

# Paul Brunton and Ramaṇa Maharshi

by

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## I. Introduction

Paul Brunton (1898-1981) was an English writer on Yoga and esoteric subjects. He is probably best known as the one who made the western world aware of the Hindu sage Ramaṇa Maharshi (1879-1950). In this article, I will explore how Brunton's background influenced what he wrote about Ramaṇa, and how Brunton's books in turn influenced Ramaṇa.

Brunton tried to keep secret many details about his early life. We know that his original name was Raphael Hurst. He was a bookseller and journalist. Brunton wrote under various pseudonyms, including Raphael Meriden and Raphael Delmonte. When he first visited Ramaṇa in India in January 1931, he referred to himself by his real name, Raphael Hurst.<sup>1</sup> Later, he chose the pen name Brunton Paul,<sup>2</sup> but for some reason, perhaps a printer's error, the names were reversed to Paul Brunton, a name that he kept.

In 1934, he published a book about his meeting with Ramaṇa. The book was called *A Search in Secret India*.<sup>3</sup> The book was immensely popular. Many people came to visit Ramaṇa as a result of reading Brunton's book. Even Indian writers refer to Brunton's works. For example, Yogananda visited Ramaṇa in 1935 after reading Brunton's books. He met Brunton at Ramaṇa's *ashram*, and praised his writing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See "From the Early Days," *The Maharshi* 7, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1997, online at [[http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1997/sep\\_oct.html](http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1997/sep_oct.html)]).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Brunton (under the name Brunton Paul): "With a Southern Indian Tantrist," *Occult Review* 56 (July, 1932).

<sup>3</sup> Paul Brunton: *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider & Co., 1934) ['*Search*'].

<sup>4</sup> C. Richard Wright: "The Spread of Self Realization Fellowship (Yogoda Sat-Sanga) over the Earth" [[www.ananda.it/it/yogananda/india1935/india19.html](http://www.ananda.it/it/yogananda/india1935/india19.html)]. The visit is also described in *Talks*, 101-103.

Ramaṇa himself makes several references to Brunton's book; Ramaṇa expressly says that the book is useful for Indians (*Talks*, 121, par. 136). And as we shall see, Ramaṇa was himself influenced by Brunton's ideas.

My primary interest is to explore the ideas that Brunton had prior to meeting Ramaṇa, and which determined the way that he wrote his book. Now this does not mean that I accept a constructivist view of reality, where all of our experiences are formed and determined by our thoughts. It seems to me that such a constructivism actually overemphasizes the rational and the conceptual, missing both the unconscious as well as the superconscious or transpersonal part of our Selfhood from which all of our temporal functions arise, including the rational. And as Perovich has pointed out, constructivism is really a hyper-Kantianism.<sup>5</sup>

But in this case, we know that Brunton constructed his experience. He tells us so. He confesses that he used his book about Ramaṇa as a "peg" on which to hang his own ideas:

It will therefore be clear to perspicacious readers that I used his [Ramaṇa's] name and attainments as a convenient peg upon which to hang an account of what meditation meant to me. The principal reason for this procedure was that it constituted a convenient literary device to secure the attention and hold the interest of western readers, who would naturally give more serious consideration to such a report of the "conversion" of a seemingly hard headed critically-minded Western journalist to yoga.<sup>6</sup>

In view of this startling admission, we need to look at the following issues:

1. How did Brunton's own western background influence what he wrote about Ramaṇa?
2. Did Brunton's own ideas influence the way that Ramaṇa and his teachings have been perceived, both by Ramaṇa himself as well as by his disciples? This is important in view of the fact that Ramaṇa himself praised Brunton's book and incorporated what Brunton said in some of his own teachings.

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony N. Perovich, Jr.: "Does the Philosophy of Mysticism rest on a Mistake?" in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, ed. Robert K.C. Forman (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (London: Rider & Co., 1969, first published 1941), 25. [*Hidden Teaching*]. Note: Brunton's books have been published several times, and page references in these various editions are not uniform.

To my knowledge, neither of these two questions has been previously investigated.

## II. Previous Biographies of Ramaṇa Maharshi

Brunton was not the first westerner to write about Ramaṇa Maharshi. The first English reports about Ramaṇa were by Frank H. Humphreys, a policeman stationed in India in 1911. Humphreys published the book *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*. The book is based on articles that Humphreys first published in *The International Psychic Gazette* in 1913.<sup>7</sup>

Humphreys had interests in occult powers and theosophy. This is important, because as we shall see, Brunton was also interested in occult powers. *Glimpses* reports some of Humphreys' own psychic abilities, such as having a vision in Bombay of his future Telegu teacher, S. Narasimhayya, before he met him in Vellore (*Glimpses*, 8). Humphreys was also able to identify his teacher's guru, Ganapati Sastri, from a series of photos (*Glimpses*, 9), although he had never met Sastri. And he had a vision of Ramaṇa in his cave before he met Ramaṇa (*Glimpses*, 11).

When Humphreys first arrived in Vellore, his first question was to ask his teacher of the Telegu language whether he knew any astrology. He then asked whether the teacher knew of any Mahatmas in the vicinity. This idea of Mahatmas is an idea emphasized by Madame Blavatsky's kind of theosophy.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Humphreys met Ganapati Sastri

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<sup>7</sup> Frank H Humphreys.: *Glimpses of the Life and Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai 1999) [*Glimpses*']. The book is based on articles that Humphreys first published in *The International Psychic Gazette*, May 1913, 295ff; June 1913, 327ff; and July 1913, 357ff.

<sup>8</sup> Although Humphreys and Brunton were clearly interested in Madame Blavatsky's type of theosophy, it should be pointed out that not all theosophy is of that type. Notwithstanding Blavatsky's belief that she incorporated previous theosophy, there are other kinds of theosophy. For example, Gershom Scholem says that 'theosophy' should not be understood in the sense of Madame Blavatsky's later movement of that name:

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

(also known as Ganapati Muni). Humphreys met Sastri in Tiruvannamalai, where Sastri was at a theosophical society conference. Tiruvannamalai is also where Ramaṇa's *ashram* is located.

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

Sastri was a disciple of Ramaṇa, and Sastri was in fact the first disciple to refer to Ramaṇa as 'Bhagavan' or 'Lord.' Together with Ganapati Sastri, Humphreys visited Ramaṇa in 1911.

The reports about Ramaṇa by Humphreys were the basis of all future biographies of Ramaṇa, especially since Humphreys was the first to report on Ramaṇa's pivotal experience of the Self at the age of 16. But even here we must be careful, for Humphreys says that the story of Ramaṇa's awakening was not told to him by Ramaṇa himself, but by a disciple or *chela* (*Glimpses*, 27).

Humphreys' writings were also used as the basis for the first major biography of Ramaṇa, which was by Ramaṇa's disciple Swami B.V Narasimha. In 1931, Narasimha published (in English) *Self Realization: The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi*.<sup>9</sup> Narasimha reports that even in 1931, there were divergent interpretations of Ramaṇa:

Maharshi is regarded by many as a sphynx. He speaks little and only as to what is asked. He is mostly silent. His works are cryptic and are capable of diverse interpretations. *Saktas* go to him and think he is a *Sakta*, *Saivas*

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And I have written about the Christian theosophy of Franz von Baader and the tradition of Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme. These writers rejected occult powers. Although they believed that creation is an expression of God's wisdom, they did not regard creation in a pantheistic identification with God. Creation reflects, images the dynamic movement out of the Godhead, but it is also distinct from it.

<sup>9</sup> Swami B.V. Narasimha: *Self Realization: The Life and Teachings of Sri Ramaṇa Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai, 1993, first published 1931) ['Narasimha'].

take him for a *Saiva*, *Srivaishnavas* find nothing in him inconsistent with their *Visishtadvaitic* ideal. Moslems and Christians have found in him elements of their “true faith” (Narasimha, 197-98).

I have analyzed some of these divergent interpretations of Ramaṇa in my work “Ramaṇa Maharshi: Hindu and Non-Hindu Interpretations of a Jivanmukta.”<sup>10</sup> In that work, I show that Ramaṇa should not be regarded as a traditional *advaitic* sage. Ramaṇa was influenced by tantra and by neo-Hinduism.<sup>11</sup> I explore Ganapati Sastri’s significant tantric influence on Ramaṇa. But there were other tantric influences on Ramaṇa in the books that he read and translated. In addition to these non-traditional Hindu influences, there were also Western influences. I discuss the many Christian references and Biblical quotations both in Narasimha’s biography of Ramaṇa and in Ramaṇa’s own thought. And Ramaṇa was also influenced by western philosophical ideas, including the writings of Ramaṇa.

Brunton's book *A Search in Secret India* was much more influential than either of the previous biographies by Humphreys and Narasimha. In subsequent editions of his biography of Ramaṇa, Narasimha added two chapters on Brunton. In these revised chapters, Narasimha mentions that Brunton was interested in theosophy, spiritualism hypnotism, thought-reading, and had obtained some first-hand experiences in some of these fields (Narasimha, 231). Thus, Brunton’s interest in occult powers was evident to Narasimha.

And because Brunton’s book is so important, we need to look at Brunton's own background, and the ideas that he used in interpreting his experience with Ramaṇa Maharshi.

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<sup>10</sup> J. Glenn Friesen: “Ramana Maharshi: Hindu and Non-Hindu Interpretations of a *Jivanmukta*.” Online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/abhishiktananda/jivanmukti.pdf>] [*‘Jivanmukta’*].

<sup>11</sup> By neo-Hinduism, I am using Paul Hacker’s meaning of Hinduism that has been influenced by western thought. He particularly focuses on Vivekananda’s incorporation of Western ideas. See Wilhelm Halbfass, ed., *Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) [*‘Hacker’*]. Also Wilhelm Halbfass: *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

### III. Brunton's Own Life and Thought

#### 1. Previous Studies of Brunton

The most comprehensive study to date regarding Brunton is Annie Cahn Fung's doctoral thesis: *Paul Brunton: un pont entre l'Inde et l'occident* (Sorbonne, 1992). The English translation of this thesis, *Paul Brunton: A Bridge Between India and the West* is available online.<sup>12</sup> Although there is a great deal of useful information in this thesis, Cahn Fung does not mention the fact that Brunton confessed he had used Ramaṇa as a peg for his own thoughts. Nor does she explore how this influenced Brunton's reporting of Ramaṇa, or how this might have in turn affected Ramaṇa self understanding.

Cahn Fung does question whether Brunton's teachings are really *advaitic*. She points to Brunton's individualistic and anti-institutional view of enlightenment. She says that this was based on Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was one of Brunton's favourite authors:

He was fond of Emerson's remark, "Souls are not saved in bundles," and maintained that only alone can we find Truth, in the depths of our own innermost being, alone with the Alone (Cahn Fung, I, 10).

Brunton's son Kenneth Thurston Hurst also reports Brunton's interest in Emerson. Emerson used the term 'Oversoul' for the ray of divinity within us.<sup>13</sup> As we shall see, Brunton uses this idea of a ray of divinity. And the relation of the term 'Oversoul' to Brunton's term 'Overself' seems obvious. Cahn Fung has questioned whether Brunton's use of the term 'Overself' was derived from the *Vedāntic* view of the Self (*ātman*), whether it is this idea of *ātman* in western disguise, or whether it is a new concept. She asks how Brunton can maintain the idea of the Overself as a "higher individuality" and still maintain the idea of nonduality. She says that Brunton's idea of the Overself is "an intermediary between the finite and the human," and that this idea is more accessible to contemporary thinkers who are attached to the idea of individuality. But she says that

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<sup>12</sup> Annie Cahn Fung: "Paul Brunton: A Bridge Between India and the West," Doctoral thesis, Sorbonne, 1992). Online at [<http://wisdomsgoldenrod.org/publications/>] ['Cahn Fung'].

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Thurston Hurst: *Paul Brunton: a Personal View* (Burdett, N.Y.: Larson Publications, 1989), 63 ['Hurst'].

Brunton was also nondual because his mentalistic philosophy reduced "subject and object, in a purely rational way, to the one stuff of which both are made: Mind" (Cahn Fung, I, 11; II, 4-5).

I have difficulty with this Cahn Fung's attempted reconciliation of Brunton's idea of the Overself with nondualism. To me, a reduction of subject and object to Mind would be not nondualism unless *advaita* is understood as monism. In my own thesis, *Abhishiktānanda's Non-Monistic Advaitic Experience*<sup>14</sup> I have argued that *advaita* is neither dualistic nor monistic.

Furthermore, prior to his use of the term 'Overself,' Brunton's philosophy was not nondual, but dualistic. Brunton made a sharp distinction between mind and matter. But I do believe that Cahn Fung is correct that Brunton's solution to these issues of relating the Overself to nondualism is related to what he learned from the *guru* that he chose after his meeting with Ramaṇa, V. Subrahmanya Iyer. Iyer was very much within the neo-Hindu tradition—that is, the interpretation of Hinduism that has been influenced by Western philosophy.

Brunton first uses the term 'Overself' in his book *The Secret Path* (1935).<sup>15</sup> That was after his meeting in 1931 with Ramaṇa. But Cahn Fung is incorrect that the term 'Overself' was a new term coined by Brunton (Cahn Fung II, 5). The term 'Overself' appears in a 1932 book by Gottfried de Purucker (1874-1942). That book is a collection of lectures that he gave between 1924 and 1927 at the Theosophical Society regarding Madame Blavatsky's book *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). Purucker there uses both the terms 'Oversoul' and 'Overself':

Thyself—what is it? It is consciousness; it is also the heart of the universe. Thyself, that self which is the same in thee and in me, in you and in all others, which is not different in any one of us, as compared with any other one of us. It is the ultimate self, the spiritual oversoul; and therefore it is the one self, the heart of the universe. It is the consciousness in you which

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<sup>14</sup> J. Glenn Friesen: *Abhishiktānanda's Non-monistic Advaitic Experience* (University of South Africa, 2001), online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/abhishiktananda/>].

<sup>15</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Secret Path* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1935) [*'Secret Path'*].

says simply "I am," and that same consciousness is in me and in all others: in the Teacher, in the *chelas* of the Teachers, in the Teachers of the Teachers, in the Silent Watcher of our supernal sphere—that overself is the same in all entities comprised in any hierarchy.

But while that overself is the same in you, and in me, and in all that is, not different anywhere from what it is anywhere else; yet this does not comprise all there is of us psychologically speaking. There is something else within us, not different from the oversoul but a ray of that oversoul, so to say, and this something else in each one of us is the individual ego: that part in each of us which says not merely "I am," but "I am I," and not you.<sup>16</sup>

Purucker was a leader of the Theosophical Society from 1929 until his death in 1942. The book referred to is considered the classic commentary on Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*. It was published in 1932, two years before Brunton even published his book *Search*. The term 'Overself' is therefore a term associated with Blavatsky's theosophy. I am not aware whether Blavatsky herself uses the word 'Overself,' but the word 'Oversoul' is certainly used, and she makes references to Emerson.<sup>17</sup> Purucker's idea that the ego is a "ray" of this Overself is something that is also found in Brunton, although Brunton could also have obtained it from Emerson's writings directly. But Purucker's book appeared shortly before Brunton's writings, and as we shall see, Brunton was interested in theosophical topics. Brunton's interest in theosophy continued even after he met Ramaṇa, so it is very likely that he read Purucker's book.

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<sup>16</sup> Gottfried de Purucker: *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, first published 1932), chapter 48. (Available online [<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/fund/fund-1.htm>]).

<sup>17</sup> H.P. Blavatsky: *The Secret Doctrine* (London: Theosophical Publishing Co., 1888). The following references appear in the index to that work:

brooding over the Earth I 375  
Emerson's, not world soul I 140  
Emerson's, or Alaya I 48  
identity of all souls w I 17  
universal sixth principle I 17



## 2. Brunton's Boyhood and Youth

Brunton's real name was Raphael Hurst. Cahn Fung says that he was born in London on November 27, 1898, the son of Jewish parents. But there is some confusion as to his exact birthday. His own son says that Brunton's real birthday was October 21, 1898, and that Brunton did not want astrological charts made for that date (Hurst, 219).

Brunton's mother died when he was young, and he was brought up by a stepmother whom he called "Auntie." Brunton was a sensitive young boy. He writes, "Boyhood years had been shadowed by a terrible and tremendous yearning to penetrate the mystery of life's inner meaning" (*Hidden Teaching*, 23).

As a boy, Brunton was already practicing meditation:

Before I reached the threshold of manhood and after six months of unwavering daily practice of meditation and eighteen months of burning aspiration for the Spiritual Self, I underwent a series of mystical ecstasies. During them I attained a kind of elementary consciousness of it. If anyone could imagine a consciousness which does not objectify anything but remains in its own native purity, a happiness beyond which it is impossible to go, and a self which is unvaryingly one and the same, he would have the correct idea of the Overself....(Hurst, 42-43).

Brunton says much the same thing in *Hidden Teaching*, where he "confesses" that he was not a novice in yoga before he met Ramaṇa:

Before I crossed the threshold of manhood the power of inward contemplation had been laid up as treasure in heaven, the ineffable ecstasies of mystical trance had become a daily occurrence in the calendar of life, the abnormal mental phenomena which attend the earlier experience of yoga were commonplace and familiar, whilst the dry labours of meditation had disappeared into effortless ease [...] In the deepest stage of trance I seemed to become extended in space, an incorporeal being (*Hidden Teaching*, 23).

## 3. Allan Bennet (Bhikku Ananda Metteya)

Allan Bennet (1872 -1923), also known as the Bhikku Ananda Metteya,<sup>18</sup> introduced Brunton to Buddhist thought and Buddhist methods of meditation. Brunton kept a photo of Bennet on his living room wall. It is reported that Bennet was a British occultist, and

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<sup>18</sup> The name Ananda Metteya means "bliss of loving kindness."

that he was a teacher of Aleister Crowley when they both were members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.<sup>19</sup> Bennet was the author of several books on Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> Bennet also wrote articles for the *Theosophical Review*.<sup>21</sup> Bennet had been influenced by Edwin Arnold's poem, "The Light of Asia." As a result, he journeyed to Sri Lanka and Burma to study Buddhism and, in 1901, was ordained in Burma as Venerable Ananda Metteya, the first Westerner to become a Buddhist monk.<sup>22</sup> In 1903, Bennet founded the International Buddhist Society (Buddhasasana Samagama) in Rangoon. An English monk from that Society, Frederic Fletcher (known as Prajnananda), accompanied Brunton on his visit to Ramanā.

#### 4. The Theosophical Society

Brunton joined the Theosophical Society (which had been founded in 1875 by Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott). He later left the Theosophical Society, but as we shall see, he continued with his interest in occult subjects, and he joined a similar society.

#### 5. Michael Juste

At the Theosophical Society, Brunton met Michael Juste (also known as Michael Houghton). They became friends, and opened a bookshop together, although it failed after only six months. Juste wrote the book, *The White Brother: an Occult Autobiography*.<sup>23</sup> The book refers to their theosophical studies, and specifically mentions

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Bennett: A Biographical Sketch of a Friend and Acquaintance of Aleister Crowley," [<http://www.redflame93.com/BennettAlan.html>].

<sup>20</sup> Allan Bennet (Ananda Metteya): *The Religion of Burma* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1923). Allan Bennet (Ananda Metteya): *The Wisdom of the Aryas* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923).

<sup>21</sup> Allan Bennet: "Buddhist Gratitude to Henry Steel Olcott," *Theosophical Review* 42, (June, 1908), 363. Col. Olcott was of course one of the co-founders of the Theosophical Society.

<sup>22</sup> Graeme Lyall: "Buddhism and the Future of Humanity," [<http://www.buddhistcouncil.org/budfut.htm>].

<sup>23</sup> Michael Juste: *The White Brother: an Occult Autobiography* (London: Rider & Co., 1927). It is available for download online [<http://wisdomsgoldenrod.org/publications/>]

Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. A student in Juste's book named David was modeled on Brunton. This character appears in the book as a pale and slender youth:

Here I met David, who was to become my partner and companion in many spiritual and material ventures, and a fellow-pilgrim in the quest of realization. [...] David was of short and somewhat slight stature, pale and intensely sensitive (he originally disliked me because I was too crude, and argued with him), serious, and, I used to think, much too casual about the incidents of the world, and much too deeply, engrossed in the world within. He always appeared to move in a perpetual haze. He had had some most interesting experiences of an occult nature when young, which helped me to prove the existence of unknown states of consciousness, and when I first met him his air of other-worldliness puzzled me greatly. I remember particularly one day, when I was waiting for him in the shadow of a staircase, he touched me to see if I was real or a ghost. Life to him was then very insubstantial, although since that period he has had experiences which have taught him the wisdom of planting his feet firmly on earth (Juste, 15).

Juste writes that all of these students were unbalanced and neurotic, although they called their behaviour merely unconventional and bohemian. But Juste says that the mystic is “the mystical fool of God who has to learn Balance, Discrimination and Understanding” (Juste, 15).

Juste says that Brunton (or "David") sometimes studied astrology, generally wandering about as though caught in the "misty maze of a dream" (Juste, 19). He refers to their opening a bookshop together in Bloomsbury, which closed in 6 months. They then sought a cheaper place for their bookshop (Juste, 27, 32). It appears that Juste later opened the famous Atlantis Bookshop in Bloomsbury, which specializes in occult books. It is unclear whether Brunton had an ownership in that bookshop.

## **6. Thurston ('M')**

Hurst says that in 1922, Brunton met an “American painter” living in London named Thurston, whom he said was a kind of clairvoyant. The meeting occurred in the bookshop in Bloomsbury (Hurst, 59). Juste was also present at this meeting. Thurston predicted that Brunton would discover and publish ancient mysteries. Brunton said that he regarded Thurston as his first teacher. In fact, Brunton named his son after Thurston,

who claimed to have contacted his son while still in the womb. Brunton's son Kenneth Thurston Hurst, was born the next year, 1923.

Although Thurston was obviously of great importance to Brunton, very little is known about him. We don't know his first name or date of birth. Cahn Fung says that he died in the mid-1920's. I have wondered whether he is perhaps Frederic W. Thurstan, who contributed articles to the *Occult Review* and the *Theosophist*. F.W. Thurstan wrote about the Mahatmas of India as well as of the mysteries of ancient Egypt. He wrote about Hindu *rishis* and angelic powers. If Thurstan was indeed Thurston, then there is a remarkable convergence in that Humphreys, the first person to write about Ramaṇa, was encouraged to send his reports because of interest generated by Thurstan's previous articles in the *International Psychic Gazette* (*Glimpses*, 13). However, to identify Thurston with Thurstan remains speculation on my part.<sup>24</sup>

Whether or not Thurston is the same as Thurstan, we do know about Thurston's ideas through his books. He wrote *The Dayspring of Youth*.<sup>25</sup> The author of the book is identified as "M". According to the preface, M. also wrote *The Lord God of Truth Within*.<sup>26</sup> Both books were published posthumously. Hurst says that Juste assisted in editing *Dayspring* (Hurst, 59). Thurston also translated and annotated the occult book *Le Comte de Gabalis*, written in 1652 by l'Abbé N. de Montfaucon de Villars (1635-1673).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Frederic W. Thurstan was one of the incorporators of the London Spiritualist Society. See [<http://www.spirithistory.com/98lond.html>]. Two articles that he wrote for *The Theosophist* are: "The Visit of Apollonius to the Mahatmas of India," *Theosophist* 11 (Feb. 1890) and "Ordeals & Mysteries of Ancient Egypt," *Theosophist* 16 (Jul 1895). See also footnote 25.

<sup>25</sup> M ['Thurston']: *Dayspring of Youth* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1970; first published London: Putnam, 1933) [*Dayspring*]. The title '*Dayspring*' appears to be a reference to Jacob Boehme's *Aurora: The Dayspring, or the Dawning of the Day in the East*.

<sup>26</sup> M ['Thurston']: *The Lord God of Truth Within* (Los Angeles: Phoenix Press, 1942).

<sup>27</sup> Villars, Nicolas Pierre Henri de Montfaucon, *Le Comte de Gabalis: Discourses on the secret sciences and mysteries, in accordance with the principles of the ancient magi and the wisdom of the Kabalistic philosophers*, Newly rendered into English with commentary and annotations (London: William Rider & Son, 1922). There may be an earlier undated edition; some antiquarian bookshops suggest a date of circa 1914.

Juste confirms the meeting with Thurston, whom he refers to as 'M.' Both he and Brunton met Thurston. Thurston made many visits to their bookshop. On his first visit, he brought a book. It was *Le Comte de Gabalis* (Juste 24, 25). Juste found the definition of a Master in that book:

A master is an evolved being who has perfected a mental body in which he can function consciously while out of his physical vehicle. (Juste, 25).

Juste also quotes the following passage from *Le Comte de Gabalis* regarding concentration in meditation:

By concentration in meditation upon a given subject, and by the effort of regular breathing, the inhalation and exhalation occupying the same space of time, the mind may be held so that it is not subject to other thought than that pertaining to the object or symbol of expression about which man desires knowledge. And if man will persist in this practice, he can enter into an harmonious relationship to the Divinity within, and from that source can gain knowledge which is the result of the soul's own experience while passing through the higher and lower states of matter. At the same time, if man will concentrate upon the highest, he can evoke from within self, that Solar Force and Power which if directed upwards will awaken and revitalize those ganglia or organs of perception hitherto withheld from his use. If it be true from God we came, to God we return, life is but the attainment of that consciousness which is of God. And man is therefore shut out from the knowledge of his true being and estate until he seeks atonement with his own Divine Life-principle, and its evolution and manifestation in him (Juste, 51).

Juste never mentions that Thurston was either an American or an artist. There are a few references to art. Juste says a "sylph" of wonderful beauty once visited Thurston. Sylphs are among the beings referred to in *Le Comte de Gabalis*. The sylph had a magnificent head of hair, and Thurston said it "would take a painter a month to draw" it (Juste, p 31). And Thurston said that the (American) artist Whistler taught the world to see (Juste, 56).

Thurston's book *Dayspring* is worth looking at in order to understand Brunton. Thurston says that the book refers to a cosmic hierarchal energy, which appears at the beginning of a new age in man's development. Through yoga, a student attempts to tune himself into this directing consciousness, and that this is done through the agency of "the Brothers":

A Fraternity known as The Brothers has existed before man descended into matter, and have worked and still work out in the world upon the Path of activity. They appear only as an active Brotherhood when the cosmic

energy of a Dayspring of Youth brings them into manifestation to bring its vibration into the minds of those who seek their Innermost (*Dayspring*, 12).

Thurston refers to "the Higher Self," which he says is created from the best of man's aspirations during his descent and evolution through matter. It is the intermediary between man and his Innermost, and pleads for the remission of our past evil after we have reviewed this through Yoga practice (*Dayspring*, 14). Juste also refers to Thurston's use of the term 'Higher Self' (Juste, 27). And Thurston uses the term 'Innermost' to refer to that part of the Reality (God) within man to which the Yogi seeks to attune himself before attaining cosmic consciousness (*Dayspring*, 15). In Thurston's idea of an intermediary, we have an early parallel to Brunton's idea of the Overself as intermediary.

We can also see parallels to Brunton's later idea of "mentalism":

Occultism teaches us that the visible universe is but the lower counterpart of the higher one which, if perceived, would give us youth and happiness. All that we see about us is illusory and but a fragment of something greater; for our minds are imprisoned and held subject to our own illusion world. When we can pierce this we shall perceive in the depths of Nature a mind that directs and guides all things (*Dayspring*, 21).

And like Brunton was later to do, Thurston opposes mere mysticism to the "science" of yoga:

We are not blind like the mystic who, though radiating great love, has little to demonstrate; for the mystic and Yogi of this science are far apart. The mystic with fasting and praying weakens his body, seeking to make it subservient to its Higher Self, of whom he is ignorant, and only Its fragrance and peace remains in his heart; but the Yogi will develop and learn from his atomic intelligence his own great truth (*Dayspring*, 31).

Thurston was certainly interested in occult powers. Thurston says that as we pass through each division of Nature we are taught the laws and customs of each sphere. From these we learn what is known as Nature's magic. The elementals working with us can manipulate mind-stuff and produce illusions that to the beholders would seem miracles (*Dayspring*, 72). He speaks of the importance of Importance of gaining the "knower consciousness," to know a thing without thought. It is an instantaneous method. He gives the example of a yogi, who can say immediately where you would be at ten o'clock the following morning (*Dayspring*, 86). The advanced Yogi increases and

diminishes his own wavelength; he seeks to attune his mind to move in harmony with each sheath (*Dayspring*, 107). Thurston refers to White Magicians, who seek to serve humanity impersonally and obey the directions of their Innermosts according to the degree of their occult development. A *mantra* is used to harmonize body and its centres with the finer forces in Nature and in man.

Thurston refers to Michael Juste's book, *The White Brother*. This reference is a bit odd, since as we have seen, this book by Juste contains a good deal of information about Thurston or 'M.' There is therefore a kind of self-reference here by Thurston in referring to Juste's book. Thurston refers to a passage in *The White Brother* regarding levitation, and the power to pass from a dense state of mind-matter into a finer state (*Dayspring*, 72). The reference would appear to be to Juste's report of his experience with M. in mentally traveling to visit a friend who was in Africa. A letter from the friend later confirmed the details of their mental vision.

Thurston also refers to *Le Comte de Gabalis* (*Dayspring*, 85).

It can be seen from this brief review of *Dayspring* that Thurston was very much concerned with developing special powers. Thurston's writings were an important and continuing influence on Brunton, especially in regard to the seeking of such powers.

## **7. Brunton's continued interest in occult powers**

Brunton says that he left the Theosophical Society after only two years.<sup>28</sup> But by that time, he says that he had obtained certain psychic powers:

I developed in little time powers of mediumship, in particular clairvoyance and clairaudience, and thus obtained the best kind of proof in the existence of a psychic world, in other words by personal experience, without having recourse to professional mediums. After I had completely established the truth of the afterlife for myself, I turned toward the study of Theosophy and I belonged to the Theosophical Society. I am aware of what I learned

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<sup>28</sup> Juste reports that he and Brunton broke their ties to the Theosophical Society because they came under the influence of a "false prophet" referred to as 'S.' (Juste, 40). Thus, it is not necessarily the case that Brunton left the Theosophical Society because he was no longer interested in occultism. Besides, Brunton later became a member of the Spiritualist Society.

there in the course of this second phase; but at the end of two years I left the Society. I felt that the adepts who had presided over its foundation were now retired, abandoning the society to its own devices. But it was Theosophy which gave me my first introduction to Oriental thought...<sup>29</sup>

Brunton's use of the word 'adept' here is important, since he will later refer to Hindu and Egyptian masters as adepts. And Brunton continued to maintain an interest in special powers or *siddhis*. For a time, Brunton joined the Spiritualist Society.<sup>30</sup> Brunton also wrote numerous articles for the *Occult Review*. That journal was published by William Rider and Sons, the same company that had published *Le Comte de Gabalis*, and that would later publish Brunton's books about Ramaṇa.<sup>31</sup> Some of these articles were written under his real name, Raphael Hurst. But others were written under the pseudonyms 'Raphael Meriden,' 'Raphael Delmonte.'

Cahn Fung says that Brunton later unequivocally condemned occultism.<sup>32</sup> But even if Brunton repudiated occultism in later life, I am interested in looking at his views at the time that he met Ramaṇa in 1931, and at the time he wrote *A Search in Secret India*. Brunton told his son Kenneth Thurston Hurst, that he had occult and clairvoyant powers, including astral travel. He told his son that he had an American Indian as a guardian angel. And he recommended that his son read Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy* (Hurst 42, 51, 91). Since his son was only born in 1923, that would indicate that Brunton's interest in these matters continued long after he met Ramaṇa. And even later, Brunton related similar powers to a young disciple, Jeffrey Masson. Masson says that

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<sup>29</sup> Excerpt from an article in *The London Forum*, ca. 1930, cited by Cahn Fung, I, 15.

<sup>30</sup> As mentioned in footnote 24, F.W. Thurstan was one of the incorporators of the London Spiritualist Society. Since it appears that Brunton joined the Spiritualist Society after leaving the Theosophical Society, then this would be a time when he was influenced by Thurstan. This is further, although still inconclusive, evidence that Thurstan and F.W. Thurstan may be the same person.

<sup>31</sup> See *The Builder Magazine* (July 1922 - Volume VIII - Number 7 ) online at [[http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/the\\_builder\\_1922\\_july.htm](http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/the_builder_1922_july.htm)] regarding publishing of the *Occult Review*.

<sup>32</sup> Cahn Fung I, 16, citing *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984), VIII, 4, 148) [*Notebooks*].



Brunton always carried a magic wand or glass rod.<sup>33</sup> And, as will be discussed below, it seems that one of Brunton's disappointments with Ramaṇa was that Ramaṇa did not impart more special powers to him.

Even after he met Ramaṇa in 1931, Brunton continued to publish in the *Occult Review*. In 1932, under the name 'Brunton Paul,' Brunton published an article in that journal entitled "With a Southern Indian Tantrist."<sup>34</sup> The article does not mention his visit the previous year with Ramaṇa. It is about someone he met in Madras named Bramasuganandah. Brunton says that he met him not many miles from where the Theosophical Society has its headquarters. Brunton relates the story Bramasuganandah's life. "At about the age of twelve he had heard of the occult path, the way of yoga..." Thus even in 1932, after meeting Ramaṇa, Brunton regarded Indian yoga in terms of occultism. Bramasuganandah told Brunton that he himself had a *guru* who was over four hundred years old. He told Brunton about secret herbs that prolong life, and how yoga is also a means of attaining longevity. He gave a *tantric* diagram (*yantra*) to Brunton and told him that if he glanced at it, Brunton would be able to connect with him on the astral plane. Now it is true that Brunton expresses skepticism regarding these powers. But the focus of the article is on the *siddhis*. Later that same year, Brunton published a review of the occultist Aleister Crowley, also in the *Occult Review*.

## 8. Materialism before the Spiritual Quest

It is curious that before Brunton went to India, he participated in a very materialistic venture. He founded a magazine called *Success*. The magazine contained interviews of leaders of industry like J.W. Woolworth, Lord Leverhulme, and Sir Herbert Austin (Hurst, 63). But he started the magazine in 1929, the year of the stock market crash, and

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<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson: *My Father's Guru: A Journey through Spirituality and Disillusion* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 91 ['Masson']. The title of this book summarizes Masson's experience with Brunton. Masson has raised some serious criticisms of Brunton, who acted as a guru to Masson's father and uncle Bernard for many years. In 1967, Brunton fraudulently tried to cause a table to rise, lifting it with his own hands when he had told everyone to keep their eyes closed for a demonstration of powers.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Brunton (under the name Brunton Paul): "With a Southern Indian Tantrist," *Occult Review* 56 (July, 1932).

the magazine soon folded (Cahn Fung, I, 18). The next year, Brunton left for India. It seems that Brunton did not disclose to those he met the fact of this business failure. Narasimha says that Brunton rejected a profitable journalistic proposal and started out to India in 1930 (Narasimha, 231).

#### **IV. Brunton's Books**

We now need to examine the books written by Brunton, particularly those that refer to Ramaṇa. It will be evident that Brunton's preoccupation with occult powers continued even after he met Ramaṇa, and that it influenced the way that he wrote about him.

##### **1. A Search in Secret India (1934)**

Brunton first visited Ramaṇa for two weeks in January 1931. Brunton then moved on in search of other *gurus* and miracle workers. He was about to leave India when he thought back on Ramaṇa. A "voice" told him to return. The next day he received a letter from someone at the *ashram*, "You have had the good fortune to meet a real Master" (*Search*, 273). He saw this as a confirming sign and went back to visit Ramaṇa. This second visit also lasted several weeks.

During his second visit with Ramaṇa, Brunton became ill ("blackwater fever") and he then returned to England.<sup>35</sup> The fever lasted intermittently for two years (Cahn Fung, I, 38). Brunton wrote *A Search in Secret India* in a small Quaker village in Buckinghamshire (Hurst, 73). Every Sunday he would join the Quaker meeting in the village (Cahn Fung I, 38). The book was published in 1934, and he sent one of the first copies of this book to Ramaṇa.

##### **a) The impact of *A Search in Secret India***

Brunton's book *Search* was enormously influential. Many people visited Ramaṇa as a result of reading this book.

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Brunton: *Paul Brunton: Essential Readings*, ed. Joscelyn Godwin (Aquarian Press, Northamptonshire, 1990), 12 ['*Essential*'].

As early as January 6, 1935, an English lady, Mrs. M.A. Piggot came to see Ramaṇa because she had read *Search*.<sup>36</sup> Douglas Ainslie, nephew of a former Governor of Madras came to see Ramaṇa with a letter of introduction from Brunton (*Talks*, 7; Jan. 19, 1935). So did W.Y. Evans-Wentz, the scholar of Tibetan religion from Oxford (*Talks*, 9; Jan. 24, 1935). A Muslim is reported as having tried the method of self-enquiry, as described by Brunton (*Talks*, 11; para. 123; Jan. 3, 1936).

Major Chadwick came to Ramaṇa's *ashram* on Nov 1, 1935, having heard of Ramaṇa through Brunton's book *Search*. Chadwick had met Brunton in London. When Chadwick first met Ramaṇa, Ramaṇa was very interested to hear about Brunton, who would be returning to India in a few months. Chadwick became a disciple, and wrote the book *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramaṇa Maharshi*.<sup>37</sup> Chadwick says, "I have always felt that his [Brunton's] chapters in the book which refer directly to Bhagavan were certainly inspired by Bhagavan himself (Chadwick, 16).

Ramaṇa himself read the book and recommended that others read it. There are several references to Brunton's book in *Talks*, and Ramaṇa expressly says that the book is useful even for Indians (*Talks*, 121, par. 137). As already mentioned, Swami Yogananda visited Ramaṇa in 1935 after reading Brunton's books. He met Brunton at the *ashram*, and praised his writing.

A visitor mentioned Brunton's reference to the peace that Ramaṇa bestowed on visitors, as mentioned by Brunton. He asked Ramaṇa whether peace is the sole criterion of a Mahatma's Presence. Ramaṇa seemed to concur, saying that subduing egos is "a much more formidable task than slaying a thousand elephants" (*Talks*, 216, par. 262).

Another visitor, evidently a friend of Brunton's, was seeking a spiritual experience. She had a vision of Ramaṇa with a child-like, cherubic face. Ramaṇa refers to Brunton's

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<sup>36</sup> Ramana Maharshi: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramansramam, 1994, first published 1939), 4; Jan. 6, 1935 [*'Talks'*].

<sup>37</sup> A.W. Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala): *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramansramam, 1994, first published 1961) [*'Chadwick'*].

vision of himself. He said, "Paul Brunton saw me as a giant figure; you saw me like a child. Both are visions. (*Talks*, 264, par. 304).

Ramaṇa was asked about the last chapter of *Search*, where Brunton says it is possible to be conscious without thinking (*Talks*, 49 para. 43).

S.S. Cohen, a disciple of Ramaṇa, asked for an explanation of the "blazing light" referred to by Brunton in the last chapter of *Search*. Ramaṇa said,

Since the experience is through the mind only it appears first as a blaze of light. The mental predispositions are not yet destroyed (*Talks*, 167; June 14, 1936).

This incident of interpreting Brunton's reference in *Search* to the "blazing light" is also reported elsewhere:

It is said that during their exercises, yogis experience several lights and colours, before they actually realize the Self. (*Conscious Immortality*, 42).

Ramaṇa says he had "thousands of such experiences" (visions and hearing mystic sounds).

Another questioner referred to Brunton's saying that the experience of realization was indescribable. It seems that Ramaṇa agreed with that statement. "The answer was there." (*Talks*, 464, par. 485).

Another visitor asked Ramaṇa about Brunton's statement that he had one hour's *samādhi*. He asked whether *samādhi* can come and go. Ramaṇa seemed to be critical of Brunton's account in *Search*. He said that Brunton's peace of mind was the result of his own efforts. But the real state is effortless and permanent (*Talks*, 552-53, para. 597).

Brunton's book *Search* continued to attract interest. In January, 1946, Ramaṇa was shown a small pamphlet called 'Divine Grace Through Total Self-Surrender' by D.C. Desai. It contained extensive quotations from Brunton, and Ramaṇa read them out to those who were listening.

I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant Self. Something that is far superior to my unimportant personality rises into consciousness and becomes me. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. I sit in the lap of holy bliss.

and

Divine grace is a manifestation of the cosmic free-will in operation. It can alter the course of events in a mysterious manner through its own unknown laws, which are superior to all natural laws, and can modify the latter by interaction. It is the most powerful force in the universe.

and

It descends and acts, only when it is invoked by total Self-surrender. It acts from within, because God resides in the heart of all beings. Its whisper can be heard only in a mind purified by self-surrender and prayer.

and

Rationalists laugh at it and atheists scorn it, but it exists. It is a descent of God into the soul's zone of awareness. It is a visitation of force unexpected and unpredictable. It is a voice spoken out of cosmic silence....It is cosmic will which can perform authentic miracles under its own laws.<sup>38</sup>

The first quotations are not exact, but are clearly derived from *Search* (p. 305). The source of the other quotations is unclear.

Ramaṇa's *ashram* continues to distribute Brunton's writings about Ramaṇa. They were collected in a smaller book entitled *The Maharshi and his Message*.<sup>39</sup>

After Brunton's death, his son Kenneth Hurst gave the *ashram* Brunton's notes from his visits with Ramaṇa in the 1930's. From these and other notes by Munagala Venkataramiah, another book was compiled entitled *Conscious Immortality*.<sup>40</sup> It was first published in 1984, and then revised in 1996 in what was considered to be a more systematic manner, and "amended" in accordance with other sources of the same facts. It is therefore a little difficult to know which are Brunton's own words, but I will also refer to it.

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<sup>38</sup> A. Devaraja Mudaliar: *Day by Day with Bhagavan* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1995, first published 1968), 77 [*'Day by Day'*].

<sup>39</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Maharshi and his Message: A Selection from A Search in Secret India* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, no date).

<sup>40</sup> Paul Brunton and Munagala Venkataramiah: *Conscious Imortality* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramansramam 1984, revised in 1996) [*'Conscious Immortality'*].

We need to examine what Brunton says in *A Search in Secret India*. In view of Brunton's later confession that he used Ramaṇa as a “peg” for his own ideas, we need to look at his descriptions of both his own experience and the experience of Ramaṇa in terms of Brunton's previous interests and ideas.

### **b) Existing biographies and materials in English**

Brunton says that he consulted both Ramaṇa and other disciples in order to write his book (*Search*, 281). Brunton must also have consulted books in order to obtain the information set out in *Search*. Narasimha says that Brunton visited Ramaṇa after Narasimha's own biography of Ramaṇa had been published (Narasimha, 231). As already mentioned, Narasimha relied on the previous account by Humphreys for his biography. So these two biographies were available to Brunton by the time that he arrived at the *ashram* in 1931, or at least by the time of his second visit.

In subsequent editions of his biography of Ramaṇa, Narasimha added two chapters on Brunton. In these revised chapters, Narasimha mentions that Brunton was interested in theosophy, spiritualism hypnotism, thought-reading, and had obtained some first-hand experiences in some of these fields (Narasimha, 231). We will examine in more detail Brunton's interest in these occult powers. But it is important to note that Brunton's interest in these powers was also evident to Narasimha.

### **c) Brunton's account of his encounters with Ramaṇa**

Brunton claims that he visited Ramaṇa with Yogi Subrahmanya (*Search*, 132). The clear implication is that this was a Hindu disciple of Ramaṇa. But there is an independent account of Brunton's first visit.<sup>41</sup> In this account, Brunton is still known as R. Raphael Hurst. His companion is identified as an English Buddhist monk, Prajnananda.

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<sup>41</sup> See “From the Early Days,” *The Maharshi* 7, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1997, online at [[http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1997/sep\\_oct.html](http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1997/sep_oct.html)]). This article was first published in the September 1931 monthly magazine called *PEACE*, the journal of Swami Omkar's Shanti Ashrama in Andhra Pradesh. It was later reprinted in the April, 1966 issue of the *Mountain Path*, a journal started by Ramaṇa's disciple Arthur Osborne.

Prajananda is reported to have founded “the English Ashrama in Rangoon.” Graeme Lyall gives information about a Prajananda who seems to fit this description:

In 1922, a British expedition set out for Tibet in order to study Tibetan Buddhism. They reached the southern Tibetan city of Shigatse but were refused permission to proceed to the capital Lhasa where they had hoped to meet the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. However, one of their number, Frederic Fletcher, ordained in the Gelugpa or Yellow Hat tradition under the name of Lama Dorje Prajananda. He later also received Theravada ordination in Sri Lanka and therefore had dual loyalties to both the Theravada and Vajrayana traditions.<sup>42</sup>

Prajananda therefore seems to be the Englishman Frederic Fletcher. Lyall gives no sources for these statements, but there was an English expedition to Tibet in 1922, led by George E. O. Knight.<sup>43</sup>

If Fletcher had been to Tibet, then that would be one explanation for Brunton’s later attempt to visit Tibet for himself. Furthermore, there appears to be a connection with Brunton’s Buddhist mentor Allan Bennet. For it was Bennet who founded the International Buddhist Society in Burma. Bennet and Fletcher must have known each other in London. Both of them also appear to have written articles for the *Theosophical Review*.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Graeme Lyall: “Buddhism and the Future of Humanity,” [<http://www.buddhistcouncil.org/budfut.htm>].

<sup>43</sup> George I.E. Knight: *Intimate Glimpses of Mysterious Tibet and Neighbouring Countries* (1930). The publicity for the book reads as follows:

While riding on a bus in London in 1921, the author came upon the following paragraph in a discarded magazine: "What a splendid opportunity now exists for securing the first motion pictures of Lhasa, the Forbidden City of Tibet."

This chance occurrence inspired a merry little jaunt for five friends to visit Tibet. Not for a moment did they consider the many political and physical obstacles that stood in their way. Their view was: "If the Governments of India and Tibet refused to grant us permission to proceed to Lhasa in a gentlemanly way, there was an alternative course of action."

<sup>44</sup> F. Fletcher wrote a review of *The Sixth Sense: Psychic Origin, Rationale & Development* in *Theosophical Review* 41 (February 1980), 574. And as mentioned in

But why did Brunton not acknowledge that his companion was Frederic Fletcher (Prajnananda)? Why did he change these facts about his visit? Was he afraid that if he acknowledged the Tibetan Buddhist and theosophical connections to his quest that it would be seen that he was not the naïve journalist he pretended to be? Brunton's lack of candour here is the first indication we have that his account of his visit is not completely trustworthy.

#### **d) Ramaṇa's Silent Healing Vibrations**

There are two accounts of why Ramaṇa was silent for two hours on Brunton's first visit. Brunton says that he seated himself before Ramaṇa, but that there was no response. Brunton says that as he waited in silence, his questions slowly started to disappear.

But it is not till the second hour of the uncommon scene that I become aware of a silent, restless change which is taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I have prepared in the train with such meticulous accuracy drop away (*Search*, 141).

Brunton also describes the mysterious peace that he felt:

I begin to wonder whether, by some radioactivity of the soul, some unknown telepathic process, the stillness which invades the troubled waters of my own soul really comes from him (*Search*, 142)

Brunton says that not till after two hours did someone ask if he had questions.

But Brunton's report of the reason for the silence is contradicted by the independent report of his visit. That report says that an initial silence was broken by the person who brought them, asking if the visitors had any questions. But "They were, however, not in a mood to do so, and thus an hour and a half passed." According to this version, the lengthy silence was due to Brunton, not Ramaṇa. Everyone else was waiting for something to happen. Thus, the silence was equally unexpected for them.

The report says that after that hour and a half, Hurst [Brunton] asked a question:

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footnote 21, Bennet, under the name of Bikkhu Ananda Metteya wrote an article linking Buddhism and theosophy: "Buddhist Gratitude to Henry Steel Olcott."



In a voice of intense earnestness he said that he had come to India for spiritual enlightenment. "Not only myself," he added, "but many others also in the West are longing for the Light from the East.

The report says that Ramaṇa "sat completely indrawn and paid no attention." That hardly sounds like someone radiating peace.

The report says that someone then asked Ramaṇa and the English monk if they were studying comparative religion. The monk replied,

No, we could get that better in Europe. We want to find Truth; we want the Light. Can we know Truth? Is it possible to get Enlightenment?

But Ramaṇa still remained silent and indrawn.

It is then said that Brunton and the monk wanted to take a walk. So the conversation ended and everyone dispersed.

Now which version is correct? Brunton's or the independent account? I prefer the independent account, because if Brunton's first visit was so wonderful, it is hardly likely that he would have left Ramaṇa to seek other *gurus*. Ramaṇa's silent rebuff to his earnest question must have seemed an affront. In fact, Brunton's version in *Search* is that he did not ask any questions at that time. If Ramaṇa was teaching Brunton by his silence, that is hardly the way that it appeared to the onlookers and was reported by them. And they report no evident experience of ecstasy in Brunton. The only report is that Brunton and his companion, the Buddhist monk, wanted to go for a walk. And we have every reason to distrust what Brunton says, since he has admitted that he was only using Ramaṇa for his preconceived ideas.

Now it is certainly true that Ramaṇa sometimes refused to talk to visitors or to answer their questions. And that is the treatment that Ramaṇa appears to have given Brunton, at least on the first day.

Brunton repeats this idea of healing vibrations in his account of his second visit to Ramaṇa later that year. Brunton speaks of "benign radiations" (*Search*, 279 ). And he says that one enjoys tranquility merely by sitting in his presence. There is a "reciprocal inter-influence" (*Search*, 280). He says,

At first I wonder whether he has heard me, but in the tense silence which ensues, and which I feel unable or unwilling to break, a force greater than my rationalistic mind commences to awe me until it ends by overwhelming me. The realization forces itself through my wonderment that all my questions are moves in an endless game, the play of thoughts which possess no limit to their extent; that somewhere within me there is a well of certitude which can provide me with all the waters of truth I require; and that it will be better to cease my questioning and attempt to realize the tremendous potencies of my own spiritual nature. So I remain silent and wait. For almost half an hour the Maharishee's eyes continue to stare straight in front of him in a fixed, unmoving gaze. He appears to have forgotten me, but I am perfectly aware that the sublime realization which has suddenly fallen upon me is nothing else than a spreading ripple of telepathic radiation from this mysterious and imperturbable man (*Search*, 280).

There is an "unseen power of the sage being powerfully impacted on my mentality" (*Search*, 293), "beneficent radiation which emanates from him" (*Search*, 300). And Brunton wants to link these telepathic radiations with science:

I am learning to see that this is the Maharishee's way of helping others, this unobtrusive, silent and steady outpouring of healing vibrations into troubled souls, this mysterious telepathic process for which science will one day be required to account (*Search*, 290).

In these emphases on radiating energy, Brunton seems to follow Humphreys' report from 1913. Humphreys also reported a first silent meeting with Ramaṇa:

For half an hour I looked Him in the eyes which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realize somewhat that the body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost—I could only feel His body was not the man, it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically. My own sensations were indescribable (*Glimpses*, 15).

This idea of a Master radiating energy is something that Humphreys would have been familiar with from theosophy. Humphreys also says that when he first met Ramaṇa he "felt lifted out of myself" (*Glimpses*, 15). And Brunton reports the same thing:

Suddenly, my body seems to disappear, and we are both out in space! (*Search*, 163).

Humphreys also reports Ramaṇa as saying that when you attain realization,

...mind and body physically (so to speak) disappear and the only thing that remains is Being, which is at once existence and non-existence, and not explainable in words and ideas (*Glimpses*, 21).

It appears that Brunton was appropriating these reports by Humphreys into the report of his own visits. Brunton would have been aware of Humphreys' reports at least by the time of his second visit to Ramaṇa. If he did not read Humphreys directly, he would have seen Narasimha's book, which incorporates them. It is even possible that Brunton knew about Humphreys' work before he arrived in India, since the accounts had been published in London in 1913 in the *International Psychic Gazette*. F.W. Thurston was also writing in the *Gazette*, and if he is indeed the same person as Thurston, then Brunton would almost certainly have known about Ramaṇa. It was not only Humphreys' ideas that were appropriate, for as we shall see, Brunton also copied many sayings of Ramaṇa and passed them off as his own. This was one of the major reasons why the *ashram* later disallowed Brunton from taking notes of disciples' conversations with Ramaṇa, and then finally barred Brunton from visiting the *ashram* altogether. But we will discuss his disagreements with Ramaṇa and the *ashram* in more detail below.

Whether or not Brunton was following Humphreys' earlier reports, it seems apparent that Brunton altered the facts regarding his first meeting with Ramaṇa. In making this alteration, for which of his preconceived ideas was he using Ramaṇa as a "peg?" Is the idea of the beneficent radiations from Ramaṇa one of Brunton's preconceived ideas? And if so, did it correspond to how Ramaṇa viewed himself at the time? These are very important questions.

Brunton's repeated comments about these radiations of healing vibrations from Ramaṇa involve several interrelated although inconsistent ideas:

- (1) Brunton says that the radiations have a telepathic effect. Telepathy is one of the special powers or *siddhis* that interested Brunton. But as we shall see, Ramaṇa does not at all emphasize the importance of *siddhis*.
- (2) The idea that a realized Master can help others in silence is a theosophical idea. According to the teachings of the Theosophical Society, a Master or Mahatma was believed to possess extraordinary powers that were available to others. Already in 1989,

Madame Blavatsky wrote the book *The Voice of the Silence*.<sup>45</sup> In their commentary on that book, Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater say,

The strength of many a man who is doing vigorous work in the world comes largely from others who are engaged in radiating spiritual force in meditation.<sup>46</sup>

Brunton himself believe that a true sage would help others. He said that the term sage must be reserved for those who have sacrificed every future nirvanic beatitude in order to return to earth until all are saved. They feel for others and must return, since they have found the unity of all human beings.<sup>47</sup>

(3) Brunton wanted to link these special powers with science. That was a common concern of both theosophy and of neo-Hinduism.

(4) The idea of helping the external world is also an idea of neo-Hinduism. Hacker says that there are passages in the Hindu scriptures that refer to loving others. For example, a wife may love her husband “because of the Self in the husband.” Ethics presuppose relationships. Relations between persons cannot be reduced to an egoism of the universal One (Hacker, 277, 306). An “egoism of the Ultimate” is not really the same as compassion towards others as others, which he sees developed in Vivekānanda’s neo-Hinduism. Although Ramaṇa was acquainted with the neo-Hindu ideas of Vivekananda as early as 1901,<sup>48</sup> and although Ramaṇa adopted some of their ideas, he also makes some very traditional *advaitic* statements that there is no external world to help. For example, Ramaṇa was asked by a disciple, “How can I help others?” Ramaṇa replied:

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<sup>45</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: *The Voice of the Silence: Being an Extract from the Book of the Golden Precepts* (1989).

<sup>46</sup> Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Commentary on the Voice of the Silence* (Madras, 1926) online at [[http://www.anandgholap.net/Voice\\_Of\\_Silence-Commentary-AB\\_CWL.htm](http://www.anandgholap.net/Voice_Of_Silence-Commentary-AB_CWL.htm)].

<sup>47</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Vol. 10, “The Orient” 2:470).

<sup>48</sup> See footnote 50 below.

Who is there for you to help? Who is the 'I' that is to help others? First clear up that point and then everything will settle itself.<sup>49</sup>

Inasmuch as there is no ego in him, there are not others for him. [...]When there is no mind he cannot be aware of others (*Talks*, 552; Dec. 20, 1938).

The scholar of Tibetan Studies, Evans-Wentz asked Ramaṇa whether it not be better if a saint mixed with others? Ramaṇa replied "There are no others to mix with. The Self is the one and only Reality" (*Talks*, 16).

A very interesting account of Ramaṇa's silence is given by Major A.W. Chadwick, also known as Sadhu Arunāchala. Chadwick came to Ramaṇa's *ashram* on Nov 1, 1935, having heard of Ramaṇa through Brunton's book *Search* (Chadwick, 11). Chadwick asked Ramaṇa about his vow of silence. Ramaṇa said there was never any vow, but he had observed how convenient it was:

...while living in temple at one time he found himself seated for a while by a Sadhu who was observing such a vow and saw how convenient it was as the crowds did not worry the Sadhu in the same way as they worried him. So for convenience he pretended to copy him. "There was no vow, I just kept quiet, I spoke when it was necessary," he explained. I asked him how long this had continued. "For about two years," he replied. (Chadwick, 18)

Chadwick understood Ramaṇa's silence in terms of traditional *advaitic* monism, where there are no others to influence by any radiations. He says that Ramaṇa's *mouna* [silence] was mythical. Once he had achieved perfection, he just sought out quiet places where he thought that he would not be disturbed and where he might enjoy Bliss.

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

If we look at reports of visits prior to Brunton, most of the emphasis is not on his silence but on how Ramaṇa provided oral or written answers to disciples. Humphreys emphasizes that Ramaṇa called forth appropriate words in response to questions by disciples. He says

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<sup>49</sup> Ramananda Swarnagiri: *Crumbs from His Table* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramansramam 1995, first published 1963), 30-31 [*'Crumbs'*].

A Master when instructing is far from any thought of instructing; but to feel a doubt or a difficulty in his presence is to call forth, at once, before you can express the doubt, the wonderful words which will clear away that doubt. The words never fail and the Master with his heart fixed on GOD, realising perfectly that no action is a personal one, making no claims to have either originated the thought or to have been the means of destroying a doubt, saying never “I” or “Mine”, seeing only GOD in every thought and action, whether they be yours or his, feels no surprise, no especial pleasure to himself in having allayed your doubt (*Glimpses*, 26).

So for Humphreys, the allaying of doubts is done by words, even if these words appear before one has expressed his doubts. He compares this to Jesus, whom he says was “utterly unconscious when He worked His miracles, and spoke His wonderful words” (*Glimpses*, 25).

Humphreys does say that Ramaṇa had observed silence for two years. He broke this silence when he spoke to Ganapati Sastri. He says that this meeting with Sastri occurred six years before Humphreys visited Ramaṇa in 1911 (*Glimpses*, 28). But even during his silence, Ramaṇa was giving instructions by answering questions on written slips of paper. Some of these slips of paper were collected into Ramaṇa’s book *Self-Enquiry*.<sup>50</sup> The emphasis was not on silent teaching, but on obtaining answers. Sometimes Ramaṇa would just pick up a book and point to a passage in answer to a question (Narasimha, 73). It is interesting that Ramaṇa later commented on this practice:

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<sup>50</sup> Narasimha reports (p. 23) that from 1900, G. Seshier of Tiruvannamalai visited Ramana. Seshier was studying yoga, especially Vivekananda’s English lectures on Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga and an English translation of the *Rama Gita*. He brought these books to Ramana and mentioned his difficulties. Ramana

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

Narasimha says that it is from these slips and Seshier’s notebook that Ramana’s book *Vichara Sangraha* (Self-Enquiry) was published (pp. 73-74). This fact is of enormous importance, since it shows that Ramana was exposed to Vivekananda’s neo-Hinduism at a very early date.

How could real *mowna* [silence] be achieved? Some people say that they are observing *mowna* by keeping their mouths shut but at the same time they go on writing something or other on bits of paper or on a slate. Is that not another form of activity of the mind?<sup>51</sup>

Thus, Ramaṇa himself casts doubt on whether his silence in the caves was real *mouna*.

Narasimha also emphasizes that Ramaṇa's teaching was in words. He says that most people turn up to see Ramaṇa with a vague desire to see a Swami noted for his selflessness and equanimity (Narasimha, 188). And he repeats Humphreys' view that Ramaṇa addresses some devotees on the very matter that they were seeking his help, but without their expressing themselves (Narasimha, 190). But when people come in to test Ramaṇa's learning or skill in dialectics, it is then that Ramaṇa becomes silent:

When such people arrive, he remains quiet in *samadhi*; and not infrequently the spirit of peace enters them, and they go away wiser (Narasimha, 191).

For example, if someone questioned Ramaṇa about evolution or biology, he would remain silent. By his silence he would be "pointing out the inappropriateness of those questions" (Narasimha, 191). These references to Ramaṇa's silence are quite different than Brunton's enthusiastic claims that Ramaṇa was teaching and radiating energy by his silence.

But there are also some writings that pre-date Brunton's visit that emphasize the radiating power of Ramaṇa's presence. We have already referred to Humphreys' account. Humphreys first met Ramaṇa with Ganapati Sastri. Both had theosophical interests.

But as I have shown in *Jivanmukta*, Sastri also had many non-traditional Hindu influences, including *tantra*. If Ramaṇa believed that his silence radiated power, then Ramaṇa was probably also influenced by Sastri and these non-traditional sources. Kapali Sastri, a disciple of Ganapati Sastri, writes about the radiating power of Brahman as the universal fire within each individual:

His living is a source of joy and power of the living of others, to the general progress of the world, of all beings, and of the human kind in

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<sup>51</sup> Suri Nagamma: *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, (Tiruvannamali, 1995, first published 1962 and 1969), 236, Sept. 3, 1947 ['Letters'].

particular that is closer to his level. Whether the others in the outer world know it or not, he radiates the rays of wisdom, throws out waves of life-giving strength, emanates the concrete influence spontaneously exercised for the onward march of the soul's progress in others. Therefore other souls feel joyous and satisfied when they are drawn to him.<sup>52</sup>

Narasimha's refers to accounts by M. Sivaprakasam Pillai of visits with Ramaṇa in 1902 and 1913. From these accounts, Narasimha infers that Ramaṇa

...has a powerful, magnetic personality, that by staying with him for some time a person may change his life habits and instincts, and that by this grace one can receive faith in God as tangibly and certainly as one receives a fruit or a book (Narasimha, 76-77).

Another source for the idea of silent instruction is Shankara's work on *Dakshinamurti* (a form of Siva used in mediation). *Dakshinamurti* is said to have taught by this silence. Ramaṇa was asked about the significance of the silence of *Dakshinamurti*. His answer was

Many are the explanations given by scholars and sages. Have it any way you please (*Talks*, 119; Jan 6, 1936).

Ramaṇa therefore seemed to allow disciples to project whatever views they wanted on his silence. Chadwick reports that Ramaṇa "was like a mirror which seemed to reflect back your own feelings" (Chadwick, 15). But later Ramaṇa said that *Dakshinamurti* gave initiation (*diksha*) by silence (*Talks*, 402; Dec. 26, 1937). And a year later, Ramaṇa gave a more extended talk on *Dakshinamurti's* silence. Ramaṇa said that those who saw *Dakshinamurti* as he sat in perfect repose themselves fell into *samadhi* and their doubts were at an end (*Talks* 528; Nov. 7, 1938). There was a picture of *Dakshinamurti* painted on the wall next to Raman's dais.<sup>53</sup> There was also a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna (*Osborne*, 146). Ramakrishna was the teacher of Vivekananda, who transformed Ramakrishna's teachings into the neo-Hindu concern for the world.

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<sup>52</sup> T.V. Kapali Sastri, *Collected Works* I, 215. Cited in Prema Nandakumar: *T.V. Kapali Sastri* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Arthur Osborne: *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1970), 107 [*'Osborne'*].



It is therefore unclear to me whether or not Ramaṇa, prior to Brunton's visit, believed that his silence would teach and help disciples by a kind of telepathic radiation. As we have seen, many of Ramaṇa's statements present a traditional monistic view of *advaita*, where the world is unreal, and there would be no one to help in this way. Osborne reports that Ramaṇa held to both opinions: that we are to help others, but that there are no others:

When asked by an aspirant whether his Realization, if attained, would help other, Bhagavan has been known to reply:

‘Yes, and it is the best help you possibly can give them.’

But then he added:

‘But in fact there are no others to help.’<sup>54</sup>

Ramaṇa therefore gave a twofold response: there are no others and the sage does more by meditating than any action.

But it is clear that after Brunton wrote *A Search in Secret India*, Ramaṇa promoted this view of his powers of silence. Here are some quotations from Ramaṇa after the date of Brunton's visit:

Lectures may entertain individuals for a few hours without improving them. Silence on the other hand is permanent and benefits the whole of humanity (*Talks*, 18; Jan. 30, 1935).

Public speeches, physical activity and material help are all outweighed by the silence of Mahatmas. They accomplish more than others (*Talks*, 227; Oct. 23, 1936).

Preaching is simple communication of knowledge. It may be done in Silence, too. (*Talks*, 243; Nov. 18, 1936).

Silence is the most potent form of work (*Talks*, 370; April 14, 1937).

Guru's silence is the loudest *upadesa* [instruction] ...If the Guru is silent the seeker's mind gets purified by itself. (*Talks*, 501; Sept. 27, 1938).

Silence is “eternal eloquence” (*Talks*, 141; Feb. 24/1936).

There are no 'others' to be helped. For the Realized Being sees only the Self...The Realized One does not see the world as different from Himself.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ramana Maharshi: *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978, first published 1962), 186 [*Teachings*].

And Chadwick reports that Ramaṇa's "conversation" with the novelist Somerset Maugham was a half hour of silence. Ramaṇa said, "Silence is best. Silence is itself conversation" (*Chadwick*, 38).

And Ramaṇa says that "the realized ones send out waves of spiritual influence which draw many people towards them, even though they may be sitting silently in a cave" (*Conscious Immortality*, 134).

What is interesting is that Ramaṇa justified his belief in the teaching power of silence by appealing to Brunton's books! We shall see this when we look at the book *The Secret Path*.

But we should not conclude that Ramaṇa was always silent. His devotees have written many memoirs where they describe a very different Ramaṇa who would recite and enact stories with great emotion, and who would participate in many daily events. These stories are reported in *The Maharshi*. Ramaṇa read books and engaged in debate. Although he often communicated only by silence, he would also sometimes give very sharp replies. See for example the report by U.G. Krishnamurti of his visit with Ramaṇa:

That man [Ramaṇa] was sitting there. From his very presence I felt "What! This man -- how can he help me? This fellow who is reading comic strips, cutting vegetables, playing with this, that or the other -- how can this man help me? He can't help me." Anyway, I sat there. Nothing happened; I looked at him, and he looked at me. "In his presence you feel silent, your questions disappear, his look changes you" -- all that remained a story, fancy stuff to me. I sat there. There were a lot of questions inside, silly questions -- so, "The questions have not disappeared. I have been sitting here for two hours, and the questions are still there. All right, let me ask him some questions" -- because at that time I very much wanted moksha. This part of my background, moksha, I wanted. "You are supposed to be a liberated man" -- I didn't say that. "Can you give me what you have?" -- I asked him this question, but that man didn't answer, so after some lapse of time I repeated that question -- "I am asking 'Whatever you have, can you give it to me?'" He said, "I can give you, but can you take it?" Boy! For the first time this fellow says that he has something and that I can't take it. Nobody before had said "I can give you," but this man said "I can give

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<sup>55</sup> Ramana Maharshi: *Maharshi's Gospel* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1969), 33.

you, but can you take it?" Then I said to myself "If there is any individual in this world who can take it, it is me, because I have done so much sadhana, seven years of sadhana. He can think that I can't take it, but I can take it. If I can't take it, who can take it?" -- that was my frame of mind at the time -- you know, (Laughs) I was so confident of myself.

I didn't stay with him, I didn't read any of his books, so I asked him a few more questions: "Can one be free sometimes and not free sometimes?" He said "Either you are free, or you are not free at all." There was another question which I don't remember. He answered in a very strange way: "There are no steps leading you to that." But I ignored all these things. These questions didn't matter to me -- the answers didn't interest me at all.

But this question "Can you take it?" ... "How arrogant he is!" -- that was my feeling.<sup>56</sup>

Although he felt Ramaṇa's responses were arrogant, he nevertheless resolved to try to attain Ramaṇa's state of being. I cite his remarks only to show that Ramaṇa did sometimes teach by speech and not by silence.

#### **e) Ramaṇa's Method of Self-Enquiry**

Although Brunton appears to have embellished and changed the report of his first visit, he did not invent all the facts that he reports. Even the independent report says that the next day Ramaṇa responded to many of his questions. The dialogue among Ramaṇa, Brunton (Hurst) and the monk was as follows:

*Bhikshu:* We have travelled far and wide in search of Enlightenment. How can we get it?

*Maharshi:* Through deep enquiry and confident meditation.

*Hurst:* Many people do meditate in the West but show no signs of progress.

*Maharshi:* How do you know that they don't make progress? Spiritual progress is not easily discernible.

*Hurst:* A few years ago I got some glimpses of the Bliss but in the years that followed I lost it again. Then last year I again got it. Why is that?

*Maharshi:* You lost it because your meditation had not become natural (*sahaja*). When you become habitually intuned the enjoyment of spiritual beatitude becomes a normal experience.

*Hurst:* Might it be due to the lack of a Guru?

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<sup>56</sup> U.G. Krishnamurti: *The Mystique of Enlightenment: The unrational ideas of a man called U.G.* Online at [[http://www.realization.org/page/namedoc0/moe/moe\\_1.htm](http://www.realization.org/page/namedoc0/moe/moe_1.htm)].

*Maharshi:* Yes, but the Guru is within; that Guru who is within is identical with your Self.

*Hurst:* What is the way to God-realization?

*Maharshi:* *Vichara*, asking yourself the 'Who am I?' enquiry into the nature of your Self.

Brunton seems to have correctly summarized Ramaṇa's method of Self-Enquiry, the "Who am I?" method:

Trace thought to its place of origin, watch for the real self to reveal itself, and then your thoughts will die down of their own accord (*Search*, 304; see also 144, 145).

But I suggest that Brunton understood as corresponding to what Thurston had said about the Higher Self, or what the theosophists said about the Overself. For one thing, it seems clear that Brunton understood this in terms of mentalism, and the importance of the ideas of the mind. Brunton's book *Conscious Immortality* has a whole section on "The doctrine of mentalism." The introductory paragraph to this section says,

'Mentalism'—the theory that physical and psychological phenomena are ultimately only explicable in terms of a creative and interpretive mind.' (OEC). For Brunton, the doctrine of mentalism demonstrates that our experience of the world is nothing but our thoughts of it. In short, there is nothing but mind, and the whole world is an appearance in Consciousness. (*Conscious Immortality*, 111).

The book does not just represent this as Brunton's idea, for it goes on to report Ramaṇa as saying:

The Universe is only an idea. It is the Heart that takes all these forms.  
That is called the Atman wherein no ego or sense of personality remains.

Surprisingly, Brunton interprets Ramaṇa's method of self-enquiry as a "rational" process of self-questioning (*Search*, 302). By this self-questioning one can "...stand aside and watch the very action of the brain (p 304).

And yet Brunton also recognizes that the process leads beyond mind. He reports "what the Maharishee has confidently affirmed, that the mind takes its rise in a transcendental source" (p. 304). This was already Ramaṇa's view in 1913, as reported by Humphreys. Humphreys says that realization is the experience is where you "argue your mind out of existence." Humphreys only thing that remains is Being, and not explainable in words or

ideas. But a Master can use mind, body and intellect without falling back into the delusion of having a separate consciousness (*Glimpses*, 21).

Although Brunton understood self-realization as going beyond mind, he seems to have understood this in terms of a higher transcendental mind observing a lower process of thought.

#### **f) Brunton's story of Ramaṇa's Enlightenment**

It is clear that Brunton relied on previous biographies of Ramaṇa, especially for the account of Ramaṇa's enlightenment at the age of 16.

(1) Like Narasimha, Brunton emphasizes that Ramaṇa had a propensity for deep sleep as a child. He finds in Ramaṇa's abnormal sleep and depth of attention an indication of his mystical nature (schoolmates took him from bedroom into the playground, beat his body and box his ears and then lead him back to bed; he had no remembrance of these things in the morning) (*Search*, 282).

(2) And Brunton characterizes Ramaṇa's experience at the age of 16 as a trance, "a profound conscious trance wherein he became merged into the very source of selfhood" (*Search*, 283). Narasimha had said that Ramaṇa hardly knew the difference between sleep and the *samadhi* state into which he had sunk on his way to Tiruvannamalai at the age of 16 (*Narasimha*, 36). And for Narasimha, the intensity of Ramaṇa's trance showed his spiritual state:

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

(3) And like Narasimha, Brunton emphasizes that Ramaṇa had had no previous experience of enlightenment. And Brunton says that Ramaṇa's next six months involved mystical trances and spiritual ecstasies (*Search*, 285).

The second and third points are questionable, even though they have become firmly established in the traditional hagiographic accounts of Ramaṇa. As I have shown in *Jivanmukta*, Ramaṇa did have some previous knowledge of meditation prior to his experience as a 16 year old, and he derived his teaching of Self-Enquiry from books that he read before he wrote any of his own. Even more importantly, Ramaṇa did not himself

have the certainty at the age of 16 that his experience was permanent. And he later disputed the necessity of a state of trance for enlightenment. Based on Ramaṇa's own teaching, the significance of his experience of enlightenment at the age of 16 must be reevaluated.

And as we shall see, it is the issue of whether trance is necessary that forms one of the primary bases for Brunton's later criticism of Ramaṇa.

In any event, Brunton seems to have incorporated this view of Ramaṇa's independence of any written teachings to his own life experience:

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

This last statement is almost exactly what Ramaṇa claimed for himself—that his experience was direct, and that the later books that he read were only "analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name." (*Osborne*, 24 and *Teachings*, 11).

### **g) Occult powers or *siddhis***

We know that Brunton was interested in special powers or *siddhis*, such as telepathy or the power to read thoughts.

Humphreys had already written that Ramaṇa that had powers of telepathy:

Everyone who comes to Him is open as a book, and a single glance suffices to reveal its content (*Glimpses*, 16)

But Humphreys says,

Clairvoyance, clairaudience and such things are not worth having when, such far greater illumination and peace are possible without them than with them. The Masters take on these powers as a form of Self-Sacrifice! I know the Masters, two of the greatest, and I tell you that the idea that a Master is simply one who has attained power over the various occult senses by long practice and prayer or anything else is utterly and absolutely false. No Master ever cared a rap for occult powers for he has no need of them for his daily life (*Glimpses*, 19).

Humphreys says that Ramaṇa noticed his “bent of mind” [towards the *siddhis*] and was afraid Humphreys would yield to the charms of thaumaturgy (*siddhis*) (*Glimpses*, 112). But Humphreys says on the same page that he “felt the magnetic attraction of Maharshi.” Narasimha reports this statement of magnetic attraction (Narasimha, 112).

Osborne says that Humphreys was probably wrong about Ramaṇa’s clairvoyance. He says that although Sri Bhagavan saw through people in order to help and guide them, he did not use any such powers on the human plane (Osborne, 101).

It is Osborne’s view that Narasimhayya, [Humphreys’ Telegu tutor, who brought Humphreys to see Ramaṇa] had previously told Ramaṇa Humphreys’ life story. Osborne says that Ramaṇa no more used subtle powers than those of the physical world (Osborne, 97).

And yet there are stories about Ramaṇa’s *siddhis*. Narasimha relates story of Ganapati Sastri, who in 1908 went to a temple at Tiruvottiur near Madras, and had a vision of Ramaṇa coming in and sitting up next to him. Sastri tried to sit up but in his vision, Ramaṇa held him down. It gave him something like an electric shock. He regarded this as the grace of the guru. Sastri later asked Ramaṇa about it. On Oct 17/29 [21 years later!], Ramaṇa told him:

One day some years ago I lay down, but I was not in *samadhi*. I suddenly felt my body carried up higher and higher till all objects disappeared and all around me was one vast mass of white light. Then suddenly the body descended and objects began to appear. I said to myself, ‘evidently this is how *Siddhas* appear and disappear.’ The idea occurred to me that I was at Tiruvottiur (Narasimha, 94)

Narasimha himself had a vision of Ramaṇa, but Ramaṇa told him that the visions may be from his study of the *Bhagavad Gita*. But he also told him that Ganapati Sastri had had a similar experience, so Narasimha should go ask him. (Narasimha, 107)

Ramaṇa himself discounted the importance of these powers. Ramaṇa said that for the formless self to have a body, to eat food and drink water—that these are *siddhas* enough (*Letters*, 76, Aug. 10, 1946). One of the reasons that Ramaṇa discounted powers was that they implied the existence of others to whom to display them:

To have powers there must be others to whom to display them; therefore the wise man does not give them a thought.

and

Even if powers come spontaneously they should be rejected. They are like ropes to tether a beast; sooner or later they drag a man back from his pursuit of Moksha (Liberation).<sup>57</sup>

Ramaṇa said, “Why recall the past incarnations? It is a waste of time.” (*Conscious Immortality*, 117). Ramaṇa was asked whether yogis can show us the dead. He answered that they may be able to, but not to ask him because he could not do it. Ramaṇa says that some *jñānis* may develop *siddhis* such as invisibility. But no powers can equal Self-realization. “*Jñāna* is everything, and a *jñāni* will not waste any thought on the occult powers.” (*Conscious Immortality*, 39). “The occult powers are only of the mind, they are not natural to the Self.” They are not worth trying for (p. 40).

So although there are accounts of Ramaṇa having powers of telepathy and telekinesis, he is also clear that such *siddhis* must never be sought for themselves. The search for powers distracts one from self-enquiry. In his discussion with Evans-Wentz, Ramaṇa says that *siddhis* are not natural, and not worth striving for, and the would-be occultist seeks to acquire them so that others may appreciate him. These powers do not bring happiness.

Ramaṇa even discounted the importance given to black magic or evil powers:

Another visitor referred to Brunton's statement that he had actually feared a woman for her association with black magic. Ramaṇa said that black magic is condemned in *Devikalottaram*. By such practices a person ruins oneself. But Ramaṇa goes on to say that *avidya* or ignorance is itself bad, and why should we add a separate category of black magic? (*Talks*, 499-500, par. 517; also confirmed in *Conscious Immortality*).

Nor did Ramaṇa give much importance to dreams:

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<sup>57</sup> Both statements cited in a review of T.V. Kapali Sastri's *The Way of Light*, in *The Mountain Path* 1 (January, 1964), 55, online at [[www.ramana-maharshi.org/downloads/m\\_p\\_january\\_1964.pdf](http://www.ramana-maharshi.org/downloads/m_p_january_1964.pdf)].



Dreams are only impressions which have been received in the waking state and are recalled to mind in the dream state (*Crumbs*, 39).

On the same page, it is reported that Ramaṇa seemed to give more value to the conscious mind:

The mind is a wonderful power, a mysterious power (*shakti*) of the Supreme Being. It is after the rise of the mind that God, world and *jivas* (individuals) appear, whereas in sleep we are not aware of any of these.

And Ramaṇa did not believe in the importance of miracles. K.K. Nambiar asked Ramaṇa about the miracles that Christ performed. Ramaṇa asked whether such Saints know and act as though they were performing those miracles. In other words, they do it unconsciously.<sup>58</sup> This is the same answer that Humphreys had reported. Nambiar says that Ramaṇa is averse to the use and exhibition of any mystical powers. Ramaṇa has warned disciples that indulging in such powers will sidetrack them from Self-realization. But Nambiar himself reports several powers. e.g. a dream that Ramaṇa had where Nambiar needed some ink (Nambiar, 41).

Ramaṇa's dismissive attitude towards miracles is also reported elsewhere:

Miracles, clairvoyance, clairaudience—what are these? They are sidetracks. The realized person is above them. (*Conscious Immortality*, 39).

Although Ramaṇa is clear in discounting the importance of *siddhis*, Brunton emphasizes the telepathic powers of Ramaṇa that he felt on his first visit:

There comes a perceptible change in the telepathic current which plays between us, the while my eyes blink frequently but his remain without the least tremor. I become aware that he is definitely linking my own mind with his, that he is provoking my heart into that state of starry calm which he seems perpetually to enjoy...[...] What is this man's gaze but a thaumaturgic wand [...] Suddenly, my body seems to disappear, and we are both out in space! (Search, 162-63).

Ramaṇa told Brunton that he should find the master within himself (*Search*, 278). In other words, he should not be traveling about looking for someone else with powers. And yet Brunton did not stay, but left to search for more holy men in India.

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<sup>58</sup> K.K. Nambiar: *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramana* (Tiruvannamalai, 1984) ['Nambiar'].

## h) Theosophy and astral planes

Ramaṇa was specifically asked about theosophy. It appears that the following questions were asked by Brunton:

Question: Theosophists mediate to seek masters.

Ramaṇa: The master is within. Meditation is for removing the ignorant idea that he is external.

Question Meher Baba (whom Brunton met) says he is an avatar (incarnation). Is that true?

Ramaṇa: Everyone is an *avatar* of God. One who knows the truth sees God in every face and everyone else as a manifestation of God. (*Conscious Immortality*, 136).

Ramaṇa says that occultism and theosophy are circuitous routes to the Self (*Conscious Immortality*, 44). His response regarding speculation about astral planes was equally dismissive:

The theory of evolution, the philosophies of planes and degrees, the systems of spirit descending into matter and evolving back, the idea of the self developing towards perfection—all these things are for spiritually uncultured, materially-minded people, but for the advanced, these thoughts are discarded (*Conscious Immortality*, 45).

Theosophy speaks of evolving selves. But Ramaṇa asked,

How can that be? The true Self is infinite, formless, beyond time and hence beyond evolution, it cannot grow to perfection because it is already perfect, free, boundless. (*Ibid.*)

Ramaṇa says that reincarnation, astral planes are true, but only from a lower standpoint:

It is true that subtle astral bodies exist, because in order to function in the dream-world a body is necessary for that world; but it too is real only on its own plane, whereas the One Self is always real, always and eternally existent, whether we are aware of it or not (*Conscious Immortality*, 122).

Brunton says that there are "degrees of reality," but Ramaṇa corrects him and says there is always only one reality and that is the Self (*Talks*, 127, par. 144).

Ramaṇa told Humphreys that religion, whether Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Theosophy can only take us to the point where all religions meet (Narasimha, 118).<sup>59</sup>

And when Ramaṇa was asked what happens after death, he merely said, engage yourself in the present.

### **i) Meditation and trance**

As already mentioned, Brunton, like Narasimha, emphasizes Ramaṇa's condition of trance. On his first visit, he said that Ramaṇa was "certainly in a trance condition" (*Search*, 141). When Brunton left Ramaṇa the first time, he reports that Ramaṇa had re-entered the trance-like condition (p. 161). Brunton says that the hall then becomes pervaded with a "subtle, intangible and indefinable *power* which affects me deeply" (p. 161).

And on his second visit he remarks on Ramaṇa's "trance-like abstraction wherein he locks his senses against the world outside" (*Search*, 292).

Brunton says that on this second visit, he himself was in a trance for over two hours, and that Ramaṇa watched him (*Search*, 310).

### **j) The Overself**

The term 'Overself' does not appear in the *Search*. But there are references to a higher or deeper self:

I perceive with startling clarity that a man can look serenely upon his tribulations, if only he can find the standpoint of his deeper self" refers to Galilean, take no thought for the morrow (*Search*, 300).

On the same page, Brunton refers to the "mystery of the divine within-ness." There is a deeper being:

Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant self. For something that is far superior to the unimportant personality which *was* I, some deeper, diviner being rises into consciousness and *becomes* me. [...] I, the new I (p. 305).

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<sup>59</sup> This is a neo-Hindu view of religion.

Now that we are familiar with Thurston's writings, we can see similarities in Brunton's reports of Ramaṇa. Brunton says, "There is That in man which belongs to an imperishable race" (*Search*, 306). And on the same page, he refers to : "the voice of a hidden, recondite and mysterious being who inhabits his centre, who is his own ancient self." Thurston had spoken of "the Higher Self," which he said was created from the best of man's aspirations during his descent and evolution through matter:

A Fraternity known as The Brothers has existed before man descended into matter, and have worked and still work out in the world upon the Path of activity. They appear only as an active Brotherhood when the cosmic energy of a Dayspring of Youth brings them into manifestation to bring its vibration into the minds of those who seek their Innermost (*Dayspring*, 12).

Brunton asked Ramaṇa about the "true self." Ramaṇa responded,

What exactly is this self of which you speak? If what you say is true, then there must be another self in man. Can a man be possessed of two identities, two selves?" (*Search*, 158; also reported in *Talks*).

In this conversation, Ramaṇa tells Brunton (to his evident shock) that the sense of the personal 'I' must totally disappear into the true self.

The sense of 'I' belongs to the person, the body and brain. When a man knows his true self for the first time, something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal.... (*Search*, 159).

Brunton then refers to Jesus' words, "Whoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it..."

But Ramaṇa himself sometimes refers to the Higher Self, and he does this in reference to Brunton's books! And then Ramaṇa speaks of two meanings of 'I' or Self. In response to a question by a certain Mr. Knowles, who had read Brunton's two books, Ramaṇa refers to the "true Self" (*Conscious Immortality*, 11). A similar reference by Ramaṇa to Brunton is found in *Talks*:

Question: The Buddhists say that 'I' is unreal whereas Paul Brunton in *The Secret Path* tells us to get over the 'I'-thought and to reach the state of 'I'. Which is true?"

M (Ramaṇa): There are supposed to be two 'I's'; the one is lower and unreal, of which all are aware; and the other, the higher and the real, which is to be realized (*Talks*, 56, par. 53)

Ramaṇa also refers to the "Real Self" (*Talks*, 121, par. 136; Jan. 15, 1936). This was said while Brunton was visiting the *ashram*. And when Ramaṇa was asked how one could get in touch with the Higher Self, he answered, "The Higher Self is always so, whether you follow the path to it or not" (*Conscious Immortality*, 161).

This is a fascinating interplay between Brunton, who admits that he was interpreting Ramaṇa through his own ideas, and Ramaṇa who then adopts Brunton's ideas to describe his own teachings! This is even more apparent in disciples of Ramaṇa, who adopt the term 'Overself' in their translations of some of Ramaṇa's works.

For example, let us look at the works of Sri Muruganar (1893-1973), one of Ramaṇa's most prominent disciples. David Godman says this about him:

He was instrumental in getting Bhagavan to compose the verses that comprise *Ulladu Narpadu* [40 Verses on Reality] and *Upadesa Undiyar* [also known as *Upadesa Saran* [Spiritual Instruction], two of Bhagavan's major philosophical poems, and he composed thousands of poems of his own that either praised Bhagavan, recorded his teachings or expressed gratitude to Bhagavan for having established him in the Self.<sup>60</sup>

Muruganar personally attended on Ramaṇa since his meeting with him in 1926.<sup>61</sup> Muruganar wrote down Ramaṇa's teachings in Tamil. One of these books is the *Guru-*

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<sup>60</sup> David Godman: *The Power of the Presence* (Tiruvnannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2000); Online at [<http://www.realization.org/page/doc1/doc102a.htm>] ['*Presence*'].

<sup>61</sup> As an aside, there is a troubling report that at his first visit to Ramana, Muruganar was administered a hallucinogenic. Muruganar reported the following to Narasimha in 1930:

Two or three days after my arrival I was given some medicine. I do not know what it was, but it excited me and overpowered me. I sat in front of the Maharshi and concentrated my mind on his person. After a few minutes I had a vision of brightness. It was a suffused brightness all over his body and around it. The body was, however, distinct from the surrounding light. How long it lasted I do not know, so wholly lost was I in contemplating the vision. Kunju Swami, Dandapani Swami and Arunachala Swami were present while this was going on. Maharshi then appeared to me as Christ, for what reason I cannot say, and again as Mohammed and other great souls for similarly inexplicable reasons. I lost my former personality during this period, for it was submerged and lost in a huge ocean wave of a new state of spirituality. I was feeling that all my experience was dream-like, vague, insubstantial, and mysterious, in spite

*Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mala*. That book was a collection of verses from Muruganar's larger work *Guru Vāchakakkovai*.<sup>62</sup>

The word 'Overself' is used in the English translation of *Guru-Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mala*.<sup>63</sup>

The real meaning of the two (teachings), namely that "He Himself became all this," and that "That same Overself created all this," is that the world is just a false appearance in Him (verse 16).

and

This ego is (to be regarded as) a ghost appointed by the Overself (God) to keep the body intact so long as (the current) *karma* is not spent by their fruits being experienced (verse 62).

From this it can be seen that not only did Brunton interpret Ramaṇa through his previous theosophical ideas, but that he in turn influenced Ramaṇa and his disciples to interpret the experience in the same way.

### 3. *The Secret Path* (1935)

In 1935, Brunton wrote *The Secret Path*. This is the first book in which he mentions the Overself. A whole chapter is entitled "The Awakening to the Overself." Brunton says that the Overself consciousness is equivalent to deep dreamless sleep (*Secret Path*, 87).

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of the feeling that I was still in the waking condition. I was obsessed by this fear that my former worldly waking state was being smothered and my former self plundered of its sense of reality and individuality. I felt that as a consequence I might be perpetually held down to this strange life in Tiruvannamalai and be forever lost to my mother whose sole support I was. (Cited in *Presence*; online at <http://www.realization.org/page/doc1/doc102b.htm>).

<sup>62</sup> Sri Muruganar: *Guru Vachaka Kovai (The Garland of the Guru's Sayings)*. New translation by Michael James and Sadhu Om online at [[http://davidgodman.org/rteach/gvk\\_intro.shtml](http://davidgodman.org/rteach/gvk_intro.shtml)]. This translation makes no reference to 'Overself.' It does refer to "True Self" (e.g. verse 16).

<sup>63</sup> *Guru-Ramaṇa-Vachana-Mala*, tr. by "Who" (Tiruvnammalai, Sri Ramanasramam, 1960), 5 verse 11. The translator, "Who" was the pen name of Lakshmana Sarma, who also wrote the book *Maha Yoga or The Upanishadic Lore in the Light of the Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana* (Tiruvannamali: Sri Ramanasramam, 1961, first published 1937).

And Brunton's mentalism is also evident, since he regards the Overself as Universal Mind:

...all men exist *within* the Universal Mind which has brought this world into being—a Mind which is perennially benevolent, unfathomably wise and eternally peaceful.” (*Secret Path*, 21)

Brunton compares his view of Indian Absolutists to Bishop Berkeley's idealism (*Secret Path*, 25). Brunton also refers to Emerson (*Secret Path*, 13, 98)

It is worth looking at this book in some detail. The Foreword to this book is by Alice A. Bailey (1880-1949), a well-known occult teacher at the time. She was the author of 24 books, which she said she authored with the help of a Tibetan teacher or master, a spirit that she contacted through channeling. These books covered topics like white magic, telepathy, occult meditation, and the reappearance of the Christ. For a time she was a member of the Theosophical Society. She said that Madame Blavatsky's teaching of the occult masters had led her to identify her own spirit guide from the age of 15. She left the Theosophical Society. With her husband, another theosophist, she founded and founded The Arcane School, a movement that continues to this day.

In the first paragraph of her Foreword, Alice Bailey mentions the “growing sensitivity to the that “mysterious Overself mentioned by our author [Brunton]” (*Secret Path*, 9).

Now why did Brunton ask for a Foreword by this theosophist and occult teacher? Had he not already obtained enlightenment with Ramaṇa? The answer can only be that Brunton had not achieved the enlightenment he sought, and that he was still searching. This is confirmed in *Secret Path*. After he had written *A Search in Secret India*, Brunton proposed “an exploration right across Asia, an exploration that would continue my old quest of the last surviving exponents of genuine Oriental wisdom and magic” (*Secret Path*, 13). His meeting with Ramaṇa had therefore not diverted him from his real interest in seeing and possessing magical powers. He also speaks of seeking “wonder-working lamas of Nepal and the Tibetan border.” And he speaks of the “Himalayan attitude” of the Overself (*Secret Path*, 128). Later in 1936, Brunton himself traveled to the Himalayas, with the intention of reaching Mount Kailas in Tibet. One place he would

have received the idea to do this would have been from Alice Bailey, and her purported revelations from her Tibetan Master.

*Secret Path* does not mention Ramaṇa by name, although it does set out the "Who am I?" method. "This inquiry into the true self is the simplest system of meditation I know..." (*Secret Path*, 51). There is a whole chapter entitled "A Technique of Self-Analysis." And there is a clear reference to Ramaṇa in a few pages in Chapter 1. Brunton refers to Ramaṇa as "a wise man of the east." He says that he met the man "unexpectedly." That is hardly true, since Brunton had had to make a special train journey to see Ramaṇa. Even the newspapers had been announcing that Brunton would be visiting.<sup>64</sup>

Brunton emphasizes that at that first meeting, Ramaṇa had telepathic insight into his life:

There in that seated being was a great impersonal force that read the scales of my life with better sight than I could ever hope to do. I had slept in the scented bed of Aphrodite, and he knew it; I had also lured the gnomes of thought to mine for strange enchanted gold in the depths of my spirit: he knew that too. I felt, too, that if I could follow him into his mysterious places of thought, all my miseries would drop away, my resentments turn to toleration, and I would understand life, not merely grumble at it! (*Secret Path*, 11-12)

So again we see Brunton's continued interest in special *siddhis* or powers. He says, "The spiritual radiations which emanated from him were all-penetrating." (*Secret Path*, 12).

Thus, Brunton is still emphasizing special occult powers or *siddhis*. His reference to "gnomes" is probably a reference to the ideas of *Le Comte de Gabalis*, which speaks of salamanders, sylphs, undines and gnomes.

Another reference to powers is at page 106, where Brunton says,

The magicians of olden times waved a wand to bring men to see such things as they desired them to see. They touched a seed and it became a tree, or wrapped the Cloak of Invisibility about themselves. But now we have put aside such clumsy effects and seek to place subtle spells upon the mind of man with nothing more mysterious than a humble pen.

Brunton refers to some Christian ideas. With respect to the lack of argument in the book, he refers to Christ's saying "Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter the

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<sup>64</sup> "From the Early Days," *The Maharshi* 7, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1997).



kingdom of heaven” (*Secret Path*, 18). And he refers to Jesus’ words “Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven...” (*Secret Path*, 51). But he also makes some strange statements, such as “Christ descended on earth from a superior planet, which was His real home...” (*Secret Path*, 102).

In *Secret Path*, Brunton says that he is putting forward what seems to be an astounding proposition:

Assuming that the intellect is not dependent on the flesh for its sole existence, I suggest that it is composed of nothing more than the endless sequence of thought, the endless series of ideas, concepts and memories, which normally make up the waking day, and that therefore there is no true selfhood even in the intellect. If all this aggregate of thoughts could be eliminated, then we should find that there is no such thing as a separate reasoning intellectual faculty (*Secret Path*, 65).

He says that if intellect is only this train of thoughts, then we could cease to think but still remain conscious (*Secret Path*, 66).

But this idea of the mind being only a train of thought was hardly original to Brunton.

Bhagavan once told me that thought comes in flashes, like the cycle of alternating current, but was so rapid that it seemed continuous as does the light given off by an electric bulb. If one could only concentrate on the intervals between thoughts rather than on the thoughts themselves that would be Self-realization

He always taught that mind and thought were the same: “The mind is nothing but a lot of thoughts” *Upad. saram* V.18 (Chadwick, 43).

Ramaṇa’s book *Upadesa saram* [Spiritual Instruction], which is quoted here, was written at the request of Muruganar. Ramaṇa wrote it before Brunton wrote *Secret Path*. The idea that “the mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts” already appears in Ramaṇa’s work “Who Am I?”<sup>65</sup> And in *Upadesa Saram*, Ramaṇa says,

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<sup>65</sup> Ramana Maharshi, “Who am I?” in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997, first published 1972), 41. The statement does not appear in the revised edition of *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2001), although it does have the statement, “Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind.” (p. 38). Osborne had translated that as ““So then, thoughts themselves constitute the mind.”

17. When the mind unceasingly investigates its own nature, it transpires that there is no such thing as mind.

18. The mind is merely thoughts. Of all thoughts, the thought 'I' is the root. (Therefore) the mind is only the thought 'I'.<sup>66</sup>

Ramaṇa says that the first thought that arises is the "I-thought." And the state of true Being is where there is not the slightest trace of even this first thought. Ramaṇa emphasizes that this state does not include any telepathy of clairvoyance or other psychic powers of the mind. As for Brunton's idea that we can retain "consciousness without thought," this is already in Ramaṇa's translation of the *Vivekacudamani*.<sup>67</sup> And in a dialogue in 1937, Ramaṇa continues this line of reasoning. He recommends concentrating on "the interval between thoughts" as an explanation of the realized state.

That is the state of the *jñāni*. It is neither sleep nor waking but intermediate between the two. [...] It is the state of perfect awareness and of perfect stillness combined. It lies between sleep and waking; it is also the interval between two successive thoughts. It is the source from which thoughts spring...(*Talks*, 563-64; January, 1939).

But although this idea of the mind as a collection of thoughts was not original to Brunton, it is important to note that Ramaṇa read Brunton's book *Secret Path*. Already in 1935, a certain Mr. Knowles refers to reading Brunton's two books (*Talks*, 56; June 15, 1935). And Swarnagiri shows that Ramaṇa approved of some of Brunton's ideas:

The writer was just about to put a question to Sri Bhagavan and just as he began doing so, Sri Bhagavan answered him by referring him to page 73, para. 2 of Mr. Brunton's "Secret Path" and remarked that, as stated therein, speech only beclouded argument and disturbed the silent communication of thought (*Crumbs*, 45).

The incident is also reported in *Conscious Immortality*:

Read it a thousand times –P.B. [Brunton] has expressed me correctly; then why do you not practice it. Turn to page 73 and see if you don't find an answer to your question in paragraph 2 (*Conscious Immortality*, 154).

So again we note this amazing interplay between Brunton's ideas and those of Ramaṇa himself. And yet Ramaṇa did not approve of everything Brunton wrote, or at least did

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<sup>66</sup> *Collected Works* (Osborne translation), 85.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

not interpret them in the way that Brunton wrote them. Brunton wrote that he had a vision of “the Wise One of the East” [Ramaṇa]. In the vision, Ramaṇa said,

My son, it is not well. Hast thou forgotten compassion? Shalt thou go forth to add to thy store of knowledge while others starve for the crumbs of wisdom? (*Secret Path*, 15)

Ramaṇa was asked about Brunton’s vision referred to in this passage. He was asked whether Paul Brunton saw him in London. Ramaṇa answered that Brunton had a vision. “Nevertheless he saw me in his own mind.” (*Conscious Immortality*, 41).

#### **4. A Search in Secret Egypt (1935)**

In 1935, the same year that he published *Secret Path*, Brunton also published *A Search in Secret Egypt*.<sup>68</sup> The book refers to Brunton’s experience of spending a night alone in the Great Pyramid. The book is evidence that, despite his stay with Ramaṇa, Brunton was still interested in esoteric and occult mysteries.<sup>69</sup> We should recall that F.W. Thurstan (who may or may not be Thurston) also wrote about the mysteries of Egypt.

The book *Egypt* refers to many strange powers. He refers to being with others who were in a hypnotic state or hypnotic trance (pp. 99, 101). Chapter 5 is entitled “With a Magician of Cairo. Chapter 6 is entitled “Wonder-working by hypnotism.” Chapter 7 is “An Interview with Egypt’s Most Famed Fakir.” Chapter 12 is “The Ancient Mysteries.” Chapter 16 is “With Egypt’s most famed Snake-charmer.” Chapter 18 is “I Meet an Adept.”

In reference to the last chapter, Brunton says that he believed that the adept that he met possessed “some unusual power (p. 275). He says that adepts are those “who had entered into the councils of the gods and knew the deepest spiritual secrets man could never learn” Adepts work in silence and secrecy. They can exchange thoughts with fellow Adepts at a distance, that they can temporarily use the body of another person by

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Brunton: *A Search in Secret Egypt* (London: Rider & Co., 1935) [*‘Egypt’*].

<sup>69</sup> Fung says that in the 1940’s, Brunton “publicly repudiated certain passages of *A Search in Secret Egypt* in which the search for Truth was sacrificed to a love of mystery and the sensational.” (Cahn Fung I, 19-20). Even if that is so, the book is important in showing that Brunton was still attracted to these ideas after his meetings with Ramaṇa.

projecting his soul into that person's body" Brunton calls this power to use another body the power of "overshadowing"(p. 276). The idea of overshadowing is another idea that Brunton took over from Madame Blavatsky's theosophy.<sup>70</sup> Brunton says that the adept speaks with him about "magical powers of injuring other people." The powers were originally used for self-defence were later used for "injuring enemies from a distance or removing those who stood in the path of the magician's (or his patron's ) ambition (p. 281)

Brunton says that "In ancient times, Egypt was the chief centre of magical knowledge and practice excelling even India." Brunton says that some Adepts from ancient Egypt were still alive. Their bodies lie in a comatose state in certain Egyptian tombs not yet discovered. "Trance" most nearly describes that state. They are like the Indian *fakirs*, but the knowledge of these Adepts is far more profound. Hindu *fakirs* become unconscious, but these Adepts remain fully conscious. While they are in coma, their spirits are free and working. Their hearts were never cut out. Some have been there 10,000 years (pp. 282-284).

We see here Brunton's continued fascination with occult powers. This does not seem to correspond to any enlightening experience with Ramaṇa! Chadwick is of the opinion that in later years, Brunton wrote a lot of rubbish (Chadwick 16).

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<sup>70</sup> 'Overshadowing' is a term used by Blavatsky. See her *The Key to Theosophy*, online at [<http://www.theosophical.ca/keytheos.htm>]

We say that the Spirit (the "Father in secret" of Jesus), or *Atma*, is no individual property of any man, but is the Divine essence which has no body, no form, which is imponderable, invisible and indivisible, that which does not *exist* and yet *is*, as the Buddhists say of Nirvana. It only overshadows the mortal; that which enters into him and pervades the whole body being only its omnipresent rays, or light, radiated through *Buddhi*, its vehicle and direct emanation. This is the secret meaning of the assertions of almost all the ancient philosophers, when they said that "the *rational* part of man's soul" never entered wholly into the man, but only overshadowed him more or less through the *irrational* spiritual Soul or *Buddhi*.

And yet we know that Ramaṇa read Brunton's book *Egypt*. He says [to Brunton on Brunton's return in 1936]:

Ramaṇa: Just as you have said in *Secret Egypt*, "The mystery of the pyramid is the mystery of the Self," so also the mystery of this Hill [*Arunāchala*] is the mystery of the Self (*Talks*, 25; par. 143).

### 5. *A Message from Arunāchala* (1936)

Brunton returned to India, via Egypt, and again spent some time with Ramaṇa. He reached Ramaṇa's *ashram* before the end of 1935 (*Essential*, 13). At that time he wrote the book *A Message from Arunāchala*, which was published in 1936.<sup>71</sup> The book does not name Ramaṇa, but refers to 'the Maharshee of South India.' After Ramaṇa's death, Brunton dedicated a new printing of this book to "The Maharshee of South India." In the dedication, he says that after the Maharshee's death, the mountain of Arunāchala lost much of its sacred atmosphere. "...it is a man and his mind which give holiness to a place, not the place which gives holiness to man."

Brunton compares this book to the Mosaic tablets written on the mountain. In this case, the mountain is Arunāchala. Brunton compares Arunāchala to the Egyptian pyramids. He says that Ramaṇa told him that the lost continent of Lemuria had once stretched from Egypt to South India. I find that doubtful. The idea of Lemuria is related to Thurston's ideas. Thurston refers to Lemuria, although not in an approving way. Thurston said that the worst type of atom is from Lemurian period; bodies were of an animal nature and were constantly engaged in war. They sacrificed their victims and ate their flesh (*Dayspring*, 49).

Brunton later said that *A Message from Arunāchala* was a book of "pointed criticism," "an indictment of the materialistic foundations of our modern civilization and therefore necessarily destructive in tone."<sup>72</sup> He said that its bitterness was too extreme and that he would now tone down its language.

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Brunton: *A Message from Arunāchala* (London: Rider & Co., 1936) [*'Message'*].

<sup>72</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Quest of the Overself* (London: Rider & Co., 1937), 29 [*'Quest'*].

In *Message*, Brunton refers to Emerson (p. 24). Emerson wrote that he did not have one disciple, because what he wrote was not to bring men to him, but to themselves.

*Message* makes several references to the Overself. Brunton characterizes his first meeting with Ramaṇa in terms of the Overself. He says that his first period with the Maharshee was when the “Overself stretched forth its hand to touch me” (p. 12). And, “to know the Overself is to know the deep, unmoved rest which is at the centre of our being” (p. 100). “The Overself speaks to man in the only language that his deafened mind cares to understand—suffering” (p. 116). The Overself is “inexplicable.” “It is the self-created ray of light out of the Absolute Darkness. It is the nearest that any human being can get to God.” (p. 138).

In January 1936, Brunton asked Ramaṇa about *Siddhas*. The glossary at the back of *Talks* defines a *siddha* as “one who has acquired supernatural powers and is capable of working miracles; also a state of accomplishment. In other words, it is one who has *siddhis*, supernatural powers. Ramaṇa tells him that there are reputed to be special beings with powers, *siddhas*, within the holy mountain Arunāchala.<sup>73</sup> Brunton’s conversation with Ramaṇa was as follows”

Brunton: *Siddhas* are said to be in the Himalayas.

Ramaṇa: Kailas is on the Himalayas: it is the abode of Siva. Whereas this Hill [Arunāchala] is Siva Himself. All the paraphernalia of His abode must also be where He Himself is.

Brunton: Does Bhagavan [Ramaṇa] believe that the Hill is hollow, etc.?

Ramaṇa: Everything depends on the viewpoint of the individual. You yourself have seen hermitages, etc., on this Hill in a vision. You have described such in your book.

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<sup>73</sup> Chadwick reports similar statements by Ramana:

[Ramana] would sometimes tell us that he had seen inside of Arunachala a great city with large buildings and streets. It was all very mysterious. There he had seen a big company of Sadhus chanting the Vedas, most of the regular devotees were among the company, he said, and he saw me there. “But that’s only a vision,” some one remarked. “All this is only a vision too,” he would reply, meaning our world. “That is just as real as this.” (Chadwick, 57).

Brunton: Yes. It was on the surface of the Hill. The vision was within me.

Ramaṇa: That is exactly so. Everything is within one's Self. [...]

Brunton: What is the mystery of this Hill?

Ramaṇa: Just as you have said in *Secret Egypt*, "The mystery of the pyramid is the mystery of the Self," so also the mystery of this Hill is the mystery of the Self (*Talks*, 25; par. 143).

This remarkable exchange shows that as of this date, Brunton is still very much concerned with those who possess powers. This is likely the main reason that Brunton left Ramaṇa in order to visit the Himalayas later that year.

Ramaṇa's exchange with Brunton is remarkable for another reason: it shows that Ramaṇa had read *A Search in Secret Egypt*, and was now using its teaching to describe the power of Arunāchala.

It is also evident that at this time in 1936 that Brunton was visiting Ramaṇa, he was also visiting other teachers. Chadwick writes about the American Bierce Spaulding, who came to the Ramana's ashram in 1936 with a group of Americans. The reference appears to be to Baird Thomas Spaulding, who wrote about his trip to India in 1894.<sup>74</sup> In 1935, when Spaulding was 78 years old, he organized another trip to India with 18 fellow-travelers and seekers. Chadwick reports that they had bought one way tickets to India. They had been told that once with the Masters, every care would be taken of them and that they would not want to return to America. They arrived in Calcutta, where Spaulding left them in a hotel while he tried to communicate with the Masters as to how to proceed. Spaulding told they group that he had met Brunton, who invited them to Ramana's *ashram*. Spaulding took the group to Pondicherry for a *darshan* of Aurobindo. Brunton was present at the same *darshan* and stayed at the same hotel. Brunton told Chadwick that members of the group accused Spaulding of having swindled them. When they arrived at Ramana's *ashram*, there were 12 members left of the group. Others had left in exasperation. One of the group, a Mrs. Taylor, asked Ramaṇa for Self-realization "right

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<sup>74</sup> Baird Thomas Spaulding: *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East*, 6 volumes (DeVorss & Co., 1996, first published 1924).

away.” Chadwick thought that Spalding was an interesting person, who “obviously suffered from delusions” and was “slightly mad” (Chadwick, 48-51).

### 7. A Hermit in the Himalayas (1937)

In early 1936, Brunton was still at Ramaṇa's *ashram*. While still with Ramaṇa, Brunton planned to go to Tibet with Yogi Pranavananda on a pilgrimage to Mount Kailas. Pranavananda's teacher was Swami Jnanananda, in Andhra, then the northeast part of Madras Presidency. So even while he was with Ramaṇa, Brunton was still looking for other teachers.

Brunton seems to have believed that there are Masters who possess spiritual powers in the Himalayas. Others had told him about the Himalayas, including his former Buddhist mentor Allan Bennett, the Buddhist monk Frederic Fletcher, who had actually been to the Himalayas before visiting Ramaṇa with Brunton in 1931. And Alice Bailey, who wrote the Foreword to *Secret Path* had told Brunton about Tibet. And we must not forget Sir Francis Younghusband, who had led a military expedition to Tibet. Younghusband had been sent by Lord Curzon to Tibet in 1904, where Younghusband forced a treaty on the Dalai Lama, after firing on Tibetan soldiers. Younghusband wrote the Foreword to *A Search in Secret India*.

Brunton had discussions with Ramaṇa about his desire to see the holy Mount Kailas in the Himalayas. Ramaṇa told him his real search was within:

Mount Kailas is within you," my Master [Ramaṇa] has said cryptically a day or two before my departure.<sup>75</sup>

Ramaṇa also told Brunton the story of Appar, a Tamil saint, who wanted to go to Kailas, but found Kailas in a temple tank in Tiruvayyar, near Tanjore, where an old man told him to take a dip. Tanjore is in South India. Ramaṇa said, "Where is Kailash then? Is it within the mind or outside it?" and "Everything is within, there is nothing without" (*Conscious Immortality*, 111).

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<sup>75</sup> Paul Brunton: *A Hermit in the Himalayas: The Journey of a Lonely Exile* (London: Rider & Co., 1937), 26.



But Brunton left Ramaṇa. In the summer of 1936, Brunton went to the Himalayas, where he stayed as the guest of a Nepalese prince, a nephew of Maharajah of Nepal.

In 1937, Brunton published *A Hermit in the Himalayas: The Journey of a Lonely Exile*.<sup>76</sup> The Prince wrote the Introduction to *Himalayas*. He refers to certain criticism that had been directed against Brunton:

I can gauge the profound ignorance of the reviewer who, in a certain European-managed newspaper of Calcutta, denounced the author's earlier work "A Search in Secret India" as false, denied the existence of any spirituality in India, and finally ridiculed the author's competency to conduct these researches. All the best Indian journals and leaders of opinion have, nevertheless, given the highest praise to that book... (*Himalayas*, 8).

The title of the book refers to 'exile.' That probably means the renunciation of the world, or a retreat from it. But in a Preface that he added twelve years later to the first British edition of the book in 1949, Brunton warns against any permanent retreat from the world:

However, I do not advocate rural or monastic retreat for the purpose otherwise than as a valuable temporary and occasional help, for the real battle must be fought out within one's self, just where the aspirant now stands. Every successful passage through the tests provided by worldly life gives him a chance to make a spurt not only in consciousness and understanding but more especially in character.

In his Preface, Brunton says that Westerners need to learn how to be; we have already learned how to do. He says that the mystical quest links us with "an infinite power, an infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness." Usually only brief glimpses of "the soul's flower-like beauty" usually only for a few minutes, but the "adept" can return at will to "the serene beatitude of this high consciousness."

The book is a collection of various ideas. Brunton's publishers called it "a literary cocktail." It is noteworthy that it begins with a poem by Emerson, "Good-bye, proud world."

Brunton writes that he receives letters from readers of his books. Some letters he replies to. But he says that he sends telepathic messages to others:

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

When the exquisite pulsation of the sacred silence overwhelms me with its sublimity, I telegraph it, as by telepathy, to those faithful souls (*Himalayas*, 65).

Brunton does not describe observing any special powers in the Himalayas. That must have disappointed him. He does refer to a Buddhist monk with memories of previous existences (*Himalayas*, 42). And he reports what his companion Pranavananda's said about his *guru*, Swami Jnanananda. The Swami was said to have lived for a time in Gangotri in the Himalayas, stark naked in the ice and snow that was 7 feet deep. Talking to Pranavananda, Brunton "sees" the sublime presence of the Swami. Brunton says he does this by "overshadowing" Pranavananda.

Brunton also makes some comparisons between Hinduism and Buddhism. He says that Mount Kailas is the most sacred spot in Asia to Buddhist and Hindus (*Himalayas*, 24). He finds the Hindu Krishna is more adorable and lovable than Buddha; Krishna preaches no harsh asceticism. Brunton says that Buddha took existence too seriously (*Himalayas*, 149-150).

Brunton also refers to the Bible, "Be still and know that I am God." That is also the concluding line of the book. Ramaṇa himself frequently used that verse in order to sum up his own method of Self-Enquiry.<sup>77</sup> But Brunton does not mention Ramaṇa at all in the book. Brunton says that Jesus spoke out of the deep region of the Overself (*Himalayas*, 84).

Ramaṇa was aware of the book *Himalayas*. In October 1936, Ramaṇa was read an extract from it that had been printed in the *Sunday Times*. This shows that Ramaṇa continued to follow Brunton's work. In the article, Brunton mentioned Buddhist methods of gaining the faculty of recovering past incarnations. Again, this shows Brunton's

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<sup>77</sup> S.S. Cohen: *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1990, first published 1959), 168: "the whole Vedanta is contained in the two Biblical statements: 'I AM THAT I AM', and 'BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD'". See also *Talks*, 187, 285, 307, 322-23, 333, 345, 458, 487, 563. *Conscious Immortality*, 49 "Be still, do not think, and know that I AM." See also *Erase the Ego* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996), 24. And *Maharshi's Gospel* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1969), 33. See my work *Jivanmukta* for many more Biblical references made by Ramana.

fascination with powers. Ramaṇa said, "The attempt to recall the past is mere waste of time" (*Talks*, 215; para. 260).

## 8. The Quest of the Overself (1937)

### a) The Maharajah

Brunton spent the winter of 1936 and the spring of 1937 with the Maharajah of Mysore, who had read his books and invited him there (Cahn Fung I, 39).

The Maharaja had perhaps learned of Brunton from Ramaṇa, whom he had visited for 15 minutes.<sup>78</sup> When the Maharajah left, Ramaṇa said that he was a highly advanced soul, a Janaka (*Conscious Immortality*, 154). Janaka is mentioned in the Hindu Scriptures as a king who was also a realized person.

Brunton writes with great enthusiasm about some books that the Maharajah gave him to read. These were the *Ashtavakra Gita*, the *Mandukya Upanishad*, Gaudapada's *Karika*, and Shankara's *Commentary on King Janaka*.<sup>79</sup>

The *Ashtavakra Gita*<sup>80</sup> is a record of Ashtavakra's teaching to King Janaka. Its later chapters emphasize the fact that the true sage does not flee to caves or sit idly in *ashrams* but is constantly engaged in work for the welfare of others. It points out that he will outwardly pretend to be just like ordinary people in order not to be put on a pedestal by them." The *Ashtavakra Gita* was translated into English by Swami Nityaswarupananda of the Ramakrishna Order. It included a transliteration in the Kannada language. The book was published by the Maharaja of Mysore. Its later chapters emphasize the fact that the true sage does not flee to caves or sit idly in ashrams but is constantly engaged in work for the welfare of others. It points out that he will outwardly pretend to be just like ordinary people in order not to be put on a pedestal by them.

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<sup>78</sup> Apparently this was in order to present to Ramana a copy of the *Ashtavakra Gita* (see below).

<sup>79</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* (London: Rider & Co., 1969, first published 1941), 36-37 [*'Hidden Teaching'*].

<sup>80</sup> Still available from Ramana's *ashram*.

Brunton does not seem to know that the *Ashtavakra Gita* was presented to Ramaṇa Maharshi in 1932. Ramaṇa then meticulously wrote with his own hand all the Sanskrit verses above each Kannada verse. Brunton also does not seem to know that these same books were also discussed by Ramaṇa.

#### **b) T. Subrahmanya Iyer**

In Mysore, Brunton met T. Subrahmanya Iyer, who was the Maharajah's reader in philosophy. Iyer would become Brunton's new *guru*. Cahn Fung has shown from Brunton's letters to Iyer that their relationship was more than just academic, but that Brunton regarded Iyer as his spiritual teacher (Cahn Fung II, 128). Cahn Fung also points out that Iyer was in his own words "a keen theosophist." Cahn Fung writes, "Earlier in his life he had been a regular reader of Blavatsky's books, and was "several years in the clutches of Annie Besant." (Cahn Fung I, 19).

What were Iyer's teachings that so attracted Brunton? Iyer's main difference from Ramaṇa was that his neo-Hinduism was more pronounced. He emphasized practical ethics. Iyer was a follower of Vivekananda (1863-1902). Vivekananda was an Indian philosopher who was a disciple of the Indian holy man Ramakrishna (1836-1886). But Vivekananda was also influenced by western thought. Vivekananda wrote the book *Practical Vedanta*, in which he argued that Vedanta had ethical implications<sup>81</sup>. Ramakrishna's disciples set up the Ramakrishna Missions, which emulated Christian missions in India with their emphasis on service to humanity and social involvement. And we have already seen how Jung was familiar with Ramakrishna, and makes reference to his ideas of involvement with the world.

Following Vivekananda, Iyer stressed the basis of ethics in our interdependence with others. He related this in Hindu terminology, and in particular to the Upanishadic identity of atman and Brahman. This is the *tat tvam asi* ["that art thou"] basis of ethics. According to this view of ethics, we do good to others not out of altruism, but because in some sense we and others share a common identity, so we are serving our true Self. Iyer

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<sup>81</sup> Swami Vivekananda: *Practical Vedanta* (Calcutta: Ananda Press, 1978, first published 1896).

interpreted Shankara from a Neo-Vedantic point of view. He found in the great *advaitin* philosopher a validation of his own ethic of social service (inspired by Western influence), universalism (i.e. Neo-Hindu inclusivism), as well as ideas of Indian nationalism.

Iyer also presented Shankara as a rationalist philosopher, in contrast to the more traditional image of him as a theologian:

[Shankara's system of Advaita] is not even a philosophical dish cooked to suit exclusively the palate of the Hindu. It is like the air and the water, the common food of all men in all countries. It is ... an attempt ... at constructing a "Science of Truth," nay, in fact, it is the only attempt yet made at such a science.<sup>82</sup>

Cahn Fung summarizes Iyer's teaching:

Thus Iyer interpreted Shankara's teaching as food for all humanity, the universal teaching par excellence; it is not just a religion, but *the* religion; not a philosophy, but *the* philosophy; not a science, but *the* Science of Truth; not a soteriology, but *the* path to spiritual liberation par excellence, wide and deep as the ocean which contains virtually all the water of the world and in which all particular forms ultimately dissolve (Cahn Fung I, 62).

It is unclear whether Brunton realized that in following Iyer, he was accepting a more western outlook on life. But it is interesting that Brunton found Iyer's emphasis on ethics to be too one-sided. Iyer rejected mystical experience and mystical feeling. For him, intellect alone was important.

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<sup>82</sup> V. Subrahmanya Iyer: "Shankara and Our Own Times," reprinted in his book, *The Philosophy of Truth* (Salem :Sudharma ,1955). See also Iyer's book, *The Meaning of Life* (self-published from 'Mysore Lodge', Madanapalli, A. P.). In the latter book, Iyer argues that the art of living consists in being in tune with nature and in tune with the law of life. It starts with self-enquiry: "Who am I? Whither do I come? What is the purpose and meaning of life?" It is based on self-knowledge, the principles of dharma and the law of karma.

### c) The Quest for the Overself

In the summer of 1937, the Maharajah let Brunton stay at a hill station, where he wrote his next book, *The Quest of the Overself*.<sup>83</sup> He refers to the Cave of Baba Budan that he visited, where the mystic Dattatreya

...made his final meditation and then disappeared completely from the face of the earth—to return only, he predicted, when the misery and materialism of the world called for a divine Avatar to help mankind.

Brunton dedicated *Quest* to his patron, the Maharajah of Mysore. In this dedication, he refers to

...the task of building a bridge between the ancient methods of mind-mastery as practised in Your Highness's land and the modern psychological needs of my Western people.

He says that he regards the Maharajah as a philosopher king. Both the Maharajah and Iyer encouraged Brunton in this task of building a bridge between east and west. Iyer told Brunton what the Maharajah had said before he died in 1940:

The late Maharaja of Mysore was so anxious to spread the philosophy of Advaita that he once said to me: "Here is Paul Brunton. He has a great gift with his pen and an aptitude for mysticism and philosophy. Let us keep him here in Mysore to study Advaita and then make it known to the West (Cahn Fung, I, 33).

and Iyer told Brunton

You have a very great and important work before you in introducing Vedanta to the West. I want to prepare you to do this, so that my life may bear some fruit (Cahn Fung I, 77).

The book *Quest* is described as a "more comprehensive and advanced work" than *Secret Path*. Brunton says that he wants lead reader into "realms of knowledge, forms of experience and phases of consciousness that surpass what is usual" (*Quest*, 9). He says that there has been "considerable expansion in personal realisation" since writing *Secret Path* (*Quest*, 32).

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<sup>83</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Quest of the Overself* (London: Rider & Co., 1937).

In response to his critics, Brunton briefly discusses some of his previous books. He says that if there are contradictions in his writings, this is because of the grade of development in the mind of his readers (*Quest*, 33). This is the same justification that was frequently given for apparent contradictions in Ramaṇa's teachings.<sup>84</sup>

He says that the title *Secret Path* was criticized. He says he meant a path of spiritual attainment mostly lost to the modern world. He also says that he took the title from Tirumoolar, from the Tamil Sacred Scriptures, as well as from Ramaṇa, whom he quotes as saying "This method of realizing the Absolute is known as the Secret Path of the Heart" (*Quest*, 12). He says that Ramaṇa is the "highest embodiment" of mysticism (*Quest*, 15). But he also boasts that it was left to him, "an infidel foreigner, to make the Maharishee famous in his own country" (*Quest*, 17).

Brunton says that the book *A Message from Arunāchala* gave him the least pleasure to write (*Quest*, 29).

Brunton refers to *A Search in Secret Egypt*. He says that he found actual wonders in Egypt. What was revealed to him during the night spent at the Sphinx's feet was confirmed by a later archaeological discovery (*Quest*, 19). He says that whereas India has mothered the deepest thought of man; Egypt was the father of his "most marvellous magic" (*Quest*, 43). The fundamental lesson of *Secret Egypt* is that of man's survival after death:

He steps out of the body, as one steps out of a prison, and does not perish with it. For man is mind, not matter.

But Brunton goes on to say that this view of psychic survival perpetuates the personal ego, whereas spiritual immortality dissolves it. It is important to surrender our ego to the Overself (*Quest*, 28, 33).

But *Quest* also shows Brunton's continued interest in special powers. He says he has observed *fakirs* suspending their breath for hours or days in an airless coffin or below ground. He discusses trance, hypnotism and psychic research. Profound trance is when

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<sup>84</sup> Chadwick says there are contradictions in Ramana's teachings because he had to speak from two points of view [self and phenomenal world] (Chadwick, 45).

persons forget their bodies and witness far-off scenes. There is also real trance of the third degree. Brunton sees trance as evidence of separation of mind and body (*Quest*, 56-60). Thus, *Quest* teaches a dualistic view of the self, as opposed to *advaita's* nondualism. There is “an immaterial Overself, to which the physical body is subordinate” (*Quest*, 63).

Brunton quotes Emerson: “souls are not saved in bundles” (*Quest*, 48,130)

Brunton also refers to discoveries of modern science, which he tries to relate to his own ideas. He refers to the work of Sir James Jeans. Cahn Fung has pointed out that Jeans’ *The Mysterious Universe* was assigned reading in the philosophy courses that Subrahmanya Iyer taught to the monks of Mysore’s Ramakrishna Ashram. Thus, *Quest* seems to incorporate ideas that Brunton learned from Iyer.

He says that the mind’s incessant movement creates the time sense (*Quest*, 96). We must overcome this time sense by being still. He again quotes the Bible, “Be still and know that I am God.” The ‘I’ of man is the God-element within him, eternal (*Quest*, 101). By being inwardly still, one avoids this movement. The goal is to seek a kind of semi-trance, in which one must endeavor to remain perfectly awake, perfectly alert, and yet indulge in no mental, emotional or physical movement whatsoever (*Quest*, 172). This idea seems similar to Ramaṇa’s idea of seeking the state where one is conscious without thinking, seeking the space between the thoughts.

Again he refers to the special powers that emerge along the path he is setting out. The telepathic power to send or receive thoughts from other minds becomes commonplace. The freed soul can fly the world and appear to others in vision or dream; also prophetic premonitions of future events. There is a “fourth-dimensional consciousness of the Overself” (*Quest*, 142-146). The “electrifying guidance of a true Adept” is a “potent help” (*Quest*, 148). And when their great science of the *tantras* is known, one no longer remains under the limitations of matter. He calls the *tantras* ‘Secret Books of Power’ (*Quest*, 176).

Brunton speaks of The Path of Self-Enquiry, but he does not credit Ramaṇa with the source of this idea (*Quest*, 143).



The Overself is a “region.” It is impersonal, and exceeds our intellect. It can be communicated only by not-words and by profound telepathic silence (*Quest*, 181, 193). Brunton’s diagram of the refraction of the ray of the Overself on p. 196 of *Quest* is very similar to the diagram in the *Collected Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*.<sup>85</sup> Again, Brunton does not credit Ramaṇa. It is also surprising that he says that the Overself is impersonal, when he had previously criticized Ramaṇa for this apparently nontheistic viewpoint.<sup>86</sup>

After all his evident interest in occult powers, Brunton then warns that these occult powers should not be sought for their own sake. This is not to say that they do not exist, for “...the supreme power which supports all occult powers is the Overself’s own power. All lesser forces take their rise therein.” Yet Brunton says that studies of the psychic and occult are not without worth. These studies may “break the back of crude materialism.” He then quotes Jesus that all these things will be added unto us if we seek the kingdom of heaven first. Unexpected miracles and wonders then happen. But they then come unsought (*Quest*, 223, 224).

We see here that Brunton continues to be fascinated by occult powers, and that he believes that upon self-realization, these powers will be there. That seems to me to be a very different attitude from Ramaṇa, who said that the powers do not count for the realized person, since powers are only for the phenomenal level of reality.

#### **d) Brunton, Iyer and Jung**

In August 1937, Brunton and Iyer were in Paris. Iyer represented India at the International Congress of Philosophy at the Sorbonne. It was while they were in Europe that they met C.G. Jung. Jung invited Iyer and Brunton to Küsnacht, Switzerland, where they discussed problems of Indian philosophy. It was at this meeting that Jung told Brunton that he was a mystic but could not acknowledge this, because he wanted to preserve his scientific reputation. Both Brunton and Iyer influenced Jung's ideas about

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<sup>85</sup> Ramaṇa’s *Collected Works* (Osborne translation), 18, 23.

<sup>86</sup> See discussion below.

Ramaṇa Maharshi, as I have shown in my article "Jung, Ramaṇa Maharshi and Eastern Meditation."<sup>87</sup>

As I have also shown, Brunton and Jung had very similar criticisms of Ramaṇa. The fact that Jung criticized Ramaṇa is also not generally known. This is partly due to the fact that Jung's introduction to the book *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramaṇa Maharshi*<sup>88</sup> gives the impression that Jung agreed with Ramaṇa. But that introduction was taken from Jung's introduction to Heinrich Zimmer's book about Ramaṇa, *Der Weg Zum Selbst: Lehre und Leben des indischen heiligen Shri Ramaṇa Maharshi aus Tiruvannamalei*. The English translation of Jung's introduction is contained in Jung's *Collected Works*, Volume 9, under the title, "The Holy Men of India." Only excerpts of that introduction appear in the Shambhala edition. When Jung's full introduction is read, it is clear that he had serious disagreements with Ramaṇa, at least as he understood him.

## 9. Discover Yourself [The Inner Reality] (1939)

In 1938, Brunton also wrote *Discover Yourself* [the U.S. title for *The Inner Reality*].<sup>89</sup> It was published the next year, 1939. The book is addressed to Christians, and it does not directly refer to Ramaṇa.

Brunton frequently quotes from the Bible in this book. He says that the best advice is "Be still and know that I am God" (*Discover*, 15). As we have seen, this verse was also one of Ramaṇa's ways of characterizing his teaching of Self-Enquiry. In *Discover*, Brunton uses other Christian language. He refers to the mystery of the Kingdom of

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<sup>87</sup> J. Glenn Friesen: "Jung, Ramana Maharshi and Eastern Meditation" (2005). Online at [<http://www.members.shaw.ca/cgjung/JungRamana.html>].

<sup>88</sup> C.G. Jung: "Sri Ramana and His Message to Modern Man," Foreword to *The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988). This Foreword contains only very selective excerpts from Jung's introduction to Heinrich Zimmer's book on Jung, *Der Weg Zum Selbst: Lehre und Leben des indischen heiligen Shri Ramana Maharshi aus Tiruvannamalei* (Zurich: Rascher, 1954). Jung's introduction was translated into English and included in Volume 9 of his *Collected Works* as "The Holy Men of India."

<sup>89</sup> In 1938, Brunton also wrote *Discover Yourself* [formerly called *The Inner Reality*] New York: Samuel Weiser, 1939 [*Discover*].

Heaven and the words of the Lord's prayer (*Discover*, 53), and the Beatitudes and their emphasis on being called the "children of God" (*Discover*, 75, 103) and the Gospel of John (*Discover*, 269). Brunton says that thought is secondhand, but we must have immediate knowledge by unifying ourselves with God:

When you have found your inner spiritual self then you can look outwards again, and you will find the sun—in other words the Universal Self. You will see God in every thing and every body—after you have seen God in yourself!" (*Discover*, 35)

Brunton uses the analogy of the unity of the Self refracted into phenomenal reality, like white light in a prism:

Thinking, moving, acting in this material world are merely different manifestations of spiritual consciousness. When you let a light shine through a window made of coloured glass, the rays which appear on the farther side will seem coloured, yet on your side they will be white (*Discover*, 63).

Brunton says that meditation is the process of interiorization, withdrawal, and ultimately reaching "the original white lamp." Now the idea of temporal reality being a refraction of a prism is not unique to Brunton. But did he take it from Ramaṇa? Humphreys refers to the prism and the White Light. He says that Jesus was utterly unconscious when He worked His miracles. "It was the White Light, the Life, Who is the cause and the effect, acting in perfect concert. "My Father and I are One" (*Glimpses*, 25).

Later, in his *Notebooks*, Brunton admitted that in *Discover*, he had used Christ's teachings as a peg for his own ideas:

In *The Inner Reality*, I have used the words of Jesus as mere pegs on which to hang my own teaching. This follows the example on the ancient religion makers. It has thus helped thousands of Christians, who might otherwise not have been reached by my words, to a higher concept of Truth.<sup>90</sup>

So it was not only Ramaṇa's teaching that Brunton used as a peg. He also acknowledges using Christ's teachings in this way!

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<sup>90</sup> Cahn Fung II, 98, citing *Notebooks* VIII, 5, 199.

## 10. Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture (1939)

Brunton spent the winter of 1937/38 in London (Cahn Fung I, 39). In May 1938, Brunton went to the United States. Then from the west coast of the U.S., he sailed back to Asia.

Brunton published *Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture*<sup>91</sup> at the request of the Maharaja of Mysore (*Essential*, 14). It was dedicated to Iyer. Brunton later referred to this work as his doctoral thesis (Hurst, 79). As early as 1937, Brunton had begun referring to himself as having a doctorate. Brunton's 1937 book *The Quest for the Overself* gives the author's name as "Paul Brunton, Ph.D." Masson says the thesis (if it was a thesis), is 45 pages long. Brunton told him that his Ph.D. was from Roosevelt University in Chicago. Masson says that he checked, and that university has no record of Brunton. And Masson, who studied Sanskrit, says that Brunton had no knowledge of Sanskrit (Masson, 161).

## 11. The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga (1941)

In January 1939, Brunton returned to Ramaṇa's *ashram*. He had expected to stay there three months, and then spend three months in Mysore. He left Ramaṇa's *ashram* after only three weeks, and says he was forced to leave.<sup>92</sup> Ramaṇa's serious disagreements with Ramaṇa and the *ashram* are not well known, and we will look at these in some detail.

Instead of staying with Ramaṇa, Brunton went to Mysore to stay with the Maharajah. He remained at Mysore until 1947 (although the Maharajah died in 1940). While at Mysore, Brunton published *The Hidden Teaching Behind Yoga*.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Paul Brunton: *Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1939) [*Modern Culture*].

<sup>92</sup> George Feuerstein is clearly wrong in his view that these disagreements arose only after publication of *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* in 1941. See "Paul Brunton: From Journalist to Gentle Sage" at [<http://www.yrec.org/brunton.html>].

<sup>93</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Hidden Teaching Behind Yoga* (London: Rider and Co., 1941) [*Hidden Teaching*].

In *Hidden Teaching*, Brunton changes the question “Who am I?” to “What am I?” He says that “Who Am I” was a question which emotionally pre-supposed that the ultimate ‘I’ of man would prove to be a personal being, whereas “What Am I?” rationally lifted the issue to scientific impersonal enquiry into the nature of that ultimate ‘I.’ (*Hidden Teaching*, 17).

In *Hidden Teaching*, Brunton says that he still regards Ramaṇa as “the most eminent South Indian yogi.” But he also says something quite surprising: that he had known about meditation and yoga before he came to Ramaṇa's *ashram*, and that his experience with Ramaṇa was no new experience. He makes the “confession” that when he first came to India, he was “no novice in the practice of yoga,” Even as a teenager

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

Brunton claims that he not only had practiced yoga, but that he had experienced the abnormal phenomena, or siddhis. He refers to the experience of being seemingly extended in space, an incorporeal being.

What I omitted to state and now reveal was that it was no new experience because many years before I had met the saintly yogi of Arunāchala, I had enjoyed precisely similar ecstasies, inward repose and luminous intuitions during self-training in meditation (*Hidden Teaching*, 25).

Brunton says that Ramaṇa only confirmed his earlier experiences. Is Brunton being honest here? Or has he invented this story of previous experience in view of his disenchantment with Ramaṇa? Surprisingly, the independent record seems to show that Brunton may be telling the truth. There is evidence that Brunton had had earlier experiences. The 1931 independent report of his first meeting with Ramaṇa reports

Brunton (then known as Hurst) as telling Ramaṇa that he had earlier experienced moments of bliss.<sup>94</sup>

It is in *Hidden Teaching* that Brunton says that he used the story of Ramaṇa as a “peg” on which to hang his own theories of meditation:

It will therefore be clear to perspicacious readers that I used his name and attainments as a convenient peg upon which to hang an account of what meditation meant to me. The principal reason for this procedure was that it constituted a convenient literary device to secure the attention and hold the interest of western readers, who would naturally give more serious consideration to such a report of the “conversion” of a seemingly hard headed critically-minded Western journalist to yoga (*Hidden Teaching*, 25).

It is also in *Hidden Teaching* that Brunton made public his criticisms of Ramaṇa. Brunton says that there were “threats of physical violence” against him. He says he left the *ashram* “abruptly.” He refers to “threats of physical violence” and “malicious lying ignorance.” He speaks of being “harshly separated by the ill-will of certain men.” He speaks of “hate” and “low manners”, which he attributes to jealousy over his success (*Hidden Teaching*, 18). Brunton did not return to see Ramaṇa at all in the 12 years before Ramaṇa’s death, even though he passed within a few miles of the *ashram* (*Notebooks* 8, s. 6:233.)

Brunton had many disagreements with Ramaṇa and with the way the *ashram* was run. We will examine them in detail.

### **a) The allegation of plagiarism**

An article in *The Maharshi* gives the following reason for Brunton’s disagreements with the *ashram*. It says that after the success of his book *A Search in Secret India*, Brunton had published many books without acknowledging that Ramaṇa was the source of his ideas. Therefore Ramaṇa’s brother, Niranjanananda Swami, who as the *Sarvadikhari* managed the *ashram*, objected to Brunton continuing to take notes of what Ramaṇa said to disciples. In 1939, Niranjananda asked Munagala Venkataramiah to tell Brunton that

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<sup>94</sup> (“From the Early Days,” *The Maharshi* 7, No. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1997) [http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1992/mar\\_apr.html](http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1992/mar_apr.html)

he could not longer take notes in the hall. Brunton asked whether this was also Ramaṇa's own view. Venkataramiah did not reply. Ramaṇa overheard Brunton's question, but he did not make any response, either. That was the last time that Brunton took notes in the hall, and it is said that this was when Brunton began distancing himself from the *ashram*.<sup>95</sup>

As we have seen, there certainly appears to be truth in the allegation that Brunton did not sufficiently acknowledge Ramaṇa as his source for many ideas. Chadwick says that Brunton was "a plagiarist of the first water" (*Chadwick*, 16). But there were also other disagreements with Ramaṇa, at least as noted by Brunton.

### **b) Management of the *ashram***

Brunton disagreed with Ramaṇa's brother, who was the *Sarvadhikari* in charge of the *ashram*. Brunton describes the situation at the ashram as:

... a highly deplorable situation in the Ramaṇa ashram which represents the culminating crisis of a degeneration which has been going on and worsening during the last three years.<sup>96</sup>

He says that Ramaṇa's ascetic indifference meant that he could not control the *ashram*:

But during my last two visits to India it had become painfully evident that the institution known as the Ashram which had grown around him during the past few years, and over which his ascetic indifference to the world rendered him temperamentally disinclined to exercise the slightest control, could only greatly hinder and not help my own struggles to attain the highest goal, so I had no alternative but to bid it an abrupt and final farewell (*Hidden Teaching*, 18).

The *ashram* had turned out to be "a miniature fragment of the imperfect world I had deserted" (*Hidden Teaching*, 43).

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<sup>95</sup> "The Recollections of N. Balaram Reddy," *The Maharshi*, Nov/Dec 1995, Vol. 5, No. 3. Online at [[http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1995/nov\\_dec.html](http://www.arunachala.org/NewsLetters/1995/nov_dec.html)].

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Brunton to Iyer; copy in Brunton Archive (Cited in Cahn Fung I, 40).

### c) Comments made about Ramaṇa

Masson says that Brunton had given interviews in the Indian papers about Ramaṇa, which the brother had not found satisfactory (Masson, 25). Were these disagreements even earlier than 1939? Brunton had not been at the *ashram* since early 1936. In September 1936, Ramaṇa was asked about "some disagreeable statements by a man well known to Maharshi." Ramaṇa replied,

I permit him to do so. I have permitted him already. Let him do so even more. Let others follow suit. Only let them leave me alone. If because of these reports no one comes to me, I shall consider it a great service done to me. Moreover, if he cares to publish books containing scandals of me, and if he makes money by their sale, it is really good. Such books will sell even more quickly and in larger numbers than the others [...] He is doing me a very good turn (*Talks*, 204; paragraph 250 (Sept. 7, 1936).

Perhaps this is not a reference to Brunton. But the dates fit with his trip to the Himalayas "in exile." Brunton did write an article in September 1936 in *The Leader*. The article concerned the Maharaja in Pithapuram (in northeastern India), of whom Brunton spoke very favourably (Cahn Fung I, 38). And I am not aware of anyone else who was making money from books about Ramaṇa. In *Conscious Immortality*, the reference to the "vilifier" of Ramaṇa is indicated to be someone from the town, and to a pamphlet that this person has printed, and not to a newspaper interview. It is unclear why this reference was changed from what is reported in *Talks*. The changed version makes it much less likely that the reference was to Brunton.

Chadwick reports that when Ramaṇa was asked why so many things happened at the *ashram* of which he did not approve, Ramaṇa replied,

What can I do? If I go off to the forest and try to hide, what will happen? They will soon find me out. Then someone will put up a hut in front of me and another person at the back, and it will not be long before huts will have sprung up on either side. Where can I go? I shall always be a prisoner (Chadwick, 93)

### d) Lack of guidance by Ramaṇa

Brunton says that with Ramaṇa, he experienced intermittent satisfactions of mental peace. But these entered into conflict with "an innate, ever-enquiring rationalism" (*Hidden Teaching*, 21). He had hoped to obtain more guidance from Ramaṇa:



I turned in the first hope of finding clear guidance to the Maharishee. But the guidance never came. I waited patiently in the hope that time might draw it out of him, but I waited in vain. Gradually it dawned upon me as this question of obtaining a higher knowledge than hitherto rose uppermost in my mind, that so far he had never instructed any other person in it. The reason slowly emerged as I pondered the matter. From my long friendship with him it was possible to gauge that primarily this was not his path and did not much interest him. His immense attainment lay in the realms of asceticism and meditation. He possessed a tremendous power of concentrating attention inwardly and losing himself in rapt trance, of sitting calm and unmoved like a tree. But with all the deep respect and affection I feel for him, it must be said that the role of a teaching sage was not his forte because he was primarily a self-absorbed mystic. This explained why his open disdain for life's practical fulfilment in disinterested service of others had led to inevitable consequences of a disappointing kind in his immediate external environment. It was doubtless more than enough for himself and certainly for his adoring followers that he had perfected himself in indifference to worldly attractions and in the control of restless mind. He did not ask for more. The question of the significance of the universe in which he lived did not appear to trouble him. The question of the significance of the human being did trouble him and he had found an answer which satisfied him. (*Hidden Teaching*, 16)

Brunton complains about a lack of guidance. He certainly had Ramaṇa's instruction of the method of self-enquiry. Now what more did Brunton want? It seems to me that perhaps he wanted the magical powers or *siddhis* associated with yoga. Brunton wanted initiation. That is the only meaning that I can give to his statement that Ramaṇa "never instructed any other person." Examples are the power of telepathy or of foreseeing the future. We know that Brunton was interested in such powers. And he refers to the "higher mysteries of yoga."

#### **e) Insufficiency of trance**

We have seen that Brunton's book *Search* emphasizes Ramaṇa's trances, and that Brunton regarded these trances as evidence of Ramaṇa's enlightenment. But in *Hidden Teaching*, Brunton criticizes trances. Brunton refers to the "sheer shrivelled complacency" of some of Ramaṇa's followers, and their "hidden superiority complex." He refers to this mystical attitude as a "holier than thou attitude," and an assumption that total knowledge had been reached when in fact it was only a partial knowledge (*Hidden*

*Teaching*, 16). He says that without the healthy opposition of active participation in the world's affairs, they [mystics] have no means of knowing whether they were living in a realm of sterilized self-hallucination or not (*Hidden Teaching*, 19).

Brunton's change from emphasizing trance to criticizing it as insufficient seems to be based on Iyer's neo-Hindu emphasis on helping others.

Brunton says that meditation on oneself is a necessary and admirable pursuit but it does not constitute the entire activity which life is constantly asking of us.

Without the healthy opposition of active participation in the world's affairs they [mystics] had not means of knowing whether they were living in a realm of sterilized self-hallucination or not.

Meditation apart from experience was inevitably empty; experience apart from meditation was mere tumult. A monastic mysticism which scorned the life and responsibilities of the busy world would frequently waste itself in ineffectual beating of the air (*Hidden Teaching*, 19).

Furthermore, the ecstasies of meditation were not lasting. They had to be repeated if one wanted to live again in the original condition (*Hidden Teaching*, 26).

Brunton cites Aurobindo with approval:

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

Brunton refers to Zen as more sensible and practical. Young men are trained for 3 years; during that time they are given active tasks. They are not allowed to pass the day in lazy, futile or parasitical existence." A half hour of meditation daily is sufficient after their departure from the monastery to keep them in contact with spiritual peace; their worldly life did not suffer but as enriched (*Hidden Teaching*, 28).

And yet Ramaṇa himself was opposed to trance in the sense of loss of consciousness. Ramaṇa distinguished between *nirvikalpa samādhi* (trance) and *sahaja samādhi*. See my discussion of this in *Jivanmukta*.

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

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

One must not allow oneself to be overtaken by such spells of stillness of thought: *the moment one experiences this, one must revive consciousness and enquire within as to who it is who experiences this stillness* (Crumbs, 25-27; italics in original)

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

Trance and unconsciousness also are only for the mind; they do not affect the Self (Crumbs, 40). And

There is no question of transition from unconsciousness to supreme pure Consciousness. Giving up these two, self-consciousness and unconsciousness, you inhere in the natural Consciousness, that is pure Consciousness (Crumbs, 41).

Even talk of “killing the mind” is rejected, for mind is also part of reality:

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

And Ramaṇa also says, “Absence of thought does not mean a void. There must be one to know the void” (*Conscious Immortality*, 77).

#### **f) The lawsuit**

Brunton says that someone published a statement that he had started a lawsuit against Ramaṇa. He felt compelled to deny the allegation (*Notebooks*, vol. 10: 2:462). But a legal action had been commenced for control of the *ashram*. K.K. Nambiar says that the lawsuit was started by one of Ramaṇa’s attendants, named Perumalsami, claiming the right to the land (Crumbs, 26). The action was commenced some time in 1936. Brunton was at the *ashram* for part of 1936, so it is possible that even if he did not commence the lawsuit that he expressed some sympathy for it. We know that he was opposed to the way that the *ashram* was being run.

The lawsuit is very interesting, since in 1936 Ramaṇa was himself compelled to testify in the case. A fascinating excerpt is given recorded in *Talks*. (*Talks* 237-240; November 15, 1936.) The plaintiff's argument was that if Ramaṇa was truly a *sannyasin*, he could not own any property. The same issue was to arise later when Ramaṇa made a will. There was a real issue whether Ramaṇa owned any property that he could dispose of by his will.<sup>97</sup>

Even if Brunton was not involved in any legal action to take control of the *ashram*, he certainly had strong objections to the *ashram* management. And he blamed Ramaṇa for not caring how the affairs in the *ashram* were being managed. He says that Ramaṇa's ascetic indifference to the world had rendered him "temperamentally disinclined to exercise the slightest control."

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

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<sup>97</sup> Yet Ramana did sign a Power of Attorney in 1933 in favour of his brother, the *sarvadhikari*, and Ramana executed a will. Excerpts from the will appear in the *Maharshi*, May/June 93, Vol. 3, No. 3. [www.sentient.org/maharshi/mayjun93.htm](http://www.sentient.org/maharshi/mayjun93.htm). Chadwick also describes the circumstances of the signing (Chadwick, 99-102). The book is excerpted at [[www.beezone.com/Ramana/ramanas\\_will.html](http://www.beezone.com/Ramana/ramanas_will.html)]. Chadwick raises the issue whether Ramana was duped into signing the will "by a management that feared loss of its executive powers after his demise." Chadwick says that just before Ramaṇa's death, his brother asked him to sign a new will because the old one might have some legal loopholes, but Ramaṇa refused to sign another will.

### g) Ethical disagreements

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

Brunton says that meditation on oneself is a necessary and admirable pursuit but it does not constitute the entire activity which life is constantly asking of us. Meditation apart from experience is "inevitably empty." He says the price of yoga is world-renunciation—fleeing from wife, family, home, property and work; taking refuge in *ashrams*, caves, monasteries, jungles or mountains. But Brunton says that we were meant to live actively in the world. The field of activity is in the external world, not in the trance-world (*Hidden Teaching*, 20).

Brunton felt that Ramaṇa took no stand on issues like the coming war. Brunton seems particularly upset by an incident when news was brought to the *ashram* that Italian planes had gunned undefended citizens on the streets of Ethiopia (the Italians invaded Ethiopia in October, 1935). Brunton reports that Ramaṇa said:

The sage who knows the truth that the Self is indestructible will remain unaffected even if five million people are killed in his presence. Remember the advice of Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield when disheartened by the thought of the impending slaughter of relatives on the opposing side.<sup>98</sup>

Brunton's criticisms of Ramaṇa are quite different from what he said in *Search*:

But perhaps it maybe good for us to have a few men who sit apart from our world of unending activity and survey it for us from afar (*Search*, 289).

Chadwick also made some criticisms of Ramaṇa. He says that Ramaṇa used to chew snuff, and that when Chadwick knew him he still chewed betel nut (Chadwick, 35). A

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<sup>98</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984), vol. 10, "The Orient", s.2:441.

more serious ethical shortcoming is that caste was observed in the *ashram* dining room. On one side the Brahmins were seated, on the other side the rest. Ramaṇa insisted on it (Chadwick, 34). And Ramaṇa seemed unconcerned regarding World War II. He is reported to have once remarked, “Who knows but that Hitler is a Jnani, a divine instrument.” (Chadwick, 35).

Ramaṇa seemed to believe that a realized person was above ethical obligations of right and wrong. For the *jñāni* there is no good or evil, only spontaneous activity or actionless-activity of Tao:

What is right and wrong? There is no standard by which to judge something to be right and another to be wrong. Opinions differ according to the nature of the individual and according to the surroundings. They are again ideas and nothing more. Do not worry about them. But get rid of thoughts. If you always remain in the right, then right will prevail in the world (*Talks*, 428; Feb. 8, 1938).

Ramaṇa took the view that our concern is to be with our own self-realization, and that if good results, we will be unconscious in performing it:

Do not think that you are the one to bring about some reform. Leave these aims alone and let God attend to them. Then, by getting rid of egoism, God may use you as an instrument to effect them, but the difference is that you will not be conscious of doing them; the Infinite will be working through you and there will be no self-worship to spoil the work (*Conscious Immortality*, 12).

Ramaṇa said “Self-reform automatically brings about social reform” (*Conscious Immortality*, 14). Ramaṇa referred to Tayumanavar for support:

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

Humphreys refers to Vivekananda for interpretation of this view. “You do not help the world at all by wishing or trying to do so, but only by helping *yourself*.” (*Glimpses*, 21).

I believe that Brunton's criticism of Ramaṇa is correct, at least with respect to ethics. Ken Wilber also says that, however realized Ramaṇa was, he had ethical shortcomings.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ken Wilber: *One Taste* (Boston, Shambhala, 1999), 201.

I see the problem as an inconsistency in Ramaṇa's teachings between different views of the self. On the one hand, the self is seen as static and unmoving, uninvolved in the world. On the other hand, there is the view of the self as dynamic and participating in the world.

#### **h) God as an illusion.**

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

The final declaration which really put me, as a Western enquirer, off Advaita came later: it was that God too was an illusion, quite unreal. Had they not left it at that but taken the trouble to explain how and why this all was so, I might have been convinced from the start. But no one did. I had to wait until I met V. Subrahmanya Iyer for the answer.<sup>100</sup>

This is a rather strange criticism, and reflects a rather naïve view of *Vedānta*. Brunton had discussed this issue with Ramaṇa as early as December 1935 (*Talks*, 106, par. 112). Brunton's own later teaching moves from a personal to an impersonal Absolute. And instead of "Who am I?" Brunton refers to "What am I" as being more scientific (*Hidden Teaching*, 17).

#### **i) Lack of Originality**

Finally, Brunton seems to criticize Ramaṇa for a lack of originality. He says, "some years after I met Maharshi I discovered in an old Sanskrit text the same Who Am I method."<sup>101</sup> This is also a strange criticism, in view of the fact that Brunton was not really interested in Ramaṇa's ideas at all, except as a peg for his own ideas. Nevertheless, there is some point to the criticism, for Ramaṇa's disciples have often assumed more originality in Ramaṇa than is warranted by the facts. Ramaṇa relied on many previously written works, including some tantric works, as I have shown in *Jivanmukta*.

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984), Vol. 10, s. 2:366.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton* (Burdett, NY: Larson, 1984), Vol. 18, 212.

Although Brunton left the *ashram*, and wrote publicly about his disagreements with Ramaṇa, he nevertheless expressed his "loving devotion and profound reverence for him":

As I wrote in a London journal when he died in 1950: "He was the one Indian mystic who inspired me most...The inner telepathic contact and close spiritual affinity between us remained vivid and unbroken... (*Hidden Teaching*, 33).

It should be noted that even in this appreciative comment, Brunton is emphasizing special occult powers, such as telepathy.

In his *Notebooks*, Brunton wrote that he regretted saying some of the things he did about Ramaṇa. He says that he regrets the criticism of Ramaṇa, and says that this criticism was occasioned "more by events in the history of the *ashram* than by his own self."<sup>102</sup> But although he continued to admire Ramaṇa as a mystic, Brunton did not change his views about the importance of ethics.

## **12. The Wisdom of the Overself (1943)**

From 1939, and throughout World War II, Brunton remained as a guest of the Maharajah of Mysore. Brunton was still there when his own disciple Jacques Masson visited him in December 1945 (Masson, 9).

Brunton completed the book *The Wisdom of the Overself* in 1942; it was published the following year.<sup>103</sup> In it, Brunton stresses his idea of mentalism. He says that the whole world is rejected by our own minds. And the world outside of us has been projected as a thought by the World Mind.

I have earlier shown how Thurston had a similarly mentalistic view of the world in *Dayspring*.

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<sup>102</sup> *Notebooks*, vol. 10 "The Orient," s. 2:459.

<sup>103</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Wisdom of the Overself* (London: Rider & Co., 1943).



### 13. The Spiritual Crisis of Man (1952)

In 1946, Brunton wrote to Ramaṇa. The letter was read to Ramaṇa on March 29, 1946. A disciple of Ramaṇa reports this:

In this [letter], Brunton says he is going back to America and that he should have very much liked to meet Bhagavan [Ramaṇa] during the last six years, but that that was rendered impossible by the attitude of the Asramam [*ashram*] and that therefore he had come to accept fate in this matter and was meeting Bhagavan only in the deep places of his heart where Bhagavan still is (*Day by Day*, 163).

Brunton stayed in Mysore until 1947, when he moved to the Masson home in Los Angeles (Masson, 27). In 1954, Masson lived in Hawaii, with Brunton as guest (Masson, 47).

In 1952, Brunton published *The Spiritual Crisis of Man*.<sup>104</sup> That same year, he went back to Ramaṇa's *ashram*:

In 1952, more than two years after Ramaṇa's death, Brunton again visited the ashram at Tiruvannamalai, and discovered within 24 hours that he and the ashram leaders had nothing to say to each other (Cahn Fung I, 49).

### 14. *Essays on the Quest*

After Brunton's death, his book *Essays on the Quest* was published.<sup>105</sup> In one of the essays, he sets out his views against black magic or "evil occultism" (*Essays*, 12). And he speaks about the unity of Mind:

The Overself is a ray of the Mind. "Just as the sun appears to have split itself up into millions of rays but nevertheless remains the same single sun that it was before, so the ineffable Mind cannot be separated into parts except in appearance, and cannot be divided into individual entities except in human thinking of it (*Essays*, 100).

This shows that Brunton continued his mentalist or idealist view of the world

In these essays, Brunton also refers to meditation. The following words surely have reference to Ramaṇa:

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<sup>104</sup> Paul Brunton: *The Spiritual Crisis of Man* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1984).

<sup>105</sup> Paul Brunton: *Essays on the Quest* (London: Rider & Co., 1984) [*'Essays'*]

Whoever has attained true and permanent insight does not need to spend his time always in meditation. For meditation is a form of mental exercise to help its practise get into the transcendent consciousness of pure Mind. He who sees pure Mind all the time does not need to practise any exercise for its possible perception. When, therefore, we are told that a sage lives in remote places and mountain caves in order to practise his meditations undisturbed, we may be sure that he is only an aspirant, only a would-be sage. The populace, impressed by his asceticism and awed by his trance often regard such a yogi as a sage. He may himself accept such a valuation. But he will really possess the status only of a mystic, perhaps even a perfect one. If he reaches such perfection and is bewitched by his transient trances, he will feel that he is all-sufficient in himself and that he does not need anything from the world. The corollary of this, unfortunately, is that the woes of his fellow creatures have nothing to do with him (*Essays*, 117).

A person who merely meditates is "a complacent recluse and nothing more." The true sage "is the man who has finished all three stages of religion, yoga and philosophy, has realized the Overself and has come in consequence to a wide compassion for his fellow creatures" (*Essays*, 118). And, contrary to what he says in his first book, *A Search in Secret India*, Brunton says that the aura of peace radiated by a mystic is not a sign of perfection:

The aura of intense mental peace which is felt in the presence of a perfect mystic is not necessarily a sign of perfection, as the ignorant think, but a sign of successful inward-turned concentration. He consciously exerts a mesmeric force on the disciples who sit passively around him. The sage, on the other hand, spends all this concentrative force in action intended to render real service to others whilst at the same time spontaneously and effortlessly also giving that which is given by the mystic to those who search (*Essays*, 118).

It is this lack of ethical concern for others that was Brunton's primary criticism of Ramaṇa, and the reason that he chose V. Subrahmanya Iyer as his *guru* instead of Ramaṇa.

## VII. Conclusion

Brunton is the one who is most responsible for introducing Ramaṇa Maharshi's ideas to the English speaking world. For that we must be grateful. But a review of Brunton's writings raises serious issues regarding what Brunton says about Ramaṇa. Brunton says that he used Ramaṇa as a "peg" on which to hang his own ideas. His own ideas were

very much influenced by Madame Blavatsky's theosophy. I have shown that Brunton's idea of the Overself, although related to Emerson's idea of the Oversoul, is also related to ideas that were developed in this kind of theosophy. These ideas of the Overself, and Brunton's mentalistic interpretation of it, appear to have influenced the way that he reported his experiences with Ramaṇa. And throughout the time that he wrote about Ramaṇa, Brunton had an interest in occult powers or *siddhis*. The powers that Brunton was interested in included telepathy, and the silent radiating power of self-realized persons. Brunton reports both with respect to Ramaṇa.

Apart from his own ideas, Brunton relied on previous biographies of Ramaṇa by Humphreys and by Narasimha. Humphreys, whose biography was also used by Narasimha, was himself influenced by theosophy.

As we have seen, Ramaṇa read many of Brunton's books, including *A Search in Secret India*, *The Secret Path*, *A Search in Secret Egypt*, and *A Hermit in the Himalayas: The Journey of a Lonely Exile*.

Ramaṇa recommended these books for others to read, and he seems to have used Brunton's ideas to interpret his own teachings. This seems particularly evident in the idea of teaching by silent radiations of power.

Ramaṇa's disciples were also influenced by Brunton's ideas. Many of them came to see Ramaṇa only because they first read about Ramaṇa in Brunton's books. And Brunton's ideas like the Overself also appear in these disciples' own writings.

Brunton's works as a whole are also important in showing how his initial idealization of Ramaṇa was tempered by his subsequent experience. Devotees of Ramaṇa need to ask whether Ramaṇa's ethical stance is beyond criticism. I have explored some of these issues in my article "Jung, Ramaṇa Maharshi and Eastern Meditation."

Brunton's criticism of Ramaṇa was based largely on the ideas he learned from his subsequent guru V. Subrahmanya Iyer. Iyer's philosophy was not based on traditional Hinduism, but on neo-Hinduism—a Hinduism that has been influenced by western philosophy. It seems that Brunton and Iyer did not see how Ramaṇa himself was influenced by at least some ideas of neo-Hinduism. At the very least, Ramaṇa was

influenced by Hindu traditions that are different than traditional Vedanta. Ramaṇa was also influenced by Christian ideas. He had a good knowledge of many Biblical passages, and he quoted them freely, a fact that is often forgotten. I have explored these issues in my work "Ramaṇa Maharshi: Hindu and Non-Hindu Interpretations of a *Jivanmukta*."

The use of western ideas, whether in neo-Hinduism or in the western mystical tradition can be of help in interpreting Ramaṇa and in even correcting some of his views. I believe that Franz von Baader's Christian theosophy, and Baader's interpretations of Meister Eckhart and Jakob Boehme are useful in attempting to bridge eastern and western nondual traditions. But I do not think that Brunton's reliance on Madame Blavatsky's occult theosophy is useful. Nor do I agree with Brunton's attempted synthesis between western idealistic mentalism and Hindu *advaita*. Brunton's solution alternates between a dualism and a mentalistic monism. Brunton's philosophy is not nondual. And his emphasis on seeking occult powers is not in accord with either nondualism or with Ramaṇa's own ideas.

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