The Revealed Secret: The Successful Quest of Paul Brunton for a Guru

“The Quest is both a search for truth and a dedication to the Overself.”

- Paul Brunton

Raphael Hurst was a bookseller and journalist, who published his writings under the pseudonym of Brunton Paul, and later came to be known as Paul Brunton. He is considered as a Mystic in the West and had numerous followers. The principles of Yoga were popularised by Brunton in the West apart from the other luminaries like Blavatsky, Vivekananda and Yogananda.

Apart from the books A Search in Secret India and A Hermit in the Himalayas, he also wrote another travelogue A Search in Secret Egypt. The first two books as their names suggest were accounts of the author’s travels in India. A Search in Secret India describes the quest of Brunton for a spiritual teacher. The second book talks about the retreat of Brunton into the Himalayas in search of mystical experiences and peace which are attributed to the holy mountain of the Indians and also the Tibetans. Both the books elucidate the pains taken by Brunton in an honest search for a true spiritual master and the sincerity with which he puts his findings into practice during his search for the mystical experience and its impact on the Human soul.

In the preface to the book, A Search in Secret India, Sir Francis Young Husband talks about why Brunton chose to come to India and how he managed to discover the true spiritual teachers from an innumerable crowd of mental acrobats and contortionists and other kinds of jugglers who were masters in a particular art but not spiritually strong or elevated. He says
“SACRED INDIA” would be as apt a title for this book. For it is a quest for that India which is only secret because it is so sacred. The holiest things in life are not bruited abroad in public. The sure instinct of the human soul is to keep them withdrawn in the inmost recesses accessible to few—perhaps to none, certainly only to those who care for spiritual things. And with a country as with an individual, the most sacred things a country keeps secret. It would not be easy for a stranger to discover what England holds most sacred. And it is the same with India. The most sacred part of India is the most secret.¹

One of the twentieth century’s greatest explorers of the spiritual traditions of the East, Paul Brunton, left his journalistic career and travelled among the Yogis and mystics and studied Eastern and Western esoteric teachings. The book, A Search in Secret India was his very first travelogue published in the year 1934 even before India became an Independent country. His travels into India for the very first time are described in this book, however with an air of the sceptical eye of a foreigner. Whilst he made this journey, Brunton was still in search of the true spiritual experience. The heightening of his wisdom and also his progress as a spiritual seeker is well evident in his later works.

The journey of Brunton started after he witnessed an encounter between a bookseller and an Indian in a bookshop in London. The intriguing conversation of the bookseller and the turbaned Indian made Brunton inquisitive. Upon receiving an invitation to dinner, Brunton met the very first instructor who would arouse his curiosity about the exotic East, a yearning, he happened to have since childhood when he first heard the name “India” mentioned in his Geography class.

Paul Brunton embarked on a journey into India searching for the “true” Rishis and Yogis about whom his Indian friend talked at length in their many conversations. While listening to the queer customs and peculiar traditions of Indians, Paul Brunton on a particular evening caught the strange phrase Yogi, and begged his Indian friend to offer further enlightenment on the subject. The answer he received is mentioned as follows:

But I can hardly tell you, in a single definition, what constitutes a Yogi. No doubt, a dozen of my countrymen will define the word in a dozen different ways. For instance, there are thousands of wandering beggars who pass by this name. They swarm through the villages and attend the periodic religious fairs in droves…there are strange individuals in solitary retreats far from the big cities, in the seclusion of lonely jungles or mountain caves, men who devote their entire existence to practices which they believe will bring marvellous powers. Some of these men will eschew all mention of religion and scorn it; others, however, are highly religious; but all of them unite in the struggle to wrest from nature a mastery over forces invisible and intangible…Now these men too are called Yogis.²

The Indian however describes a much higher form of spiritually elevated men known as the Rishis. His master was a Rishi and he gives the definition of a Rishi as, “Transfer the Darwinian theory to the realm of human character; accept the Brahmin teaching that there is a spiritual evolution running parallel with the physical one; look upon the Rishis as men who have attained the crest of this upward climb; then you may form some rough conception of their greatness.”³

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³ Ibid, 30.
Paul Brunton thus embarked upon a search for the true Rishi hidden in India as told by his friend. The yearning of a true seeker slowly grew in him due to the contact with his friend and Brunton landed in Bombay in the year 1931. His trip was preordained by his friend in London and he was instructed to go alone. The very first encounter in India, of Brunton was with “A magician out of Egypt”, Mahmoud Bey, who was a spiritualist, an adept at talking to, and controlling spirits and jinns. According to his conversation with Brunton, he is from Cairo the capital of Egypt where he was taught the art of talking to spirits by a Jewish neighbour. On Brunton’s request, Mahmoud Bey, demonstrated his skills. The incident in brief, involved Brunton, gripping a pencil, and a tiny folded paper with a question scrawled on it, simultaneously with a tight hold. The Spiritualist sat meditating several feet away, and successfully recognised the three questions during the three trials. The result of his meditations were, an answer was written in pencil each time and proved to be the correct one.

This was explained by Mahmoud Bey as the practice of Spiritualism, where the dead spirits are contacted and controlled by the spiritualist to assist him. Mahmoud Bey elucidates that it is important to distinguish the good and bad spirits. He claims association with the former kind as they are willing to do his bidding. However he rules out the possibility of him being a spiritualist medium, as he never let a spirit possess him in the process of his practices.

The chapter ends with Paul Brunton’s reflections on the phenomenon of the unusual, and also on another well-known spiritualist Mme Blavatsky of the theosophical society who was reputed to have performed a parallel phenomenon fifty years ago. Certain favoured members of the society received messages from her agency, and the messages were scrawled upon the letters right below the questions. However, Blavatsky
denied possessing the art of Spiritualism, and attributed the messages to her Masters in Tibet.

Paul Brunton regarded this experience as apt and prophetic warning him of still many unusual things to come henceforth. His experiences further, lead him to many corners of India, like Ahmednagar, where he met Meher Baba, a Parsee known as the ‘Messiah of the East’ by his disciples. Paul Brunton describes his encounter with the baba as non-stimulating, but he does not criticize him on prejudice. Paul Brunton in his book has made it clear that he approached all the spiritual masters with an objective mind without being carried away by first impressions. He took his time to understand the nature of the cult and its practices by observing the routine and the disciples of the Master. Paul Brunton visited Meher Baba twice in his travels. His disappointment in him is more pronounced in the second visit and he comes to the conclusion that Meher Baba is in a delusional world where he imagined himself to be the messiah who was sent by god to redeem the world.

Meher Baba’s fallacy is exposed by Brunton through two main observations, the first being his extensive study of the accounts of the Baba’s disciples written in the form of diaries and personal experiences. These recordings proved to be honest and surprisingly highlighted the Baba to be “a fallible authority, a man subject to constantly changing moods, an egotist who demands complete enslavement on the part of his brain stupefied followers. And lastly, I find in these pages that he is a prophet whose predictions are seldom verified.”

Paul Brunton through his research also found out that Meher Baba was administered a kiss by a holy woman fakir known as Hazrat Babajan, which led to a brief

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period of impairment of his brain functions. Meher Baba describes it as a mind altering experience divinely ordained. Paul Brunton’s encounter with her is not disappointing though, when he visited her in Poona right after his first encounter with Meher baba. She was an old woman with an unworldly expression, who made a prophecy regarding the journey of Paul Brunton to India. Her only words spoken to him were “He has been called to India and soon he will understand.”

“Once I publicly announce myself as a messiah, nothing will be able to withstand my power. I shall openly work miracles in proof of my mission at the same time. Restoring sight to the blind, healing the sick, maimed and crippled, yes, even rising the dead—these things will be child’s play to me!”5 Meher Baba’s delusional belief in his own powers is presented by Brunton as opposed to the honest powers of holy men and jugglers who claimed to be adept at the secrets behind the spiritual world. Of all these there was a fakir who could detach his body parts and put them back, a juggler who controlled figurines and brought them to life however briefly, etc. But they were simple men who used their powers for their daily bread and did not gather disciples.

Brunton journeyed southwards and also towards the holy city of Benares. Most of his journey covers the Deccan plateau. The places he visited after his meeting with Meher Baba constitute the banks of the Adyar River, near the city of Madras, where he encountered a Tamil Brahmin named Brama suganandah, who introduced him to a mysterious form of Yoga which employed a system of body control. He is called a Yogi by Brunton and his conversations about the Yoga that conquers death are found to be baffling and unbelievable by Brunton until he saw them in practice. Brama himself demonstrated and also took Brunton to meet a live example, “The Sage who never speaks”. While the art of Yoga can help conquer death when practiced in a proper

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manner, this sage never spoke since he appeared on a spot in Madras as instructed by his
teacher, fakir Marakayar. The experience which Brunton has in the house of the sage,
built by a kind policeman, reveals that he was a true seeker of enlightenment and wished
to be left alone. He had no disciples but a few admirers among whom Brama was one.

A brief experience of Brunton was instigated when he was leaving the sage’s
abode. The sage himself said to Brunton,

“I am very pleased because you came here. Take this as my initiation.”

I hardly finish taking in the purport of his answer when I suddenly feel a strange
force entering my body. It pours through my spinal column and stiffens the neck and
draws up the head. The power of will seems raised to a superlative degree. I become
conscious of a dynamic urge to conquer myself and make the body obey the will to
realize one’s deepest ideals. And I feel intuitively that those ideals are but voices of
my best self, which alone can promise me lasting happiness.⁶

With this experience Brunton leaves the sage never to disturb him again in his quest for
spirituality through the art of mind and body controlling Yoga, for he never spoke and sits
still in a stone like position waiting for his moment to join the Universal Soul.

One of the admirers of the sage introduced himself to Brunton and in their
conversation; Brunton for the first time hears the name of his soon to be discovered
master, the one who resides on Arunachala- ‘the Hill of the Holy Beacon’, located in the
north Arcot territory. But Brunton does not go to the place as he had to keep his
appointments in Madras.

The succeeding events lead him to the ‘Hill of the Holy Beacon’ in a surprising manner. Brunton is taken to meet his Holiness Shri Shankaracharya of Kumbhakonam who is the spiritual head of south India. His abode in Chingelput is visited by Brunton and it is here that he is informed by the Acharya that true holy men who taught the practices of Yoga were rare, but he mentions two masters dwelling in India, one in Banaras and the other, on the Arunachala Mountain.

This indication and the appearance of the former friend who directed him to visit the Maharishi, made Brunton to cancel his visit to north India and to divert his travels to ‘the Hill of the Holy Beacon’. But the Acharya warns him that these holy souls did not easily admit Europeans to their presence.

The next chapter in the travelogue of Brunton begins on the ‘Hill of the Holy Beacon’, Arunachala, the two words Aruna and Achala meaning Red Mountain. The temple priests, once a year celebrate their central festival. Immediately after that a phenomenon occurs within the temple. A huge fire blazes out on top of the mountain, its flame being fed with vast quantities of butter and camphor. It burns for many days and can be seen for many miles around. It symbolises the fact that this mountain is sacred ground, overshadowed by a great deity.

“There is something in this man that holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him.” This is the responsive thought in the head of Brunton as he perceived the Maharishi sitting on his divan in the middle of a jungle hermitage, on the Arunachala hill.

The queries bothering Brunton are put forth before the master and the Maharishi raised one question in return which would set Brunton towards the basic lesson of
spiritual seeking. “You say I. ‘I want to know.’ Tell me, who is that I?”…”know first that I and then you shall know the truth.”

After receiving many answers to his questions, and experiencing a few spiritual visions, Brunton, leaves the ashram to continue his journey into discovering the holy men of India. His departing experience is stimulating and insightful.

Brunton’s reverence for the Maharishi is transparent in this chapter and his experiences are more pronounced than the ones he had before. He admits that he felt the same kind of energy in the abode of the “Sage who never speaks.” But, Brunton was in search of a master, who would teach him the secrets of Yoga.

The course of his further journey leads him to Banaras, the holy city of the Hindus. His first impression about the city is not very impressive due to the murkiness and its unholy smell. Brunton reflected thus, “But Benares! You may be the hub of Hindu culture, yet please learn something from the infidel whites and temper your holiness with a little hygiene!”

He was here on a mission to locate the ‘Wonder Worker of Benares’ as people called him. True to his name, he possessed the remarkable power of making wonders happen and according to the account of Brunton, even bring back the dead.

His name was Vishudananda and Brunton upon arriving at his house is denied admittance by one of the disciples, as Europeans were never considered as being interested in the secrets of the Universe. Brunton however, entered the house to find the teacher in a hall surrounded by his followers. Brunton is introduced to the results of intense practice of the Solar Science. The author is presented with different fragrances of flowers with the help of a mere magnifying glass a silk handkerchief and the rays of the
sun. Then the ultimate delight for Brunton was that Vishudananda agreed to perform the advanced stage of using the solar powers to bring back the dead. The phenomenon is explained in detail by the author.

The magician picks up his magnifying glass and concentrates a ray of sunlight into an eye of the bird. I wait while a few minutes pass uneventfully. The old man sits bent over his strange task, his large eyes fixed in a glassy stare, his face cold, emotionless and non-committal. Suddenly, his lips open his voice breaks out into a varied, crooning chant in some language which is unknown to me. A little later the bird’s body begins to twitch. I have seen a dog twitch its suffering frame in the same manner, when the spasms of approaching death have overtaken it. Then comes a slight fluttering of the feathers and within a few minutes the sparrow is on its legs, hopping around the floor. Truly the dead have come to life!  

Brunton’s next journey is to a place in Benares itself to meet an astrologer named Sudheibabu an adept in the Yoga of Brahma Chinta translated as ‘Divine meditation’ or as the ‘Quest for Brahma’ or even as ‘God knowledge’. It is a highly austere method to be practiced under the guidance of an expert master for it is dangerous for amateurs to experiment with the unknown. Brunton thus does not mention the procedures in his book. He simply mentions that some of the predictions of the astrologer proved to be true with time.

Before resuming his journey to the ashram of Ramana Maharishi, Brunton traced his steps towards Agra, to visit a small less known colony by the name of Dayalbagh which means ‘Garden of the Lord’. The place is the headquarters of the Radhasoamis whose master was then, Sahabji Maharaj. He was directed to the place by two friends

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namely Sunderlal Nigam and Mallik. The Radhasoami faith fascinated Brunton because he was told that the master had “conceived the astonishing and interesting notion of combining a Yoga discipline with daily life based on Western ways and ideas.”

His meeting with Sahabji Maharaj helped Brunton understand that he was a master striving to improve three different things, the spirit, mind and body. He witnessed the colony of Dayalbagh and also the various establishments like the model industries, the dairy farm, which was reputed to be one of the finest in the country and also the Radhasoami Educational Institute, the various colleges set up for the benefit of the resident students of the city and also the fields where the community works every day for their daily bread. The presence of highly qualified men retired to this place to serve their Master baffled Brunton. His opinion of the Master is pictured as follows

And as Sahabji Maharaj expounds his ideas I catch the picture of an alert American mind encased in a brown Hindu body, so efficient and business-like is his manner, so precise is the expression of his thoughts…I realize anew the curious paradox which his character presents. Master of over one hundred thousand people, who practise a mysterious form of Yoga; prime organizer of the multifarious and materialistic activities which seethe around me in Dayalbagh; taken all in all, I write him down as a brilliant and breath-taking man. Nowhere in India, nowhere in the entire world, may I expect to meet his like again.  

The activity of elevating the spirit was also witnessed and experienced by Brunton as he was invited to attend the prayer meeting of the Radhasoamis. He observed that the prayer meeting involved chanting in Hindi for fifteen minutes and followed by deep meditation without a sound! The Master was seated on an elevated platform and in

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profound meditation. His personality was magnetic and arresting. The secrets of the faith were denied to be revealed as Paul Brunton refused to have faith before proof. Thus his plea to be made familiar with the practices of the *Surat Shabd Yoga* (*Yoga* of the spirit and sound current) proved futile as faith was essential.

His parting experience is noteworthy, as Sahabji Maharaj advised Brunton as “you are right in being so careful about taking anyone as your master. Scepticism is a useful attitude before you decide on him, but afterwards you must have full faith. Don’t rest until you find your spiritual preceptor. He is absolutely essential.”

These words were spoken to him on his journey with Sahabji Maharaj up to Timarni. As He descended the train, Brunton took his Holiness’ blessings.

Sahabji Maharaj rises to depart. Something awakens in me before his disciples can come and capture him. It breaks my reserve, ignores my western pride, crushes my anti-religious temperament and speaks through my lips.

“Your Holiness, may I have your blessing?”

He turns with a friendly smile, beams pleasantly through his glasses, and cordially pats my shoulder.

“You have that already!” he assures me in farewell...my mind is still carrying away a picture of a notable man, whom I greatly admire. For he is at once an inspired dreamer, a serenely-minded Yogi, a practical man of the world and a polished gentleman.  

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10Ibid. 251-252.
The meeting of Brunton took place with a Yogi on his wanderings about Western India. His name was Chandi Das who had the serene outlook of a Yogi. On his prediction, Brunton returned to Bombay and was immediately overcome by illness. During this period, Brunton experienced a state of pessimism and was to leave for his homeland in three days. During his reflective moods he bore witness to an apparition of the Maharishi and then, he realized that his quest for a master ended. But his doubts about the Maharishi’s indifference and his lack of any indication as to whether he would accept him as his disciple, weighed on his mind.

Upon arrival at the Maharishi’s ashram, his questions are said to have been answered and his final experience among many others in the Arunachala hermitage, put an end to his search for a Guru in Sacred India.

I touch, as in a flash, the meaning of this mysterious universal drama which is being enacted in space, and then return to the primal point of my being. I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. I have drunk the Platonic Cup of Lethe, so that yesterday’s bitter memories and tomorrow’s anxious cares have disappeared completely. I have attained a divine liberty and an almost indescribable felicity.¹¹

Brunton’s next travelogue on India was to the Sacred Mountains, i.e. The Himalayas. His journey to these mountains was in search of peace and inner quiet and most importantly on the instructions of his Master to sit still, for a while. Doing nothing but contemplating on the secrets of the universe in the lap of nature.

The book, describes everything about the mountains, their majestic beauty, the strength which it exudes, the breath-taking beauty of nature in the surrounding areas, the

simple village folk and their able bodies equipped to tolerate the extreme temperatures of
the region. His aim was to head for the summit of Mount Kailas, the scared abode of Lord
Shiva, equally worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists. This part of the Himalayas was a
part of Tibet and was hard to cross. Brunton was denied permission to enter Tibet through
India, hence he chose a lonely Bungalow in the Himalayan ridges.

The beauty of the summits is described by Brunton for the very first time he set
his eyes on the Holy Mountain. “The rugged charm of this display makes it more
attractive than any other natural scene I know. I take nature’s gift thankfully. The Gods
who made this land must have been beauty-drunk. The wild beauty of the scene outsteps
imagination. It inspires the mind and uplifts the soul. Were I a Shelly, I would quickly
become lyrical over this region, but, alas, I am not.”

The solitary bungalow on the Himalayan ridges acted as his abode for as long as
the weather permitted him to stay. The book starts with the season of summer and ends
with the rains taking over the Himalayas. The only means of journey being by pony ride,
Brunton had very few visitors during his stay and those who did visit were men like him
seeking Spiritual retreat and others were Holy men and a few of Brunton’s friends.

“Be still and know that I am God!” that is the phrase from the Hebrew Bible. It
bids me go to the Himalayas, not as an explorer or as a researcher, but simply to cease my
external activities and to tranquilize my mind to the point of utter placidity. I am not even
to continue my ancient labours of self-conscious meditation, it counsels, but just to be
still!”

This was the ulterior motive of Brunton, this time; his quest was to find a suitable
place to carry on his meditations uninterrupted. He found a place carpeted with autumn

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13 Ibid, 23.
leaves near to the Bungalow and decided to make it his seat for contemplation and to sit still. A single deodar tree stands on his abode and is his constant companion. The chapters in the book are divided to describe the various encounters of Brunton with nature’s inhabitants like the wild animals, singing birds, fireflies, and the occasional visitors.

Brunton’s quest now is inner exploration. But he also talks about the experiences narrated by his visitors which throw light upon the lives led by the Tibetan lamas and the mountain dwellers. The forest around the place is rich with flora and fauna including bears, panthers and other animals. There is an account of Brunton’s confrontation with a Panther on his way home from the meditation spot one day. The panther, sound asleep on a tree in daylight, was spotted by Brunton, on his way home. The tree was in his way, and there was no way of escape. But, the fact that panthers did not hunt in daylight saved him from assault.

The incident is described by the author as follows,

Perceiving that I have detected it, the panther’s expression changes into one of rage. It opens its jaws slightly in irritation and the bared teeth show defiance… the muscular body rises arch-like and leaps headlong to the farther side of the tree and lands with a heavy crash in the tangled growth of underwood. My last glimpse is of a long, black-tipped twitching tail and then the panther disappears into the forest.  

The book also introduces Brunton’s concept of the Overself. He describes the term as, “There is a godlike thing within us which theology calls the spirit and which, because it is also a portion of the higher power within the universe, I call the Overself. He is wise indeed who takes it as his truest guide and makes it his protective guardian.”

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According to the teacher of Paul Brunton, the Overself is akin to God and they both are considered to be one it is the quest for the Overself which is the purpose of his journey to the Himalayas. However his peace is occasionally intruded by other seekers. During his stay, he received the companionship of two Yogis, who unexpectedly visit him; another Yogi who is on a journey to Tibet from whom the author receives an account of his adventurous journey to Mount Kailas from Kashmir, and a visit from a Nepalese Prince, a friend of Brunton.

Paul Brunton’s Himalayan expedition is filled with his musings over the world, and also about the various sacred texts of the world Religions.

Alongside these retrospective musings, PB has a few encounters with various visitors to his high camp, bringing with them interesting interludes of spiritual conversation and anecdotes of their own adventures. Even so, this book is rather more about Nature than Humankind. He befriends a fly, studies meditation from an ancient tree, and confronts a hunting panther, all with equal curiosity and poise. His descriptions of the surrounding mountains and their denizens is at once inspired and inspiring—inspiring us to seek our own communion with Nature and perhaps essay a trek into her hidden, sacred places.¹⁶

Brunton is in sync with nature and admits as being comfortable in becoming one with the Overself which is impregnated in the magnetic atmosphere of these Exotic Mountains. He admits of being aware of a driving force present in these elevated peaks

<http://www.paulbrunton.org/additional-publications.php>
which are so close to the abode of Lord Shiva, Mount Kailas-the sacred Mount of the Hindus.

The author also has written mini essays intertwined into the book about his reflections on the world. One chapter is entitled, “On Philosophy and Fun—Reflections on Mr Charles Chaplin—His Silent Art and Genius;” where Brunton talks about the beloved character of Charles Chaplin who was and remains to be the best comedian ever of the silent movie era. His antics spoke of perfection, and in real life he was termed as a silent and serious man who loved seclusion. These qualities of Chaplin are presented in a new light by Brunton and he says, Chaplin had the qualities of a potential Yogi in him. As Brunton puts it, Chaplin was a lover of solitude and was a victim of withdrawn moods and taciturn silences which were the price of his genius.

Humour is the essential part of human existence and a man capable of humour is akin to the spiritual philosopher. According to Brunton, both aim at achieving impersonality. A man capable of laughing at himself destroys his ego and hence is above the worries of life and human existence. This is precisely the aim of the Spiritual Philosopher. Hence, Chaplin is considered to be a potential Yogi by the author in his musings, he also admits he has a portrait of the comedian hanging on the wall of his bungalow and it is his constant companion on his travels.

The other significant aspect which stands out in the book is Brunton’s admiration for nature and its gifts. He has a robin bird as his friend, a family of crows, the turtle doves and strangely, a tame house fly, whose seat is the thumb nail of the author. And finally, a cream coloured mountain goat. The beauty of the Himalayan evenings,

At nightfall, when I sit occasionally at the forest’s verge, under the prefect sphere of a full moon set in an indigo-blue sky, strange cries come to me out of the depths.
The savage population is astir. The night invites wild animals to begin their roaming. Above it all the nightjar, that noisy bird, screeches overhead in the darkness. Fireflies flicker between the trees, weaving weird patterns of phosphorescent light in the blackness.17

As far as the adventures of the visitors are concerned, the visit from Yogi Pranavananda was a surprise visit and he bought with him the tale of his master Swami Jnanananda, who is said to have performed deep meditation in the raging cold of the Tehri region of the Himalayas where the author is now residing. The Swami travelled to Gangotri according to his disciple and sat at a height of eleven thousand feet at the temple level in deep meditation. This feat was accomplished due to the expertise in Hatha Yoga, the Yoga of body control.

During his meditative state on the hillock with Yogi Pranavananda, through telepathic connection, he is granted the drashan of the Swami. Another significant adventure is narrated by the Nepalese Prince, about a fakir who could control jinns. Prince Mussoree Shum Shere Jung Bahadur Rana of Nepal was an acquaintance of Brunton. He visited the author in the Himalayas on a prior promise.

The story of the spirit, possessing the raja, and his eluding its effect with the help of his master, tells us the importance of Hatha Yoga and his undying devotion towards his master in his life. The Nepalese king’s family were practitioners of Hatha Yoga for generations including the Raja’s twelve year old son.

These incidents and the visits proved stimulating for the practices of Paul Brunton. His spiritual practices to sit still and unleash the power of the Overself were combined with the gaining of the working knowledge of the universe. The presence of the

spiritual flow in the universe through natural forces and the harmony of man with nature absorbing the divinity existing therein is remarkably described by Brunton.

With the approach of the autumn season, Brunton had to leave the bungalow and he retraced his steps towards a small-town named Pratapnagar. Before he left the place he had a profound experience near the deodar tree where the universal soul spoke to him through the tree, as a thought current. This made Brunton realize that Nature and man are truly one.

The town of Pratapnagar made the author aware of the cruelties of the wildlife and the hard lives of the mountain dwellers. Night travel was dangerous due to possible animal attacks. The bear attacks, which were common in the area made one to be constantly vigilant. The town of Pratapnagar was least affected by the ferocious monsoon showers than the rest of the Himalayan range. Hence the author had to shift his abode to the palace in the town.

In the end, the message of the Himalayan range as received by Brunton was, as he puts it, “the ultimate message of Himalaya is SILENCE, that silence which carries the breath of God in its hush. In that silence mankind may find its proof of the existence of God, of the reality of a Universal Power behind Nature which is ever present and ever-working. To me life shall ever after be bigger and nobler because I have lived here.”18

The most important aspect of A Search in Secret India is its function as the archetypal blueprint of the quest for a spiritual teacher—be it in India, or in one’s own heart. PB presents us with a compendium of all the problems and opportunities such a search must encounter. These include the issue of dealing with over-eager disciples who may be well-disguised messengers of truth or mere

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fanatics; the challenge of differentiating the public image of a popular Guru from the truth—or falsity—of the man himself; the experience of opportunely meeting a genuine teacher, only to find that he or she is not one’s own teacher; and finally, there is the fundamental battle within oneself as to whether or not to accept a teacher.19

A Hermit in the Himalayas on the other hand is filled with descriptions of the surrounding mountains and their denizens inspiring us to seek our own communion with Nature and to explore its sacred places. Like the Chinese Mountain Sage Han Shan, PB (as known to his admirers) focuses on the ordinary things of life, and, as the outer world diminishes, in its importance takes us a little ways within ourselves, even as he withdraws deeper and deeper into himself.

The progress in the personality and outlook of the author is clearly evident in the books. The first book A Search in Secret India was written with a doubtful air as he did not yet find his master. The quest here was for a true spiritual Guru. The book was written in an objective manner with a conflict of faith and doubt acting as the constant companions of the author’s mind. But the second travelogue resulted after the experience of Brunton spiritually. The expedition was to fulfil an inner promise, the promise of finding the Overself (The universal force.)

Brunton, through his teachings developed a new concept called Mentalism.

Mentalism teaches us that the world around us and in us and we ourselves are naught but Universal Mind, and that individual minds work in concert to generate


<http://www.paulbrunton.org/additional-publications.php>
experience, perception, and even life itself. This is not a doctrine of illusion, for PB
tells us that to labour for lifetimes only to return exactly from whence we came is
both a waste and an untruth. There are real lessons, skills, and experiences to be
had here in this life and in this world that contribute to the spiritual journey of all
humankind.20

The books are entirely autobiographical and written in first person narrative. They
contain a brief description of the conditions of India and he also highlights the fact that,
European seekers were not very welcome to be entrusted with the secrets of Yogic
practices which were the treasured secrets of the Hindus.

The social conditions and the Indian mind-set are beautifully studied by him. He
agrees that the average Indian is a religious man, and faith is deeply rooted in his soul.
Brunton also highlights the problem of fake Yogis misleading the people in the name of
religion.

The author also is a lover of nature as is evident from his book, A Hermit in the
Himalayas. His allusions to Shelley’s poetry to describe the beauty of the Himalayas and
its surroundings prove it to be true. As Brunton says, “in the poet Shelley’s phrase I feel
“made one with Nature.” When I sit on my cliff-edge with untimed patience, letting
beauty and serenity of my surroundings seep into my being, I begin to feel that I, too,
have become a part of the quite landscape.”21

Paul Brunton is sceptical in the first book but in his second book, he is reminiscent
and calm. The inner conflict in the first book is resolved, now the soul of the author is

20<http://www.paulbrunton.org/termsandteachings.php#mentalism-and-philosophy>

seeking peace and calm, hence the language is philosophical and analytical as opposed to the argumentative and objective outlook in *A Search in Secret India*.

Paul Brunton’s search for the Universal mind started on the peaks of the Himalayas after he successfully completed his quest for a *Guru*. The importance of a teacher as mentioned by Sahabji Maharaj quoted by Brunton in *A search in Secret India* proved to be true for him. “The master knows beforehand who is to come to him and he will draw them magnetically to him. His power meets their destiny and the result is inescapable.”

Paul Brunton was drawn to Sri Ramana *Maharishi* and the results were life changing. PB later wrote many books on his mystical experiences and carried the teachings of the *Rishi* to the West. His books *The Secret Path* and *A Search in Secret India* carried the teachings of the *Maharishi* to the west. Paul Brunton is to this day regarded as a mystic and a teacher whose presence generated spiritual bliss among his followers.

The answer to the question which his teacher Shri Ramana *Maharishi* advised him to put on himself about his identity i.e. who am I? is finally resolved and his quest for spiritual identity ends in *A Hermit in the Himalayas*. In the Epilogue, he reinvents the previously mentioned phrase of the Psalmist “Be still, and know that I am God” to “Be still and know the *I Am*-God!” 22

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