

# The Philosophy of Sri Ramana Maharshi

by Bibhu Padhi (January 2015)

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The Vedanta has been considered as one of the most influential of the Indian philosophical systems. It obviously deserves the close attention it has been paid over the years. It has influenced most of the greatest Indian and western thinkers of the twentieth century. Vedanta is based on the *Upanishads*, one of the most ancient of Indian scriptures, although the “Vedanta” occurs in the Upanishads and includes some of the earlier portions of the Veda and includes the philosophy of the *Gita*.

Ramana Maharshi is the greatest of the *advaitins* (non-dualist) of the early part of the twentieth century. One is caught by the quiet intensity of his style and simplicity of his language. It is interesting to begin with Ramana Maharshi’s answers as to the nature of happiness:

If a man thinks that his happiness is due to external causes, it is reasonable to conclude that his happiness must increase with the increase of passions and diminish in proportion to their diminution. ...if he is devoid of possessions, his happiness would be nil ...[However] in deep sleep the man is devoid of all possessions, including his own ...Everyone desires to sleep soundly....[H]appiness is inherent in man and not due to external causes.... One must realise his Self in order to open the store of unalloyed happiness (*Talks*, 1-2).

He profiles the nature of reality He answers to the profound question: Who am I? “The gross body which is composed of the seven humours (*dhatus*), I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz., the senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell, which apprehend their respective objects, viz. sound, touch, colour, taste and odour, I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz., the organs of speech, locomotion, grasping, excretion and procreation, which have as their respective functions, speaking, moving, grasping, excreting and enjoying, I am not; the five vital airs, *prana*, etc., which perform respectively the five functions of in-breathing, etc., I am not; even the mind which thinks, I am not the nescience too, which is endowed only with the residual impressions of objects and in which there are no objects and no functionings, I am not. If I am none of these, then who am I? After negating all of the above

mentioned as 'not this', 'not this', that Awareness which alone remains – that I am" (*Who am I?*, 12-13).

*Samadhi* is the state in which the unbroken experience of existence-consciousness is attained by the still mind. That still mind which is adorned with the attainment of the limitless supreme Self, alone is the reality of God. The word "Samadhi" refers to a stage in meditation, wherein lies a conscious experience of the Self, "an intense undisturbed absorption in the absorption in the object of meditation" (quoted in Godman, 148), holding on to the Self. There are differences in deep sleep, *laya* (a state of trance in which the mind is temporarily absent) and *Samadhi*. In deep sleep the mind is merged with the body and not destroyed. It may appear in meditation also. But the mind which is destroyed cannot reappear. The yogi's aim must be to destroy it and not to sink into *laya*. In the peace of meditation, *laya* sometimes ensues but it is not enough. The true destruction of the mind is the non-recognition of it as being apart from the Self.

The classification used by Maharshi works the various *samadhis* into a three-fold division—the *Sahaja Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, *Kebala Nirvkculpa Samadhi* and the *Sabikalpa Samadhi*. *Sahaja nirbikalpa samadhi* is the state of a *jnani* (one who has self-knowledge), who has moved beyond the ego. In this state, one does function in a natural way like an ordinary person. "If you keep hold of the Self, you will not see the objective world." In some ways or another, you are like a "child" (*Talks*, 3). There is no difference between himself and the existential world. *Kebala nirvikalpa samadhi* refers to a stage just under Self-realisation. In such a stage there is a temporary but "effortless Self-awareness" (Godman, 148), when the ego is not totally annihilated, but there is absence of the body-consciousness. One is not able to perceive sensory perception or function in the world. In the *sabikalpa samadhi*, the stage of Self-awareness has to be continued persistently. *Nirbikalpa samadhi* is effortless consciousness and is formless. A mind which is matured to being called "ripe," *nirbikalpa* comes "as a flood." After a long time, one has Self-realisation, and freedom, "a natural, effortless state" (Godman, 154). Mere non-perception of the differences (*vikalpas*) in things is not the real nature of effortless and firm *nirbikalpa*. It is said that the quake of the body is because of the residual ego-consciousness. However, "this dies completely, without leaving even a trace, one abides as the vast space of mere consciousness where bliss alone prevails" (Godman, 154).

Maharshi talks about *Samadhi* as a blissful and ecstatic, perfectly peaceful state. When the mind arises at the end of *Samadhi*, the mind remembers the peace. There are also, in some cases, "tears of joy, hair standing on end and vocal stumbling" (Godman, 154). In the Upanishads and other ancient texts, it is mentioned that true *Samadhi* must be experienced when one truly knows the Self. "If Self is known, *samadhi* will be known automatically" (Godman,

155). Godman further states: "Samadhi is one's natural state. It is the undercurrent in all the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping. The Self is not in these states: these are in the Self.

The body does not say "I." In sleep no one will say "I am not." After the "I" rises, all rises. One must feel from where the "I" rises. Maharshi would say the Samadhi is our natural state. It is the "undercurrent" in all the three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping. "The Self," he says, "is not in these states, but these states are in the Self...The distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness belong to the realm of the mind, which is transcended by the state of the real Self" (quoted in Godman, 155).

There are times when meditation results in "spectacular side effects" (Goodman, 156). The visions of gods may appear and occasionally supernatural powers such as clairvoyance and telepathy. A long period of concentration on a mental image will sometimes result in visions. Maharshi said that these visions were products of the mind which might come on the way like hindrances to the state of Self-realisation and Self-liberation. When a man told him that he knew nothing and wanted to hear something from Maharshi, Maharshi replied that, "You *know* that you knew nothing. Find out that knowledge. That is liberation" (*Talks*