in public. The meditation belt was cotton cloth; it was brought round his father’s back and across his raised knees (Chadwick, 14).

B. The Nature of Ramaṇa's Enlightenment

1. Thought experiment

The traditional account says that Ramaṇa obtained enlightenment when he enacted being in the state of death. His enlightenment was therefore a kind of thought experiment. What degree of rational analysis was required for Ramaṇa's self-enquiry? How does it differ from Descartes' systematic doubt and self-examination? How rational a process is his method of Self-Enquiry?

Ramaṇa's teaching is that by self-reflection, we can determine that we are not our arm, nor our body, nor our emotions. By a similar process of reflection, Descartes concluded that we are therefore our thoughts and mind. But Ramaṇa's method of Self-Enquiry continues further. He says that we are not the mind, either. We are not our thoughts. Ramaṇa says that our real center is in our heart, the center of all our functions. The fact that Ramaṇa did not identify Self with mind would appear to distinguish his method from that of Descartes.¹⁴

But although that is a correct representation of Ramaṇa's later view of Self-Enquiry, did he have that understanding at the time of his thought-experiment as a 16-year-old boy? There is no record of any mention of the heart at the time of this thought-experiment. In Narasimha's words, Ramaṇa concluded that after the material body died, there was a "spirit transcending it that cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless

¹⁴ Georg Feuerstein contrasts Descartes and Shankara:

Descartes placed little faith in the evidence of the senses or the faculty of imagination, but he implicitly trusted reason. It was in this way that he arrived at the famous Cartesian dictum: cogito ergo sum, 'I think therefore I am.' For Descartes, thought was the only means of certainty, from which one could even deduce one's own existence and the existence of everything else. Shankara, representing the East, would have been baffled by Descartes' logic and his apparent satisfaction with a merely rational certainty. According to him, being (sat) is a self-evident fact, as obvious as sunlight, requiring no intervention of reason, whereas thought is a derivative of Being, even a falsification of it. See Georg Feuerstein: *The Deeper Dimensions of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003).

spirit.” Narasimha emphasizes that Ramaṇa’s enlightenment was “not a mere intellectual process” but rather a “living truth” that Ramaṇa perceived immediately. He says that the experience was “almost” without any argument (Narasimha, 21).

However, Ramaṇa had gone through a similar analysis at the age of 12, when his father had died. Paul Brunton even gives that as the age when Ramaṇa became enlightened. Brunton says that “by analysis” Ramaṇa realized that his father’s ‘I’ had left his body, and that he obtained *jñāna* or became enlightened (*Conscious Immortality*, 170). This version of Ramaṇa’s enlightenment would appear to give more weight to a rational analysis of events. Nevertheless, that may be more of a reflection of Brunton’s western presuppositions than what actually occurred.¹⁵

But the earliest biographer of Ramaṇa, F.H. Humphreys, also gives an account of the method of self-enquiry that is based on argument:

You argue your mind out of existence as a separate entity, and the result is that mind and body physically (so to speak) disappear and the only thing that remains is Being, which is at once existence and non-existence, and not explainable in words or ideas.¹⁶

There is therefore some doubt as to the nature of Ramaṇa’s experience, the extent of rational argument involved, whether he experienced it at age 12 or 16, and whether Ramaṇa had a sense of his selfhood as something beyond mind or spirit or whether it was identified with mind and spirit.

¹⁵ See my article, “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,” online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/Brunton.html>]. In that article, I show how Brunton was influenced by western ideas, and by Madame Blavatsky’s kind of theosophy. And Brunton admits that he used his story about Ramaṇa as a “peg” for his own ideas.

¹⁶ Frank H. Humphreys: *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai 1999) [*Glimpses*]. The book is based on articles that Humphreys first published in *The International Psychic Gazette*, May 1913, 295ff; June 1913, 327ff and July 1913, 357ff.

2. The Necessity of Trance

The traditional account emphasizes Ramaṇa's state of trance, both in his experience at the age of 16, and when he left home for the temple in Tiruvannamalai. Biographers emphasize that even as a boy, Ramaṇa had very deep sleep. Narasimha says that Ramaṇa hardly knew the difference between sleep and the *samādhi* state into which he had sunk on his way to Tiruvannamalai at the age of 16 (*Narasimha*, 36). And his state of trance in the temple—the fact that he was completely unconscious of even being bitten by insects—was regarded as only proving “the depth of his absorption in the Infinite” (*Narasimha*, 47). Thus, Ramaṇa's trance state was very important in establishing his reputation as a Swami. Some of his attendants were attracted to him because of his trance state.

This emphasis on trance is especially puzzling in view of Ramaṇa's later teaching that trance is not necessary for enlightenment. In fact, Ramaṇa sometimes opposed the practice of meditation. He says that those who are the most competent seekers take the path of Self-enquiry. The less competent meditate on identity. Those who are even lower practice breath control. And Ramaṇa himself did not teach meditation or breath control.¹⁷

Ramaṇa was opposed to trance in the sense of loss of consciousness. Ramaṇa discouraged meditation, especially meditation leading to trance. Ramaṇa says that trance is a state like drugs:

If you are so anxious for trance any narcotic will bring it about. Drug-habit will be the result and not liberation. There are *vāsanās* in the latent state even in trance. The *vāsanās must be destroyed*.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Self-Enquiry*, pp. 17-38; *CW* 3-35; *Os* 17-47.

¹⁸ *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1994, first published 1955), 280, para. 317 [*Talks*]. In this passage, Ramaṇa distinguishes between two kinds of *vāsanās*—those that cause bondage (*bandha hetuh*) and those that give enjoyment for the wise (*bhoga hetuh*). The latter do not obstruct realisation. Thus, in his view, not all *vāsanās* need be destroyed.

Vāsanās are innate tendencies and the memory of past experiences. In the same passage, Ramaṇa says that trance is only an absence of thoughts. Such a state prevails in sleep. But trance is only temporary in its effects. There is happiness so long as it lasts. After rising from it the old *vāsanās* return. Unless the *vāsanās* are destroyed in *sahaja samādhi* (effortless *samādhi*) there is no good of trance. Thus, if you want a trance, go to sleep! Ramaṇa also says that meditation strengthens the ego instead of liberating from it. “Meditation is possible only if the ego be kept up” (*Talks*, 145, para. 174). And he says,

Who is the meditator? Ask the question first. Remain as the meditator.
There is no need to meditate (*Talks*, 174, para. 205).

and

Why do you wish to meditate at all? Because you wish to do so you are told *Atma samstham manah krtva* (fixing the mind in the Self); why do you not remain as you are without meditating? (*Talks*, 257, para. 294).

Instead of seeking a trance state, or *nirvikalpa samādhi*, Ramaṇa advises us to seek *sahaja samādhi*. *Sahaja* means ‘natural.’ And *sahaja samādhi* is the consciousness of the liberated person who returns to the world. That person does not live out of ego anymore, but lives through Self. *Sahaja* is also pure consciousness:

There is no question of transition from unconsciousness to supreme pure Consciousness. Giving up these two, self-consciousness and unconsciousness, you inhere in the natural Consciousness, that is pure Consciousness.¹⁹

Swarnagiri reports that Ramaṇa said that the practitioner of self-enquiry must be on the alert, and must enquire within as to who it is that is having this experience:

Failing this enquiry he will go into a long trance or deep sleep (*Yoga nidra*). Due to the absence of a proper guide at this stage of spiritual practice, many have been deluded and fallen a prey to a false sense of salvation.

One must not allow oneself to be overtaken by such spells of stillness of thought: *the moment one experiences this, one must revive consciousness*

¹⁹ Swarnagiri, Ramaṇanda: *Crumbs from his Table* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1995), 41[‘*Crumbs*’].

and enquire within as to who it is who experiences this stillness (Crumbs, 27; italics in original)

This is the point of divergence between the road to salvation and *yoga nidra*, which is merely prolonged deep sleep.

Ramaṇa also says that trance and unconsciousness are only for the mind; they do not affect the Self (*Crumbs*, 40). He even rejects talk of “killing the mind,” since mind is also part of reality:

Seeing ice without seeing that it is water is illusion, *Māyā*. Therefore saying things like killing the mind or anything like that also has no meaning, for after all mind also is part and parcel of the Self. Resting in the Self or inhering in the Self is *mukti*, getting rid of *Māyā*. *Māyā* is not a separate entity (*Crumbs*, 41).

Ramaṇa also opposes any view of meditation as a void. He says, “Absence of thought does not mean a void. There must be one to know the void” (*Conscious Immortality*, 77). His emphasis is on the Self, and not on the Buddhist emphasis in seeking *sunyata* [emptiness] in meditation.

When we later look at the *tantric* influences on Ramaṇa, we will see the source of some of the confusion between an emphasis on the importance of trance and the ability of the liberated one to live in the world.

3. Immediate Realization?

We have already seen that after his experience at the age of 16, Ramaṇa was not without doubts. He prayed at that time that the experience might be continuous. This seems to imply a concern that he feared it was not permanent.

III. Some Biographies and Interpretations of Ramaṇa Maharshi

A. *Frank H. Humphreys*

The first English reports about Ramaṇa were by Frank H. Humphreys, a policeman stationed in India in 1911. Humphreys published the book *Glimpses of the Life and*

Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi. The book is based on articles that Humphreys first published in *The International Psychic Gazette* in 1913.²⁰

Humphreys was interested in occult powers and in Blavatsky's kind of theosophy. *Glimpses* reports some of Humphreys' own psychic abilities, such as having a vision in Bombay of his future Telegu teacher, S. Narasimhayya, before he met him in Vellore (*Glimpses*, 8). Humphreys was also able to identify this teacher's guru, Gaṇapati Muni, from a series of photos (*Glimpses*, 9), although he had never met Sastri. And he had a vision of Ramaṇa in his cave before he met Ramaṇa (*Glimpses*, 11).

When Humphreys first arrived in Vellore, he first asked his Telegu language teacher whether he knew any astrology. He then asked whether the teacher knew of any *mahatmas* (spiritual masters) in the area. This idea of *mahatmas* is emphasized by Madame Blavatsky's kind of theosophy.²¹ As a result of asking this question,

²⁰ Frank H Humphreys: *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai 1999) [*'Glimpses'*]. The book is based on articles that Humphreys first published in *The International Psychic Gazette*, May 1913, 295ff; June 1913, 327ff; and July 1913, 357ff.

²¹ Although Humphreys and Brunton were clearly interested in Madame Blavatsky's type of theosophy, it should be pointed out that not all theosophy is of that type. Notwithstanding Blavatsky's belief that she incorporated all previous theosophy, there are other kinds of theosophy. For example, Gershom Scholem says that 'theosophy' should not be understood in the sense of Madame Blavatsky's later movement of that name:

Theosophy postulates a kind of divine emanation whereby God, abandoning his self-contained repose, awakens to mysterious life; further, it maintains that the mysteries of creation reflect the pulsation of this divine life. Gershom G. Scholem: *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 206.

And I have written about the Christian theosophy of Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme, extending through Franz von Baader to Herman Dooyeweerd. See "Imagination, Image of God and Wisdom of God: Theosophical Themes in Dooyeweerd's Philosophy," online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Imagination.html>]. These writers rejected occult powers. And although they believed that creation is an expression of God's Wisdom or *Sophia*, they did not regard creation in a pantheistic identification with God. Creation reflects, images the dynamic movement out of the Godhead, but it is also distinct from it.

Humphreys met Gaṇapati Muni (also known as Gaṇapati Sastri). Humphreys met him in Vellore, where Muni was on his way to attend a theosophical society conference in Tiruvannamalai. Tiruvannamalai is also where Ramaṇa's *ashram* is located. We will look in detail at the influence of Gaṇapati Muni on Ramaṇa, and his *tantrism*.

Humphreys says that Sastri was the first Master that he met in India (his second Master would be Ramaṇa). Humphreys says that a Master does not use occult powers, but Humphreys nevertheless reports extensively on Gaṇapati Muni's powers of clairvoyance and psychic gifts (*Glimpses*, 30, 31). Humphreys says that Gaṇapati Muni learned the Tamil language "by meditation" in 15 days, not using any book or grammar. Humphreys compares this to Christ's Apostles having the ability to speak in tongues (*Glimpses*, 14).

Humphreys and Gaṇapati Muni visited Ramaṇa in November 1911. As already mentioned, Gaṇapati Muni was the first of Ramaṇa's disciples to refer to Ramaṇa as 'Bhagavan' or 'Lord.'

Humphreys' biographical reports about Ramaṇa were the basis of all future biographies of Ramaṇa. In particular, Humphreys was used by Ramaṇa's disciple Narasimha as the basis for his biography of Ramaṇa. Narasimha includes two chapters about Humphreys. He reports that Humphreys said that he had been a member of a mystic society in a former birth (Narasimha, 108-109).

Some of the interesting points in Humphreys' biography of Ramaṇa are:

a) Humphreys is the first to report Ramaṇa's pivotal enlightenment experience of the Self at the age of 16. This account is used by all future biographers of Ramaṇa. But we must be careful in using this story, for Humphreys says that the story of Ramaṇa's awakening was not told to him by Ramaṇa himself, but by a disciple or *chela* (*Glimpses*, 27). Ramaṇa's chief disciple at that time was Gaṇapati Muni, so Muni might be the source of this information.

b) Humphreys had some ethical concerns about how sitting in a cave can help the world. The first question that he asked Ramaṇa was:

Humphreys: "Master! Can I help the world?"

Ramaṇa: Help yourself and you will help the world. [...] You are not different from the world, nor is the world different from you.

H: Master, can I perform miracles as Sri Krishna and Jesus did before?

Ramaṇa: Did any of them at the time of acting feel that he as acting and doing something inconsistent with the laws of nature?

H: No, Master.

The idea that ethical acts are done “unconsciously” is something that we find in later accounts of Ramaṇa. And Humphreys also refers to Vivekānanda’s neo-Hinduism for help on this point. “You do not help the world at all by wishing or trying to do so, but only by helping *yourself*” (*Glimpses*, 21). But it is interesting that Ramaṇa told Humphreys that he could attend both to his duty as a police officer and to his meditation (Narasimha, 114).

c) Both Humphreys and Gaṇapati Muni were interested in Blavatsky’s theosophy. Gaṇapati Muni was on his way to a theosophical conference when Humphreys met him. We have to ask whether Gaṇapati Muni’s interest in theosophy also affected his own writings about Ramaṇa, and the translations that he did for Ramaṇa.

d) Humphreys reports that Gaṇapati Muni considered himself the “instrument” of Ramaṇa. He said, “It is not I but Maharshi who does these things” (*Glimpses*, 29). This seems to indicate that Muni was doing the actual writing. Humphreys says that Gaṇapati Muni was the intellectual part of the master/disciple relationship; Ramaṇa was the devotional part. But although Gaṇapati Muni, may have considered himself an instrument, the question arises to what extent he thereby influenced the way that Ramaṇa expressed his ideas.

e) Humphreys makes many comparisons between Ramaṇa and Christianity. This was something that Narasimha continued to do in his biography of Ramaṇa. Humphreys says that Ramaṇa was “well acquainted with Christian History and Bible Times” (*Glimpses*, 27).

f) Humphreys describes looking into the eyes of Ramaṇa, and seeing him as “the instrument of God, merely a sitting motionless corpse from which God was radiating

terrifically.” Thus, Gaṇapati Muni was the instrument of Ramaṇa, but Ramaṇa was considered to be the instrument of God. Ramaṇa told him,

A master is one who has meditated solely on God, has flung his whole personality into the sea of God, and drowned and forgotten it there till he becomes simply the instrument of God, and when his mouth opens it speaks God’s words without effort or forethought, and when he raises a hand God flows again through that to work a miracle (*Glimpses*, 18).

g) Humphreys was interested in occult powers. He reports that when he sat at the feet of Ramaṇa, he “felt lifted out of myself” (*Glimpses*, 15). In my article “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,”²² I discuss how this idea of Ramaṇa’s ability to radiate powers and to teach in silence is an idea that can be found in Blavatsky’s theosophy. Other powers that Humphreys ascribes to Ramaṇa include clairvoyance and the ability to read one’s past history (*Glimpses*, 16). But Ramaṇa told Humphreys not to think too much of psychical phenomena:

Clairvoyance, clairaudience, and such things are not worth having, when so much far greater illumination and peace are possible without them than with them. The Master takes on these powers as a form of Self-Sacrifice! (*Glimpses*, 19; see also Narasimha, 115).

And yet, although Ramaṇa warned against an interest in these occult powers, Ramaṇa also told him that if he meditated fifteen minutes a day, then in four or five months, all kinds of unconscious powers would show themselves, including clairvoyance, peace of mind and power to deal with troubles. And Ramaṇa told him, “I have given you this teaching in the same words as the Masters give it to their intimate *chelas* [disciples].” (*Glimpses*, 20).

g) Humphreys shows that Ramaṇa did not just teach in silence. When a certain disciple asked him a question, Ramaṇa picked up a book, pointed to it and said, “There is your answer” (*Glimpses*, 17). And Humphreys emphasizes that Ramaṇa taught by giving the appropriate words:

²² J. Glenn Friesen: “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,” [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/Brunton.html>].

A Master when instructing is far from any thought of instructing; but to feel a doubt or a difficulty in his presence is to call forth, at once, before you can express the doubt, the wonderful words which will clear away that doubt (*Glimpses*, 26).

h) Humphreys gives an interesting account of Ramaṇa's teachings. Ramaṇa tells him that one and only one illimitable force is responsible for both the phenomena that we see and the act of seeing them (*Glimpses*, 18). This seems to be a *tantric* kind of nondualism that does not deny the reality of the world, but instead regards the world as created by the power or *shakti* of God. And yet Ramaṇa also tells him not to fix his attention on phenomena or even on the act of seeing them but only on that which sees all these things.

Humphreys also gives an account of the method of self-enquiry:

You argue your mind out of existence as a separate entity, and the result is that mind and body physically (so to speak) disappear and the only thing that remains is Being, which is at once existence and non-existence, and not explainable in words or ideas.

A Master is perpetually in this state, but he can use his mind and body and intellect too, without falling back into the delusion of having a separate consciousness (*Glimpses*, 21).

Humphreys compares self-realization to white light shining through a prism to make up the many colours of a man's character:

How are colours formed? By breaking up white light with a many-sided prism. So is it with a man's character. It is seen when the Light of Life (God) is shining through it, *i.e.*, in a man's actions (*Glimpses*, 23).

After his retirement, Humphreys returned to England where he entered a Catholic monastery.²³ Chadwick reports an interesting anecdote about Humphreys. Someone in the hall of the *ashram* said that he had recently seen Humphreys, and that Humphreys had denied receiving any benefit from Ramaṇa's instruction. Ramaṇa responded with the strong words, "It's a lie!" (Chadwick, 21).

²³ Arthur Osborne: *Ramaṇa Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1970), 106 [*'Path of Self-Knowledge'*]

B. B.V. Narasimha Swami

I have already referred to Narasimha's biography of Ramaṇa. Narasimha used Humphreys' earlier biography of Ramaṇa, and he devoted two chapters to Humphreys.

Narasimha acknowledges that Ramaṇa's exact words have not been recorded. He also acknowledges that he has changed whatever record there was of Ramaṇa's actual words, since Ramaṇa normally spoke impersonally, and not in the first person:

His actual words may be found too colourless and hazy to suit or appeal to many readers, especially of the Western type. Hence the use here of the customary phraseology with its distinct personal reference (Narasimha, 20 fn.)

This is an important admission, and it raises the critical issue of to what extent Narasimha put a western slant on Ramaṇa's story.

It is also surprising how many explicit comparisons Narasimha makes between Ramaṇa and Jesus Christ. Almost every chapter is headed by a quotation from the New Testament, including the following:

(1) But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they which are gorgeously appareled and live delicately, are in King's courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.

(2) Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, the other left [in reference to Ramaṇa choosing the path of liberation and not his two other brothers].

(3) Ye must be born again [in reference to Ramaṇa's awakening at the age of 16].

(4) How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? [Luke 2:49, in reference to Ramaṇa's departure for Arunāchala]. Note the reference to his "Father."

(5) He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

(6) He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

(7) His Father knows his need of these things [what he should eat and wherewithal he shall be clothed]

(8) He who clothes the lilies of the field was clothing him.

(9) Love of wealth is the root of all evil [in reference to throwing away his money and possessions].

(10) Then one said unto him, “Behold, thy mother and brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.” “But,” he answered and said, “who is my mother and who are my brethren?” [St. Matthew, used by Narasimha in reference to Ramaṇa not returning with his mother].

(11) Ye are the light of the world. A City that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel but on a candle-stick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house [Matthew 5:14-15, in reference to living in the caves].

(12) Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

(13) Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do [in reference to robbery at the *ashram*].

(14) Easier to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.

(15) Lay up treasures in Heaven.

Narasimha also refers to Christian Gospel hymns by Sankey, applying the words of these hymns to Ramaṇa instead of to Jesus. The hymn “Rock of Ages” is applied to the holy mountain of Arunāchala. He says that when the baseness of the ego is lost, the survivor is the “Son of God” (Narasimha, 30). The ego is referred to as “the old Adam” (Narasimha, 65).

Narasimha also quotes other Western writers, such as Alexander Pope (p. 158), Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, p. 13), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and modern writers such as William James. These Western and Christian references are highly surprising, especially in view of the fact that this biography was published three years before Brunton’s book.

C. Paul Brunton (1898-1981)

I have described Paul Brunton's interpretation of Ramaṇa, and Brunton's own influences, in my lengthy study entitled "Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi."²⁴

The journalist Paul Brunton visited Ramaṇa in 1931, and described this meeting in his book *A Search in Secret India*. Brunton wrote this book after his return to England; it was published in 1934.²⁵ It was an instant success and was translated into many different languages; it is still in print today. Many of Brunton's readers made the trip to see Ramaṇa for themselves.

Ramaṇa himself read Brunton's book *A Search in Secret India*, as well as some of Brunton's subsequent books. There are several reference to Brunton's book *Search in Talks*, and Ramaṇa expressly says that the book is useful for Indians (*Talks*, 121). I have shown how some of Brunton's ideas therefore seem to have even influenced Ramaṇa, who refers several questioners to passages in Brunton's books, and who begins to describe his own teachings using Brunton's terminology.

Brunton acknowledges getting information from disciples of Ramaṇa. Narasimha's biography of Ramaṇa was published in 1931, the year that Brunton visited Ramaṇa. Brunton repeats much of the information from the earlier biographies by Humphreys and Narasimha. For example, Brunton emphasizes that even before Ramaṇa's experience at the age of 16, he had an abnormal ability to sleep. His schoolmates could take Ramaṇa from bedroom into the playground, beat his body and box his ears and then lead him back to bed; he had no remembrance of these things in the morning. Brunton finds this as an indication of Ramaṇa's mystical nature (*Search*, 282). He emphasizes that Ramaṇa had never studied any system of *yoga* and had never practiced under any teacher (*Search*, 286). Brunton says that in his experience, Ramaṇa fell into a "profound conscious trance wherein he became merged with the very source of selfhood, the very essence of being" (*Search*, 283). Brunton says that many Western minds would consider Ramaṇa's life as

²⁴ J. Glenn Friesen: "Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi," [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/Brunton.html>].

²⁵ Paul Brunton: *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider & Co., 1934) [*Search*].

wasted, but that Ramaṇa's way of helping others was this silent "outpouring of healing vibrations." Brunton says, "But perhaps it may be good for us to have a few men who sit apart from our world of unending activity and survey it for us from afar" (*Search*, 289). Brunton describes Ramaṇa's method of self-enquiry: "Trace thought to its place of origin, watch for the real self to reveal itself, and then your thoughts will die down of their own accord" (*Search*, 304).

Excerpts from *A Search in Secret India* were published separately as *The Maharshi and His Message*²⁶, and a third book about Ramaṇa, entitled *Conscious Immortality* was published by the *ashram* in 1984, based on Brunton's notes of conversations with Ramaṇa in the 1930's.

After writing *A Search in Secret India*, Brunton returned to Ramaṇa's *ashram* in 1935, travelling via Egypt.²⁷ He then published several other books.²⁸

However, in a startling admission in 1941, Brunton confessed that he had used the book *A Search in Secret India* as a "peg" on which to hang his own ideas:

It will therefore be clear to perspicacious readers that I used his name and attainments as a convenient peg upon which to hang an account of what meditation meant to me. The principal reason for this procedure was that it constituted a convenient literary device to secure the attention and hold the interest of western readers, who would naturally give more serious consideration to such a report of the "conversion" of a seemingly hard headed critically-minded Western journalist to yoga.²⁹

²⁶ Brunton, Paul: *The Maharshi and his Message: A Selection from A Search in Secret India*, 13th ed. (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 2002, no date of original publication).

²⁷ This resulted in another book, *A Search in Secret Egypt*, published in 1935. It deals with his experience of spending a night alone in the Great Pyramid. We may question whether Brunton's devotion to Ramaṇa was as great as he says it was. His subsequent books seem to show that Brunton was still searching for someone with occult powers.

²⁸ Another book published in 1935 was *The Secret Path*. While at the *ashram* in 1935, he wrote *A Message from Arunāchala* (published in 1936). In 1937, he published *A Hermit in the Himalayas: The Journey of a Lonely Exile* (London: Rider & Co., 1937).

²⁹ Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (London: Rider & Co., 1969, first published 1941), 25. [*'Hidden Teaching'*].

Brunton also says something else that is surprising: that he had known about meditation and yoga before he came to Ramaṇa ashram, and that his experience with Ramaṇa was no new experience. He makes the “confession” that when he first came to India, he was no novice in the practice of yoga. Even as a teenager,

...the ineffable exstasis of mystical trance had become a daily occurrence in the calendar of life, the abnormal mental phenomena which attend the earlier experience of yoga was commonplace and familiar, whilst the dry labours of meditation had disappeared into effortless ease (*Hidden Teaching*, 23).

Brunton here claims that he not only had practiced yoga, but that he had experienced occult phenomena, or *siddhis*. He refers to the experience of being seemingly extended in space, an incorporeal being. And he indicates that Indian teachings merely confirmed his own experiences, although in different terminology:

When later, I came across translations of Indian books on mysticism, I found to my astonishment that the archaic accents of their phraseology formed familiar descriptions of my own central and cardinal experiences (*Hidden Teaching*, 23).

This last statement is almost exactly what is claimed for Ramaṇa—that his experience was direct, and that it was only corroborated by the later books that he read.

In view of Brunton’s admissions, it is important to attempt to disentangle his own ideas from those of Ramaṇa. In my work “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,”³⁰ I have researched Brunton’s own background. His real name was Raphael Hurst, and he only changed it to Paul Brunton after he met Ramaṇa. I have shown how, prior to meeting Ramaṇa, Brunton was influenced by Blavatsky’s theosophy, and that he was interested in acquiring occult powers like telepathy. These interests continued even after he met Ramaṇa. In that work, I also argue that Brunton’s first ‘Master’ in England, a man he called Thurston, was F.W. Thurstan. Thurstan, like Humphreys, also published articles in the *International Psychic Gazette*. If Thurston is the same individual as Thurstan, then it is likely that Brunton learned of Ramaṇa even before he left England for India.

³⁰ J. Glenn Friesen “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,” [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/Brunton.html>].

I have also shown how Brunton's theosophical ideas, and his desire for acquiring occult powers influenced the way that he reported his experience with Ramaṇa. Brunton's ideas are particularly evident with regard to the idea that Ramaṇa was able to influence and to teach others by his silence, emitting powerful currents of spiritual radiation to influence them. Apart from Brunton's theosophical interpretation of this silence, we also need to examine other accounts that show that Ramaṇa sometimes was silent for merely tactical reasons.³¹

Brunton made two later visits to Ramaṇa, in 1936 and 1939. It is not generally known that Brunton was forced to leave Ramaṇa's *ashram* in 1939. Brunton says that he left "abruptly." He refers to "threats of physical violence" and of being "harshly separated by the ill-will of certain men." He speaks of "hate" and "low manners," which he attributes to jealousy over his success. He says that he was "unfairly treated" (*Hidden Teaching*, 18). Brunton says that he did not see Ramaṇa at all in the 12 years before Ramaṇa's death, even though he passed within a few miles of the ashram.³²

³¹ Mudalier reports the following tactical silence:

A lady Principal asked Bhagavan whether it was not better for people to work and do something for the betterment of the world than to sit in contemplation, aloof from the world, seeking for their own salvation. This was not by any means a new question and Bhagavan had given a very clear answer to it which has already been published in the *Maharshi's Gospel*. In brief, it is that one *Jnani* by his Self-realization is doing much more for the world than all social workers put together and that his silence is more eloquent and effective than the words of orators and writers advocating any courses for man. On this occasion, however, Bhagavan remained silent. When the lady found that Bhagavan did not answer, she went on speaking for some ten minutes. Even then Bhagavan remained silent. The lady and her sister then left in chagrin.

After they had left Bhagavan said to me: "It is no use telling them anything. The only result would be that it would be published in the papers that such and such are the views of so and so and there will be endless dispute. The best thing is to keep quiet."³¹

³² Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (16 volumes) (Burdett, N.Y., Larson, 1984-1988). 8, s. 6:233 [*'Notebooks'*].

In my article, I have listed the various disagreements that Brunton had with Ramaṇa and with the way that Ramaṇa's brother, the *Sarvadikhari*, managed the *ashram*. Brunton says that Ramaṇa's ascetic indifference to the world had rendered him "temperamentally disinclined to exercise the slightest control" (*Hidden Teaching*, 18).

He possessed a tremendous power of concentrating attention inwardly and losing himself in rapt trance of sitting calm and unmoved like a tree. But with all the deep respect and affection I feel for him, it must be said that the role of a teaching sage was not his forte because he was primarily a self-absorbed mystic. This explained why his open disdain for life's practical fulfillment in disinterested service of others had led to inevitable consequences of a disappointing kind in his immediate external environment. It was doubtless more than enough for himself and certainly for his adoring followers that he had perfected himself in indifference to worldly attractions and in the control of restless mind. He did not ask for more. The question of the significance of the universe in which he lived did not appear to trouble him (*Hidden Teaching*, 15-16).

Brunton's concern about Ramaṇa's indifference to the way that the *ashram* was being managed is only one issue within the larger issue of how a self-realized person should interact with the world. And it is this larger ethical issue that was really the basis of Brunton's ultimate dissatisfaction with Ramaṇa's teaching. For Brunton, it was not sufficient for a realized person to meditate. He believed that interaction and involvement with the outside world are also necessary.

Brunton says that meditation on oneself is a necessary and admirable pursuit but it does not constitute the entire activity which life is constantly asking of us. Meditation apart from experience is "inevitably empty." He says that the price of yoga is world-renunciation—fleeing from wife, family, home, property and work; refuge in ashrams, caves, monasteries, jungles or mountains. But we were meant to live actively in the world. Brunton says that illuminations gained by yoga or by trance states are always temporary ones. Although a trance may produce a feeling of exaltation, this feeling goes away and one must repeat the experience daily. He cites Aurobindo:

Trance is a way of escape--the body is made quiet, the physical mind is in a state of torpor, the inner consciousness is left free to go on with its experience. *The disadvantage is that trance becomes indispensable and that the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved, it remains imperfect* (*Hidden Teaching*, 27; italics Brunton).

Brunton says that Ramaṇa's emphasis on trance is no different than the world-flight of the Christian mystics, who also come in for strong criticism. Brunton refers to their "sheer shrivelled complacency" and their "hidden superiority complex." He refers to this mystical attitude as a "holier than thou attitude", and an assumption that total knowledge had been reached when in fact it was only a partial knowledge.

Without the healthy opposition of active participation in the world's affairs, they [mystics] had no means of knowing whether they were living in a realm of sterilized self-hallucination or not (*Hidden Teaching*, 19).

Brunton seems particularly upset by an incident when news was brought to the *ashram* that Italian planes had gunned undefended citizens on the streets of Ethiopia (the Italians invaded Ethiopia in October, 1935). Brunton reports that Ramaṇa said:

The sage who knows the truth that the Self is indestructible will remain unaffected even if five million people are killed in his presence. Remember the advice of Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield when disheartened by the thought of the impending slaughter of relatives on the opposing side.³³

Many western interpreters of Ramaṇa seem to have had difficulty with this issue of how a realized person or *Jīvanmukta* should relate to the world. We will look at the issue in more detail when we contrast traditional Hinduism and neo-Hinduism.

There are a few other criticisms by Brunton that need to be referred to. Brunton complained that Ramaṇa did not give him the instruction that he expected (*Hidden Teaching*, 16). What does this mean? Ramaṇa certainly gave the instruction of Self-Inquiry. What more did Brunton want? It appears that by "instruction" Brunton is referring to initiation. But Ramaṇa never initiated anyone. Brunton may also be referring to a hope that he would have received special magical powers or *siddhis*. We know that Brunton had an interest in such powers. But although there are accounts of Ramaṇa having powers of telepathy and telekinesis, he is also clear that such *siddhis* must never be sought for themselves. For example his discussion with W.Y Evans-Wentz, Ramaṇa says that *siddhis* are not natural, and not worth striving for, and the

³³ Paul Brunton: *Notebooks*, vol. 10, "The Orient," 2:441.

would-be occultist seeks to acquire them so that others may appreciate him. These powers do not bring happiness (*Talks*, 9; Jan. 24, 1935).

Brunton also criticizes Ramaṇa's view that even God is an illusion.

The final declaration which really put me, as a Western enquirer, off Advaita came later: it was that God too was an illusion, quite unreal. Had they not left it at that but taken the trouble to explain how and why this all was so, I might have been convinced from the start. But no one did. I had to wait until I met V. Subramanya Iyer for the answer.³⁴

But Brunton's own later teaching moves from a personal to an impersonal Absolute, which he called the Overself. Brunton in fact changed Ramaṇa's essential question of "Who am I?" to the impersonal question "What am I?" (*Hidden Teaching*, 17).

In *Hidden Teaching*, Brunton says that he still regards Ramaṇa as "the most eminent South Indian yogi" (*Hidden Teaching*, 33). And in his *Notebooks*, Brunton says that he regrets saying some of the things he said about Ramaṇa. He says that he regrets his criticism of Ramaṇa, and that this criticism was occasioned "more by events in the history of the ashram than by his own self."³⁵ But although he continued to admire Ramaṇa as a mystic, Brunton did not change his views about the importance of ethics. Nor did Brunton return to the *ashram*. He spent the war years in India. But he stayed as a guest of the Maharajah of Mysore, in a modest bungalow opposite the Maharajah's palace. He became acquainted with the Maharajah's reader in philosophy, V.S. Iyer, who soon became Brunton's own *guru*.

Brunton writes with great enthusiasm about some books that the Maharajah gave him to read. These were the *Ashtavakra Gītā*, the *Mandukya Upanishad*, Gaudapada's *Karika*, and Shankara's *Commentary on King Janaka* (*Hidden Teaching*, 36-37).

³⁴ Paul Brunton: *Notebooks*, Vol. 10, "The Orient," 2:366. Subrahmanya Iyer was the reader in philosophy for the Maharajah of Mysore. Iyer became Brunton's new *guru*. See my article "Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi." But Brunton also criticized Iyer's rejection of the mystical, and Iyer's reliance only on the intellect for the quest.

³⁵ Paul Brunton: *Notebooks*, Vol. 10, "The Orient," 2:459

The *Ashtavakra Gītā*³⁶ is a record of Ashtavakra's teaching to King Janaka. It was translated into English by Swami Nityaswarupananda of the Ramakrishna Order. It included a transliteration in the Kannada language. The book was published by the Maharaja of Mysore. Its later chapters emphasize the fact that the true sage does not flee to caves or sit idly in ashrams but is constantly engaged in work for the welfare of others. It points out that he will outwardly pretend to be just like ordinary people in order not to be put on a pedestal by them.

Brunton does not seem to know that the *Ashtavakra Gītā* was presented to Ramaṇa Maharshi in 1932. In his own handwriting, Ramaṇa then carefully copied out all the Sanskrit verses above each Kannada verse. Brunton also does not seem to know that these same books were also discussed by Ramaṇa.

As already mentioned, Brunton criticized Ramaṇa's emphasis on meditation. But Ramaṇa himself was critical of some forms of meditation, and says that trance is only temporal in its effects. I believe that Brunton's preconceived ideas of what Hindu meditation must be like may have led him to misinterpret the goal of meditation, and to assume that its goal was a loss of consciousness or trance.³⁷

D. Major Chadwick

Major Chadwick came to Ramaṇa's *ashram* on Nov 1, 1935, having heard of Ramaṇa through Brunton's book *A Search in Secret India*. Chadwick had met Brunton in London. When Chadwick first met Ramaṇa, Ramaṇa was very interested to hear about Brunton, who would be returning to India in a few months. Chadwick became a disciple, and wrote the book *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramaṇa Maharshi*.³⁸ Chadwick says, "I have always felt that his [Brunton's] chapters in the book which refer directly to Bhagavan were certainly inspired by Bhagavan himself (Chadwick, 16).

³⁶ Still available from Ramaṇa's *ashram*.

³⁷ This same error appears to have been made by C.G. Jung, and by Abhishiktānanda.

³⁸ A.W. Chadwick (Sadhu Arunāchala): *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramansramam, 1994, first published 1961) ['Chadwick'].

Chadwick emphasizes the written teachings of Ramaṇa. He says that when he arrived, Ramaṇa told someone to give him a copy of *Who am I?* and told Chadwick to read it. He says that Ramaṇa always insisted that the book should be sold so cheaply that it could be purchased by the poorest person (Chadwick, 17). Ramaṇa told Chadwick that the book was “...direct from his own experience and in no way influenced by his reading of various Upanishads and other sacred writings which were afterwards brought to him to explain.” These are his teachings “at first hand and uncoloured” (Chadwick, 22).

The second book that Ramaṇa told him to read was Narasimha’s biography *Self-realization*.” Chadwick says, “Without this book we should have known nothing of the early years of Bhagavan’s life” (Chadwick, 20). Chadwick does not take into account Humphreys’ earlier work on which Narasimha relied.

The Prologue to Chadwick’s book cites Narasimha’s biography of Ramaṇa. Like Narasimha, Chadwick mentions the story of Raman’s abnormally heavy sleep as a boy, and how his friends took advantage of this by taking Ramaṇa from his bed and hit him and play tricks when he was asleep. Chadwick sees this as a sign of spirituality:

I think that this heavy sleep of his must have been associated with his future attainment, the tremendous power of his concentration being here illustrated (Chadwick, 5)

And like Narasimha, Chadwick seems to acknowledge that there are many interpretations of Ramaṇa. Chadwick says that Ramaṇa was like a mirror, which seemed to reflect back your own feelings (Chadwick, 150).

Chadwick gives a very interesting account of Ramaṇa’s silence. He says that people identified Ramaṇa with Dakshinamurti, the silent *guru* (an aspect of the ascetic form of Siva). They would come into his presence with doubt, sit in his presence, and go away without asking a single question, all their doubts cleared” (Chadwick, 63). Chadwick asked Ramaṇa about his vow of silence after he left home at the age of 16. Ramaṇa told Chadwick that there was never any vow, but that Ramaṇa had observed how convenient it was:

...while living in temple at one time he found himself seated for a while by a Sadhu who was observing such a vow and saw how convenient it was as the crowds did not worry the Sadhu in the same way as they worried

him. So for convenience he pretended to copy him. “There was no vow, I just kept quiet, I spoke when it was necessary,” he explained. I asked him how long this had continued. “For about two years,” he replied. (Chadwick, 18)

He says that Ramaṇa’s *mouna* [silence] was “mythical” (Chadwick, 18). Once Ramaṇa had achieved perfection, he just sought out quiet places where he thought that he would not be disturbed and where he might enjoy Bliss:

It was all a dream anyhow, so why do anything about it? Just sit somewhere and enjoy the Self. What did teaching others and helping the world signify? There were no others (Chadwick, 19).

So despite Ramaṇa’s pragmatic reasons for silence, Chadwick interpreted his silence in terms of traditional *advaitic* monism. Ramaṇa’s silence was not for the purpose of teaching others, because in fact there are no others to teach! There are no others that could be affected by any radiations of a silent presence. But although Chadwick here takes a monistic view of Ramaṇa’s teaching, Chadwick elsewhere interprets ‘*advaita*’ as neither dualistic nor monistic:

Now Advaita is not the same as is usually meant by Monism nor is it some catchword to avoid difficulties. The word means, of course, Not-Two, but this [is] not the equivalent for One, though to the casual thinker it is not easy to see where the difference lies. But if we call it Monism then premising one we infer a whole series, one, two, three etc. No such series actually exists, there is just Not-Two (Chadwick, 44).

And Chadwick interprets the doctrine of *māyā* as meaning not illusion, but only impermanence.

When we see things we see duality; in one sense this duality is not unreal, it is only unreal in the sense that there is Not-Two. It is there in appearance but yet is impermanent and fleeting. [...] But even though the snake is quite unreal the rope is there. So the obvious solution for our riddle is to search out and find the permanent behind the impermanent. This was Bhagavan’s solution and he taught us how to do it by his method of self-enquiry. Though the ego changes minute by minute, though we are entirely different people through every stage of our life, there has always been for us and [*sic*] “I.” Not the ego because the ego changes every second (Chadwick, 44-45).

Inconsistently, Chadwick says that Ramaṇa did give initiation to disciples by his presence. He gave initiation through the eyes (Chadwick, 66). Chadwick also reports

that Ramaṇa was not always silent. He says that Ramaṇa had a great sense of humour. He was also a magnificent actor, and would dramatize the protagonists in any story he related. At times, Ramaṇa became filled with emotion was unable to proceed. He would “laugh with the happy and at times shed tears with the bereaved. In this way he seemed to reciprocate the emotions of others” (Chadwick, 26).

Chadwick says that he asked Ramaṇa about Richard Bucke’s book *Cosmic Consciousness*, and about Bucke’s report that illumination comes in a flash.³⁹ Ramaṇa said that that which comes in a flash will disappear in a flash:

Actually it is not Self-realization they experience but Cosmic Consciousness where they see all as one, identify themselves with Nature and the Cosmic Heart. In Hinduism this is called *Mahat*. Here a trace of ego remains even during the experience and a consciousness of the body belonging to the visionary. This false sense of “I” must go entirely, for it is the limitation which serves as bondage (Chadwick, 25).

And yet Ramaṇa himself speaks of cosmic consciousness as that which lies behind the ego. In answer to a question from Chadwick, Ramaṇa says that cosmic consciousness pervades even *Īśvara* or the Absolute (*Talks*, 149; para. 177; March 10, 1936). Ramaṇa does criticize Bucke’s idea that cosmic consciousness is only possible at a certain stage of life (*Talks*, 307; Jan 23, 1967). As we shall see, another biographer of Ramaṇa, Lakshmana Sarma, also refers to Bucke’s book. And Swami Siddeswarananda of the Ramakrishna Mission asked Ramaṇa about a verse by Nammalwar embodying his vision of “cosmic consciousness” (*Conscious Immortality*, 137).

Like other biographers, Chadwick tries to reconcile contradictions in Ramaṇa by saying that the contradictions are only apparent. They are there because Ramaṇa had to speak from two points of view (Chadwick, 45).

Chadwick reported to Ramaṇa that as he began meditating in the presence of Ramaṇa, he experienced fear. Ramaṇa told him that this was his ego that was experiencing the fear. The ego was “was losing its grip and dying” (Chadwick, 46).

³⁹ Richard Maurice Bucke: *Cosmic Consciousness* New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969, first published 1901). Bucke was a Canadian doctor who in 1901 wrote about a sudden experience of illumination.

Chadwick is important not only for his recollections of Ramaṇa, but for what he says about others who visited Ramaṇa. Chadwick refers to Brunton, whom he says was “a plagiarist of the first water” and who later “wrote a lot of rubbish” (Chadwick, 16).

Chadwick reports the visit of the novelist Somerset Maugham, who came to the *ashram* in March 1939. Maugham wrote that he sat in the hall of the *ashram*, but Chadwick says that that is untrue, because he could not enter with his boots; he only gazed at it from the outside. Chadwick says that in his novel *The Razor’s Edge*, Maugham tacked on philosophy that Ramaṇa could never have accepted. Chadwick says that he suspects a theosophical influence in Maugham’s book. Chadwick says that Maugham’s emphasis on *Brahman* and on reincarnation is dualistic and has nothing to do with *advaita*. Chadwick refers to Ramaṇa, who always said, “Find out if you are born now. If you are not even born, how can you be reborn?” (Chadwick, 37-40). But as I have shown in my article “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,” both Humphreys and Brunton also interpreted Ramaṇa through theosophical ideas.

And Chadwick reports the visit of the American Bierce Spaulding [*sic*], who came to ashram in 1936 with a group of Americans. His reference appears to be Baird Thomas Spaulding, who wrote about his trip to India in 1894.⁴⁰ In 1935, when Spaulding was 78 years old, he organized another trip to India with 18 fellow travelers and seekers. Chadwick reports that they had bought one-way tickets to India. They had been told that once with the Masters, they would be taken care of, and that they would not want to return to America. They arrived in Calcutta, where Spaulding left them in a hotel while he tried to communicate with the Masters as to how to proceed. Spaulding told the group that he had met Brunton, who invited them to Ramaṇa’s *ashram*. Spaulding first took the group to Pondicherry for a *darshan* of Aurobindo. Brunton was present at the same *darshan* and stayed at the same hotel. Brunton told Chadwick that members of the group accused Spaulding of having swindled them. When they arrived at Ramaṇa’s ashram, there were 12 members left of the group. Others had left in exasperation. Mrs. Taylor,

⁴⁰ Baird Thomas Spaulding: *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East*, 6 volumes (DeVorss & Co., 1996, first published 1924).

one of the members of the group, asked Ramaṇa for Self-realization “right away.” Chadwick thought that Spalding was an interesting person, who “obviously suffered from delusions” and was “slightly mad” (Chadwick, 48-51).

Ramaṇa told Chadwick that in ancient India, Rama had his flowercar, which was an aeroplane. There were fire-weapons, diamond weapons and electric weapons. They had a combination of metals by which they were able to overcome gravity (Chadwick 90-91).

Chadwick also reports some *tantric* influences on Ramaṇa, such as the granite *Sri Chakra Meru* that was installed in Ramaṇa’s mother’s tomb, and which is still regularly worshipped. It is one and a half feet square. Chadwick says that Ramaṇa personally superintended the installation in the inner shrine and blessed the *Sri Chakra*. Because of this interest by Ramaṇa in *tantra*, Chadwick later (after Ramaṇa’s death) was able to persuade the *ashram* to institute the *Sri Chakra Pujas* six times a month (Chadwick, 59-60). The only occasion when such a *puja* was performed during his life, Ramaṇa refused to go for his evening meal but insisted on remaining a witness of it until the end. He thought it would be good if such *pujas* would be continued. Chadwick says that *Shakti must always accompany Siva*. Otherwise, the world would stop.

Chadwick also reports on Ramaṇa’s use of some Christian ideas. Ramaṇa told him that people do not want simplicity. They want something elaborate and mysterious that is why so many religions have come into existence. The Christian will not be satisfied unless taught that God is in Heaven and can’t be reached without help of the church. He is not satisfied with the simple truth “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Chadwick, 70).

Chadwick also asked Ramaṇa about Elijah and Christ. Ramaṇa said that the Tamil Saint Manickavasagar’s body disappeared in a blaze of light leaving no residue. Chadwick refers to Elijah (who was taken up to Heaven in a chariot). He asked Ramaṇa whether Christ’s death was different. Ramaṇa said that Christ’s body remained for a time after death but other bodies were immediately and utterly consumed (Chadwick, 71).

But Chadwick does not interpret Ramaṇa in Christian terms. Chadwick reports on the visit by the Christian missionary Stanley-Jones (Chadwick, 80-85). Stanley-Jones

emphasized that the Kingdom of Heaven was personified in Jesus Christ, and that “if that Kingdom is universalized, each of us will become at one with the rest.” Chadwick reports Ramaṇa as answering that there are no differences between people. This is known not only in sleep, but also in the “real waking state” which does not involve differences. Chadwick became frustrated at Stanley-Jones’ “pestering” of Ramaṇa, and referred to him to the Biblical saying “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” Stanley-Jones disputed this, and said the real translation was “among you.” Stanley-Jones then left. Another record of this visit by Stanley-Jones is found in *Talks*, 452-55.

Ramaṇa’s reply to Stanley-Jones raises issues that are not really resolved. If the waking state of the realized person does not involve differences, how does the *jīvanmukta* function in the world? Chadwick himself raised this issue, and reports Ramaṇa’s answer:

How can he [the *jñāni*] both see distinctions and not see distinctions? He obviously does. He can answer questions, discuss and apparently do all things in that way we do, yet for him I repeat, there is only one Self and this life is nothing but a dream (Chadwick 73).

E. W.Y. Evans-Wentz

W.Y. Evans-Wentz, the Oxford scholar of Tibetan studies, was one of the first western scholars who visited Ramaṇa as a result of reading Brunton. He visited Ramaṇa in January 1935, and he carried a letter of introduction from Brunton. Evans-Wentz had by then translated the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1927) and *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (1928) and a third book on the *Tibetan Yoga and its Secret Doctrines* (1935).⁴¹

Evans-Wentz asked Ramaṇa about the nature of time and Ramaṇa replied, “Time is only an idea. There is only the Reality” (*Talks*, 10, para. 17). He asked Ramaṇa about illusion. Ramaṇa replied: “To whom is the illusion? Find it out. Then illusion will vanish.” But Ramaṇa also said, “Māyā is used to signify the manifestations of the Reality. Thus Māyā is only Reality” (*Talks*, 16). As we shall see, these two views of *māyā* are inconsistent, and the view that *māyā* is reality is a *tantric* idea.

⁴¹ He gave copies of these books to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa liked *The Life of Milarepa* the best.

Evans-Wentz then asked whether work is an obstruction to Self-realization. Ramaṇa replied:

No. For a realized being the Self alone is the Reality, and actions are only phenomenal, not affecting the Self. Even when he acts he has no sense of being an agent. His actions are only involuntary and he remains a witness to them without any attachment.

There is no aim for this action. Even one who is still practising the path of Wisdom (*jñāna*) can practise while engaged in work. It may be difficult in the earlier stages for a beginner, but after some practice it will soon be effective and the work will not be found a hindrance to meditation (*Talks*, 11)

Ramaṇa told Evans-Wentz that one must search for the ego, and that one must find out, “Who am I?” This could be done by someone who was married or unmarried. Celibacy (*brahmacharya*) means ‘living in Brahman.’ Similarly, solitude is in one’s mind. Whether one is in the thick of the world or in a forest, one may still not be controlling the mind. But it is possible to be in solitude even when working, provided that one works with detachment (*Talks*, 15, para. 20).

As we shall see, Ramaṇa’s emphasis on being able to be enlightened and still act in the world is the idea of living liberation, or *jīvanmukti*, an idea which is not shared by all Hindus.

Evans-Wentz then focused on ethical questions. He asked Ramaṇa how the saint helps humanity. Ramaṇa said that the help is imperceptible but still there; humanity is not aware of the help it receives. Evans-Wentz asked, would it not be better if the saint mixed with others? Ramaṇa replied “There are no others to mix with. The Self is the one and only Reality” (*Talks*, 16, para. 20).

Ramaṇa thus gave two different answers to the ethical issue. The first is that the realized person helps the world without the world being aware of it. The second is that there is in fact no world, anyway. These two answers are not consistent. The second is a much more monistic view, regarding the world as illusion. Ramaṇa also gives a third view—that of quietism. He says “The power which has created you has created the world. If it can take care of you, it can similarly take care of the world also.” None of these three answers calls for any active involvement in the world.

Evans-Wentz asked about occult powers, and Ramaṇa replied,

The occult powers (*siddhis*) are only in the mind. They are not natural to the Self. That which is not natural, but acquired, cannot be permanent, and is not worth striving for (*Talks*, 17, para. 20).

Ramaṇa's views on these powers or *siddhis* therefore are quite consistent. They are not to be sought.

F. K. Lakshmana Sarma

In 1937, K. Lakshmana Sarma published *Maha Yoga (or The Upanishadic Lore in the Light of the Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa)*. He published it under the pseudonym "Who"—a most appropriate name given Ramaṇa's method of "Who are You?" The Ramaṇa website refers to this book as "the most thorough and intriguing study" of Ramaṇa's teachings. Sarma refers to Ramaṇa's experience at the age of 16 in terms of "grace":

We must take it that, possessed by this power—which is identical with what devotees call 'grace'—the mind plunged deep into the Source of all life and mind and was merged in *It* (*Maha Yoga* 5).

Sarma says,

Soon after coming to Tiruvannamalai, as a result of his continuous experience of the Egoless State, he [Ramaṇa] realized the truth of the ancient Revelation: "I and my Father are one" (*Maha Yoga* 12).

Does this mean that the realization was not during the enactment of death at Ramaṇa's home when he enacted his death? Or that Ramaṇa was only able to articulate this when he came to Tiruvannamalai? In either case, why is it that the Revelation in question is with reference to a Christian text? Later, Sarma refers to the "I am" of Jehovah (*Maha Yoga* 120). And he quotes the words of Jesus, "The kingdom of Heaven is *within you*," (*Maha Yoga* 129).

Like many other biographers of Ramaṇa, Sarma makes many references to Western writers. He refers to William James, and to Bucke's *Cosmic Consciousness* (*Maha Yoga* 38). He refers to Kant's view that what we all perceive is not the world itself, but an ever-shifting mass of sensations, sounds, contacts, forms, tastes and smells, and that

space, time and causality are the mind's creation (*Maha Yoga* 63). He even refers to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*; he says that the wonder-world is seen as quite real until the very end (*Maha Yoga* 73).

But Sarma says we must distinguish between *yogis*, saints and sages. No sage ever contradicts another sage. Non-sages have only a distorted view of truth. For proof, he refers to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, verse 365 (*Maha Yoga* 39). Sarma quotes Ramaṇa as saying that when we seek to know anything other than oneself, without caring to know the truth of oneself, the knowledge obtained cannot possibly be right knowledge (*Maha Yoga* 26). There is the eye of flesh, and the Real eye (*Maha Yoga* 73).

Sarma also refers to other non-traditional Hindu works. He says that Ramaṇa referred him to the *Vishnu Purana* and to the sage Ribhu (*Maha Yoga* 70). And Ramaṇa quoted the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (*Maha Yoga* 124).

Of special interest is the part of the book dealing with the issue of our "identity" with the Self. Sarma says that to say that the individual soul is God is "blasphemous" (*Maha Yoga* 87). He quotes Ramaṇa, who says that these issues arise only in "controversies" by those who have not attained true identity:

He that has not attained the state of perfect identify with the Reality,—which is his Natural State, since that Reality is ever shining in the hearts of all creatures as the real Self—by seeking and becoming aware of It, engages in controversies, asserting 'There is something real,' 'no,' 'that something has form,' 'no,' 'It is one,' 'It is twofold,' 'It is neither' (*Maha Yoga* 89).

Sarma has what might be called a negative theology. He says that we can only know what the Self is not, and not what it is (*Maha Yoga* 127).

It may be said that there *are* positive descriptions about It in the ancient lore, namely that It is Reality, Consciousness and Happiness—*Sat*, *Chit*, and *Ananda*. The answer is that these descriptions are positive only in form; they are negative in meaning, being intended only to dispel misconceptions (*Maha Yoga* 128).

But Sarma says that Ramaṇa quoted from the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, that the Heart is the real Self, the original Consciousness. Here, Sarma places a monistic interpretation on the Self:

It is called the Heart, because It is the Source of intelligence from which the mind takes its rise and expands into the world. To that Source it must return, so that relativity may be wound up and may cease. When the mind, with life, returns to the Heart and stays there in unity with It, then it can no more project on the Self the world-appearance which conceals It. From this it follows that the Sage does not see the world, though he rarely says so, having regard to the weaknesses of questioners... (*Maha Yoga* 129-130).

And yet Sarma tries to reconcile the teachings of Shankara and Rāmāṇuja regarding *māyā*. Rāmāṇuja says that the world is real and there is no *māyā*. Shankara tells us to find out Reality underlying the ever-changing world. “What is called changefulness by Rāmāṇuja is called illusion by Sankara.” (*Maha Yoga* 203).

Sarma also translated Muruganār’s *Guru Vāchaakakkovai*,⁴² which is said to embody the oral teachings of Ramaṇa. That book states “Self-Realization is not learning something new, but of unlearning, eliminating the false knowledge that the ego-mind has gathered in the course of numerous lives” (*Sarma*, 5 fn1). The book is also of interest with respect to the idea of *māyā* or illusion. He says it is not wrong to say that the world is unreal and real provided both statements are understood to mean the same thing. The names and forms that diversity the world are unreal but it is real in the sense that the something, on which the names and forms are superimposed by the ego-mind, is real. “He does *not* endorse the common man’s view that the world is real with all its names and forms” (*Sarma*, 6 fn7).

Guru Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mālā also deals with the question of ethics. It says that the teaching of non-duality is to be meditated upon. It is not to be the basis of actions (*Sarma*, 43 v. 209). A footnote explains that because actions proceed from the contrary idea that the doer is an individual, the teaching of non-duality will be mis-applied. So for actions, we must assume that duality is real!

The *Sādhaka* must act always according to the best standard applicable to other men; that is, in conduct he must respect the distinction between moral and immoral conduct, as if duality were real.

⁴² Lakshmana Sarma: *Guru Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mālā* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1998, 2nd ed. published 1960) 2nd ed. 1960) [‘Sarma].

But there is a difference between a sage and a mere *sādhaka*.

Guru Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mālā emphasizes that the true Self to be sought in the Heart, not in books (*Sarma*, 43, v. 211). The state of the Real Self is one where no object appears (*Sarma*, 49, 243), and where there are no pairs of opposites, nor space nor time, nor action, nor its fruition, nor any other non-self (implying) duality (*Sarma*, 51, v. 248). The triad of knower, knowing and known does not exist in the Transcendental State (*Sarma*, 57, v. 263).

For one who looks outwards (at objects) both ignorance and knowledge exist; Consciousness in the case of the ‘knower of the Self’ is free from both, always of the same nature. (*Sarma*, 57, v. 266).

The one who is liberated, the *mukta*, does not see differences (*Sarma*, 70, v. 338). There is also no longer any ‘I’:

In this State of Silence, which is egoless and mindless, who is there called ‘I’ to say ‘I am Brahman?’ (*Sarma*, 50, v. 247).

The seemingly real ego, called *jīva*, is unreal (*Sarma*, 59, v. 277). Pure Consciousness has the form I AM (*Sarma*, 61 v. 286). And yet *Guru Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mālā* does not say that the world is totally unreal. It is real insofar as it is the place where the creative Consciousness plays:

The three categories of the creator, the creature and the world, *māyā* the creative Consciousness who plays with them, and the place where she plays; all these are the Pure Reality only (*Sarma*, 61, v. 288).

The one who has attained the Natural State (*sahaja*) may seem to have the mental mood of the quality of *Rajas*, like a crystal mirror (*Sarma*, 71, v. 342).

G. Jean Herbert

Jean Herbert, a French writer on eastern spirituality, visited Ramaṇa’s *ashram* twice before the beginning of the war.⁴³ In 1937, Herbert published *Quelques grands penseurs*

⁴³ Jean Herbert: *Spiritualité hindoue* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1972, first published 1947), 464.

de l'Inde.⁴⁴ This is a 45-page booklet about several of India's holy men and women, including Ramaṇa, Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Ananda Ma, and Gandhi. Herbert wanted to include references to Ramaṇa's works in his book, but he was refused permission.⁴⁵

Herbert writes that, unlike other *gurus* in India, Ramaṇa hardly ever talks to his disciples. Being a *rishi*, one who has “seen” God, Ramaṇa is content to “radiate” in silence. Although a person may arrive with questions and problems, these problems are solved naturally after a brief time with Ramaṇa. He says that Ramaṇa does not claim to teach anything new, but wants to guide his disciples into their own direct and personal experience of the Divine. Herbert briefly describes the method of Self-Enquiry. He says that this leads to the further step of union with the Divine, which Herbert explicitly compares with the words of Jesus, “My Father and I are one.”⁴⁶

Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde gives only brief information about Ramaṇa. It was expanded in a book that Herbert published ten years later.⁴⁷ In this later book, Herbert says that Ramaṇa does not usually appear to be conscious of anything that happens around him. He says that Ramaṇa usually does not talk except about indifferent subjects, and that Ramaṇa attaches a considerable importance to the perfection of each of his acts, even the act of undoing a package. He passes his days in an almost complete immobility, stretched out on a couch at the foot of which his disciples prostrate themselves and burn incense. Herbert says that for his whole life, Ramaṇa has allowed “commercial

⁴⁴ Jean Herbert: *Quelques grands penseurs de l'Inde* (Paris: Les Trois Lotus, 1937) [‘Herbert’].

⁴⁵As reported in *The Maharshi*, January/February 1996, Vol. 6-No. 1. See website www.Ramaṇa-maharshi.org/publish/janfeb96.htm. Herbert was eventually able to publish the works of Ramaṇa: *L'Enseignement de Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Albin Michel, 1972).

⁴⁶ Herbert, 25. Abhishiktānanda also frequently refers to this verse from the Gospel of John. For example, see Abhishiktānanda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, tr. David Fleming and James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 42 (5.6.52) [‘Diary’].

⁴⁷ Jean Herbert: *Spiritualité hindoue*. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1947). Jules Monchanin (see below) referred Abhishiktānanda to this book in his letter dated August 13, 1949. See *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 62.

parasites” to install themselves around him and to monopolize him. Ramaṇa watches and allows them to drive away his oldest and most faithful disciples, sometimes with clubs.⁴⁸

On a positive note, Herbert writes that Ramaṇa’s disciples receive from him “an astonishing spiritual impulse.” One look from Ramaṇa can change a person’s life completely. An apparently insignificant word can open vast horizons, a sign from him can be more convincing than long explanations.

Herbert reports that Ramaṇa has written a few verses of poetry. He says that Ramaṇa allows the most contradictory interpretations to be given to this poetry. In 1940, Herbert published *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, containing French translations of some of these contradictory interpretations of Ramaṇa’s teachings.⁴⁹ There are, for example, both monistic and non-monistic interpretations of Ramaṇa’s teachings.

Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi contains a long article by “Dr. Sarma K. Lakshman.” This is in fact the same person I have referred to as Lakshmana Sarma, and the article is an extract from his book *Maha Yoga*. Sarma here gives a monistic interpretation of Ramaṇa’s teachings—that there is neither God nor world outside of Self.⁵⁰ It is Sarma’s view that Ramaṇa only learned this monistic view in later life, although his experience at the age of 16 had given him an experience of the Self.

In contrast to this monistic interpretation, Swami Siddheswarānanda’s article says that Ramaṇa’s conception of life embraces the totality of life, which for an Indian includes the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. Siddheswarānanda was a member of the Ramakrishna Order, and thus a disciple of Vivekānanda.⁵¹ We can therefore see a

⁴⁸ This may be a reference to Brunton. Herbert’s emphasis on Ramaṇa’s teaching in silence also seems to owe much to Brunton’s account.

⁴⁹ Jean Herbert: *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940) [*Études*]. Herbert does not mention any prose works by Ramaṇa. Nor do the authors of the works he cites make any reference to *Vichara-sangrahaṃ* or *Self-Enquiry*.

⁵⁰ This is a French translation, with revisions, of *Maha Yoga or the Upanishadic Lore by “Who”* (Tiruvannamalai, 1961).

⁵¹ Siddheswarānanda was a member of the Ramakrishna Mission in Paris. On February 26, 1950, Siddheswarānanda participated in a seminar on *yoga* at the Sorbonne.

pronounced neo-Hindu interpretation in this article. Siddheswarānanda says that one cannot say that the exterior world did not interest Ramaṇa. Siddheswarānanda cites the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* as support for this viewpoint. He says that going beyond ego does not signify that one is dead to all sensibility. In realization of the Self, one does not just content oneself by denying false ideas of reality; the positive element is most important, and that is to know the place of the ego with respect to the totality. If that were not the case, says Siddheswarānanda, people could find emancipation without making any personal effort, like sleep without dream, or like a loss of consciousness, where all perception disappears completely.

An article in *Études* by another disciple, Anantachari, records that when Ramaṇa himself was asked for an interpretation of his poems, Ramaṇa said that he had no idea at all what he meant when he wrote the poetry. Anantachari reports Ramaṇa as saying, “How can I explain what I wanted to say? I didn’t want to say anything at all.” A similar viewpoint is expressed in the article by Swāmi Tapasyānanda, who also asked Ramaṇa how his teaching corresponded to that set out in a book about him. Ramaṇa said that it was very difficult to know, since he himself did not have any particular doctrine. He himself did not have any desire to write a book. A further article by Swāmi Tapasyānanda is interesting in an unexpected way. He says that Ramaṇa has a unique imperturbable serenity, and that he just exists, without waiting for anything and without any anxiety at all. But he also says that he does not know whether or not Ramaṇa is really a *jñāni*. Swāmi Tapasyānanda also records that he asked Ramaṇa to instruct him in spiritual matters. Ramaṇa’s first response was that the best instruction was by silence. According to Ramaṇa, the *advaitin* has no opinion no express and no teaching concerning *Vedānta*. Because he had no particular doctrine, Ramaṇa could not say whether books about him corresponded to his “teaching.”

In his Preface to *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, Herbert says that he wrote the book because the spiritual influence of Ramaṇa had become considerable, and that readers wanted to know more than romantic ideas of western journalists who thought they had understood Ramaṇa. That is probably a criticism of Brunton. Herbert says that Ramaṇa’s real teachings are in the way that he interprets other Hindu works that he refers

to (the book includes French translations of excerpts from the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, and a poem of *Tayumānavar*). Herbert says that Ramaṇa's responses to questions from disciples are usually intended not so much to provide information as to give the questioner a shock, and causing him or her to reflect. Thus, the answers must always be seen in relation to the context in which they are given. Herbert says that Ramaṇa believed that the paths to truth vary according to individuals; each can interpret what he hears or reads, as long as this interpretation helps him progress from the point he finds himself. Therefore, there can be contradictory interpretations.

There is evidence within *Talks* (415) that Herbert is correct, and that Ramaṇa was not concerned about contrary viewpoints. Grant Duff asked Ramaṇa how Lakshmana Sarma's *Maha Yoga* and another publication (*Sat Darsana Bhashya*) could both claim to represent Ramaṇa's views when *Maha Yoga* actually condemned the other views. *Sat Darsana Bhashya* claimed that individuality was retained even after the loss of the ego. Ramaṇa said they were written from different standpoints—that of the body, and that of the realized state. It could be said that Ramaṇa was only following the example of Shankara, who held to a two-truths theory. But that doctrine did not prevent Shankara from engaging in intense intellectual debate with those who disagreed with his views of *advaita*.

In Herbert's criticisms of Ramaṇa, we see some of the same concerns that are raised by other western interpreters. There is the same concern with ethics, and the issue whether the *jīvanmukta* should involve himself in the running of the *ashram*. But Herbert's books raise additional issues. One issue is that of the relation between concepts and experience? Are there inconsistencies in Ramaṇa's ideas? Do inconsistencies of thought matter? How does the *jīvanmukta* perceive the world? Is the realized person conscious of the external world? Siddheswarānanda compares the outlook of a man who has attained realization with stereoscopic vision.

The article by Siddheswarānanda is one of the first to draw connections between Ramaṇa's teachings and the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. Herbert also relates Ramaṇa's ideas to Christian ideas, and especially to the words of Jesus that "I am my Father are One." This is the issue of the "identity" between oneself and the Absolute. What is the meaning of

nonduality or *advaita* in this connection? Is it the same as monism, or absolute identity? Or is there still a distinction between the Self and the Absolute?

H. Olivier Lacombe

The Indologist Olivier Lacombe had a three-hour visit with Ramaṇa in 1936. At the time of his visit to Ramaṇa, Lacombe was the *attaché consul* for France in Calcutta. A record of his brief visit is contained in *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (*Talks*, 155-157). Lacombe asked Ramaṇa whether his ideas corresponded with Shankara. Ramaṇa did not give a direct reply, but said that *others* had found that his ideas corresponded to Shankara. This raises the issue of how Ramaṇa's emphasis on experience corresponds to traditional views of *advaita*.

Lacombe asked about the various types of *yoga* and methods of enlightenment in Hinduism. Ramaṇa told him that the method chosen will vary according to the standpoint of the person, although he also said, "To remain in the Self amounts to all these [*yogas*] in their highest sense." Once a person is realized, he will use individual language to teach about it.

Lacombe recorded his reflections of this brief visit in the October 1937 volume of *Études Carmélitaines*.⁵² Lacombe refers to Ramaṇa as a *yogi*. Lacombe believed Indian *yoga* to be a "natural spirituality" as distinct from the supernatural spirituality given by the Holy Spirit in Christianity. *Yoga* is a conquest of the soul by itself, a kind of dis-incarnation, the isolation of the spirit in its native and original purity. *Yoga* starts by emptying one's consciousness and proceeds ultimately to an intuitive knowing beyond sensing and discursive thought.

⁵² Olivier Lacombe: "Sur le Yoga indien," *Études Carmélitaines*, October, 1937, pp. 163-176. The next year the same Journal (October, 1938) published another article by Lacombe, "Un Exemple de Mystique Naturelle: L'Inde." and an article by Jacques Maritain: "L'Experience Mystique Naturelle et le Vide." Maritain recommends that Catholics should study the experience of the Self where all religious implications are absent. The 1938 volume of *Études Carmélitaines* contains a full page photograph of Ramaṇa Maharshi. In 1954 Abhishiktānanda referred Fr. Lemarié to these articles. *Lettres d'un sannyās chrétien à Joseph Lemarié*, p. 103 (17.3.54).

Lacombe relates the story of Ramaṇa's enlightenment at the age of 16, and how Ramaṇa did not have previous knowledge or training. He says that the foundation of Ramaṇa's mysticism is the "grasping of the soul by itself" in the depth of its substance—a depth that is beyond even the most spiritual actions, and beyond the root of our powers of knowing and loving. Lacombe says that the grasping of the soul by itself is a radical conversion, and also a passage from extraversion to introversion. Lacombe believes that for Ramaṇa, his shock or fear of death rendered him immediately introspective or introverted. Ramaṇa's later sayings as a sage were designed to give a similar psychological shock to those who asked him questions. He wanted to plunge them into their depths, to convert them in a radical introversion. But although this experience of introversion is valuable, Lacombe says that Ramaṇa "exalted the experience of the individual self to the experience of the universal self."

Disciples of Ramaṇa soon knew about Lacombe's 1937 article in *Études Carmélitaines*. It is referred to by Swami Siddheswarānanda, one of the writers in Herbert's *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*. Swami Siddheswarānanda disputes the characterization of Ramaṇa as a *yogi*. He also disagrees with the view that Ramaṇa proceeds by a psychological shock that was the equivalent of his own fear of death and by which he became introverted. He says that Ramaṇa never provoked a shock, because he did not have any preconceived idea of the results of his action. He was just not concerned with psychological or philosophical problems.

Lacombe's writings raise important comparative issues about how Ramaṇa's teaching and experience corresponds to other Hindu schools or *darshanas*, and to *yoga* in particular. Lacombe's idea of the yogic experience as a "grasping of the soul by itself" seems to correspond to what has been referred to in later literature as a "pure consciousness" experience.⁵³

⁵³ See K.C. Forman (ed.): *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990).

I. *Lanza del Vasto*

Lanza del Vasto's book *Return to the Source*⁵⁴ was published in 1943. Like Brunton's works, this book was also very popular and it was translated into other languages. It sold over a million copies in France alone. Del Vasto gives a brief account of his meeting with Ramaṇa in 1937. He is very critical of Ramaṇa's appearance: "a little man who goes about half naked and remains perfectly simple in the midst of the great honours done to him"; "the grey eyes in his dark face are mild and vacant"; and "He has been laid on a small sofa styled in the worst taste." He criticizes the fact that Ramaṇa chewed betel nut and that he "sometimes opens his mouth wide and belches." He refers to the self-enquiry practiced by the disciples:

The disciples look at Him who Is and think of what they are. Or, rather, they think of what they are not. They are not this arm or this leg, this head or this heart, they are not this body, they are not this anxiety or this joy, this hope or this remorse, this anger or this love nor any of these changing emotions. They are not their thought, since their thought ceases when they sleep, whereas they do not cease to be. They are not the I that names itself.

Del Vasto rejects Ramaṇa's model of spirituality:

There is a Christian restlessness in me that prefers itself, imperfect as it is, to the perfect serenity of which I see the model here. If I had the rare courage and the power to dedicate myself to godliness, I should seek it, not so much in the peace of absolute sleep as in the frenzy of the enamoured soul. If I had the rare courage and the power to do so, I should still not think I had the right to seek salvation by myself and for myself. I should have to reach my own good through the good of others, and I maintain that charity is greater than wisdom.

This is harsh criticism. Del Vasto left Ramaṇa's *ashram* to look for Gandhi at Wardha (the site of Gandhi's *ashram*), in order to "learn how to be a better Christian."

Del Vasto's criticisms are very similar to Brunton's. Is it correct to say that Ramaṇa sought "the peace of absolute sleep," or what Brunton calls trance? And what role does "charity" or ethics play for the *jīvanmukta*?

⁵⁴ Lanza del Vasto: *Return to the Source*, tr. Jean Sidgwick (Simon and Schuster, 1971, first published in France in 1943 under the title of *Le Pèlerinage aux Sources*), 96, 97.

J. S.S. Cohen

Another disciple of Ramaṇa was S.S. Cohen. He wrote several books, including *Guru Ramaṇa: Memories and Notes*, and *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*.⁵⁵

Abhishiktānanda (see below) met Cohen in 1952, and Abhishiktānanda says that with Cohen he had some of his best conversations concerning Ramaṇa's teaching. But Abhishiktānanda found Cohen rather too intellectual in his approach.⁵⁶

K. Arthur Osborne (1906-1970).

The devotee Arthur Osborne wrote another biography of Ramaṇa.⁵⁷ Osborne follows Narasimha's biography, but deletes most of the Christian references to Ramaṇa. Osborne repeats the story of Ramaṇa's sound sleeping as a boy.

In 1964, Osborne founded the *ashram's* monthly review, *The Mountain Path* (named after the sacred mountain Arunāchala, symbol of the Guru, Siva, and the formless Absolute). In the first volume of that review, Osborne said,

The aim of this journal will be to set forth the traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages, especially as testified to by their saints and mystics, and to clarify the paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world.⁵⁸

It is interesting that Osborne emphasizes the “traditional wisdom of all religions and all ages.” As we shall see, this perennialist view represents neo-Hinduism and not traditional Hinduism. Osborne continued by making a link to Buddhism:

⁵⁵ S.S. Cohen: *Guru Ramaṇa: Memories and Notes* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1993, first published 1952) and *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1996, first published 1959) [*'Reflections'*].

⁵⁶ Abhishiktānanda: *Souvenirs d'Arunāchala: récit d'un ermite chrétien en terre hindoue* (Paris: Epi SA, 1978), translated as *The Secret of Arunāchala* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1979, revised 1987), 38.

⁵⁷ Arthur Osborne: *Ramaṇa Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1970).

⁵⁸ *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 1 - JANUARY 1964 - No. 1, online at [http://www.ramanamaharshi.org/m_path/m_path.htm].

It is related (and the story is no less significant whether historically true or not) that after attaining Enlightenment the Buddha's first impulse was to abide in the effulgence of Bliss without turning back to convey the incommunicable to mankind. Then he reflected: "Some there are who are clear-sighted and do not need my teaching, and some whose eyes are clouded with dust who will not heed it though given, but between these two there are also some with but little dust in their eyes, who can be helped to see; and for the sake of these I will go back among mankind and teach" It is for those with little dust in their eyes that this journal is intended (*Ibid.*).

The same issue of *The Mountain Path* contained another article, "Outside the Scriptures," by Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, referring to Buddhism's emphasis on experience transmitted apart from the scriptures:

A special transmission outside the scriptures;
No dependence upon words or letters;
Direct pointing at the heart of man;
Seeing into one's own nature, and the attainment of Liberation.

Other works that Osborne published include *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*, a study of Sai Baba of Shirdi, and many studies of Ramaṇa Maharshi. He was the first to assemble Ramaṇa's *Collected Works*.⁵⁹ Osborne uncritically repeats the view that Ramaṇa's teachings were not derived from the books he read:

There was no change or development in his philosophy during the half century and more of his teaching. There could be none, since he had not worked out any philosophy but merely recognized the expositions of transcendental Truth in theory, myth, and symbol when he read them.⁶⁰

It is worth looking at Osborne's own influences prior to meeting Ramaṇa. Osborne was educated at Oxford. He was an enthusiastic reader of the writings of René Guénon. Annie Cahn Fung⁶¹ reports that Rene Guénon's *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu*

⁵⁹ *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. by Arthur Osborne, (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997).

⁶⁰ Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Collected Works of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1972), Preface, 11.

⁶¹ Annie Cahn Fung, "Paul Brunton: A Bridge Between India and the West," Doctoral thesis, Sorbonne, 1992). Online at [<http://wisdomsgoldenrod.org/publications/>], 26 ['Cahn Fung'].

Doctrines made a strong impression on Osborne: "...his uneasiness and dissatisfaction disappeared when he realized that life had sense after all."⁶² Osborne corresponded with Guénon, and translated into English Guénon's *Crisis of the Modern World*. Osborne and his wife then left with his wife for Thailand, where he taught at the University of Bangkok. Osborne was interned by the Japanese. It was only after the war that he went to Tiruvannamalai, where he stayed for the rest of his life.

Osborne's interest in Guénon is another Western influence that needs to be considered in understanding the teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi. We must bear in mind that Osborne was himself from the West, and may have used Western categories in interpreting Ramaṇa. A full comparison is beyond the scope of this work. As an aside, it is interesting that Osborne's son was the inventor of the Osborne computer, one of the first personal computers.

L. Abhishiktānanda (1910-1973)

Abhishiktānanda is the Indian name given to the French Benedictine monk Henri Le Saux. Abhishiktānanda came to India in 1948 with the intention of converting Hindus to Christianity. He visited Ramaṇa's *ashram* and thereafter tried to emulate what he understood to be Ramaṇa's *advaitic* experience.

I have described Abhishiktānanda's interpretation of Ramaṇa, and his search for the *advaitic* experience in my 2001 doctoral thesis "Abhishiktānanda's Non-Monistic Advaitic Experience."⁶³ See also my online interview regarding Abhishiktānanda.⁶⁴

Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa's state of trance was evidence of a direct experience (*anubhava*). This experience is more immediate than the knowledge of the great saying (*mahāvākya*) "I am He." Because of this immediate experience,

⁶² Lucia Osborne: "Arthur Osborne," *The Mountain Path*, v. 7:4 (October 1970).

⁶³ J. Glenn Friesen: "Abhishiktānanda's Non-Monistic Advaitic Experience." Online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/>].

⁶⁴ Interview of J. Glenn Friesen, online at [<http://www.innerexplorations.com/ewtext/Friesen.htm>].

Abhishiktānanda believed that Ramaṇa was greater than Shankara. He still saw traces of duality in Shankara:

Shankara understood *so'ham*—I am He; for Bhagavan there is only *aham*—I. The “ashes” of duality that still appeared in Shankara were never there in Bhagavan. Bhagavan’s experience required years of “trance” before his body could be brought back to normal.⁶⁵

It is interesting that in defence of his view that distinctions are real, Abhishiktānanda refers to Ramaṇa’s work *Ulladu Narpadu*. He also says that it is because distinctions are real that the *jīvanmukta* does not have to stay in *samādhi*. This relates an appreciation of the reality of the world to the *sahaja* experience. In immersing ourselves in God, we do not disappear. The sage can discover, adore and serve God in creation and in the multiplicity of beings.⁶⁶

When Abhishiktānanda arrived in India, his idea of *advaita* was that of *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He was disappointed in the fact that Ramaṇa seemed so ordinary, and that he participated in everyday activities. Over time, Abhishiktānanda came to appreciate the idea of *jīvanmukti*. He did not seem to appreciate the difference between the interpretation of the *jīvanmukta*’s actions as due to *prārabdha karma*, and the interpretation that the *jīvanmukta* was actively doing good. In his book *Guhāja*, Abhishiktānanda identifies these two ideas. He says that the Christian idea of vocation is called *prārabdha karma* in Hinduism.⁶⁷

In emulating Ramaṇa by meditating in the caves, Abhishiktānanda seems to have interpreted Ramaṇa in terms of yoga and meditation. Although he mentions it, Abhishiktānanda does not seem to fully recognize the difference between *sahaja* and *nirvikalpa samādhi*, nor of Ramaṇa’s own opposition to meditation. Abhishiktānanda believed that the *kevala* (or *nirvikalpa*) state was a necessary stage in order to attain to the *sahaja* state. As we shall see, Abhishiktānanda’s understanding conflicts with Ramaṇa’s own opinion.

⁶⁵ *Diary*, 76 (27.11.53).

⁶⁶ *Guhāja* (or *Guhāntara* II) (unpublished, in Abhishiktānanda Archives, Delhi), 86, 87.

⁶⁷ *Guhāja*, 88.

Abhishiktānanda's conception of *advaita*, insofar as it affirms the reality of the world, and the possibility of liberation as a *jīvanmukti*, follows a *tantric* view of *advaita*. This fits with his Christian bias of reality having both unity and diversity. He compares the state of the *jīvanmukti* to that of resurrection to new life.

In choosing to enter into dialogue with Ramaṇa, Abhishiktānanda assumed that Ramaṇa embodied the traditional teachings of *Vedānta*. Although Abhishiktānanda was aware of some influences of Kashmir Shaivism on Ramaṇa, he does not seem to have been aware of the way that Ramaṇa had been influenced by non-traditional Hindu influences, such as *tantra*, neo-Hinduism, western philosophy, and Christianity. If he had known of these other influences, he might not have been so eager to engage in dialogue with him.

M. Jules Monchanin

Jules Monchanin was the priest who, together with Abhishiktānanda, founded the Christian *ashram* Shantivanam in Tamil Nadu, India. Monchanin also wrote about his visits to Ramaṇa. In addition to the visits that he had with Abhishiktānanda, Monchanin also made several visits on his own. Monchanin visited Ramaṇa on February 14, 1950, while Abhishiktānanda stayed at Shantivanam. Monchanin reports that he was filled with admiration for Ramaṇa. He asked himself whether he was the victim of a mirage. He concluded that his experience was not a mirage, because he did not stop for an instant of being the lucid master of himself. Nevertheless he says that he was “seduced” by Ramaṇa. Monchanin writes that there was mystery in this man who had found by his own experience the essence of India's mysticism—“an unpitying, obstinate negation of all that is not the Necessary One [*l'unique nécessaire*].”⁶⁸ Monchanin visited Ramaṇa a fourth time on March 7, 1950. Ramaṇa was dying, but Monchanin reports that he seemed to be detached and almost absent to his own body. Monchanin wrote Abhishiktānanda

⁶⁸ Letter dated March 6, 1950, cited in *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 72. See also *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 293.

that the death of Ramaṇa should not sadden beyond measure those at the *ashram*, because the *Shakti* is immortal. He says that Ramaṇa's devotees call this *Shakti* "mother."⁶⁹

Monchanin also read and referred to Lacombe's articles, including the article on Ramaṇa and yoga. Contrary to Lacombe, Monchanin did not think that the idea of a natural mysticism based on ecstasy necessarily implied a distinction between nature and supernature.⁷⁰

Monchanin was aware of the criticism of Ramaṇa by traditional *sannyāsīns*. In 1949, Monchanin referred to a *sannyāsī* named Śuddhacaitanyaśiva, who says that Ramaṇa's serene indifference comes "out of stupidity rather than out of *jīvanmukti*."⁷¹

Monchanin used a pragmatic criterion to judge Ramaṇa's experience. In an entry of April 12, 1950, Monchanin asks what outward signs there are of a *jīvanmukta*. He says that the supreme criterion is that of direct experience; only a *jīvanmukta* can really know whether or not someone else is a *jīvanmukta*. Monchanin then looks at the fruits of the experience. He lists the following characteristics that he finds in Ramaṇa: equanimity, being beyond contraries, universal benevolence, imperturbable grace [*śanti*], and the state of being beyond good and evil. He also points to consistency between thought and life. He finds in Ramaṇa a remarkable consistency between life and Vedantic doctrine.⁷² For example, during the operation on what would prove to be a fatal tumour on his arm, Ramaṇa continued to smile and to behave as if his body were *not-self*. Monchanin sees this as an indication that Ramaṇa lived his doctrine of the successive sheaths of the self. Ramaṇa's method was not meditation so much as a rejection of these illusory sheaths or

⁶⁹ *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), Letter May 1, 1950, 77.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Letters dated November, 1953 and February 24, 1954 (pp. 119 and 134). Monchanin's views should be contrasted with those of P. de Lubac, who insisted on the distinction between nature and supernature.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Letter Nov. 1949, p. 67.

⁷² *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), April 12, 1950, p. 293. Although he found Ramaṇa's actions to be consistent with his thought, that does not necessarily mean that Ramaṇa was a model he personally accepted.

envelopes that are not the true self. The true self is the *ātman*, unborn, unchanging, and unique.

According to Ysabel de Andia, Monchanin considered the problem of the One and the Many to be the true axis of thought.⁷³ One of his first communications to the Société Lyonnaise de Philosophie was in 1931, and it was entitled “l’Un dans le multiple, dans le Parménide de Platon.”⁷⁴

Monchanin says that the problem of the One and the Many leads to the dilemma of monism vs. pluralism. If only the One is real, the result is monism. If only the Many are real, then there is pluralism. Other dilemmas that Monchanin believed resulted from this problem are personal/impersonal; monotheism/polytheism. Monchanin believed that only the idea of the Trinity goes beyond these dilemmas. In the Trinity there is neither only unity nor is there only diversity.

Monchanin thought that the Vedāntic idea of *advaita* was an equivalent form of thought to the Trinity.⁷⁵ Just as the Trinity is neither one nor three (it is not tritheism), so *advaita* is neither monism nor dualism. Reality surpasses our reasoning or *logos*. There is both unity and diversity. The fact that diversity is real also means that neither solipsism nor idealism is true. Monchanin was not the first to apply Trinitarian ideas to Hindu thought.

⁷³ Ysabel de Andia: “Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l’Inde”, *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997), 111. He writes about Parmenides’ hypothesis of a pure One that is-not. He says that this hypothesis leads to apophaticism. (The quotation is from the French translation of Plato’s *Parmenides*: “d’un pur qui n’est pas”). Another contribution was called “Comparative Mysticism”; it compared the Greek Plotinus and the Buddhist Asaṅga, the Moslem Al-Hallaj, and St. John of the Cross. See Sten Rodhe: *Jules Monchanin: Pioneer in Christian-Hindu Dialogue* (Delhi: ISPCCK, 1993), p. 9.

⁷⁴ *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 72.

⁷⁵ R. Panikkar: “Le Project Monastique de Monchanin,” *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), 232: “l’équivalent homéomorphique.”

Many years before, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861-1907) had done the same.⁷⁶ He compared the Trinity to the Hindu idea of *Saccidānanda* (*Sat-chit-ānandam*). Monchanin refers to Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya in *Ermites*.⁷⁷

Monchanin's emphasis on the Trinity clearly influenced Abhishiktānanda's own view of the Trinitarian structure of reality. The Trinity was an important idea for both of them; even the ashram Shantivanam was called "The ashram of the Trinity." Monchanin's Trinitarian ideas also help to explain Abhishiktānanda's view of *advaita* as non-monistic.

Monchanin's Trinitarian ideas also explain his view of yoga. Yoga leads to the One, but is incomplete. It needs to be completed by the Christian revelation of the Trinity. For Monchanin, mysticism is the participation in the Trinitarian relation. This mysticism is an intuition that surpasses image and concept, a direct experience, not made by humans, but given by God.⁷⁸ In this Christian mysticism, the ecstasy of yoga transubstantiates itself in the Spirit into pure ecstasy. The Hindu *kevala*, (aloneness, *esseulé*) is sublimated to Trinitarian thought after a "crucifying dark night of the soul."⁷⁹

Monchanin believed that *advaita* could not account for love (*bhakti*). Love involves a distinction between beings. According to *advaita*, love is in the realm of *māyā*. But as soon as we say "God is love," this is to confess a Trinity.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ See "The Pioneering Contributions of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya" in K.P. Aleaz: *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996).

⁷⁷ Abhishiktānanda: *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* (In collaboration with Abbé J. Monchanin), (Shantivanam: Tannirpalli, 1951, reprinted, Times Press, 1964). Translated and revised as *Ermites du Saccidānanda: un essai d'intégration chrétienne de la tradition monastique de l'Inde*, (Tournai/Paris: Casterman, 1957), "Note C", p. 182.

⁷⁸ Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), 116. See also *Mystique de l'Inde, mystere chretien*, 134.

⁷⁹ Ysabel de Andia: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), 125-128.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-135. Harvey Cox makes the same point. Love presupposes genuinely different selves. God and the world are both real, but different, and the relation between them is love. Harvey Cox: *Turning East* (Simon and Schuster, 1977), 85, 86.

Monchanin liked to say that he would not be Christian if the Trinitarian revelation had not introduced him to a better knowledge of creation and of humans. The internal dynamism of Trinity and the infinite stability of the absolute alterity is reflected in creation, in the physical universe as well as in human sociability.⁸¹ In 1956, Monchanin said that Christian mysticism is Trinitarian or nothing.⁸²

After Ramaṇa's death, Monchanin accompanied Abhishiktānanda to Arunāchala from mid-May to June, 1954. Monchanin did not stay in a cave but in a bungalow two kilometers away. He was worried about Abhishiktānanda. Each morning Abhishiktānanda came down to celebrate Mass with him. Monchanin asked Abhishiktānanda to try to pierce the *advaitic* experience to discover the communion (*samsat*) beyond. It is at this time that Abhishiktānanda writes that Monchanin is too Greek to understand *advaita*.

N. C.G. Jung

C.G. Jung is mistakenly regarded as a supporter of Ramaṇa's teachings. One introduction to the collected works of Ramaṇa uses an excerpt from Jung's writings as an introduction to the book.⁸³ But these excerpts do not tell the complete story. When we look at the full document, together with Jung's letters, it is evident that Jung had deep disagreements with what he regarded as Ramaṇa's message.

Jung visited India in 1948, and had an opportunity to visit Ramaṇa. Jung's decision not to visit Ramaṇa seems to have resulted from his conversations the previous year with Paul Brunton and V. Subrahmanya Iyer at his home in Küsnacht. Jung did visit Iyer in Mysore when he visited India.

⁸¹ Jacques Gadille: "Jules Monchanin: Prophète dans la Culture et dans l'Église de son Temps," in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), 39, 43.

⁸² Sten Rodhe: "De la vision inclusive de Jules Monchanin à la vision complémentaire de Bede Griffiths," in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997), 224.

⁸³ *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, with an introduction by C.G. Jung (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).

I have explored the relation between the ideas of Brunton, Ramaṇa, Iyer and Jung in my article “Jung, Ramaṇa Maharshi and Eastern Meditation.”⁸⁴ Jung expressed difficulties with what he believed to be Ramaṇa’s emphasis on meditation, and his lack of interest in the temporal world.

IV. Conflicts and tensions

We will look in detail at *tantric*, neo-Hindu and Christian influences on Ramaṇa. These influences often contradict each other. Each of these influences is also in tension with traditional Hinduism.

The first tension to be explored is that between traditional Hinduism and neo-Hinduism, or Hinduism that has been influenced by Western philosophical traditions.

The next tension to be explored is that of the *Vedānta advaita* versus *tantra*. Ramaṇa has been viewed as an authentic sage of *Vedānta Advaita* or nondualism. *Vedānta Advaita* tends to emphasize the importance of liberation from a temporal world of illusion or *māyā*. But Ramaṇa is also regarded as an example of a *jīvanmukta*—one who becomes liberated while still living in this temporal world. This idea of living liberation is a *tantric* idea. And Ramaṇa himself says that the world has some reality, thus contradicting the Vedāntic view of *māyā* as illusion in favour of an idea of *māyā* as the creative power of Shiva. In fact, the very idea of liberation while still alive is not universally accepted within Hinduism. Andrew Fort says that the idea of *jīvanmukti* was popularized by writings such as the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Fort has provided an excellent analysis of how the idea of *jīvanmukti* applies to Ramaṇa, in his book *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*. But Fort tends to rely on later sources and interpretations of Ramaṇa.⁸⁵ Specifically, he relies on Osborne’s biography. But Osborne admitted that he has “improved” the earlier bibliographies. We have looked at some of the earliest interpretations of Ramaṇa. We will also examine the *tantric* and *yogic* influences on

⁸⁴ J. Glenn Friesen: “Jung, Ramaṇa Maharshi and Eastern Meditation,” online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/cgjung/JungRamaṇa.html>].

⁸⁵ Andrew O. Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 134-151 [‘Fort’].

Ramaṇa by books he read during his twenty years of meditation in the caves of Arunāchala, as well as the considerable *tantric* influence on Ramaṇa by Gaṇapati Muni and T.V. Kapali Sastri. And as we shall see, Ramaṇa frequently refers to the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* and other tantric works. We will also look at the Christian influences on Ramaṇa, which he frequently reinterprets to avoid conflict with his views.

A. *Traditional Hinduism versus neo-Hinduism*

The Indologist Paul Hacker used the term ‘neo-Hinduism’ to refer to the interpretation of Hinduism by Hindus in response to the concerns of the non-Hindu West, and the use of the terminology and assumptions of the West. For example, Hacker says that Paul Deussen, a disciple of Schopenhauer, influenced Vivekānanda.

Hacker contrasts neo-Hinduism with “surviving traditional Hinduism.” This is represented by *pandit* literature, often written in Sanskrit, and by devotional tracts. It is often bitterly opposed to any Western interpretation of Hinduism.⁸⁶

Some of the ideas that Neo-Hinduism is said to have taken from the West are (1) the importance of direct experience (2) the idea of a perennial philosophy and (3) a social ethics based on the idea of *tat tvam asi* [that art thou]. I would add (4) disagreement as to whether *advaita* means the same as ‘monism’ and (5) differing views of the role of the *sannyāsī*.

1. The importance of Direct Experience

a) *Advaita Vedānta* versus Direct Experience

Ramaṇa is often regarded as a follower of traditional *Advaita Vedānta*, as expressed in the teachings of Shankara. For example, Mahadevan sees continuity with Shankara’s thought.⁸⁷ Ramaṇa himself was asked whether his teaching agreed with that of Shankara.

⁸⁶ See Wilhelm Halbfass: *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta* (State University of New York, 1995).

⁸⁷ T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramaṇa Maharshi: The sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977). It is interesting that Mahadevan does not emphasize other sources of Ramaṇa’s ideas, such as those that will be discussed.

He replied, “Bhagavan’s teaching is an expression of his own experience and realization. Others find that it tallies with Sri Shankara’s.”⁸⁸ So we see that Ramaṇa emphasized the importance of his own experience, and not whether his ideas agreed with those of Shankara. Halbfass says that Ramaṇa has become “a living symbol of the idea of religious experience.”⁸⁹ Ramaṇa’s method of “self-enquiry” emphasizes the primacy of direct experience. In his translation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Ramaṇa emphasized this necessity of direct experience. True liberation can be achieved by Self-enquiry or *vichāra*, and not by book learning (*CW*, 207). He says, “The Power will come down from above. It is a direct experience.” (*Talks*, 151, March 13/36).

Halbfass says that the idea of immediate experience is more obscure and ambivalent than is usually admitted.⁹⁰ He agrees with Hacker that the neo-Hindu emphasis on the personal experience of the *rishis* is something new to neo-Hinduism, and is not to be found in traditional Hinduism such as in the writings of Shankara. Traditional Hinduism holds to the priority of the revealed word of the *Vedas*. The use of the word *anubhava* in neo-Hinduism to refer to personal experience is therefore open to the criticism that it is due to the influence of Western ideas in neo-Hinduism.⁹¹

Hacker refers to the philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as “the most typical neo-Hindu.” Radhakrishnan was of the view that all genuine religious documents and

⁸⁸ *Teachings*, 15. Also *Talks*, 155, May 19, 1936. It is interesting that this answer was given in response to a question by Olivier Lacombe, the author of the article that most influenced Abhishiktānanda while he was still in France. At the time of his visit to Ramaṇa, Lacombe was the attaché consul for France in Calcutta. See Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Tiruvannamalai, 1946), p. 99.

⁸⁹ Wilhelm Halbfass, “The Concept of Experience in the Encounter Between India and the West,” *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York, 1988), 384 [‘*India and Europe*’].

⁹⁰ *India and Europe.*, 379. Halbfass refers to Gadamer’s statement that the concept of experience is among the least clarified concepts which we have. This applies not only to ‘*Erlebnis*,’ which has subjective and emotional connotations, but also to the wider word for experience, ‘*Erfahrung*.’

⁹¹ See also Anantanand Rambachan: *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekānanda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

scriptures have their origin in the immediate personal experience of “seers” or *rishis*. Hacker suggests that these ideas of Radhakrishnan come not so much from Hindu sources as from his reading of William James.⁹² In addition to William James, Radhakrishnan’s sources included the ideas of F.H. Bradley, Henri Bergson and Baron F. von Hügel.⁹³ Hacker and Halbfass have therefore raised the issue of whether the idea of immediate experience is really more Western than Hindu.

But is this emphasis on experience or *anubhava* found in Shankara’s *Advaita Vedānta*? Eliot Deutsch has interpreted Shankara in terms of a philosophy of experience.⁹⁴ But Halbfass says that an emphasis on direct experience, or *anubhava* is absent in Shankara. Shankara does not base any veridical claims upon personal experiences of his own; he does not even speak about them. The *Vedas* are his ultimate authority, and particularly the *Upanishads*.⁹⁵ The *Upanishads* are considered to be authorless. The *Upanishads* do

⁹² Even if neo-Hindu ideas of direct experience derive from William James, this does not mean that neo-Hinduism is irrational and subjectivistic. Gadamer’s criticism of direct experience may not apply to James, at least not in the same way that it applies to the Romantics. James does not just invert the priority between rational concept and intuitive experience; he sets out a new epistemology of ‘pure perception.’ And he insists that there is a ‘noetic’ element in immediate experience—it is experienced as a kind of knowing. The criticism of subjectivity may also not apply to James. His theory allows for an experience that is prior to any subject/object division. This rules out any initial subjectivity. Furthermore, James’s view of the self is not individualistic, but extends outwards to the world. It is connected with other human beings and the surrounding environment. G. William Barnard: *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997) pp. 150-152. James also speaks of this being a trans-personal experience, and therefore one that is not caught by *individual* subjectivity.

The model of immediate experience is currently not in fashion among scholars. However, there has been a renewed interest in James’s ideas of ‘pure perception’. In addition to Barnard, I would refer to Wilber and Krüger. Despite Wilber’s criticism of Romanticism, he defends the idea of immediate experience, using James’s ideas of pure experience. See Ken Wilber: *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad* (Boston: Shambhala, 1998), 5, 6. James’s idea of pure consciousness is also used by J.S. Krüger in *Along Edges* (University of South Africa, 1995). pp. 41ff.

⁹³ *India and Europe*, 398.

⁹⁴ Eliot Deutsch: *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu, 1969).

⁹⁵ *India and Europe*, 388.

not record anybody's personal experience; they are rather an objective structure that guides experience. Shankara criticizes such experiential principles as the "voice of the heart"; guidance must be by the *Vedas* because there can be false *anubhava* which does not recognize non-duality. In order to recognize non-duality, Scripture is needed.⁹⁶ It is in this sense that the word, the *Vac* is primary. The word comes first, but the process culminates in the experience of *samādhi*.⁹⁷

Halbfass says that although Shankara uses the word *anubhava*, it is not to be confused with "personal experiences" or "observations" which one could use as evidence for or against the *Vedas*. It is rather used to refer to an ultimate experience, a goal, the knowledge of *Brahman* (*brahmajñāna*).

The neo-Hindu emphasis on experience is also evident in Aurobindo, who denied that his philosophy was derived from Shankara:

That is not true. I have not read much philosophy. It is like those who say that I am influenced by Hegel. Some even say that I have been influenced by Nietzsche...The only two books that have influenced me are the *Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*. What I wrote was the work of intuition and inspiration working on the basis of my spiritual experience...experience and formulation of experience I consider as the true aim of philosophy. The rest is merely intellectual work and may be interesting but nothing more.⁹⁸

J. L. Mehta has written about Aurobindo's view of Scripture. He says that for Aurobindo, the myths and rites recorded in the *Vedas* are above all symbols (in the Jungian sense). Authority attaches not to Scripture, but to the yogic process. But for Aurobindo, the yogic process itself relies on

...a textual tradition, a *Sruti*, an 'order of words', a pre-existent given tradition of language, images, myths and concepts and the key-words that

⁹⁶ See also Anantanand Rambachan: *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in Sankara* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹⁸ A.B. Purani, *Evening Talks*, First Series, p. 127, cited by Prema Nandakumar: *T.V. Kapali Sastri* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), 31 ['Nandakumar'].

open out its linguistic space within which experience is then ordered and comprehended.⁹⁹

Aurobindo's emphasis on experience is significant in view of his influence on Gaṇapati Muni and Kapali Sastri, who in turn influenced Ramaṇa (see below).

b) Ramaṇa's emphasis on experience

Ramaṇa's references to direct experience

Ramaṇa makes many references to the necessity of direct experience. Here are some examples:

We regard as saints those persons who have realized the Self, i.e. those who have had direct or immediate knowledge of the Self.¹⁰⁰ The intuitive knowledge of the Heart is direct immediate experience. Self-enquiry: realized the Self by direct and immediate experience (Self-Enquiry, 25). Knowledge of the Self It shines as 'I-I', as ever-present, direct experience (CW 224 ; Osb 139).

We also see in Ramaṇa the neo-Hindu emphasis that experience is more important than the Vedas. Mere knowledge of Scripture is not sufficient (*Teachings*, 14). The scriptures are only meant to make a man retrace his steps to his original source (*Teachings*, 63). Study of the Scriptures becomes unnecessary because there is nothing else to be gained; you must actually experience the Self. The great sayings like "I am Brahman" will not remove bondage without direct experience. It is like a treasure trove, which is not obtained by hearing about it, but by being told by a friend who knows about it and then digging. We experience the Self directly through constant meditation (*Talks*, 114, CW, 217).

The intellect cannot attain to the Self (*Teachings*, 53). Mere book learning never yields this bliss, which can be realized only through Self-enquiry or *vichāra* (CW, 207).

⁹⁹ J.L. Mehta: *Philosophy and Revelation, Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi, 1990), 179.

¹⁰⁰ A. Devaraja Mudaliar: *Day by Day with Bhagavan* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1995), 166. ['Day by Day'] The book is online at [<http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/books.htm>].

Ramaṇa is against philosophy and the intricacies of distinctions (*Conscious Immortality*, 178). The ultimate Truth is so simple. It is nothing more than being in the pristine state. That is all that need be said. But people will not be content with simplicity; they want complexity. Because they want something elaborate, attractive and puzzling, so many religions have come into existence (*Reflections*, 82). 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 (*Teachings*, 13, 28).

Nor can the experience be expressed in words. Realization is beyond expression. Expression always fails to describe it. Although the expression of realization is impossible, still its existence is indicated.¹⁰¹ *Samādhi* transcends thought and speech and cannot be described. (...) You know *samādhi* only when you are in *samādhi* (*Reflections*, 152).

Ramaṇa compares the experience to poetry and music. In poetry or music, when you experience bliss, you are plunging into the Self, albeit unconsciously. “If you do so consciously, you call it realization. I want you to dive consciously into the Self, i.e. into the Heart” (*Conscious Immortality*, 43).

And yet to some extent, this experience is not knowledge, since knowledge depends on distinctions. The transcendental state is beyond experience, because it involves dissolution of mind (*CW*, 33). Reality lies beyond and beyond the triad of knower-knowledge-known (*Teachings*, 174).

Ramaṇa says that we must even give up meditating on Scripture like the *Bhagavad Gītā*:

Even books like the *Bhagavad Gītā* and *Light on the Path*, must be given up to find the Self by looking within. Even the *Gītā* says, ‘Meditate on the

¹⁰¹ Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Erase the Ego*, ed. Swami Rajeshwarananda (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996), 12 [‘Erase’].

Self.’ It does not say, ‘Meditate upon the book of the *Gītā* (*Conscious Immortality*, 83).

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. (*Teachings*, 13; also in *Talks*, 31)

The Self is self-luminous because it is self-evident, that is, it knows itself and does not depend on an external knowledge to be known—itsself being pure knowledge (*Reflections*, 86).

Non-western sources of the idea of direct experience

If Ramaṇa uses the word *anubhava* in the sense of direct experience, does this mean that Ramaṇa was influenced by Western ideas, like other neo-Hindus? It can be argued that Ramaṇa’s emphasis on direct experience does not derive from European influence but rather from Hindu sources that pre-date the European Romantics by many centuries. Halbfass does acknowledge that there are non-traditional *advaitic* sources that emphasize direct experience and that these sources are independent of any European influence.¹⁰² He refers to the “vision” of the *Vedic* poets, and to the *Upanishads*, which show an early awareness of the four states of consciousness. These states are: waking, dreaming, sleeping and the fourth state *turīya* that is beyond the other three states.

Another pre-Romantic source of the importance of experience are the poet-saints like Tūkārām and others from Maharashtra who glorify personal experience or *anubhava*. Ramaṇa refers in his teachings to these poet-saints, and to the Tamil poet-saints.

There are also traditions in Yoga that emphasize direct experience. One source from these traditions is the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Another work that is popular among yogic practitioners of *advaita* is the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, a work that is often attributed to Shankara. Both of these works strongly influenced Ramaṇa, and will be examined in

¹⁰² *India and Europe*, 386. Halbfass questions whether these non-European sources are sufficient to support the claims of neo-Hinduism.

more detail. Here we can point out that the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* itself speaks of *anubhava*. For example, verse 62 states:

An illness is not cured just by pronouncing the name of the medicine without drinking it, and you will not be liberated by just pronouncing the word God without direct experience. [*anubhava*].¹⁰³

Another Hindu source that emphasizes immediate experience is Kashmir *Śaivism*, which emphasizes consciousness and internality.¹⁰⁴ It also pre-dates any possible European Romantic influence.

A traditional Hindu source emphasizing experience is the *Bhagavad Gītā*. It refers to Arjuna's direct experience of Krishna. This vision is said to be one that could not be attained by the Vedas or study (*BG* 11:48). The *Bhagavad Gītā* also refers to the experience of reaching the Self (*BG* 6:20).

Buddhist traditions also emphasize the experiences and visions of the Buddha. And as Halbfass points out, the very title of the Buddha indicates an event of awakening, a "radical transformation of awareness." Western scholars also see the influence of Buddhism in Hindu works like the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Ramaṇa himself sometimes refers to Buddhist ideas.

In view of all these sources, it is unfair to dismiss Ramaṇa's emphasis on the importance of direct experience as merely based on western ideas, or as merely neo-Hindu. Nevertheless, the western influence must not be disregarded, since Ramaṇa was aware of Vivekānanda's teachings. And Westerners like Major Chadwick and Paul Brunton also influenced Ramaṇa. As we shall see, even Gaṇapati Muni, one of the most important influences on Ramaṇa, was himself influenced by western ideas of philosophy and

¹⁰³*Vivekacūdāmaṇi The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, tr. John H. Richards. Online version at file:///Macintosh%20HD/Thesis/Sacred%20Texts/VIVEKACHUDAMANI%202. See also *Vivekacūdāmaṇi of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, tr. Swami Madhavananda, 9th ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

¹⁰⁴*India and Europe*, 386. Halbfass says that this is so particularly for the *Pratyabhijñā* school in Kashmir *Śaivism*. See the article by H.N. Cahkravart: "Divine Recognition: *Pratyabhijñā*", *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), 179.

theosophy. And even if Ramaṇa's emphasis on direct experience can be related to non-Western sources, these sources stand in tension with traditional *Advaita Vedānta*.

2. Perennialism

Perennialism is the view that all religions are a path to God, or at least to realization. Perennialist ideas appear in Ramaṇa's comparisons of his own teachings to Jesus, or to the Buddha. This view is in contrast to traditional Hinduism, which regarded non-Hindus as *mleccha* (barbarians, foreigners).

Perennialism in neo-Hinduism tends to view other religions as having a partial truth, and that Hinduism provides the truest answer. The lesser truths are valuable to those at a lower stage of their spiritual development. Thus, Ramaṇa says that views of a personal God are appropriate for people at a certain stage. Or that although all religions teach the same things, there is a higher truth:

All religions postulate the three fundamentals, the world, the soul and God; but it is the One Reality that manifests itself as these three. One can say: The three are really three only so long as the ego lasts (*Teachings*, 44).

But sometimes, Ramaṇa also seems to take a view that religions are expressions of comparable experiences. He says, for example, that the Bible and the *Gītā* are the same (*Teachings*, 58). And he says that the last stages of all paths are the same: surrender of the ego (*Conscious Immortality*, 58). This is an emphasis not of Hinduism as the highest stage, but as being similar to other religions. Narasimha quotes him as saying:

...religion takes us only to the one point where all religions meet and no further. That point is the realization that God is every thing and every thing is God (Narasimha, 118).

Ramaṇa was asked whether it was true that Buddhists deny the world whereas Hindu philosophy admits its existence but calls it unreal. Ramaṇa replied that it is only a difference of point of view (*Teachings*, 17).

3. Ethics

According to Hacker, neo-Hinduism's emphasis that Hinduism has ethical consequences in the temporal world derives from Vivekānanda (1863-1902), an Indian philosopher who

was a disciple of the Indian holy man Ramakrishna (1836-1886). Vivekānanda wrote the book *Practical Vedānta*, in which he argued that Vedānta had ethical implications.¹⁰⁵ Vivekānanda's view of ethics is based on the Upanishadic idea of *tat tvam asi* [that art thou]. In doing good to others, we are really doing good to our true Self. And he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, which emulated the social efforts of Christian missionaries in India. But Hacker has shown that Vivekānanda obtained this idea of basing ethics on the idea of *tat tvam asi* from Paul Deussen, a disciple of the German philosopher Schopenhauer.¹⁰⁶

Ramaṇa was acquainted with the neo-Hindu ideas of Vivekānanda as early as 1901. Narasimha reports that from 1900, G. Seshier of Tiruvannamalai visited Ramaṇa. Seshier was studying yoga, especially Vivekānanda's English lectures on *Raja Yoga*, *Jñāna Yoga* and an English translation of the *Rama Gita*. He brought these books to Ramaṇa and mentioned his difficulties. Ramaṇa

...then went through each of them and wrote out in easy Tamil prose the gist of these works on bits of paper and answered similarly supplemental questions. Thus Seshier had quite a sheaf of these slips written by the swami in 1900, 1901 and 1902, and he copied them into a small note-book (Narasimha, 32).

Narasimha says that Ramaṇa used these slips and Seshier's notebook to publish his book *Vichāra Sangraha* (Self-Enquiry) (Narasimha, 73-74). This fact is of enormous importance, since it shows that Ramaṇa was exposed to Vivekānanda's neo-Hinduism at a very early date, and that these ideas may have formed part of the basis of his ideas of Self-Enquiry.

But although Ramaṇa may have derived neo-Hindu ideas from Vivekānanda, he was not at all clear about the need for us to involve ourselves in social issues. In this respect, Ramaṇa was much more traditionally *advaitic* in his views. He asked "what others" were being referred to that needed help. If the Self is all that is real, then there are no others.

¹⁰⁵ Swami Vivekānanda: *Practical Vedānta* (Calcutta: Ananda Press, 1978, first published 1896).

¹⁰⁶ *India and Europe*, 240.

There are no ‘others’ to be helped. For the Realized Being sees only the Self. The Realized One does not see the world as different from Himself.¹⁰⁷

Ramaṇa says that our concern about the world’s suffering comes from our misidentification of the body and the self:

When you are not aware of the world, that is to say when you remain as the Self in the state of sleep, its sufferings do not affect you. Therefore turn inwards and seek the Self and there will be an end both of the world and of its miseries (*Teachings*, 38)

This is an idealist/monistic view of the world and its suffering—neither exists except within our thoughts. Ramaṇa says that both the world and the pain are within us. War, for example, is just a thought of the deluded questioner. All suffering is due to the false notion ‘I am the body.’ Getting rid of this false idea is knowledge (*Teachings*, 40-42).

Ramaṇa’s answer to suffering in the world is that one should be concerned only about the Self, which does not suffer and is indestructible. Ramaṇa’s ethics are therefore an ethic of non-involvement in the world. Sometimes Ramaṇa says that we must just follow the prevailing ethics in the phenomenal world. Ramaṇanda Swarnagiri relates how Ramaṇa was asked about the plight of the untouchables. Ramaṇa replied, “We have left the world and society. Why do you pose questions about social problems?” When the visitor persisted in the question, he said, “In these matters, the one who searches for spiritual development only has to conform to the attitude of the majority.”¹⁰⁸

Fort says that the closest that Ramaṇa comes to acknowledging the need to take action in the world is in the following question and response:

Question: But we see pain in the world. A man is hungry. It is a physical reality. It is very real to him. Are we to call it a dream and remain unmoved by his suffering?

¹⁰⁷ *Maharshi’s Gospel* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1939), 33.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Herbert: *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972), p. 217.

Bhagavan: [...] But all this is not to say that while you are in the dream you can act as if the suffering you feel in it is not real. The hungry in the dream has to be appeased by dream food.¹⁰⁹

Even if this can be interpreted as a direction for social action, Ramaṇa is devaluing the hunger and the food; they are only a dream reality (*Reflections*, 53).

And yet, inconsistently, Ramaṇa does speak about others. He says that service of others is only permitted if it is done as a *sādhana* [discipline] with *jñāna* [knowledge] as the ultimate aim, as a means to self-purification.¹¹⁰ Narasimha says,

The tendency of spiritual aspirants has generally been to shun society, not merely in the initial stage of preparation, but even later. Maharshi on the other hand is fully in sympathy with the tendency of present-day ethics to stress social service rather than the perfection of the individual ascetic in isolation, and notes the importance of society even for the perfection of individual character. When Yoganatha asked him whether a man should prefer *santi* (peace in solitude) to *sakti* (*i.e.*, the power to render service to one's community or society), Maharshi pointed out that the path to peace runs through social service, that a man should develop his full power to serve the society in which he is born before he can fall into a life wholly absorbed in the Self (Narasimha 215).

At other times, Ramaṇa takes a view of the world as having some reality. The world exists, but we do not have to be active. *Mahatmas* help the world by their silent centredness. They accomplish more than others do. It is better to silently send out an intuitive force than to preach to others. Self-reform automatically results in social reform. Realization of the Self is the greatest help that can be given to humanity (*Conscious Immortality*, 144). And a realized person helps the whole of mankind, although without their knowledge (*Teachings*, 90-92). Realized ones send out waves of spiritual influence which draw many people toward them, even though they may be sitting silently in a cave (*Conscious Immortality*, 134).

A *rishi* sitting in one place can do anything, if he wills it. He can start wars or end them, but he knows there is a cosmic and karmic process

¹⁰⁹ Fort, 145 citing *Teachings* 102-103. Fort refers to one other quotation that suggests that doing good is important. "The *jīvanmukta* lives only for the good of the world." (*Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, 423).

¹¹⁰ *Reflections*, 59.

going on, so he will not interfere unwisely. [... Public speeches, physical activity and material help are all outweighed by the silence of the *mahatmas*. [...] How do you know they do not help? (*Conscious Immortality*, 145-46).

This is a more intermediate view of social ethics, based on the argument that the one who meditated did more for the world than anyone else:

Realisation of the Self is the greatest service that can be rendered to humanity. Therefore the saints are helpful although they dwell in forests. But it should not be forgotten the solitude is not obtained in forests only, but even in towns, in the thick of worldly occupations. The help is imperceptible, but it is still there. A saint helps the whole humanity unknown to it (*Reflections*, 53).

Self-reform automatically results in social reform. Attend to self-reform and social reform will take care of itself (*Teachings*, 85).

A self-realized being cannot help benefiting the world. His very existence is the highest good (*Teachings*, 93).

Realisation of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity. Therefore, the saints are said to be helpful, though they remain in forests. But it should not be forgotten that solitude is not in forests only. It can be had even in towns, in the thick of worldly occupations (*Talks*, 15).

But this view of meditation cannot be found in Shankara, either, and is far more likely to be the result of *tantric* influence on Ramaṇa (see below).

Finally, Ramaṇa sometimes just asserts a passive view of involvement. It is God's responsibility to take care of the world, and not ours.

If God has created the world, it is His business to look after it, not yours (*Maharshi's Gospel*, 33; also *Teachings*, 87).

But this is inconsistent with what Ramaṇa says elsewhere:

God has no purpose. He is not bound by any action. The world's activities cannot affect him. (Osborne, *Path of Self-Knowledge*, in answer to the question, "Is not this world the result of God's will?")

And sometimes Ramaṇa says that the realized one is beyond ethics. Restrictions and discipline are for *jivas* and not for *muktas* (*Conscious Immortality*, 129).

There is evidence that Ramaṇa recognized the inconsistency of his views.

The truth of Non-Duality is to be only mediated upon by the mind; do not do any action from belief in Non-Duality (ft. because actions proceed from the contrary idea that the doer is an individual; he is sure to mis-apply it and thus worsen the bondage he is in (Sarma, *Guru-Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mala*, 43).

Ramaṇa's lack of acceptance of any active involvement in social ethics was criticized by many of his followers. As we have seen, Paul Brunton turned instead to a new *guru*, the neo-Hindu V. Subrahmanyah Iyer, who advocated social change. Kapili Sastri, whose ideas we will examine later, turned to Aurobindo's idea of integral *yoga*. Aurobindo synthesized the ideas of liberation and the duty of social involvement. For Aurobindo, *yoga* is not just for individual transformation. We must also remember the example set by *bodhisattvas* and *jīvanmuktas* to contribute to the well-being of suffering humanity. To further this, Aurobindo proposed a synthesis between *tantra* and *Vedānta*:

We have in this central Tantric conception one side of the truth, the worship of the energy, the Śakti, as the sole effective force for all attainment. We get the other extreme in the Vedāntic conception of the Śakti as a power of illusion and in the search after the silent inactive Puruṣa as the means of liberation from the deceptions created by the active energy. But in the integral conception the conscious soul is the Lord, the nature-soul is his executive energy. Puruṣa is the nature of Sat, conscious, self-existence, pure and infinite; Śakti or Prakṛti is of the nature of Cit, –it is the power of the Puruṣa's self-conscious existence, pure and infinite. The relation of the two exists between the poles of rest and action.¹¹¹

Ramaṇa did not have this view of active involvement in the world. Ken Wilber, who otherwise admires Ramaṇa, says that this is an area that Ramaṇa was not advanced.¹¹²

Many neo-Hindus, like Aurobindo, sought to break down the barriers of caste. This was not Ramaṇa's attitude. In the dining hall at the ashram, the *Brahmins* were separated from the others. Chadwick says that Ramaṇa objected to Brahmins sitting with the non-Brahmins. The dining room was divided into two by a screen almost the whole width of the room. Ramaṇa sat at right angles to the screen and could be visible on both sides.

¹¹¹ Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1955), 48, cited by Nandakumar 26. The reciprocity of rest and action suggests to me a parallel with Franz von Baader's views of the reciprocity between our self as heart and its expression in its temporal nature.

¹¹² Ken Wilber: *One Taste* (Boston, Shambhala, 1999), 201.

One side were the Brahmins; the other side the rest. This was done at Ramaṇa's insistence: "Not only did he allow it but he insisted on it." Ramaṇa said that he was not to be used as an excuse to do something that you would consider wrong at home (Chadwick, 34).

Chadwick also reports Ramaṇa as saying that Hitler might be an instrument of God: "Who knows but that Hitler is a *jñāni*, a divine instrument." Chadwick's own comments are equally surprising:

He [Hitler] was certainly a man of fate. To deny of his acts as evil is wrong. For the *Jñāni* there is no good and evil. There is only action—spontaneous activity or the actionless-activity of Tao. This has no karma-binding effects. Yet it seems doubtful if Hitler's actions were quite so disinterested, though it is not impossible (Chadwick, 52).

Chadwick had apparently tried to bring this same disinterestedness into his own life. Chadwick says that prior to coming to Ramaṇa's *ashram*, he had thought he could not lead a worldly and spiritual life at the same time, divided into two compartments. He had not realized that worldly life was just as unreal as the unworldly life, and that both were as real as each other; *prārabdha* [*karma*] had to be worked out:

...that actually there was no such thing as good and evil, only attachment; that actions were actions and it was identifying oneself with such that mattered and not the actions in themselves. I still believed in the importance of morals, as such, as absolute standards, and, so my meditation could be nothing but a spasmodic affair (Chadwick, 12).

Evans-Wentz asked Ramaṇa whether it was right to take the life of another person, whether in war or execution of a murderer. Evans-Wentz suggested that it was not right to take any life, since God was immanent in all. But Ramaṇa did not follow up on this. Instead, he said that for the realized person, the loss of several or all lives either in this world or in all the three worlds makes no difference. He referred to the *Gītā*, c. 18:7. (*Talks*, 12-13)

David Loy says that it is acting from non-ego that is the basis for ethical action in the nondual experience. Nonduality, in denying an ego-self, eliminates the basis of selfishness. The realized person therefore acts appropriately. The "appropriate" choice

of action arises quite spontaneously from what is normally called the subconscious.¹¹³ But what does ‘appropriate’ mean in this context? Is it acting in disinterest with respect to oneself? Is it action that has a positive effect on others? Is it acting beyond our sense of ego and self-interest?

Abhishiktānanda also saw the basis for ethical action in acting without ego. He says that the *jñāni* will always act well because there is no egoism.¹¹⁴

Do everything, act in everything without “mine”, without ego [*nirmamo nirahamkāra*].¹¹⁵

If ethics is a result of our acting beyond ego, Ramaṇa could be said to have an ethical attitude, since he does speak of going beyond ego and ‘I.’ For example, he says that in the state of *sahaja samādhi* you realize that nothing belongs to you as ego (*Teachings*, 185). In fact, destroying the ego is the direct path to liberation:

Destroy the ego by seeking its identity (with the Self). Because the ego is not an entity it will automatically vanish, and Reality will shine forth by itself. This is the direct method (*Reflections*, 92).

And Ramaṇa says that you then realize that everything is being done “by something with which you are in conscious union” (*Teachings*, 185). Self-realization is therefore a state beyond ego-consciousness. And elsewhere, he says,

Get rid of egoism. Do not think you are the one to bring about some reform. Then God may use you as an instrument to effect deeds, but you will not be conscious of doing them (*Conscious Immortality*, 12).¹¹⁶

¹¹³ David Loy: *Nonduality* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988), 131.

¹¹⁴ *Guru*, 87.

¹¹⁵ *Diary*, 385 (8.7.73).

¹¹⁶ Humphreys says the same in the first biography of Ramaṇa :

Jesus, the man, was utterly unconscious when He worked His miracles, and spoke His wonderful words. It was the White Light, the Life, Who is the cause and the effect, acting in perfect concert. “My Father and I are One.” Give up the idea of “I” and “Mine.” Can the body possess anything? can the mind possess anything? Lifeless tools are both, unless the Light of God be shining through. These things which we see and

Other parts of the same book support this view. He says that good social work is a way to render the mind purer (p. 13). *Sannyāsa* is giving up of the ego (p. 21).

Simply become aware of it [Self] during your work and do not forget it. Contemplate it in the background of your mind even while you are working. To do that, do NOT hurry. Do not imagine it is you who are doing the work. Think that it is the underlying current which is doing it. Identify yourself with this current (*Conscious Immortality*, 27).

The ego is the 'I'-thought (*Conscious Immortality*, 89).

But in the same book, *Conscious Immortality*, Ramaṇa also says that our only concern should be self-reform: self-reform automatically brings about social reform. Confine yourself to self-reform. Social reform will take care of itself (*Conscious Immortality*, 14). And he slips into the monistic viewpoint of denying that there are any others to help:

What other is there for you to help? Who is the 'I' that is going to help others/ First clear up that point and then everything will settle itself...If you believe in the problem of another, you are believing in something outside of the Self. You will help him best by realizing the oneness of everything, rather than by outward activity. (*Conscious Immortality*, 15).

Yogananda asked Ramaṇa why God permits suffering in the world. Ramaṇa's response was "Who suffers? What is suffering?" Yogananda did not respond.¹¹⁷

When he takes this monistic standpoint, Ramaṇa says that the Self alone is the Reality.

Evans-Wentz: Thus then, the saint's realization leads to the uplift of humanity without the latter being aware of it. Is it so?

Ramaṇa: Yes. The help is imperceptible but is still there. A saint helps the whole of humanity, unknown to the latter.

Evans-Wentz: Would it not be better if he mixed with others/

Ramaṇa: There are no others to mix with. The Self is the one and only Reality (*Talks*, 16).

sense are only the split-up colours of the One illimitable Spirit (Humphreys, 25).

¹¹⁷ Talks 103. Another version of this dialogue is given in *the Maharshi*, MAY/JUNE 97, Vol. 7

So although Ramaṇa speaks of going beyond ego, the ethical problem is that for Ramaṇa, this state of being beyond ego sometimes does not seem to have led to any concrete action at all.

And yet Ramaṇa emphasized the importance of treating animals ethically. He referred to the principle of *samabuddhi*: the principle of equal treatment to man and animal, citing the *Bhagavad Gītā* V, 18). Ramaṇa loved animals and treated them as humans. One was Lakshmi the cow. He said that if a cow trespassed on the vegetable garden, the fault was with the fence and not the animal. When Lakshmi died, she was buried in the *ashram* compound. Ramaṇa composed a Tamil quatrain in which he referred to her as a “liberated soul.” He considered dogs his disciples, even though Brahmins considered them as unholy. One dog performed the function of leading visitors around the hill. Narasimha says that he regarded animals as souls that have cast off their human sheaths to live near him to work out the effects of past *karma*. He would stop quarrels among monkeys. Crows and squirrels would eat from his palm. He refused to kill scorpions. (Narasimha, 157-59, 164-70).

How did the goal of disinterestedness affect Ramaṇa’s ability to express emotion? On the one hand, Narasimha says that he displayed equanimity, and did not show anxiety, depression or elation. He says that Ramaṇa was not fond of music, and that he kept his attention fixed on the *sruti* (the monotone drone) so as not to be distracted by the diverse notes or tunes. Similarly, in the world of sights and sounds we must attend to the *sruti*, the one Reality that the *Vedas* proclaim, and our concentration will then remain undisturbed (Narasimha, 184-86). And when he ate, Ramaṇa

...would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf—the sweet, the sour and the savory, everything together—and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in his mouth. When we would tell him that it was not right to mix such nicely made up dishes, he would say: “Enough of multiplicity. Let us have some unity.”¹¹⁸

On the other hand, and inconsistently, Narasimha says that Ramaṇa did display emotion and did enjoy music. Narasimha says that Ramaṇa shed tears of devotional fervour when

¹¹⁸ Sampurnamma, *The Maharshi*, Sept./Oct 1992 Vol. 2, No. 5.

he listened to devotional songs or music. He reports Ramaṇa as saying that devotion (*bhakti*) and realization (*jñāna*) are the same. In *bhakti*, one dwells on a Personal God that one worships until one loses oneself or merges in Him. In the path of inquiry, one dwells on oneself, which one loves most, and loses oneself or merges in that. In both cases, emotion or personality characterizes the beginning. The end is beyond emotion, thought, will and personality (Narasimha 133).

4. Monism, Advaita and Māya

Is traditional *Vedānta Advaita* monistic? For Shankara, what is important is not personal experience, but overcoming ignorance or *avidya* of one's true nature. And for Shankara, once one has overcome ignorance, and realized one's true nature, then one also realizes that what one thought was real was only illusion or *māyā*. Only Brahman is real. The question arises whether Shankara therefore interprets *advaita* in a monistic sense.

Advaita has been frequently interpreted in a monistic fashion. This is especially the case in Western interpretations of *advaita*, which often apply Western ideas of monism to describe it. For example, Ninian Smart describes Vedāntic *advaita* as monistic:

Though the non-dualism of Shankara is well known, it is useful to recapitulate briefly its main features. For Shankara the 'That art thou' is to be taken in the starkest, clearest sense. It means that the eternal self within the individual is identical with Brahman, the Absolute or Ultimate Reality. (...) This rigorous insistence on the non-dualism between the soul and the divine Reality is paralleled by an equally uncompromising monism in relation to the world.¹¹⁹

Such monistic interpretations of *advaita* are also very common in Hindu philosophers. For example, Radhakrishnan refers to *advaita* as "monistic idealism":

If we put the subjective interest of the Indian mind along with its tendency to arrive at a synthetic vision, we shall see how monistic idealism becomes the truth of things. To it the whole growth of Vedic thought points; on it are based the Buddhistic and Brahmanical religions; it is the highest truth revealed to India. Even systems which announce themselves as dualistic or pluralistic seem to be permeated by a strong monistic character. For

¹¹⁹ Ninian Smart: *The Yogi and the Devotee: the Interplay between the Upanishads and Catholic Theology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968), pp. 36-37.

our purposes monistic idealism is of four types: (1) Non-dualism or Advaitism; (2) Pure Monism; (3) Modified Monism; and (4) Implicit Monism.¹²⁰

Radhakrishnan says that his first category, ‘Advaitic monism’ relies on abstract and philosophical reflection, particularly the psychological interpretation of the three states of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. Through all these states, there remains the self that is permanent and “ever-identical.” Only the self is real. The categories of the world of experience, time, space and cause are self-contradictory and have no real existence. Their inexplicable existence is explained by the word *māyā*.

For Radhakrishnan, the self is “the true and the eternal and there is nought beside it.” His second category, ‘Pure Monism’ recognizes a higher power than the abstract intellect relied on in the first category:

We have to sink ourselves in the universal consciousness and make ourselves co-extensive with all that is. We do not then so much *think* reality as *live* it, do not so much *know* it as *become* it. Such an extreme monism with its distinctions of logic and intuition, reality and the world of existence, we meet with in some Upaniṣads, Nāgārjuna and Śaṅkara in his ultra-philosophical moods, Śrī Harṣa and the Advaita Vedāntins, and echoes of it are heard in Parmenides and Plato Spinoza and Plotinus, Bradley and Bergson, not to speak of the mystics, in the West.¹²¹

Radhakrishnan considers both Non-dualism and Pure Monism to be monistic. His two other categories also are monistic, at least by implication. Modified Monism (e.g. Rāmāṇuja) recognizes degrees of reality, but these are measured in relation to their distance from the one integral reality. And he says that even the dualism of Madhva is fundamentally a monism so long as the reals are dependent on God who alone is independent.

Other Hindu philosophers are equally adamant that *advaita*, even in Shankara, is not monism. For example, T.M.P. Mahadevan says,

¹²⁰ S. Radhakrishnan: *Selected Writings on Philosophy, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Robert A. McDermott “Introduction to *Indian Philosophy I*”, New York: Dutton, 1970), pp. 75,76.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 81.

The term *advaita* is negative. It does not imply a monistic ideal, but implies a negation of dualism. And this negation applies both to two-ness as well as to the attempt to grasp the world as a whole by means of any logical system with rational distinctions. Because *Brahman* is beyond duality, it cannot be known conceptually, nor can it be substantially or qualitatively determined, for this would imply a division of the One.¹²²

And in his book on Ramaṇa Maharshi, Mahadevan makes the same point:

Brahman is without characteristics. Even to say that it is one is not strictly true, for the category of number is not applicable to it. That is why the negative expression ‘non-dual’, or ‘not-two’ (*advaita*), is preferred.¹²³

There are therefore differing views, even by Hindu philosophers, as to whether or not *advaita* is monistic. If it is not monistic, then it may not be correct to speak of the individual’s *identity* with *Brahman*. And if *advaita* is not monistic, then the ideas of *māyā* and of the unreality of the world may also be reinterpreted.

Ramaṇa has inconsistent views of what *māyā* means. Sometimes he takes a thoroughly monistic view of reality, regarding as illusory everything other than the Self. We have seen this in his attitude towards ethics, sometimes arguing that only the Self is real, and that there are no “others.”

But at other times, Ramaṇa says that the world has a relative reality, and that it is illusory only when it is regarded apart from Brahman:

All this world is indeed Brahman (CW 234; Osb 147).

The whole world emanates from Brahman, which alone is. It emanates like pots come from clay (CW 237; Osb 149).

[To abolish thought] ...hold firmly to the view that” ‘All this that appears as separate names and forms is Brahman Itself’ (CW 242; Osb 152),

Everything from (the threefold appearance of) Personal God, individual being, and world down to the minutest atom is merely a form of Brahman (CW 250; Osb 160).

¹²² T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi, 1974), 367f, cited by Michael von Brück: *The Unity of Reality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 17.

¹²³ T.M.P. Mahadevan: *Ramaṇa Maharshi: The Sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977), p. 12.

Do not differentiate between Self and Brahman or between world and Brahman (*CW* 253, *Os* 162).

[Re: 'I am Siva'] One is not transformed into Siva, but the ruinous effects of the ego are put an end to (*Talks*, 307).

In this view, it is important to recognize that that *Sakti* (power) is coeval with *Siva*. The one does not exist without the other. *Siva* is unmanifest, whereas *Sakti* is manifest on account of Her independent will *swatantra*. Her manifestation is the display of the cosmos on pure consciousness, like images in a mirror. The images cannot remain in the absence of a mirror. So also, the world cannot have an independent existence.

Ramaṇa says that both ideas mean the same thing. *Māyā* is *not* and has *no* real being. Images in a mirror cannot in any way be real. But the world is real if it is seen as a manifestation of consciousness. "If the world be taken as *chit* (consciousness), it is always real."

Siva is the Being assuming these forms and the Consciousness seeing them.

Siva is the background underlying both the subject and the object, and again *Siva* in Repose and *Siva* in Action, or *Siva* and *Sakti*, or the Lord and the Universe. Whatever it is said to be, it is only Consciousness whether in repose or in action (*Talks*, 425).

Ramaṇa himself tried to dismiss issues of the meaning of *advaita* by appealing to experience instead of concepts. He was asked whether Shankara was only an intellectual and not a realized person. He answered that we should not worry about Shankara, but should rather realize our own self. Ramaṇa also emphasized that the different doctrines of *advaita* were unimportant. We should seek the experience without asking questions about the exact nature of the experience. He said that non-dualism or dualism cannot be decided on theoretical grounds alone. If the Self is realized the question will not arise (*Teachings*, 27). And he says,

Find the *jiva* first. Then there will be time to find out if it should merge in the Supreme, is part thereof, or remains different from it. Let us not forestall the conclusion. Keep an open mind, dive within and find out the Self." (*Reflections*, 144; also *Teachings*, 52)

In a dialogue with one of his disciples, Ramaṇa refused to speculate regarding dualism and nondualism:

D: The final State of Realization is said to be according to *Advaita* the absolute Union with the Divine and according to *Visishtadvaita* a qualified Union, while *Dvaita* maintains that there is no Union at all. Which of these should be considered the correct view?

M: Why speculate as to what will happen some time in the future? All are agreed that the 'I' exists. To whichever school of thought he may belong, let the earnest seeker first find out what the 'I' is. Then it will be time enough to know what the final State will be, whether the 'I' will get merged in the Supreme Being or stand apart from Him. Let us not forestall the conclusion, but keep an open mind (*Maharshi's Gospel*, 55)

Ramaṇa says that to answer this question depends on the intellect, which shines only by the light it derives from the Self. It is presumptuous of the intellect to sit in judgment over that of which it is but a limited manifestation:

How can the intellect which can never reach the Self be competent to ascertain, and much less decide the nature of the final State of Realization? It is like trying to measure the sunlight at its source by the standard of the light given by a candle. The wax will melt down before the candle comes anywhere near the sun (*Ibid.*)

True reality is hidden from us. We are experiencing this reality all the time, but we do not realize it:

We are actually experiencing the Reality only; still, we do not know it (*Talks*, 131; also *Reflections*, 92).

Rather than theoretically discuss the nature of nondualism, we should realize the Self:

Both the non-dualists and the dualists agree on the necessity for Self-realization. Attain that first and then raise other questions. Non-dualism or dualism cannot be decided on theoretical grounds alone. If the Self is realized the question will not arise (*Teachings*, 27).

This emphasis on experience is quite different from Shankara's detailed theoretical expositions of the meaning of *advaita*, and his opposition to those who held contrary viewpoints.

5. The nature of the *sannyāsī*

a) Family

A traditional *sannyāsī* is supposed to leave his family behind. This is why, when Ramaṇa's mother came to visit him, Ramaṇa refused to see her. But later, when his mother was ill, Ramaṇa moved out of the cave in which he was meditating, and down to where his mother was staying. That was the beginning of the formation of the *ashram*. He said it was not of his own will that he moved from Skandashram, but something placed him there; the will of others or of the Lord.¹²⁴

Ramaṇa allowed his mother to cook for him and his adherents. But Ramaṇa was criticized for this family domesticity. Some said he was not a *yogi* at all.

While his mother was alive, Ramaṇa corrected some of her notions of acquiring religious virtue by bathing and eating. He would “joke” with her that someone had touched her clothing and that therefore it was polluted, or that cooking with an onion was a great obstruction to achieving liberation (Sastri, 28). But this “joking” by Ramaṇa was also a recognition that his activities were contrary to traditional Hindu ideas.

When his mother came, there was much opposition to her coming, since it was feared that Ramaṇa would move away. The criticism was based on the view that a *sannyāsī* was supposed to have no family. Some people dismissed Ramaṇa as a hybrid—neither an orthodox Brahmin nor a regular *sannyāsī*. Narasimha comments on this inconsistency: “the maintenance of an aged and helpless mother may be a duty devolving even on a hermit” (Narasimha, 126). Ramaṇa's mother cooked food for herself, her sons and visitors. This again caused some people to comment that Ramaṇa's life was really more like a householder than a *sannyāsī* (Narasimha, 127). We see here the conflict between the traditional view that a *sannyāsī* should aim to remove himself from life, and the *jīvanmukti* view that one can be liberated in this life.

¹²⁴ T.V. Kapali Sastry: *The Maharshi*, ed. M.P. Pandit (Ramaṇasramam, 1996, first published 1955), 29 [‘Sastri’] Most of the book had previously appeared as articles written for the *Sunday Times*. This book must be distinguished from the newsletter of the same name.

When she died on May 19, 1922, Ramaṇa was with her and placed his right hand on her heart and the left on her head. He said that during these 10 or 12 hours, the *vāsanās* (innate tendencies and memory of past experiences) were very active in her. She might have required many rebirths except for the special touch on her. But by his touch, “the soul was disorbed of the subtle sheaths before it reached the supreme Peace, Nirvana, Samādhi from which there is no return to Ignorance.” Ramaṇa therefore said that she had not passed away, but had been absorbed. This was not the case with his attendant Palanasvami, whom he had also tried to assist in this way, but who had merely passed away (Sastri 28-29; Shankaranarayanan, 24).

We have earlier seen that there was a question as to whether Ramaṇa’s mother should be buried as a saint. It was Gaṇapati Muni who settled this matter by reminding Ramaṇa of something he had written earlier. Muni cited verses from his *Ramaṇa Gītā* to show that women had an equal right to *sannyāsa* as men.¹²⁵ Chapter 13 of that book is entitled “Women eligible for *Sannyāsa*.” Verse 8 says that a woman can abide in the Self. And verse 9 says,

In liberation and Self-knowledge there is no difference between men and women. The body of a woman liberated while alive is not to be cremated as it is a temple of God.

Later, a memorial or *samādhi* was erected over Ramaṇa’s mother’s tomb. There were *tantric* influences involved in this *samādhi*. At the time it was erected, Gaṇapati Muni also composed verses praising Ramaṇa’s mother:

Spotless in character, she was the mother of Ramaṇa Maharshi, as *amsa* of the God Guru Guha. Washing her sins by her devotion to the feet of Siva, abandoning her mental attachments, her Prana controlled by the force in the hand of Guha (Ramaṇa), she cast away all distractions at that very moment and became liberated (cited, Shankaranarayanan 25).

And in a letter dated June 9, 1931, Muni wrote Ramaṇa, comparing Ramaṇa’s mother to the mothers of Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, and even to Mary:

¹²⁵ S. Shankaranarayanan: *Bhagavan and Nayana* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1983), 24 [‘Shankaranarayanan’].

Mother Mary gave birth to the son of God who bears the burden of sin of all devotees. Likewise, for the welfare of the world, for removal of the darkness of ignorance, for the casting away of all ill-conceived notions, for the realization of the Truth, thy mother gave birth to thee endowed with all these excellent qualities (cited, Shankaranarayan 26).

So we can see that Gaṇapati Muni was very important in influencing Ramaṇa's understanding of his mother as a saint.

b) Possessions

A *sannyāsī* is not supposed to have any possessions of his own. This caused complications when an attendant of Ramaṇa named Perumalsami started a lawsuit. He claimed ownership of the land on which the *ashram* was constructed. How then could Ramaṇa defend the ashram against the lawsuit that was brought claiming possession of the land?

In his reminiscences, K.K. Nambiar says:

The civil suit in the District Munsiffs court at Tiruvannamalai was filed by one of the erstwhile disgruntled attendants of Bhagavan named Perumalsami claiming right to the land which the Ashram was constructed and allied properties. He wanted Bhagavan to be summoned to attend the court to defend the case. But some of Bhagavan's devotees, particularly Grant Duff informed the Governor of Madras about the case and explained to him that it would be a sacrilege to drag Ramaṇa Maharshi to court, whereupon a Gazette Extraordinary was issued granting exemption to Bhagavan Ramaṇa Maharshi from appearance in court in civil suits. I was particularly delighted to see a copy of the Gazette Extraordinary.¹²⁶

It was therefore necessary to examine Ramaṇa at the *ashram*. Ramaṇa himself had to testify in deposition, although special arrangements were made for the deposition to be taken outside of the courtroom, and at the *ashram*. The commissioner, Sri V. Krishnaswami Reddi, came to the *ashram* and heard the case in November. Ramaṇa's testimony was given in 1936, and a fascinating excerpt of the transcript is given recorded in *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (*Talks*, 237-40, Nov. 15, 1936). Ramaṇa was asked to which of the four stages of life he belonged. This is a reference to the four life stages

¹²⁶ K.K. Nambiar: *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1997, first published 1984), 26 ['Nambiar'].

of student, householder, forest dweller and *sannyāsī*. The point of asking this question was that if Ramaṇa were a *sannyāsī*, he would have renounced all property and therefore could not own the ashram. Ramaṇa replied that he belonged to the *atiasramam*, which means “beyond the four stages.” He was asked whether there were any others who belonged to that stage, and he referred to Suka, Rishabha, Jada Bharata. Suka is mentioned in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Rishabha and Jada Bharata are mentioned in the *Srīmad Bhāgavatam*. Rishabha was a saintly king who once ruled over the earth. Jada Bharata was his eldest son. Ramaṇa clearly compared himself to these saintly figures. Ramaṇa was asked why he didn’t sign his name, and he said he did not know by which name he should be known. People had given him several names since he had arrived. This response is rather misleading, since already in 1933, Ramaṇa had signed a Power of Attorney in favour of his brother Niranjanananda Swami.

Ramaṇa was asked how the *ashram* accumulated property. He said, “Property is thrust on me. I neither love nor hate it.” And,

Properties came and I accepted them. I agree that owning properties relates to worldly affairs, but I do not hate worldly affairs...I used to accept anything if given to me. Moneys were given only on my behalf.

He was then asked whether the property was given to himself. He said it was given to “the Swami in the world”—to his body. Donations were accepted by the *ashram*, and Ramaṇa neither approved nor disapproved of these actions.

Ramaṇa was asked how he had approved the building of the *ashram*. He said he was “guided by the same Power which made me come here and reside on the Hill.” As for people living near him, he said that he was not a *guru* and that he did not have any disciples. If people considered themselves his disciples and wanted to live near him, he could not help it. If he did not find it agreeable, he could always move away.

Following his testimony in the legal action, Ramaṇa was asked whether the examination had caused him any strain, and he said, no, because he had not used his mind. Paul

Brunton reports a similar comment, so Brunton may have been present at this examination, although it is unclear which side of the litigation he was supporting.¹²⁷

The legal action was apparently settled in 1938, although it is not clear on what terms. There was a discussion whether a Board of Trustees should control the *ashram*. But Ramaṇa disagreed. He thought that trustees would take no real interest in running the *ashram*, and that they would only use it “for a milch-cow for their own ends.” Ramaṇa thought that it would be better to give permanent management to those who were tied by “blood and sentiment” (meaning his brother).

In 1933, Ramaṇa had already executed and registered a General Power of Attorney in favor of Niranjanananda Swami, his brother and manager of the *ashram*. But it was decided that a will would be also required, to ensure that there would be no problems after his death. The information about the will is also interesting. Chadwick says that there was again a lot of debate whether Ramaṇa could even make a will, but one was drafted in 1938 by K. Sundaram Chetty, a retired high court judge from Salem.¹²⁸ The will was read out to Ramaṇa, clause by clause. Ramaṇa approved the draft will, and marked an ‘X’ on every page, and put a line on the last page in lieu of a signature. The line followed this declaration:

In token of my execution of this document I affix my mark and also authorize G. Sambasiva Rao to sign for me in my presence as I have not been in the habit of affixing my signature.

The 1500 word will contains a biographical section, which begins,

BORN AT TIRUCHUZI, a village in the present Ramnad Dt., on the 30th of December, 1879, I left my native Home for good in my 17th year under Divine inspiration in quest of Arunāchala and reached Tiruvannamalai in the year 1896.

Ramaṇa’s will goes on to provide that:

¹²⁷ Brunton says that someone published a statement that he had started a lawsuit against Ramaṇa. He felt compelled to deny the allegation (*Notebooks*, vol. 10: 2:462). But we know that Brunton was opposed to the way that the *ashram* was being run.

¹²⁸ Note: Chetty had written the introduction to Narasimha Swami’s biography of Ramaṇa)

All the properties hereunder described and comprised in what is called ‘Sri Ramaṇasramam’ (and the accretions thereto) are dedicated by me to the Idol already installed and consecrated therein, viz., Sri Mathrubhutheswara Swami and also to the Idol or Statue as my symbol to be installed and consecrated after my demise on my Samādhi at a suitable place in the Asramam itself. I appoint my brother, Niranjanananda Swamy, as the sole manager. After him his son, T.N. Venkatarama Iyer, will be the sole manager. This right of management or trusteeship will vest as a hereditary right in the latter's family so as to devolve successively on his lineal male descendants from generation to generation.

The final document was signed by witnesses and the Maharshi then officially filed the Will for registration by handing it over to the Sub-Register of Tiruvannamalai. Ramaṇa told the Sub-Register that he had executed the Will, and he then requested him to register it.

Chadwick says that just before Ramaṇa’s death, his brother asked him to sign a new will because the old one might have some legal loopholes, but Ramaṇa “flatly refused” to sign another will. At the time, Ramaṇa was already ill with his final illness.¹²⁹

c) Retreat from the world

Fort says that Ramaṇa rejected the traditional view of renunciation (Fort, 142). Chadwick says that Ramaṇa was against *Sannyāsa*. “Thought goes on; people will think, Now I am a *sannyāsī*, instead of ‘now I am in the world’” (Chadwick, 92). We are to “Be in the world but not of the world.” That is, of course, a Biblical quotation.

For Ramaṇa, a *sannyāsī* did not have to retreat from the world. Ramaṇa says that some realized persons carry on trade or business or rule a kingdom. Our occupation or duties in life need not interfere with spiritual effort. Some enlightened people withdraw to solitary places and abstain from all activity; others carry on trade or business or rule a

¹²⁹ Excerpts from the will appear in *The Maharshi*, May/June 93, Vol. 3, No. 3. www.sentient.org/maharshi/mayjun93.htm. Chadwick also describes some of the circumstances of the signing. A.W. Chadwick: *A Sadhu’s Reminiscences of Ramaṇa Maharshi by Sadhu Arunāchala* (Sri Ramaṇasramam, Tiruvannamalai, 1961), 99-102. The book is excerpted at www.beezone.com/Ramaṇa/Ramaṇa_s_will.html. Chadwick raises the issue whether Ramaṇa was duped into signing the will “by a management that feared loss of its executive powers after his demise.”

kingdom. There is no general rule (*Teachings*, 186). For Ramaṇa, the key in acting as an enlightened person is knowing that you are not the doer of your actions. The householder when detached, renders “selfless service” to his family (*Teachings*, 81). True *sannyāsa* means renouncing one’s individuality, not merely shaving one’s head and putting on ochre robes (*Teachings*, 79). Ramaṇa told Brunton that the life of action need not be renounced (Narasimha, 237).

Ramaṇa himself helped out in tasks in the ashram, such as cutting vegetables for cooking, polishing walking sticks, stitching leafplates, copying from books, binding books and other useful work (Narasimha, 195).

When Natesa Mudaliar wanted to leave his family for an ascetic life, Ramaṇa told him, “go home and try to be equally unconcerned and unaffected in the midst of home life.” Although he tried for a while to become a *Sannyāsi*, Mudaliar resumed his place as a householder and teacher (Narasimha, 224).

e) Refusal to give initiation

Traditionally, a guru gives initiation to a disciple. But Ramaṇa did not consider his followers to be his disciples, and he did not give initiation. Narasimha reports that one Brahmin said he had spent 16 years with Ramaṇa, trying to get his *anugraham* (grace) but Ramaṇa was so indifferent. “Even if you break your head there, he will not care or inquire why” (Narasimha, 219)

Ramaṇa’s response to disciples who sought initiation was, “I am always giving my *anugraham*. If you cannot apprehend it, what am I to do?” (Narasimha, 221).

6. Sources of neo-Hindu and Western influences

As already discussed, Ramaṇa became acquainted with the ideas of Vivekānanda at least as early as 1901. He was also indirectly influenced by the theosophical ideas of Madame Blavatsky. Gaṇapati Muni was also aware of her ideas. And Ramaṇa’s biographers Frank H. Humphreys and Paul Brunton were both highly interested in Blavatsky’s

theosophy. Brunton also influenced Ramaṇa in taking over some of this terminology, such as speaking of the ‘Overself.’¹³⁰

Many of Ramaṇa’s followers (both Hindu and non-Hindu) used Western ideas to interpret Ramaṇa. Several devotees used the ideas of William James to describe Ramaṇa’s religious experience. Others viewed Ramaṇa’s experience in terms of a dualistic spiritualism, of mind over matter. This spiritualist interpretation appears in the writings of Humphreys and Brunton.

Ramaṇa had what is described as a visual photism—a vision of dazzling light suddenly streaming forth and pervading the place. Narasimha (p. 99) refers to William James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* in support of such a phenomenon. And yet Ramaṇa discouraged his disciples from seeking such photisms. Echammal (Lakshmiammal of Mandakolathur) had studied yoga. She fixed her attention on her nose; she could remain for days contemplating the light that appeared before her. Ramaṇa said that those lights should not be her real goal but that she should aim at realizing her Self. She discontinued the yogic practice. He gave similar advice to Santammal of Ramnad, who saw flashes of light and the figure of Rama (Narasimha, 103, 105). Ramaṇa says that this experience of a blaze of light is an indication that the mental predispositions (*vāsanās*) are not yet destroyed (*Talks*, 166).

Other disciples asked Ramaṇa about ‘cosmic consciousness’ (*Conscious Immortality*, 137). Cosmic consciousness is an idea that was made known by Bucke’s book of the same name.¹³¹ But Ramaṇa says that it is possible to lose Self-realization after having achieved cosmic consciousness. He says that the *vāsanās* are not destroyed by a flash of cosmic consciousness (Chadwick, 52).

Ramaṇa himself refers to a Western journal in support of his ideas. On October 11, 1941, Ramaṇa referred to the location of the ‘heart’ as being in the middle of the chest. He

¹³⁰ See my article, “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,” online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/abhishikatananda/Brunton.html>]

¹³¹ Richard Maurice Bucke: *Cosmic Consciousness* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1923, first published 1901).

referred to some *tantric* writings. But he also took out a book where he had copied out some sentences from an American Journal, the *Journal of the Psychological Research Institute* started in Philadelphia in 1872. Around November of 1931¹³² there was an article describing the “true heart” to be on the right side (where Ramaṇa also said it was). This was confirmed by a 1934 article in the same journal. This heart was the deepest and the innermost psycho-physical and spiritual centre of man. Ramaṇa had tried, but failed to get the whole article (Sastri, 51-52).

Heinrich Zimmer wrote a book about Ramaṇa entitled, *Der Weg zum Selbst*.¹³³ C.G. Jung wrote an introduction to Zimmer’s book.¹³⁴ Dr. B. K. Roy reviewed Zimmer’s book and advised Ramaṇa it was only a translation of Ramaṇa’s ideas (*Day by Day*, 285). But Ramaṇa recommended to someone to read this book (*Day by Day*, 168).

B. Traditional Hinduism versus Tantra and yoga

1. Non-Traditional Hindu Written Sources

Ramaṇa obtained various books while meditating in his cave, and he even translated some of these works. It is worthwhile briefly reviewing some of these works, for they relate not to traditional *Advaita Vedānta*, but to a later *tantric* and *yogic* tradition.

a) The *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*

During his stay in the caves, Ramaṇa translated the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. As discussed, he believed that this was a work by Shankara, although this is questioned by modern scholarship.

¹³² I have not been able to locate this journal.

¹³³ Heinrich Zimmer: *Der Weg Zum Selbst: Lehre und Leben des Indischen Heiligen Shri Ramaṇa Maharshi aus Tiruvannamalai* (Zurich, Rascher Verlag, 1944).

¹³⁴ Jung’s introduction is actually highly critical of Ramaṇa . This fact is obscured by some editions using a highly edited copy of that introduction. see my article “Jung, Ramaṇa Maharshi and Eastern Meditation,” online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/cgjung/JungRamaṇa .html>]

Ramaṇa's method of "self-enquiry" emphasizes the primacy of direct experience. In his translation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Ramaṇa emphasized this necessity of direct experience. True liberation can be achieved by Self-enquiry or *vichāra*, and not by book learning (*CW*, 125). This idea of self-enquiry is itself an idea that derives from the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. Verse 32 speaks of an inquiry into the reality of one's own nature. Verse 15 speaks about knowing one's own nature. Verse 472 is recognition of the supreme truth about one's self.

Ramaṇa cites the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in his work. For example, he cites it in his book *Self-Enquiry* (p. 22).

b) The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*

One of the most important influences on Ramaṇa's teaching is the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, which he first read while he was living in the caves of Arunāchala.

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* was known at least as early as 13th century CE, but may date from as early as the 6th or 7th centuries. Olivier Lacombe dated it in the interval between Gaudapāda and Shankara.¹³⁵ The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* is attributed to Valmiki, the author of the *Rāmāyana*. Western scholars say that the work is syncretic, with borrowings from Yoga, *Sāṃkhya Śaiva Siddhanta* and Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹³⁶ Some have said that it is specifically related to Yogācāra Buddhism. Parallels to Yogācāra Buddhism are found in its description of mind as a creative force, the negation of the reality of the world and the claim that all appearances proceed from the mind.¹³⁷ Insofar as the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* denies the reality of the world, it is inconsistent with Ramaṇa's understanding of the reality of

¹³⁵ Olivier Lacombe: *L'Absolu selon le Vedānta* (Paris, 1937), 14.

¹³⁶ See Christopher Chapple, Introduction to *The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, tr. Swami Venkatesananda (State University of New York, 1984), xii. Quotations are from this edition of the work.

¹³⁷ Christopher Chapple finds a relation to the Yogācāra idea of "mind-only" from the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*. It speaks of a reciprocity between what is perceived and the means of perception. "The notions of agent, action and result, seer, sight, seen and so forth are all only thought (III: 103:18). *Swami Venkatesananda: The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (State University of New York Press, 1984), xiii, fn. 10.

the world as set out in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*. But the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* also speaks of the power or energy (*śakti* of infinite consciousness (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 73). This *śakti* brings into manifestation the infinite variety of beings, from the Creator to the blade of grass; it also sustains these beings (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 193). *Śakti* is always dynamic and active. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* therefore supports the doctrine that the world has some reality. It specifically refers to the world as an object in a mirror that is neither real nor unreal (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 230). Two attitudes are conducive to liberation. One is that “I am the extremely subtle and transcendent self.” The other is that “I am all and everything” (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 234).

One of the issues that must be addressed in interpreting Ramaṇa’s experience is whether the *advaitic* experience is necessarily monistic. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* lends support to the view that *nondualism* is different from mere unity or monism. It says that when the mind drops the perception of duality there is neither duality nor unity (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 75). Unity is seen only in opposition to duality. We are to be freed from the conditions known as duality and non-duality (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 209). The all-pervading consciousness is not an object of knowledge; it is beyond the concepts of unity and diversity. It is that “other than which nothing else is” (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 214).

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* also played a role in developing what Fort refers to as “Yogic Advaita (Fort, 85). Yogic Advaita continued Shankara’s idea that knowledge of the nondual Self brings liberation. It also emphasized certain Buddhist ideas, as well as Yogic practices, such as exerting control of mental states. It urged “destroying the mind.” We should destroy the *vāsanās*, mental impressions that are the cause of bondage. The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* speaks of the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* in which “there is no movement of thought.”¹³⁸ But what is interesting is that when the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* speaks of a state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, there remains a kind of perception. It tells the story of Līlā, who enters into *nirvikalpa samādhi*. It is said that she was in the infinite space of

¹³⁸ Christopher Chapple, Introduction to *The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), xiii.

consciousness, and yet she can see the king, although he cannot see her (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 53, 57). She was on another plane of consciousness.

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* played a large role in popularizing the idea of the *jīvanmukta*. It says that a liberated person may act in the world. It tells how the sage named Vāṣiṣṭha gives instruction to Rāma. Rāma becomes enlightened, and returns to rule his kingdom. This is an example of a *jīvanmukta* (one who is liberated in this life). Such a person can lead an active life without incurring any further bondage or *karma* from one's actions. Vāṣiṣṭha tells Rāma that *samādhi* is where one realizes the objects of the senses in a state of "not-self" and thus enjoys inner calmness and tranquility at all times. If one can mentally renounce all false identification of the self with objects, one can then live where one likes, either at home or in a mountain-cave. If the mind is at peace and if there is no ego sense, even cities are as void. On the other hand, forests are like cities to him whose heart is full of desires and other evils (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 223).

The continuance of perception is probably related to the idea of *jīvanmukti*. For the one who is liberated in this life, certain *vāsanās* remain. But they are pure (*śuddha*) *vāsanās* that are free from joy and sorrow and cause no further birth. Andrew Fort comments:

Even though awake, the *mukta's* *vāsanās* and *vṛttis* are at rest. Thus, the liberated being is often described as "asleep while awake": detached and desireless, doing all while doing nothing, having perfect equanimity in activity. When acting with a one-pointed "sleep mind," this being is not a doer and acts without bondage (Fort, 94).

Just as in deep sleep one experiences no duality or suffering, so in the *vāsanā*-less state, the knower has equanimity and "a kind of coolness within." This is the *turīya* or fourth state. There is a state beyond even this, called the *turīyātīta*, a nondual "state" beyond great bliss. It is associated with bodiless liberation, which is even higher than liberation in the body.

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* says that in order to attain liberation, one must abandon the aspect of the mind called the "I" notion, *ahamkāra*, *ahambhāva* (Fort, 920). *Samādhi* is specifically said to be the same whether one is engaged in constant action or in contemplation. Thus, it is not limited to a state of trance, since in a trance, one would not be able to be in a state of action. The emphasis is on attaining a state of egolessness:

Knowledge of truth, Lord, is the fire that burns up all hopes and desires as if they are dried blades of grass. That is what is known by the word *samādhi* in which there is eternal satisfaction, clear perception of what is, egolessness not being subject to the pairs of opposites, freedom from anxiety and from the wish to acquire or to reject (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 227)

In *samādhi* there is “clear perception of what is.” This is not a cessation of consciousness, but a state of egolessness. This egolessness is obtained when one realizes that the light rays are not different from the sun, that the waves are not different from the ocean, that the bracelet is not different from gold, that the sparks are not different from the fire. Someone who has seen this true has an understanding that is said to be unmodified (*nirvikalpa*). We are to abandon the perception of diversity or objectification and remain established in the *nirvikalpa* consciousness. Then we do not get enmeshed in the objects.¹³⁹

It is clear that, like the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* was a source for Ramaṇa’s teaching of self-enquiry. According to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, liberation is achieved only by the conquest of the mind by self-enquiry, and specifically the question “Who am I?”:

What is inquiry? To inquire thus: “Who am I? How has this evil of *saṃsāra* (repetitive history) come into being?” is true inquiry–knowledge of truth arises from such inquiry (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 34)

Not everyone enquires into the truth of the self. But the self alone is to be sought, adored and meditated upon (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 194). By this enquiry of self-knowledge, one obtains infinite consciousness. There is no other way of liberation from bondage (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 229).

The *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* advises abandoning the aspect of the mind called the “I” notion, *ahamkāra ahambhāva* (Fort, 92). There is no liberation as long as one clings to the reality of ‘you’ and ‘I’. We are to rest in the self (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 107). We are warned against taking our stand on concepts and percepts of the mind (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 211). We

¹³⁹ *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 400. Part of this realization is also that the world is unreal. Whatever the self contemplates is materialized on account of the inherent power in consciousness. That materialized thought then shines *as if* it is independent. Whether this view of unreality is consistent with the view that *Brahman* permeates everything is open to debate.

are rather to rely on pure experience (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 234). Immediate experience is described: “whatever vision arises within oneself, that is immediately experienced. Consciousness (as subject) itself becomes, as it were, the object of knowledge (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 62). You cannot merely verbally deny a dual notion of existence. Such denial itself becomes a further distraction (*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, 39). We are to become conscious of the self in all states of awareness.

Ramaṇa frequently refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and he even incorporates six couplets from it in his *Supplement to Forty Verses* (verses 21 to 27) (CW 125-26; Osb. 80). The remaining six *slokas* were printed separately by the *ashram*, with translation in English. We are to be free from egoism, with mind detached as in sleep, pure like the sky, ever untainted. Inwardly cool but outwardly full of fervour, we should act playfully in the world.

Ramaṇa also refers to the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* in *Self-Enquiry*—in support of his view that we should not search for the Self outside ourselves. It constantly shines as “I-I’ within the Heart (CW 6; Osb. 27). He says that Vasiṣṭha and Valmiki possessed siddhis:

That might have been their fate. But don’t aim at that which is not essential but apt to prove a hindrance to wisdom (*Talks*, 36).

He refers to the story of Punya and Papa [in *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, V. Ch. 20]. Punya consoles Papa on the death of their parents and turns him to realising the Self (*Talks*, 233). In *Conscious Immortality* (p. 172), he says, “*Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* says that the quest ‘Who am I?’ is the axe which, when struck at the roots of the ego, destroys it.” A couple of pages later (p. 174), he says,

In the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* says that what is real is hidden to us, but what is false is revealed as true. Actually, we are experiencing only the reality, but we do not know it. Isn’t it the wonder of wonders?”

Ramaṇa cited the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* regarding the futility of searching for the Self outside oneself, oblivious of its constantly shining as ‘I-I’ within the Heart (Osb. 27). Nambiar’s *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* has an appendix of verses from the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha*, selected by Ramaṇa to describe the state of *Jīvanmukti*. Sarga 18, verses 17-26

Verses 20 and 23 were incorporated in *Ulladu Narpadu*. Slokas 24 and 26 incorporated in verse 27 of the *anubandham*.

Ramaṇa cites Lila's story. *Jñāna* stands for knowledge without practice; *abhyasa* stands for practice without knowledge; *dhyana* stands for practice with knowledge (*Talks*, 114).

Ramaṇa refers to the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*'s statement that Kundalini is composed of 101 nadis, and that the heart is the seat of meditation. You see the body in the Heart, the world in it (*Talks*, 378). And he says that the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* defines liberation as the abandonment of the false, and just remaining as Being (*Talks*, 413).

The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* is a kind of *yoga*. But Ramaṇa is careful to distinguish it from some other yogas. He says that one does not have to first develop all the qualities of perfection for a seeker as mentioned in the *Yoga Sutras*. There may not be any individual in the world possessing all those qualities.

K.K. Nambiar says that Grant Duff (Douglas Ainslie, the nephew of one of the British Governors in India) asked Ramaṇa how a *jīvanmukta* could engage in worldly activities. Ramaṇa referred to the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, verses 17-26 of *sarga* 18 (Nambiar, 9). When a sage engages in activities, they don't disturb him because his mind abides in Brahman, just as a woman walking with waterpot on her head can engage in talk with companions, all the while remaining intent on water above (*Conscious Immortality*, 10).

c) The *Ashtavakra Gītā*

We have already referred to the *Ashtavakra Gītā*. Ramaṇa frequently related the story of King Janaka. He says that Ashtavakra composed the *Ashtavakra Gītā*, the main theme of which is "Brahman is not anything new or apart from one and *no particular time or place is needed to realize Brahman*" (*Crumbs*, 32-34)

d) The *Ribhu Gītā*

Ramaṇa refers to the *Ribhu Gītā* many times, including a reference in his earliest book, *Who Am I?* Ramaṇa was acquainted with this work from an early date. In 1908, he often gave V. Ramaswamy Iyer the *Ribhu Gītā* to read (Narasimha, 98). Ramaṇa later said that

readings from the *Ribhu Gītā* are as good as *samādhi* (Narasimha, 208). Narasimha reports that he also read *Kaivalya Navaneetha*.

The *Ribhu Gita* is an extract from a much longer epic, the *Sivarahasya*. It tells of the experience of nonduality by the sage known as Ribhu. The focus of the text is on the Self. In order to achieve bliss, one must discard the mind. There is nothing that is not-self (1:11). Verse 24 says that if there is no “you”, there is no “I”. The *Ribhu Gītā* refers to the heart-space within all beings (1:59). It is also significant in its view of nonduality as something that cannot be conceptualized:

26. If there is duality, there is (a concept of) nonduality; in the absence of duality, there is no (concept of) nonduality either. If there is something to be "seen," a seer is also there; in the absence of anything to see, there is no seer at all either.¹⁴⁰

But whereas the *Ribhu Gītā* confirms that nonduality cannot be conceptualized, this view of nonduality, as denying that there is in fact anything to see, is inconsistent with the view that Ramaṇa takes from other texts that refer to seeing *Brahman* in all things.

e) The *Tripura Rahasya*

One of the publications still for sale at Ramaṇa’s ashram is the *Tripura Rahasya*. Its English translation contains the subtitle: “The Mystery Beyond the Trinity.”¹⁴¹ It is unclear who chose this title for the work. It may have been the English disciple of Ramaṇa, Major Chadwick. Chadwick wrote the Foreword to the book. The *Tripura Rahasya* is a *tantric* work. It refers to the Supreme Goddess by various names. She is called Tripura, because Her Body consists of three *śaktis* (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva).¹⁴² Chadwick says that Ramaṇa considered this as one of the greatest works of *advaita* and that he often quoted from it. Ramaṇa regretted that it was not available in English.

¹⁴⁰ *Ribhu Gītā*, tr. Dr. H. Ramamoorthy, (Society for Abidance in Truth, 1994).

¹⁴¹ *Tripura Rahasya: The Mystery Beyond the Trinity*, tr. Swami Sri Ramaṇananda Saraswathi (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1989). It is attributed to Dattatreya, the *guru* of *Patañjali*.

¹⁴² See Gopinath Kaviraj: “The Philosophy of Tripura Tantra.” Online at <http://www.hubcom.com/magee/tantra/philtan.htm>

According to this work, the Pure Self sometimes unfolds itself as the cosmos, and at other times withdraws Itself and remains unmanifest. Therefore cosmos and the Self are only the same, but different modes of the one Reality, which is Consciousness.¹⁴³ The cosmos is therefore not unreal. It is real in the same way that an image in a mirror is real; the cosmos is a real image of the Self. This book helps to explain Ramaṇa's view that the world is real, although only insofar as it is dependent on *Brahman*.

The *Tripura Rahasya* also emphasizes the importance of direct experience. It says,

Second-hand knowledge of the Self gathered from books or *gurus* can never emancipate a man until its truth is rightly investigated and applied to himself; direct Realisation alone will do that. Therefore, follow my advice and realise yourself, turning the mind inward (*Tripura Rahasya* 18: 89-90).

f) The *Tayumānavar*

Thayumanavar was a saint and a poet. Sometimes he would retire to the forest or public gardens and remained for days absorbed in the bliss of the Self. According to legend, he was sitting in meditation in a public garden in Ramnad when the gardeners, not noticing him, piled a heap of dry leaves and twigs about him and set fire to it; in this way, Thayumanavar merged in the Supreme.

The *Tayumānavar* is one of the earliest works with which Ramaṇa was familiar. He had read parts of it even as a boy, although it is unclear which parts he had read. But his reading of the *Tayumānavar* might have induced him to seek a trance state. The *Tayumānavar* says,

When I think, I will have to shuffle this body
I swoon in fear, my heart trembling
Long, long indeed is the distance between
The blissful state of Transcendent Silentness
And this ignorant one.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ *Tripura Rahasya* Chapter XI, verse 85 says, "That which shines as 'Is' is Her Majesty the Absolute Consciousness. Thus the universe is only the *Self—the One* and one only."

¹⁴⁴ Canto 2. Online translation of the *Tayumānavar* at www.magna.com.au/~prfbrown/thayumanavar/, published by Himalayan Academy.

Later in life Ramaṇa recited portions of the hymns in the *Tayumānavar*. He used to quote the following from the *Tayumānavar*:

When overpowered by the wide Expanse which is without beginning, end or middle, there is the realization of non-dual bliss.¹⁴⁵

Of all the stanzas in the *Tayumānavar*, Ramaṇa preferred the one that says, “Ego disappearing, another ‘I-I’ spontaneously manifests in full glory.” This manifested state is called *mouna* (silence). The *Tayumānavar* defines *mouna* as “that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego.” (*Talks*, 111). This stanza therefore appears to be another source for Ramaṇa’s teaching of self-enquiry.

The *Tayumānavar* says that eternal Being is that state in which you disappear. You are eternal and also still. This cannot just be done by the mind telling us to be still. He quotes the *Tayumānavar* as saying that silence is the ocean in which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves (*Talks*, 547). Ramaṇa explains this doctrine of the *Tayumānavar* with the story of someone who is told that the medicine he is given will work if only he doesn’t think of a monkey. Naturally, he will always think of the monkey. Conscious, deliberate effort is necessary to reach the state of stillness (*Talks*, 555, 606; also *Teachings*, 70). It is the state that is free from thoughts (*Talks*, 606).

Ramaṇa defines the silence of *mouna* as that state which spontaneously manifests after the annihilation of the ego. Ramaṇa says that although mentioned several times, the *Tayumānavar* defines it in only one verse (*Talks*, 11, Jan 1/36).

Silence is the ocean in which all the rivers of all the religions discharge themselves. So says Thayumanavar (*Talks*, 547, Dec 15/38).

He refers to the influence of the sage who sits in silence:

As the Tamil Saint, Tayumānavar, points out in a poem, a person who sits still and silently can influence a whole country (*Conscious Immortality*, 83).

Here is another reference to the *Tayumānavar*:

¹⁴⁵ Ramaṇa Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge, 61.

A person who sits still and silently can influence a whole country. The force of meditation is infinitely more powerful than speech or writing. One who sits in silence, meditating on the Self, will draw a whole crowd of people to him, without his going out to anyone (*Conscious Immortality*, 83).

Balaram Reddy says that Ramaṇa often quoted this stanza of Saint Thayumanavar's in praise of the Guru:

Oh Lord! Coming with me all along the births, never abandoning me and finally rescuing me!¹⁴⁶

Reddy said that this was the way he felt about Ramaṇa.

Reddy says that Ramaṇa was often heard quoting from Thayumanavar's verses. He says that the following are ten verses especially selected by Ramaṇa:

1 & 2. The individual ego known as "I" having manifested and troubled everyone, the universal Māyā, the diversifying agency, spontaneously follows in its wake. Who can possibly describe the vast ocean of misery consequent upon it? It appears as the flesh, the body, the senses, interior and exterior, as the all pervading ether, air, fire, water and earth, as mountain, forest, huge visions like hills physical and subtle, as forgetfulness and memory, and so on, rising up wave after wave and beating against man, bringing pleasure and pain, which are the result of his past actions, and also their remedies known as creeds, religions, God-Seeker, and the testimonies and sanctions found in various sciences, and explained by logic. All these are more numerous than even the fine grains of sand on the seashore.

3. Unaccountable troubles crop up spontaneously, sheaf upon sheaf. How to root them out wholesale, even as burning up a hill of camphor without residue in a vast blaze of fire? In order to achieve this miracle, and to enlighten me, Grace took shape. In every respect, like my self, eating and sleeping, suffering and enjoying, bearing a name and born somewhere, it appeared as the Silent Guru, like a deer used to decoy another of its species.

4. And claimed my body, possessions and life itself and consistently with the process of elimination, signified "you are not the five senses nor the five elements, nor the limbs, nor the mind, nor their attributes, nor all these collectively, nor the body nor knowledge nor ignorance. You are

¹⁴⁶ Balaram Reddy, "Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy," *The Maharshi*, Mar/Apr 1995, Vol. 5, No. 2.

pure consciousness, unassociated like a crystal, but reflecting the background to lookers-on; whereas we (guru) are only the inherent nature revealing the truth on finding you ripe for it.

5. If eager to reach Consciousness-Bliss-Eternity innermost in all, which is also the inner abode of refreshing Grace, listen to the course I indicate. May you reach the Pure Heart and abide there forever! May dense ignorance vanish for you! May you attain to Bliss-Consciousness! May bondage cease for you! Communicating thus,

6. And dispensing the true knowledge of the Natural and Unique Silence which destroys all bondage and where there is no meditation nor the ego, no space, no time, no direction, no association, no elimination, no differentiation, no expression, no phenomena of night and day, no end, no beginning, no middle, no interior or exterior, nor an aggregate of all these.

7. (The *Guru* indicated further) that, though all these are eliminated, "It" is not void, but is Natural, Eternal Be-ing inexpressible by words, not manifesting as ego, but is the Reality engulfing all, having swallowed all ignorance like day covering night, and absorbing unhindered all knowledge, metamorphosing the person into Itself, It shines in Silence, Self-effulgent;

8. With its emergence, It prevents any other from appearing; and all else is put out suddenly like burning camphor blown away without residual flicker or glow; and in its place It shines beyond the senses, and apart from the knower, known and knowledge; and yet It is there, though who can speak of it and to whom? For if It arises, the individual is metamorphosed; It will assert Itself (Literally: It Speaks Itself),

9. (And further on), if it is said to be "It," the question arises "which," though such doubt about the non-dual One is illogical; so transcending it also, King Janaka or Suka and others remained like the bee intoxicated with honey in that state. (The same *Guru's*) blessing helped me to reach it. Grace is needed in order to reach the Nirvikalpa Samādhi and attain absolute Bliss. I will not rest nor attend to my wants until I attain it.

10. On the "I" idea of the individual ego vanishing, there springs up within me a current of "I-I" endless indeed. This confers bliss engulfing all my knowledge, unique and transcendental, ending in Silence! How then can Silence be expressed?¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Part III, Vol. 5, No. 4.

Ramaṇa referred to the *Tayumānavar* regarding the state of a *jñāni*.¹⁴⁸

Ramaṇa also referred to other Tamil saints. He said that the Tamil Saint Manickavasagar's body disappeared in a blaze of light leaving no residue. This was because our body is solidified mind. "When in *Jñānam* the mind dissolves and consumes itself in a blaze of light, the body is burnt up in the process." He gave Nandanar as another example. Chadwick referred to Elijah being carried up to Heaven in a chariot. But Ramaṇa said that Christ's death was different; Christ's body remained for a time after death, whereas the bodies of the others had been immediately and utterly consumed (Chadwick, 71).

2. Jīvanmukti

Ramaṇa accepted that one could be a *jīvanmukta*, one who is liberated in this world. The one who is liberated in the body is the *jīvanmukti*. Full liberation is only gained after death (in *videhamukti*). But this idea of *jīvanmukti* allows for the continuing the liberated person to continue functioning within the world of diversity. This idea of *jīvanmukti* is not at all universally accepted within Hinduism. Indeed, as Fort has shown, the entire idea of the *jīvanmukti* probably derives from *tantric* sources, and is connected with the *tantric* ideas of the reality of the world, and of *māyā* in terms of the *śakti* or energy of Shiva.¹⁴⁹

The *jīvanmukta* sees *Brahman* within all things. But there is an inconsistency between the state of *kevala* (the experience of the aloneness of the *ātman*) and this state of *sahaja* (seeing *Brahman* within all things). As Fort says, Vedānta has two ideas of *mukti*: freedom from *saṃsāra* and knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. The first view, freedom from *saṃsāra*, is a more negative idea of liberation. It usually requires some form of world renunciation, and some kind of yogic practice; it ends in the perfect isolation (*kaivalya*)

¹⁴⁸ N.N. Rajan: *More Talks with Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. A.R. Natarajan, 2nd ed. (Bangalore: Ramaṇa Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1996), 61.

¹⁴⁹ Andrew Fort: *Jīvanmukti in Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

of the spirit (Fort, 6). This view is also connected with seeing the world as *māyā* in terms of illusion.

The second view of liberation is knowledge of *Brahman/ātman*. In this second view, some *Vedāntic* thought holds that there can be liberation when one is in a body, with the mind and the senses.

Even for those who believe in the possibility of *jīvanmukti*, there is a further problem. There are those who argue that the only reason that the *jīvanmukti* can continue to function in the world is because of his or her *prārabdha karma*. This is the *karmic* energy that continues from before liberation, like the continued spinning of the potter's wheel. On this view the *jīvanmukti* is not really participating in the world, since the energy of acting in the body comes from the past. However, another opinion is that the *jīvanmukti* is participating in the world out of a mission to save the world or to do good in the world. Fort argues that this second opinion is not found within traditional Hinduism; it is a Western conception (Fort, 13). It may also be linked to the Buddhist idea of the *bodhisattva*.

For those who accept the idea of *jīvanmukti*, it is often unclear what the idea means. If the liberated person has attained to unity with *Brahman*, how does he or she deal with the diversity of the world? Is the *jīvanmukta* conscious of his or her actions? Are rational distinctions still made after liberation? Is there a distinction between subject and object, between self and others? And what are the *jīvanmukta's* ethical obligations to others?

3. Tantric view of māyā

We have already discussed differing views as to whether *advaita* is monistic. *Tantra* does not regard the world as totally illusory. *Māyā* is regarded as the creative power of *Brahman* (or more frequently, of *Siva*). The world has a relative reality. It is real insofar as it is related to *Siva*, as the field play of *Siva's* creative power or *shakti*. We have seen how this view of relative reality is supported by the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*.

In his translation of the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Ramaṇa also refers to the world as having emanated from *Brahman*:

“Thou are That” because this whole world emanates from Brahman, which alone IS, and is Brahman Itself, just as pots come from clay and are clay itself and indeed are made of clay (CW, 149).

But although traditionally ascribed to Shankara, recent scholarship has questioned whether the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* was written by Shankara. And this view of *māyā* as a relative reality is more closely related to *tantra*.

Hacker also comments that the Upanishads speak of the world when not yet unfolded. This is designated as “the unmanifest” (*avyakta*).¹⁵⁰

This view that *Brahman* emits or emanates the world is not emphasized in Vedānta. Vedānta tends to regard the world as a result of ignorance and illusion. Although Vedānta does acknowledge some reality to the world in its doctrine of *anirvacanīya*, the emphasis on the full reality of the world as an expression of *śakti* is more a *tantric* doctrine. Loy says that both Hindu and Buddhist *tantra* hold that the ultimate nondual reality possesses two aspects in its fundamental nature—negative and positive, static and dynamic, *Śiva* and *Śakti*, *Prajñā* and *Upāya*, *Śūnyatā* and *karuṇā*. The ultimate goal of *tantra* is union between these two aspects of the reality. In this union, one realizes the non-dual nature of the self and the not-self.¹⁵¹

Ramaṇa says that tantric *advaita* admits world, soul, God.

There is the *Tantric Advaita* which admits three fundamentals *jagat*, *jiva*, *Isvara*—world, soul, God. These three are also real. But the reality does not end with them. It extends beyond. That is the *Tantric Advaita*. The Reality is limitless; the three fundamentals do not exist apart from the Absolute Reality. All agree that Reality is all-pervading.... (*Talks*, 118).

¹⁵⁰ Paul Hacker: “Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology,” *Philology and Confrontation*, 83, referring to *Brh. Up* I, 4,7.

¹⁵¹ *Nonduality*, 270. Loy refers to the idea of emanation as “a weaker kind of monism.” On this view, instead of there being only a monistic One, there is only one *type* of thing (such as Mind) of which the many particulars are manifestations. It is unclear why he still refers to it as monism, since both the One and its manifestations are real. Why not just refer to it as nondualism? It appears that Loy’s reluctance to refer to emanation as nondualism is that he regards it as a reification of emptiness.

This *tantric* positive valuation of the world is expressed in the *Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* and in Kashmir *Śaivism*. Swami Muktananda points out that within Kashmir *Śaivism*, the world is seen as a real manifestation of Shiva's *śakti*. Everything is in consciousness, including the material world. Christopher Chapple cites Abhinavagupta in this connection:

Shiva the independent and pure Self that always vibrates in the mind, is the Parashakti that rises as joy in various sense experiences. Then the experience of this outer world appears as its Self. I do not know where this word '*samsāra*' has come from.¹⁵²

Lilian Silburn writes about the Shaivite doctrine of the emanation of the world from Shiva. In the dance of Shiva, the sound vibrations from his drum give rise to the universe as they generate time and space. With his other hand, he holds the fire of resorption. This fire consumes the I. There is therefore both emanation and resorption. The creative emission takes place when the Goddess energy (*śakti*) is churned by Bhairava. This is the “gross aspect of vibration” in which Shiva differentiates himself from his energy in order to contemplate her. After this separation there is a return into unity. The *yogi* dwells at this junction of the twofold movement of emanation and resorption. The *yogi* is returned to the primordial oneness, the vibration of the universal heart. In this union, Shiva takes back the divided energy, turning it inward by a series of withdrawal to the initial vibration of the peaceful center.¹⁵³

Ramaṇa held that the world is no illusion. Only the ignorant one sees the truth of the visible universe alone, while the wise one goes behind to the Formless Truth that is the base and support of the visible universe (Shankaranarayanan, 63).

Ramaṇa translates the Devikalottara, one of the minor Agamas, as saying,

The mere consciousness of being as Awareness is itself *Shakti* and all this world is the projection of this *Shakti*. Recognition of the world as the manifestation of *Shakti* is worship of *Shakti*. (CW 173; Osb. 112).

¹⁵² Swami Muktananda: Preface to *The Concise Yoga Vāṣiṣṭha* (State University of New York, 1984), v.

¹⁵³ Lilian Silburn: *Kundalini: energy of the depths: A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (State University of New York, 1988), 5-9.

Another time that Ramaṇa was questioned whether Shankara was correct in his view that Brahman is real and that the world is illusion. He said that both are true, and that these refer to different stages of development:

The aspirant starts with definition that the Real always exists, and then eliminates the world as unreal because it is changing and hence cannot be the Real. Ultimately he reaches the Self and there finds unity. Then that which was originally rejected as being unreal, is found to be part of the unity. Being absorbed in the Reality, the world is also real. Vedāntins say *māyā's* manifestation is the display of the cosmos on pure Consciousness like images in a mirror. Just as the images cannot remain in the absence of a mirror, so the world cannot have an independent existence (*Conscious Immortality*, 107).

The Vedāntins do not say the world is unreal. That is a misunderstanding. If they did, what would be the meaning of the Vedāntic text: “All this is Brahman”? They only mean that the world is unreal as world, but it is real as Self. If you regard the world as not-Self it is it not real. Everything, whether you call it world or *māyā* or *lila* or *sakti*, must be within the Self and not apart from it. There can be no *sakti* apart from the *sakta*. (*Day by Day*, 233; Cf. *Teachings*, 19)

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 (*Teachings*, 16).

Shankara has been criticized for his philosophy of *Māyā* (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 too is that phenomena are real when experienced as the Self and illusory when seen apart from the self (*Teachings*, 16).

Even the idea of illusion is itself illusory (*Teachings*, 17). Both of the following statements are true: “The world (*jagat*) is illusion” and “The world is reality.” The statements refer to different stages of development, and are spoken from different points of view (*Talks*, 41).

Sometimes, Ramaṇa's view that the world is a manifestation of God's power seems to be like panentheism:

Iswara is immanent in every person and in every material object throughout the universe. The totality of all things and beings constitutes God. There is a power out of which a small fraction has become all this universe, and the remainder is in reserve. Both this reserve power, plus the manifested power as the material world, together constitute *Iswara*.” (*Conscious Immortality* 127).

And yet, although Ramaṇa affirmed the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in its view that the world has some reality, he sometimes inconsistently refers to the world as comparable to only a vision. He said had seen in Arunāchala a great city with large buildings and streets and a big company of *Sadhus* chanting the *Vedas*. Someone said, but that is only a vision. He said “All this is only a vision too. That is just as real as this” (Chadwick, 57).

4. The Heart

Ramaṇa frequently speaks of the idea of our heart centre. In 1917 he says, “That from which all thoughts of embodied beings spring is the Heart.” Descriptions of the Heart are only mental concepts. He refers to the “cave of the Heart.” The transcendental Being residing therein is the Lord of the Cave (Osborne, 28). Our real Self is there in the heart behind the ego-self (*Teachings*, 128).

There is in the Heart the infinite consciousness ‘I-I’, which is at the same time pure and constant; on eradicating the ego this manifests and leads to *moksha* (*CW* 178; Osborne 114).

The Self is the centre and is everywhere aware of itself as the Heart or Self-awareness (*Teachings*, 129). Analysis and synthesis are in the region of intellect. The Self transcends the intellect (*Conscious Immortality*, 50).

For Ramaṇa, the Self is found in the Heart:

If you ask, Who am I? the Deity or the Atma will be found shining (throbbing) as 'I' in the lotus of the heart. By practice of this kind of meditation one becomes unaware of oneself and what one is doing and one's mind gets absorbed in the Self. The subtle state in which even the pulsation subsides is the state of *samādhi* (Osborne, 35).

Although the self enjoys its experiences in the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, residing respectively in the eyes, throat and heart, in reality, however, it never leaves its principal seat, the heart. In the heart-lotus which is of the nature of all, in other words in the mind-ether, the light of that self in the form 'I' shines (*CW*, 10).

It is said the whole *Vedānta* can be compressed into four words, *deham, naham, koham, soham*. *Deham* is *naham*; the body is not 'I'. If one enquires *koham*, i.e. Who am I?, if one enquires whence this 'I' springs and realises it, then, in the heart of such a one, the Omnipresent God will shine as 'I', as sa *aham* or *soham*; i.e.; he will know That I am, that is 'I'. (Erase, 12).

It is not denied that the physical organ is on the left, but the heart of which I speak is on the right. It is my experience. No authority is required. But still, you can find confirmation in the Sita Upanishad, where there is a mantra that says so. The whole cosmos is contained in one pinhole in the Heart. A tiny hole in the heart remains always closed and is opened by *vichāra*. The result is 'I'I' consciousness, the same as *samādhi* (*Conscious Immortality*, 166).

Ramaṇa's idea of the heart as the centre seems itself to be related to *tantric* sources. One whole chapter (5) of the *Ramaṇa Gītā* is devoted to "the Science of the Heart." The Heart has intuitive knowledge and direct immediate experience (see discussion below).

5. Meditation

Sometimes, Ramaṇa refers positively to yoga and meditation. For example, he says that there are some verses that are suitable for meditation. This is related to *tantra*. *Tantra Shastra* has a method of invocation. Each deity has own particular name, form and characteristics, own lines of vibration. This is a *dhyāna sloka*: a form of verse for meditation (Shankaranarayanan, 80). Gaṇapati Muni gives such a *sloka* in *Ramaṇa Gītā*: XVIII.13. (Shankaranarayanan 82). Kapali quotes Ramaṇa as saying that this verse deserves to be the *dhyāna sloka* [a verse to be meditated on], and that Ramaṇa approved it as appropriate for himself:

In showering grace, he is like the moon, the friend of the blue water-lily.
In the same way, in lustre he is like the sun, the kinsman of the lotus. In
his Brahmic state, he reminds us of his Father abiding under the Banyan
tree. Him, the moveless one we lovingly remember.

The reference is to Dakshinamurti seated under the Banyan tree. When this *sloka* is recited with devotional fervour, it is said that the Presence, *sānnidhya* of Ramaṇa is felt as Peace.

But as we have already seen, Ramaṇa elsewhere refers to meditation as unnecessary. He says that Self-Enquiry is the direct path to realization, so why would one bother with *Kundalini*?

Meditation is possible only if the ego is retained; there is the ego and the object mediated upon. This method is indirect. However if we seek the ego-source, the ego disappears and what remains is the Self. This method is the direct one (*Conscious Immortality*, 59).

There are four states of consciousness: waking, sleep, deep sleep, and the fourth state, the *turīya*. Ramaṇa interprets the *turīya* as beyond both the waking and sleeping states. He says that this fourth stage is really our natural [*sahaja*] state, the under-current in all the three states (*Talks*, 121). It is not a state of trance, since this *sahaja* state is the state of the *jīvanmukta* who moves about and acts in the world. This point has not been emphasized enough by interpreters of Ramaṇa's experience.

Ramaṇa does not advocate achieving a trance state. He says that trance is the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, a lower state of realization than *sahaja samādhi*. Ramaṇa distinguishes these levels of *samādhi*:

- (1) Holding on to Reality is *samādhi*.
- (2) Holding on to Reality with effort is *savikalpa samādhi*. He subdivides *savikalpa samādhi* into four kinds. All involve effort.
- (3) (3) Merging in Reality and remaining unaware of the world is *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He subdivides these into two kinds.
- (4) Merging in Ignorance and remaining unaware of the world is sleep. In sleep, the mind is alive, but sunk into oblivion.
- (5) Remaining in the primal, pure natural state without effort is *sahaja nirvikalpa samādhi* (*Teachings*, 185; also *Talks*, 357-58; Cf *CW* 272-73; *Osb.* 176-77).

In *savikalpa samādhi*, the mind jumps from one object to another. All kinds of thoughts rise up from the Reality within and “manifest themselves.” The distinction between Knower, Knowledge and Known is not lost.

In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, which Ramaṇa also calls *kevala samādhi*, the mind is alive, but “sunk in life,” “like a bucket with a rope left lying in the water in the well to be drawn out.” The distinction between Knower, Knowledge and Known is lost (*CW* 272; *Osb* 176). One can come out of the state. It is therefore temporary, a mere suppression (*laya*)

of consciousness, a state of trance. For those who reach only this stage, everything appears different from themselves, unlike *sahaja samādhi*, where there is nothing different from themselves.¹⁵⁴ Ramaṇa is ambivalent as to whether or not *nirvikalpa samādhi* is a necessary stage to attaining *sahaja samādhi*. He says that a scholar who has not had a firm experience of *nirvikalpa samādhi*, however learned he may be, will not be capable of destroying the ego (*CW* 245, Osb 155). And he says in order not to fall back into samsāra, practice *nirvikalpa samādhi* by concentration on *Brahman*, which is experienced in the heart as one's own radiant Self, free from all limitations and as Being-consciousness-Bliss. This will destroy the individual consciousness, which is the cause of all error, and thus you can unravel the knot of the heart, which causes the ills of birth and death (*CW* 252, Osb 161). Elsewhere he says,

When we have tendencies that we are trying to give up, that is to say when we are still imperfect and have to make conscious efforts to keep the mind one-pointed or free from thought, the thoughtless state which we thus attain is *nirvikalpa samādhi*. When, through practice, we are always in that state, not going into *samādhi* and coming out again, that is the *sahaja* state. In *sahaja* one sees the only Self and sees the world as a form assumed by the Self. (*Teachings*, 184)

Elsewhere, Ramaṇa says that the trance of *nirvikalpa samādhi* is not necessary in order to achieve the *sahaja* state. The method that he recommends for enlightenment is that of Self-Enquiry. Ramaṇa criticized meditation as often leading to the inflation of the ego of the meditator.¹⁵⁵ Liberation can't be attained through *yoga* or ritual (*CW* 277; Osb. 133).

Ramaṇa says that Shankara emphasized *sahaja samādhi* in preference to *nirvikalpa samādhi* (*Reflections*, 52). Now although it is true that Shankara did not emphasize the experience of trance, or *nirvikalpa*, it is unlikely that he advocated *sahaja*, which is more tantric. For Ramaṇa refers to the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* in support of the preference of *sahaja samādhi* to *nirvikalpa samādhi* (*Talks*, 59). *Sahaja* is in any event experiential, something that Shankara did not emphasize.

¹⁵⁴ Nagamma, Suri: *Letters from Sri Ramaṇasramam*, tr. D.S. Sastri (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1985, first published 1970), 270 [*Letters*].

¹⁵⁵ His view that meditation is not necessary is similar to Shankara's opinion.

In *sahaja samādhi*, the mind is “dead,” “resolved into the self, like a river discharged into the ocean and its identity lost.” The mind has resolved itself into the Self and has been lost. Differences and obstructions mentioned above do not therefore exist here. The activities of such a being are like the feeding of a sleeping boy, perceptible to the onlooker (but not to the subject).

Similarly the *sahaja jñāni* remains unaware of his bodily activities because his mind is dead—having been resolved in the ecstasy of *Chid Ananda* (Self) (*Talks*, 154).

And yet, although the mind is dead, in *sahaja samādhi* one is able to continue to function in the world after enlightenment. Elsewhere Ramaṇa says it does not matter whether the senses are active:

Turīya [the fourth state] is mind in quiescence and aware of Self, with awareness that the mind has merged in its source. Whether the senses are active or inactive is immaterial. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* the senses are inactive (*Conscious Immortality*, 97).

The enlightened one lives as a *jīvanmukta*. He is able to think and to reason. Ramaṇa himself was able to think. He said that he usually did not have thoughts. He had thoughts when he was reading and when replying to questions. The realized sage sees the world, but his outlook differs. But in reality there is nothing but the self (*Conscious Immortality*, 142). Yet a realized person can have feelings; *jñāna* is not inconsistent with the feeling of being slapped (*Conscious Immortality*, 143).

And Narasimha says,

A Master is perpetually in this state; in some incomprehensible way, he can use the mind, body, and intellect too, without falling back into the delusion of having separate consciousness (Narasimha 117).

Swami Siddeswarānanda says that *sahaja samādhi*, even for Ramaṇa, is seeing the true nature of the world. It is not a case of cessation of consciousness, or of pure consciousness. Although the realized person still sees the world, he sees it as being *Brahman*. He perceives *Brahman* in all things. To attain *samādhi*, it is helpful “to regard everything as *Brahman*.” The result will be that the frail tendencies of the ego will disappear like darkness before the sun (Translation of *Vivekacūdāmani*, CW 242, Osb.

153). The Self is like screen in movie theatre. The screen remains, but the pictures and appearances that are projected on it, come and go:

When the Realized Man sees the world he sees the Self that is the substratum of all that is seen (*Teachings*, 192).

In *sahaja* one sees only the Self, and one sees the world as a form assumed by the Self (*Teachings*, 184). The importance of regarding everything as *Brahman* seems to indicate that perception continues after one attains *sahaja*. The state is not just one of pure consciousness, but a state in which there is some content.

There is also a hearing. Ramaṇa refers to meditation on sound (*nada-yoga*):

One sound after another will come and this will lead to a state of *laya*. Remember to look at who it is that hears these sounds....If you lose sight of the subject then you will go into *laya* [*nirvikalpa*] (*Conscious Immortality*, 37).

Thus, to avoid going into trance, we need to remember the Self, the hearer of the sounds, and not concentrate on the sounds alone.

Sahaja, the highest state of consciousness is not withdrawal from the world or a cessation of activity. A person who has attained Realization may or may not withdraw from active life. Some realized persons carry on trade or business or rule a Kingdom like Rāma as described in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Realization does not mean being inert like a stone or becoming nothing:

Then how would it differ from deep sleep? Besides, it would be a state which, however exalted, comes and goes and would therefore not be the natural and normal state, so how could it represent the eternal presence of the Supreme Self, which persists through all states, and survives them? It is true that there is such a state and that in the case of some people it may be necessary to go through it. It may be a temporary phase of the quest or persist to the end of a man's life, if it be the Divine Will or the man's destiny, but in any case you cannot call it the highest state. If it were you would have to say that not only the Sages, but God Himself has not attained the highest state, since not only are the Realized Sages very active but the Personal God (*Īvara*) himself is obviously not in this supremely inactive state, since he presides over the world and directs its activities (*Teachings*, 185).

And yet elsewhere Ramaṇa says

Are there thoughts in *samādhi*? R: only the feeling 'I am' and no other thoughts. The egoless 'I am' is not a thought. (*Conscious Immortality*, 69).

and

In *sahaja*, however, there is no relapse into mental activity and no consequent loss of bliss. Happiness is unbroken and ever-enduring. The body, senses and mind may be operative, but the person is hardly conscious of the acts (*Conscious Immortality*, 73).

and

In deep sleep we do not think whether we are or not; so in the waking state we can also live without thought (*Conscious Immortality*, 78).

Ramaṇa says that *sahaja samādhi* is preferable to *nirvikalpa*, because even if one is immersed in *nirvikalpa samādhi* for years, after emerging from it one will find oneself in one's environment. One should be in spontaneous *samādhi*—in one's pristine or natural state—in the midst of every environment.¹⁵⁶ In the natural state of *sahaja* we do not go into *samādhi* and out again. We no longer have to make conscious efforts to keep the mind one-pointed or free from thought (*Teachings*, 185).

Ramaṇa was asked which state of *samādhi* he was in. He said that if his eyes were closed, it was *nirvikalpa*; if open it was (though differentiated, still in absolute repose) *savikalpa*. He said that *sahaja* is the ever-present state, the "natural state" (*Talks*, 13, also *Conscious Immortality* 71).

Samādhi with closed eyes is certainly good, but one must go further until it is realised that actionlessness and action are not hostile to each other. Fear of loss of *samādhi* while one is active is the sign of ignorance. *Samādhi* must be the natural life of every one. There is a state beyond our efforts or effortlessness (*Talks*, 123-24).

To a questioner who continued to ask about the importance of trance, Ramaṇa replied,

¹⁵⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, p. 59. Ramaṇa refers to the *Vivekacūdāmani* to support this priority of *sahaja samādhi*. It appears that he is referring to the *Vivekacūdāmani*'s emphasis on the *jīvanmukta*.

If you are so anxious for trance any narcotic will bring it about. Drug-habit will be the result and not liberation. There are *vāsanās* in the latent state even in trance. The *vāsanās* must be destroyed (*Talks*, 280).

Ramaṇa's rejection of trance is related to his acceptance of the idea of *jīvanmukti*, or living liberation. If one can be liberated while still alive, then liberation cannot mean trance, at least not in the sense of a loss of consciousness.¹⁵⁷ Some kind of consciousness is necessary in order to function while alive. Ramaṇa calls this kind of consciousness *sahaja samādhi*. It is the highest state of consciousness. Ramaṇa expressly contrasts it with trance:

In yoga the term [*samādhi*] is used to indicate some kind of trance and there are various kinds of *samādhi*. But the *samādhi* I speak to you about is different. It is *sahaja samādhi*. In this state you remain calm and composed during activity. You realize that you are moved by the deeper Real self within and are unaffected by what you do or say or think. You have no worries, anxieties or cares, for you realize that there is nothing that belongs to you as ego and that everything is being done by something with which you are in conscious union (*Teachings*, 185).

This is an important passage for understanding Ramaṇa. He expressly says that while in *sahaja samādhi*, we may participate in activity. The emphasis in *sahaja samādhi* is on remaining calm and composed during that activity. This is an emphasis that is found in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. It describes the liberated being is detached and indifferent. The liberated person appears always the same: constant, equable, impartial and even-minded, calm in all states of awareness, unchanging in joy and despair, as one who has lost all desire and anger. These liberated beings wander the world with detached minds, whether they are rulers like Janaka or renouncers of the world. The reason for this detachment is to avoid any further *karma* accruing to one's actions. Because the *jīvanmukti* does not act out of desire, there is no action in the *karmic* sense—no action that brings fruit. Even while acting, the *jīvanmukti* is not a doer. Unliberated people often do not recognize the *jīvanmukti* as liberated, because of this apparent worldliness (See Fort, 87-88)

¹⁵⁷ Brunton reports that Ramaṇa says, “When mind subsides an unconscious ‘blank’ state is produced, a swoon or trance-like state. Although that is the natural state, a person who has not controlled the mind is dazed and merged in it.” (*Conscious Immortality* 35).

In his description of *sahaja samādhi* Ramaṇa also says that you realize that nothing belongs to you as ego (*Teachings*, 185). It is therefore a state beyond ego-consciousness. And on the same page, Ramaṇa says that one realizes that everything is being done “by something with which you are in conscious union.” Both of these ideas—liberation as a state beyond ego and as union with something beyond one’s ego—have already been referred to.

And yet, inconsistently, Ramaṇa sometimes refers positively to meditation, and even to states of trance. For example, Narasimha reports that Ramaṇa does analyze the concentration of the mind. He says that at the beginning, the *antahkarana*, often termed ‘the mind’ is used. It consists of *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahankara* (mind, intellect, desire and personality). The mind must be developed for concentration. The goal is to merge the personality of the meditator in the thought or the form concentrated on, like an arrowhead in its target (*Mundaka Upanishad*). Attention to breath may help, although Ramaṇa says not to waste much time and effort on that. Anything will do as object of meditation,

If a man has already started meditation on God Gaṇapati, Subrahmanya, Kali, Siva, Rama, Jesus, Buddha Pranava, Sakti *bijam*, *Panchakshari*, *Ashatakshari*, a lamp’s flame, his mother or his guru, Maharshi tells him to go on with that with full faith, as that will ultimately lead him to the goal. But to him who comes with what is practically a mental *tabula rasa* without any practice or predilections, he advises the adoption of his own method. Follow intently the quest “Who am I?” (Narasimha, 200).

Ramaṇa says that our self is not the mind:

Many conclude that it must be the mind. Yet we are not our thoughts. It is we who entertain the thoughts. Conclude thoughts are objects with which the Self, the subject, is sporting. But even the subject seems to be a thought. At first eliminate objective thoughts. What is the residuary subject, this stem, or root thought ‘I’ which is termed personality. “The final service of the intellect is to eliminate itself, saying “I too am only the instrument of the subject and am not the subject itself.” The pure self is not sensed by the intellect. Realization of this Self as pure bliss-consciousness-existence (*Saccidānanda*) can be understood only by actual experience (Narasimha, 202).

Chadwick reports:

Bhagavan told me that in the early stages a person who was regularly meditating would usually at first go into a trance which would probably last for some thirty minutes, and if he continued with this *Tapas* properly such *Samādhi* would become more frequent. So carried away by it would he be that he would be able to think of nothing but slipping away to some quiet corner to meditate undisturbed. He would lose all interest everything else until that time when he became established in the Self and no more meditation was necessary (Chadwick, 53).

Chadwick says that such a person had then attained *Sahaja Samādhi* or his natural state. Chadwick also says that for Ramaṇa, *Manolaya* is just a blank mind. But this can be attained every night in sleep (Chadwick, 54). Chadwick also seems to be of the view that for Ramaṇa, trance is not a necessary intermediate state before achieving *sahaja*. He says that in *savikalpa samādhi* one knows that one is meditating and can consciously continue in one's *sadhana*. This is distinguished from the state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* or trance. He says, "But Bhagavan attained *Sahaja Samādhi* directly without any intermediate state" (Chadwick, 55).

Ramaṇa also makes some ambivalent statements regarding the importance of regulation of the breath during meditation. He said that proximity to great ones helps one to attain breath regulation (Narasimha, 203). Some devotees of Ramaṇa say they very quickly attained an inward vision near him. Some devotees chose Ramaṇa as their object of contemplation. But Ramaṇa said to put aside even this form of meditation. One must "throw away the ladder" (Narasimha, 205). Yet Osborne affirms that Ramaṇa used breath control (*pranayama*) as an aid to concentration (*Path of Self-Knowledge*, 21). And Cohen reports Ramaṇa as saying that if one is not temperamentally suited to *vichāra*, then one must develop *bhakti* [devotion]. This will decrease attachments to other things. In the absence of *vichāra* and *bhakti*, control of breath (*pranayama*) may be tried. This is known as *yoga marga*. (*Reflections*, 133). And in *Talks*, Ramaṇa says,

Breath control may be an aid but can never lead to the goal itself. The I-thought will sink along with the breath (*Talks*, 313).

Breath control is appropriate for those without a guru (*Conscious Immortality*, 36). A *yogi* uses breath control, but a *jñāni* uses enquiry (*Day by Day*, 15).

Sometimes, Ramaṇa asked devotees to place his palm on his right breast, where they feel rhythm of the “heart” of which he speaks. Some devotees felt something like an electric shock (Narasimha, 206).

6. *Kundalini Yoga*

Positive statements

Kundalini yoga is also a *tantric* tradition. Ramaṇa was certainly aware of *Kundalini yoga*, since he makes mention of it. He says,

Different books and different schools have located the *kundalini* at different centres in the body. While the usual centre with which it is associated is *mūlādhāra*, there are books which locate it in the heart, and other books which locate it in the brain (*Day by Day*, 143 March 6/46R).

Chadwick once saw Ramaṇa giving instruction in yoga to a North Indian who was practising some form of *Kundalini Yoga*. The man complained that he could only bring force up to a certain *chakra*, where he got stuck. Ramaṇa explained yoga in detail (Chadwick 56-57). He says that the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* says that Kundalini is composed of 101 *nadis* or paths (*Talks*, 378).

Sometimes Ramaṇa says that *kundalini* is useful. *Kundalini* must be roused before realization (*Talks*, 358). *Kundalini Sakti* is another name for the ‘I-I,’ which also goes by the names of God, Self, Consciousness, Yoga, Bhakti, and Jñāna (*Talks*, 161). When the mind is traced to its source it is Kundalini (*Talks*, 80).

Ramaṇa speaks about “*Tantrik sadhana*,” and says that *Kundalini* brings about Self-Realisation (*Talks* 240).

And Ramaṇa says that everyone has the energy of *Kundalini*:

Ramaṇa: Who does not have *Kundalini Sakti*? When the real nature of that *Sakti* is known, it is called *Akhandakara Vritti* (Plenary consciousness) or *Aham Sphurana* (effulgence of ‘I’, ‘I’). *Kundalini Sakti* is there for all people whatever path they follow. It is only a difference in name (*Letters*, p. 373, Jan 18/49).

Rousing the *kundalini* energy has the same effect as realization.

The yogi may be definitely aiming at rousing the *kundalini* and sending it up the *sushumna*. The *jñāni* may not be having this as his object. But

both achieve the same result, that of sending up the Life-force up the *sushumna* and severing the *chit-jada granthi*. *Kundalini* is only another name for *atma* or Self or *sakti*. We talk of it as being inside the body, because we conceive ourselves as limited by this body. But it is in reality both inside and outside, being no other than Self or the sakti of Self (*Day by Day*, 14).

Negative Statements

In other places, he advises against *kundalini yoga*, or claims not to know much about it. He also said, “What do I know about those paths? Please ask those who know them well” (*Letters*, 373-374). All meditation, even meditation on the great sayings or *mahāvākyas* requires an object to meditate on, whereas in self-enquiry there is only the subject and no object.¹⁵⁸ The *chakras* are merely mental pictures and are meant for beginners in yoga (*CW*, 29). The *chakras* are for concentration purposes and are interpreted symbolically. The current of *kundalini* is ourselves (*Conscious Immortality*, 39).¹⁵⁹ He translated one of the *agamas*, which says not to waste time meditating on *chakras*, *nadis*, *padmas* or *mantras* of deities, or their forms (*CW* 173; Osb. 112).

Ramaṇa differentiates between the locations of the *chakras* and the seat of the self. The head, the place between the eyebrows, is not the seat of the Self (*Maharshi's Gospel*, 74). The undifferentiated consciousness of pure being is the heart or *hridayam*, our true self, as signified by the word itself (*Hrit + Ayam*= Heart am I). But the *anāhata chakra* lies behind the heart (*Talks*, 392). Ramaṇa told Nembiar that if heart center were really in the *anāhata chakra*, why not go directly to it instead of to the other centers (why meditate on the base of spine (*mūlādhāra*) or the tip of the nose or the space between the eyebrows). If you want to go to Tiruvannamalai from Madras, why go to Benares first? (Nembiar, 53).

He says this elsewhere, too:

¹⁵⁸ *The Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, p. 112. As we have seen, Ramaṇa was influenced in these ideas by the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*.

¹⁵⁹ A view later expressed by C.G. Jung. C.G. Jung: *the Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, ed. Sonu Shamdasini (Princeton, 1996).

The yogis think that after purifying 12,000 *nadis* in the body, *sushumna* is entered and the mind passes up to the *sahasrāra chakra*, where nectar flows. These are all mental concepts...The purpose of all these is to rid one of concepts—to make one remain as the pure Self, i.e. Absolute Consciousness, bereft of thoughts. Why not go straight to it? Why add new encumbrances to the ones that exist already? (*Conscious Immortality*, 34).

Ramaṇa distinguishes between his idea of the heart, and the idea of heart in *kundalini*, which is called *anāhata*. He tells Brunton:

The heart *chakra* of the yogis, called *anāhata*, is not the same as this Heart. If it were, why would they progress further onto *sahasrāra*? [...] *Atman* is the Heart itself. Manifestation is in the brain. “Yogis say the current rises up to the *sahasrāra* and ends there. That experience is not complete. For *jñāna* they must come to the Heart. The Heart is the alpha and the omega (*Conscious Immortality*, 38).¹⁶⁰

The heart is the seat of meditation. You see the body in the Heart, and the world in it (*Talks* 378). It is not sufficient to concentrate on the highest *chakra*, the *sahasrāra*. If only the *sahasrāra* is concentrated on, there is *samādhi*, but it is not permanent. The *sushumna* is a curve; it starts from solar plexus, rises through the spinal cord to the brain and from there it bends down and ends in the heart. When the yogi has reached the heart, the *samādhi* becomes permanent. Thus we see that the heart is the final centre (*Teachings*, 155). The *sushumna* with its source *kundalini* is included in the Heart (*Talks*, 262).

So this is an unusual teaching about *kundalini yoga*: there is not only an ascent that exits from the topmost *chakra*, but there is an ascent and then a descent back to the heart center (which is distinguished from the *anāhata* heart *chakra*). The final step (after attaining the *sahasrāra chakra*) is to come down to the Heart (*Talks*, 450). He says that when the real nature of *Kundalini Sakti* is known, it is called *Akhandardara Vritti* (Plenary consciousness) or *Aham Spuhurana* (effulgence of the ‘I’). It is there for all people to realize, whatever path they follow (*Letters*, 373)

¹⁶⁰ The use of the phrase ‘alpha and omega’ is of course a Christian reference from the Bible.

In other words, Ramaṇa believes that his idea of the heart-centre is more central and more encompassing than the idea in *Kundalini yoga*. The entire universe is in the body and the whole body is in the Heart. Hence the universe is contained within the Heart (Ramaṇa Gītā, 54). In fact, the symbols of *kundalini yoga* are just for purposes of concentration:

The *chakras* are for concentration purposes and are interpreted symbolically. The current of *kundalini* is ourselves [...]. Mind is the real *kundalini*. The representation of *kundalini* as a serpent is merely to assist duller minds. The forms of representation of the chakras are also illusory. (p. 39).

Kundalini is just one name given for what is encountered by other paths:

Both the yogi and the jñāni achieve the same result of sending the life-force up the sushumna nadi severing the chit-jada granthi. Kundalini is only another name for atman or Self or sakti. We talk of it as being inside the body, because we conceive ourselves as limited by this body. But it is in reality both inside and outside, being no other than Self or the *sakti* of Self (*Day by Day*, 14, Aug 14/45).

and

Kundalini is one name given by the *yogic* people for what may be called the *atma sakti* inside the body. The *vichāra* school calls the same power *jñāna*. The *bhakta* calls it love or *bhakti*. The *yogic* school says that this power is dormant in *mūlādhāra* at the base of the spinal cord and that it must be roused and taken through the various *chakras* on to *sahasrāra* at the top, in the brain, to attain moksha. The *jñānis* think this power is centred in the heart, and so on (*Day by Day*, 32, Nov. 11/45).

The seeker's aim must be to drain away the *vāsanās* from the heart. This is done by the search for the origin of the ego and by diving into the heart. It is the direct method for Self-Realisation; you don't have to worry about Kundalini (*Talks*, 576). The light of consciousness flows from the Heart through *sushumna* channel to *sahasrāra* (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 50).

The blaze of light that is experienced is when the mental predispositions have not yet been destroyed. Mere yogic ecstasy is not enough. (*Talks*, 167).

If one concentrates on the *sahasrāra* there is no doubt that the ecstasy of *samādhi* ensues. The *vāsanās*, that is the latencies, are not however destroyed. The yogi is there found to wake up from the *samādhi*, because release from bondage has not yet been accomplished. So he passes down

from the *sahasrāra* to the heart through what is called the *jivanadi*, which is only a continuation of the *sushumna*. The *sushumna* is thus a curve. It starts from the solar plexus, rises through the spinal cord to the brain and from there bends down and ends in the heart. When the yogi has reached the heart, the *samādhi* becomes permanent. Thus we see that the heart is the final centre (*Talks*, 575).

It is not the experience of the *sahasrāra* that is the key experience, but rather the experience is in the Heart. The path of the energy of *śakti* is up the pathway of the *sushumna* and then down again to the heart. In the Heart the aim is to drain away the *vāsanās*. It is by “diving into the heart” that one searches for the origin of the ego. This is the direct method of self-enquiry (*vichāra*) for Self-Realization; you do not have to worry about attaining the *kundalini* experience.¹⁶¹ The method of Self-inquiry is sufficient. It opens a tiny hole in the Heart, with the result that I-I consciousness shines forth (*Talks*, 201).

In this experience of the Heart, one experiences the true relation between the Self and the body or the mind. One must give up one’s mistaken identity with the changeful body or the mind. The body and the mind obtain their existence from the unchanging Self. Ramaṇa compares the relation between the Self and the body or the mind to that of a clear crystal and its background. If the crystal is placed against a red flower, it shines red; if placed against a green leaf it shines green, and so on. When one’s mistaken identity is given up, the ever-shining Self will be seen to be the single non-dual Reality (*Talks*, 576).

The emphasis in this experience of the Heart is therefore on seeing the Self or *Brahman* within everything. It is a kind of perception. Seeing *Brahman* means that it has content and is therefore different from Pure Consciousness or the state reached by yoga. Yoga is only preliminary to the real awakening the experience of the heart.

¹⁶¹ *Talks*, 576. Loy says that Shankara was also of the view that there is no necessity for yogic practice except for those of “inferior intellect.” See *Nonduality*, 239.

7. The *samādhi* for Ramaṇa's mother

As already discussed, when Ramaṇa's mother died, there was an issue as to how she should be buried. And as we have seen, Gaṇapati Muni reminded Ramaṇa of his answer in 1917 to the question whether a woman-saint should be buried. They therefore decided to bury her body (Narasimha, 132). It is not clear why no one remembered the poem that Ramaṇa had composed in 1914 when his mother was ill with typhoid, and where he says, "What need for burial?" It raises the issue of whether that poem was in fact composed before her death.

Sastri says that the idea behind the *samādhi* of Ramaṇa's mother was that it was to be a centre of Spiritual Force.

The Maharshi said as much and would not have come down the hill and stayed where he has been staying and did not intend it to be so. That is why he took such keen interest in the construction of the temple and in the *Sri Chakra*, which he specially asked me to see when I had been there in 1941... (Sastri, 84).

It was believed that the principle of female Energy, *shakti*, was required to extend and spread Ramaṇa's influence and that this energy was supplied by his mother after her *samādhi* (Sastri 30). Sastri says she took the place of the Madonna in the *ashram* where the Lingam Matr bhuteswara (the Lord who has taken her into Himself) is offered daily worship.

In 1941, Ramaṇa's brother, the *sarvadhikari* of the *ashram*, took Sastri to his office, where he took out a solid gold plate, a few inches square, with a diagram of a *Sri Chakra*. There were two other plates, one with letters inscribed in the diagram; *Subrahmanya Yantra*. He took Sastri to another hut where he was shown *meru* in solid rock (*śilā*) (Sastri 49).

Ramaṇa took a personal interest in the cutting of the granite *Sri Chakra Meru* that was installed in the completed temple for his mother. It is about one and a half feet square and about the same height. At the time of the *Kumbabhishekam*, on the penultimate night before the sacred water was poured over the images, Ramaṇa personally superintended the installation in the inner shrine of his mother's *samādhi*. Although it was very hot that night, Ramaṇa sat there for about an hour and a half, instructing the workmen.

Chadwick reports on the final ceremony of installation of the *chakra*:

On the last night of the function he went in procession, opening the doors of the new Hall and temple and passing straight up into the Inner Shrine, where he stood for some five minutes with both hands laid on the Sri Chakra in blessing. I happened that night to be at his side the whole time; this was unusual as I deliberately avoided taking prominent part in such things, preferring to watch from the back. Strangely, something made me keep by him on this occasion and on account of this I was able to understand his deep interest in the Temple especially in the *Sri Chakra*. It was because of this knowledge that I was instrumental after Bhagavan's passing, in persuading the *Ashram* authorities to institute the Sri Chakra Poojas six times a month (Chadwick, 60).

Years later, in 1949, Ramaṇa was performing *puja* before the *chakra* when his brother called Ramaṇa to join the meal (the others could not eat until Ramaṇa came). Ramaṇa was angry at being called away (Nembiar, 56).

8. Siddhis or occult powers

Tantra emphasizes the gaining of special powers or *siddhis*. Ramaṇa himself was reputed to have some of these powers, such as the ability to manifest himself at a distance. Or the ability of *ashtavadhana*, giving attention to a number of different things at the same time (Osborne, *Path of Self-Knowledge*, 94).

And yet Ramaṇa repeatedly insisted that the *siddhis* were not worth attaining, and that they were in fact a distraction from realization of the Self.¹⁶² He said that sights (photisms) and sounds are not that important. They are subjective like other phenomena, even if more glorious. They can hinder the pursuit of the Self. *Siddhi* experiences are unreal, and fan the ego. The only true *siddhi* is Self-abidance. We should not have a craving for *siddhis* (*More Talks*, 68).

...meditation on the Self is the straight, short and direct path, which does not concern itself with planes and degrees (*Conscious Immortality*, 45)

Jñānis who had *siddhis* before *jñāna* preserve them after merging with the Absolute. *Siddhis* are acquired by *prarabdha* karma and are not a

¹⁶² See my extended discussion of this in “Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi,” online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/Brunton.html>].

hindrance in *Mukti*. They are a hindrance on the way to *Mukti* (Cohen, *Guru Ramaṇa*, 99).

Miracles, clairvoyance, clairaudience are sidetracks (*Conscious Immortality*, 39).

When asked whether Vasishta and Valmiki possessed *siddhis*, he replied,

That might have been their fate. But don't aim at that which is not essential but apt to prove a hindrance to wisdom (*Talks*, 36).

Ramaṇa was not at all interested in these powers, and made statements like, "To have powers there must be others to whom to display them; therefore the wise man does not give them a thought," or: "Even if powers come spontaneously they should be rejected. They are like ropes to tether a beast; sooner or later they drag a man back from his pursuit of *Moksha* (Liberation)."

9. Beyond thought

There is an inconsistency in Ramaṇa as to whether or not we can continue thinking after liberation.

On the one hand, he says there is an annihilation of mind, a state of no-mind where one is not aware of any others (*Talks*, 552). This acosmic state is related to a monistic view of reality. In this viewpoint, the world of *māyā* is not given much (if any) reality. Ramaṇa sometimes says that the phenomenal world is nothing but thought. When the world recedes from one's view—that is, when one is free from thought—the mind enjoys the Bliss of the Self. Conversely, when the world appears—that is, when thought occurs—the mind experiences pain and anguish (Osborne, 46). This idealist, acosmic, and monistic view appears to be related to an emphasis on the state of "Pure Consciousness." From this perspective, thinking is the original sin (*Erase the Ego*, 32). The emanating ray converges in the self. Then there is no mind at all (Shankaranarayanan, 51).

Already in 1908, V. Ramaswamy Iyer reported that Ramaṇa said that the most important way to improve the brain is to stop thinking (Narasimha, 99). Ramaṇa said the mind was like a monkey, never still for one second. But "make an effort to be without effort." (Chadwick 63). And sometimes, Ramaṇa takes a Buddhist view. He says, "*Nirvana* is perfection, neither subject nor object; nothing to see, feel, know" (*Talks*, 381).

But elsewhere, Ramaṇa rejects the idea of “killing the mind.” And Ramaṇa seems to speak not of ceasing thought, but of going beyond it. Chadwick reports the importance of going beyond thought:

Bhagavan once told me that thought comes in flashes, no thought was continuous. It was like the cycle of an alternating current, but was so rapid that it seemed continuous as does the light given off by an electric bulb. If one could concentrate on the intervals between thoughts rather than on the thoughts themselves that would be Self-realization.” “The mind is nothing but a lot of thoughts. *Upad. Saram* V.18 (Chadwick, 43).

David Loy describes this not as a rejection of thinking altogether, but as a kind of nondual thinking. Nondual thinking is that it is when there is no sense of “I” while thinking. Loy says that nondual thought is when thinking is unsupported, without a thinker. For someone liberated, thoughts still arise, but there is no clinging to them, no linking in a series. You negate the thinker distinct from the thought (*Nonduality*, 135). He refers to Ramaṇa’s idea of letting thoughts arise without lining them up in a series:

The ego in its purity is experienced in the interval between two states or between two thoughts. The ego is like the worm which leaves one hold only after it catches another. Its true nature is known when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts. You should realize this interval as the abiding, unchangeable Reality, your true Being.¹⁶³

Ramaṇa says that, although other people see the *jīvanmukta* acting in the world, the *jīvanmukta* is not conscious of this:

Like a passenger asleep in a carriage, a *jñāni* in *sahaja samādhi* is unaware of the happening, waking, dream and deep sleep. In *kevala samādhi*, the activities (vital and mental), waking, dream and sleep, are only merged, ready to emerge after regaining the state other than *samādhi*. In *sahaja samādhi* the activities, vital and mental, and the three states are

¹⁶³ *Erase the Ego*, 28. Ramaṇa acknowledges that this image is taken from the *Tripura Rahasya* (*Talks*, 276). See Chapter 17: 12-14 of the *Tripura Rahasya*:

There are also intervals of *Samādhi*, namely the interim period between the waking, dream and sleep states; at the time of sighting a distant object, the mind holding the body at one end projects itself into space until it holds the object at the other end, just as a worm prolongs itself at the time of leaving one hold to catch another hold. Carefully watch the state of mind in the interval.

destroyed, never to reappear. However, others notice the *jñāni* active e.g. eating, talking, moving etc. He is not himself aware of these activities, whereas others are aware of his activities. They pertain to his body and not to his Real Self, *swarupa*. For himself, he is like the sleeping passenger—or like a child interrupted from sound sleep and fed, being unaware of it (*Talks*, 84).

Sahaja samādhi is like being asleep in the waking state (*jagrat sushupti*) (*Talks*, 339). In *sahaja*, the mind has resolved itself into the Self and has been lost. Differences and obstructions therefore do not exist. The activities of such a being are like the feeding of a boy who has just been awakened, perceptible to the onlooker, but the boy is unaware of being fed. Similarly the *sahaja jñāni* remains unaware of his bodily activities because his mind is dead—having been resolved in the ecstasy of *Chid Ananda* (Self).

This explanation of *jīvanmukti* tends towards a monistic view of Self. It devalues the world and the nondual perception of that world. An extreme example of this is Ramaṇa’s statement that there is no such thing as the physical world apart from thought (As translated by Osborne, Osb. 40).

But was Ramaṇa truly unaware of objects in the world? He certainly seemed to be aware of those people who asked him questions. He also participated in some activities, such as preparing food in the kitchen, and reading newspapers and correspondence. One early disciple commented on the fact that the exterior world was in fact of interest to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa was the most normal person he had ever found. He was able to think and to reason in response to questions. Even when he sat seemingly utterly absorbed in Self, he would become alert if someone nearby mispronounced a word in reciting a verse. He listened and corrected errors, and sometimes he explained the meaning of books like the *Ribhu Gītā*. He read for two or more hours, sometimes a whole night. He said, “These readings from *Ribhu Gītā* are as good as *samādhi*.” (Narasimha, 207-208).

It therefore cannot be said that Ramaṇa’s mind was dead in the sense of “pure consciousness.” His mind was functioning, but as a *jīvanmukti*, “as one who is wholly

awake but at the same time free of characteristics of the state of wakening, and free of all desire and of a sense of separate ego” [*Vivekacūdāmani* v. 429]¹⁶⁴

Abhishiktānanda comments on the difficulty of understanding what Ramaṇa’s consciousness as a *jīvanmukta* was like:

They say that for him who is no longer aware of *śariram* [the body], all is clear. But what exactly does that mean? Ramaṇa for example, took his meals, was *interested* in food, its preparation, etc. I am afraid that the *idea* that we make for ourselves of this (experience of) non-awareness is false. (...) it is only ignorance that sees a difference between the *jīvan-mukta* and the *other*. I think that this duality which we assert between *advaita* and *dvaita* is precisely our mistake.¹⁶⁵

This viewpoint, of being able to participate in the world as a *jīvanmukta*, but participating from a standpoint beyond ego, relies on *tantric* ideas of the relative reality of the world. “The world is not real apart from the reality which underlies it.” (*Reflections*, 63). And this is also found in Ramaṇa’s translation of the *Atma Sakshatkara* (verse 11):

Whatever is seen or heard of in the Universe, both within and without, is permeated by me (Os. 107; Cf. *CW* 161).

C. Ramaṇa and Christianity

We have seen that the first biography of Ramaṇa, by Narasimha Swami, contained many Biblical quotations and comparisons of Ramaṇa to Christ. The Western and specifically Christian influence here is obvious.

Lakshmana Sarma also refers to many Christian sources in his book *Maha Yoga*:

Jesus told his disciples: Be ye perfect even as thy Father in Heaven is perfect (*Maha Yoga*, 3).

Sarma says that this refers to being a sage, not a saint. He refers to Jesus’ saying, “Ask, and it shall be given; knock and It shall be opened” (*Maha Yoga*, 6). And to the saying “know the Truth and let it make you free” (*Maha Yoga* 22, fn).

¹⁶⁴ Swami Siddheswarananda in *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert (Dervy, 1972), 181-182.

¹⁶⁵ Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Swami Abhishiktānanda: His life told through his letters*, ed. James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995) 293 (MC 12.4.73).

And we have also seen how some people like Abhishiktānanda have interpreted Ramaṇa in Christian terms.

But it is not only these people who have used Biblical references in relation to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa himself quoted the Bible. Ramaṇa went to a Christian school as a boy, so that is where he learned about Christianity. He interpreted his pivotal experience at the age of 16 in terms of his “Father in Heaven.” Humphreys reported in 1911 that Ramaṇa was “well acquainted with Christian History and Bible Times” (*Glimpses*, 28). In his discussions, Ramaṇa makes frequent quotations and ideas from the Bible, especially the following:

1. “I am that I am”

Be still, do not think, and know that I AM (*Conscious Immortality*, 49).

Know the Self, and God is known. Of all the definitions of God, none is so well put as the Biblical “I am that I AM” in the book of Exodus. (*Conscious Immortality*, 159)

God says “I AM before Abraham.” He does not say “I was” but “I Am” (*Talks*, 408).

Your duty is TO BE and not, to be this or that. “I AM THAT I AM” sums up the whole truth: the method is summarized in ‘BE STILL’ (*Maharshi’s Gospel*, 33)

The Christ also declared that He was even before Abraham (*Talks*, 127, para. 145; said to Brunton).

The Hebrew Jehovah=I am expresses God correctly (*Talks*, 106).

TO BE is to realise—hence I AM THAT I AM, I AM is Siva (*Reflections*, 101).

The Cosmic Mind, being not limited by the ego, has nothing separate from itself and is therefore only *aware*. This is what the Bible means by ‘I am that I am’ (*Reflections*, 111).

Christ also said that he was before Abraham (*Teachings*, 28).

“I am that I AM” and “Be still and know that I am God.” (*Talks*, 307).

Of all the definitions of “God, none is indeed so well put as the Biblical statement” I AM THAT I AM in Exodus (Cap. 3). There are other statements, such as *Brahmaivaham*, *Aham Brahmasmi* and *Soham*. But

none is so direct as the name JEHOVAH=I AM. The Absolute Being is *what* is–It is the Self. It is God. Knowing the Self, God is known. In fact God is none other than the Self.” (*Talks*, 103)

The ‘I’ thought is the ego and that is lost. The real ‘I’ is ‘I am that I am.’ (*Teachings*, 58; *Talks*, 164).

TO BE is to realise hence I AM THAT I AM, I AM is Siva (*Reflections*, 101).

The Cosmic Mind, being not limited by the ego, has nothing separate from itself and is therefore only aware. This is what the Bible means by ‘I am that I am’ (*Reflections*, 111).

Of all the definitions of God, none is so well put as the Biblical ‘I am that I AM’ in the book of Exodus (*Conscious Immortality*, 159).

An entire article on ‘I Am’ has since appeared in the journal for Ramaṇa’s *ashram*, *The Mountain Path*.¹⁶⁶ It collects all the ‘I am’ statements of Jesus. The article specifically refers to Abhishiktānanda, and cites some of his letters.

Ramaṇa had a discussion with the sage Yogananda about the nature of the Self. It is interesting that Ramaṇa refers to the Self as one’s Being, and then refers to the Biblical definition of God in Exodus: “I am that I am.” Ramaṇa also says that if we search for the source of the ego, then Bliss is revealed (*Talks* 102).

Ramaṇa compares the name of Yahweh to the *advaitic* experience. He says that the Hebrew ‘Jehovah’ is equivalent to ‘I am’, and that it expresses God correctly.¹⁶⁷ Lakshmana Sarma (one of Ramaṇa’s early disciples) refers to Ramaṇa’s statements about I AM THAT I AM.¹⁶⁸ He also uses Jesus’ statement “My father and I are One” to

¹⁶⁶ David Godman: “I AM—the First Name of God”, *The Mountain Path* 1992 29/3-4, pp. 126-142. For another recent article on this topic see Seiichi Yagi, “I in the Words of Jesus,” *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), pp. 117ff.

¹⁶⁷ *Talks* 102, 106, 110, 140, 155, 323, 401, 424, 487, and 556.

¹⁶⁸ Sarma K. Lakshman: “La Recherche,” *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert, 120. As discussed, this appears to be the same individual who wrote *Maha Yoga*, K. Lakshmana Sarma.

describe Ramaṇa's own enlightenment. He says that Ramaṇa became a "perfect sage" when he realized that he and Arunāchala, whom he called his Father, were one.¹⁶⁹

We find similar emphases on the 'I am' experience in other writers dealing with comparative mysticism. Rudolf Otto comments on Eckhart's use of the verse "I am that I am", and compares this to Shankara.¹⁷⁰ D.T. Suzuki says that all our religious or spiritual experiences start from the name of God given to Moses, "I am that I am." He says this is the same as Christ's saying, "I am."¹⁷¹

2. "Be still and know that I am God."

A certain Christian asked Ramaṇa for advice. Ramaṇa told him to follow his words and practice:

Be still. Be without the disturbance of your mind. Mind only disturbs your natural stillness. Stillness is your nature. (More Talks p. 77 (18.12.44))

"Be still and know that I am God." Here stillness is total surrender without a vestige of individuality. Stillness will prevail and there will be no agitation of mind. [...] "I am that I am." "*I am*" is god—not thinking, "I am God." Realise "*I am*" and do not think *I am*. "Know I am God"—it is said, and not "Think I am God." (*Talks* 322-23).

The experience of '*I am*' is to *Be Still* (*Talks*, 187).

The whole *Vedānta* is contained in the two Biblical statements: "I am that I AM" and "Be still and know that I am God" (*Talks*, 307).

All that is required to realize the Self is to "Be Still." (*Talks*, 345).

Be still and know that I AM GOD. "Stillness" here means "Being free from thoughts." (*Talks*, 458).

The only permanent thing is Reality; and *that* is the Self. You say, "I am," "I am going," "I am speaking," "I am working," etc. Hyphenate "I am" in all of them. Thus *I-AM*, *That* is the abiding and fundamental Reality. This truth was taught by God to Moses: "I AM that I-AM." "Be still and know that I-AM God." So "I-AM" is God. (*Talks*, 487).

¹⁶⁹ Sarma K. Lakshman, "Le Sage d' Arunāchala," *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, 44, 43.

¹⁷⁰ Rudolf Otto: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970, first published 1932), 27.

¹⁷¹ D.T. Suzuki: *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhism* (Harper, 1971), 126.

We learn that the thoughts in the waking state form the obstacle to gaining the stillness of sleep. “Be still and know that I AM God.” (*Talks*, 563).

Be still and know that I am God (*Erase the Ego*, 24).

The Bible says, “Be Still and Know that I am God” (*Reflections*, 168).

Be still, do not think, and know that I AM” (*Conscious Immortality*, 49).

The Bible says, Be still and Know that I am God. (*Reflections*, 168).

G.V. Subbaramayya reports that at Christmas, 1936, he attended Sri Bhagavan's Jayanti celebration for the first time.

Many Western visitors had come. One of them, Mr. Maurice Frydman, a Polish Jew of subtle intellect, plied Sri Bhagavan with ingenious pleas for practical guidance for Self-realization. Sri Bhagavan followed his arguments with keen interest but kept silent all the time. When pressed to say something, Sri Bhagavan only quoted from the Bible, “Be still and know that I am God,” and added “The Lord said ‘know’ and not, ‘think’ that I am God.” We understood Sri Bhagavan as meaning that all these arguments were spun by the intellect, the stilling of which was the only way to Realisation.¹⁷²

3. “The Kingdom of God is within you.”

Ramaṇa frequently refers to this saying of Christ:

The Kingdom of God is within you (*Chadwick*, 70).

The Kingdom of Heaven is within you (*Reflections*, 82).

The Kingdom of Heaven is within you (*Conscious Immortality*, 122).

Christ told the simple truth: “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” (*Talks*, 92).

Sarma refers to the saying in several places, too. He says that the reference to the kingdom within you is the egoless state, the heart (*Maha Yoga*, 114 fn and 129).

¹⁷² G.V. Subbaramayya: In *The Maharshi*, Sept/Oct 1997, Vol. 7, NO. 5 at [<http://www.sentient.org/maharshi/janfeb92.htm>].

4. Sons of God

Ramaṇa understood the meaning of the phrase ‘Son of God’ as that Jesus rose after being crucified and went to heaven:

The body is the cross; the sense of its self-hood is named Jesus; his attainment of the State of the Real Self by the extinction of that sense is the resurrection (*Guru-Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mala*, 18).

H says that all who have won this state are Sons of God.

5. Christ

Ramaṇa had considerable knowledge of Christ and his teachings. But Ramaṇa interprets Christ’s sayings in Hindu terms and experience. For example, he interprets Christ as referring to reincarnation and previous births.¹⁷³ He refers to Christ’s saying that he was before Abraham (*Teachings*, 28). Ramaṇa makes a similar reference in *Talks*, 127. Christ also declared he was before Abraham. Ramaṇa sees this in terms of Christ having many incarnations. He compares this to Krishna conforming to the outlook of Arjuna. Jesus says he had taught the truth to Abraham. Ramaṇa sees this as evidence that there is no contradiction between not having a selfhood, and having previous births (*Conscious Immortality*, 53).

For Ramaṇa, Christ-consciousness and Self-Realisation are all the same.

The body is the cross. Jesus, the son of man, is the ego or 'I-am-the-body'-idea. When the son of man is crucified on the cross, the ego perishes, and what survives is the Absolute Being. It is the resurrection of the Glorious Self, of the Christ, the Son of God (*Maharshi’s Gospel*, 29).

Ramaṇa was asked, “But how is crucifixion justified? Is not killing a terrible crime?” His response was,

Everyone is committing suicide. The eternal, blissful, natural State has been smothered by this ignorant life. In this way the present life is due to

¹⁷³ Ramaṇa’s own idea of reincarnation seems to be that the real Self is continuous and unaffected. the reincarnating ego belongs to a lower plane, that of thought. It is transcended by self-realization (*Teachings*, 31). This seems to be opposed to the Buddhist view that there is no continuous entity answering to the idea of the individual soul.

the killing of the eternal, positive Existence. Is it not really a case of suicide? So, why worry about killing, etc.? (*Maharshi's Gospel* 29)

The first question that Major Chadwick asked Ramaṇa was why Jesus called out ‘My God, My God’ while being crucified. Ramaṇa’s answer was,

It might have been an intercession on behalf of the two thieves who were crucified with Him (Chadwick, 21).

Similarly, he gives the “inner meaning” of the Biblical narrative that Jesus rose up after being crucified and went to heaven:

The body is the cross; the sense of its self-hood is named Jesus; his attainment of the State of the Real Self by the extinction of that sense is the resurrection.

All those men that have won this State are (alike) Sons of God, since they have overcome *māyā*; they are worthy of being adored.” (Sarma, *Guru Ramaṇa*, 18).

And Ramaṇa says that if the ego is killed the eternal Self is revealed in all its glory:

Jesus the Son of Man is the ego, or the ‘I am the body’ idea. When he is crucified he is resurrected, a glorious Self, Jesus, the Son of God!” “Give up this life if thou wouldst live.” Matt. 10:39 (*Conscious Immortality*, 88).

Christ is the ego. The Cross is the Body. When the ego is crucified, and it perishes, what survives is the Absolute Being (God), (cf. “I and my Father are one”) and this glorious survival is called Resurrection (*Talks*, 86).

Many of those who sought advice from Ramaṇa also had knowledge of Christ. In 1908, V. Ramaswamy Iyer: his question to Ramaṇa was, “Sir, Jesus and other great souls came into the world to redeem sinners. Is there no hope for me?” Ramaṇa replied in English that there was hope (Narasimha, 96).

He was asked regarding the “lost soul” spoken of by Jesus. Ramaṇa replied, “There is nothing to be lost except that which is acquired. The Self can never be lost” (*Talks*, 18).

Evans-Wentz asked Ramaṇa whether Jesus was a Perfect Being possessing occult powers (*siddhis*). Ramaṇa replied that Jesus could not have been aware of his powers.

Ramaṇa relates a strange story (not found in the Bible), of a man cured of his blindness by Jesus. Jesus later met him and asked him why he had become wicked. The man said

that when he was blind, he could not commit sin, but since Jesus had cured him, he grew wicked and Jesus was responsible for his wickedness (*Talks*, 17)

6. Is God personal?

One of Brunton's criticisms of Ramaṇa was that Ramaṇa did not believe in a personal God. And yet there are statements where Ramaṇa says the opposite. Ramaṇa responds to the question, "Is God personal?" as follows:

M. Yes, He is always the first person, the I, ever standing before you. Because you give precedence to worldly things, God appears to have receded to the background. If you give up all else and seek Him alone, He alone will remain as the I, the Self (*Maharshi's Gospel*, 55).

But other statements indicate a God far removed from our personal concerns:

God has no purpose. He is not bound by any action. The world's activities cannot affect him. (Osborne, *Path of Self-Knowledge*, 87, in answer to question is not this world the result of God's will?)

7. Other statements by Ramaṇa about Christianity

Ramaṇa criticized some Christians for clinging to the idea of a permanently real and separate ego, although he says that the greatest mystics did not do so (Osborne, *Path of Self-Knowledge*, 46). With respect to the mystics, he responds to a question about the Christian mystic St. Theresa (*Conscious Immortality*, 43). Ramaṇa also refers to St. Paul. He said that Paul was always thinking about Christ and the Christians, so when he returned to self-consciousness after his experience, he identified his realization with this predominant thought. Ramaṇa referred to Ravana as an example. He hated Rama, and never ceased to think of him, but in dying, Rama was the uppermost thought in his mind and so he realized God. "Not a question of love or hate, just what is in the mind." (Chadwick 24).

Ramaṇa refers to the Christian idea of prayer. He says that Western thinkers pray to God and finish with "Thy Will be done!" He comments that it is better to remain silent:

If His Will be done why do they pray at all? It is true that the Divine Will prevails at all times and under all circumstances. The individuals cannot act of their own accord. Recognise the force of the Divine Will and keep quiet (*Talks*, 546).

Even Ramaṇa's words to his disciples are similar to what is recorded of Jesus' words to his disciples, "Lo I am with you always" (Matt. 28:20):

Bhagavan is always with you, in you and you are yourself Bhagavān.¹⁷⁴

V. The Influence of Gaṇapati Muni (Gaṇapati Sastri)

We will now look in more detail at the important influence of Ramaṇa's first disciple, Gaṇapati Muni, and his own disciple T.V.K. Kapili.

A. Gaṇapati Muni (1878-1936)

Gaṇapati Muni is also known as Gaṇapati Sastri. He is also sometimes known by his title Kavya Kantha (Narasimha, 86). I will refer to him as 'Gaṇapati Muni' or 'Muni' so that we may distinguish him from his own disciple, T.V. Kapali Sastri.

Muni was enormously influential for the development of Ramaṇa's ideas. Narasimha says that Ramaṇa always consulted him on matters of importance (Narasimha 93). And Narasimhayya says that Muni's teaching did not differ from Ramaṇa's (*Glimpses* p. 9). That may be so, but Muni's teaching was obviously influenced by *tantra*, by neo-Hinduism, and by Blavatsky's theosophical ideas. If his teaching did not differ from Ramaṇa's, that raises the question to what extent Ramaṇa's own teaching bears the same influences.

1. Muni and Ramaṇa

Like the biographies of Ramaṇa, much of what is said about Muni is hagiographic. Again, I summarize this information from the sources indicated.

In 1903, Muni stayed for a year in Tiruvannamalai. He visited Ramaṇa twice that year; Ramaṇa was then known as 'Brahmanswami.' Muni applied a famous verse (a *stotra* originally applied to Vinayaka) to Ramaṇa, portraying Ramaṇa as all-pervading, like

¹⁷⁴ Cited by Ramaṇanda Swarnagiri in Jean Herbert: *Etudes sur Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940), 213.

Divinity. He stated that Ramaṇa could remove obstacles from the devotee's path.¹⁷⁵ He composed a thousand verses to Siva and read them in the temple at the Kartikai festival in 1904. Then he left Tiruvannamalai to teach school in Vellore. Muni believed that he and his students could develop *śakti* (spiritual energy) by reciting *mantras*.

In November 1907, Muni returned to see Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa remembered the previous visit and Muni's application of the verse to him. Muni grasped Ramaṇa's right foot with his right hand and left foot with his left hand. By that time, Muni had made a dozen trips to various parts of India, performing *tapas* or austerities. He hoped in this way to make Siva appear before him and grant him favours. Muni told Ramaṇa that he had read everything there was to read, that he had performed *japa*, and that he had not understood what *tapas* was. Ramaṇa replied that if one observes the source where the notion 'I' arises, and the source where the *mantra* is produced, and if the mind is absorbed into that source, that is *tapas*. Thus, it is sufficient to seek the Self; *mantras* are not needed. Muni should throw his burden on the Lord (*Īśvara*).

After receiving Ramaṇa's answer, Muni immediately composed five verses in praise of Ramaṇa, shortening Venkatarama's name to Ramaṇa; this had also been what Ramaṇa had been called as a boy. The next day, Muni wrote a letter to his disciples, mentioning this instruction (*upadesa*) and saying that Ramaṇa must from then on be known as 'Maharshi.'

Muni considered that Ramaṇa's instruction had been the result of Mother *Sakti's* grace (*anugraha*). So we already see the influence of Muni's *tantra*. Muni composed a poem of one thousand stanzas in praise of Mother *Sakti*. He called it *Umasahasra*. It was completed in three weeks, and was dictated to four people simultaneously. I discuss this poem in more detail below.

From January to March, Ramaṇa and Muni spent three months at Pachaiamm Koil with many others. Muni says that at one time he saw a sparkling light come down and touch the forehead of Ramaṇa six times. He realized that Ramaṇa was an incarnation of Lord

¹⁷⁵ S. Shankaranarayanan: *Bhagavan and Nayana* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1983), 3 ['Shankaranarayanan'].

Subrahmanya. He referred to Ramaṇa as “the *Guha* residing in the *hṛdaya*, or *guha*, the heart-cavern of all beings” (Shankaranarayanan 13). Thus, Ramaṇa’s very important idea of the cave of the heart appears to have first been emphasized by Muni. It is also found in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. Gaṇapati Muni was himself aware of the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, since he intensively studied the writings of Vyasa and Valmiki (Shankaranarayanan 89). Later, in 1915, Ramaṇa’s first verse in Sanskrit referred to the heart, “*hṛdaya kuharamadhye*.” This was considered the nutshell, the essence of Ramaṇa’s teaching.¹⁷⁶ It therefore seems that Muni was influential in how Ramaṇa formulated his teaching.

Muni also composed some verses in praise of Ramaṇa.¹⁷⁷ There was also some praise for himself in this. Muni referred to himself and to Ramaṇa as being “Sons of God.” Shankaranarayanan gives the following hagiographic commentary:

All the discerning devotees realized that the Muni and the Maharshi were the emanations of Gaṇapati and Skanda, the sons of God who had appeared on earth to restore back the children of Man to their Eternal Father.

The two Sons of God who came down from the Celestial regions for the same purpose—how different they looked in outward activity! The maharshi was silent, indrawn most of the time, a waveless ocean of deep bliss. The Muni, on the other hand, was all expression sparkling with an ethereal splendour, a diamond reflecting the myriad colours that fuse into the white Radiance. The maharshi would stay still, but the Muni had to wander from place to place (Shankaranarayanan 13),

Muni and his disciples then went to the temple dedicated to the Goddess Tripurasundarī, in Tiruvottyur. It was here that Muni met for the first time his own disciple T.V. Kapali Sastri (see below). While meditating in the temple, Muni had a vision of Ramaṇa. And Shankaranarayanan says that Ramaṇa, while sitting in the cave at Virupaksha, travelled to meet Muni in Tiruvottiyur:

He [Ramaṇa] experienced that from his heart a ray of light rose and darted though his head outside. Along with it the maharshi went up the sky and was travelling on the path of the luminaries. He heard from somewhere the

¹⁷⁶ It is found in Chapter 2 of the *Ramaṇa Gītā*.

¹⁷⁷ These 8 verses were later included in *Forty Verses in praise of Sri Ramaṇa* (Shankaranarayanan 13 fn1).

word Tiruvottiyur and came down. He walked up the road in front of him, saw the Ganesha temple and entered it (Shankaranarayanan 15).

We can see that Muni's disciples believed that there was a very close connection between Ramaṇa and Muni.

Muni visited Ramaṇa frequently. In 1913 and 1917 he asked Ramaṇa various questions. He put these questions and answers in verse form in the *Ramaṇa Gītā*. It was modeled on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, with 18 chapters (see below). To what extent was Muni influencing the teachings of Ramaṇa by re-writing them in this way?

Thirteen years after his first meeting with Ramaṇa, Muni visited him again. This was around the time that Ramaṇa's mother died. Ramaṇa was living at the Skanda *ashram* at the foot of the mountain Arunāchala. Muni described his own turbulent inner state at the time. Muni told his own disciples that *kundalini Sakti* had become active in him. Ramaṇa told him not to worry, and advised him to anoint the crown of his head with castor oil before his bath and to apply almond oil after his bath. It is said that smoke was seen coming from the crown of Muni's head, and that the *kundalini* caused an aperture at the top of his skull. A sound was heard. His wife and daughter saw the whole event. A devotee had to hold Muni's body to keep him from falling. Smoke or vapour was seen coming from his head for 10 days. After that, Muni never shaved his head, and he lived for 14 more years (Shankaranarayanan 20-21).

Muni lived at Tiruvannamalai from 1922 to 1929. He was therefore in close proximity to Ramaṇa .

In a letter to Ramaṇa dated April 14, 1931 (Tamil New Year's Day), Muni refers to the casting aside of ego and the becoming permanent of "the natural inborn state, *sahaja stithi*." We must ask to what extent this idea of *sahaja*, so important to Ramaṇa, can be attributed to the influence of Muni. Of course it is also found in *tantric* scriptures, but it may very well have been Muni who emphasized this to Ramaṇa.

Muni considered that he himself was a manifestation of the God Gaṇapati. Normally, that God is considered senior to the God Skanda. But Muni regarded Ramaṇa as the God Skanda. In a letter dated April 21, 1931, he wrote Ramaṇa:

Salutations to thee, my Lord the Junior. Thou livest in the *guha* cave and art Guha thyself. Thou slumbereth in the bodies of worldly and manifesteth in the bodies of Yogins. This inner manifestation is spoken of as the second birth of men (Shankaranarayanan 15).

In another letter dated March 24, 1931, Muni begged Ramaṇa for a thought emanating from him, “capable of bringing about in me a realization wherein I shall see everything as the Self.” He asked why God cannot create realization directly in himself but rather only in Ramaṇa’s mind. The answer was that God acts only through his *avatar* on earth. Shankaranarayanan (Shankaranarayanan 23) says “The Maharshi’s grace manifested to the world through the Muni.” So again we see the emphasis that God’s grace is given to Ramaṇa, and then Ramaṇa acts through Muni to the world.

On June 9, 1931, Muni wrote Ramaṇa, calling him “Lord at play as man” (Shankaranarayanan 26). Ramaṇa acted through Muni, and Muni derived the *sakti*, the force for his activities, from the profound *shānti* [peace] of the Maharshi (Shankaranarayanan 28).

In another letter dated 10-3-31, Muni referred to his experience of the self in the heart cavern as quite clearly separate from the body, “on the gnostic plane.” (Shankaranarayanan 29). Muni signed the letter, “A servitor of Bhagavan, *vasishta ganapati*.” In this letter, the reference to Gnosticism is another Western interpretation of the Hindu experience.

It should be noted that this correspondence between Muni and Ramaṇa is from 1931, the very year that Brunton first visited Ramaṇa. Even at that time, the influence of Muni on Ramaṇa is still apparent. And Muni’s biographer claims that Muni’s writings are necessary in order to understand Ramaṇa:

It is no exaggeration to say that those who want to understand the message of the Maharshi in its pristine purity have to drink deep at the fountain sources of the Muni’s writings on the Maharshi. (Shankaranarayanan 36).

It is said that Ramaṇa’s mother, once liberated, became the Sakti and provided the pītha for the Maharshi and his teachings. Shankaranarayanan comments:

The yoga of both [Ramaṇa and Muni] which began as the search for the essential unity in diversity found its fulfillment in seeing the unity manifested as diversity (Shankaranarayanan, 26)

As we shall see, the influence of Muni on Ramaṇa included his emphasis on *tantra*, his view of the importance of women, his views of meditation, and of *kundalini*.

2. Muni's knowledge of Sanskrit

Muni was a scholar who was very skilled in Sanskrit; he was known for making impromptu Sanskrit verses. It is possible that much of what Ramaṇa is reputed to have written was in fact written by Muni. Muni probably helped with Ramaṇa's Sanskrit (Narasimha 93-95). Although he helped with the writing, Muni is reported to have given Ramaṇa the credit for what was written:

What Sastriar [Muni] himself always says is: "It is not I but the Maharshi who does these things." He evidently regards himself as the Maharshi's instrument, as the wielder of the power generated by this *greatest of living Mahatmas* (*Glimpses* 29).

3. Muni and Blavatsky's theosophy

As a young man, Muni had a vision of a white man 'Bhadaka' who told him to perform *tapas*; he later claimed to recognize this person as Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, one of the founders of the Theosophical Society. He said this after Olcott's death in 1907. In 1911, Humphreys met Muni in Vellore, where Muni was on his way to attend a theosophical society conference in Tiruvannamalai. It should be recalled that Humphreys himself was interested in theosophy, and wrote the first biography of Ramaṇa. As already discussed, Humphreys also obtained his information about Ramaṇa's enlightenment from "a disciple" of Ramaṇa. We know that Humphreys met Muni, and that Muni was the first to call Ramaṇa 'Bhagavan.' It seems likely that Muni was the source for Humphreys' biography of Ramaṇa. Thus, Muni's influence may extend even to the very basic information we have about Ramaṇa and his enlightenment.

Balaram Reddy indicates that Ramaṇa was familiar with the work of Annie Besant, who, together with Col. Olcott, led the Theosophical Society in India:

The next day, as soon as I walked into the hall and sat down, Bhagavan looked at me and began saying, "In Kumbhakonam there was one yogi, C. V. V. Rao, who was proclaiming to all his doctrine of the immortality of the body. He was even so bold as to declare that Dr. Annie Besant (a distinguished public and spiritual personality in India) would have to come to him to learn how to make her body immortal. But, before he had a chance to meet Dr. Annie Besant, he died." This brief story clearly illustrated his point.¹⁷⁸

4. The Vedas and Indian politics

Muni used his knowledge of Sanskrit to try to revive the original Vedic knowledge. According to Muni, worship was prescribed by the Discipline of Sandilya (a teacher in *satapatha brahmana*).

All this is Brahman. Everything is born from it and merges into it. Thus worship in quiescence.

The worship of God has eight forms: the five elements, the sun, moon and the embodied soul are eight special forms of the Godhead:

As all this universe is pervaded by all these forms, serving the universe becomes the worship of the Divine in his eight forms. This, of course, is integral worship (Shankaranarayanan, 45).

But Muni wanted to use this Vedic knowledge in a practical way to achieve the resurgence and independence of India. Prema Nandakumar compares this to the political action of Aurobindo, who was also writing at about the same time (1903) with respect to how English education had reduced Indians from being a heroic race to being merely glorified clerks, or small shopkeepers and big middlemen who would help British trade.¹⁷⁹

Muni wanted to supported the emancipation of the untouchables, and wanted to change the place of women in Indian society. So although he emphasized the authority of the *Vedas*, Muni used the *Vedas* in a neo-Hindu way, like Aurobindo.

¹⁷⁸ Balaram Reddy: The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy, *The Maharshi*, (May/June, 1995. Vol. 5 No. 3, Part II).

¹⁷⁹ Prema Nandakumar: *T.V. Kapali Sastri* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), 16-17 ['Nandakumar'].

5. Muni and tantra

Nandakumar says that Muni wanted to combine “the best of earthly life with the search for spiritual realization.” And Nandakumar expressly relates Muni’s practical emphasis to *tantra*:

Gaṇapati Muni’s philosophy and spirituality were firmly attuned to *Tantra*. [...] His philosophy was one of action, constantly putting to test received traditions and his own intentions regarding the presence of deities, the interaction of the human and the divine, and the possibility of the human achieving a divine transformation (Nandakumar, 16).

Many scholars view the *tantras* as inferior to the *Vedas*, and as representing a decline. But Nandakumar says that Aurobindo saw no decline after the *Upanishads*. The *Puranas* and the *Tantras* completed “the diffusion of the philosophical intelligence” of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* (Nandakumar 63).

B. T.V. Kapali Sastri (1886-1953)

1. The influence of Muni and Aurobindo

T.V. Kapali Sastri was a disciple of Gaṇapati Muni. As discussed, he met Gaṇapati Muni at the Tripurasundarī temple, after Muni had met Ramaṇa in 1907. He watched Muni perform *mantra-japa* and devotion to the Mother [*Sakti*]. Sastri called Muni ‘Nāyana,’ *beloved father*.

Kapali Sastri also became a scholar of the *Vedas* and of Sanskrit. Nandakumar compares Sastri’s ideas about language to those of Owen Barfield.¹⁸⁰ Sastri thought that Sanskrit as a language is less fixed than English. It is fluid and vague, and the parent and former of ideas (Nandakumar, 47).

¹⁸⁰ See Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1965). This is another of those startling comparisons with Western ideas that we find in neo-Hindu thought.

Although he considered Ramaṇa as one of his teachers, Kapali Sastri eventually chose to follow Aurobindo and the Mother¹⁸¹ in Pondicherry. We have already seen Nandakumar's comparisons of Muni to Aurobindo, so Kapali Sastri's choice in following Aurobindo is not that surprising. Nandakumar says,

But he found Ramaṇa's teaching too direct. There were no steps in between the starting point and the goal. But he could not have gone to Aurobindo without his faith being awakened by Ramaṇa (Nandakumar 77).

Sastri said of Ramaṇa

The very first day wrought a remarkable change in my being and no amount of *tapas* or *japa* would have given me the indubitable knowledge of spiritual consciousness and correct appreciation of spiritual life that the Maharshi gave me (Cited by Nandakumar, 77).

Kapali Sastri was introduced to the ideas of Aurobindo in 1914. In 1917, he visited Aurobindo in Pondicherry. He asked another poet there, Sujbramania Bharati, about the Vedic concept describing the Godhead as "the Flame in the heart-cave of man."¹⁸² The poet told him that he had been studying the *Rgveda* with Aurobindo. Kapali Sastri asked to see Aurobindo, and was allowed to do so, even though Aurobindo was not receiving visitors at that time. Kapali Sastri later wrote that he had found God in Aurobindo. He met Aurobindo again in 1923. When Gaṇapati Muni came to Pondicherry in 1928, Muni told Kapali Sastri that Aurobindo and the Mother were divine beings. In 1929, Kapali Sastri joined the Pondicherry ashram and became a disciple of Aurobindo. He and his

¹⁸¹ This reference to the Mother is to the French woman Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973). She was interested in occultism, and went to Algeria in 1905 to study with the adept Max Theon. She met Aurobindo in Pondicherry in 1914, and in 1920 moved there to join him. In 1926, the *ashram* was founded, and the Mother was placed in charge; this continued until her death in 1973. Her own *Collected Works* number 17 volumes. She is venerated as a yogi, and Aurobindo himself considered her to be the divine Conscious Force dominating all existence.

¹⁸² Nandakumar explains this as Agni the flame in the cave of our heart. We can ascend to heaven without our leaving the waking state, or 'Earth.' Agni becomes Skandha (Nandakumar, 40).

family lived at the *ashram*, where he wrote about Aurobindo's philosophy (Nandakumar, 9-10). Kapali's own collected works were edited by his disciple, M.P. Pandit.

But Kapali Sastri continued to visit Ramaṇa, and to translate and to comment on Ramaṇa's works. He first visited Ramaṇa in 1911, and again in 1930, and also in 1941, when he gave Ramaṇa his commentary on Sastri's *Ramaṇa Gītā*.

Kapali Sastri asked Ramaṇa whether a disciple could go to more than one *guru*. Ramaṇa said that he could, provided the teaching was the same (Narasimha, 204). In fact, there is evidence that Ramaṇa was himself interested in Aurobindo. Balarama Reddy recalls Ramaṇa reading a book review of Aurobindo's book *Lights on Yoga*. The reviewer was Kapali Sastri, and the editor of the newspaper was a devotee of Ramaṇa, S.M. Kamath. Reddy reports:

Bhagavan seemed to take great interest in the review and would occasionally stop reading and comment on what he had just read to those sitting around him. When he had concluded reading it, someone who was aware that I had that very book with me, said to Bhagavan, "This man has come from the Aurobindo Ashram and he has that book with him." Bhagavan turned to me and said, "Oh, is that so? Let me have a look at it."

And Reddy says that Ramaṇa "thoroughly understood Aurobindo's philosophy."

When I came into the hall the next day he began discussing the book with me, telling me that a certain term used in the book might look like something new, but it is actually the equivalent of this other term used in such and such ancient text, etc. Like this, he went on discussing and comparing Aurobindo's philosophy for some time. So Bhagavan thoroughly understood Aurobindo's philosophy both intellectually and also from the standpoint of experience. [...]

One evening I said to Bhagavan that the major attraction of Aurobindo's teachings is that it professes that immortality of the body can be achieved. Bhagavan made no comment.¹⁸³

2. Sastri's opinion of Ramaṇa :

Kapali Sastri comments on Ramaṇa's experience at 16:

¹⁸³ Balaram Reddy: The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy, *The Maharshi*, (May/June, 1995. Vol. 5 No. 3, Part II).

Such was the flash of illumination which contained within it a superb ratiocinative exercise. This was his *sādhana* which he taught his disciples. Pursue the enquiry, “Who am I?” (Nandakumar 4)

It is interesting that he calls it a ‘ratiocinative exercise.’ That seems quite different from a meditative exercise. This raises the issue discussed at the outset of this book, to what extent Ramaṇa’s method of Self-Enquiry was like Descartes’ method. But Sastri says that Ramaṇa’s realization took place suddenly, not gradually in Tiruvannamalai. The silence that Ramaṇa later observed was required to “normalise and stabilise the realisation under all conditions” (Sastri, 85). The seeker of salvation must be hardened by the path of *sādhāna*; if he is not, he will not be able to bear the ecstasy (Nandakumar, And yet Kapali Sastri seems to have concluded that Ramaṇa’s method of Self-Enquiry was without ethical consequences for the transformation of the world. Kapali Sastri was more interested in *tantric* powers, at least as taught by Aurobindo. These *tantric* powers are used to transform our own being; we then use our transformed being “as a divine centre in the world’ to help the rest of humanity. Then even time is no longer an obstacle but an instrument to achieve transformation to our Supernature (Nandakumar, 27-28). Man is midway between pure self-existent conscious Being and inert inconscient matter. Man can see fascinating and tempting colours but also the supra-mental planes of consciousness (Nandakumar, 53). Nandakumar says,

What man has to renounce is the sense of separateness from the rest of creation. When he does this and affirms his identity with Brahman, he ceases to be a *jīva* bound to earth-nature, but becomes verily the carrier of the supreme who has voluntarily encased himself in mind and life for the sake of the cosmic manifestation (Nandakumar, 54).

Man then “becomes a universal soul without losing his grip on earth”:

His living is a source of joy and power to the living of others, to the general progress of the world, of all beings, and of the human kind in particular that is closer to his level. Whether the others in the outer world know it or not, he radiates the rays of wisdom, throws out waves of life-giving strength, emanates the concrete influence spontaneously exercised for the onward march of the soul’s progress in others. Therefore other souls feel joyous and satisfied when they are drawn to him. (Nandakumar, 55)

In this way, the world has a relative reality. Nandakumar says that this view

...reconciles Absolute Idealism with relative Realism of world-existence in which an all-embracing dualism is the dominant note (Nandakumar, 58).

The relative reality of the world is due to the fact that it is a manifestation of the divine. Kapali Sastri's own disciple M.P. Pandit said that for Kapali Sastri, "the choice of his being was to participate in the divine manifestation, not to withdraw from it." (Nandakumar, 86). Did Kapali Sastri regard Ramaṇa as withdrawing from the divine manifestation? He found Ramaṇa to be aloof, withdrawn into himself (Nandakumar, 53). And yet Nandakumar also says that Kapali Sastri saw the compassion of Ramaṇa in feeding the people who came to him, and in Ramaṇa's regard for his mother. He says that Ramaṇa saw the divine as embodiment of maternal love; he refers to the lingam of *Matrbhuteśvara* (The Lord who has taken Her into Himself) as the presiding deity of Ramaṇa's *ashram* (Nandakumar, 75).

In addition to his commentaries on Ramaṇa's works, Kapali Sastri wrote *The Maharshi*.¹⁸⁴ Most of the book had previously appeared as articles written for the *Sunday Times*. The first article, "The Maharshi and his central teaching." was written in 1936. We should note that this was after the publication of Brunton's book about Ramaṇa in 1934 (see above).

Kapali Sastri says that all his commentaries were submitted to Ramaṇa for approval, and were accepted by him (Sastri, 2). This is in spite of the fact that these commentaries were written after Kapali Sastri accepted Aurobindo's philosophy. But other people saw a difference between Kapali Sastri's commentaries and Ramaṇa's teaching. For example, Abhishiktānanda was surprised by the differences of interpretation in these commentaries. He thought that Kapali Sastri's commentary on Ramaṇa's *Forty Verses*

¹⁸⁴ T.V. Kapali Sastry: *The Maharshi*, ed. M.P. Pandit (Ramaṇasramam, 1996, first published 1955) ['Sastri']. Most of the book had previously appeared as articles written for the *Sunday Times*. This book must be distinguished from the newsletter of the same name.

[*Ulladu Nārpadu*] was rather forced in making Ramaṇa's thought to conform with Aurobindo.¹⁸⁵

Kapali Sastri says that for Ramaṇa, liberation or *mukti* lies in the loss of the ego. A *jīvanmukta* lives and acts from the depths of the Truth, the Heart, and is guided by the Lord of All, the Self behind all selves (Sastri, 23). The ego is the radical knot of the heart; it is cut off only by direct perception of the supreme (Nandakumar, 51).

Kapali Sastri says that Ramaṇa's instruction was from his own experience and not by considering the *Shastras* (Scriptures), although the *Shastras* fit with what Ramaṇa says (Sastri, 70). This is in line with Aurobindo's own neo-Hindu view of the Scriptures as a record of experience. The Upanishads conceptualize experience (Nandakumar, Kapali Sastri thought that Aurobindo's *Hymns to the Mystic Fire* were the "ignition point" to understand the entire Scriptures. He was opposed to Radhakrishnan's criticism of the intuitive approach to Scripture (Nandakumar50). 35, 37).

Pages 77 to 91 of *The Maharshi* are excerpts from Kapali Sastri's diary from 1948 to 1951, where he compares Ramaṇa and Aurobindo. He says,

In the Maharshi's teaching, as indeed in all yogas of ancient India, the problem to be solved is the problem of the individual. In Sri Aurobindo's teaching, it is the problem of man in his total being and the meaning of his existence on the earth that is sought to be discovered and worked out. The problems are different and so are the solutions.

The Maharshi's position is simply this: the Divine is, indeed, everywhere. But, you must first find your own self, your own centre in the Divine who is everywhere. Once you find it, you are no longer yourself in the usual sense; you are in His hands. What you call yourself is nothing, does not count; it is that, the Self, the Real 'I' that matters. There is no longer any problem for you; your problems are His 'problems' (Sastri 77-78).

Kapali Sastri refers to Buddha and Jesus:

Jesus was actually the Son of God. When he spoke of the "Kingdom of Heaven within" he spoke of a direct personal experience. Christ had that consciousness. As the Maharshi used to say, Christ moved and acted as he

¹⁸⁵ Abhishiktānanda: *Secret*, p. 41. This shows a familiarity with Aurobindo's thought at the time. Over time, Abhishiktānanda had an increasing appreciation for Aurobindo.

did because of his direct realization, *sākṣāt anubhūti*. (Sastri 79, written 19-1-1949).

Kapali Sastri records a remark by a devotee of Ramaṇa that rays of light emanate from Ramaṇa and do their work on the devotee. Ramaṇa corrected this to say “He emanates and directs the rays” –Ramaṇa wanted the active and not the passive tense (Sastri, 81).

Kapali Sastri says that Ramaṇa lived for more than 50 years after realization, and that this has no parallel in history. Even the Buddha lived for only 50 years. He attributes Ramaṇa’s cancer to the accumulated sins of his visitors (Sastri, 83, 87).

C. *Muni’s writings about Ramaṇa, with Commentary by Kapali Sastri*

1. Gurugita

Muni wrote the *Gurugita* “Hymn to the Guru” (*Maharshi*, 35). Muni refers to Ramaṇa as *Brahman* in the *guru’s* form (p. 37). Some of the verses, with their reference to the Heart, and to the cosmos show *tantric* influence, not regarding the world as illusion but as manifestation of Brahman. For example, see the following verses:

1. The Unmanifest from which all this manifestation takes birth, which sustains it, into which it resolves itself–That the Eternal is:
2. In which support, in which matchless Strength, this cosmos (this Brahma’s Egg) with its myriads of globes firmly abides”
7. Its abode is in the Heart’s lotus; (yet) it flows (upwards) for the lotus of the head, and from behind for the energy of the senses:
8. With the outward eye it makes for the body’s illusion, with the eye inward for the experience of the Self’s oneness

2. The Umasahasra

This is a poem that Muni composed in praise of Ramaṇa, and in gratitude to the great Goddess Uma for giving Maharshi to Muni as his master (Shankaranarayanan, 120). Muni therefore called the poem the *Umasahasra*. It refers to Ramaṇa as well as to tantric works. The *Rgveda* and the *Kenopanisad* speak of Umā Haimāvātī as the Source-of-All. It consists of one thousand stanzas, in 40 cantos, each with 25 verses. The forms of the Vedic and Tantric deities are seen as a way to gain divine grace by meditating on them. The second canto deals with the importance of a guru to envision Uma’s secret splendour

(Sastri, 93). The fourth canto regards Uma as the kundalini force moving in man's body. Sastri interprets this as a poetic record of Muni's experiences gained with Ramaṇa.

Muni wrote the poem in 1903, and revised it in 1907. He refers to Ramaṇa as well as to Vedic and *tantric* deities, and he discusses ways to meditate on them.

Kapali Sastri wrote a commentary on the poem. He says that the first verse refers to the unfailing grace of Umā while the second indicates he need for ceaseless aspiration of the devotee (Nandakumar 92). The 20th canto refers to the Mother as the indwelling universal in all creation, the essence of all that we know and experience:

In Vedic mantra, Thou art present as sense,
In Tantric mantra, as force of sound
In Śābara mantra, as ritual power,
In constant mantra, as essence Thou art. (cited, Nandakumar 95).

Muni's nationalism is also apparent in the poem. He calls on the Supreme Mother to infuse India with might and light. There are passages that invoke Umā's grace for the freeing of India from foreign domination. British spies said his poem contained revolutionary material (Nandakumar, 96).

3. The Ramaṇa Gita and Commentary

Muni wrote the *Ramaṇa Gītā*, and Kapali Sastri wrote the commentary on it.¹⁸⁶ This commentary was also written after Kapali Sastri had accepted Aurobindo's philosophy. Sastri's commentary was written in 1941, 10 years after Paul Brunton's visit. There is a reference to Brunton:

Ramaṇa explained to Paul Brunton the advantage of self-enquiry: Mental quiet is easier to attain and earlier, but the goal is mental destruction.

¹⁸⁶ Gaṇapati Muni: *Ramaṇa Gita: Dialogues with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, tr. A.R. Natarajan (Bangalore: Ramaṇa Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1994). Sastri's commentary on Ramaṇa Gita titled *Prakāśa* was read to Ramaṇa and received his blessing. In the introduction he says that some traditional scholars may find deviations from received ideas. Secular activities, dharma, artha and kāma are means to attain the knowledge of the self. *Tantra* gives us *mukti* (liberation as well as *bhukti* (cosmic enjoyment). Integral yoga is transforming the human into the divine by harnessing nature to the way of Truth (Nandakumar, 96).

Most paths lead to the first. Whereas self-enquiry leads to it quickly and then to the second (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 76).

The *Ramaṇa Gītā* is modelled on *the Bhagavad Gītā*, with 18 chapters.

The only verse of the *Ramaṇa Gītā* that was composed by Ramaṇa is 2:2:

In the centre of the Heart-cave, Brahman shines alone. It is the form of Self experienced directly as 'I'. Enter the Heart, through self-enquiry or merging or by breath-control and become rooted as That.

Even with respect to this verse, the first three words, *hridaye kuhara madhye*, were written in 1915 by a devotee of Ramaṇa, Jagadiswara Sastri. The devotee left the words with Ramaṇa, who it is said then completed the verse (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 22).

Although Ramaṇa did not write most of the *Ramaṇa Gītā*, it is clear that he approved of it. Kapali Sastri gives details of his discussions with Ramaṇa regarding the commentary to the *Ramaṇa Gītā*; Ramaṇa even pointed out variances in the text (Sastri, 54). He records an interesting discussion with reference to the proper term to be used to refer to the heart. Ramaṇa referred to the use of the term *hṛdayam* for heart in the Upanishads, and the Appar and Tamil saints referring to the heart centre *anāhata* in the middle of the chest. Ramaṇa was familiar with its use by *tantrics* and *yogins*. He also referred to a manuscript of Muni that spoke of the heart. And Ramaṇa also referred to articles in 1931 and 1934 in the *American Journal of the Psychological Research Institute* describing the true heart to be on the right side of the chest.¹⁸⁷ The articles described the heart as “the deepest and the innermost psycho-physical and spiritual center of man.” Ramaṇa had excerpts of the article but wanted to obtain the whole article to see the means by which the experiment was carried out (Sastri 50-51).

Ramaṇa found confirmation that the spiritual heart is on the right side from a Malayalam Ayurvedic book and in the Sita Upanishad. In his genuine trance (discussed above, where he was in the company of Muni), Ramaṇa felt that the muscle had ceased, but aware of Heart center on the right continuing to work (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 52).

¹⁸⁷ I have not been able to locate these articles.

For Ramaṇa, the terms ‘heart,’ ‘*Brahman*,’ ‘*ātman*’ and ‘self’ are interchangeable (*Ramaṇa Gītā* 20).

The *Ramaṇa Gītā* uses ideas from *Kundalini yoga* to describe the heart. It says that the light of consciousness flows from the Heart through *Sushumna* channel to *sahasrāra* (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 50, verse 6). But the *Anāhata chakra* is not the Heart center; it is the chakra lying behind the Heart (*Talks*. 367). From the *sahasrāra*, consciousness spreads all over the body and then the experience of the world arises (p. 52, verse 7). Sastri comments that “The ego, individuality is the link, the knot, which has to be cut.” The ‘knot’ is the link between the self and the body (Chapter IX, v. 3). Ramaṇa Gītā self-enquiry separates the ‘I’-thought from other thoughts, by a churning process. Kapali Sastri compares this to the churning of the sea of milk in the Puranas; produced the drink of immortality. We then stay in the channel linking *sahasrāra* with the Heart (p. 107 IX, 13). The one whose knot is cut can never again become bound (p. 111 IX, 22). But is not this idea of cutting the link with the body inconsistent with living as a *jīvanmukta*? It is different from a later comment that emphasizes the relative reality of the body: when we regard ourselves as only the body, we are separated from others (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 106; IX, 11).

The fact that Ramaṇa approved of the *Ramaṇa Gītā* raises some interesting problems, since Muni wrote it from an obvious *tantric* perspective. There are many indications of this *tantric* influence in the text. Chapter 11 is entitled “On the Compatibility of *Jñāna* and *Siddhis*.” And as already noted, Chapter 14 concerns *jīvanmukti*. There are also references to *sahaja samādhi*, an idea that Ramaṇa was to emphasize. Chapter 3 says that the purpose of spiritual practice is to discover our natural state. It says that in *sahaja samādhi*, activity and object awareness do not distract one from Self-rootedness (Chapter 10, verse 7A). And it contrasts *sahaja* form *nirvikalpa samādhi*.

The state in which awareness is firm, even when objects are sensed, is called the natural state. In ‘*Nirvikalpa Samādhi*’ there is no objective perception.(p. 53 verse 10).

In *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the mind is in ‘*sahasrāra*’ according to yogic texts. In *sahaja* state there is awareness of objects and activity but it does not disturb Self-attention.

And the *tantric* idea of the relative reality of the world is also there. “The *jñāni* does not think of the universe as ‘Unreal’ nor does he see it as apart from himself” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 11 verse 11). And it says that society is like the body and individuals like the limbs (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 117): “an individual prospers by working for the good of the society like a limb being useful for the body.” And verse 5 says, “One should serve the interests of society through body, speech and mind and enthrone his circle to do likewise.” In his commentary, Sastri also says, “the creator and His power being one the entire creation is the manifestation of His own power since nothing exists outside the one, the Supreme. Everything, stability and movement, can only be aspects of it.” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 153).

And even more fascinating is this reference to political involvement: peace is required for an individual; power for a society, to maintain order “Society should be raised through power and then peace should be established.” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 117; X, 8). And “Brotherhood based on equality is the supreme goal of human society” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 118; X, v. 10). Verse 11 says that this will result in peace and amity, and “the world will flourish like a single household.” These are clearly Muni’s ideas, and they conflict with Ramaṇa’s avoidance of social involvement. We can see that Sastri has difficulty with this conflict. For some of Ramaṇa’s sayings indicate we need not do anything: “Failure to perform prescribed action is not sinful for the wise.” The commentary on this verse indicates that if we are inactive, there is no sin (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 84, verse 19). The following verse 20 says that there are two categories of the wise: those who renounce action for solitary communion, and those engaged in action for the welfare of others. But if we do engage in such action, there is no sense of doership because there is no body consciousness (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 110; IX 20). The *jñāni* has no *sankalpa*, no specific desire to help or to intervene in the course of events, as soon as a matter is brought to his notice ‘automatic divine activity’ flows from him (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 135 commentary). One who exercises powers deludes not only others, but himself (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 136 commentary, referring to *Sat Darshanam*, 35).

With respect to the relative reality of the world, Sastri’s commentary is interesting. He says that the world, too is permeated by consciousness and cannot therefore be unreal. And Sastri refers to the *40 Verses* [see below], where Ramaṇa says it is futile to debate

whether the world is real or unreal; instead abide in the state where neither individual nor world is seen to exist, separately (*Sat darshanam* v 3). The ignorant foist an independent reality on the world (*Sat darshanam* 18). And yet Sastri is inconsistent. See for example his comment that that *māyā's* veil is in reality only the veil of thought itself (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 152). And it is said (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 15) that the absence of ‘others’ makes for a natural and universal love. And in his commentary on the *Darshana Bhashya*, p. xxix, Sastri says that Ramaṇa explained to him the “equality for all creation”:

The very term equality implies the existence of differences. It is a unity which the wise one perceives in all differences, which I call equality. Equality does not mean ignorance of distinction, when you have realisation you can see that these differences are very formal. They are not substantial or permanent and what is essential in all these appearances I the one ‘Truth’ the ‘Real’.

The relative reality of the world is also affirmed by those passages that affirm that the Self is endowed with *Shakti* or Power. There is a relation between the Self as unmoving substratum of all change, and the expression of power in movement (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 149 XII, 7). The all-powerful God is the ground, the unmoving principle is also the movement, the manifestation.”(*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 150, commentary). Static and dynamic are non-separate. Like fire and its power to burn. “movement seen apart from the reality, the substratum, is illusory.” “The seer, the seen, the screen on which it is projected, the light, are all only the one” (*Sat Darshanam* 3, referred to at *Ramaṇa Gītā* 151 commentary). Activity comes under two categories, manifestation and subsidence. The *Vedic* text “When all this has become the Self” refers to subsidence [evolution and involution] (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 154; XII:17).

Ramaṇa Gītā XII:20 “Power has two aspects-activity and ground”. See also verse 22

The commentary to the *Ramaṇa Gītā* emphasizes the importance of direct experience. The introduction says that Ramaṇa’s teachings were based on direct experience of the Self (Intro, p. 20). The *mahāvākya* ‘I am Brahman’ is merely conceptual (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 40). The Scriptures do not provide direct experience (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 77 v. 4 and *Ramaṇa Gītā*, 189). “Truth is apprehended in two ways, by indication and in reality. By indication it is spoken of as Real and it is experienced as Reality” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 158’

XII:29). We should not dwell on words in sacred texts, but listen to the heart. Self-enquiry is the only contemplation of the Self (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 187).

Only direct experience provides knowledge. We have intuitive knowledge of the Heart, direct immediate experience (*Ramaṇa Gītā* chapter 5, The Science of the Heart). The entire universe is in the body and the whole body is in the Heart. Hence the universe is contained within the Heart (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 54). The mind of the knower, abiding in the Heart, is merged in the consciousness of the Heart like the moonlight in daylight

You remain calm and composed even while you are active. You realize you are moved by the deeper real Self within. You have no worries, no anxieties, no cares. For, here you come to realize that there is nothing belonging to you, the ego. Everything is done by something with which you get into conscious union (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 56 Verse 17).

The mind only reflects the consciousness of the Heart, and has no independent existence. Therefore, concentrating on finding the mind's source will take you to the heart. The Heart lights up the body like the sun. "The Self is the electricity, dynamic, the mind is the contact switchboard, while the body is the bulb" (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 105). But if this heart consciousness is absent, we see only the mind, just like we see the moon at night when the sun is gone. In swoon or sleep, the mind goes back to Heart (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 56, v. 20). But that is unconscious merger. *Sahaja* is conscious.

We have already observed the comment to Paul Brunton that there must be destruction of the mind. The difference between the seer and seen is only in the mind. For those abiding in the Heart the perception is unitary, one (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 57 verse 19).

And yet there is an inconsistency. Sastri's other commentaries indicate that one can continue thinking.

... pure mind measures the immeasurable, Self. It means that the Self makes itself felt in the pure mind so that even when you are in the midst of thoughts you feel the presence." (*Ramaṇa Gītā* 42, citing *Bhasya*, xii).

Muni asked Ramaṇa about his state "in which the entire visible world is seen as shadows" (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 128; XI, 5). The commentary on p. 131 says that the mind is to be used to pay attention to the root 'I' thought. In the end the mind gets destroyed, like a stick used to stir the funeral pyre [or like throwing away the ladder]. There is a conflict

here between ceasing all thoughts and continuing to think and to perceive after liberation. Sastri obviously wrestles with this in his commentary. He says

To the onlooker the state of the wise would appear inert, when all thought movements cease. Hence it is explained that it is not so for one is pure consciousness in that state. Intelligence is then sharp like the tip of kusa grass for it is unhampered by attachments (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 132)

And there is a conflict whether the subject-object relation continues after liberation. It says that the object of meditation merges in the end in the great fire of the Self. Commentary; no subject-object relationship (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 86, Verse 25). But later it says,

Though objects are near they are not seen as separate. Commentary: consciousness is seen everywhere “Is there objective awareness for the wise? Yes. But it does not distract their awareness of the throb of the Heart.” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 108; IX, 15).

and

the separate perceiver, the ‘I’, the individual is not there. “the subject, the individual consciousness and the objects are seen as movements arising from the Self and subsiding in it, as one integral whole. (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 148; XII:4, commentary).

and

Even in the difference, the essential unity is perceived by the wise. The ignorant caught up in variety considers himself as separate.” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 149; XII: 6)

Sastri’s commentary on *sahaja* says that there is no loss of body consciousness; cognizes the world (*Ramaṇa Gītā* 147).

The ego is limited, separative and particular (p. 21). ‘I’-‘I’ is limitless expanse of consciousness. Sastri asked how you feel this in the body. Ramaṇa said

...the whole body becomes a mere power, a force current: Life becomes a needle drawn to a huge mass of magnet and as you go deeper and deeper you become a mere centre and then not even that for you become mere consciousness. (*Bhasya* xxi)

There are also some inconsistencies with Ramaṇa’s other teachings about the best way to enlightenment. It is said (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 21) that there are three alternatives: self-enquiry,

merging and breath control. Self-enquiry and breath control are “two branches of the same tree” (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 22). But the text goes on to say breath control is only a temporary aid for self-enquiry; a brake to thoughts; temporary stillness leaves thought of ego or separateness, untackled.

The *Ramaṇa Gītā* also comments on the issue of *siddhis* or powers. In one place it is said that it is only by their *karma* that some seers exhibit powers (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 133; XI, 20). Elsewhere it is said that powers arise naturally for the Jñāni whether openly or by his very presence (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 136 XI, 24). But Ramaṇa says it is not important whether one can become invisible or intangible. Continuing in the body or becoming invisible are immaterial (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 176-77). Self-enquiry alone gives liberation. Other practices may give *siddhis* (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 79, Verse 7).

Finally, it is surprising that the *Ramaṇa Gītā* says that supreme Reality may be referred to in personal terms:

The one supreme Reality is termed as ‘Shakti’ by some, as ‘Self’ by other learned ones and by yet others as a ‘Person.’ (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 158; XII).

4. *Commentary on the 40 Verses*

Gaṇapati Muni translated Ramaṇa’s *Forty Verses on Existence (Uḷḷādu Nārpadu)* into Sanskrit. He called it *Sat-darśanam*. Kapali Sastri wrote a commentary on this Sanskrit work. In his introduction, Kapali Sastri says that all of creation is one existence, Brahman, the Puruṣa, but it is seen in manifold forms:

Conditioned in space, which is full, intense and immobile, in the Self as extension, there arise and endure the endless distinctions among perceptible objects. The endless distinctions among internal processes, ceaselessly arising in the one continuous flow of activity, the phenomena of remembrance and expectation, and all the differences in condition everywhere, even outside, these exist conditioned in time, which like an intangible void, is only the self as eternal change and ceaseless movement. (Sastri’s *Coll Works* II, 264, cited Nandakumar 19).

In Sastri’s introduction to the work, he says that Brahman is the all-pervading existence-consciousness (*sat-cit*) whose gaze or *īkṣā*

...brings into existence all these beings or rather becomings, in a variety of species, with striking differences in the nature of their embodiments

such as physical, vital and mental and with remarkable variations in their capacity to develop the organs of vital, mental and spiritual or divine functions (Nandakumar, 98, citing III, 289).

Sastri notes that unlike Shankara, Ramaṇa does not say that creatures are mere illusions. We must realize the Self in the heart (Nandakumar 98). And in his commentary to the *Ramaṇa Gītā*, Sastri says

Since nothing is seen as apart from himself, the world too is seen as permeated by consciousness and cannot therefore be ‘Unreal.’ (*Ramaṇa Gītā*, 12).

Kapali Sastri also says,

As there is nothing that is really unreal, a fact that is often stressed by Sri Maharshi, this system may be appropriately called ‘Truth Realism’ or ‘Ideal Realism’ (Introduction to *Sat-darśanam*, Muni’s Sanskrit translation of the *Forty Verses*).

This may be more a reference to Aurobindo’s ideas than to Ramaṇa’s.

What is especially interesting is that Kapali Sastri says that Ramaṇa’s teachings, including the *Forty Verses*, cannot be considered as *Advaitic*, or within any other traditional Hindu philosophy. The writings arise from Ramaṇa’s experience and are an “independent utterance” in philosophy (Nandakumar 19).

In the *Forty Verses*, Ramaṇa says

Get at the Heart within by search.
The ego bows its head and falls.
Then flashes forth another “I”,
Not the ego that, but the Self, Supreme, Perfect (cited Nandakumar 20).

Sastri’s comment on this is that is not a destruction but a transformation of the ego:

Does this mean that the ego-self is lost for ever? No, the ego is lost, but only to make way for its original, the real Self, to come up to the surface by either using the regenerate ego-self as an instrument or by transforming it to a true reflection so as to make its presence felt on the surface, the effect of which is an experience a feeling in the ego-self that it is one with its deeper and real Self and that it is this deeper being that has assumed the form of the apparent self in the phenomenal existence. (Sastri, *Coll. Works* III, 355, cited Nandakumar 20).

Sastri’s translation of Tenth verse of Muni’s *Sat-darśanam*:

For perception of the truth, worship of the Supreme
 In name and form is means indeed.
 But the state of being that in natural poise of Self,
 That alone is perception true [Nandakumar 98]

The heart-based life is integral, whole and perfect. It is existence in all its fullness (*Sat Darshanam*, v. 30)

Sastri says that worship by means of forms is indeed fruitful, but the worshipped Lord is not confined to the particular form in which he is worshipped. The supreme state is *sat-darśana*, real perception of the truth.

5. Commentary on the Five Verses

Sastri also wrote a commentary on Ramaṇa's *Five verses on Arunāchala* (*Śrī Aruṇācala-pañcaratna*) (Nandakumar 99). It is said that Ramaṇa wrote these verses in Sanskrit (Nandakumar 19). But was that writing with Muni's help as the "instrument" of Ramaṇa?

The *Five Verses* refers to the hill of Arunāchala as the one Real. The verses begin with a prayer for divine grace. Self-enquiry cannot be taken without grace. Nandakumar quotes Ramaṇa's advice to a disciple,

But the very fact you are possessed of the quest of the self is a manifestation of the divine grace, *aruḷ*. It is effulgent in the heart, the inner being, the real Self. It draws you from within to get in. You have to attempt to get in from without. Your attempt is *vicāra*, the deep inner movement is grace, *aruḷ*. That is why I say there is no real *vicāra* without grace, nor is there grace active for him who is without *vicāra*. Both are necessary.¹⁸⁸

Kapali Sastri refers to these verses as the nutshell of Ramaṇa's teaching. In his commentary to the fifth verse, Kapali Sastri says,

The *mukta*'s eye sees everywhere the infinite form of the supreme Self. Within or without, he, directly perceiving the self serves the Self, sporting in the Self and reigns supreme, immersed in the form of infinite bliss (Nandakumar 99).

¹⁸⁸ Nandakumar 19, citing Kapali Sastri's *Collected Works III*, 264.

VI. Conclusion

We have looked at several interpretations of Ramaṇa. Most of these interpreters are from the West, such as Brunton, Del Vasto, Herbert, Lacombe, Zimmer, and Jung. Many of Ramaṇa's disciples who wrote about him were also from the West, such as Cohen and Osborne. But we have also looked at some Hindu interpretations, such as those referred to in Herbert's *Études*, as well as the interpretation by Mahadevan. In these various interpretations and criticisms, some of the same issues keep recurring:

- What is the value of trance or meditation?
- What is Ramaṇa's view of the reality of the world?
- What does Ramaṇa believe to be the relation between the Self and the Absolute?
- How does the liberated person relate to the world?
- How does the liberated person perceive the world?
- Are there ethical obligations for a liberated person?

When we examine Ramaṇa's writings, and consider how he has been interpreted, we find inconsistent answers to all of these questions.

The story of Ramaṇa depends entirely on the idea of living liberation or *jīvanmukti*. But his questioners and interpreters have frequently been unaware that this is not a universally accepted idea within Hinduism. Even those interpreters who are aware of the idea of *jīvanmukti* often do not want to acknowledge its conflict with other traditions within Hinduism.

The story of Ramaṇa's life and teachings is not as simple as frequently supposed. A close reading of the traditional account of his enlightenment at the age of 16 raises many questions. His thought experiment was not a real trance, and was certainly not something totally spontaneous. Ramaṇa had previous knowledge of meditation. Prior He had models of a *sannyāsī* in his uncle, as well as in his father, who practiced meditation. Ramaṇa had even tried meditation at the age of 12. Nor did this event occur without written sources that could have inspired him to seek this kind of enlightenment. Furthermore, although Ramaṇa's disciples emphasize the trance nature of Ramaṇa's enlightenment, he himself rejected trance. Ramaṇa's own words emphasize the importance of the *sahaja* experience of the *jīvanmukti* over any trance experience, and this has not been sufficiently explored by his devotees. He contrasts trance with his own

method of Self-Enquiry, and he contrasts *nirvikalpa samādhi* with *sahaja samādhi*. Finally, it does not seem that Ramaṇa had the certainty of union with the Self that is so emphasized by his biographers.

It is doubtful that Ramaṇa's self-realization was without the benefit of any other influences, and that he merely recognized in his later reading what he had already experienced. At the very least, it is clear that Ramaṇa's own teachings about self-realization depend on other sources. Even in the early years, he was given copies of many books to read, and he translated some of them. In these works we can see the outlines of Ramaṇa's teaching on Self-Enquiry. Ramaṇa's teachings need to be viewed in terms of the books that he read while living in the caves, in the decades before the *ashram* was formed.

There are many different influences on Ramaṇa that are difficult to disentangle:

1. There is the Christian influence. For Ramaṇa, the *advaitic* experience is an experience of Being and he relates it to many Biblical statements, such as "I am that I am." And Ramaṇa's first biographer makes many comparisons between Ramaṇa and Jesus.
2. Neo-Hinduism. Ramaṇa was reading Vivekānanda from at least as early as 1901. This neo-Hindu influence on Ramaṇa was also through Gaṇapati Muni and Kapali Sastri, who had both been influenced by Aurobindo's form of neo-Hinduism. Muni, was the first of Ramaṇa's disciples to call him 'Maharshi.' The influence of Muni on Ramaṇa was so strong, and over such a long period of time, that it is difficult to determine whether certain works were written by Ramaṇa or whether they were ghost-written by Muni as Ramaṇa's self-proclaimed "instrument."
3. Tantric influences. The very idea of *jīvanmukti* or living liberation is not traditional *advaita*. Ideas of God's power or *shakti* are also non-traditional, as is the idea of the relative reality of the world.
4. Traditional influences. These are probably the least important influence. Ramaṇa was criticized by traditionalists. And his interpretation of Shankara—that the world has some reality—is hardly traditional. Abhishiktānanda and Monchanin were correct to find in this

relative reality of the world some similarity to Christian Trinitarian doctrine. Some type of Trinitarianism may also be found in *tantric* works.

5. Other western influences. In addition to the influences already mentioned, Ramaṇa was influenced by western philosophy and by Blavatsky's theosophy. Some of this was as early as his meetings with Muni and with Humphreys. Ramaṇa also read some works of Western psychology, and he seems to have been influenced by the ideas of Paul Brunton, who interpreted Ramaṇa according to his own fixed ideas.

It is important to try to disentangle all of these different influences from each other: traditional Hinduism and Vedānta, neo-Hinduism, *tantra*, *yoga*, Christianity, and other western influences. This will help us to better understand Ramaṇa's advaitic experience, and his interpretation of that experience. It will also help us to better relate Ramaṇa's teachings to the teachings of mystics in the Western Christian tradition.

Because of these various influences, Ramaṇa is inconsistent in the interpretations that he gives of the *jīvanmukta's* experience.

First, Ramaṇa is inconsistent in whether the world has reality. Can we speak of an external world at all, and what is Ramaṇa's view of the *advaitic* doctrine of *māyā*? Some passages, especially those where he relies on the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* and on *tantric* works, he emphasizes the relative reality of the world. In other places, he puts forward a much more monistic view of reality, denying that there are any others at all.

This inconsistency is also evident in what Ramaṇa says about how the liberated person relates to and perceives the world. Sometimes he says that the subject-object relation, and all thought is gone. At other times, he acknowledges that the liberated person continues to act, think and perceive in the world.

Ramaṇa emphasizes the importance of experience. In this, he seems to be following more neo-Hindu views than traditional Hindu thought or the teachings of Shankara. But *tantric* sources also emphasize the importance of direct experience, so it would be a mistake to regard this emphasis on experience as totally due to Western influence.

The issue of how the realized person or *jīvanmukta* is supposed to relate to the external world is a problem that bothered many of Ramaṇa's followers. Some, like Paul Brunton,

rejected Ramaṇa's teachings in favour of another guru whose neo-Hinduism emphasized social and ethical obligations. Can Ramaṇa's ethical behaviour be criticized? Or is a *jīvanmukta* beyond ethics? The conflict here is partly the issue as to whether the external world has reality. For if, as Ramaṇa sometimes says, there are no others to help, then of course we have no ethical obligations. It is possible that neo-Hindu ideas, which emphasize ethical obligations, are more influenced by Western traditions, or by Buddhist traditions of the *bodhisattva*. Such traditions regard liberation as a state where the ego is transcended, and there is a sense of inter-relatedness with others and the world, and of seeing *Brahman* everywhere. But *tantra* accords a relative reality to the world. And neo-Hindu ideas say that the *jīvanmukti* is involved in doing good.

Aurobindo gives a more consistent view of *jīvanmukti*. Fort says that Aurobindo's perspective is more world-affirming than Shankara's or Ramaṇa's:

Since Aurobindo holds that existence, from grossest Matter to highest Spirit, is an integral unity, the deluded individuated self (*jīva*) is real and can evolve back to its Spiritual basis (Supermind). Put another way, for Aurobindo *Brahman* includes *māyā*, and *māyā* is dynamic (*śakti*), including its derivations of mind and body. True (integral) liberation is not separation from *samsāra*, but realization of the Divine (*Brahman*) in the Divine (Fort, 150).

For Aurobindo there is therefore no problem in remaining embodied after liberation. This view of the world is also evident in T.V. Kapali Sastri's interpretation and commentaries on Ramaṇa's state of *sahaja* liberation. From this point of view, Sastri gives what I consider one of the best summaries of Ramaṇa's teaching:

The Maharshi's position is simply this: the Divine is, indeed, everywhere. But, you must first find your own self, your own centre in the Divine who is everywhere. Once you find it, you are no longer yourself in the usual sense; you are in His hands. What you call yourself is nothing, does not count; it is that, the Self, the Real 'I' that matters. There is no longer any problem for you; your problems are His 'problems.' (Sastri, *The Maharshi*, 78).

Perhaps that is a neo-Hindu interpretation of Ramaṇa. It is in any event an interpretation that is influenced by Aurobindo's synthesis of *tantra* and traditional Hinduism. And this interpretation, which acknowledges the relative reality of the world, and the importance of finding one's true Self, is an interpretation that is probably most fruitful for those those

who want to make comparisons of Ramaṇa with Western mystics. We may, for example compare this finding our own self, and placing ourself in God's hands, with Meister Eckhart's idea of '*Gelassenheit*' ('*Gelatenheit*' in low German). When interpreted in a nondual way, Eckhart's mysticism, like neo-Hinduism, does not lead to a passive acosmism, but to greater action in the world.¹⁸⁹ A full discussion and comparison of Ramaṇa and western mysticism is beyond the scope of this article. But I hope that this article, in showing the various influences on Ramaṇa, and the interpretations by both Hindus and non-Hindus of his liberation, will assist in such future studies.

VII. Bibliography

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Guhāntara: au sein du fond* (written 1952-53; only extracts published so far). Part of Chapter 3 published in *Initiation* (I.A.14). Parts of Chapters 4 to 7 published in (I.A.19).

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Guhāja* (or *Guhāntara* II) (unpublished, in Abhishiktānanda Archives, Delhi).

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *An Indian Benedictine Ashram* (In collaboration with Abbé J. Monchanin (Shantivanam: Tannirpalli, 1951, reprinted, Times Press, 1964). Translated and revised as *Ermîtes du Saccidānanda: un essai d'intégration chrétienne de la tradition monastique de l'Inde*, (Tournai/Paris: Casterman, 1957).

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Lettres d'un sannyās chrétien à Joseph Lemarié* (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *La montée au fond du coeur: le journal intime du moine chrétien-sannyasi hindou 1984-1973*, introduction et notes de R. Panikkar (Paris: OEIL, 1986); translated as *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, tr. David Fleming and James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998) ['*Diary*'].

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Souvenirs d'Arunāchala: récit d'un ermite chrétien en terre hindoue* (Paris: Epi SA, 1978), translated as *The Secret of Arunāchala*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1979, revised 1987), 38.

Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Guru and Disciple* (containing *A Sage from the East—Sri Gnānānanda* and *The Mountain of the Lord*), (ISPCK, London, 1974).

¹⁸⁹ See *Meister Eckeharts Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie*, ed. Ilse Roloff (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1934) ['Roloff']. And see my discussion of Eckhart in "Monism, Dualism, Nondualism: A Problem with Vollenhoven's Problem-Historical Method," online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Method.html>].

- Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): “Jusqu’à la Source, l’expérience de non-dualité,” *Initiation à la spiritualité des Upanishads: Vers l’autre rive* (Sisteron: Présence, 1979) [‘Initiation’].
- Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): “Sannyasa”, *The Further Shore* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1975; reprinted with additions in 1984); revised and expanded in *Initiation à la spiritualité des Upanishads: Vers l’autre rive* (Sisteron: Présence, 1979).
- Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Sagesse hindoue mystique chrétienne: du Védanta à la Trinité* (Paris, Centurion, 1965). Revised as *Saccidānanda: a Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1974, 2nd revised edition 1984).
- Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): “Jésus le Sauveur” (1971), *Intériorité et révélation: essais théologiques* (Sisteron: Présence, 1982) [‘Intériorité’].
- Abhishiktānanda (Le Saux, Henri): *Swami Abhishiktānanda: His life told through his letters*, ed. James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, 1995) [‘Letters’]
- Aleaz, K.P., ed.: “The Pioneering Contributions of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya,” in *Christian Thought through Advaita Vedānta* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1996).
- Aurobindo: *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1955).
- Barnard, G. William: *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997).
- Bettina Bäumer (ed.): *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997).
- Brunton, Paul: *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider & Co., 1934).
- Brunton, Paul: *A Search in Secret Egypt*, ((London: Rider & Co., 1935).
- Brunton, Paul: *The Secret Path* ((London: Rider & Co., 1935).
- Brunton, Paul: *A Message from Arunāchala* ((London: Rider & Co., 1936).
- Brunton, Paul: *A Hermit in the Himalayas: The Journey of a Lonely Exile* (London: Rider & Co., 1937).
- Brunton, Paul: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (London: Rider & Co., 1969, first published 1941), [‘Hidden Teaching’].
- Brunton, Paul: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (16 volumes) (Burdett, N.Y., Larson, 1984-1988). 8, s. 6:233 [‘Notebooks’].
- Brunton, Paul: *The Maharshi and his Message: A Selection from A Search in Secret India*, 13th ed. (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 2002, no date of original publication).
- Bucke, Richard Maurice: *Cosmic Consciousness* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969, first published 1901).
- Cahkravart, H.N.: “Divine Recognition: *Pratyabhijñā*”, *Mysticism in Shaivism and Christianity*, ed. Bettina Bäumer (Abhishiktānanda Society, 1997), p. 179.

- Cahn Fung, Annie: "Paul Brunton: A Bridge Between India and the West," Doctoral thesis, Sorbonne, 1992). Online at [<http://wisdomsgoldenrod.org/publications/>] ['Cahn Fung'].
- Chadwick, A.W. (Sadhu Arunāchala): *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1994, first published 1961). Excerpts online at [www.beezone.com/Ramaṇa/Ramaṇas_will.html] ['Chadwick'].
- Cohen, S.S.: *Guru Ramaṇa: Memories and Notes*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1993, first published 1952) ['Cohen'].
- Cohen, S.S.: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1990, first published 1959) ['Reflections'].
- Cox, Harvey: *Turning East* (Simon and Schuster, 1977).
- de Andia, Ysabel: "Jules Monchanin, La Mystique Apophatique et l'Inde", *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic 1997),
- Del Vasto, Lanzo: *Return to the Source*, tr. Jean Sidgwick (Simon and Schuster, 1971, first published in France in 1943 under the title of *Le Pèlerinage aux Sources*).
- Deutsch, Eliot: *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu, 1969).
- Eckhart, Meister: *Meister Eckeharts Schriften zur Gesellschaftsphilosophie*, ed. Ilse Roloff (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1934) ['Roloff']. Feuerstein, Georg: *The Deeper Dimensions of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003).
- Forman, K.C. (ed.): *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1990).
- Fort, Andrew O. and Patricia Y. Mumme (eds.): *Living Liberation in Hindu Thought* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- Fort, Andrew O *Jīvanmukti in Transformation*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) ['Fort'].
- Friesen, J. Glenn: "Abhishiktānanda 's Non-Monistic Advaitic Experience." Online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/>].
- Friesen, J. Glenn: "Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi," [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/Abhishiktānanda/Brunton.html>].
- Friesen, J. Glenn: "Jung, Ramaṇa Maharshi and Eastern Mediation," online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/cgjung/JungRamaṇa.html>].
- Friesen, J. Glenn: Interview of J. Glenn Friesen, online at [<http://www.innerexplorations.com/ewtext/Friesen.htm>].
- Friesen, J. Glenn: "Monism, Dualism, Nondualism: A Problem with Vollenhoven's Problem - Historical Method," online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/hermandooyeweerd/Method.html>].
- Feuerstein, Georg: *The Deeper Dimensions of Yoga* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003).

- Gadille, Jacques: “Jules Monchanin: Prophète dans la Culture et dans l’Église de son Temps,” in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997).
- Godman, David: “I AM—the First Name of God”, *The Mountain Path* 1992 29/3-4, pp. 126-142.
- Guénon, Rene: *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, tr. Marco Pallis (New Delhi, 2000, originally published 1921)
- Guénon, Rene: *Crisis of the Modern World*, tr. Arthur Osborne (Sophia Perennis, 2004, first published 1927).
- Halbfass, Wilhelm: *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta* (State University of New York, 1995).
- Halbfass, Wilhelm: “The Concept of Experience,” *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (State University of New York, 1988) [‘India and Europe’].
- Herbert, Jean: *Spiritualité hindoue* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1972, first published 1947), 464.
- Herbert, Jean: *Quelques grands penseurs de l’Inde* (Paris: Les Trois Lotus, 1937) [‘Herbert’].
- Herbert, Jean: *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940).
- Herbert, Jean: *L’Enseignement de Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Albin Michel, 1972).
- Hacker, Paul: “Distinctive Features of the Doctrine and Terminology”, *Philology and Confrontation*,
- Humphreys, Frank H.: *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai 1999) [‘Glimpses’]. The book is based on articles that Humphreys first published in *The International Psychic Gazette*, May 1913, 295 ff; June 1913, 327ff and July 1913, 357ff.
- Jung, C.G.: “The Holy Men of India,” introduction to Heinrich Zimmer, *Der Web Zum Selbst: Lehre und Leben des Indischen Heiligen Shri Ramaṇa Maharshi aus Tiruvannamalai* (Zurich, Rascher Verlag, 1944).
- C.G. Jung: *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga*, ed. Sonu Shamdasini (Princeton, 1996).
- Kaviraj, Gopinath: “The Philosophy of Tripura Tantra”. Online at <http://www.hubcom.com/magee/tantra/philtan.htm>
- Lacombe, Olivier: “Sur le Yoga indien,” *Études Carmélitaines*, October, 1937, pp. 163-176.
- Lacombe, Olivier: “Un Exemple de Mystique Naturelle: L’Inde.” *Études Carmélite*, 1938.
- Lacombe, Olivier: *L’Absolu selon le Vedānta* (Paris, 1937).
- Loy, David: *Nonduality* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1988).
- Mahadevan, T.M.P.: *Ramaṇa Maharshi: The sage of Aruṇācala* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977).

- Mahadevan, T.M.P.: *Invitation to Indian Philosophy* (New Delhi, 1974),
- Maritain, Jacques: "L'Expérience Mystique Naturelle et le Vide," *Études Carmélitaines*, 1938.
- Mehta, J.L.: *Philosophy and Revelation, Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi, 1990), 179.
- Monchanin, Jules: *Abbé Monchanin: Lettres au Père Le Saux*, ed. Françoise Jacquin (Paris: Cerf, 1995).
- Monchanin, Jules: *Jules Monchanin: Mystique de l'Inde, mystère chrétien*, ed. Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974), p. 293.
- Monchanin, Jules and Le Saux, Henri (Abhishiktānanda): *Ermîtes du Saccidānanda: un essai d'intégration chrétienne de la tradition monastique de l'Inde*, (Tournai/Paris: Casterman, 1957).
- Mudaliar, A. Devaraja: *Day by Day with Bhagavan* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1995) ['Day by Day'] The book is online at [<http://www.ramanamaharshi.org/books.htm>].
- Muller-Ortega: *The Triadic Heart of Shiva* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989).
- Muni, Ganapati (Sastri, Ganapati): *Ramaṇa Gita: Dialogues with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, tr. A.R. Natarajan (Bangalore: Ramaṇa Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1994).
- Muni, Ganapati (Sastri, Ganapati): *Forty Verses in Praise of Sri Ramaṇa*
- Nagamma, Suri: *Letters from Sri Ramaṇasramam*, tr. D.S. Sastri (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1985, first published 1970) ['Letters'].
- Nambiar, K.K.: *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1997, first published 1984) ['Nambiar'].
- Nandakumar, Prema: *T.V. Kapali Sastri* (New Delhi: Manoharlal Publishers, 1998) ['Nandakumar'].
- Narasimha Swami, B.V.: *Self Realization: The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai, 1993, first published 1931). ['Narasimha'].
- Nandakumar, Prema: *T.V. Kapali Sastri* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1988), ['Nandakumar'].
- Osborne, Arthur (ed.): *The Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, (Samuel Weiser, 1972, first published 1962), ['Teachings'].
- Osborne, Arthur (ed.): *The Collected Works of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1997).
- Osborne, Arthur: *Ramaṇa Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1970) ['Path of Self-Knowledge'].
- Osborne, Lucia: "Arthur Osborne," *The Mountain Path*, v. 7:4 (October 1970).
- Panikkar, R.: "Le Project Monastique de Monchanin," *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d'Occident et d'Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997).

- Otto, Rudolf: *Mysticism East and West* (Macmillan, 1970, first published 1932),
- Purani, A.B.: *Evening Talks*, First Series, cited by Nandakumar.
- Radhakrishnan, S.: "Introduction to *Indian Philosophy I*", in *Selected Writings on Philosophy, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Robert A. McDermott, New York: Dutton, 1970).
- N.N. Rajan: *More Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. A.R. Natarajan (Bangalore: Ramaṇa Maharshi Centre for Learning, 1996, first published 1993) [*'More Talks'*].
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Maharshi's Gospel* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1939).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Collected Works of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1972) [*'Osborne'*].
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Collected Works of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, 7th ed. with revised translations (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 2001) [*'CW'*].
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*, with an introduction by C.G. Jung (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Conscious Immortality* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1996, first published 1984) [*'Conscious Immortality'*].
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Erase the Ego*, ed. Swami Rajeshwarananda (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Talks with Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Sri Munagala S. Venkataramiah (Swami Ramaṇananda Saraswati), (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1994, first published 1955).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* (Tiruvannamalai, 1946).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *Be as You are: The Teachings of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. David Godman (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992, first published 1985).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).
- Ramaṇa Maharshi: Website for Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi [<http://www.Ramaṇa-maharshi.org/books.htm>].
- Rambachan, Anantanand: *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in Sankara* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1991).
- Rambachan, Anantanand: *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekānanda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (University of Hawaii Press, 1994)
- Reddy, Balaram, "Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy," *The Maharshi*, Mar/Apr 1995, Vol. 5, No. 2.
- Rodhe, Sten: *Jules Monchanin: Pioneer in Christian-Hindu Dialogue* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993).

- Rodhe, Sten: “De la vision inclusive de Jules Monchanin à la vision complémentaire de Bede Griffiths,” in *Jules Monchanin: Regards croisés d’Occident et d’Orient* (Lyon: Profac-Credic, 1997).
- Sarada, Kumari: *Ramaṇa Thatha: Grand Father Ramaṇa* (Bangalore: Ramaṇa Maharshi Centre for Learning 1998).
- Sarma, Lakshmana [“Who”]: *Maha Yoga or The Upanishadic Lore in the Light of the Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1961, first published 1937) [‘Maha Yoga’].
- Sarma, Lakshmana: *Guru Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mālā*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1998, 2nd ed. published 1960) [‘Sarma’].
- Sarma, Lakshmana (Lakshman, Sarma K.): “La Recherche”, *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert, (Paris: Dervy-Livres, 1972).
- Sarma, Lakshmana (Lakshman, Sarma K.): “Le Sage d’Arunāchala”, in *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*.
- Sastri, (Sastry) T.V. Kapali: *The Maharshi*, ed. M.P. Pandit (Ramaṇasramam, 1996, first published 1955)
- Sastri, (Sastry) T.V. Kapali: *Collected Works* [cited Nandakumar 19]
- Scholem,: *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961).
- Shankaranarayanan, S.: *Bhagavan and Nayana* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramansramam, 1983), 3 [‘Shankaranarayanan’].
- Siddheswarananda, Swami: ___ in *Études sur Ramaṇa Maharshi*, ed. Jean Herbert (Dervy, 1972).
- Silburn, Lilian: *Kundalini: energy of the depths: A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (State University of New York, 1988).
- Silburn, Lilian: *Instant et Cause: Le discontinu dans la pensée philosophique de l’Inde* (Paris, 1955)
- Smart, Ninian: *The Yogi and the Devotee: the Interplay between the Upanishads and Catholic Theology* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968),
- Spalding, Baird Thomas: *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East*, 6 volumes (DeVorss & Co., 1996, first published 1924).
- Subbaramayya, G.V.: In *The Maharshi*, Sept/Oct 1997, Vol. 7, NO. 5 at [<http://www.sentient.org/maharshi/janfeb92.htm>].
- Suzuki, D.T.: *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhism* (Harper, 1971),
- Swarnagiri, Ramaṇa nda: “Conversations rapportées,” in Herbert, Jean: *Etudes sur Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Dervy-Livres, 1972, first published 1940).
- Swarnagiri, Ramaṇa nda: *Crumbs from his Table* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1995) [‘Crumbs’]

- The Mountain Path*, online at [http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/m_path/m_path.htm].
- Vivekānanda, Swami: *Practical Vedānta* (Calcutta: Ananda Press, 1978, first published 1896).
- Von Brück, Michael: *The Unity of Reality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991),
- Wilber, Ken: *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*, Boston: Shambhala, 1998),
- Yagi, Seiichi : “I in the Words of Jesus,” *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987),
- Zimmer, Heinrich: *Der Weg Zum Selbst: Lehre und Leben des Indischen Heiligen Shri Ramaṇa Maharshi aus Tiruvannamalai* (Zurich, Rascher Verlag, 1944).

Some works referred to by Ramaṇa:

Ashtavakra Gita

The Bible

Patañjali: *Yoga-Sūtra*.

Peria Purānam, Condensed English Version, ed. G. Vanmikanathan (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1985).

Ribhu Gita, tr. Dr. H. Ramamoorthy, (Society for Abidance in Truth, 1994).

Tayumānavar, tr. by Himalayan Academy, online at [www.magna.com.au/~prfbrown/thayumanavar/].

Tripura Rahasya: The Mystery Beyond the Trinity, tr. Swami Sri Ramaṇananda Saraswathi (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramaṇasramam, 1989).

Vivekacūḍāmaṇi. See Ramaṇa’s translation in *Collected Works. Vivekacūḍāmaṇ The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, tr. John H. Richards. Online version at file:///Macintosh%20HD/Thesis/Sacred%20Texts/VIVEKACHUDAMANI%202. See also *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya*, tr. Swami Madhavananda, 9th ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

Wilber, Ken: *One Taste* (Boston, Shambhala, 1999).

Yoga Vāsistham: The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha, ed. Christopher Chapple, tr. Swami Venkatesananda (State University of New York, 1984),