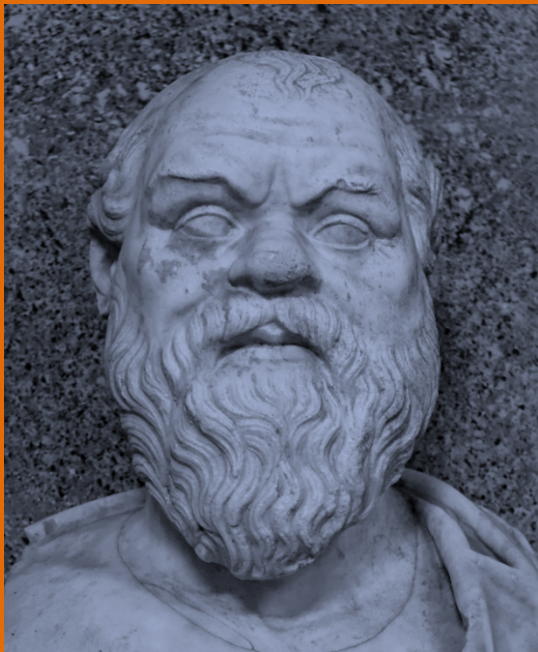


Death Experience
of



Socrates and Raman Maharshi

A Study

Nagesh D. Sonde

Socrates and Ramana Maharshi

Reflection on Life and Death

Comparative study of thoughts and teachings of two adept-thinkers requires sensitive receptive mind. This specially when they are born in different places and during different periods and living and responding to different racial, social, cultural surroundings and situations. The primary purpose of comparative philosophy is to bring out similarity or dissimilarity, without being dogmatic, assertive and argumentative, without doubting the enlightenment experienced or justifying the opinions expressed. The primary purpose should be to examine them as living vibrant fundamental Truths of the persons, in the places and during the period they lived.

We have, therefore, taken for our study the teachings as are available of the two great savants - *Socrates* born in the west in Greece in pre-Christian era and lived during 429-399 B.C. and *Ramana Maharshi* born in the east in India during 1879 – 1950 more than 2000 years thereafter. Their spiritual experiences were intensely personal received by the mind in the primary stage, without being influenced, conditioned, restricted and burdened by the racial memory or personal experiences, responses and thoughts gathered through instruments of senses, though expressed by Persons in the words and terminology, signs and symbols contemporary to the Places and the Periods.

Neither *Socrates* nor *Ramana Maharshi* left any writings of their teachings and what we know of as their teachings is what we have received from their followers as their teachings, no more nor less. Therefore, for the wisdom of *Socrates*, we have taken the translation done by *R. S Bluck* in *The Dialogues of Plato* published by *Bantom Books* and edited by *Erich Segal*. However, to come close to the essence of his teachings, slight changes have been made in the terminology and construction of the language. Those who desire more clarity, without being bound by the words or the language they have used, may also refer to the translation of *Pheado* done by *Benjamin Jowett* or any other author. It would be useful to accept the suggestion made by *Socrates* himself to *Cebes*, his follower, when he said, '*Hellas (the name applied to the ancient Greece and the neighbouring islands) is wide and in it there are many good men, even among many tribes of the barbarians, therefore, must enquire diligently for such charmer. You should search also among yourselves and help one another. But it is difficult for you to find any one more capable of doing this than you are*'. Therefore, self-inquiry is the most potent instrument.

For the wisdom of *Ramana Maharshi* we have used the books published by *Ramanashrama, Tiruvannamalai*. The extracts quoted from the books should be considered with the suggestion which *J. Krishnamurti* had made when he said that communication between two persons, even if both of them know each other well, is difficult. Because the words used by one may have significance different from the other. Understanding comes, therefore, only when both meet on the same level at the same time. Therefore, the quotations have been redrafted minimally to bring out the essence which the savant may have intended, at the same time never claiming that the speaker has understood truly and fully. Therefore, readers need not, should not clutch and be glued to the steps to reach to the top of the ladder.

Erich Segal points out in his Introduction that *Socrates* did not leave any writings, being deeply ambivalent about the value of the written word, saying that the true Philosopher lives in the realm of ideas and not of books, which represent pale reflections of truth, declaring ‘*Any one who leaves behind him any thing in writing and like wise anyone who takes it over from him supposing that such writing will provide some thing reliable and permanent would be a fool*’ (*Phedo*). Yet he had in rare occasions seems to have composed few poems. When *Cebes* inquired that ‘*A number of people have asked me, and Euenus did just recently, about those poems which you have written, putting Aesop’s tales into verse and the hymn to Apollo. . . although you had not composed anything before*’, *Socrates* replies, ‘*Tell him the truth, Cebes, that I did not compose them . . to rival him or his works (but because)I was trying to discover the meaning of some dreams and I wrote the poems to clear my conscience*’. He spoke of a dream that was coming to him from time to time during his life, taking different forms at different times but always saying : ‘*Socrates pursue the arts, and work hard at them*’. He took this as a suggestion that ‘*he should follow the popular kind of art, follow it and not to disobey*’. So to salvage his conscience he composed some poems in obedience of the dream, in honour of the god for whom ceremonies were being held and then realizing that if he was going to be a poet, or composer at all, he must compose not factor fiction.

Ramana Maharshi responded almost in identical manner. When some one asked for his opinion of a famous poet who had visited him, he replied reminiscently, ‘*All this is only activity of mind. The more you exercise the mind and more success you have in composing verses the less peace you have. What use is it to acquire such accomplishments if you don’t acquire peace?. . . Some how it never occurs me to write a book or compose poems. All the poems I have written were on the request of some one or the other in connection with some particular event. Even Forty Verses on Reality, of which so many commentaries and translations no exist, was not planned as a book but consists of verses composed at different times and afterwards arranged as a book by Murugannar and others. The*

only poems that came to me spontaneously and compelled me, as it were, to write them without any one urging me to do so are the Eleven Stanzas to Sri Arunachala and the Eight Stanzas to Sri Arunachala. The opening words of the Eleven Stanzas came to me one morning and even though I tried to suppress them, saying What have to do with these words? They would be suppressed till I composed a song bringing them in; and all the words flowed easily without any effort '.

Early Life

Socrates' early life is wrapped in mystery, little being known except what comes out from his conversations and depositions later in life. Having served with some distinction as a soldier at *Delium* and *Amphipolis* during the *Peloponnesian War*, *Socrates* dabbled in the political turmoil that consumed *Athens* after the War, then retired from active life to work as a stonemason and to raise his children with his wife, *Xanthippe*, a cantankerous woman who considered him a good-for-nothing, though honest and harmless person, and could not see him die the way he was made to die. He did not have any occupation nor had any intention in pursuing one in later life and perhaps the querulous attitude of his wife led him to loneliness to remain out of her presence and be a philosopher than live with her a be a householder. He lived on the inheritance which received from his father, the sculptor *Sophoniscus* and used his marginal financial independence as an opportunity to give full-time attention to inventing the practice of philosophical dialogue. He was popular among the young intelligent people, though neither their families nor his family appreciated his adventure in wisdom, but which he took upon himself as a mission assigned to by God. Consequently he spent more time out in the street corners than in his home with his wife and children. He did not earn for his bread and would not object when any offered him food.

Maharshi's early life, on the other hand was an open book. He was born in a middle class family, his father having started his career as an accounts clerk, later changed to legal profession. His mother was not educated, but literate enough to read religious scriptures in *Tamil* and like many women of her times, was god-fearing by nature and superstitious by temperament. As a young boy he went to the local school, responding to normal influences. His health was robust and fond of sports but he rarely mixed with boys of his age. He was given to sleep for long hours, lapsing in long spells of silence, often becoming externally recluse and internally reflective. But no extra-ordinary intelligence was seen in him in his childhood nor any spiritual inclination.

Absence of spiritual Teacher or Guru

Socrates did not have any teachers nor was he initiated in philosophy. He spoke instead of an *Oracle* or the inner voice which became his Teacher or guide. He said, ‘*You have heard me speak at sundry times and in diverse places of an Oracle or a sign which came to him and is the divinity which Meletus ridicules in the indictment. This sign which is kind of voice, first began to which came to me when he was a child ; it always forbidding but never commanding him to do anything which he was going to do.*’

He became interested in philosophy when *Oracle of Delphi* referred him as the *Wisest* man and he wanted to know why. Therefore, he proceeded to investigate and approached some celebrated poets with passages from their writings and he found there was hardly a person who could not talk better of their poetry than they did of themselves. Then he realized that ‘. . . *not by wisdom do poets write poetry but by a sort of genius and inspiration ; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things but do not understand the meaning of them. The poets appeared to me to be much in the same case; and I further observed upon the strength of their poetry they believe themselves to be wisest of men in other things in which they were not wise.*’ He was surprised that ‘*the men most in repute were all but the most foolish ; and that others less esteemed were really wiser and better.*’

He rationalized that ‘*although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful or good, I am better of than he (the poet or the politician)is, for he knows nothing and thinks that he knows; (whereas) I neither know nor think that I know. In this particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him*’. He comforted himself saying ‘*I am called wise for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others; but the truth is that God only is wise; and by his answer (that there was no man wiser than me)he intends to show that the wisdom of men is worth little or nothing ; he is not speaking of Socrates, he is only using my name by way of illustration, as if he said He, O Men, is the wisest, who like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing .And so I go about the world obedient to the god, and search and make inquiry in to the wisdom of any one, whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise; and if he is not wise, then in vindication of the Oracle I show him that he is not wise; and my occupation quite absorbs me.*’

Ramana Maharshi’s case was slightly different. No one had called him wise nor he had considered himself wise, Therefore, he had no reason to search for wise men or expand whatever wisdom he had. If any thing drove him to *Self Inquiry* it was the primeval fear of death. When he was told that that according to *Sri*

Aurobindo he had no Guru, he explained, 'That depends on what you call a Guru. He need not necessarily be in human form Dattatreya had twenty-four Gurus - the elements etc. That means that any form in the world was his Guru. (But) Guru is absolutely necessary'. At the same time he told Swami Yogananda that every one has to have a Guru, because 'there can be no mass instruction' and 'it depends on the temperament and spiritual maturity of the individual'. Therefore, 'Two things are to be done, first to find a Guru who is outside yourself and then to find Guru within'. When Mr. Bose insisted that a Guru is necessary Maharshi remarked 'Practice is necessary for you, the Grace is always there', continuing he remarked, 'You are neck deep in water and yet you cry out that you are thirsty . . . Guru is like an ocean. If one comes with a cup he will get a cupful. It is not use complaining of the niggardliness of the ocean; the bigger the vessel the more he will be able to carry. It is entirely up to him'.

Maharshi accepted that he had a Guru saying 'Guru is one who at all times abides in the profound depth of the Self.' Therefore, even as Death was a teacher for Nachiketa, वक्ता तास्यान् तादृगन्योन लभ्यः न चान्यो वस्तुल्य एतस्य । - a communicator like whom was not to be obtained nor any one similar, for Maharshi also Death came as a teacher, when ' . . . suddenly a violent fear of Death came over me . . . (and felt that) I just felt I was going to die' and without having to 'call any of the relatives or a doctor. I felt that I have to solve the problem myself. The shock of the fear that I may now die drove me inward to think for myself' . . . Without framing the words, I asked myself: 'Now that the Death has come what it means? What is Death; what is it that dies'. Even after that during his extended period of his penance and austerity, the self within remained his sole Guru with श्रद्धा – unrestrained receptivity with his five senses of perception together with Mind ceasing from their operation and intellect itself not stirring, becoming the stick with which he stirred his conscience and भक्ति communion being the conclusive communion.

First exposure to Spiritual essence

From his conversation with his followers, we find that Socrates never did anything by his own will and intent but depending on power that prompted him from within, his experiences being the involuntary responses. In *Phaedo*, we find him clarifying Cebes that he compose poems because he : ' . . . was trying to discover the meaning of some dreams and I wrote them to clear my conscience, in case this was the sort of art that I was told to pursue. The same dream had kept on coming to me from time to time through out my life, taking different forms at different times, but always saying the same thing 'Socrates pursue the arts and

work hard at them', I formerly used to suppose that that it was urging me to do what I was doing . . . for philosophy is the greatest of all arts and that was my pursuit. I thought just in case the dream meant, after all that I should follow the popular kind of art, I ought to follow it and not disobey. It seemed safer not to depart before salving my conscience by the composition of the poems in obedience to the dream . So I wrote in honour of the god for who the ceremonies were being held . . . ?

These dreams seem to have acted even as the '*. . . Oracle or sign which comes to me and is the divinity . . . which is kind of voice . . . (which) always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do.*' And which '*I go about the world obedient to the God, and search and make enquiry in to the wisdom of any one , whether citizen or stranger, who appears to be wise, and if he is not wise then in vindication of the Oracle I show him that he is not wise and my occupation quite absorbs me.*' The Oracle or the sign came to him and which is the divinity, a kind of voice came to him in his child hood and continued to be with him from then onward been guiding him during his trail or during the moment of his death.

Ramana Maharshi's first exposure to his inner voice or the self or the I within was not very much unlike that of *Socrates*, having decided to heed it from the very source and not from any external sources. He '*dramatized the event of Death. I laid myself on the back with my limbs stretched out stiff . . . and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to my inquiry. I held my breath with my lips closed tight, so that no word either I or any other word may come out. 'Well then,' I said to myself, 'this body is now dead. It will be carried stiff to the cremation grounds, there to be cremated and reduced to ashes . . '* coming to a final conclusion '*that it is the body that dies does the death of the body means that I am dead? Is the body, I? The body is insentient and inert, whereas I feel the presence of my personality and the resonance of the 'I' too within me and without the body. Then 'I' should be the spirit transcending the body. The body seems to die, not the spirit, for Death cannot touch it. That means 'I' am the Deathless spirit.*'

Then with one stroke the entire puzzle fell in places, the solution resolved and the methodology suggested without being strict, severe or stringent suggested as the base and basis of spiritual awakening amidst the digressing diversions of the empirical life induced by sensory instruments. From that time onward his quest was to further confirm his awareness of the *I* within himself which he designated as his father, the source of all his Wisdom. Therefore he wrote in the note left to his family words spiritually significant, '*I have set out in quest of my father in accordance with His command. It is on virtuous enterprise that this has embarked ; therefore let none grieve over this act and let no money be spent in search of this*'. His detachment with his body was intense and he remained in that trance-

like *Bliss of Beatitude*. In later days he recalled some of these events, saying ‘*Some times I opened my eyes and it was morning, sometimes it was evening. I did not know when the Sun rose and when it set*’ His *sadhana* was to be receptive to the ‘*I*’ within.

The life after enlightenment

Athenians had prosecuted on both religious and a moral grounds. They accused him that he did not believe in the gods of the city-state and instead introduced new ones. Morally, he was charged for having led young men away from *Athenian* conventions and ideals. *Socrates* refused all the charges but to reiterated his unyielding dedication urging his fellow citizens into examining their pre-conceptions, thus initiating a process of constant inquiry which he maintained, would help them learn to live virtuous lives, without caring for material possessions but making their souls good and virtuous.

Socrates believed as a firm conviction that ‘*Athenians, it seems to me, do not much care if they think a man is clever, so long as so long as they do not suspect him of teaching his cleverness to others; but if they think he makes others like himself, they becomes, whether out of jealousy or for some other reason*’. Therefore, he took his role, as he tells his inquisitors, ‘*a sort of gadfly given to the state by God, and the state is a great and noble steed who is tardy in his motions owing to own size and requires to be stirred into life. I am that gadfly which God has attached to the State and all day long and in all places am always fastening upon you, arousing and persuading and reproaching you.*’. ‘*When I say that I am given to you by God, the proof of my mission is this – if I had been like other men, I should not have neglected all my own concerns or patiently seen the neglect of them during all these years and have been during yours, coming to you individually like a father or elder brother exhorting you to regard virtue; such conduct, I say, would be unlike human nature.*’

The *Oracle*, a sign, the divinity, or the voice, which came to *Socrates* when he was a child continued to guide and initiate him thereafter. There is enough evidence in his dialogues with his disciples to show that *Socrates* never did anything by his own will and intent but only depending heavily on some thing that prompts him from within, reasoning that his experiences themselves were the involuntary product of such encouragements.

In *Phaedo*, we find that when *Cebes* asks him about some poems which *Socrates* had written putting *Aesop’s* fables to verse, though he had never earlier composed poems? *Socrates’* reply is revealing in that he did not compose them because he wanted to rival others but because, as he puts : ‘*I was trying to discover the meaning of some dreams and I wrote the to clear my conscience, in case this*

was the sort of art that I was told to pursue. The same dream had kept on coming to me from time to time through out my life, taking different forms at different times, but always saying the same thing 'Socrates pursue the arts and work hard at them', I formerly used to suppose that that it was urging me to do what I was doing . . . for philosophy is the greatest of all arts and that was my pursuit. I thought just in case the dream meant, after all that I should follow the popular kind of art, I ought to follow it and not disobey. It seemed safer not to depart before salving my conscience by the composition of the poems in obedience to the dream . So I wrote in honour of the god for who the ceremonies were being held . . .'. These dreams were the same as the ' . . . Oracle or sign which comes to me and is the divinity . . . which is kind of voice . . . (which) always forbids but never commands me to do anything which I am going to do.' And which 'I go about the world obedient to the God, and search and make enquiry in to the wisdom of any one , whether citizen or stranger, who appears robe wise, and if he is not wise then in vindication of the Oracle I show him that he is not wise and my occupation quite absorbs me.'

Ramana Maharshi related his enlightenment to his arrival to the ultimate place of his abidance. His brother's reprimand became the proverbial moment of the detachment of the ripe fruit from the stem which had attached to the tree. He journey and the note which he had left demonstrated the intensity of his detachment or separation of the body form his self and the supreme state in which he was in with unmistakable signs that his journey from the individual 'I' and 'this' towards a universal source, 'the father' had already begun. His declaration '**Father, I have come**' was only an acknowledgement of the momentous moment of his being enlightened..

Whether in the precincts of the *Tiruvannamalai* temple or in the mountains of *Arunachala*, he lived in an absolute state of renunciation and Bliss. But his idea of *Renunciation* does not mean outward denial of clothes or abandoning home. True renunciation is the renunciation of desires, passions and attachment . . (the merging) himself with the world and (expanding) his love to embrace each one who constitutes the world . . . When your love extends to cover all, when the heart extends to embrace all creation, then there is no question of giving up this or that ; you will drop of your temporal life a ripe fruit that drops from the tree. The whole world then becomes your family.

Maharshi did not need the external world nor was he concerned with its illusory existence. For weeks and months he remained scarcely moving and never speaking. It was a great moment of renunciation but he did not seem to encourage others following his step. Detached from all external life, he remained in a trance-like *Bliss of Beatitude*, which in later days he clarified 'Some times I opened my eyes and it was morning, sometimes it was evening. I did not know when the Sun

rose and when it set, his actions being misunderstood. If he closed his eyes, people would say that he is in meditation; if he refrained from talking, they would assume that he was observing mauna; if he did not eat, it was taken that he was fasting, though his actions were spontaneous like seeds sprouting, breeze blowing, the rains, the seasons and the birds singing. He would see, listen, smell and touch everything, without any impressions on his Mind.

Those who came to visit the temple would not fail to observe him, some through curiosity and others through faith. Soon he came across some scriptures, which appeared to him authenticating his experiences, making him feel, *'I did not yet know that there was an Essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything and that God and I were both identical with It. Later at Tiruvannamali . . . I found that they were analyzing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name'*.

Maharshi was an adept, without having to be initiated, was a *Guru* without professing to be one. Impulse had come for him from within for him, silently and loudly. Others need prodding as one does when the stick used for stirring funeral pyre, the stick itself finally being reduced to ashes once pyre and corpse are burnt. In this manner, without claiming to be one he became a *Guru* to many removing the ignorance, the ash that had covered the glowing embers of their self and placing them on the *Path to Perfection* and pointing out the direction which they have to follow. For many *Tapas* was an arduous effort; for him it was as natural as breathing. People gathered around him for clarification of doubts and seeking wisdom.

Death as a metaphor

Death is a great mystery with everyone seeing others die but yet not being prepared to consider *Death* being a constant companion the moment one is born. One's last breath is as uncertain as one's birth was. Self is the *Existence; Birth* and *Death* being mere *Events*, foot notes on the eternal journey through which Self evolves. *Death* comes to every one and it should come when you are happy to receive him, it comes softly with steps unheard and presence unobserved. Yet a human being thinks *Death* as a distant eventuality and not immediate concern. Every one has lived life carrying a baggage on shoulders his wife, children, relatives and associates, possessions and positions, gods and divinities, religions and philosophies. Every one has neither taken a path from the regular one and he has lived very much in the same manner as others have done. *Death* appears to one as if all doors are now close, without an opening being left, no one even knowing what is to happen in future and all doors are closed to the future. He cannot plan,

does not plan for tomorrow, plan for tomorrow. His existence becomes inconsistent and futile and that causes despondency and sufferings for him.

Death teaches one to live Life with fear. In one's quieter moments all the ideas of good and bad, noble and evil, preferable and not preferable and all the things he had accepted as important, substantive turn out be of no consequence. One should know what *Death* is to live the Life that he has to live. One would live one's life without baggage on shoulders. Then he will realize that *Death* could be an event that provides as opportunity to live more productive life without fear of losing what one brought when one was born.

Every one, even great minds have considered, reflected, meditated and spoke on *Death*, but they were not saved by *Death*. *Death* has no respect for childhood, adolescence, youth or an old age, neither for a healthy man nor for a sick one. *Death* is a great power that snuffs out a life out of recognition. When *Death* arrives it arrives, with no notice, everything becoming accepted. He who knows what *Death* is, knows what *Death* brings out. *Death* makes one understand the importance of remaining alive. When one reflects on *Death*, the living becomes important. A man commits suicide not because he is afraid to live, a man commits suicide because he is consciously aware of the importance of living. Therefore, all great thinkers therefore, give great importance to *Death*. Understanding the importance to *Death*, its meaning and purpose one becomes wise, enlightened and delivered from the *Life* as one knows and living in the state of *Death* as eternal Self. *Socrates* and *Ramana Maharshi* used *Death* as a metaphor.

Socrates considered *Death* 'as separation of the soul from the body and being dead as the independent state of the body in separation of the soul and independent state of the soul in separation from te body.' Therefore for him Philosophy is 'the practice of *Death*' and 'the Philosopher qua a philosopher does not concern himself with the body but so far as he can separate himself from the body and concentrate upon the soul.' In *Phaedo*, he clarifies his attitude to Life and *Death*, 'A true philosopher in particular, or rather alone, are always eager to free the soul and this very thing is the philosopher's occupation, a freeing or separation of soul from body . . . it would be absurd for a man who was training for himself throughout his life to live as closely as possible to death to grumble when death came to him?. . . those who are really philosophers practice dying and death has less terror for them than any one else.' 'Philosopher's soul has no respect for the body and shuns it, seeking rather than to be independent of it. This is what is called death, freeing or separation of soul from body'.

In his reply to the Judges at his trial charging that he has been misguiding *Atheninas*, *Socrates*, perhaps in anticipation that his is likely to get death penalty, explains that 'The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death but to avoid unrighteous; for that runs faster than death. I am old and move slowly and the

slower runner has overtaken me, and my accusers are keen and quick and the faster runner, who is my unrighteousness has overtaken them. And now I depart hence condemned by you to suffer the penalty of death.' Then reflecting on the state of Death he says. *'either death is as state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by dreams, death will an unspeakable gain . . . I say that to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night. If death is a journey to another place and there as men say, all the dead abide, what good of friends and Judges, can be greater than this? If, indeed, the pilgrim arrives in the world below, he is delivered from the professors of justice on this world and finds the true judges who are said to give judgment there . . . the sons of God who were righteous in their own life . . . If this be true that let me die again and again . . .'* Then consoling himself he finally says, *'I shall then be able to continue my search into true and false knowledge, as in the world so also in the next; and I shall find out who is wise and who pretends to be wise and is not . . . On another world they do not put a man to death for asking questions, assuredly not.'*

Centuries later, *Ramana Maharshi's* response was not different but one expressed distinctive to his own *Death Experience* which was not the conclusion but the testimony and testament of his enlightenment. Surprising as it is, *Venakatrman*, a lay person seems to have had *Death Experience* even before he had lived to experience *Life*. But as *Ramana Maharshi* he mentioned later, *Ramana* was not the one whom they were seeing clapping his hands when hymns are sung but *Ramana* was *Brahman* that is immediately present and directly perceivable, who is within each one, who breathes in when breathing in, one who breathes out with breathing out, one who breathes about with breathing about, one who breathes up with breathing up, *Ramana* is one's self which is in all beings. One can not see *Ramana*, the seer of seeing, listen *Ramana*, the listener of listening, think *Ramana*, the thinker of thoughts, know *Ramana*, the knower of Knowing. *Ramana*, is the self within.

Therefore, it would be reasonable and rational to accept that *Ramana Maharshi* was the luminous *Self* within, having already overcome desire for sons, the desire for wealth having done with Learning in earlier lives had completed his Life Experience, prior to the moment in *Time*, he had his *Death Experience*, the *Death Experience* having revealed to and having made him conscious that *'The body is insentient and inert, whereas I feel the presence of my personality and the resonance of the 'I' too within me and without the body. Then 'I' should be the spirit transcending the body . . . That means 'I' am the Deathless spirit'*. Then the *'Fear of Death vanished, absorption in the Self continued in unbroken stream from*

then onward. Other thoughts too passed along as musical notes would do, but the 'I' continued to dominate as the shruti note underlying and blending with all rest of the notes. Whether the body was engaged in speaking, reading or in any thing else, I still continued to be central point'.

Ramana Maharshi was consciously aware that 'the real I or self is not the body, nor any of the five senses, nor the sense-objects, nor the organs of action, nor the praana, nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state where there is not cognizance of these . . . After rejecting each of these and saying 'these I am not', that which alone remains is the I and that is Consciousness . . . It is Sat-Chit-Ananda in which there is not even a slightest trace of the (empirical) I thought. This is called Mauna –silence or Atman. That is the only things That Is'. Therefore, that 'Renunciation does not mean outward divestment of clothes abandoning home etc. True renunciation is the renunciation of desires, passions and attachments'.

Ramana Maharshi clarifies, 'If the Mind, which is the cause of all thoughts and activities, disappears, the external objects too would disappear. Mind is only thoughts, it is a form of energy. It manifests itself as world. When Mind sinks in Self, then the Self is realized; when the Mind issues forth, the world appears and the Self is not realized.' 'All thoughts are inconsistent with realization, The right thing to do is to exclude thoughts of oneself and all other thoughts. Thought is one thing and realization is quite another'. 'If all thoughts and actions vanish, then external objects will also vanish . . . The mind is only thoughts. It is the form of energy. It manifests itself as the world. When the mind sinks internally deep in the Self, then the Self is realized. When the mind issues forth externally, the world appears and the Self is not realized'.

'The sense of (empirical) I pertains to the person, body and the brain. When a man knows his true self (the individual real I) for the first time something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him, that which is (the Universal I or the Self), behind the mind is the infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it soul and others again call it Nirvana, Hindus call it liberation; you may give whatever name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself; rather he has found himself'. Therefore, 'The purpose of inquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not a case of one I searching another I'. Since thoughts influenced by sense organs gives rise to the empirical mind Maharshi says, 'Once we take away the world, which causes our doubts, the clouds in our mind, then the light of God will shine clearly through. How is the world taken away? When for example instead of seeing a man you and say, this is God existing as body, which body answers more or less perfectly to the description of a God, then it would as a ship meets the description more or less of the wheel'.

The nature of empirical I

Socrates had clear idea of his *temporal or empirical I* as against his *spiritual or supra-sensory I*. Therefore, when *Crito* asked him the momentous question, ‘*How are we to bury you*’ he replied without slightest hesitation : ‘*Any how you like, if you can catch me and I don’t you elude you*’, making a clear distinction that his spiritual or supra-sensory-essence, which is the real *Socrates* and not the one who talks and represents as the person communicating and setting out arguments, certainly not the temporal or empirical I-form by which he is recognized as the corpse of *Socrates* to whom *Crito* brought the poison and the one who died drinking the poison but *Socrates* is the one whom *Crito* would not be able catch when he dies drinking the poison.

Socrates clarifies that ‘*When the man dies the visible part of him, situated in the visible realm, that is to say, the body which we call corpse, which decays and becomes decomposed and dissolved by the winds, does not suffer any experiences and can remain as it is for quite a long time. Even if a man dies and if his body is in fine condition and during fine season of the year, it may last for a long time as when the body is embalmed – as in the case of those who have been embalmed in Egypt, remains for an amazing length of time; and even if the body corrupts, some parts of it – bones and sinews - are practically everlasting. The soul, the invisible part however, leaves the body, pure when separated, dragging nothing of the body with it, having no dealings with the body even during its life time, having shunned it and kept itself to itself, making that as its constant purpose and practice pursuing philosophy in the correct manner, in very truth practicing death or in truth that itself being the practice of death!*’.

Socrates believes that ‘*Every pleasure and pain fastens it (the soul) to the body as with a nail pining it down and making it (or identifying it) with the body, imagining to be true whatever the body declares to be so. Holding the same opinion as the body and taking delight in the same things, the soul is forced to acquire the same sort of habits and to take the same sort of nourishment and to become such that it can never reach the other world in the state of purity ; it would always go contaminated by the body and soon fall back again in another body and grow there like a seed that has been sown and as a result be deprived of the privilege of dwelling in what is divine and pure and of single nature.*’

This is because ‘*when the soul makes use of sight or hearing or some other sense, being the disposition of the body, in studying some thing under sense influence, it is dragged by the body and to whatever that is not constant, fluctuating and confused, and wavering like one drunk, because it is in contact*

with things that are fluctuating and confused, and wavering. Whenever soul and body are together it is the nature of body that bid the soul to be subservient and ruled over, while it is the nature of the soul to rule and dominate. Here which one of the two would you think is the divine, and which is the mortal ? Or would you agree think that it is the nature of the divine to rule and to lead, and of the mortal to be ruled and to serve?’

Socrates points that the philosopher leads is a narrow path because so long as one uses body and reason, his search and the soul remains tainted with blemish and will never attain to the truth. As he puts, *‘The body presents one innumerable distractions because of the necessity of looking after it and if any illness assails it, even that hamper us in our pursuit of truth. The body fills us with emotions of love, desire and fear and all kinds of phantasy and nonsense, so that in every truth it does allow us ever to think of anything at all. In fact all wars, strife and battles are due to the body and desire’*. Therefore, Socrates denies any possibility of *‘pure knowledge of any thing when we are with body, when one of the two things becomes true: either it is not possible to acquire knowledge or it is possible only after death. . .’*.

When Socrates uses the word *Death*, one must understand that it could mean the separation of the soul intellectually and psychologically of the soul with body and not necessarily the separation of the soul with decay, deterioration and destruction of the body. Therefore, being in body is a constraint in acquiring true knowledge, and freeing or separation of the soul from the body alone gives one true knowledge, suggesting that empirical knowledge as an impediment in the search for true spiritual wisdom. Only through *Death*, Socrates means the *‘separation of the soul from the body and being dead as the independent state of the body in separation of the soul and independent state of the soul in separation from te body.’* He says that *‘Philosopher’s soul has no respect for the body and shuns it, seeking rather than to be independent of it. This is what is called death, freeing or separation of soul from body’*. *‘A true philosopher in particular, or rather alone, are always eager to free the soul and this very thing is the philosopher’s occupation, a freeing or separation of soul from body.’*

Socrates, therefore, summarizes that *‘the souls not of the good but of the bad-souls which are compelled to wander about such places, paying the penalty for their former wicked ways of life. And they wander about until through desires of that which follows about with them, the corporeal element, they are imprisoned again in a body, and they are probably imprisoned in creatures or whatever sort of character they have cultivated during their lives.’* Therefore, *‘if ever you see a man grumbling when on the point of death (the separation of the soul from the body)*

isn't sufficient proof that he has not been a lover of wisdom but merely a lover of the body ? also a lover of wealth and of honour?'

For *Ramana Maharshi* realization came from his *Death Experience* that the gross body as some thing different from the luminous self within. It was his first luminous experience that *'The body is insentient and inert' and 'I am the Deathless spirit'*. This sudden transformation became evident in the note which he left home to meet *Aunachala*, which read, *'I have set out in quest of my father in accordance with His command. It is on virtuous enterprise that this has embarked ; therefore let none grieve over this act and let no money be spent in search of this'*, which shows a significant shift from the body referred conventionally as *'I'* reaching out to the universal and spiritual *I, 'the father'*, announcing when he reached *Arunachala*, that *'Father, 'I' have come'*.

From that moment whether in the underground *Patala Lingam* sanctuary of the temple or in the mangrove or on the mountains, he was completely oblivious of his body and the external surroundings, whether worms were biting or ants were traveling over his body, his *I* was completely separated from the *I-consciousness*. During his entire presence in this primordial world, he brought to the attention of the people with his statement (which appeared casual language but which were pregnant with enlightened wisdom), to what extent human beings are enslaved by mind in identifying the body and the empirical *I* with *the Self, the spiritual I* within.

During the closing years when the first signs of cancerous growth were perceived, and when he would say 'There is pain' in the body and never 'I have pain' in my body, he would see important devotees grieving showing normal emotions, exclaiming *'Here is someone who has been listening to my teachings for forty years and now says that he is going somewhere away from Bhagavan! . . . They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. What a pity! They are sad that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away; where can he go and how can he go?'* Cohen records him saying, *'If the hands of the Jnani were cut with knife there would be pain as with every one else but because his mind is in bliss he does not feel the pain as acutely as other do'*. *'The jnani who has found himself as formless pure Awareness is unaffected though the body be cleft with a sword. Sugar candy does not lose its sweetness though broken or crushed'*. He would remark *'You attach too much importance to the body'*.

To one of the earnest devotee he asked, *'Do you know what Moksha is? It is getting rid of the sense of misery, which is unreal and attain Bliss, which is always there. That is Moksha.'* Therefore *'Why should he carry the burden of coconut'* or would inquire *'When we have finished the meal do we keep the body alone, when it needs four persons to carry?'* and say, *'Suppose you go to a firewood depot and*

buy a bundle of firewood and engage a collie to carry it to your house. As you walk along with him, he will be anxiously looking forward to the destination so that he can throw off his burden and get relief. In the same way the jnani is anxious to throw off his mortal body' After some time he spoke again correcting himself, 'This exposition is all right as far as it goes, but strictly speaking even this is not accurate. The jnani is not even anxious to shed his body; he is indifferent alike to the existence or non-existence of the body, being almost unaware of it'.

Teachings

Socrates was a different kind of Teacher, who in spite of being accused by Meletus that he is ' . . an in evildoer and a curious person, who searches in to things under the earth and in heaven and makes the worse appear the better cause . . .' and which Socrates categorically denies telling the Judges that 'there little foundation that I am a teacher and take money . . .although if a man were really able to instruct mankind, to receive money for giving instruction would, in my opinion, be an honour to him'.

He was nevertheless one who would ask any one who appears as wise, whether a citizen or a stranger, to define their terms and if such one is not wise then show him that he is not wise. People gathered around him, rich and young like *Plato*, commoners like *Antisthenes* and many others to whom problems agitated the people of *Athens*. People liked his simplicity and unassuming poverty as well eagerness for knowledge and humility in wisdom. *Will Durant* speaks of the loss of the faith of young generation in gods and religion, moral code and ethical standards due to the teachings of the *Sophists*. The older generation would have liked him to bring back young people back to the temples and the ancient polytheistic religion but he was keen to make people think for themselves, though he had his own religious convictions, believing in one god, immortality of soul and that death would not destroy it. *Socrates* was not a preacher but a teacher who encouraged people to ask questions and think for themselves. He saw his role as guide who encourages and goads people to think for themselves, '*Know Thyself*' being the process.

Inquiring himself in all sincerity, '*When did our souls acquire the knowledge?*', he would rationalize, '*. . not presumably when we have been human beings . . our souls existed. Simmias, earlier before inhabiting the human form . . . existed apart from the bodies having had intelligence . . . (Therefore) if the things which we talk about do exist, the beautiful and the Good and all the reality of that kind . . that it existed previously and belonged to us, and comparing the sensory data with the Reality, we will realize that our souls existed even before we were*

born. *If these things do not really exist, then our discussions will have no purpose*'. Continuing he said *'If our soul had previous existence before coming to the land of the living, being born and necessarily generated from death or the state of deadness, then it surely must exist even after death and has to be born again'*.

He believed in the eternal and immortal existence of Wisdom within each one, whether human or any other living creature. And therefore, there is nothing to be learnt afresh, learning was only recollection of what one already knows and now forgotten due to excessive attachment to the body. The problem arises *'whenever soul and body are together, the nature of the body forces the soul to become subservient and be ruled over, while the soul's nature is to rule and be dominant'*. *'Every pleasure and pain fastens the soul with a nail to the body, and pins it down and makes it similar to the body, and it (the soul) imagines to be true whatever the body declares it to be so. From holding the same opinion as the body and taking delight in the same things it is forced, I suppose, to acquire the same sort of habits and to take same sort of nourishment and to become such that it can never reach the other world in the state of purity; it always depart contaminated by the body and grow like the seed that has been sown and as a result be deprived of the privilege of dwelling with what is divine and pure and of single nature.'*

Since the soul makes use of sight, hearing or any other sense, which is the bodily or physical method, then the soul is dragged by the body towards that is never constant, vacillates and is confused, since the body being in similar position. Therefore one should inquire, *'... which one do you think is the divine and which is mortal? Don't you think that it is the nature of the divine to rule and lead of the mortal to be ruled and to serve? ... The soul very similar to that which is divine and deathless, intelligible and uniform, indissoluble and always invariable and constant while the body is very much like which is human, mortal and manifold, incomprehensible to the intelligence, never constant. Is its possible to say that they are false?'*

Socrates says that *'it is not lawful to join gods without having pursued philosophy and without being absolutely pure. For this reason, true philosophers abstain from lusts of the body and surrender themselves exercising will-power, not because they are afraid to lose their (physical) power and energy (and want to strengthen), which is the reason of the worldly people, nor even fearing disrepute and disgrace, being their love for power and honour, but because having regard for their souls they do not live for body, detaching themselves from the worldly people, who are ignorant of where they are going, but cultivating only those pursuits taking different course, believing that they should do nothing to hinder philosophy that purifies, following philosophy accepting the path which philosophy leads them'*.

Then *'the lovers of learning find out that philosophy takes in hand their souls, bound and glued to the body as though through a prison wall and being self-indulgent in utter ignorance. Philosophy surveys reality freely by themselves, seeing the body as prison and soul as the prisoner and shrewdly works using the desires and aiding and abetting his imprisonment as far as possible. The lovers of learning will find that philosophy takes over their souls in this condition, gently soothing and trying to free them, pointing that the evidence of the eyes, ears and other senses is completely misleading, urges them to withdraw their souls from using them, except when such use is inevitable. It encourages the soul to gather itself up unto itself, all alone and to put trust in nothing but itself and to trust only such realities as it may find in their essential nature by its own essential nature. Because whatever the soul sees by the use of something else, things appear variously in various other things, it would count in no way real. Such things are objects of senses and visible, while what the soul sees by itself is an object of thought and invisible'*.

'The soul of the true philosopher, simply believes that it should not oppose such detachment, therefore, abstains from pleasures, desires and pains as far as possible, realizing that whenever one experiences intense pleasure or fear or desire he would not suffer or find pleasure, even though these evil things one may expect to bring loss of health and wealth as a result of the desires. In fact one may suffer the greatest and worst of all evils and yet fail to take it as one of the same'. Socrates believes, therefore, the philosopher's job is to work for the release of the soul and that it would not thereafter willfully give itself again to those pleasures to become bound by the body. It would follow reason and always fix attention to what is true and divine and not to any object nor any opinion but knowledge, nourishing itself on that belief that this is how it should live and that when end comes it arrives to the stage similar to stage of being released from human sufferings.

Socrates compares the philosophers to the swans who when they realize that they are to die, sing longer and more sweetly than they have ever did earlier, because they are going to the gods whose servants they are. But mankind because they fear death, slander swans saying that they lament their death, therefore, being distressed they sing their farewell song. These people forget that no bird sings when it is hungry or cold or experiences pain, not even a nightingale or a swallow. Swans are prophetic and see the good things waiting for them in the other world. That is why they sing, because they are filled with joy and on that day they will travel to a higher plane than ever in their lives before.

A confident Socrates then tells his companions that *'I think that I myself am a fellow traveler with those swans and presiding priest of the same god and I no less than they have the gift of prophesy from the master and that I am leaving this*

*life no more sorrowfully than they do.’ Therefore, for all practical purposes, he proposes that Wisdom is not acquired but through inquiry discovered, perceived within one’s self, reflected upon and meditated ‘. . . if a man sees or hears or otherwise perceives something, and not only recognizes that particular thing but also thinks of **something else** . . . So long as seeing one thing you form an image of another, whether the other thing is similar or not, the process must be accepted as that of recollection’.*

Socrates suggests to Cebes who points out to him that there is child in each human being who is afraid of Death without being wise to its meaning, he recommends each one should be convinced and convinced continuously till the fear leaves him. When inquired, where to find such teacher, Socrates replies, ‘Hellas (the name applied to the ancient Greece and the neighboring islands) is wide and in it there are many good men, even among many tribes of the barbarians, therefore, must enquire diligently for such charmer. You should search also among yourselves and help one another. But it is difficult for you to find any one more capable of doing this than you are’. Therefore, self-inquiry is the most potent instrument.

Ramana Maharshi became a Guru inadvertently but fortunately for large number of intellectuals who were confused of Indian mysticism by the torrential influence of western philosophical thoughts and its seemingly impressive record in scientific and technological fronts. While Bhakti, with its extreme demands on religious scriptures and did not satisfy those who were exposed to western world the intellectualism of western educated but oriented to eastern philosophies could not satisfy the integral involvement in things spiritual. Ramana Maharshi represented the point where the eastern philosophy became explained in eastern symbols and eastern intellectualism, bringing India back to some extent where the upanishadic intellectuals stood. The emphasis on the need for individual intellectual inquiry in one’s self – “क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामन्यासकचेतसाम् । अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहावदभिरावाप्यते ॥” was balanced by worshipping through worship and surrender to reach the universal Self – “चेतना सर्वकर्मणि मयि संन्यस्य मत्परः । बुद्धियोगमुपाश्रित्य मच्चित्तः सततं भवा ॥”. His first encounter as *Guru*, the word understood as one who removes ignorance, was when some sadhus living on *Arunachala* mountain asked him to clarify some obtuse passages from scriptures, which he himself had not earlier read, but when read, made him conscious that they speak of experiences similar to the ones which he himself had gone through.

His constant insistence was to inquire within, ‘*Who am I?*’ because as he pointed out to *Paul Brunton*, ‘*The first and foremost of all thoughts, the primeval thought in mind of every human being, is the thought I. It is only after the birth of this thought that all other thoughts can rise at all. It is only after the first personal*

pronoun I has risen in mind that the second thought could mentally follow the I thread, until it takes you back to its source. You would discover that, as it is the first thought to appear so it is also the last one to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced’.

Creation and creative activity begins with realization and affirmation of the I. As mentioned in *Brihad Aranyaka Up.* even *the Prime Existence*, the universal Self which in the beginning was all alone – “आत्मैवेदमग्र आसीत् पुरुषविधः ।” and seeing none other than the self, conducted himself as ‘I’ and ‘Existence’ – सोऽनुवीक्ष्य नान्यदात्मनो पश्यद् । सोऽहमित्यब्रे व्याहरत् । ततोऽहं नामाभवत् । Then *the Prime Existence* acknowledged I am verily the creation for I myself have produced all this, having created all this – “अहं वाव सृष्टिरस्मि अहं हीदं सर्वमसृष्टीति ।”, even as the seer of Isha Up. says - यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मैवावनुपश्यते । सर्व भूतेषु आत्मानं ततो ना विजुगुप्स्यते ॥ – he sees all beings in his own self and his own self in all beings. Maharshi says that ‘*In the case of jnani the rise or existence of the ego is only apparent and he enjoys his unbroken transcendental experience in spite of such apparent rise or existence of the ego, keeping his attention always on the Source. This ego is harmless; it is like the skeleton of a burnt rope - though it has a form, it is no use to tie anything with.*’

As one *Guru* for innumerable disciples, he clarified in conventional language and symbols and examples. Using common form of speech he pointed that unconsciously one is aware that his self is different and distinct from his body, when he says that my eyes, my ears, my hands, my body and my mind yet identifying the self with the body when declaring I have pain, I am happy, I suffer, I enjoy, I die, knowing well that when his body deteriorates, decays and is destroyed, then he accepts that it is ‘*my body is being taken to the cremation ground*’ and would not say, ‘*I have been taken to the cremation ground*’.

He points out that *the temporal I*, is the result of the empirical mind and *the spiritual I* is the result of the absence of the empirical mind. Empirical Mind is the repository of the mental impressions created in mind by sense organs that leads the mind to associate the body with one’s self. ‘. . . it is your mind that haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body, the world and it makes you think that you are householder . . . It is no help to change the environment. The one obstacle is the mind and it must be overcome whether in the home or in the jungle. If you can do it in jungle why not in the home?’

‘*Innate tendencies and subtle memories of past experiences lead to consequential possibilities of them becoming active*’. ‘*The sense of (this empirical) I pertains to the person, body and the brain*’. Therefore, ‘*If the Mind, which is the cause of all thoughts and activities, disappears, the external objects too would disappear. (Because) Mind is only thoughts, it is a form of energy. It manifests*

itself as world.’ ‘If the (empirical) Mind, which is the cause of all thoughts and activities, disappears, the external objects too would disappear. Mind is only thoughts, it is a form of energy. It manifests itself as world. When Mind sinks in Self, then the Self is realized; when the Mind issues forth, the world appears and the Self is not realized.’

Maharshi says, ‘Once we take away the world, which causes our doubts, the clouds in our mind, then the light of God will shine clearly through. How is the world taken away? When for example instead of seeing a man you and say, this is God existing as body, which body answers more or less perfectly to the description of a God, then it would as a ship meets the description more or less of the wheel’. ‘This exposition is all right as far as it goes, but strictly speaking even this is not accurate. The jnani is not even anxious to shed his body; he is indifferent alike to the existence or non-existence of the body, being almost unaware of it’. Therefore, he concluded ‘As you are so is the world. Without understanding yourself what is the use of trying to understand the world?’ The spiritual life is lived when When Mind sinks in Self, then the Self is realized; when the Mind issues forth, the world appears and the Self is not realized.’

Maharshi considers inquiry in the nature of I as ‘the one unfallible means, the only direct one, to realize the unconditioned absolute Being, which you really are’ and says ‘There is no other adequate method except self-inquiry. If the mind is quietened by other means it stays quiet for some time and then springs up again and resumes its former activity’. At the same time, ‘The purpose of inquiry is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not a case of one I searching another I’. One would discover that even ‘as it (the I) is the first thought to appear so it is also the last one to disappear. This is a matter which can be experienced’.

When thoughts rise up in mind during inquiry, one should not follow them but watch them as they arise – what is this thought? where did it come from, and to whom? To me – who am I? Even if impure thought rise in mind, let them be. Even as one watches the thoughts rising in mind, they come to be terminated, reverting to their source. All thoughts are inconsistent with realization. The right thing to be done is termination of the thoughts of oneself as well others as they arise.

He will then become aware that ‘the real I or self is not the body, nor any of the five senses, nor the sense-objects, nor the organs of action, nor the praana, nor the mind, nor even the deep sleep state where there is not cognizance of these . . . After rejecting each of these and saying ‘these I am not’, that which alone remains is the I and that is Consciousness. When a man knows his true self (the individual real I) for the first time something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him, that which is (the Universal I or the Self), behind the mind is the infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it the Kingdom of Heaven, others call it soul and others again call it Nirvana, Hindus call it liberation; you may give

whatever name you wish. When this happens a man has not really lost himself; rather he has found himself’.

Last Days

During all his life *Socrates* had upheld the rights of human beings to think for themselves as foundational necessity and sincerely believed himself as the one sent by gods to contribute the welfare and virtue of the society and the state. Therefore, when he found that he is being unjustly and unwisely being punished, he refused to beg for mercy, and even agree to flee when avenues were provided to him. Refusing to compromise his convictions, he told them that be of good cheer. However he was surprised and concerned not so much that the *Athenians*, excepting the few who listened to him, did not accept what he spoke, but *Crito* who was one of the closest to him, should have not understood the full implication of his death. Therefore, when *Crito* asked him, how should he be buried?, he blandly replied, *‘Anyhow you like, if you can catch me and I don’t elude you.’* Then chuckling quietly and glancing at others, he said *‘I can’t persuade my friends, that I am Socrates here, the person who is talking to you now, and setting out each of these arguments. He thinks that the person he will be looking at shortly as a corpse, and so he asks how he should bury me. As for my lengthy arguments to show that when I drink the poison, I shall no longer remain with you but take my leave of you and go off to some joys of the blessed. I think that my words are of no avail so far as he is concerned, although I was trying to console both you and myself as well . . .But you should have no fear; you should say that it is my body that you are burying and you should bury it just as you like, and as seems to you to conform best to custom.’*

When the final moment came and people could not restrain their tears from flowing, and *Crito* went away unable to restrain his tears and *Aollodorus* burst out crying aloud making every one present break down, *Socrates* admonished them, *‘What are you doing strange fellows? That was my reason for sending the women away ,so that they should’nt make this mistake; I have heard that it is better to die in silence. Please remain quiet and be brave.’* Plato records the last moments with graciousness and in humility. When the jailor brought the cup of poison for him to drink, he spoke these heart-wrenching words, *‘To you, Socrates, whom I know to be the noblest and gentlest and best of all who came to this place, I will not impute the angry feelings of other men, ho rage and swear to me when in obedience to the authorities, I bid them drink the poison. Indeed I am sure that you will not be angry with me, for others as you are aware and not I, are the guilty cause. So fare you well and try to bear lightly what must what needs be.’* Then bursting in tears he

turned away. *Socrates* who was observing all the events as they were taking place replied, *'I return your good wishes and will do as you bid'* and turning his face to others remarked, *'How charming is this man!'*

But *Crito* is not yet ready for *Socrates* to depart and pleads with him, *'The sun is still upon the hill-tops, and many have taken the draught late; they have eaten and drunk and indulged in sensual delights. Do not hasten then there is still time'*. Surprised *Socrates* speaks to him mildly, *'Yes, Crito,, they of whom you speak are right in doing thus, for they think that they will gain by the delay. I am right in not doing thus , for I donot think that I should gain anything by drinking the poisons a little later.I would be sparing and saving a life which is already gone. I could only laugh at myself for this. Please do as I say, and not refuse me'*. Then the cup is brought and *Socrates* puts it to his lips and drinks the contents. Soon the poison took its toll, but not before *Socrates* reminded *Crito* to return the debt which he owed. Then when no further words came out of the sleeping body, its eyes were closed and mouth was shut. And thus did one whom *Plato* called the wisest, the justest and best of all the men whom he has known.

Maharshi had never had any healthy constitution except perhaps in his adolescence prior to his *Death Experience*. In the following years when once he left his home, the intense penance and severe austerities left signs of deterioration on his body, though he did not have any sickness. Therefore, it was only when the first signs of cancerous growth were perceived that people became concerned, wanting him to get treatment from doctors. But he was not enthusiastic giving scant importance to the malady of the body but left it to the devotees, who prevailed for treatment to please them. They offered him various remedies and *Maharshi* accepted treatment as compassion to others, in spite of the cancer eating his vitals, causing him immense pain.

His detachment to the body was so complete that he would say *'There is pain'* in the body and never *'I have pain'* in my body. In spite of the pain in the body, he would remark *'One should witness all that happens'*. If one were to express concern about his health, he would say *'There is no need to alarm. The body itself is a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it?'* Having no personal desire for treatment, he would remark *'Have I ever asked for any treatment? It is you who want this and that for me, so it is you who must decide. If I were asked I would always say, as I have said from the beginning, that no treatment is necessary. Let things take their course'*.

Even in pain, his sense of humour did not desert him. When he was informed that a woman in grief was banging her head on the pillar he remarked *'Is that so? I thought she was trying to break a coco-nut'*. When a woman devotee told him, *'Bhagavan! Give this sickness to me instead. Let me bare it'* he asked her to find out who had given him this sickness in the first instance. He would remark

'You attach too much importance to the body'. He would say, 'Why should he carry the burden of the body alone, when it needs four persons to carry?' or would inquire 'When we have finished the meal do we keep the banana leaf?' He consoled a devotee saying, 'Suppose you go to a firewood depot and buy a bundle of firewood and engage a collie to carry it to your house. As you walk along with him, he will be anxiously looking forward to the destination so that he can throw off his burden and get relief. In the same way the jnani is anxious to throw off his mortal body.'

He would, therefore, remark: *'They take this body for Bhagavan and attribute suffering to him. What a pity! They are sad that Bhagavan is going to leave them and go away; where can he go and how can he go?' Cohen records him saying, 'If the hands of the Jnani were cut with knife there would be pain as with every one else but because his mind is in bliss he does not feel the pain as acutely as other do'. He would assure 'The jnani who has found himself as formless pure Awareness is unaffected though the body be cleft with a sword. Sugar candy does not lose its sweetness though broken or crushed'. He said 'I am only ill if you think I am; if you think I am well I shall be well'. 'The jnani is not even anxious to shed his body; he is indifferent alike to the existence or non-existence of the body, being almost unaware of it'. To one of the earnest devotee he asked, 'Do you know what Moksha is? It is getting rid of the sense of misery, which is unreal and attain Bliss, which is always there. That is Moksha.'*

His surrender of the body to the *Will of the Ordainer*, who *'controls the fate of souls in accordance with their prarabdhakarmas'* was complete. One devotees distraught seeing him in pain ventured to suggest that if he wills, he could cure himself with one single thought only to be rebuffed with disbelief, *'Who could have such thought? . . . Who is there to Will this? . . . Every thing will come right in due course'*. There was nothing more to *Will*, when *Ramana*, the *Universal Consciousness* has taken charge of the body. When one becomes conscious and aware of the working of the *Cosmic Cycle*, one participates but does not complain. He had said earlier, *'whatever is destined not to happen, will not happen, try as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it. This is certain'*. This was not fatalism but conscious acceptance of the *eternal Law*.

Maharshi epitomized the statement in *Bhagavata Purana* : *"Let the body, the result of fructifying Karma, rest or move about, live or die, the Sage who has realized the Self is not aware of it, just as one in drunken stupor is not aware of his clothing"*. If he does not, then who else will represent truth of the statement?

The days passed in to weeks and weeks to become months. *Bhagavan* remained a spectator and witness to the events that were passing before him, even while he continued to cooperate with doctors and devotees. His *Grace* continued to

be showered on his devotees even while he was suffering the disease. To the doctor he was very considerate saying, '*I hope you won't mind when you have taken so much trouble with your medicine*'. To the attendants who were looking after his conveniences, he said '*The English have a word Thanks but we only say santosham*'. Then he told his attendants to go leaving him alone, either sleep or meditate.

When the moment to depart came, he started breathing heavy, seeing which doctors tried to offer oxygen, which he politely brushed aside. When unexpectedly a group of devotees started singing the hymn, *Arunachala Shiva*, a smile of indescribable tenderness hovered on his lips. Then one more breath and then no more breaths came and he lapsed in the state of *Bliss*, easily without struggle, with no signs that he has left the body.

As *Ramana* was leaving the body which had been his abode for all these years, the grieving devotees spontaneously sang in unison the hymn '*Arunachala Shiva*'. On hearing the chant, Maharshi opened his eyes briefly and as the words seeped in his consciousness, a smile hovered on his lips and tears of bliss streamed from the corner of his eyes. When the end came, a long breath passed out without effort, without struggle, without even any sign that *Death* has taken hold of the body. Maharshi epitomized the statement in *Bhagavata Purana* : "*Let the body, the result of fructifying Karma, rest or move about, live or die, the Sage who has realized the Self is not aware of it, just as one in drunken stupor is not aware of his clothing*". If he does not, then who else will represent truth of the statement? *Ramana* entered the Space softly to merge gently in *Lord Arunachala*. *Death* was defeated and the *Deathless Spirit* strode undefeated, unconquered and free.

Concluding remarks

One thing that comes to one attention is that whichever a people belonging to whichever place and whichever period, there is a strange foundational conformity in their experiences and perceptions, though they seem to have been expressed in diverse fashion according to the society, the place and period in which they lived. No seer is superior to any other, whether oriental or occidental, whether ancient or recent, experiencing the luminous moments in absolute purity, finding no need to extend except for the limited purpose to share it with others, through terms and figures, words and symbols that vary when the original experience is expressed. If comparative philosophy is accepted as a religion, then there will remain no scope for dogmatic beliefs and faiths, sects and factions. There would then be no prophets nor protagonists, holy scripture or texts not dividing but cementing the differences.

The seers of all the places and periods have declared without hesitation that apart from *the Primal Existence*, apart from *That One* nothing else exists as the eternal, universal neither being crafted by intellect nor fashioned by mind, but as an experience perceived with full receptivity as something beyond mind and speech and breath, these three being the prime instruments which *That One* created for bring creativity in existence. Therefore, in enlightenment both the experience and the perception become important, perception becomes transformed as श्रवण – listening, listening becomes transformed as धारणा - meditation, meditation becomes transformed as श्रद्धा - receptivity, receptivity becomes transformed as श्रुति, that which is heard and भक्ति being the consummation of the enlightened awareness.

Every thing from the greatest of the great to the smallest of the small, every un-manifest element and every un-manifest emotion comes to be created, using *Mind, Speech and Prana*, through perception, reception, reflection and meditation, though not in similar extensive, all-comprehensive manner and reach which *Brahman* had. Therefore, in communication of the experience if the figures, words, signs and symbols used for conveying the subtle and profound mysticism then the fault lies not in the experience but in the attributes and inclination, temperament and personality of the communicator, the narration appearing prosaic and pedantic without the grace, richness and beauty of the one who experiences. In such communicator awareness did not seep as a stream would through crevices of the hardened boulders, but flashing like lightning and reverberating like thunder, with all uncertainty removed and all doubts resolved. Enlightenment is the ripe fruit, neither racial nor regional, not plucked by a gardener at will but which fell involuntarily effortlessly.

For *Valya*, the hunter it was chance encounter with *Narada* that transformed him to become *Valmiki*, the seer-poet; for *Siddhartha*, the prince it was chance sight of suffering of the people that transformed him to become *Buddha*, the enlightened; for *Tulasidas Dube*, the love lorn householder it was chance admonition by his wife that transformed him to become *Tulasidas*, the saint; for *Gadhadhra*, the simple priest in a temple it was chance encounter with the white cranes flying on a rainy day in the sky enveloped with dark clouds that transformed him to become *Paramahansa*; similarly for *Venkataraman*. an uncharacteristic lad it was his *Death Experience* that transformed him to become *Ramana Maharshi*.

For *Socrates* it was the voice, ‘*which always forbid but never commnded*’ the dream ‘*coming to me from time to time and always saying the same thing*’. ‘*Tao’s principle is spontaneity*’ or as *Haiku* poet says ‘*Poppy petals fall softly, quietly, calmly when they are ready*’ or ‘*Gazing at falling petals, a baby almost looks like a Buddha*’, so was it when *Gabriel* told *Muhammad* ‘*Read*’.

A comparative study of the thoughts expressed earlier or expressed in recent times, in the east or in the west, is not to find out who is a Seer, or who among them is great and speaks Truth but to be consciously aware that savants of every period and place, while expressing in diverse manners show a common strand of eternal essence not constrained by people, place or the period, validating the immortal words that *Satya, the Prime Existence* is singular and unitary experience though fashioned variously – “एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति”, “एकं सत्यं बहुधा कल्पयन्ति”।

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