

Wolter Keers: The heart of the world

1977: Wolter Keers tells how he heard the name of Ramana Maharshi during the second world war. That was the beginning of an odyssey, that brought him back home by way of India.

When I look back upon my childhood, it is clear as crystal that I brought many of samskaras into this life. Born into a family of clergymen, many generations, with my father and both my grandfather ministers of divinity in the Protestant, Calvinist tradition, all interest was focused on matters of religion, and I must have been taught how to pray almost before I could talk.

If it is true that one's childhood is decisive in the most important matters in life, this is certainly true in my case. Two events have marked the whole sequence of adventures in the spiritual realm, leading to a desperate search for someone who might enlighten me, and ending in the unbelievable event of finding just such guidance.

The first event must have occurred when I was about five years old. A well-known missionary, traveling from place to place, arrived at our village with a roving exposition about Netherlands New Guinea (now West Irian) where he had worked. I can still remember some of the exhibits, but more important was that he stayed at our house, and had his meals with us.

Then one day during lunch, he told my parents how this time he had made the journey from the East Indies (now Indonesia) over land, traveling also through British India.

That phrase, British India, struck me like lightning. It is hardly possible that at this very early age I could ever have heard this name before. But it struck me as if to split me into two. I was numb with still, amazed wonder – with some inexplicable recognition of something extraordinary, something absurdly desirable, something like the ultimate good, even almost like God.

The second event must have occurred just a little later. I presume that it might have been in the spring of 1928 when I was five years old.

I was playing on a small grass field, baking sand cakes, and looking up at a hedge with very tiny pink flowers and white balls as big as marbles.

If anything triggered off what then happened, I cannot tell what it was. But suddenly the entire world and I myself were transformed into light. I fell into samadhi. But although it was a most impressive event, at the same time it was the most ordinary of all ordinary things. Even so, small as I was, I decided to keep this as a secret to myself, and in fact I never talked about it until the age of twenty, when the same thing happened in the company of a very good friend, who was reading a text to me, originating from ancient oriental mysticism. Suddenly, and without a warning – as it always does – samadhi as it were dissolved me.

Many things had of course happened between the ages of five and twenty. But here was a new decisive point, confirming that it was in the East that I had to look for an answer to the questions I put to all the theologians in my family and many others, but that none could ever answer, not even vaguely.

I continued my reading, but although I found many books of interest, none could explain to me what I wanted to know. But gradually it seemed to become quite desperate, and when, after this second and spontaneous samadhi I discovered that whatever I tried or did, I could not get back to that state, I fell into a deep depression. I decided that I must find a Guru, and that, if I did not find one, life would not be worth living any more.

It was then that an elderly lady, mother of a friend of mine, lent me two books. The first one was written by Swami Vivekananda, and its title was 'Jnana Yoga'. I had no idea that the book as well as the author were world-famous, to me it was a book like any other. But when I started to read it, it caused something like an explosion in me. There, finally, I found someone who had been able to put in words what I had been feeling intuitively, but could never have verbalized.

Then, the second book, written by Paul Brunton, did the rest. When I read that there was a living sage in India whom one could talk with, asking questions and getting real answers, blue patches returned to my sky. The only thing I was worried about was,

that this sage might meanwhile have left this world, and there was no means to enquire, for it was right in the middle of a war.

But I decided to trust what was written about him, and started to concentrate on him. In the Dutch edition of *A Search in Secret India*, which is called *Hidden Wisdom*, there was a picture of Bhagavan, which I used during my meditation, and initially with a lot of effort I started to concentrate on the heart-center, which, of course, was the tool he handed to us in order to get beyond the phenomenal.

Having rather strong yogic samskaras, it turned out to be quite easy, after a while, to descend straight into this center.

During my meditation hours, I concentrated very hard on Bhagavan, and after a while I was assured of his living guidance.

Yet, this was not enough. It did help as a marvelous preparation, it did melt all depressive tendencies in less than no time; it did help me to see that I was not a body, not this, not that, but it did not place me in my true center.

What I did not know at the time is, that on account of the close identification with the body, the body must be brought at least once, but preferably many times, into the living presence of an authentic Master. What I did know, is that I had to see this strange being, in that little Indian town. I concentrated on him, more and more, and sometimes almost fought with him, asking him to help me in my efforts to come and see him. And absurd as this expression now sounds – I won. He made his presence felt, very strongly, and with it came the certainty that I was to see him.

What part of this sadhana was my own projection and what part was Bhagavan's real presence, I shall never be able to know. Certain it is, that every sadhaka projects a man upon a sage; a man who walks and talks and eats and wills things, failing to understand that from his own 'point of view' the Master is nothing of the kind. The authentic Master never gives the sadhaka anything to get a grip on. He is like thin air – wherever you try to catch him or to find something tangible, he disappears. One cannot get hold of him, any more than one can put sunlight into a box. Yet the sunlight is there, most clearly.

Still, it took several years before finally, in the beginning of 1950, I arrived. As if it happened last night, I can remember the train ride from Madras on the meter gauge; the first view of the

Arunchula, with the full moon hovering above it – a very good omen, I thought; the fight amongst the porters, who had got hold of my luggage before I knew what had happened; the ride in the jutka and the driver shouting 'Hey-hey', the accent always on the second syllable. It all just happened, I was no longer implicated. It was as if I had become completely transparent. I knew from friends around the ashram that Bhagavan was terribly ill, but I knew also that I had come in time to see him, and that he had kept his promise to help me get there. Hereafter nothing in the world could go wrong.

It was Roda Maclver, who is still living at the ashram, who took me to him, a few hours later. And when I saw him, from far, sitting on a chair on the little passage between his room and the main hall, I started to tremble all over – not because of nerves or uneasiness, but because of the shock of his confrontation. Here I was – but what on earth could this mean. I, this transparent thing – and there, there, there, on that chair, light Itself, radiant as I had never seen anything or anyone.

Roda introduced me to him, and Bhagavan looked at me. He hardly talked, but his face, his presence said; 'So, finally you're here!'

I was invited to sit down, amongst a group of men, perhaps ten, perhaps twenty, my back against the wall opposite him. I looked, and looked, and looked. Long ago I had lost faith, all the belief of my childhood years; no god riding the clouds anymore, no soul. And now, suddenly, here Light Itself, blazing light, penetrating light, going right through me, like X-rays.

Bhagavan seemed at the same time completely unconcerned, looking around, smiling at the squirrels that ran up and down the trees; exchanging a few words with his attendants; dozing off, now and then for half a minute; then, immediately and fully awake, looking, not at you but into you, casually like one looks into the street, without effort, but seeing in one glance right to the other end and taking note of all that happens in one glance; and then again rubbing his head with his long fingers.

In those days he came out twice a day: two hours in the morning, and two hours in the evening, so that we might have his darshan.

To me, those first days were the fulfillment of everything I had ever hoped to find – as a matter of fact, it was much more than that. I knew that in the most lucid, radiant moments of my heart, it would have never been possible to imagine even a portion of this blazing Presence, that radiated right through everything and took me way beyond the phenomenal.

The second, or the third day, I had to laugh, about the absurdity that had been my life before. Who was I, to cultivate a garden full of problems? What on earth could have given me the impression that I was so important that I ought to have problems – questions, complicated situations to get out of.

And before I knew it, there I was in the middle of this Who-am-I sadhana. But now, in his presence, it was an entirely different matter. In this radiant light it was so evident that I was not a body, not an ego, that no analysis was needed. This light swept away all my darkness in one stroke.

Then after a week or two, an irritation came up in me, for I noticed that when I returned to the little house opposite the Ashram, which belonged to a Dutch friend, the lucid, blazing state which invariably swept everything away in Bhagavan's presence, left me, and when questions did come up, I was quite unable to solve them.

So after a few days, I became rebellious, and decided that I was going to have it out with Bhagavan.

When I walked in, during the afternoon darshan hour, I refused to melt away in his radiance, strong as ever. I simply refused his blessing, and I may say that it was most difficult to do so. It was, I discovered, as if you were slapping your own mother in the face. Yet, I decided to be stubborn, because it was not a heavenly hour I was in search of but lasting liberation from ignorance.

When I passed in front of him, and greeted him, Indian fashion, a quick smile ran across his face – and that was all. I was already at that moment perfectly certain that he was aware of the whole situation, but he paid no attention to it at all. He showered his radiance over all visitors (and every day there were more, as the news of his impending departure from us spread rapidly, and many, many people wanted to see him before he went away), rubbed his head, looked at the squirrels, dozed off for a moment, or looked quite indifferent at something or the other.

I found a place opposite him, under the covered hallway that in those days ran along the side of the hall, and sat not very far from where we now find his samadhi. The hallway has now been added to the big hall.

From there I started my bombardment. I fired thought at him, with all my might. 'Bhagavan, of what use is all your radiance to me, if I cannot solve my problems, the moment I have left you?' That was, more or less, the theme.

Bhagavan took no notice. So I concentrated on him even more, and with my thoughts I began to shake him as if he were a fruit tree. I must have an answer.

Then suddenly he looked at me, with a smile of utter amazement. 'What do you want?' the smile said. And then, with a different expression on his face; 'You are looking for your glasses, and they are right on your own nose!' Then, suddenly, his eyes emitted light, spat fire, and when he looked at me, his look went straight into me, physically into my chest. The heart center, very often felt in his presence, began to get warm, became hot like fire, and then started to spark as if an electric machine were installed next to my heart. I sat straight as a needle, my eyes glued to his drilling firelook. 'Kill me', I prayed.

How long this may have lasted I cannot say. It was an event outside of time and space. The moment came, when my body could no longer stand the strain. It was as if my chest would explode, and I asked him to let me go.

I had received what I came for. This account of initiation that I received from Bhagavan is of course only a mere indication. In

reality it was a complete transformation – an Umwertung aller Werte, as Nietzsche calls it. And all this, without hearing Bhagavan's voice. Communication in silence was clearer than any explanation in words could have given.

Yet, I still needed words.

A few days before Bhagavan's departure, I decided to leave Tiruvannamalai. There were at least a thousand people, and we were only allowed to stand in front of the door for ten or twenty seconds, to see Bhagavan lying on his bed. I thought that he ought to be left alone.

Back in Bombay, where I stayed in a friend's flat, I was amazed to discover to what extent changes had occurred. On my way coming to India, I had been reading Spinoza's Ethics – a very tough book, which I had to chew phrase by phrase. I had left it open on my bed. Now, coming back, I picked it up, and found that I could read it almost like a novel.

Yet all this was not enough. Although my two months with Bhagavan had turned me inside out and upside down, this period had been too short to remove all obstacles, if only for the reason that at the time a number of fundamental questions had not arisen, and certain mistakes had not been recognized. I had for instance very strong yogic tendencies, and I could not understand that consciousness did not arise from the kundalini, but that the kundalini appeared in consciousness. Where I got this absurd notion I cannot tell, but it was only when somebody drew my attention to it, that a doubt about this point of view arose in me – weeks after Bhagavan had shed the body. And other questions, new ones, began to tease me: what about this mysterious deep sleep state, for instance; and what was implied in the simple statement that one is ever witness of a thought, not a thinker....

But although I was far from satisfied, I did not suffer or worry to the extent I had done in Europe. If Bhagavan had proved a help and a certainty as tall as Mount Everest, he would not leave me after shedding the body. So I waited in full confidence.

And help came.

Some three months after His physical departure, suddenly a discussion as I used to have with Him in my imagination turned into something that might perhaps be called a vision. Suddenly I was back at Ramanashraram, and I sat opposite Him, as I always had during the first weeks of my stay. Again, there were quite a number of people, perhaps a hundred or two hundred.

Silently I wished: 'O Bhagavan, I wished I were alone with you.' And hardly did I think this, when the first person stood up, prostrated before Bhagavan, and left. Then number two, and in less than no time, the entire gallery was empty, but for Bhagavan and myself/

I drew myself next to His feet, looked at Him, and said: 'How wonderful, to be alone with Bhagavan'. – Again this smile of His – It always contained a world. It was a bath of light and love, spiced very slightly, this time, with some sarcasm to make me aware of my absurd standpoint, when He said, slowly, taking time to pronounce every syllable slowly and clearly: 'Are... you... ever... not... a-lone...?'

Immediately, this very 'Bhagavanish' remark made me glow with happiness and recognition. I understood immediately what He meant – I was completely home again.

But, very much aware of my new problems, I asked Him what to do. He then directed me to see a certain person, whom I discovered to be most venerable, and who, for some incomprehensible reason, allowed me to be with him regularly over a period of several years, until the obstacles had been overcome.

When, during that same vision, I questioned Bhagavan about this Guru, and asked Him: 'Is he realized?' He again fired one of his cryptic answers at me, saying: 'He is neither realized, nor not realized'. This one took me a week to understand: 'realized' and 'not realized' are labels – that we paste onto someone. But the person Bhagavan referred me to was beyond labels – and I soon found the confirmation of what Bhagavan had indicated.

Now, more than 25 years later, I am still sometimes with Bhagavan – and I do not mean with Him as pure consciousness or the Atma Brahman, but as this 'typically Bhagavanish Presence', with or without form. I am no longer interested in visions or other,

phenomena of a yogic nature, but when, suddenly He is there in one way or the other His presence may either bring tears of deep love and emotion into my eyes, or it may make me glow with happiness, and make my heart jump into the sky. Such is the radiance from His heart. It is the Heart of the World.

Search in the water and you will not find the waves:
Yet the waves arise from the water.
[Daito Kokushi]

From: Mountain Path Volume 14, No 1, January 1977