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**THE VEDĀNTIC TRADITION  
IN  
ŚRĪ RAMAṆA MAHARSHI**

by

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### **Publisher's Note**

This article by Swāmi Siddheśwarānanda of the Ramakrishna Order, which lucidly discusses certain living implications of Advaita Vedānta as portrayed in Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi, is published within the frame of our endeavour to collect and put together material pertaining to the beginning of Vedānta Work in Europe during the 1930s..

A brief biographical sketch of the Swāmi is on the back of this pamphlet.

Publisher



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ŚRĪ RAMAṆA MAHARSHI represents the pure tradition in Advaita Vedānta. In this article I propose to examine certain aspects of the life and teachings of Maharshi that have appealed to me as verifications of Vedāntic Truths.

In Vedānta there is a theistic as well as a non-theistic tradition, and these refer to two aspects of reality. The first treats of *Sa-guṇa* Brahman and the second treats of *Nir-guṇa* Brahman.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* says that the path of the Unconditioned (**Avyākta**) is not for the aspirant who is still bound by the 'body-am-I'-idea, [BG 12.5]. Maharshi transcended the body-idea on the very day he made the investigation into the nature of the Self. His spiritual career is of particular interest to the student of Vedānta; for an example like his is rare to find. He is one who has acceded to the realization of the *Nir-guṇa* ideal without passing through the preliminary stages of discipline where much importance is given to devotion and worship (**sagūṇa-upāsana**). In history the most brilliant example of the same line of research and realization that Maharshi undertook is that of Lord Buddha, though he had to spend long years of meditation before he had the Awakening. We are now above the prejudice handed down through the ages where Buddhism and Vedānta in their essential spiritual appeal are placed one against the other in unrelenting opposition. We now consider Lord Buddha as one of the continuators of the Vedāntic tradition of the Upaniṣads, where the non-theistic ideal was lived and practiced.

To understand Maharshi we have to place him against the cultural background of Indian philosophical tradition, which finds its perfect expression in his life and realization. That background of his life is the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Upaniṣads*, particularly the *Māṇḍūkya* and the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka* studied in the light of the commentaries of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and the *Kārikās* of Śrī Gauḍapādācārya.

There are two Vedāntic positions in conformity with two

grades of seekers aspiring to know the One, Ultimate Reality; the less astute consider Brahman as **Sa-guṇa**, the other, higher type, consider it as **Nir-guṇa**. The one is *theological* and the other is *philosophical*. The two standpoints are not mutually exclusive; for the goal of the two methods is identical, namely, to bring the aspirant to the realization of Brahman. It should be noted that if the theological position adopts the *deductive* form of enquiry, it is merely a question of emphasis on a particular aspect in the method of approach.

Brahman is posited as the first principle. There are two categories – Brahman and **Māyā**. There is a severe and austere dialectic to establish the nature of **Māyā**. Brahman, the Absolute, is beyond all ‘relations’, beyond the reach of all movements of thought. We have no dialectic of the Absolute, as they have it in the occident, where the Absolute is considered as possessing a thought content. According to the higher philosophical tradition of the East, Brahman is beyond the reach of thought (**avāñ-mānasa-gocara** [*Brahmavidyā Up.*]). But in the philosophical method there is no necessity to take for granted untested universals like Brahman and **Māyā**. Here all data of living experience are looked into and examined to determine the truth in them. This method necessarily becomes *inductive*, and, after a thorough analysis of experience, a *synthesis* is arrived at. The goal of all philosophy, **tattva-nirṇaya**, is this synthesis of the totality of experience: “*to know that by knowing which everything else is known*”. This synthesis which Vedānta arrives at should not be confounded with philosophical researches known to us as an intellectual game. **Tattvajñāna** surpasses the zone of intellect and leads one to a ‘direct realization’ of TRUTH, **aparokṣānubhūti**. As such, the whole procedure becomes spiritual. As all branches of lived experience are enquired into, Vedānta takes into consideration the analysis of the states of waking (**jāgrat**), dream (**svapna**), and sleep (**suṣupti**), and their synthesis (**turiya**), the Supra-intellectual plane. The research starts from the sensible world of experience and merges in the Supra-sensible. When Maharshi made the first investigation “Who am I?”, evidently he had not envisaged this particular technique or any other one. He had not then any theological education. Maharshi once told me that at that time he was not even familiar with such

terms as Brahman or Ātman. He had not the support of any of the accepted thesis on the subject. The enquiry was his own, and the way he discovered it was equally his own. He discovered much later that he had come to the same conclusion that scriptures and the experience of others in the same line had arrived at from time immemorial.

He started from the sensible world with the analysis of a factor of experience that was not a mere hypothesis. It was a burning question to him; *the solution of the strongest emotion of man, – the most fearful form of fear, – the fear of Death*; and he solved it without leaning on any external aid. It may also be described as a ‘suffering’ of the most intense type, since Death is the antithesis of Life. This fear of death that took possession of young Veṅkaṭarāman [of which ‘Ramaṇa’ is an abbreviation] all on a sudden. Any ordinary lad under similar circumstances would avoid the issues by changing the predominant thought or he would seek refuge in some kind of religious consolation. But Maharshi looked the fact of this fear squarely in the face!

*“To whom does this fear occur? What is this fear due to? It is due to imminent death. Death of what? Who is it that is dying? It is the physical body that is already stiff, it will be carried away presently for cremation. But this consciousness, this I-ness, with which I see the changing condition of the body losing its life, this ‘I’ has remained totally unaffected.”*

That, in short, is the direct means whereby young Veṅkaṭarāman knew of the reality of an inner Being which witnessed not only the changing condition of the body seized by Death, but also the unchanging condition of Consciousness which is necessarily self-conscious. It is this realization that the *Gītā* calls:

**...kṣetra-kṣetrajñāyor jñānam...**

*“...the knowledge of the field and the knower of the field...”* [BG 13.2]

which in its highest form – as revealed to the Sage of Aruṇācala – is more than an intuitive flash.

To resume the subject of enquiry into the Truth. The

*Bhagavad-Gītā* begins by stating clearly a **dharmā sankata**, a conflict touching one's very being:— to kill or not to kill? When the conflict is real one seeks its solution. To Maharshi the conflict **was real**. The un-ignorable fact of death was there. It must find a solution and that too, immediately. Such a state is totally different from and has nothing to do with a theological enquiry. In the theological enquiry the aspirant has only to fit in his particular case with the conclusion the scriptures have already given. The **jijñāsu** is not satisfied with the dicta of the scriptures. He seeks AN UNDERSTANDING which can be related to his experience. Since Maharshi's knowledge, when confronted with Death, was based on his experience, he was more than a **jijñāsu**. Even of the **jijñāsu** the *Gītā* says:

**jijñāsur api yogasya śabdabrahmā 'tivarte**  
 “the enquirer after Yoga rises superior to the performer  
 of Vedic actions.” [BG 6.44]

In fact young Veṅkaṭarāman stood on the threshold of Realization no sooner than he survived the Death-experience. He had no need for either the **karma-kāṇḍa** of the Vedas or for **Yogabhāṣya** involving the practice of years of self-discipline.

Let us look more deeply into the conflict of young Veṅkaṭarāman that made him take up the challenge of DEATH. As I said, it was the fear of imminent death that provoked the conflict in him. Maharshi became the critic of his own experience. He did not avoid the issue; rather, he lived fully that Death-experience. Ordinary beings are unable to analyze their experiences, much less a conflict, for they do not fully understand nor do they live intelligently their experiences of life. The plenitude of an experience can be known when one becomes a competent spectator of it. Even in our ordinary limited experiences of joys and sufferings in life, our self goes so much in our acts that a disinterested outlook becomes impossible. We screen truth by our hopes and fears, by our desires and disappointments. From a single moment properly lived, says the poet, a whole eternity can be known. Maharshi lived fully the moment of his Death-experience. And he became at one stroke a **tattvajñāni**, a Knower of TRUTH.

A philosophy becomes dry and insipid when it does not solve



this vital problem of death and suffering. Philosophy when it deals with concepts and percepts, that have no real bearing on life, gives stones when one asks for bread! An interest in philosophical enquiry commences the very moment when a datum of experience is placed in relief as a specimen for analysis, and an attempt is made *to know what it is*. Very often all that we pass through as routine experiences do not affect us; for they do not stay in our memory as possessing any particular value. Only an outstanding event serves a notice as it were on ‘attention’ and makes it alert; for it surpasses the norm of our usual identification with experience, and thus helps it, by its very intensity, to be projected as a factor for observation – which cannot be done, so long as we are identified with it. Nothing can give us more forcibly this invitation for observation than suffering when it is really ours and not a feigned one. Of the three types of suffering (**tāpa-traya**), that which is of the physical order – **ādhibhautika**, can be attended to more easily than the two others, **ādhidāivika** (cosmic causes) and **adhyātmika** (personal causes). These sufferings born of our subtle nature, the mental and spiritual, cannot be easily quelled. In physical suffering there is more possibility for observation and hence a greater chance of relief being administered. In the other two kinds of **duḥkha** (suffering) the difficulty of dispassionate observation is complicated by the series of false identifications (**adhyāsa**), that we ourselves have woven over our nature. We are caught up in the meshes of **rāga** (attraction) and **dveṣa** (repulsion), and consequently we do not live an experience completely which, as I have already said, is the *complete separation of the factor of observation, the observed, from the Observer*. The moment this is achieved the answer is found.

This separation has been so charmingly described in the *Bhagavad Gītā* as one of the functions of Yoga:

***tam vidyād duḥkha-samyoga-viyogam  
yoga-samjñitam /***

*“Let that be known as the state called by the name of  
Yoga, a state of severance [vi-yoga] from contact with  
pain.” [BG 6.23]*

Our identification (**adhyāsa**), with every successive moment of experience does not permit us to make the experiment of iso-

lating the Spectator from the spectacle. And when a crucial moment comes, when this identification is challenged by nature through suffering, we get alarmed and desperate. In Chapter 13 of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Lord Krishna gives us the proper technique to undo this junction of the Spectator and the spectacle. The Lord speaks to us of **kṣetra** (the field) and the **Kṣetrajñā** (the Knower of the field). He says in verse 2:

***Kṣetra kṣetrajñayor jñānam yat taj jñānam  
mataṁ mama /***

*“The knowledge of Kṣetra and Kṣetrajñā is considered  
by Me to be the Knowledge.” [BG 13.2]*

The same technique of distinguishing the Spectator and the spectacle is also known as ***Dṛg-dr̥śya-viveka***.

Later on in life, when Maharshi came into contact with such classical texts as the *Dṛg-dr̥śya-viveka*, he instinctively found there a family-likeness to a psychological or rather trans-psychological way that he himself had followed. As Maharshi plunged in the depths of his soul during his analysis of “Who am I?” he got beyond the plane of doubts; for he had transcended the limitations set by the intellectualizing character of mind that never permits that dis-junction from the ***nāma-rūpa*** complex which is the field of empirical experience. His method has much in common with that of Lord Buddha. When Malukya asked Buddha questions that did not touch the vital issue involved—that of suffering, the latter replied that one pierced by an arrow would be interested only in plucking it out and not in discussing of what substance the arrow was made, whether it had a poisoned tip or not etc. He put his whole being, while controlling breath and vital forces, into the trans-psychological investigation he fearlessly undertook when confronted by Death, thus realizing another aspect of Yoga described by the *Gītā*:

***sarvāṇi ’ndriyakarmāṇi prāṇakarmāṇi cā ’pare /  
ātmasam̐yama yogāgnau juhvati jñānadīpīte //***

*“Some other Yogis let consume all the functions of the  
senses, breath and vital forces in the fire of self-control  
set ablaze by Jñāna.” [BG 4.27]*

His whole being entered into perfect concentration as he analyzed himself. He did not stop midway in the enquiry. The

metaphysical Reality he attained, allowed his *buddhi* to be drawn out of the slough of *saṁkalpa* and *vikalpa* (the image-making faculty of the mind) and enabled him to realize that other definition of Yoga in the *Gītā*:

***samatvaṁ yoga ucyate***

*“Evenness of mind is known as Yoga.”* [BG 2.48]

The conscious principle underlying thought joined to a volition that precipitated immediate investigation, gave him the full blossoming of the cognitive faculty, the way of ***Buddhi Yoga*** – all three operating in one single flash! He became a ***Sthitaprajñā***, the ‘possessor of steady Wisdom’, and in the words of the *Gītā*:

***yaṁ labdhvā cā ’param lābham manyate nā  
'dhikam tataḥ*** /

***yasmin sthito na duḥkena guruṇā ’pi vicālyate*** //

*“Having obtained which, regards no other acquisition superior to that, and where established, he is not moved even by the greatest sorrow.”* [BG 6.22]

One does not find in Maharshi that type of ***Bhakti*** associated with devotional forms; but it can be said that if the way of ***Bhakti*** brings one to an expression of bounty and love towards all, *he is that*. His very nature (***sva-rūpa***) and (***sva-bhāva***) become imbued with love (***prema***). I should not omit here to mention a scene that I myself witnessed. At my request he recited certain lines from the composition of the Saint Māṅikkavācakar, where the author spoke of the condition of the soul melted in love; hardly had the Maharshi pronounced a few lines there was a brilliance in his face. He who rarely expresses in any outward form his inner emotion could not restrain a few silent tears. A slanting ray of the morning sun from the hill-side made the scene still more vivid. A ‘peace that passeth all understanding’ pervaded the whole atmosphere. For more than an hour there was perfect silence. It looked as if one of the paintings in fresco of Ajanta has come into life! When the atmosphere was disturbed by a new visitor, I repeated before him, as a parallel to the verse from Māṅikkavācakar, the following lines from Wordsworth:

*His spirit drank the spectacle*

*Sensation, soul and form all melted into him;*

*they swallowed up  
 His animal being, in them did he live; they were his life  
 In such access of mind, in such high hour  
 Of visitation from the living God,  
 Thought was not, in enjoyment it expired.  
 Rapt in still communion, that transcends  
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
 That made him; it was blessedness and love!*

(Excursion – Wanderer – Book I, 205-218)

Maharshi followed very appreciatively this selection from Wordsworth and remarked to me in Malayalam, “How nicely they too have expressed these same high sentiments.” I made then the remark that Tāyumānavar, Rāmaliṅgaswāmi and Mānikkavācakar were all Saints. Wordsworth, like other poets of the Romantic Period, cannot be classed as a Saint. These poets had occasional intuition of the supra-sensible reality, they were neither **Jñānis** nor **Jivanmuktas**.

## II

Maharshi told me that what he realized on the first day when he made the maiden **vicāra**, has ever remained with him. It has neither increased nor decreased. When I asked him why he came all the way to Tiruvaṅṅāmalai and why he underwent so many hardships, which we would characterize as **sādhanā**, he only waved his hand, implying, “I do not know why all that happened.” Our inquiring minds want explanations; and are easily satisfied with some such fiction as Destiny or **Prārabdha**, which does not exist for the **jñāni**. For it is said that the **karmas** of a person who realizes **Brahmajñāna** are all dissolved at one stroke. From the point of view of Maharshi it must be so.

To us who follow Vedānta, the highest aspect of Maharshi’s Realization is revealed in his great message of Silence. It is not that he remains without speaking a word, as he did for some years. He is now more communicative. But with regard to the things of life his attitude is best described in the words of the *Gītā*:—

**yadā te moha kalilam buddhir vyatitariṣyati /  
 tadā gantāsi nirvedam śrotavyasya śrutasya ca //**

“When thy Buddhi crosses beyond the taint of illusion, then shalt thou attain to indifference regarding things heard and things yet to be heard.” [BG 2.52]

**...ātmany evā ’tmanā tuṣṭaḥ...**

“...one who is satisfied in the Self by the Self...” [BG 2.55]

**...yatātmā...**

“...the self-controlled one...” [BG 12.14]

**...dr̥ḍhaniścayaḥ...**

“one with firm determination...” [BG 12.14]

**...anapekṣaḥ...**

“the desireless one...” [BG 12.16]

**...sarvā-rambha parityāgī...**

“one who has renounced all enterprise...” [BG 12.16]

**...saṁtuṣṭo yena kenacit...**

“content with anything...” [BG 12.19]

**...udāsīnavad āsīno...**

“sitting like one unconcerned...” [BG 14.23]

and many such charming phrases of the *Gītā* give a word picture of Maharshi. In still more powerful language, the following verses of the *Gītā* give to the reader an insight into the transcendental State the Sage has realized:—

**yas tv ātmaratir eva syād ātmatṛptaś ca mānavaḥ /**

**ātmany eva ca saṁtuṣṭas tasya kāryam na vidyate //**

“The man who revels here and now in the Self alone, with the Self is satisfied, and in the Self alone is content, — for him there is no work which he must do.” [BG 3.17]

**yo ’ntaḥsukho ’antarāramas tathā ’ntarjyotir eva yaḥ /**

**sa yogi brahmanirvāṇam brahmabhūto ’dhi-gacchati //**

“He who is inwardly happy, revels within and who likewise becomes the Light within, that Yogi becomes the Brahman and realizes the transcendental Bliss of Brahman.” [BG 5.24]

What impressed me most in reading the characteristics of the **Jivanmukta** in *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* were the lines:—

*“He has his mind merged in Brahman; nevertheless he is quite alert, but free from the characteristics of the waking state.”* [*Vivekacūdāmaṇi* 429]

In remaining a few days with Maharshi, these lines of *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* often came to my mind. To all outward appearance Maharshi very often looked as if he were unconscious; but his mind is ever in such a state of concentration that even during the moments when he appeared to be inert he knew all that was passing on in the hall; in repeating verses from *Ribhu-Gītā*, old Tenamma made a certain error in pronunciation. Opening his eyes, he gently corrected her. In *Dṛg-drśya-viveka* in verse 30 there is a fine account of the concentration of a man of realization:

*“With the disappearance of attachment to the body and with the realization of the Supreme SELF to whatever object the mind is directed one experiences Samādhi.”*  
[DDV 30]

How a metaphysical experience of unity can be presented through a psychological mode where the essential characteristic of the psyche is **saṅkalpa** and **vikalpa**, the very opposite that produces the unitary consciousness, defies all empirical explanation. For our explanations, the data of investigation is only the findings of the waking state; whereas to an enlightened man the field of research is vaster. It is all-inclusive, as it englobes the experience of the waking state, plus that of the dream and sleep states. The **Sthitaprajñā** realizes the non-dual Brahman in each aspect of manifestation, not in the way a layman sees the world as fragmented units, but as one expression of the same Reality that comes to us through the experience of waking, dream and sleep states. Even to use the term ‘aspects of Reality’ with respect to a **Jivanmukta’s** vision of the world is a misnomer. To him the Reality ever **IS** and never gets conditioned into aspects which is a feature of **avidyā**.

To understand this spiritual outlook of a person like Maharshi, I cannot do better than quote the commentary of

Śamkara on the 89th Kārikā of the 4th chapter of Māṇḍūkya Kārikās:

*“The word **jñāna** signifies knowledge by which one grasps the significance of the three states. The word **jñeya** or ‘knowable’ signifies the three states which should be known. The first knowable consists of the gross state of empirical experience. Then comes the state of subtle experience, in which the first state loses itself; that is, merges. And the last comes deep sleep which is beyond all empirical experience (gross or subtle) which results in the absence of the two previous states, that is, in which the two previous states merge. By the knowledge of these three one after the other, and consequently by the negation of the three states the TURĪYA, non-dual, birthless and fearless which alone is the Supreme Reality is realized. Thus the knower possessed of the greatest power of discrimination attains in this very life the state of omniscience, which is identical with the knowledge of the Self. He is called **MAHĀDHI** or the man of the highest intellect as he has understood that which transcends all human experiences. His omniscience is constant and remains undiminished. For, the knowledge of the SELF once realized remains forever. This is because the knowledge of the knower of the Supreme Reality does not appear and disappear like that of mere disputants.”*

In these lines Śamkara expounds in a very clear manner the full implications of what I described in the beginning as the non-theistic or ‘extra-religious’ tradition in Vedānta of which Maharshi is a worthy representative. In India when we speak of this tradition we do not oppose it to the theistic or religious tradition. In Europe anyone expounding such a theory will be more often considered an atheist! For it is very difficult for a European with his Judeo-Christian theology as the background of his spiritual culture, to admit or conceive of spiritual life without the idea of God. Whenever I speak to Christian audiences in Europe, I have to tell them how a highly spiritual life can be conceived of as in the Buddhistic and Advaita Vedāntic traditions without even conceding to the necessity of positing the idea of God. This is at first very startling and very uncom-

fortable to the theologically-minded. They then think in terms of the possibility of a 'natural mysticism' as opposed to a 'supernatural mysticism'. A concession to study the subject under this perspective is only a recent advance in their spirit of generosity or, perhaps, of a scientific outlook towards the meta-physical reality. It is only after the visit of Prof. Olivier Lacombe to Tiruvaṅṅmalai and his contact with Maharshi that we can now note a change in the outlook of one of France's world-reputed thinkers and theologians, Jacques Maritain. In an article contributed to that well-known catholic magazine *Les Études Carmélitaines* in 1938, Maritain has taken a sympathetic position. Influenced by Prof. Lacombe and taking an objective view of the question, he recommends to his Catholic friends a study of that experience of the SELF where all religious implications are absent.

### III

The philosophical outlook of Maharshi tends very often to be confused with that of solipsism or its Indian equivalent, *dr̥ṣṭi-sr̥ṣṭi-vāda*, which is a sort of degenerated idealism. That Maharshi never subscribes to that view can be known if we study his works in the light of orthodox Vedānta or observe his behaviour in life. When he says that it is the mind that has projected this universe, the term 'mind' should be understood in the Vedāntic sense in which it is used. Unfortunately I have no books by Maharshi or works on him with me here for reference, as all of them have disappeared when our library was looted during the German occupation. What I write has necessarily to depend on my memory impressions. The term 'mind' is also used by Śāṅkara and Gauḍapāda in a wider sense than what we are accustomed to use it as an *antaḥkaraṇa vṛtti*. In certain places in the *bhāṣyas* of Śāṅkara and the *Kārikās*, the pure 'mind' is equated with Ātman. For example, let us take verse 170 in *Vivekacūdāmaṇi*:

*“In dream when there is no actual contact with the external world the mind alone creates the whole universe consisting of the enjoyer, the objects, etc. And similarly in the waking state also there is no difference. Therefore, all this phenomenal universe is the projection of mind.”*

If the 'mind' used here is taken identical with *antaḥ-*



**kaṛaṇa vṛtti** then, necessarily, Vedānta will be classed as solipsism! To understand the larger sense in which ‘mind’ is used in many such contexts we have to read the *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*. For example take verse 29 in Chapter 3:–

“As in dream the mind acts through **Māyā** presenting the appearance of duality, so also in the waking state the mind acts through **Māyā** presenting the appearance of duality.” [GK 3.29]

Śaṅkara in his commentary makes the sense more explicit. Let us quote that:–

“How is it possible for Reality to pass into birth through **Māyā**? It is thus replied: as the snake imagined in the rope is identical with the being of the rope when seen as the rope, so also the mind from the standpoint of knowledge of the ultimate reality **is seen to be identical with Ātman**. (The bold italics are ours.) The mind in dream appears to us as dual in the forms of the cognizer and the cognized through **Māyā** as the snake appears to be other than a rope through ignorance. Similarly the mind acts in a dual form in the waking state also through **Māyā**. That is to say the mind appears to act.”

[We have to note also that in this connection Śaṅkara used the term **Māyā** instead of **Avidyā**; in our Vedāntic theology, **Avidyā** has more or less reference to the individual; and when the term **Māyā** is used it signifies the totality of the manifested universe. This is another indication that there is no scope of stigmatising the term ‘mind’ as having a solipsistic significance.]

Again, in Chapter 4, commenting on *Kārikā* 54, Śaṅkara says:–

“Thus, for reasons already stated, the mind is verily of the essence of the **SELF**. External objects are not caused by the mind, nor is the mind the product of external objects. That is because all (external) entities are mere appearances in Consciousness. Thus neither the so-called effect comes from the (so-called) cause nor the cause from the effect. In this way is reiterated the absolute non-evolution of

*causality. In other words the knowers of Brahman declare the absence of causality with regard to Ātman.*”

Again, in the commentary on *Kārikā* 64 of Chapter 4, Śaṅkara says:-

*“These objects perceived by the mind of the dreamer have no existence outside the mind of the person who dreams about them. It is the mind alone which assumes the form of many diversified objects. Similarly the mind of the dreamer is perceived by the dreamer alone. Therefore there is no separate thing called mind which is apart from the dreamer himself.”*

[Swāmi Nikhilānanda in his notes makes the point still clearer. He writes, “The mind of a man is not perceived by any other being but himself. The perceiving ego is also created by the mind. The ego and the non-ego come into existence together. Therefore the charge of solipsism cannot be leveled against Vedānta.”]

Śaṅkara and Gauḍapāda use in many places the term ‘mind’ thus, as an equivalent of Ātman. In the commentary on *Kārikā* 35, Chapter 3, Śaṅkara reiterates the same idea:-

*“When the mind becomes free from all ideas of the perceiver and the perceived, the dual evils caused by ignorance, it verily becomes one with the Supreme and non-dual Brahman.”*

#### IV

Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara speak highly of the necessity of **sādhana** for one who is a candidate for the highest knowledge. The lines :-

***Na nirodho na cotpattiḥ*** etc. *“There is no dissolution, no birth, none in bondage, none aspiring for wisdom, no seeker of liberation and none liberated. This is the absolute truth.”* [GK 2.32]

are *not* spoken in reference to the **sādhakas**. To those who make efforts in spiritual life the advice given in *Kārikā* 41, Chapter 3, is very interesting:-

*“The mind can be brought under control only by an unrelenting effort like that which is required to empty an ocean, drop by drop, with the help of a blade of kusha grass.” [GK 3.41]*

The purpose of this *Kārikā* is to impress on the aspirant the immensity of the task he has undertaken, the task of transforming the *jīva bhāva* into *Brahma-Svarūpa*. But he need not feel on reading this *Kārikā* that he is embarking on a hopeless adventure. We find in the life and realization of Maharshi the fullest confirmation of the fact that the Truth Eternal is an attainable reality, and it is none other than the Self, the core of one’s own being. Maharshi declares that realization is not only possible but is the easiest thing to achieve, provided one has the right understanding and the true spirit of dedication. *Kārikā-s 3.42, 3.43 and 3.44* offer valuable hints to the aspirant, which are similar to what he finds in the ‘Talks’ in *Sat-Darshana Bhashya* (Vide also Maharshi’s *Gospel Books I and II*.) The *Kārikās* referred to above are as follows:–

*“The mind distracted by desires and enjoyments as also the mind enjoying pleasure in oblivion (trance-like conditions) should be brought under discipline by the pursuit of proper means, for the state of oblivion is as harmful as desires.” [GK 3.42]*

*“The mind should be turned back from the enjoyment of pleasures, remember that all this is attended with misery. If it be remembered that everything is the unborn Brahman, the born (duality) will not be seen.” [GK 3.43]*

*“If the mind becomes inactive in a state of oblivion awaken it again. If it is distracted, bring it back to the state of tranquillity. (in the intermediate state) know the mind containing within it desires in a potential form. If the mind has attained to the state of equilibrium then do not disturb it again.” [GK 3.44]*

It will not be out of place to quote in detail the commentary to the 43rd *Kārikā*:–

*“What is the way of disciplining the mind? It is thus replied. Remember that all duality is caused by **Avidyā** or illusion, and therefore afflicted with misery. Thereby dis-*

*suade the mind from seeking enjoyments produced by desires. In other words, withdraw the mind from all dual objects by impressing upon it the idea of complete non-attachment. Realize this from the teaching of the scriptures and ācāryas that **all this verily is the changeless Brahman.** (Bold italics is ours) Then you will not see anything to the contrary, that is, duality, for it does not exist.”*

It must be noted in passing that the mind that is referred to here is the individual mind which the **sādhaka** is to control.



A conversation I had with Maharshi about the way to interpret the 33rd verse of the third chapter of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* brings out his attitude towards **sādhanā** in a very clear manner. There the Lord says:—

**Sadrśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛter jñānavān api /  
prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati //**  
“Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings follow nature; what can restraint do?”  
[BG 3.33]

Apparently this verse is very disheartening. Maharshi in explaining this verse made a distinction between knowledge and **jñāna**. Bare knowledge as an intellectual attainment will not change character. That may give a lot of ‘information’ but will not bring about any ‘transformation’; without aiming at this transformation, if one dares to confront nature, conserving all the animal appetites that flesh is heir to, that will be catastrophic for the **sādhaka**. The Lord has said in verse 14 of the 7th Chapter:—

**daiivī hy eṣā guṇamayī mama māyā duratyayā /**  
“Verily, this divine illusion of MINE, constituted by the **guṇas** is difficult to cross over.” [BG 7.14]

Maharshi then explained that nature has two aspects and each stage has its laws. The lower is described in verse 34 of the same chapter, immediately after the note of despair struck in verse 33. Here the Lord describes one of the laws that govern the lower nature:—

**indriyasye ’ndriyasya ’rthe rāgadveṣau vyava-**

***sthitau /***

*“Attachment and aversion of the senses for their respective objects are natural;...” [BG 3.34]*

and for ***sādhakas*** the warning is forcibly given in the same verse:—

***...taylor na vaśam āgacchet tau hy asya paripanthinau /***

*“...let none come under their sway; they are his foes.” [BG 3.34]*

***Jñāna***, he said, is the realization that takes one to the higher plane of nature.

Then I asked him whether it will be appropriate to describe its functioning along the lines of the *Gītā*:—

***Bahūnām janmanām ante jñānavān mām prapadyate /***

***vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ //***  
*“At the end of many births, the man of wisdom takes refuge in ME, realizing that all this is Vāsudeva—the innermost SELF—very rare is that great soul.” [BG 7.19]*

Maharshi unhesitatingly said that that is the truth. I then told him how Mr. V. Subrahmanya Iyer of Mysore often told me that without the explanation of this ***sarvam***, no philosophy can be valid. The life of Maharshi amply illustrates that he lives the full significance of this philosophy of Totality: in him belief and behaviour are at-one-ment. The interpretation of ***sarvam*** of the *Gītā* in Maharshi is through his moral outlook and conduct; and this moral appeal of Maharshi is the greatest encouragement to all those who desire to follow the spiritual path along this particular tradition of which he is the living custodian. This moral appeal again is the fruit of his metaphysical realization. Morality and conduct in Vedānta are inseparable from metaphysics.



We often hear it said that many of the devotees of Maharshi saw him in the state of ecstasy. I do not contradict their interpretation of Maharshi as they saw him. I would like here only to give a certain Vedāntic background to his attainment of

**Sahajasthiti** which I think should not be interpreted in terms of ecstasy. Ecstasy is a religious experience. The **anubhava** of **Sahajasthiti** is, on the other hand metaphysical. Ecstasy is attained in the spiritual union with the Godhead. Union is possible when a difference is conceded between the units that afterward enter into relation. But **Sahajasthiti** is the state natural to the SELF when all the superimpositions are thrown away, that is, in the language of the *Gītā*, when one becomes **ātmany evā ’tmanā tuṣṭaḥ** “*satisfied in the SELF alone by the SELF*” — [BG 2.55]. Meister Eckhart in another language expresses the same conception thus:— “*For if you want the kernel you must break the shell and therefore if you want to discover nature’s nakedness you must destroy its symbols.*” (The bold italics are ours)

Let us see what Śaṅkara has to say with regard to this topic. In the case of a **Jñāni** the term “*he is merged in Brahman*”, as in the *mantra* in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 4.4.6, should be interpreted according to Śaṅkara in a figurative sense. Śaṅkara in commenting on this passage concludes by saying:—

“...*Therefore the Ātman by itself has no difference due to bondage or liberation, knowledge or ignorance, for it is admitted to be always the same and homogeneous by nature.*

*Those who consider the reality of the Self to be different, reduce the scriptures dealing with bondage and liberation to mere plausible statements, would dare to find the foot-prints of birds in the sky to pull it with their clenched hands, or to cover it with a skin. But we can do no such thing. We hold that it is the definite conclusion of the Upaniṣads that we are nothing but the Ātman, the Brahman that is always the same, homogeneous, one without a second, unchanging, birthless, undecaying, immortal, deathless and free from fear. Therefore the statement ‘He is merged in Brahman’ — (this text) — is but a figurative one, — (the bold italics are ours) — meaning the cessation, as the result of knowledge, of the continuous chain of bodies for one who has held an opposite view.*”

Again, on page 746 of same translation it is stated as follows:—

“The Knowledge of Brahman too, means only the cessation of the identification with extraneous things (such as the body). The relation of identity with it has not to be established, for it is already there. Everybody has that identity with IT, for the scriptures do not enjoin that identity with Brahman should be established, but that false identification with things other than THAT should stop. **When the identification with other things is gone, the natural identity with one’s own SELF becomes isolated.** This is expressed by the statement that the SELF is known. In ITSELF, IT is unknowable – not comprehended through any means.”

From the above statements we should understand that the state of **Sahajasthiti** or **Kaivalya** cannot be equated with the union attained in any particular mystic condition. Whatever may be the mystic value of these transcendental states described in the ecstasies, a **Jñāni**, – not denying of course the possibilities of these states, – remains completely detached from them; for he knows that every **bhāva**, or mode of experience, material or mystic, is the same manifestation of Ātman, and in every aspect of manifestation it is the same Brahman in action. His mind does not yearn for any special kind of experience. He has nothing to achieve nor has he anything to be achieved through others. (Vide text of *Gītā* 3.17 quoted on p.13 above.) He is the person in whom there will be no tendency at all to proselytise. He has no mission to achieve. According to Śaṅkara in the **Nirvāṇaśatakam**, he alone can say:

“I have no death nor fear, no distinction of rank or class. I have no father, no mother no friend, no master nor disciple, I am Absolute knowledge and Bliss.  
I am the ALL-PERVADING SELF,  
I am the ALL-PERVADING SELF –

(*cidānanda-rūpaḥ śivo ’ham śivo ’ham*)”

IN THE PRESENCE OF MAHARSHI THIS VERILY IS THE IMPRESSION THAT A SEEKER OF THE VEDĀNTIC TRADITION GETS.

**He is amongst us. We offer him our salutations.**

### Swāmi Siddheśwarānanda

Swāmi Siddheśwarānanda (1897-1957), went to France in 1937, following an earnest request by French admirers of Indian thought, expressed to Swāmi Yatiśwarānanda at the 1936 Ramakrishna Centenary Celebrations in Paris.

Born in Trichur (Kerala) in 1897, the Swāmi, while a student in Madras, was initiated by Swāmi Brahmānanda (the great direct disciple of Śrī Ramakrishna) in 1916. His parents, were disciples of Swāmi Śivānanda (the direct disciple of Śrī Ramakrishna). He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1920 and was ordained into saṁnyāsa by Swāmi Śivānanda in 1924. He served in various centres, first in Madras, then in Mysore (1925) [where he studied Advaita Vedānta under V. Subrahmanya Iyer, at the Mysore Ramakrishna Ashrama Study Circle], again in Madras (1933), and Bangalore (1935).

On arrival in Paris on July 31, 1937, the Swāmi was welcomed in the home of M. & Mme Marcel Sauton, who devoted themselves to his service until his passing away on April 2, 1957. He established the CENTRE D'ÉTUDES VÉDANTIQUES (the later CENTRE VÉDANTIQUE RAMAKRICHNA), and carried on his work even during the dark days of the second World War, when he had to live under forced residence in the South of France. The Swāmi's spiritual charm and scholarship soon caused many French intellectuals to take a deep interest in Vedānta. He regularly spoke at the Sorbonne and, during the war, his lectures at Toulouse and the Montpellier University attracted many people. Not merely intellectuals but persons from all strata of society. In 1945 he resumed his work in the Paris area, the classes at the Institut de Civilisation Indienne and monthly lectures at the Sorbonne etc. etc. In 1948, a devotee purchased and offered to the Swāmi the property at Gretz in the Seine & Marne province, 30 km southeast of Paris, where the CENTRE VÉDANTIQUE RAMAKRICHNA is presently located.

The Swāmi's publications in French include, among others: five volumes of lectures in Paris, at Montpellier and at the University of Toulouse between 1938 and 1943; and the following: 1. *La Méditation selon le Yoga-védanta* (1942); 2. *Avant-propos du Dṛg-dṛśya-viveka servant d'Introduction à l'étude des ouvrages Védantiques* (1945); 3. *Éssai sur la Métaphysique du Védanta avec une étude sur Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi* (1948); 4. *Pensée Indienne et Mystique Carmélitaine* (1949-53) and, posthumously, 5. *L'Intuition Métaphysique* [Talks on the *Gitā*] (1976). The Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trichur, has published, in English translation: *Meditation According to Yoga-Vedānta* and *Some Aspects of Vedānta Philosophy*.

Finally, the Swāmi inspired and supervised the translation into French, by Marcel Sauton, of significant Vedāntic works, including the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad & Gauḍapāda Kārikā* (Swāmi Nikhilānanda), *Dṛg-dṛśya-viveka* (Swāmi Nikhilānanda), *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* (Swāmi Madhavānanda), *The Eternal Companion* (Swāmi Prabhavānanda), *The Life of Śārada Devi, Spiritual Practice* (Swāmi Aśokānanda), *In The Hours of Meditation* (F.J.Alexander), *Pañcadaśi* and *Uddhava-Gītā*, all of which were translated for the first time into a Continental European language.