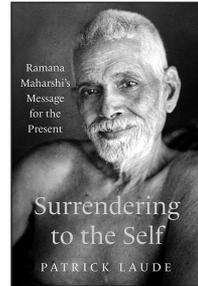


Book Review: Surrendering to the Self: Ramana Maharshi's Message for the Present

By Patrick Laude

Hurst & Company, London, 2022, 328pp.

Reviewed by Fatima Jane Casewit



In our quantitative age of endless options and of information available for spiritual and psychological enquiry and well-being, the quintessential metaphysical question is overlooked. How often do we delve within ourselves and ask: *Who am I?* Few of us take the time to probe into the depth of our being and search for an answer to this basic, sapiential query. Yet, the search for the Absolute begins with this simple question.

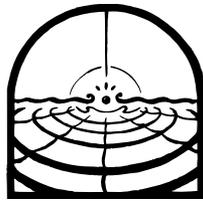
In yet another of his inspiring books, Dr. Patrick Laude interprets the Maharshi's message as relevant to our present postmodern era of spiritual crises and the search for life's meaning by studying the significance of the metaphysical truth of the Self, as distinct from the superficial ego-self. He does this by examining the life and teachings of the twentieth century grand master and realised saint, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Though there are already several masterful accounts of the Bhagavān's life and his teachings in print and online, Laude's approach is to present the Maharshi's message in the context of the present era of spiritual crises and the search for meaning. By approaching the Self through intellectual understanding and spiritual practice, argues Laude, one can begin to comprehend the significance of Consciousness and what It demands of us. One can then begin to unravel subsequent philosophical questions and become capable of discerning between the relative and the Absolute.

The first chapter outlines the life of the South Indian saint, focusing on his unique relationship with the sacred mountain of Arunachala near Tiruvannamalai, one of the five main holy places of Shiva in South India. Unlike other Indian sages of recent times, Ramana Maharshi did not travel far from his place of birth. For him, the sacred centre of Arunachala was an 'embodiment of Self-realisation', the Centre being everywhere. Since he was already situated at the Centre, which is everywhere, the Maharshi felt no need to wander outwardly. In the second half of his life, his presence drew many followers and disciples who later coalesced into a community around the Ashram in Tiruvannamalai. The Master largely communicated and taught through the eloquence of silence, and our author explains how the non-dual experience, as lived by Ramana Maharshi, is ineffable and cannot be adequately expressed through words.

Chapter Two, 'Grace and Devotion', engages with the nuances of the Maharshi's teachings. It also highlights the interesting fact that, despite being born into the Hindu world, he had not followed a specific spiritual path within the Hindu tradition, but rather achieved his enlightenment through Divine Grace. Laude observes that many Westerners are attracted to the Maharshi's teachings, imagining that the rare possibility of unmediated enlightenment could apply generally to all, without the necessity of spiritual practices and rites. Laude refutes that by stressing that human participation is necessary for individual salvation, notwithstanding the possibility of Divine Grace, given the incommensurability between human capacity and Divine Omnipotence. Both grace and works, works in the sense of persistent, concentrated, and sincere devotion, are necessary for spiritual realization: 'there is no real *Vich ra* without Grace, nor is the Grace active for him who is without *Vich ra*.' *Vich ra* can be defined as self-investigation, through devotion, from both the *bhaktic* and the *jnanic* perspectives, as explained in detail by our author.

Japa (ejaculatory prayer), Prayer and Self Knowledge' are the focus of Chapter Three, emphasising the need to 'clear away' psychic residues and purify the mind. The Master did not exclude any traditional paths to the Truth, as each soul is unique and has its own destiny in its journey to its Lord. In fact, Ramana Maharshi often recommended *Japa-Yoga*, the Path of invocatory prayer, to spiritual seekers; it is a method recognised by many teachers of all traditions as particularly adapted to the conditions

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