

This is a compilation of all the significant references in Nitya Chaitanya Yati's English writings to his time with Ramana Maharshi, from 1948 until the Maharshi's death in 1950, as well as his continuing inspirational influence thereafter. As many people found, Ramana Maharshi had a life-changing influence on Nitya, and he frequently made reference to it in his talks. Nitya's age in those years ranged from 23 to 25, during the period when he was a disciple of Dr. G.H. Mees.

Editorial information is in brackets.

Key:

BU – Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

DM – Psychology of Darsanamala

L&B – Love and Blessings (autobiography)

MOTS – Meditations on the Self

SOC – In the Stream of Consciousness

TA – That Alone

T&R – Therapy and Realization in the Bhagavad Gita

YS – Yoga Sutras (Living the Science of Harmonious Union)

For years I strongly believed in the dynamics of pedagogy, until I came under the spell of silence surrounding the person of Ramana Maharshi. (L&B 24)

It was in 1948 during my summer vacation that I first went to see Ramana Maharshi. As he was Dr. Mees' guru, I went to him with great expectations. I had read many accounts about him and considered it a rare opportunity to meet such a person.

Tiruvannamalai is a hot place. One does not feel quite comfortable there. But the morning hours are very fresh and lovely. The night abruptly comes to a close. This is followed by the golden light of the sun embracing everything, which in turn is accompanied by a very beautiful chanting of the priests.

Before going to see Ramana Maharshi in the ashram, I wanted to get a feeling for the few places in town that were associated with the early days of his tapas. I went first to the famous temple. Even though I wasn't much of a temple-going, deity-worshipping devotee, I stood before the sanctum looking at the drowsy flames of the temple lamps in that dark room. I kept absolutely still, imagining how the young Ramana first entered the temple without a ceremonial bath, yet drenched by a rain that had accidentally showered upon him. On the day I arrived, I was hoping to have a similar shower, but it didn't happen. Instead I perspired and my clothes were as wet as if I had been standing in the rain.

There were only a few people in the temple at the time. With someone's help I found the dark room in the basement where young Ramana had forgotten himself in bliss for days on end. According to the stories I'd read, his buttocks had been eaten away by ants or vermin. I went and sat in that sepulchral room, where a single lamp burned with a steady flame.

I felt tempted to go up onto the mountain and look at all the other places mentioned in his biography, but my curiosity to see the Maharshi was so strong that I went straight to the hall. There many people were seated around the figure of the Maharshi, who was lazily squatting on a wooden cot with a mattress on it. He was not conventionally dressed. He had only a t-string, like the local farmers wore. Even before entering the ashram I had seen many young and old people wearing t-strings, so when I saw Maharshi also wearing one it didn't surprise me. Under one arm he held a coiled white towel. On three sides of his bed men and women squatted on the floor, while on the fourth side there was a screen which served as a wall. Never in my life have I seen anyone so completely exposed to the public, day and night.

The Maharshi's bed was at the end of a fairly large hall, which was full of people most of the time. As everyone sat absolutely silent, you would never realize there were so many people present until you entered. Even after seeing the gathering

you didn't get the sense of being in a crowd, because each person was so much drawn inward, absorbed in themselves. Some people sat with their eyes closed. Many were dozing off. I saw a Catholic priest reading a book, probably his Bible. There was an old Muslim fakir with a rosary in his hand. He was counting the beads. From his lips I could see that he was silently muttering something. An old lady was copying a passage out of a book into her notebook. I saw a red-faced American whimpering, and occasionally sobbing and shedding tears.

The Maharshi sat erect. He looked like he was pondering over some abstract thought. His head was shaking slightly. My first impression was of an old man mildly suffering from Parkinson's disease.

My hero in those days was Swami Vivekananda. Like him I also worried about India's poverty, ignorance, and illiteracy, and its inability to organize dynamic work projects for groups of people in order for India to buck up and get out of the shackles of lethargy. The Maharshi sat before me like the concrete symbol of India's inaction.

For a while I felt sorry I had come. I didn't know why people were making such a fuss over someone who was not giving people any incentive to work hard to make India rich and beautiful. When the sun was about to set, I saw the Maharshi getting up and going out of the hall for his routine walk. I was told that for many years it had been his habit to walk around the hill. I followed him. He only walked for a short while. Then he sat on a rock.

It was just a change of place; otherwise he was exactly the same. People sat before him just as they had done in the hall. After a wash, which was done out in the open, he went back to his bed. Some Brahmins sat before him and chanted from the Taittiriya Upanishad. They also chanted some Vedic hymns, which I couldn't immediately decipher. The atmosphere was very reverent and serene, but my feeling persisted that the Maharshi was just lazy.

When I had first come, I had stood before Maharshi and saluted him, but he didn't take any notice of me. Being a young man with a lot of self-esteem and ego, I had wanted to impress everyone with my ability to chant the Gita. After a couple of days of just sitting there quietly and anonymously I became very bored, so I decided to leave. In India it is a custom not to approach or leave a saint without offering some present, so I went out and bought some oranges. I placed them on the ground near his feet and prostrated, even though I didn't have the least desire to bow before him. He took no notice of me. I thought he was treating me like a shadow or a dead man. I was filled with resentment. I wanted to walk away as though I had done nothing more than my duty.

For some reason or no reason, I lingered there for a moment. Then what a wonder! Maharshi's gaze, which had been floating over my head, became slightly tilted, and he looked straight into my eyes. It was as though two magnetic shafts were coming towards me. Both struck me at the same time, right in the middle of my heart. A great darkness began spreading around me, and I felt very dizzy. My body started trembling. I couldn't control myself. Soon it was as if my own consciousness was an unflickering flame placed in the vastness of a lake of darkness.

A sort of retrospection started unreeling my memory from the present to the past. It was just like watching my life played out in reverse. I was riveted to the scene, unable to move. Many things that had happened in my life passed before my eyes. Soon I remembered being back in my mother's womb. At one point I felt a strong physical shaking, and remembered hearing that my mother had fallen off a collapsing bridge while she was carrying me. I continued to retrogress, back before my conception to my existence as a mathematical entity defined only by vasanas and dharma. A great peace filled my entire being, as I became totally absorbed in the interstices of the cosmic matrix. After many years of search I had at last returned to the Source.

Eventually somebody tapped on my shoulder, and I came back to my senses. The Maharshi was no longer before me, and the people in the hall were also gone. Everyone had left for the dining hall. I was invited to come and eat. I walked as if in a dream. To my utter surprise, when I got to the dining hall I saw that the leaf on Maharshi's right hand was not claimed by anyone. I was asked to sit there. When food was served, Maharshi looked at my leaf as if to ascertain that every item served to him was also being given to me.

From that moment Ramana Maharshi was no longer a person to me. He was a presence, or rather he was The Presence. He was that which I was seeking, and he was everywhere. I needed no effort at all to be with him again. What held my heart with an imperiential enchantment was neither the memory of a social person nor the proximity of an unforgettable one. It was as if the duality between the perceiver and the perceived had become merged in a single unitive phenomenon.

That was how I met Ramana Maharshi for the first time. Thereafter I visited him off and on until a few days before his mahasamadhi. (L&B 139-42)

[The first chapter of L&B contains a hint of what Nitya experienced, without mentioning that he knew this from the preceding event]:

Now I shall tell you how I was born. When an animal has a vertebral column running beyond the length of its trunk, it becomes a tail. My memory also has a kind of tail, rooted far beyond the trunk of this present life in the folds of the prenatal past. Everyone's consciousness begins from this prenatal region, though only a few can recall it to mind.

When I think of the cosmos, my mind spreads out into the infinity of what we know as space and time. From the here and now it stretches out beyond the horizon to the far fringes of outer space, lingering there in bewilderment since whatever lies beyond

our known existence can never be more than a vague supposition. Similarly, as memory flows back from the present through the annals of history, plunging ever deeper into the fossils of prehistory and myth, the mind once again recoils on itself, unable to reach the beginning of time. And the imagination shoots into the future, piling possibilities upon possibilities until it too reaches a blind alley of bewilderment from an excess of complexity.

Such are the virtually immeasurable dimensions of our cosmos, the space-time continuum. But the cosmos marks only one of the poles of the axis of truth. The other pole or counterpart is marked by a point which has neither any dimension or location. This pure, spaceless, timeless, nameless aspect is the individual aspect of the all-embracing Absolute or Brahman. It throbs with a negative dynamism. In fact the movement is so subtle that it cannot even be termed a throb or a movement of any kind. Yet the negative charge precipitates the fusion of its own spiritual spark with a positive impulse from within the creative matrix of the cosmos.

Such an activated spark was the primal cause of my being. It became elongated as a mathematical line without thickness, on which were strung all my previous tendencies and talents. The pure ray which issued forth from the matrix of the cosmos and the dimensionless point became colored and split in two. One half became positively charged and attained the color of gold. The other was negatively charged and became blue. The two rays passed through the entire gamut of time and space, and through all names and forms and every kind of memory that anyone had ever had, and entered the psychophysical orbit of Earth from opposite directions. The golden ray circled the Earth clockwise and the blue ray circled counterclockwise, and both of them entered opposite halves of a ripe pomegranate. This very fruit happened to be in the garden of the haunted house where Raghavan and Vamakshy Amma had recently taken up residence. Seeing the fascinating glow of the fruit, Raghavan plucked it, cut it in two, and gave half to his wife; both of them ate their share.

In that mystic communion the negative ray of the spirit entered Raghavan's soul, while the positive ray spread itself throughout every part of his wife's organism. They became possessed of a great love for each other and felt a strong need to cling together. During this loving consummation the two rays again united and became a fertilized ovum. The dynamic rays, before becoming a fetus, took from Raghavan twenty-three chromosomes with the qualities of becoming poetic, intelligent, kind, open, frank, gentle and sensitive, and from Vamakshy Amma the qualities of being willful, austere, forgiving, generous, and so on. The fetus began to grow in the mother's womb to eventually become the present writer. (L&B 4-5)

[There is a second complementary version of Nitya's first encounter with Ramana Maharshi]:

I had this experience I have narrated many times to my friends here, but some of you are new, so I will repeat it. When I was in search of a master, I heard that Ramana Maharshi was a very great soul. I went to see him. My first impression was, "What a lazy man. He is wasting his time and the time of other people. India is a very poor country. People should work hard if they are to make a living, and if that country is going to rise up in any way. But here is a lazy man sitting on a couch. He is not teaching anything. He is not doing anything. He is only just sitting quiet." I thought that was a very bad example. I was very much inspired by the example of Vivekananda, who was so dynamic. He wanted to do many good things for the country, for the people. He went all over the world and gave inspiration to people to be active. Quite a contrast was this old man sitting there on his bed. I sat there before him. I didn't see anything great coming from him. He even looked rather ugly to me. When he got up and walked away I noticed he was limping. I asked myself, "What am I doing here?"

The second day passed, the third day passed, and it became a really boring affair to be there. I decided to go away. But even so, I

wanted to be good. Even though he was not worthy of adoration, I wanted to behave as a good man. So I went and purchased some oranges and came to see him again. I stood before him with the oranges, wanting to just say “I am going.” I bowed before him, but he did not look at me. I thought, “This fellow, he does not even have good manners. At the very least, he should behave as a social person.” Anyway, I just bent over to leave the oranges before him. Then I had a peculiar feeling to go back and sit down. I went back and sat. People were very, very quiet. Always this man was looking overhead, so I couldn’t make out where he was looking. But this time he lowered his head and looked into my face. He looked into my eyes.

My God. I felt as if suddenly the sun came out into the room as the two eyes of this man looked at me. I felt that I was becoming transparent before him. His looks were passing right through me like X-rays. I felt as if two shafts were coming from him and striking right in the center of my heart. I felt as if I were pinned there. I wanted to move, but I could not move. My whole body started shivering. Then I remembered that when Vivekananda was before Ramakrishna and Ramakrishna touched him, he felt some similar sensation. Vivekananda wanted to shout at Ramakrishna, “Don’t do this thing to me; I have my parents!” I also felt like calling out “Are you trying to hypnotize me? Don’t do this!” But I found I was tongue-tied and couldn’t speak a word. Only two minutes before I was behaving like a normal human being. Now I was completely changed. For no reason tears started coming from my eyes and they were flowing down my cheeks. My whole body shook as if I was electrified. Then the world became very dark. I was seeing nothing but darkness. And in that darkness I saw the previous day and the day before that. In a reverse order I started seeing everything that happened in my life, until I went back to that stage where I was a fetus in the womb of my mother. It was all like a film played backwards.

When the vision faded, I found that my eyes were not closed, they were open. His eyes were still looking into mine. But now it

was no more like an unbearable light coming, but a very soothing and compassionate, very loving look, such as the look of a mother. There was great tenderness. I sat there and wept with joy and also some sort of grief over what I had seen and how the life I was leading was so miserable and meaningless to me, even though I'd never felt that way previously. Then somebody came and touched me and said it was meal time. Everyone was gone. I got up and walked like a man in a trance. When I went to the dining hall, I saw Maharshi sitting there for his meal, and next to him a banana leaf was laid for me. I didn't know how I merited that very special treatment on that day, to sit next to him. He was careful to see that I was served everything in a proper manner. Then I ate.

Afterwards, when I left his physical presence, I found that a great change had come upon me. It was no longer necessary for me to be in physical proximity to him, to sit before him. I could carry his presence with me anywhere I went.

This is what I mean by the coming together of two minds, of the seer's mind and the seeker's mind, until all the intervening hindrances are removed. But it won't go all in one stretch, or in an instant. It goes step by step. Then it happens by an act of grace. When it happens, you know without a doubt that it happened. In all other cases it is only a matter of your trying to please another person, or trying to show devotion. Trying to show devotion is very different from spontaneously experiencing devotion. When that devotion is established we may say sraddha begins. When the sraddha begins to operate, a transformation will come. The transformation comes as the result of an osmosis. (T&R 60-3)

There once was a man who came to the hills of Arunacala when he was only thirteen or fourteen. He did not try to read and write or listen to discourses. He didn't try to make money, make a living, or perform any manipulations so that someone would take pity on him and give him food. He just gave up, feeling it was all over. He didn't do anything. Then after twenty years the whole world turned to him. Around him was an atmosphere of

transcendent peace that radiated to all. At least eighty percent of the people who went there did not go to listen to him, because he wasn't saying anything. Occasionally someone forced him to talk, but most of the genuine people there weren't interested in any spoken words. There is another medium which transcends the spoken word, that prevails and is as positive or more positive than anything one could experience outwardly. Such was the hilltop retreat of Ramana Maharshi.

We are not in any way referring to a hopelessly difficult attainment. The mystical depth in question is in no way an intellectual exercise to be scientifically gauged. This is why at the very beginning, in the opening verse, we were asked to approach the whole subject with a sense of surrender, a deep devotion, with absolute reverence to the unnamable that shines by its own light both as the known and the unknown. The Guru recommends a greater acceptance of the sense of awe and wonder. We must stand before this seeming impossibility with wonder, allowing ourselves not to do, but to be done with. (TA 370-1)

I know of another state in which the "inner coordinator" pushes the senses and the mind out of the way to assume a solitary role of its own. I was initiated into this strange phenomenon in one of my encounters with Ramana Maharshi. When I went to see the Maharshi, I found him sitting on a wooden couch with his eyes open. As I stood before him his eyes were almost level with mine, and I thought he was looking at me. I greeted him the Indian way. There was no response. He sat there looking past me, unblinking. How could he miss seeing me and my reverential gesture, I wondered. I moved a few steps closer to him and bowed again. It was no use. He was sitting there in complete oblivion.

He was not in a state of hypnosis or catatonia. The Maharshi looked relaxed, fresh, and even vigorous. Many others in the hall where he sat were also trying to catch his attention. Some were prostrating before him. Some placed costly presents at his feet. Some cleared their throats and even ventured to make a request or put a query. Some shed tears. One or two were sitting and sobbing

by the side of his couch. Some were in meditation and others were quietly reading or writing. From the Maharshi's face the impression I gathered was that he was alone. His aloneness was not an exclusive loneliness, however. It was characterized by an air of universal inclusiveness.

It took a long time for me to learn what causes the oblivion of spiritual absorption. It is a state in which all individual or specific forms melt into a universal formlessness and all names dissolve into the Universal Word, which cannot be spelled, which cannot be named, and which cannot even be articulated.

Both absolute consciousness and absolute unconsciousness share the same qualities of insensitivity and inarticulation. A beam of light, which paradoxically is darker than the unconscious due to being devoid of any sensitivity or consciousness, and which can be classified for that reason with a crude stone lying buried in the dark, can symbolize the world of dead matter that has no mind. Its counterpart is the self-luminous spirit that is too universal and all-embracing to cerebration or articulate by itself, except when its self-luminous effulgence is caught in the hinterland of matter engulfed in the ocean of Spirit; just as in the case of the eye that sees the light, but the light does not see either the object it illuminates or the eye which is solely dependent on it. In this coming together of spirit and matter in the experience of sight, the eye appreciates light as its greatest benefactor, and in turn the light places an encomium on the eye as the true window of the soul of the Universe.

He who sees everything as a tapestry of form and meaning that is woven on the warp and woof of matter and spirit is no longer tyrannized by the grotesqueness of any form or the tragic connotation of any meaning. Such a blessed soul will always see all specific forms as ripples on the infinite ocean of the formless and all meanings as a commentary of the one inexhaustible Word.
(MOTS 101-2)

Nataraja Guru writes, in his biography of Narayana Guru and in his own autobiography, that whenever the guru and the disciple met the guru always called the disciple's attention to some basic problem of philosophical or contemplative interest. They always had very interesting discussions. The last time he went to see the guru, he was sitting unconcerned. Nataraja Guru thought that was strange, because he always took such an interest in his disciple and brought up a question for discussion. But this time the guru was sitting there completely indifferently. He thought, "Probably the guru is in some state of meditation. He has not seen me. I'll wait." He waited, but there was only silence. He ventured to put a question, but the guru did not break his silence. He just sat there silently. Then he knew: "This is the last answer to all the questions, forever." It was into that silence he had to merge. It was from that he had to seek his answers.

For those who had the opportunity to be in the presence of Ramana Maharshi it was a very profound experience. Most of the time he sat in deep silence, but he was not meditating. He was sitting with his eyes open. He always looked just ahead. Several times I tried to determine exactly where he was looking, but I could never make out whether he was seeing outside or inside, something or nothing. At times I tried to catch his attention, but it made no impression. He was totally unaffected.

It is a little like being drunk, without normal orientation. There is no purpose, no questions or answers, no 'I' and no 'other', nothing to do. You have in a sense done everything, so there is nothing more to do. (TA 692-3)

From ancient times down to, say, Ramana Maharshi in our time, [the rishis] have all taken the question, "Who am I?" and diligently followed the track of where it led them. That path took them away from all the superficial disturbances to the pure light, which we have just now placed under the tree as the contemplative witness. Such a seer is by no means a derelict, though people entangled with masks and surfaces might call him one. In terms of

value, he is working harder and more effectively than most very busy people. He is exercising and experiencing great purification. (TA 76)

Many people used to ask Ramana Maharshi what they could do for the world. He always asked them, “Who is doing for whom?” Thus their focus was turned to their own selves. If I want to make you happy, I myself should be a happy person. If I am sad, how can I make you happy? To make you smile, I should first of all know how to smile. I should know what peace is to bring peace to you. We have to discover the peace within ourselves, the joy within ourselves. This can be done only if the friendship that we cultivate with the spirit within becomes continuous, unbroken.

This is like magic: your world tomorrow won't be the same. You live in exaggeration. This world is not as bad as you paint it. What is madness? Madness is a positive or a negative exaggeration of the mind. If you see a thing in its natural value or worth, not more or less, it is a sane attitude. But we tend to exaggerate. (TA 112)

I still remember the very last day of Ramana Maharshi's life on earth. The ashram premises were overflowing. Thousands of people drawn from different parts of the world were sitting together silently in an atmosphere imbued with such a spiritual presence that even the most insensitive could feel it. After prayers on that memorable evening, the spontaneous chanting of the devotees continued for a very long time. It was followed by a grim silence that was broken only by the wailing cries of the ashram peacocks. I was standing outside the Maharshi's room holding onto the bars of the window, and was silently admiring the peace that emanated from his face even in that state of excruciating pain.

All of a sudden I felt as if something was passing over my head. When I looked up, I was amazed to see a huge, luminous object almost the size of the moon slowly moving toward the peak of the Arunachala hills. Was it a meteor? I pointed the moving

light out to a swami standing next to me. Then everyone noticed it. The entire multitude, filled with a sense of wonder as well as an awful dread, rose to their feet and marveled at it. I feared for the Maharshi's life. Though it was hard to turn away from that luminous wonder, I forced myself to look in again at his face. It was all over. The light that filled him was gone.

A minute before it had looked as if the One Spirit that animates all bodies had still been present in him. With its passing the tie of unity in the crowd snapped. There was a great commotion. Some people fainted. In their haste to have a last look at the body of their beloved Master, people lost control and stampeded over those who were lying on the ground in grief or who had fainted.

The death of the body seemed to me to be the birth of the unbounded spirit. Until that moment the Maharshi was only in his body. When he breathed his last, it was as if he entered the hearts of all those who loved him. The perishable body was holding within it the Imperishable, which is the same as what Ramanuja calls the Immortal Immanent Lord of all beings.

Millions have walked the paths of spirituality, and millions more are on the way. Even so, only rarely does a seer of perfection like a Ramana Maharshi, a Lao Tzu or a Buddha come to grace the caravansary of life.

Many seekers put their bodies and minds through the most rigorous forms of discipline, undergoing great privations. They sleep on the floor, walk around naked, eat from their palm or their beggar's bowl, hold their tongue in silence, and flee from the warmth of others' love, and yet their spirit remains shrouded in darkness.

It seems the all-absorbing light of Realization is invariably preceded by a blinding darkness of spiritual ego. To dispel the cloud of ignorance and tear away the veil of the spiritual ego, there is no other way than kneeling down in humility and praying for Grace. Man's prayer from below is always reciprocated by the

raining down of Grace from above. Until the alpha and omega are linked together by Grace there is no true Realization. (MOTS 38-9)

Usually [Vedantins] think that this world is unreal, but Narayana Guru asserts this is the only reality. There is no other.

Ramana Maharshi had a kind of sarcoma, a very painful form of cancer. His left side was tearing away from his body. Thousands of people were sitting around in deep despair. They themselves had no cancer; they were not suffering from anything physical. Only one man had this dreadful disease, but there was no joy in anyone. All were very sad. Even the ashram peacock's cry was like a terrible lamentation, as though it were voicing the anguish of all the thousands of people sitting there. Among them were people from America, Japan, all over the world. There were Hindus and Muslims, Catholics and Protestants, children and old folks, beggars and millionaires, heads of government, doctors. This huge variety of all kinds of people were united in having a very painful time.

Maharshi's sister came to his bed and started screaming. She was crying aloud. Maharshi looked at her and said, "What is the matter?" She said, "It's you! It's you! You are going away!" She had no disease, but she was the one who was crying and he was sitting there serene, calm and unaffected. As she cried, he added, "Going? Where? Where can I go? And where is to go?" He did not see any place to go nor did he see anyone going anywhere. This is the only place. There is nowhere else to go.

When I was a student, I felt very miserable. The whole college situation seemed meaningless, so I wrote a letter to my principal stating I was going away. He sent back a note asking me to come and see him before I left. When I went to his office, he invited me to lunch with his wife and him. He said "It's a fine thing that you want to leave on finding that this place is not meaningful to you anymore. That's very good. But tell me, when you go away, are you going to take your mind with you also, or are you going to leave that here?"

"Surely I take my mind with me wherever I go."

“That means you’ll be taking the same sorrow, sadness, suspicion, doubts, misery, everything with you. It will be the same in the place where you go because you are taking all this with you. If you can leave your mind here and run away from it, fine.”

This is so true. I get letters almost every day from people who say that they want to get away, to run away. Go away where? We think all the misery is because we are with certain people and certain situations. When we move away it will again be a wonderful world. If you can create a wonderful world in another place, you can create it where you are now, too. (TA 144-5)

My Guru is bedridden. The left side of his body is paralyzed. Today I was watching the physiotherapist exercising his disabled hand and leg. The therapist would have been happy if the Guru could have raised or moved his leg even a tenth of a centimeter, but it remained inert and asleep. He tried to hold him in an upright position, but even that was not successful.

Before his stroke the Guru was a great traveler. To him all the major oceans, the land routes around the globe, and the friendly sky are all very familiar. In his wanderings he had the joy of hiking in the Rockies of America, the Alps of Switzerland, and the rugged cliffs of the Himalayas in India. Now he has not even the strength to raise his foot. Nonetheless, the disability of his body has not in any way altered his image in my mind.

An old friend and devotee of the Guru who came from a far-off country to visit him marveled at his absolute ease of mind and for his having no word of complaint about his physical illness. This took me back to the last days of Ramana Maharshi, on whom I was attending with the same devotion when the last vestige of his *prarabdha*, his past life karma, was being worked out in the form of a malignant sarcoma. The Maharshi’s left hand was dangling as a piece of decayed flesh. The cancer had eaten away the skin of the left half of the chest, and it was spreading down his left side. Eminent doctors of India’s Government Medical Service, traditional physicians of the Ayurvedic system, Homeopaths,

Unani Hakims, Faith Healers and Naturopaths were helplessly standing by watching the ghastly sight of the cancer ruthlessly licking away the great Master's body. I have read a similar account of the throat cancer of Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Lover and mystical seer of Bengal. In physical terms, Narayana Guru's end was also painful.

Whether Sri Ramakrishna or Narayana Guru, Ramana Maharshi or Nataraja Guru, whenever any of those great Masters opened their mouths, they always spoke words of wisdom and love which not only comforted those who had the good fortune to be sitting at their feet, but the undying echoes of their words still live on in the hearts of millions of people. Nobody cares any more that their bodies were as perishable as those of any other person, or that pus, blood and dirt came from them when their bodies decayed. (MOTS 37-8)

[Nitya often cited Ramana Maharshi in his explications of certain key ideas. The first entry below is included in the story of his commitment to discipleship with Nataraja Guru]:

My surrender to the Guru's cause and my initiation all happened in a comic manner. Now many years later I understand that the gravity of my gesture and all its implications were a million times greater and more profound than I realized. Suddenly it occurred to me that Ramana Maharshi had probably advised me to read about the Great Tibetan Yogi Milarepa in order to prepare me to be the disciple of Nataraja Guru, who in so many ways resembled Marpa, Milarepa's fiercely absolutist guru. (L&B 150)

Do I initiate action?

Did I not try to become a Ramana Maharshi? It didn't work. I also tried to sit quiet for many months without any word or activity. It was like a young bull trying to fast and meditate. My mind always wanted to graze in new pastures. Eventually I found out that was not my trip. My gregariousness has become somewhat

chronic, and my hands are always hungry for action. As a young man I initiated several ventures and got into endless troubles over them. I think I've learned my lesson. I do not any longer initiate any new programs of action, but that does not mean I wantonly avoid or escape action situations. (MOTS 44)

It is not by breaking away from life or shunning anything that one finds realization. Nature, with its illumination, its action and its obscuration, is going on endlessly. But that obscuration, action and illumination are only processes that are happening within the light. You are the light. You are the seer, and the process is what you are seeing. This differentiating process is what you call Nature. Nature is thus not an outside entity, not an outside factor. It is the seen. In what is experienced, there is no outside or inside. By relentless search, by continuous contemplation, one always knows this. Then you don't have to have this terrible struggle.

Ramana Maharshi told all the people who came to him to just ask "Who am I?" He didn't intend it to be turned into just another egotistic trip, with someone sitting for ten hours and asking "Who am I?" "What are you doing?" "I'm doing my *sadhana*, asking myself who I am for ten hours." No, man, it's not that way.

You need to be a participant in all this. Live your natural life. But in and through this life, see the light which you are. When you ask, "Who am I?" it is not as a special discipline. And yet it is the only discipline, going deeper and deeper into everything you experience. You may be taking a cup of tea, eating a loaf of bread, or sharing an experience with a friend, being intimate with someone. In all these you just need your transactional mind. But that is only one aspect of the mind. There is a deep awareness in you which is silently witnessing, constantly questioning, and continuously flowing as an all-permeating consciousness. It is calm, serene, all-filling. It is both on the surface and in the depths.

Then the feverishness of your search drops away. It becomes steady, gradual, and very thorough-going. You no longer try to arrive at an event called realization. You are not looking for one

single experience of an overwhelming nature. In one sense you should always be overwhelmed, because there cannot be anything more overwhelming than this. You are tinier than a point, and yet in that speck of consciousness there is a vastness, an infinitude even, caught in a timeless, spaceless awareness. The infinite cycles of time and the vast space of the cosmos are all in an unutterable, silent consciousness. (TA 425-6)

A wise contemplative seer like Ramana Maharshi complements his indifferent resignation (*upeksha*) and absolute devotion (*sraddha*) with searching questions to gain intuitive insight (*vicara*). In this third type of seeker Realization is not a singular event. Every moment has its own unique revelation to make. Wisdom lies in one's effortless flow from one intuitive vision of the Real to another beautiful and soul-stirring vision of Truth. The attitude is: mind you, you are right. Whatever route you choose, walk on, and you will also reach where others have reached. (MOTS 99)

After a couple of days Bill and Diana regained normalcy and came to see me. They both were sad that the experience of being one with the indivisibility of cosmic consciousness was so short-lived, and they had to once again face the actualities of life as a wretched couple in the Oregonian society.

When these friends narrated their experience it reminded me of Ramana Maharshi, whose buttocks were eaten away by ants while he remained in a state of absorption for a number of days in the underground chamber of the temple of Tiruvannamalai in South India. Nobody applied ice to him to make him regain his body consciousness, but once he came out of his absorption he attended to the needs of his body like any other normal man. There was one difference. The vision of oneness in which he was absorbed did not leave him to the very end of his life.

However vast are the fields of the cosmos and the worlds of the psyche, any experience of cosmologic or psychologic import

can be seen as coming under the category of either sameness or the other. The sameness to which we are exposed in the state of deep sleep, or under the effect of psychedelic drugs, or yogic trances is transient. Only Realization stabilizes the perennial vision of sameness in spite of the ever-changing pattern of the other that frequents the mind. There are aids and shortcuts to kicks, but there is no shortcut to realization. (MOTS 137)

It is a great device of Patañjali to assign to prana such an important role in pacifying both the body and mind as the aspirant observes how the gross air that enters the nostrils helps the digestive system to oxidize the ingredients of the food that goes into the stomach and intestines, then how that nourishment supplies energy to the central nervous system to become not only sensations and feelings, but also to develop a stream of consciousness by which the entire life is governed. At one level prana is only gross air and at another level it is the subtlest thoughts with which we envision the supreme truth. There is nothing more important than prana to help us to have an all-embracing discipline that can affect both the body and mind. Unfortunately, some people, not knowing the intention of Patañjali, do all kinds of breathing exercises. Seeing the grotesqueness of such exercises, Ramana Maharshi described them as the torturing of prana (*prana pidanam*). (YS 117-18)

[Lastly, the following are only loosely connected with the Maharshi, but are fun to read anyway]:

The Christian notion of mysticism is an act of surrender to do service to others as an instrument of God. The favorite examples are Joan of Arc in the battlefield, St. Francis among the lepers, and St. Teresa organizing charitable institutions. This is what Bergson calls the “model of the throbbing machine.” The other variety is what is seen in the models of the meditating Buddha or Sri Ramakrishna or Ramana Maharshi in states of beatitude. In

oriental mysticism, there is no idea of the “other.” The so-called other person is seen as one’s own Self, so there is no dualistic sense of duty to do service to oneself or to another. Instead, they only keep themselves true to their own inner rhythm that flows in harmony with the universal rhythm.

In a country where for centuries people have acted because of environmental forces, such as mineral deposits and consequent gold rushes, no realization makes much sense without relating it to action. Tales of yogis and seers attaining God-realization, brought to this country through books and by word of mouth, have fired the enthusiasm of many people to seek God-realization. This has somehow created in most people’s minds an idea of a far off realm to which one has to move for realization.

There is no world other than this, and there is no experience that is removed from one’s earthly life. However, the idea of worldly responsibility should be changed to an understanding of the world in terms of the Divine. (L&B 358-9)

A person fully opened up to the call of the spirit is called in Tamil *turavi*. There is a radical note contained in that small word. Literally it means “opening the door and walking onto the highway.” There are similar radical elements in the calls of all masters. The advice Jesus Christ gave was for the seeker to deny his self, take up his cross and follow him. Buddha asked each of his disciples to leave his homestead, shave his head and eat from a begging bowl. The Prophet instructed the true follower of Allah to commit himself without any reserve or compromise.

The spiritual models before us such as Lao-tzu, Naropa and Milarepa, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, Guru Nanak, Bahauallah, Sri Ramakrishna, Narayana Guru and Ramana Maharshi all share the same characteristic of walking away from the established haven of protection and security into the challenge of the unknown. What happened to every one of them is the theme I hold out as most valuable to me, and I commend their example to all those who are likewise contemplating abandoning the warmth

of their own hearths.

All our early training at home, in school, on the street, in the marketplace, and even in church is to convince us to adopt the ways and means of successful transaction. We are taught how to labor and get its fruit, how to learn and practice over and over again to obtain efficiency, and how to apply a well structured formula or technique to get a desired effect. Afterwards when we come to seek the spirit, we presume that we are expected to do something similar to achieve results. But masters like the Buddha and Christ and the rishis of the Upanishads draw a distinction between the world of transactional gains and the world of spiritual attainments, pointing out that transactional methods only serve us well in their appropriate context. The Indian saints call the world of transactional gains one of “small pleasures” and the world of spiritual attainment “the great happiness.”

The absolutist path is certainly not conceived with a democratic or socialistic bias. It is followed by only a few people. What is important in their path is not “laboring and finding” or “learning and practicing,” but how thoroughly they have made themselves available to a radical change or transformation. This transformation is happening not only as an event within the seeker’s psyche, but it also fashions a world, a world that can grow around them and can continue to expand in different directions for several years or sometimes even for centuries after their death.
(SOC 41-2)

In the university I took philosophy with the sole intention of living the life of a sannyasi. Even before being properly initiated in sannyasa, I was wearing the ochre clothes of a renunciate. If people asked my name away from the college, I would give whatever sannyasi name that spontaneously came to mind, such as Advaitananda or Satchidananda or something. I was emboldened to behave like that because of something I had read in Swami Vivekananda’s biography. His guru Sri Ramakrishna was not a sannyasi of any regular order and didn’t wear ochre clothes, but

when he passed away Vivekananda conducted a homam (fire ceremony) in which he burned his own clothes and hair. After that he assumed the name Vivekananda and gave sannyasa to all his brother disciples.

I thought I could also do the same thing, but I thought I should have a guru to initiate me. Ramana Maharshi didn't give sannyasa to anyone, nor did he call anyone his disciple, but he didn't object to anyone thinking of him as their guru, either. So I decided to go to Maharshi before he died. I told Professor Gopala Pillai, principal of the Government Sanskrit College in Trivandrum, of my intention, and he said he wanted to go with me.

I had heard that a person wanting to take sannyasa should first obtain his mother's blessing, so I went to her. My father was not home. It was almost impossible for my father to go anywhere any more, but on that day he was not at home. I told my mother that I wanted her blessings because I had decided to take sannyasa. Her face lit up. She smiled and put her hands on my head and said, "Long have I been waiting for this day. Even before you were born I was praying to God that I should have a son who would continue the works of Narayana Guru." I was expecting my mother to make an emotional scene but she stayed calm. I returned to Trivandrum and boarded the train with Professor Pillai.

In those days I had a friend in the Ramana Ashram. His name was Jay Ram. On a previous occasion when I had been there, there was another friend called Sri Ram, who as of 1990 was head of the Ananda Ashram in Kanhangad. In those days we always moved around as a team, introducing ourselves as Sri Ram, Jay Ram, and Jay Jay Ram.

Jay Ram had become Swami Ramadevananda. I asked him to be a proxy for Maharshi to give me sannyasa. I told him I would be treating Maharshi as my guru but that after the homam he could give me the ochre cloth and call me by my new name, Nitya Chaitanya, meaning "eternal consciousness." He said a more proper name would be Swami Nityananda, because only brahmacharis are called Chaitanya. I told him that I hated the word

swami and that I always thought ananda in a sannyasi's name was presumptuous. I wanted to avoid both.

Instead of swami I adopted the term yati, so after the ceremony he called me Yati Nitya Chaitanya. But people were reluctant to address me without the appellation of swami, so they called me Yati Nitya Chaitanya Swami. Next I brought Yati to the tail end and made it Nitya Chaitanya Yati. As fate would have it, when Nataraja Guru passed away I was accepted in the hierarchy of the Narayana Gurukula as his successor and the name became fixed as Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati. However, like Maharshi I never thought of anyone as my disciple, so the title of Guru sits on my head as a crown that doesn't fit. That's how I assumed my present name.

I returned from Tiruvannamalai with my head shaved, attire changed permanently to the sannyasi's ochre colored robes, and a new name earnestly passed on to all around. The world I lived in was outwardly the same, yet inside some steady transformations were taking place. Nataraja Guru described the process as the policeman growing into his uniform to make himself worthy to wear it. It was certainly something like that.

I remembered a couple of pieces of advice Nataraja Guru had given me long before. Youthful sannyasa can end up in the fiasco of youthful folly, and theatrical sannyasa might bring glamour, but its shallowness will be too transparent for the world to accept as genuine. So I decided not to put on any airs and not to justify whatever I was doing to anyone else. The first big change was to restrain my need to impress everyone with my philosophical observations and judgments. (L&B 142-4)