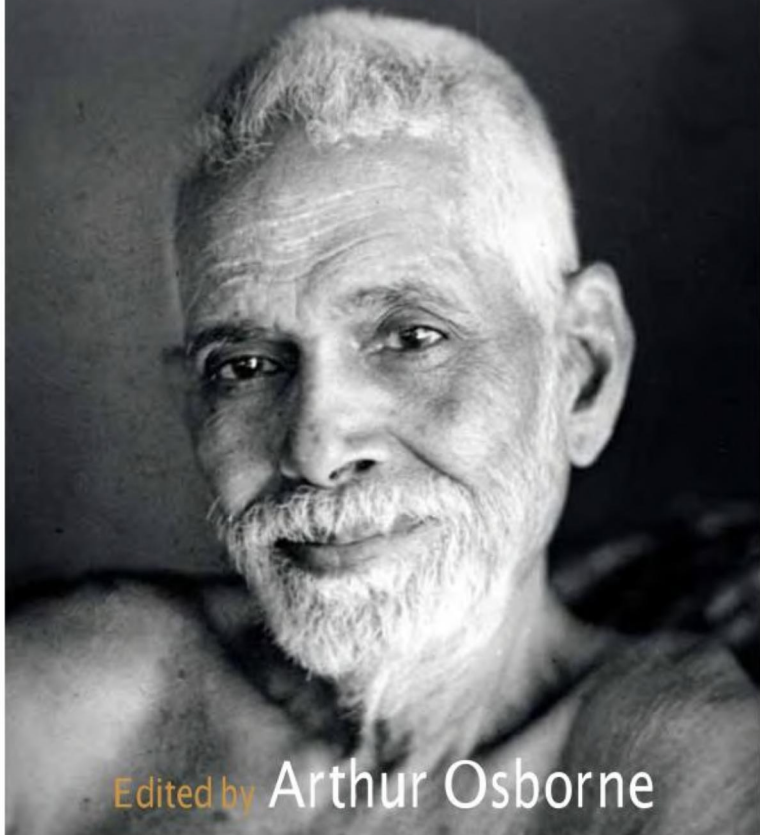


The Teachings of  
**Ramana  
Maharshi**

'Points to the possibility of finding true happiness'

*Eckhart Tolle*



Edited by **Arthur Osborne**

The Teachings  
of  
Ramana Maharshi

Edited by Arthur Osborne



RIDER

LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND • JOHANNESBURG

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

This edition reissued in 2014 by Rider, an imprint of Ebury Publishing  
First published in 1962 by Century Hutchinson Ltd

Ebury Publishing is a Random House Group company

Copyright © Sri Ramanasramam 1962

Sri Ramana Maharshi and Arthur Osborne have asserted their right to be identified as the author and editor of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

Addresses for companies within the Random House Group can be found at:  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

The Random House Group Limited supports the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®), the leading international forest-certification organisation. Our books carrying the FSC label are printed on FSC®-certified paper. FSC is the only forest-certification scheme supported by the leading environmental organisations, including Greenpeace. Our paper procurement policy can be found at:  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment)



Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

ISBN 9781846044335

Copies are available at special rates for bulk orders. Contact the sales development team on 020 7840 8487 for more information.

To buy books by your favourite authors and register for offers, visit:  
[www.randomhouse.co.uk](http://www.randomhouse.co.uk)

## CONTENTS

<u>Preface by Alan Jacobs</u>	vii
<u>Foreword by Carl Gustav Jung</u>	x
<u>Introduction by Arthur Osborne</u>	xiv
1. <u>THE BASIC THEORY</u>	1
2. <u>FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE</u>	57
3. <u>LIFE IN THE WORLD</u>	71
4. <u>THE GURU</u>	89
5. <u>SELF-ENQUIRY</u>	<u>107</u>
6. <u>OTHER METHODS</u>	<u>138</u>
7. <u>THE GOAL</u>	<u>174</u>
<u>Endnotes</u>	<u>199</u>
<u>Index</u>	<u>203</u>





## PREFACE BY ALAN JACOBS

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

A good friend of Paul Brunton at that time was the celebrated novelist Somerset Maugham. When Brunton told Maugham about his discovery of the Great Sage, it inspired Maugham to consider writing a major novel based on such a discovery. Maugham then took the journey to India himself, to meet Ramana for purposes of research. The result of his visit inspired him to write his masterpiece *The Razor's Edge*, telling of a young man's spiritual journey, ending in a meeting with a Great Guru based on Sri Ramana Maharshi and his ashram. The novel was later made into a highly successful motion picture and has been remade since.

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

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

So Ramana Maharshi, widely known, became a World Guru, the highest ranking among spiritual Indian masters. Since those pre-war days his worldwide reputation has widened even more. Ramana Ashram has published over 70 books on his teachings, written by numerous highly literate devotees. All the answers to the questions asked by devotees, during his 50 years of teaching, were recorded and translated into English and checked for his approval. (He was fluent in English, having received his earlier education in an American mission school in his home town of Tiruchuzhi.) All these extensive publications led to his growing



reputation as a Great Spiritual Master or Jnani, and led to more and more people visiting his ashram, where his presence can still be felt. After the Second World War and the release of the Fascist and Communist grip on Europe, many flocked from Russia, Germany and the Middle European countries too.

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

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

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

ALAN JACOBS  
President of the  
Ramana Maharshi Foundation UK



## FOREWORD BY CARL GUSTAV JUNG

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

Shri Ramana is, in a sense, a *hominum homo*, a true 'son of man' of the Indian earth. He is 'genuine' and on top of that he is a 'phenomenon' who, seen through European eyes, has claims to uniqueness. But in India he is merely the whitest spot on a white surface (whose whiteness is mentioned only because there are so many surfaces that are just as black). Altogether, one sees so much in India that in the end one only wishes one could see less: the enormity and variety of countries and human beings creates longing for complete simplicity. This simplicity

---

\* This foreword is extracted from C.G. Jung's long introduction to Heinrich Zimmer's book on the life and work of Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi in German and translated from English Publications of Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, India.

is there too: it pervades the spiritual life of India like a pleasant fragrance or a melody. It is everywhere the same, but never monotonous, endlessly varied. To get to know it, it is sufficient to read any Upanishad or any discourse of the Buddha. What is heard there is heard everywhere; it speaks out of a million eyes, it expresses itself in countless gestures, and there is no village or country road where that broad-branched tree cannot be found in whose shade the ego struggles for its own abolition, drowning the world of multiplicity in the All and All-Oneness of Universal Being. I was then absolutely certain that no one could ever get beyond this, least of all the Indian holy man himself; and should Shri Ramana say anything that did not chime in with this melody, or claim to know anything that transcended it, his illumination would be false. The holy man is right when he intones India's ancient chants, but wrong when he pipes any other tune.

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



To the Indian it is clear that the Self as the originating ground of the psyche is not different from God, and that, so far as a man is in the Self, he is not only contained in God but actually is God. Shri Ramana is quite explicit on this point. The goal of Eastern religious practice is the same as that of Western Mysticism: the shifting of the centre of gravity from the ego to the Self, from man to God. This means that the ego disappears in the Self, and man in God. It is evident that Shri Ramana has either really been more or less absorbed by the Self, or at least has struggled earnestly all his life to extinguish his ego in it. If we conceive the Self as the essence of psychic wholeness, i.e., as the totality of conscious and unconscious, we do so because it does in fact represent something like a goal of spiritual development. This formula shows the dissolution of the ego in the atman to be the unequivocal goal of religion and ethics, as exemplified in the thought of Shri Ramana. The same is obviously true of Christian Mysticism, which differs from Oriental Philosophy only through having a different terminology.

Shri Ramana's words, which Heinrich Zimmer has bequeathed to us, in excellent translation, bring together once again the loftiest insights that India has garnered in the course of the ages, and the individual life and work of the Maharshi illustrate once again the passionate striving for the liberating 'Ground'. The wisdom and mysticism of the East have, therefore, very much to say to us, even when they speak their own inimitable language. They serve to remind us that we in our culture possess something similar, which we have already forgotten, and to direct our attention to the fate of the inner man, which we set aside as trifling. The life and teaching of Shri Ramana are of significance not only for India, but for the West too. They are more than a document humane: they are a warning message to a humanity that threatens to lose itself in unconsciousness and anarchy. It is perhaps, in



CARL GUSTAV JUNG

the deeper sense, no accident that Heinrich Zimmer's last book should leave us, as a testament, the life work of a modern Indian Prophet who exemplifies so impressively the problem of psychic transformation.

CARL GUSTAV JUNG

## INTRODUCTION BY ARTHUR OSBORNE

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

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

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



was centered on that "I". From that moment onwards the "I" or Self focussed attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on.'<sup>1</sup>

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

Soon after this change occurred, the youth who was later to be known as 'the Maharshi' left home as a sadhu. He made his way to Tiruvannamalai, the town at the foot of the holy hill of Arunachala, and remained there for the rest of his life.

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

'I had read no books except the *Periapuranam*, the Bible and bits of *Tayumanavar* or *Tevaram*. My conception of Ishvara was similar to that found in the Puranas; I had never heard of Brahman, *samsara* and so forth. I did not yet know that there was an Essence or impersonal Real underlying everything and that Ishvara and I were both identical with it. Later, at Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to the *Ribhu Gita* and other

sacred books, I learnt all this and found that the books were analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

So far as is possible, Sanskrit words have been avoided, and it usually has been possible. The purpose of this is to make the book easier to read and also to avoid giving the false impression that the quest of Self-realization is some intricate science that can be understood only with a Sanskrit terminology. It is true that there are spiritual sciences that have a necessary technical terminology, but they are more indirect. The clear and simple truth of non-duality,



which Bhagavan taught, and the direct path of Self-enquiry that he enjoined can be expounded in simple language; and indeed, he himself so expounded them to Western visitors, without having recourse to Sanskrit terminology. In the rare cases where a Sanskrit term has seemed necessary or useful in this book its approximate meaning has been indicated in brackets, so that no glossary is necessary. It may also be remarked that the English words Enlightenment, Liberation and Self-realization have all been used with the same meaning, to correspond with the Sanskrit words *Jnana*, *Moksha* and *Mukti*.

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

ARTHUR OSBORNE



# I

## THE BASIC THEORY

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

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

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

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

*B.:* Very little. Some theoretical knowledge is needed for Yoga and may be found in books, but practical application is what is needed. Personal example and instruction are the most helpful aids. As for intuitive understanding, a person may laboriously convince himself of the truth to be grasped by intuition, of its function and nature, but the actual intuition is more like feeling and requires practice and personal contact. Mere book learning

is not of any great use. After Realization all intellectual loads are useless burdens and are to be thrown overboard.<sup>2</sup>

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

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

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

Similarly he had no use for theoretical discussions.

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

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

Ultimately, even the scriptures are useless.



God. All that exists is only a manifestation of the Supreme.’<sup>12</sup>

*D.:* What is reality?

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

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

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

*B.:* It is only a difference of point of view.

*D.:* They say that the world is created by Divine Energy (*Shakti*). Is the knowledge of unreality due to the veiling by illusion (*Maya*)?

*B.:* All admit creation by the Divine Energy, but what is the nature of this energy? It must be in conformity with the nature of its creation.

*D.:* Are there degrees of illusion?

*B.:* Illusion itself is illusory. It must be seen by somebody outside it, but how can such a seer be subject to it? So, how can he speak of degrees of it?

‘You see various scenes passing on a cinema screen; fire seems to burn buildings to ashes; water seems to wreck ships; but the screen on which the pictures are projected remains un-burnt and dry. Why? Because the pictures are unreal and the screen real.

‘Similarly, reflections pass through a mirror but it is not affected at all by their number or quality.



*image*

*not*

*available*

*B.:* You see the difficulty. Self-enquiry, 'Who am I?' is a different technique from the meditation—'I am Siva', or 'I am He'. I rather emphasize Self-knowledge, for you are first concerned with yourself before you proceed to know the world or its Lord. The 'I am He' or 'I am Brahman' meditation is more or less mental, but the quest for the Self of which I speak is a direct method and is superior to it. For the moment you get into the quest for the Self and begin to go deeper, the real Self is waiting there to receive you, and then whatever is to be done is done by something else and you, as an individual, have no hand in it. In this process all doubts and discussions are automatically given up, just as one who sleeps forgets all his cares for the time being.

The further discussion illustrates the freedom of argument that Bhagavan allowed to those who were not convinced by a reply.

*D.:* What certainty is there that something awaits there to receive me?

*B.:* When a person is sufficiently mature he becomes convinced naturally.

*D.:* How is this maturity to be attained?

*B.:* Various ways are prescribed. But whatever previous development there may be, earnest Self-enquiry hastens it.

*D.:* That is arguing in a circle. I am strong enough for the quest if I am mature and it is the quest that makes me mature.

This is an objection that was often raised in one form or another and the reply to it again emphasizes that it is not theory that is needed but practice.

*B.:* The mind does have this sort of difficulty. It wants a fixed theory to satisfy itself with. Really, however, no theory is

Sometimes it seemed to the listener that absence of thought must mean a mere blank, and therefore Bhagavan specifically guarded against this.

‘Absence of thought does not mean a blank. There must be some one to be aware of that blank. Knowledge and ignorance pertain only to the mind and are in duality, but the Self is beyond them both. It is pure Light. There is no need for one Self to see another. There are no two selves. What is not the Self is mere non-self and cannot see the Self. The Self has no sight or hearing; it lies beyond them, all alone, as pure Consciousness.’<sup>28</sup>

Bhagavan often cited man’s continued existence during deep, dreamless sleep as a proof that he existed independent of the ego and the body-sense. He also referred to the state of deep sleep as a body-free and ego-free state.

*D.:* I don’t know whether the Self is different from the ego.

*B.:* In what state were you in deep sleep?

*D.:* I don’t know.

*B.:* Who doesn’t know? The waking self? But you don’t deny that you existed while in deep sleep?

*D.:* I was and am, but I don’t know who was in deep sleep.

*B.:* Exactly. The waking man says that he did not know anything in the state of deep sleep. Now he sees objects and knows that he exists but in deep sleep there were no objects and no spectator. And yet the same person who is speaking now existed in deep sleep also. What is the difference between the two states? There are objects and the play of the senses now, while in deep sleep there were not. A new entity, the ego, has arisen. It acts through the senses, sees objects, confuses itself with the body and claims to be the Self. In reality, what was in deep sleep continues to be now also. The Self is changeless. It is the ego that has come



*D.:* They say that we have the choice of enjoying merit or demerit after our death, that it depends on our choice which comes. Is that so?

*B.:* Why raise questions of what happens after death? Why ask whether you were born, whether you are reaping the fruits of your past karma, and so on? You will not raise such questions in a little while when you fall asleep. Why? Are you a different person now from the one you are when asleep? No, you are not. Find out why such questions do not occur to you when you are asleep.<sup>35</sup>

On occasion, however, Bhagavan did admit of a lower, contingent point of view for those who could not hold to the doctrine of pure non-dualism.

‘In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna first says to Arjuna in Chapter II, that no one was born and then in Chapter IV, “there have been numerous incarnations both of you and me. I know them but you do not.” Which of these two statements is true? The teaching varies according to the understanding of the listener.<sup>36</sup>

‘When Arjuna said that he would not fight against his relatives and elders in order to kill them and gain the kingdom, Sri Krishna said: “Not that these, you or I, were not before, are not now, nor will be hereafter. None was born, none has died, nor will it be so hereafter.” He further developed this theme, saying that he had given instructions to the Sun and through him to Ikshvaku; and Arjuna queried how that could be, since he had been born only a few years back, while they lived ages ago. Then Sri Krishna saw his point of view and said: “Yes, there have been many incarnations of me and you. I know them all but you do not.”

'Such statements appear contradictory, but they are true according to the viewpoint of the questioner. Christ also said that he was before Abraham.'<sup>37</sup>

So, from a contingent level, Bhagavan could admit:

'Just as in dreams, you wake up after several new experiences so after death another body is found.'<sup>38</sup>

'Just as rivers lose their individuality when they discharge their waters into the ocean, and yet the waters evaporate and return as rain on the hills and back again through the rivers to the ocean, so also individuals lose their individuality when they go to sleep but return again according to their previous innate tendencies. Similarly, in death also, being is not lost.'

*D.:* How can that be?

*B.:* See how a tree grows again when its branches are cut off. So long as the life source is not destroyed, it will grow. Similarly, latent potentialities withdraw into the heart at death but do not perish. That is how beings are re-born.'<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, from the higher viewpoint he would say:

'In truth there is neither seed nor tree, there is only Being.'<sup>40</sup>

He would occasionally explain in more detail, but still with the reservation that in reality there is only the changeless Self.

*D.:* How long is the interval between death and re-birth?

*B.:* It may be long or short, but a Realized Man undergoes no such change; he merges into the Infinite Being, as is said in the Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad. Some say that those who, after