



MEETING RAMANA MAHARSHI

Conversations with John Sherman

MEETING RAMANA MAHARSHI

Conversations with John Sherman

Edited by Carla Sherman

SILENTHEART PRESS
OJAI, CALIFORNIA

MEETING RAMANA MAHARSHI

Conversations with John Sherman

© 2004 John Sherman. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Book & Cover Design: Carla Sherman
Cover Photo: Tim Nobles
Editor: Carla Sherman

SilentHeart Press
PO Box 1566
Ojai, California 93024 USA
Phone: (805) 646-0994
<http://www.riverganga.org> / <http://www.silentheart.net>
info@silentheart.net

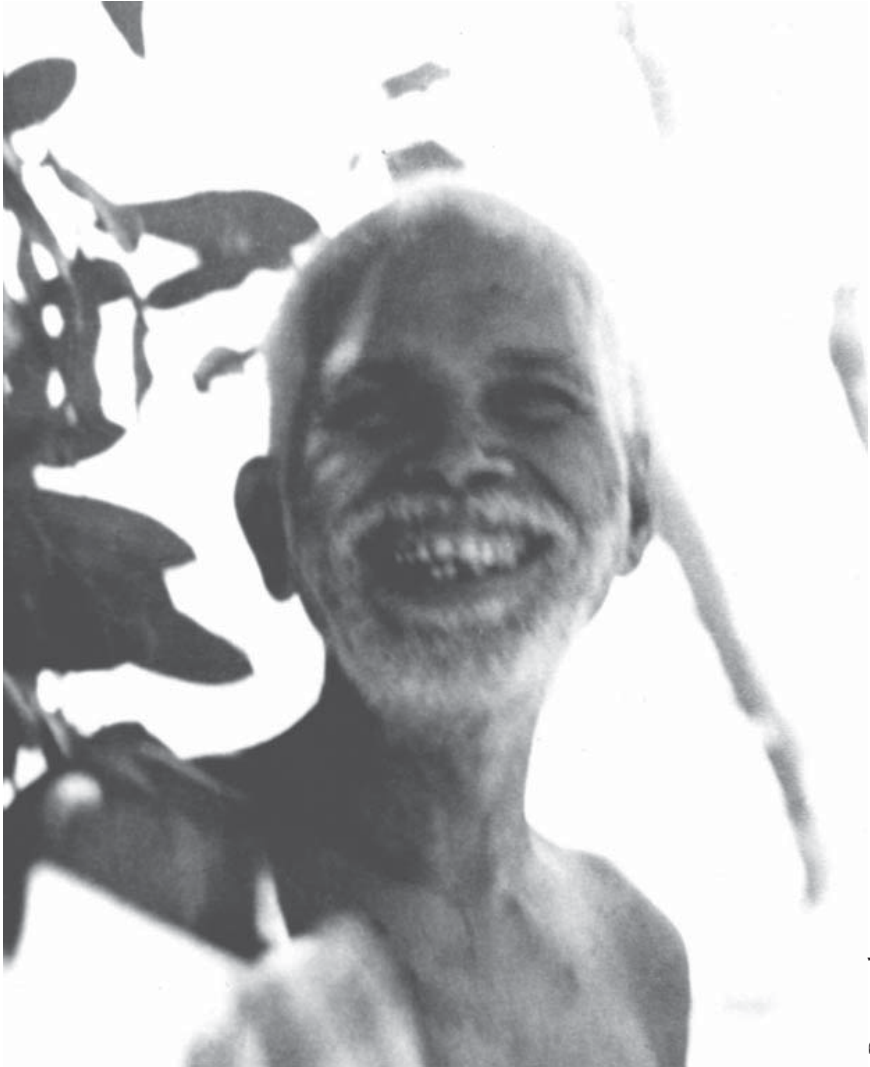
Printed in the United States of America
ISBN 978-0-9718246-0-7

Contents

Credits	ii
Foreword by Robert Wolfe	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Preface by the Editor	ix
Find Yourself	1
Surrender and Investigation	25
There Is No Place to Stand	53
How to contact John Sherman	67

This book contains the edited transcriptions of the One-Day Silent Retreat with John Sherman at the Temescal Gateway Park, Pacific Palisades, California, on September 22, 2002.

This book is protected by copyright laws. Please do not make copies. If you think this book might be useful to your friends, please encourage them to purchase their own copy. All the proceeds from the sale of this book go to support satsang.



Ramanashram

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Foreword

This book is a fine example of John's no-frills message: a smooth entry into the subject, followed by a simple laying-out of the fundamentals — with no superfluous verbiage.

By current standards, John's voice rings most loud and clear; the comments by the retreatants demonstrate that this is so. It even sounds as though he may germinate a new generation of teachers, as did Papaji.

This is a worthwhile booklet, for those who have no other access to John.

Robert Wolfe
Ojai, California
September 21, 2004

Acknowledgements:

Our sincere gratitude to Laurie Hope, who graciously and wonderfully transcribed the tapes of these meetings.

We are immensely grateful to Robert Wolfe, whose suggestions and comments were very instrumental in making the book what it is now.

Thank you, all of you who came to this retreat. Your presence, reports and questions made this book possible.

Preface

John Sherman met his teacher, Gangaji, in June 1994, when he was in the 15th year of imprisonment in federal prisons for crimes committed in the 70's in the name of armed revolution. Gangaji had been invited to the prison to offer satsang there. In that first meeting, John discovered himself to be eternally and unconditionally free.

After this first meeting with Gangaji, he spent another three-and-a-half years in prison, before he was finally released. During that time, he deeply experienced what has come to be known as “the dark night of the soul”. It was a time when everything he thought he had gained in that meeting with Gangaji seemed to disappear, leaving him empty-handed and hopeless. During that time, he started reading Ramana Maharshi's books and, out of desperation, he followed his instructions to the letter.

What he discovered in this true meeting with Ramana Maharshi is offered to you in this book, through his dialogue with spiritual seekers from all over the country.

Find Yourself

Sometimes it just seems so silly to speak. Nothing can ever be added to what is already present *here*, as you. Nevertheless, here we are. I am going to talk a little bit about my story, to begin this morning. Most of you have heard it in one form or another, but I want to put this retreat in context — by which I mean my story.

After 15 years in federal prisons, an absolutely impossible stroke of luck or Grace came to me. Gangaji visited the prison where I was. At the time of meeting Gangaji, I had had a total of six months of spiritual practice. I was unable to meet her the first time she came to the prison: I was too terrified. I didn't know that it was she who had sparked this terror. I am not even certain that it is accurate to make that connection now. Nevertheless, I passed on the first opportunity that I had to meet her, because I was stricken with a great terror, and I immediately began what was to be an extremely truncated Buddhist practice.

I had previously known no interest whatsoever in spiritual practice or spiritual ideas; after all, I was a devoted and committed Marxist/Leninist for whom spiritual practice or spiritual ideas were anathema. Then, somehow, six months after that first missed opportunity, she returned. How unlikely is this? Not only did I get a chance to meet her in a federal prison, but when I was failed to do so the first time, she came back!

In any event, between her first visit to the prison and the

second one, I embarked upon a Buddhist practice. The Tibetan Buddhists were coming to the prison. I was astonished to discover, immediately upon hearing some of their teachings, that I knew everything they were talking about — it was all deeply and intimately familiar to me. The words and the concepts they provided me with, gave me an intellectual understanding of what I already knew. So I began this Tibetan Buddhist practice with great zeal and interest and amazement. I was seen (by those who were coming into the prison) to be advanced in my understanding, and they brought a Tibetan Lama in to give me refuge in Bodhisatva vows.

I also spent those six months in contact with the people who were involved with Gangaji, and all that time I was always denouncing her. I knew very well that what she had to say was foolishness, not to be paid attention to. I was fond of saying, “The Buddhists have been about this business for 2,500 years, and they know what they are doing. This woman comes in here and tells us that you need to ‘do nothing’; and she says that, in fact, it is only the things that you are doing that stand in the way of what you are trying to attain!”

So, I called her a fraud. I didn’t know what her game was or why in the world she would be coming into a federal prison. There was no money in it for her, there is no fame or fortune to be had there, but one thing was clear to me: she was false. She was a fraud. I used to watch her videos during that period and, in much the same way that I knew what the Buddhists were talking about, I *knew* her. I did not realize that it was the same unexpected, silent

FIND YOURSELF

knowing that was present in regard to the Buddhist teachings. It felt more as if I had known her some time earlier in my life; maybe not really well, but well enough so that I could recognize her gestures, the way she carried herself, and the way she spoke. I could not figure out how I knew her but since it would be in *my* life that I knew her, it did not seem to bode well for her.

When she returned to the prison, in June of 1994, I was able to meet her personally, face to face, upon her arrival. At that point, I had a really satisfactory understanding of spiritual truth; I was quite satisfied with the continued deepening of my intellectual understanding of spiritual reality that had been triggered by my meeting with the Buddhists. Her teaching, such as it was, did not fit into that.

On the day of her second visit, it was I who had set up the room for her. I had taken care of the arrangements and made sure that the people who wanted to see this heretic knew that she was coming. It was my responsibility to meet her when she arrived with her entourage, and to tell them what the arrangements were and to take them to where they would be. When she walked up to me, she took my hand and looked into my eyes quite ordinarily. You know, there wasn't any spiritual energy: she was really quite ordinary, and she said: "Hi. You must be John." She had heard of my energetic opposition to her. And, as she greeted me, I simply dissolved and the whole mechanism of "understanding," the whole mechanism of judgment and relationship, of the maintenance of *me* disappeared. It all stopped.

There is no way I can possibly describe to you the experience of that. I am actually confident that all of you here in this room have known this experience, this glimpse, this *momentary* dissolution of identity, the momentary stopping of the mind's frenetic efforts to control, to understand, to do something *about* something. Nothing more happened for the entire time that she was there. When she left that evening, I had fallen hopelessly, wildly, uncontrollably, without restraint, in love with her. When she left my sight, I felt like my heart had been torn out of my chest. I had never imagined such torment, such pain, or such loss.

I saw her one more time, before I was released from prison, and that was six months after our first meeting. Following that second meeting, I was not to see her again for three-and-a-half years, when I was finally released from prison.

In the first year of our meeting, everything that I did was done with the intent of pleasing her. There was nothing I would not have done to earn and hold her love and her attention. I would have done anything, if that could keep her attention and her love on me. I wrote of this love — letter after letter — which were all love letters to her; I had many absolutely extraordinary, magnificent experiences during that year and I wrote of them often to her. She read those letters in satsang, wherever she went.

It had dawned on me, early on, that the only thing that *really* would please her would be for me to wake up. Nothing else. There was nothing else she wanted from me other than that I wake up permanently, that I be “finished” permanently.

Meetings and retreats with John Sherman are organized by The River Ganga Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public non-profit organization located in Ojai, California.

John's work is completely supported by your donations and the sales of books and tapes of his satsangs. If you feel that this book has been useful to you and you would like to help us make John's teachings more available to the world, please consider making a tax-deductible donation. No amount is too small. For more information and to make a donation using our secure servers, please click here to go to our website:

http://www.riverganga.org/Support/category.php?category_id=55

If there is a group of people where you live, who feel deeply called to meet with John, and you would like to invite him to speak in your area, please contact us:

The River Ganga Foundation
PO Box 1566
Ojai, California USA
<http://www.riverganga.org>
(805) 646-0994 info@riverganga.org

If you wish to contact John, write to him directly at johnsherman@riverganga.org or send a letter to our office at the address above.