



Provisions

One who is on the Quest needs provisions for the journey; such are these. We hope some are also visions-forward.

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Fr. Laurence Freeman on Ramana Maharshi

Here is more evidence, from a prominent Christian, of the influence of India's spirituality on that faith. In this case the influence is that of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Laurence Freeman is a Benedictine monk who directs the international center of the World Community for Christian Meditation. Below are extracts from his article, A Hindu Saint: A Sign to Indian Christians.

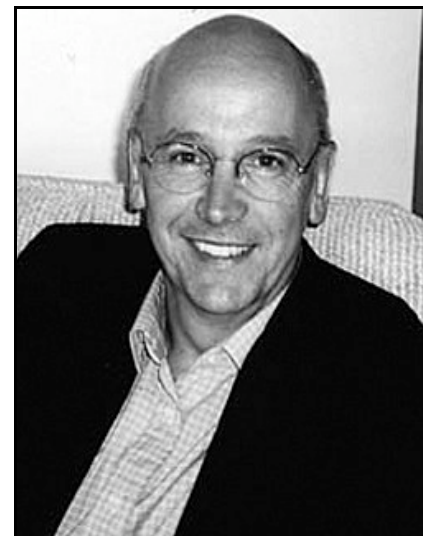
Carl Jung wrote of [Ramana Maharshi]: "He is genuine and, in addition to that, something quite phenomenal. In India he is the whitest spot in a white space." But Jung admitted that he chose not to visit him while he was in India because he feared the experience would derail his evolving theory of the psyche.

How does the story of Ramana Maharshi help us to understand India and the challenges facing Indian Christianity today? First, it points to an archetypal experience which Sri Ramana embodied but which can be seen also in the lives of Christian saints. There in an intriguing parallel here with St. Benedict, who also abandoned the world as a child to become a hermit and later, the heart of a community. Or with St. Catherine of Siena, who withdrew dramatically from her family life as a young girl to concentrate on her overwhelming experience of the Divine. Above all, Ramana teaches us the priority of inner experience in Indian spirituality . . .

Most Indian Christians, however, have never even heard of Sri Ramana Maharshi, though there are streets named after him in most Indian cities, and would be deeply shocked to hear him compared with Christian saints. It was not so long ago that they were

told that Hindus were devil-worshippers and even taught to spit when passing a temple. Among many ordinary Christians in India there remains a deep fear and ignorance of their country's spiritual culture.

This Western isolationist and exclusivist conditioning makes Indian Christians strangers in their own land. Modern changes of approach in Christian formation and catechetics remain largely superficial, even nominal. Seminaries are full but even their rectors and spiritual



Laurence Freeman

directors express concern at the lack of interest in the spiritual, experiential dimension of their studies....

Yet, however colorful and intense their devotions to Mary, the Sacred Heart, the Infant of Prague or St. Anthony, Christian churches of India cannot rival the sheer exuberance and carnival atmosphere of the Hindu temples such as the Siva temple at Tiruvannamalai where the young Ramana took refuge. There you find a religion of total sensory

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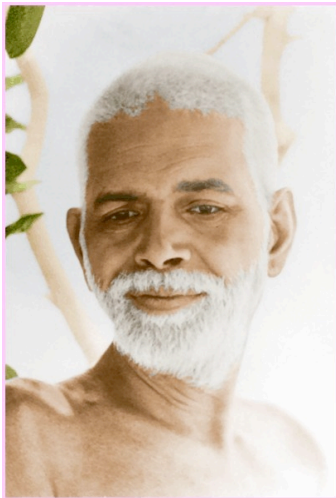
Fr. Freeman on Ramana Maharshi

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bombardment: traders in beads, incense and offerings; elephants; glistening oil-soaked statues and linga; loud music; crowds flowing from one shrine to the next for its pujas.

India simultaneously sustains a vast breadth of experience in many dimensions, from the sensory to the imperceptible. Arunachala – to take it as a symbol of Indian religion – is the icon of silence, the profoundest, most universal interiority. Yet at the same time and without contradiction it is the temple of devotional worship in which no god would ever be refused a shrine.

The depth of Indian spiritual experience is radically linked to this breadth of religious tolerance. Hindu



Sri Ramana Maharshi

fundamentalism is therefore, more than any other form of religious intolerance a self-contradiction. The nationalist BJP party, with its policy of India-for-the-Hindus, can bloodily stir the surface passions, never deeply repressed in India, but it could never represent India. Far more representative of the flexibility of Indian identity at this level are

the Hindu schools that brazenly call themselves “convent schools” in order to move up market, or the Muslims who begged crosses from their Christian friends to wear during the riots in Bhopal, or Mother Teresa's Hindu admirers in Calcutta who revere her as a manifestation of the goddess Kali.

A Christianity that could justly be called Indian would have to show a continuous way of progress from the temple to the mountain, from devotionism to meditation. Christianity in India, however, is Western and conceptual, not experiential; and the

Catholic Church is overwhelmingly Roman with a centralizing authority and emphasis on dogma foreign to the Indian spirit.... But the central Indian experience of spiritual transcendence, of advaita or non-duality, the stillness of inner awakening that calls the universe to attention, and which is the underlying unity of humanity, is rarely felt, and even more rarely encouraged among Indian Christians.

The revival of the Christian contemplative tradition which is silently transforming Western Christianity, particularly among the laity, is just beginning to stir in India. Small Christian groups are forming and a recent seminar of meditation teachers in Bangalore concluded with great promise and enthusiasm. And there are centers, ashramas like Shantivanam, where this deeper spiritual life of Christian faith is being lived and taught. But these ashramas were pioneered not by Indian but by immigrant Christians, the luminous missionaries of unity such as Henri Le Saux and Bede Griffiths. Now their generation has passed and the Christian ashrama movement in India is confused and doubtful about its identity and purpose....

India – and Sri Ramana Maharshi – teaches the world that depth of experience requires breadth of tolerance. This depth and breadth of spiritual life is exemplified by Jesus, who fulfilled his own religious tradition and rose into life-giving Spirit for all humanity. It is a great challenge to Christianity anywhere today to make the necessary distinction between the uniqueness it claims and the intolerance it must shun – and nowhere is the potential reward greater than in India....

Christianity in India has long and bravely witnessed through its social work to the absolute value of each human life. The story of Ramana Maharshi shows in what that value consists spiritually, in terms of ultimate human significance. On the day Christians can revere and understand the experience of Ramana Maharshi, India and the Church will both be changed.

– Excerpts reprinted from the February 11, 1995 issue of The Tablet, a Catholic journal.

Vedantic Universalism?

In the February/March issue of *ProVisions*, we asked for responses to the article by **Shivaya Subrahmaniyaswami** on neo-Vedantic universalism. Below you will find two of these – the first by member and devotee **Robert Schofield III**, the second by **Swami Yogeshananda**.

The piece in the February/March *ProVisions* from one of Sivaya Subrahmaniyaswami's editorials criticizes neo-Hindu, neo-Vedantic universalism in an ambivalent way. According to the author, this universalism is neither sufficiently universal nor sufficiently Hindu. My response presented here is personal and not scholarly.

My personal spiritual path has always been universal. I was brought up in the institutional Christian church, but eventually became disillusioned that many were little more than social gatherings, and that some used the Christ's message of love to spread bigotry and hatred.

On one of my trips to India, I encountered an old fellow at the entrance to a holy place who tried to sell me a thin pamphlet on the Buddha for the equivalent of a quarter. Probably taking me for a Christian, his sales pitch was, “No blood has ever been spilled promoting this philosophy.” Even though I'm not sure that that is strictly true, the thought appealed and continues to appeal to me.

I read Alan Watts and reveled in the Zen idea of “beginners mind.” I read Christopher Isherwood, and his adoption of Vedanta rather late in his life intrigued me. I meditated in the Transcendental Meditation style popular in the '60s. All these influences made of me, I suppose, a spiritual dilettante – picking and sampling what suited me. But this also gave me what Shivaya Subrahmaniyaswami calls a “vision of the oneness of paths and its avoidance of the dissension and disagreement that religions can indulge in.” Without this vision, I would have had no path at all.

Writing in 1991, Sivaya Subrahmaniyaswami states, “Neo-Hindu, neo-Vedantic universalism is burgeoning these days.” In two of the quoted paragraphs he then says, “Hindu universa-

lism ... is seldom truly universal.” But then he says, “universalism can engender a wishy-washy approach to the serious business of seeking the Divine.” So, what he calls neo-Vedanta is not truly universal, and then it's not universal enough. I'm not sure what he wants!

He also says, “Another problem with Hindu universalism is its survivability.” If our Atlanta Vedanta group can be considered “neo-,” then we have certainly burgeoned for the fifteen years since the editorial was written. The test of whether we will long survive as a group is what we are wrestling with now. However, this question for us is political and not religious. The answer will depend in large measure on Belur Math, and not on whether we are sufficiently Hindu. In general, the universal nature of Vedanta, as it is practiced in the west today, will probably increase, not decrease, its survivability. For me, at least, our embracing the truth in all religions is extremely timely in this world of war and hatred.

Finally, he does seem to approve of Sri Ramakrishna's universalism saying “his cosmic vision was inextricably linked to his Hinduism.” He also approves the Sai Baba movement as, “unabashedly Hindu and those who approach it are taken by the hand and drawn nearer to the Sanatana Dharma, not away from it.”

I feel this author is actually ambivalent on universalism. In the end, he seems at least to approve a major message I take from our study: that the world will not be at peace until the world's religions are at peace. That, for me, increases the strength and survivability of the Vedanta I know.

– Robert Schofield III

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Vedantic Universalism? *(cont.)*

The Swami complained of the “drawbacks” of Hindu universalism, asserting in the first place, that it is seldom universal. “I cannot think of a single group,” he says, “that draws equitably from all traditions.” But universalism as we understand it does not mean that a group has rituals or doctrines or scripture lessons or prayers or hymns or practices compiled from all the world's great religions. It means that one has reverence for all of those, as valid means to spiritual attainment, for their adherents. (For that matter, in Atlanta we do use chants from Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Wicca, etc.) As Swami Vivekananda famously said, “I shall go to the mosque of the Muslim; I shall enter the Christian's church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhistic temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and in his Law. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to see the Light which enlightens the heart of every one. Not only shall I do all these, but I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future.” To our mind, this is a true expression of Hindu universalism.

The second problem Subrahmaniyaswami found in current universalism is “a wishy-washy approach to the serious business of seeking the Divine.” Here we are completely in agreement. It is to the credit of restrictive, narrowly-focused groups that they often plunge their followers into the depths of spiritual practice and produce proponents focused and powerful. The downside of that is the upcropping of fanatics, of whom we see plenty of late. Certainly we need to go deep; those who avoid doing so often flounder about in a froth of religious ecumenism, taking it as the expression of freedom. As in Sri Ramakrishna's parable, they dig shallow wells for water that lies deep. “What I want to propagate,” said Swami Vivekananda, “is a religion which is as deep as it is broad and as broad as it is deep.”

In his editorial Subrahmaniyaswami also deplores the “transcending of Hindu dharma” by the universalists. The true universalist does not contravene any

dharma, but recognizes the ideal of transcending the gunas, even the sattva of dharma.

As for the falling-away of the disciples of Yogananda back to Christianity, who is to say that that is not where they belonged? “To each his own.” Every person has a right to tailor-made religion, suited just for him or her. Who are we to set sectarian boundaries to the belief and practice of another?

“Sri Ramakrishna is sometimes listed among the universalists, and certainly his disciples were its eloquent spokesmen. But his cosmic vision was inextricably linked to his Hinduism.” If his disciples were, he was too. No one should attempt to draw that kind of line between Ramakrishna and his disciples. We never heard of him using the word “Hinduism.” And his cosmic vision, according to his chief disciple, was his own and “went far beyond the discoveries of the Hindu scriptures.”

– S.Y.

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Swami Yogeshananda conducted the first formal observance of Sri Ramakrishna's Birthday at the Augusta Temple this year. The puja was done there on February 24th and in our Chapel on the 25th.

* * *

May there always be work for your hands to do;

May your purse always hold a coin or two;

May the sun always shine on your windowpane;

May a rainbow be certain to follow each rain;

May the hand of a friend always be near you;

May God fill your heart with gladness to cheer you.

– Old Irish Blessing

REGULARLY SCHEDULED EVENTS

Sunday	10:30 AM 11:00 AM	Chant Service. Discourse.
Tuesday	8 PM	Reading: <i>Holy Mother</i> by Swami Nikhilananda is the new text for this one-hour class, which is followed by a half-hour of meditation.
Thursday	8 PM	Reading: The <i>Textbook of Yoga Psychology</i> by Swami Brahmananda Sarasvati is the text. It is a highly regarded work on Samkhya and Yoga by a monk who was also a medical doctor. The meeting begins with a ten-minute meditation.
3rd Fridays	7:30 PM	RAM NAM will be held on April 20 and May 18, location t/b/a.
Daily**	6 PM	Vespers/Arati - A short period of prayer is followed by silent meditation. ** <i>Except Sundays.</i>

APRIL 2007 DISCOURSE TOPICS & SPECIAL EVENTS

1	11 AM	THE ONE AND THE MANY - Talk followed by discussion.
8	11 AM	EASTER SERVICE
15	11 AM	EVOLUTION AS WE SEE IT - Talk followed by discussion.
22	11 AM	SRI SANKARACHARYA AND HIS INFLUENCE - Talk followed by discussion.
29	11 AM	THE APPEAL OF BUDDHA AND HIS TEACHING - Talk followed by discussion.

MAY 2007 DISCOURSE TOPICS & SPECIAL EVENTS

6	10:30 AM	BUDDHA JAYANTI CELEBRATION†
12	7:30 PM	INDIAN CLASSICAL & DEVOTIONAL MUSIC BENEFIT CONCERT.*
13	11 AM	MUSIC IN SPIRITUAL LIFE - Talk followed by discussion.
20	11 AM	MEDITATION WORKSHOP.
27	11 AM	QUESTIONS?

ANNOUNCEMENTS

†The “**Thrice-Blessed Day**” of Lord Buddha will be observed on Sunday May 6th with puja and pot luck prasad lunch.

*On Saturday May 12, students of **Pandit Jasraj School of Music** will give a concert at the Center to benefit our **Building Fund**. Both classical and devotional music of India will be featured. Admission is \$10 and the program starts at 7:30 p.m.

Our **Annual Retreat** will be Sept. 29-Oct. 1, 2007, at the **Center for New Beginnings** in the beautiful North Georgia mountains. Space is limited. Reserve yours with a \$25 deposit. **Swami Yogatmananda**, Minister of the Vedanta Society of Providence, will be our special guest. His featured topic is "Human Being to Divine Being."

For the young ones....

EISELEY'S MUSKRAT

My name is Loren Eiseley. I am a naturalist – someone who “studies” nature, foolish as that may be. Not so foolish, nowadays with all our talk of the environment.

There is a lake in New England which used to be a quiet place when I was a boy. You never heard noises there. Even sounds were rare: bird calls and the lapping of waves in the wind. Country homes have been built now, and summertime play on the lake has taken over. Motorboats rattle their smoky engines and carry to and fro the laughter and the shouting of scores of teenagers. If I had felt like going in for a swim this day, as I once did, I might well have been chopped to pieces, so I just sat in the shallows under a boat dock and reflected.



Source: Indiana Division of Fish & Wildlife

Suddenly in a patch of sun-lit water I saw a dark shadow pass swiftly over the lake bottom. Life! After awhile the shadow came closer and presented itself. I saw a furry nose with whiskers above the surface of the water, green plants trailing from a mouth. It was a Muskrat. Undaunted by the inroads of civilization, it had continued to live in the paradise of its natural habitat.

Coming almost to my feet, Muskrat munched his slimy breakfast and looked my way in friendship. He didn't seem to know much about the killing instincts of human beings. Little did he know that there are people who like to shoot anything that moves. Muskrat asked little from life: a strip of shore to run on, sunlight and darkness, green plants.

Now he was caught between a deep lake with chopping blades and a forest slowly losing itself to timber. I whispered to Muskrat, “Run along; you'd better go now. You are in the wrong universe and do not know my power. I can throw stones.” And at his feet I just dropped a little pebble. His eyes, much better under water than on land, looked at me near-sightedly. For a moment it seemed he might take the pebble between his paws. Then, somehow sensing that all might not be well, he slid into the water, his nose twitching.

Muskrat lived in a shrinking universe, squeezed between the buzz-saw of the boats and the dark wall of hills beyond the bank. In the water weeds he cowered, waiting for me to disappear. I got up and walked away from the dock, vaguely thankful that I had done no harm. There was but one thought in my mind: What do we mean by “the natural world?” Is there anything we can call a natural world at all?

From The Star Thrower, by Loren Eiseley, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1979).

**INDRA'S NET
(A STELLAR ABERRATION)**

PERHAPS
IT IS NOT ALL
IN ANYTHING,
BUT DISPARATE:
SHARED IN REFLECTEDNESS,
AN INTRICATE DIASPORA
OF HOLOGRAPHIC WONDER,
A CRYSTALLINE CONNECTEDNESS,
A NET OF JEWELS
THE UNIVERSAL WEARS,
ASUNDER,
JUST FOR BEAUTY'S SAKE.
FROM EACH,
AWAKE,
ITS LIGHT,
REFRACTED,
FLARES.

– Ruth Rains



In the Vedic period of Indian philosophy (ca. 1500-600 b.c.e.), Indra was the name given “the greatest and best of the gods.” Indra’s “net” was a model of the universe, having a jewel at each intersection in which there could be seen the entire net and all the other jewels – a notion interestingly parallel to the current concept of the holograph. The poem articulates my long-held belief that myth – no matter how ancient, science – no matter how modern, and philosophy – no matter how bizarre, all struggle toward the same Reality, which exceeds our grasp, “or what’s a Heaven for?” – R.R.

notes and quotes

To let my own life become an act of redemption – not of anybody else's soul, but of my own soul. . . . What the mystic discovers must be true for all, good and bad, saint and sinner alike: the indwelling presence, our authentic identity. The call to social action, therefore, must never be an end in itself, but rather a means by which the individual sufferer can get access to his or her own altar.

– Howard Thurman

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If Americans, who rely on microwaves, television and computers in their daily lives, allege that the bacterial flagellum, which has a propeller, a motor, and a drive shaft, was made by some Intelligent Designer (read God) as Dr. Behe [prominent scientist] claimed during the intelligent design trial [in Arkansas], what is to prevent a Hindu fundamentalist from alleging that the origin of the beautiful peacock in India proves beyond reasonable doubt that the Intelligent Designer was a Hindu?

– Sarita Sarvate, “*Perspective: Intelligent Design Defies Intelligence*,” from **Khabar**

A Hindu devotee asked God, represented by the multi-armed Lord Narayana, this question. “My dear Lord,” he said. “I understand that you have innumerable inconceivable potencies. But out of all of them the energy of light seems to be the most amazing. Light pervades the spiritual world, it illuminates the material universes, and life is impossible without it.” He continued, “I would like to know how you make it work.”

“Oh, that's easy,” was the reply. “Many hands make light work.”

* * *

Know for certain that there is a special manifestation of God where for a long time many people have practiced austerities, concentration, meditation, japa, prayer, and worship in order to attain his vision. Their devotion has caused a spiritual atmosphere to solidify

in that place, so that one can easily become spiritually awakened and have a vision of God there. Why should man build churches in which to worship God? Why not worship Him anywhere? Even if he did not know the reason, man found that the place where people worshiped God became full of Tanmatras (vibrations). Every day people go there, and the more they go the holier they get, and the holier the place becomes. If anyone who has not much Sattva goes there, the place will influence him and arouse his sattva quality. Here, therefore, is the significance of all temples and holy places, but you must remember that their holiness depends on holy people congregating there.

– Swami Vivekananda

V. Subrahmanya Iyer's Dictionary

Continued from previous issues and concluding with this issue:

TURIYA means not only that which sees the three but also all three put together, making a fourth. It is Turiya that appears as sleep etc. All these three ideas of different states appear and disappear in you: you are the fourth or the whole. Turiya means “Always-seeing” or “always-knowing.” It is not a stage, except for ignorant pundits.

VEDANTA: I claim the right to interpret the word Veda not alone as “scripture” but also to include other nonreligious learning. Hence Vedanta means not the end of scriptures but “the end of knowledge.”

UPASANA: translated as practice of meditation, means fixing the mind on one line of thought and keeping off all other thoughts. It is concentrated reflection. It means the practice of yoga to gain this concentration, and then attend to the thought of truth. It does not mean emptying mind of all thoughts, for you keep one thought.

BUDDHI: Discrimination, power to think acutely.

AVIDYA: You are said to be in ignorance so long as you do not want to think, so long as you are content with accepting appearances and believing what you read or hear. For such persons the fanciful creation-stories of religion are given. In Avidya you do not know the truth and have the fears which go with ignorance.