



I N S I G H T S

INSIGHTS

into

The Ramana Way

by
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Published by
RAMANA MAHARSHI CENTRE FOR LEARNING
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Bangalore - 560 003 Phone : 3369633

© Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning
40/41, 2nd Cross,
Lower Palace Orchards,
Bangalore - 560 003.
Phone : 3369633

Third Edition : September, 1996

ISBN : 81-85378-26-6

Cover design by
M. Muralidhara Hegde
Typeset by
Viswas Services
Bangalore - 560 003
Printed by
Modern Process Printers
Bangalore - 560 010

CONTENTS

1.	Acknowledgements	i
2.	Introduction	ii
3.	Is the Mind a Myth?	1
4.	The Options	5
5.	Never Mind the Mind	8
6.	Inward, Inward is the Path	14
7.	The Direct Method	18
8.	The Exorcist - Burying the Ego	21
9.	Holistic Meditation	26
10.	Blossoming Spiritually	30
11.	Unhurried and Recollected Life	34
12.	Being Still	37
13.	From Time to Beyond Time	40
14.	The Inundation of Joy	43
15.	Should Self-Enquiry Be Only One More Method?	47
16.	The Past is the Present Misery	51
17.	Is Surrender Possible Without Self-Enquiry?	54
18.	Days Pass Into Months and Months Into Years	57
19.	Learning and Unlearning	61
20.	Common Fare	65
21.	Angles Of Vision	69

22.	Death, Continuity and Freedom	73
23.	To Me, to You, and the Whole World, He Is the Guru	77
24.	Ramana as Sadguru	81
25.	Invigorating Positivism	84
26.	Is it the Purpose for Which They Have Come?	87
27.	Ramana, Who Are You Really?	91
28.	Do Not Be Taken In	95
29.	Vicarious Penance	99
30.	Invoking Ramana's Grace	103
31.	Where Does Wisdom Lie?	107
32.	Where Has The Passion Gone?	111

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sri T.N. Venkataraman, President, Sri Ramanasramam, has kindly permitted the use of the material in various publications of Sri Ramanasramam. Dr. Sarada has offered many useful suggestions and gone through the proof with patient care. Sri Muralidhara Hegde has designed the beautiful cover. The quality D.T.P. output is by Viswas Services. Modern Process Printers have printed the book with their usual excellence.

To all of them the Centre offers its special thanks.

Bangalore
15.12.92

President,
Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore

INTRODUCTION

The sacred words of Ramana are timeless. Because they are based on his direct experience of steady Self-abidance. The hallmark of Ramana was his accessibility. His doors were always open, be it in the 'Old Hall' or the 'New Hall' or the 'Nirvana Room'. The only thing he would insist upon was that none should be denied the opportunity of meeting him. As a result there was a free flow of visitors, devotees and serious seekers of truth. Their backgrounds, their earnestness and spiritual evolution were different. Consequently we have a variety of questions, a wide gambit of spiritual doubts which Ramana has handled with authority and simple directness. It is open to all those concerned with truth, with the search for Self-knowledge, to dwell on the meaning of his words, statements and clarifications. They are like an 'open book', from which one can derive strength and inspiration. There is no need for any special scriptural knowledge for understanding his teachings.

However it is absolutely necessary to ponder over and reflect on the guidance given. Such a need is there for any path but it is more so in the Ramana Way. Why? For it is bafflingly simple, seemingly without steps between the practice and the goal. There is no system of 'dos' and 'dents'. No prescribed formulae. The nature of the experience, natural happiness, is the same during practice, and what one is used to calling the 'ultimate' experience. The difference being only that during the stage of practice one keeps moving in and out of this state of blissful, non-mental happiness. When the experience of this state is steady and undistracted, that itself is the goal.

The means and the goal being the same is so alien to our dualistic thoughts. Hence one has to go back, time and again, to Ramana's statements, to understand their true meaning for practice. When it is a matter of unfoldment, of revelation, the progress is invisible and cannot be judged with reference to tangible and measurable yardsticks. Hence the great need for calm in dwelling on the practical implications of Ramana's direct path for getting a proper insight into his teachings.

Ramana accepts all the traditional spiritual methods. He would encourage people to continue their practice along the lines to which they were naturally inclined. If ritualistic worship is your cup of tea,

fine, if you think action dedicated to God is your way, that too is fine. If your faith is in the sacred syllables, by all means do go ahead. If your attraction is for Patanjali and his breath-regulation method it is quite all right. On the other hand if you think that devotion to God is the way do not give it up. Ramana would say that all these methods are purificatory. They would prepare one for self-enquiry to which all seekers of truth have to come in the end.

Here it is necessary to go into some essential aspects of Ramana's path for it has special features of its own. As Ramana says, "Yoga teaches control of the activities of the mind. But I say self-enquiry. This is a practical way". What is the difference between the extant practices and what Ramana teaches. One might say that all other methods assume duality, the subject 'I' and the object, be it a sacred syllable, thoughts, or a form of a God held dear. Is this division really valid? Am I not the mind? The thinker and his thoughts are integral. Are they not? As Ramana remarks, "One must learn to realise that the subject and object are one". Meditation on an object would therefore be based on a non-existing division. By ignoring the sense of oneness, the other methods can take one only to the threshold and prepare one for self-enquiry by purifying the mind. Why? Because the sense of individuality, the feeling of separate existence would remain untackled.

There would also be differences in practice. For, in other methods one would necessarily be dealing with the content of the mind in order to make it virtuous, pure and desireless. Cultivation of good thoughts, cultivation of desirelessness, practice of regulation of breath and so on, would be attempted.

In contrast self-enquiry incessantly stressed by Ramana is holistic, unitary. Attention is only on the subject. The idea about one's separate identity is constantly questioned until one discovers the falsity of the notion. The question 'Who am I?' is posed in order to raise a doubt about 'one's assumption that one is a particular name and form, 'I am this' or 'that'. Unless one enquires, unless one is saturated with the spirit of enquiry how can one find out? Attention is not allowed to wander from thought to thought. The whole world of thoughts, innumerable varied and powerful in

their numerical strength, is negated by shifting attention from thoughts to the thinker. Can there be thoughts without the thinker? Can there be doubts without a doubter? All dualistic ideas are put to sword for thoughts cannot flourish when the individual's attention is not on them. They are literally starved to death for want of the attention which gives life to them. When the individual's association with his thoughts are cut, he falls back on his true strength. The mind turns within and merges in the fullness of consciousness. The individual current of energy merges in the universal current which is ever existent, all embracing and whole. When this happens one is 'inundated with happiness', with joy which is at once spontaneous and natural.

What happens is the shedding of a great load; the load of thoughts. The mind is so full of thoughts, is it not? Functional thoughts, psychological thoughts and purposeless thoughts keep persisting. Purposeless for they have no relevance to one's life. When there is a 'load-shedding' of these thoughts, one feels free, happy. The mind becomes spacious when its cluttering is cleared. Functioning directly from the universal current, termed the 'Heart' by Ramana, intuition and feeling will replace mental conceptualisation. Each moment would then be new and suffused with joy.

The reader's attention is drawn to the contents page which would give him a clear idea about the practice orientation of this book. The focus is on the mind, and the way to make it quiet, indrawn and restful. The primacy of self-enquiry for holistic meditation, for surrender and for freedom has also been covered. Because what we are looking for is not intellectual appreciation of the verbal beauty or the lofty logic of Ramana's words but their significance for experiencing the natural state of joy. Hence the 'insights' in the book are from the angle of getting off the mental movement, the angle of fostering the inturning of the mind and the angle of merging the mind in its conscious source.

It would also be noticed that a good deal of emphasis is laid on the role of Ramana as the Sadguru. For it is difficult to overstate the need for being aware of his presence as the inner guru. Who can be a better guide than Ramana himself? At times of depression, listlessness, and doubt, his support would be needed to sustain the momentum of inwardness. It would be there, unfailingly, if one seeks it.

Bangalore
1st September 1992

A.R. NATARAJAN

1. Is the Mind a Myth?

1. What is the mind? If one searches to find out there would be no separate entity as the mind.

- Upadesa Saram, Verse 17.

2. The mind stilled by breath regulation gets destroyed by pursuing a single thought.

- Upadesa Saram, Verse 13.

3. Intelligence is the nature of the mind. The mind is pure and undefiled like ether.

- Self-Enquiry:

Collected Works, pp.11-14.

Having heard Muruganar about Ramana and the uniqueness of his teaching, Santamma comes to Sri Ramanasramam with eager longing to quench her spiritual thirst. Straightaway she asks Ramana 'Please destroy my mind'. Ramana tells Muruganar, 'Ask her if there is such a thing as the mind? If so what is its form?' She is baffled, not being able to grasp the true import of Ramana's words. But Muruganar tells her, 'You have been initiated.' What had she been initiated into? Was it the secret about the mind's nature and the need to enquire about it? But then if one looks at the statements in their naked form the question would arise as to what one is to enquire into if the mind is non-existent? Ramana's statement in 'Upadesa Undiyar' - 'Manam ena onru illai, 'there is no such thing as the mind' also makes one ponder about the exact meaning of Ramana's words.

Does Ramana then subscribe to the view that the mind is a myth, that it is non-existent? Does he say that it is as illusory as the waters of a desert mirage or a barren woman's son? Quite surely 'No'. Why do we say this? Were it to be so the quotes at Nos.2 and 3 above would have no meaning would they? If there be no mind, it would be idle to refer to its lulling or destruction.

Is the Mind a Myth?

Again where would be the question of going into its nature, as to whether it is consciousness or whether it is pure or impure? So we must find out what exactly is the notion which Ramana is declaring to be false. It is the notion that the mind is a separate entity. What Ramana is constantly bashing is this erroneous idea of an independent existence to the mind. For the mind is only a bundle of thoughts. Because of emergence of thoughts, we surmise something from which they start and term it as the mind." Where was your mind in deep sleep when thoughts were not there? If it were permanent as it is imagined, can it be non-existent sometimes and existent at other times?

If thoughts constitute the mind some further questions would arise. "Are you distinct from your thoughts? Can you exist without them? Can thoughts exist without you?" If one questions thus it would be found that thoughts cannot exist without you. Why do we say this? It is common knowledge that thoughts are innumerable and varied but at any given moment only one thought can exist. Why? Because the individual's attention is needed. The moment this attention is withdrawn or switched on to another thought, the first thought recedes and the later thought to which the attention has been shifted sprouts up.

Therefore, Ramana points out that other thoughts are dependent on the individual 'I'-thought. What about the opposite position? Can one exist without the other thoughts? Can one be totally free of thoughts? 'Yes'. Sleep and the state of a jnani are enough evidence for this. It follows that the individual is the mind and not the individual and his mind, as we have all along been thinking.

Logically then if we must know about the mind and its nature, we have to find out about the individual, about the feeling of individuality. Our daily experience of waking, dream and deep sleep holds the key to this. Individuality is existent in waking and is absent in sleep. Since it is discontinuous it must have a source from which it rises and into which it subsides. Must it not?

On the basis of his experience Ramana has indicated its

Is the Mind a Myth?

source to be the spiritual heart on the right side of the chest. What is the nature of this heart? It is the fullness of consciousness. If the mind has a conscious source, its nature must be consciousness. It is precisely this point which Ramana explains in great detail to Gambhiram Seshaiyer, at the turn of this century. The nature of the mind is 'intelligence, pure and undefiled'. It is a wave in the sea of consciousness. One can never lose sight of this fact for in it lies the way to our freedom.

As long as the mind remains anchored in its source its purity is unsullied. However, presently it is merged at its source only in deep sleep and that too involuntarily. Due to the rising of latent thoughts on waking, the mind is in continuous association with some thought or the other without let. These associate thoughts may be 'good', 'bad', 'neutral' and so on. But they are all dangerous. If you let in one thought by paying attention to it you are done for. Because the mind's natural purity and silence would be disturbed and muddled. The gentle patience of Ramana in explaining this point is touching. As he says, one should not give room to such thoughts: 'Is this good?' or 'Is that good?' or 'Can this be done?' One should be vigilant even before such thoughts arise and make the mind stay in its natural state. For no thought is our friend. It is a foe in disguise ready to topple us; once thoughts surface they cause 'more and more evil' to use the strong expression of Ramana. It is seldom that Ramana uses such a strong expression. But he does so about conceptualisation for there is no point in mincing matters when it comes to restoring to us the means to be free and ever joyous. Free of what? The pollution of the mind. The overcrowding of the mind. The dissipation of the mind's energy in innumerable thoughts working at cross purposes. Not that one cannot handle the mind after the 'I' is badly mixed with its associates, the other thoughts. But this would then be a salvage operation of questioning to whom thoughts relate, which is often time-consuming and frustrating. Instead, if vigilant, one can prevent foothold to thoughts

Is the Mind a Myth?

which are ever ready for the unguarded moment.

The very simplicity of the step by step searchlight which Ramana throws on the mind is baffling. Why? Because we are unwilling to jettison, to throw overboard our false notions. We keep fumbling and groping like blind bats when the sun is shining brightly. Lost in the mind's labyrinthine ways we end our lives grumbling and complaining about a mind which is out of control, restless and chaotic. Should we not give ourselves a chance to be that vastness of silence when the mind is abiding at its source?

2. The Options

M: Yoga teaches chitta vritti nirodha (control of the activities of the mind). But I say Atma - Vichara (self-enquiry). This is a practical way.

Talks 485 p.463

Our minds are crowded with thoughts. Sometimes it is like a railway platform or airport lounge when the trains or planes are running behind schedule. At other times it is like a traffic jam when the traffic policeman is temporarily off duty. It is such a pell-mell - a regular free for all. Each set of thoughts keep competing with the other groups for the attention of the individual. Isn't this a sorry state? Why is it that our minds are so cramped, so overcrowded? Why have we reduced our mind to a basti? Why have we allowed ourselves to become slum dwellers so far as our mind is concerned? There is dirt and pollution all around.

In contrast, the mind of a Jnani is free, completely free of thoughts. There is a vast space which enables him to function in freedom. It is not that he cannot use thought. Indeed he must. How else can he communicate? All the mental faculties, memory, reasoning, inference are there. Though the Jnani's mind is ordinarily free from thoughts, whenever necessary the related thoughts come up. When the purpose of those thoughts is done, the thoughts too cease. Once again the mind is free, not limited and constrained by thought pressures, free from the 'tyranny of thoughts'

What does it imply? Jnanis are in a position to switch off and switch on thoughts. whereas we are pestered by them. We cannot get rid of the unwanted thoughts and keep holding on to wanted thoughts. Say, for instance, while meditating we have set apart time for God. Do we succeed or do we get up in disgust at the intrusion of so many 'other thoughts'? All this is to point out that we must find some means by which our minds would come under control.

The Options

It is here that we find Ramana's contribution most significant. He points out that unless you understand what the mind is, unless you know its nature you cannot control it. Do we know what the mind is? We assume it to be a separate entity like the body. We call it a subtle body. But, says Ramana, there is no such separate entity at all. That which we call the mind is only a collection of thoughts centred round a thinker. To illustrate, take away all thoughts. Then what remains? Can you point out to anything as the mind? Again in deep sleep there are no thoughts and the so called mind also ceases to be.

Ramana says that though thoughts are innumerable and varied and are quite an army they are all the individual's thoughts. All thoughts are my thoughts. Unless the individual pays attention to a particular thought it remains in the background and will not surface. This will be clear if we look at our daily thought pattern. The individual's attention when he gets up would be on thoughts relating to getting ready for the office quickly, later in his office, on the jobs on hand there, and in the evening on the family, on recreation and so on. The thoughts not relating to his particular need would not be there at all because the attention of the individual is not on them. Hence the 'I am so and so' is the core thought and it irrigates the whole system of thoughts. It is the root and other thoughts are like branches and twigs.

Following from this Ramana would say that there is no point in paying attention to thoughts for they are parasitic and dependent on the individual 'I' thought. Therefore, if you want to control the mind you must shift the focus of your attention from the thoughts to the thinker. If you succeed in this you have succeeded in paying attention to the core instead of peripheral things. This shifting of attention takes place if you question 'For whom are these thoughts?' The answer of course is 'For me'. If you question further, says Ramana, by enquiring 'Who am I?' the thoughts would cease. Silence would reign. If thoughts emerge again on the horizon the same process should be repeated. As Ramana says, it is like capturing a fort by laying siege to it. As and when the soldiers come out they are dealt with until at last the fort is captured.

The Options

Here again Ramana would caution against thinking either that 'Who am I?' is a mantra or that it is a question. It is neither. It is only an attitude or spirit of enquiry about the mind. It is an attention catching device which enables the fixing of the attention on the individual so that thoughts may not be formed. The formation of thought clouds is nipped in the bud. The results in this method are quick. Because we are dealing with the centre of the mind and focussing attention on it. It also has the advantage that it requires no particular background, no particular religious belief in order to practice it. It can be practised at any spare time. Only you should have the spirit of adventure. You should have the keen desire to know. Then you will achieve a breakthrough in mind control. You will become its boss and not a victim of its whims and fancies. Why? For you have understood its real nature. This understanding frees you from the endless thought movement. You are always at rest. Whether active or inactive the repose, the peace of mind is always there.

3. Never Mind the Mind

D: The mind always wanders. I cannot control it.

M: It is the nature of the mind to wander. You are not the mind. It is impermanent whereas you are eternal. To inhere in the Self is the thing. Never mind the mind. If its source is sought it will vanish leaving the Self unaffected.

Talks 97 P 93

In any walk of life one has certain definite goals towards which one is working. These goals keep shifting and are jacked up with reference to prior achievements. A student would be working for merit ranking, scholarship, competitive examination, foreign studies and so on. An officer of the government would be aiming at going up the official ladder, or getting posted to a more influential seat and a politician is concerned with widening his popular base, in strengthening his position in his party hierarchy and generally to be regarded as a leader. A businessman would be keen on adding to the number of companies in his group by his keen competitive edge and political clout. One important point to remember is that one can always check up and one does check the progress or lack of it with reference to these goals and constantly reappraise the needs of the situation. Also we are prepared to give all that we have got, to pour into our efforts every ounce of energy in order to be successful.

However, when it comes to the spiritual side alone one does not seem to be clear about what exactly one is seeking from it. Often one may be bogged down by theoretical and idealistic goals. For instance, one might think that the goal is 'mukti', liberation, or Self-knowledge or God - vision. While undoubtedly those having these goals are serious about their beliefs, the difficulty is that one cannot be passionate about such goals so long as it is a theoretical adherence and not a felt need. How real can the objective of liberation be to one who does not feel that all this is a passing show, a 'vanity of vanities'? Without

Never Mind the Mind

dispassion, without awareness of the transitoriness of everything which we seek and hold dear, mukti becomes only an idea, not something for which one would care deep down oneself.

So in order to go far one has to come near and look at his own daily turmoils look at his endless fears and fix his goals with reference to them. If one does give a reflective look at what he is and plans to end the gaps to happiness, then and only then there would be realism in the goals. If I am constantly living in fear of the reaction of others lest I should lose their love, if I am always in expectation of support from others to dear causes, if my mind is restless and agitated what should be my goal? To escape from the shadow of desire and fear must be our aim if we are to give a practical turn to our endeavours. Then the goal would be meaningful for it would have been integrated to life as we live it. One might stress the fact that unless the chosen goal has a direct relation to our problems it would not be possible to sustain the zest for effort. In one sense, this is a realistic turn to our goals and therefore to our sadhana. Does this mean we are giving up spiritual goals, held out before us as, ideals in the scriptures? The answer is 'no' if one goes into their true meaning. For instance when one aims at 'mukti' he is in effect seeking to be restored to his natural state of peace. Ramana made this point emphatically when speaking to Pannalal, a senior member of the Indian Civil Service. Pannalal told Ramana that he was holding a top post in the government, had a loving wife, and bright children but still he had no peace of mind. He wanted to know why he hankered after peace. Ramana told him that this was because peace is our nature and restlessness is not. He illustrated it by adding "When we have a headache we immediately seek a cure for it, for health is natural and ill-health is unnatural. So we wish to get rid of it." Peace is the natural state of the mind in the same way as sound health is of the body. If we make our goal the tranquil mind undisturbed by activities performed and by situations in life we would have opted not only for a practical goal but also for that which has been declared by Ramana to be the most natural one.

Never Mind the Mind

Let us assume that we are now clear about the goal. It is a mind which is always naturally restful irrespective of the circumstances. This very clarity gives one great strength for keeping at spiritual practices. The next question is as to what is the best means of achieving this goal?

One finds that most of the persons who came to Ramana expressed diffidence and doubt about the feasibility of a restful mind amidst the pressures and pulls of daily life. With very little time available for meditation, and with constant family worries dogging, they are convinced that even this goal which means so much is beyond their grasp. The story which Ramana told one such devotee is fascinating and drives home the point that one should not sit on the sidelines but enter the fray and find out the truth. The story narrated by Ramana in 1916 runs thus:

“A person who has never seen an ocean must make a trip to it to know about it. Standing there before the huge expanse of water, this person may wish to bathe in the sea. Of what use is it if, seeing the roaring and rolling of the waves, he were to just stand there thinking, ‘I shall wait for all this to subside. When it does, I shall enter it for a quiet bath just as in the pond back home’? He has to realise either by himself, or by being told, that the ocean is restlessness from the moment of Creation and will continue likewise till Pralaya (destruction). He will then resolve to learn to bathe in it as it is. He may wade into it by and by, and perhaps, through prior instruction, learn to duck under a wave and let it pass over him. He would naturally hold his breath while doing so. Soon he would be skilled enough to duck, at a stretch, wave after wave, and thus achieve the purpose of bathing without coming to grief. The ocean may go on and though in it, he is free from its grip ... So too here.”

The important thing is to take the plunge with confidence. Ramana would say, “Others have succeeded. Why not you?” Also, what we are attempting is only a revelatory process. The attempt is to become aware of the natural silence and quietness of the mind through appropriate enquiry.

Never Mind the Mind

What is the appropriate enquiry? It is the enquiry about the self. The question arises as to what we are referring to when we say we are enquiring into the self. What is self-enquiry? Does it refer to the mind, the ego or the Atman? Obviously it cannot refer to the Atman for the limited cannot measure the infinite. It therefore refers to the mind. Can the mind enquire about itself? Can it look at itself? Yes. Ramana has explained what exactly it means. Firstly, there is the need to examine the validity of some of our assumptions about the mind itself. In all our attempts at mind control we take for granted that there is a separate entity called the mind. This is a fundamental mistake says Ramana. He would say, "Mind is intangible. In fact it does not exist." "When we see what the mind is there is nothing like it". "If you search for it, it will vanish by itself for it has no real existence". "A search for it discloses its non-existence". "If an enquiry is made whether mind exists, it will be found that mind does not exist" and so on. At the same time, he would patiently explain to the devotees that the mind is only a series of thought patterns with the core thought of individuality and other thoughts which keep changing according to the response of the individual to the world at particular points of time. Again the multiplicity and variety of thoughts need not scare us. Why? Because though they are vast in number they are all essentially dependent like creepers on a tree. Unless the individual pays attention to a specific thought it cannot surface on the thought horizon. Have you not heard of being absent minded. The other person may be chattering but his words do not register for the attention of the individual is not there.

Following from this is the importance of paying attention to the centre, to the me. This only means that whenever there is a mental movement wherever there is the formation of thought clouds before they gather momentum they have to be arrested. They need to be stopped at the hustling. This is done by questioning for whom these thoughts arise. Such questioning would bring back the attention from the thoughts to the thinker.

This is the first but essential step in warding off thought formations and for preventing their build up. Being off the mental

Never Mind the Mind

movement enables one to stay with the 'I' - thought. The moment this happens the mind turns inwards. For the mind rises from the Self, the Consciousness. When the connection with thoughts is severed it falls back into its source. In fact in the Ramana Way the emphasis is not so much on the content of the mind, though we begin with it to explain the nature of the mind, as with the source of thought. Once there is success in turning the mind back and in exposing it to the light of the Self the mind is restored to its pristine purity and quietness. The process of getting back to the source was once explained by Ramana to his attendant Rangaswami. A nest was built above Bhagavan's couch by a squirrel. A cat had eaten the mother of the young squirrels and the responsibility for their care was taken over by Bhagavan. Each time a young squirrel came out of the nest, Ramana would put it back into the nest so that it may be safe there. For there was danger outside which the young ones did not realise. Bhagavan's purpose was to make the squirrels enjoy staying within. Just then Rangaswami asked, "What is the path for keeping inward?", Ramana replied, "It is exactly the same as what I am doing now." Pushing back the mind to its source, the heart, is the purpose of spiritual practice so that the mind may taste the happiness and peace which is its essential nature.

But if peace and happiness is only the end product, if one does not have the experience of that state along the way, as one keeps at practice, one is likely to lose interest. The absence of an experience of different dimension would make one fall back on known ways of assuming that pleasure comes from objects. Ramana assures that one does not need to have a patient or a long wait. Even though the process of transformation is gradual one begins to feel the fresh inner joy fairly early. Ramana told Humphreys as far back as 1911 that even if he were to meditate, rightly, for about ten to fifteen minutes a day, in a couple of months there would be a change in mental attitudes. One would acquire power, always as a background, to deal more harmoniously with others, with ideas and events. Nothing would be overwhelming and things would be seen in the right perspective.

Never Mind the Mind

There are also some tests which would be the barometers of change. Firstly, in our 'loveless heart' seeds of love would have been sown. There would be a growing expansion of the heart in compassion, in fellow-feeling and love for those around us. All things which eat into love like judgements, jealousies and the like would wane. Then there would be a general feeling of well being, an exhilaration in everything, a true zest in whatever we are involved in. Freed from the cramping effects of an overcrowded mind, one would live immersed in peace and joy.

4. Inward, Inward is the Path

'Inward', is the word he utters,
To me who wished to know the path
'Inward', 'Inward' is the path
For everyone the path is inward.

Muruganar, Ramana Sannidhi Murai
Verse 533

No one has given a clearer anatomy of the mind than Ramana. He has explained the A to Z of the nature of the mind, its source, its association, and how to make the most of its potential. Even so it is important to go into all his statements. One should not lose the correct hang of it by sectional and partial reading. For instance he would often question the existence of the entity, mind. He told Santamma, 'Is there such a thing as the mind? Does it have any hallmark?' He told a visitor, 'Show me the mind and I will strike it down!' On the other hand he would emphasise the need for 'destroying the mind' and stress the futility of methods which merely lull it into temporary stillness. The question would naturally arise as to how one can destroy a non-existent thing. Would it be shadow boxing? Another proposition he would make is that Reality alone is. Following from this would be the fact that the mind must originate from Reality, or Consciousness. The next idea in Ramana's exposition is that the mind is a bridge between consciousness from which it arises and the world of thoughts beginning with the 'I am so and so' thought. What Ramana means when he says that there is no such thing as the mind is only that it is not a tangible or separate entity like the body. It is only a thought cluster, with a root I-thought and other thoughts dependent on it. If thoughts constitute the mind it follows that when we do not have thoughts, as in deep sleep, there is no mind. It disappears somewhere. Quite obviously it cannot happen if it is an independent entity. When talking about destroying the mind, Ramana refers only to constant and vigilant practice of merging it in its source and stabilising it there. Once this is done, mind itself is consciousness, arising as a thought

form when thoughts are needed. The mind is like a wave in the sea of consciousness and is therefore, in essence, consciousness. It is pure, sharp and totally detached from the activities in which it is engaged. It is then 'Brahmakara Vritti', or Brahman in the form of a thought wave.

Ramana has made this clear in 1902 when explaining the nature of the mind to Sivaprakasam Pillai. He told him 'What is called the mind is conscious power residing in the Self'. He has told other seekers too that in its purity the mind is the power of the Self itself.

While the mind has a pure source, it is contaminated by its association. The mind which is pure as it originates imposes a limitation on itself by its identification with a particular body. Once this notion 'I am so and so' is superimposed, the mind which is by its nature intuned, becomes externalised. Other thoughts, based on relationship to people, possessions and ideas, crowd in. There is a regular babel of thoughts, a pell mell. Often it is like a village bazar on a shandy day. The classification of thoughts as pleasant and unpleasant and the effort to hold on to the former and avoid the latter goes on. The superimposition of value judgements and ideas add to the general confusion prevalent in the mind. The mind which is essentially pure and always in repose becomes broken, splintered and restless.

Since the root cause of the trouble is the externalisation of the mind, the solution lies in our ability to find a technique which would internalise the mind again and stabilise it at its source.

Many methods have been suggested and practised for this purpose. Desires are the cause of an insatiable activity orientation. It is therefore widely thought that if desires are controlled, suppressed, negated or sublimated, the problem would be solved. Another method practised is to cultivate noble thoughts, or the eightfold virtues, in order that the mind may be purified, in order that its 'sattvic' content may be increased. All this is undoubtedly efficacious, but quite obviously time consuming. The transformation is slow. The effort and the result are not

commensurate. The difficulty is all the greater if one remembers the inescapable time-frame of life. One has to pack all that one has got to push ahead with inwardness, to succeed in stabilising the merging of the mind in its source. True, there would be another innings or more than one innings as long as the wrong notion of identification of one's self with the body lasts. But can one who is very serious about Self-Knowledge be content with such a thought? If the urge to find out, if the compulsion to know is strong, one has to look for a direct way which would yield the maximum results. It is here that Ramana's teaching matters.

Ramana himself terms self-enquiry the straight path. Why straight? Because it concerns itself with the mind, its origin and its essential nature. One 'Brahma astra' Ramana would invariably use. If you have desires, can they exist without the desirer? Find out who the desirer is. If you plead ignorance, again the same reply, find out who is ignorant. If you consider yourself impure find out who is impure, he would say. Why? This is in order to bring attention back to the basic question about one's identity. To disabuse oneself of the habitual preoccupations with the second and third persons. Unless the focus is so clearly on 'I' unless attention is constantly brought back to it, one would remain a victim of his own ignorance, an ignorance which is responsible for mind's waywardness and restlessness. Since self-enquiry has revived the attention on the 'I', thoughts which depend on the individual's attention wither and fade for want of it. The mind turns inward and experiences the thrill of inherent joy.

By this technique of self-enquiry, we are systematically destroying the mind. For we have seen that the mind is only a conglomeration of thoughts. When thoughts are not allowed to sprout, mind too is just not there. The question naturally arises as to what would happen thereafter. The prospect is quite scary isn't it? We apprehend the loss of our memory, our intellect and reasoning faculty. Since our sense of existence is based on our relationship to objects, to persons and ideas, would not the death of the mind be cutting at the very fabric of our lives? Would we not be reduced to mere thoughtless idiots? All these fears are fundamental and unless one is able to deal with them it is unlikely that one would go the whole hog or plump for self-enquiry.

Since the fear is deep rooted one has to go into it. The most obvious way seems to be to point out the examples of jnanis like Suka, Sri Krishna and Ramana. Suka gave the devotional classic, Bhagavatham, Sri Krishna the Gita and Ramana, Ulladu Narpadu, a classic on Self-Knowledge through self-enquiry. They were undoubtedly embodiments of wisdom and their minds functioned with super-alertness even though 'dead' in the usual sense as we know it.

Again the fear is the product of wrongly locating consciousness in the mind. Ramana points out that the mind shines not by its own light. It is not self-luminous. It borrows its light from consciousness from which it springs. It is like the moon which reflects the sun's light. So when you revert to the source your mental faculties are not dimmed in the least but only heightened. The mind becomes sharp like the edge of Kusa grass, functioning whenever needed with alert passivity. One no longer needs to control the mind. Thoughts rise, and subside when their purpose is over. It is like automatic thermostat control. Freed from the stranglehold of innumerable thoughts, wanted and unwanted, the mind moves with alert swiftness in the vastness of space, a space which was lost because it was crowded with thoughts. All the burdens of psychological thoughts, the lingering on of memories which hurt, the sorrow of neglect, the moments which were once sweet, are extinguished. The mind is released from the load of useless memory. It becomes fresh and young.

Also one need not 'quake in fear and doubt' as to what would happen if we give up the thought contaminated mind. For Ramana points out that you get something much more worthwhile in its place. You become simultaneously aware of the throb, the bliss of the Heart. There is spontaneous joy, the joy of freedom when the burden of thought, of care, has ended. We are awake to and are constantly aware of the bubbling bliss within. One is suffused with exhilaration. With a mind which is ever new, ever renewing itself, a new ambrosial life begins.

5. The Direct Method

D: What is the difference between meditation and enquiry into the self?

M: Meditation is possible only if the ego ('I') is kept up. There is the ego ('I') and the object meditated upon. The method is indirect. Whereas the Self is one. Seeking the ego's source it disappears. What is left is the Self. This method is direct.

Talks 174, p 145

An American lady seeker came to India in search of truth. She went from ashram to ashram and kept asking what is the common unalterable dictum underlying Vedanta. Wherever she went the reply was the same. The world is 'unreal' and Brahman alone is 'real'. She knew nothing about Brahman. Its reality was lost on her. On the other hand she was aware of the world with its myriad beauty, with all its bewildering variety. How could it be unreal? Was there no truth in her relationships with 'her people', 'her family', 'her friends' and 'the society'? Was it all meaningless? Were her bank account and economic circumstance inconsequential? Was she to deny the evidence of her eyes, her ears and indeed all her senses? Bewildered and confused she came to Sri Ramanasramam. The Master asked, 'What happens to your 'real world' in sleep? Do you exist then, let alone your world? Again, was your dream world the same as your waking world? Were your friends able to give you their company when you were feeling lonely and lost while dreaming? How can the phenomena which keeps coming and going be real?' Slowly the truth dawned on her. She could realise the error in seeing the world as apart from the perceiver, apart from the continuing substratum of all the daily states of waking, dream, and sleep. It dawned on her that the superimposition of the notion of reality on changing movement and labelling the individual and his world as real was like 'an infatuated lover foisting chastity on a prostitute'. We too have to recognise this truth. It is time to step out of

illusion. Otherwise we could be trying to ride two horses simultaneously. One would be clinging to one's worldly attachments and seeking that which can dawn only when their hold loosens and drops off.

But this knowledge is only the first step. Chastity is unknown to thought. It keeps flirting in contra directions, attracted by pulls and contra-pulls and innate tendencies, which keep playing games more puzzling than the tricks that a magician pulls out of his hat. One must remain the victim of the mind's many allurements and illusions so long as one has separated oneself from the mind. Unless this primary ignorance regarding the mind as separate from oneself is ended there is no escape from mind's vagaries. For one is the mind. The whole thought structure with all its intricate patterns is for the thinker. The thinker and his thoughts are an integrated whole. Where are thoughts without the thinker? Why don't they come to life when his attention is absent? Once this is recognised we are on the right track. We have laid our hands on the malaise. We have diagnosed the cause of the mental muddle. We have arrived at the point that as long as the thinker is not the focus of one's attention, any sadhana to control the mind, to be free of its illusions, would be peripheral and perhaps even counter-productive.

Having come thus far we are still baffled when we start fixing attention on the question 'to whom do these thoughts relate?'. Baffled because we are so used to thinking in terms of solutions within the framework of the mind. Counter 'bad' thoughts with 'good' thoughts, give up desires and so on. The whole approach is foredoomed for the very act of pruning thoughts gives them strength as the pruning of the leaves of a tree would lead only to their profuse and lustrous growth. Hence the root and branch 'revolution' of Ramana, which enables side-stepping the world of thoughts through 'subjective' sadhana. It is not the usual subject-object oriented way but an exclusive focus on the subject, the thinker.

Along the path problems crop up. All of us know only too well the deafening roar of thoughts crowding in whenever an attempt is made to create a thought vacuum. It is almost as if

the dirty muck is being churned. There is such a volcanic surfacing of thoughts in quick and benumbing succession. One wonders whether one has succeeded only in opening up the Pandora's box in attempting to meditate. How are we to meet the challenges posed by hidden thoughts? For it is easy to be disheartened in the face of this thought-explosion, easy to give up or become luke warm in sadhana. To complain about this situation is like asking why the water boils in a kettle kept on an electric stove. The very purpose of lighting the torch of enquiry about who the thinker is through the simple query 'Who am I?' is to expose the enemy, the innumerable thoughts which lie camouflaged in seed form in the heart. By all means let them come out singly or in groups or in their battallions or regimental strength. They cannot disturb your poise unless you let them. What power do they have merely because of their numerical strength?

Ramana compares the way we load our minds with layers and layers of thoughts to a man 'who fills all the rooms of his house with chokefuls of unnecessary junk'. Ramana would add that 'if all the false ideas and impressions are swept away what remains is only the plenitude of the Self'.

This is possible only if you do not 'run with the running mind'. Thoughts should not be given any foothold. There should be no loopholes for their surreptitious entry. A precondition is to starve thoughts. For heavens sake do not pay attention to them. Let the focal point of your attention remain always on the thinker. So long as this attention is not allowed to stray one can be sure to go beyond the limitations of bizarre and uncontrolled thoughts.

What happens when the single minded focus is on the thinker is quite surprising. Surprising because we do not expect it, because we do not know how it occurs. It is totally unexpected but it happens. The idea of a separate thinker disappears. What is meant by this? The sense of individuality ceases. One becomes aware that nothing exists apart from oneself. The unity of the conscious source, the individual, and the world is experienced. All life pulsates in oneness. Oh! for the joy of it and the beauty of its benediction.

6. The Exorcist - Burying the Ego

M: Ego is not an entity independent of the Self ... It functions as an instrument of the Self and periodically ceases to function. That is to say it appears and disappears. This might be considered to be its birth and death.

Talks 285, p.243

The uprooting of the ego is the object of all spiritual effort. For it is only thereafter that the truth shines forth. It is a condition precedent to being Self-aware. But this ego is so elusive, so fleeting, that one has often to throw up one's hands in despair. We have the case of Major Chadwick, a long time inmate of Sri Ramanasramam. So deep was his disgust at his failure to tackle this problem that he solemnly dug a grave for his ego and entombed it. Not that he was not aware that any effort to bury the ego would be as futile as the efforts to bury one's shadow. It is bound to show up at the top after all the effort. His act was therefore purely symbolic of our deep rooted desire to get rid of the ego and of our growing frustration at our inability to do so.

Presently our whole world resolves round the feeling of individuality, our being this or that. Our well being and confidence depend on our ego. True, it may take various forms. Maybe it is the growing bank balance, rise in official ladder, increase in the size of political following, or the academic brilliance of the children which is the spur depending on the individual temperament. It is a purely psychological feeling that this is 'mine'. From a rational viewpoint it may be that crores in the bank account, living in a palace surrounded by servants, the children for whom we live, should not matter. For our happiness does not depend on them. But we are not rational at all when it comes to the pride of ownership, the thought of possession. We shudder at the prospect of losing our most valued possession, the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' for we have convinced ourselves that life would be empty and pointless if one does not have this. What is asked of us is to do a complete volte-face, a wholesale turn about from our cherished

values. True, it is repeatedly dinned into us that a state of bliss awaits us if we succeed in becoming totally dispossessed, devoid even of the mind and body. But this state being wholly outside the field of our present experience we are afraid that we might lose on both the fronts. Both spiritual gains and worldly joys would not be ours is the unsaid fear. It is this fear which is the silent killer of all effort to get rid of the ego. On top of it there is also the danger of the dreaded void. If the ego is snuffed out, if it is erased, would not blankness be the result? Won't we become mindless idiots? This is a fear which is very real for we find many seekers questioning Ramana about it and hanging on to their doubts even after assurances given by him that intuition would take the place of reason and that action would be perfect.

We have to put aside these fears and tackle the ego if a new life is to dawn, if life is to be lived in all its fullness. It is only the truly courageous, the 'dhiras', who can be the heirs to spiritual freedom. What does tackling the 'ego' imply and how is one to go about it? Wrongly laying the blame at the door of the possessions many have wasted long years in vain. Kings have renounced their kingdoms and retired to forests. People have resigned their jobs for the search of truth. Householders have left their families in the lurch. Some have donned the ochre robe. The hope of being free of ego is the motivation. But where has it led them? Is one handling the ego problem by these acts? An ardent devotee, Bose, suddenly took to sannyasa and came to Ramana. Ramana told him "When you were young you said 'I am a student', next 'I am a married man', now 'I am a sannyasi'. It is useless to change the attribute when the subject remains intact. What you have to renounce is the 'I' ". "The crux of the problem is to tackle the possessor, as the things he possesses are add-on's. So long as the true nature of individuality is not understood, the problem is not even faced."

Ramana narrated a story from 'Yoga-Vasista' to Paul Brunton to emphasise this point. An elephant was being constantly teased by its keeper. Once the keeper accidentally fell in front of the elephant which could have easily trampled its tormenter under its

feet. Instead of doing so, it allowed him to escape out of misplaced sympathy. The keeper later dug a pit for the elephant in the forest and killed it. The tormenter, the ego, should be trampled straightaway through the power of self-enquiry backed by strong vairagya, in the same way as the elephant should have killed its mahut when the opportunity arose.

Perhaps this accounts for the failure of many mental methods of dealing with the ego problem. It is generally believed that if one is constantly humiliated, constantly loaded with insults constantly humbled, constantly made a door-mat this would rid the person of the ego. It is believed that his ego would thereafter be well and truly tamed. Does it work out this way? If things take a different turn, will this meekness superimposed by circumstances last? The pseudo humility would be just a fleeting phenomenon. There are advocates of the opposite method too. It is said that the best counter would be to sublimate the ego or turn it Godward. Here again sustaining the Godward turn of the ego is circumstantial, dependent on situations and there is no guarantee that the ego would not be polluted again by worldliness. Bhagavan would relate the story of a person who carried a bitter gourd during his pilgrimage throughout India. He dipped it in the various sacred rivers. But was it possible to rid it of its basic bitterness? Similarly, the purity of the ego cannot be sustained for delusion is ready in the wings waiting to catch up. For that matter methods which aim at pruning or trimming the ego are bound to fail because of the faulty assumptions on which they are based.

Where does the fault lie? What is the mistake in this approach? Such methods proceed on the assumption that the ego is real or that it is a separate entity which can be dealt with. Herein lies the beauty of Ramana's solution. The clear focus in his teaching is on the fact that the ego has no independent existence. He compares the ego to a ghost, because it has no form of its own. Though it is born of forms it is always changing its form and takes to its heels when searched for. Due to play of shadows one might, while walking at night, feel that a ghost is dogging his footsteps. But on closer examination he would find out that what he took to be

a ghost is only a lamp-post or a tree. Ramana would say that the ego's case was comparable and so long as one does not enquire as to its nature it continues to give trouble. A search for it would reveal that no such separate entity exists. This 'revolutionary' approach of Ramana needs closer examination. Can it be that the arch enemy of our spiritual progress is a mere phantom, a mere myth? If so how can one explain its stranglehold on us? Ramana himself has thrown light by holding the 'ego' in clear focus.

Ramana explains that the sense of separate individuality, the ego, has its daily birth on waking. It disappears in sleep. This appearance and disappearance being a daily phenomenon, we ignore it. However this rising and subsidence which is characteristic of the ego, its hall-mark, is a pointer to us of the need to enquire wherefrom this ego originates. What is its source? To prevent our getting bogged down in wrong theories, Ramana himself supplies the answer. It rises and merges in 'consciousness' which shines without a gap. So one can say that ego is a wave in the sea of consciousness, and its numerous forms are only like the innumerable waves on the surface of the sea. We have to deal not with these endless forms of the ego but look at its source, its birth place. Ordinarily we are aware only of the waves while watching the sea. To see thus would be to have a partial view, a view which ignores the substratum, the sea on which these waves are formed. Right perception would be to pay attention to the vast sea and the waves. Ramana gives frequently the analogy of gold and the ornaments made from it. Ornaments have no separate existence apart from the gold of which they are made. So too ego. The sense of individuality is a mental wave on the sea of consciousness and it is not a separate entity. The truth about the ego is discovered only if one questions about its source. Such questioning merges it back in its place of origin, consciousness. On such merging consciousness alone remains and the ego vanishes. Hence the importance of the enquiry

The Exorcist - Burying the Ego

'Whence am 'I'?'. In Ramana's method the final question is the only one and it is raised from the very beginning. There is only one question and this silences the questioner himself.

For tracing the ego back to its place of origin Ramana's constant inner guidance is necessary. When the devil is exorcised the magician bottles it up in a Yantra (a magic contrivance) and buries it underground so that it may not rise again. Our efforts at self-enquiry are weak and half-hearted. So there is the constant danger of the ego-ghost catching hold of us again. It is only the grace of the guru which can buttress our efforts and afford constant protection against relapsing into the old egoistic ways. The guru alone can help to exorcise the ego ghost completely and to bury it. Unaided by grace the delusive limitation cannot come to an end. When effort backed by grace culminates in the merging of the ego in its source, a joy which cannot be put in words opens up.

7. Holistic Meditation

No meditation or an object is helpful. You must learn to realise that the subject and object are one. In meditating on an object, whether concrete or abstract, you are destroying the sense of oneness and creating duality.

- Ramana Maharshi,
Conscious Immortality,
pp. 53-54

In the rainy season the sun plays hide and seek. This is more noticeable in a coastal place. The sun would be shining brightly. Suddenly dark clouds would form and there would be a heavy downpour. Again the sun would come out in dazzling brilliance. This goes on day in and day out during the monsoon months. When one looks sensitively at one's spiritual practice, one can clearly discern this light and shadow, the success and failure of it not only generally but also each day within a span of hours. There is the meditative mood, the lazy languish, and hectic activity. This is only natural for each mood corresponds to the prevalent mental mode. So long as we remain within the confines of the mind, so long as one's spiritual practice is mind-oriented, the progress towards Self-awareness is bound to be tardy and slow. It would be a losing battle in the daily war one wages against the intruding thoughts which keep flooding out the chosen single thought. Meditation remains as a flickering flame, exposed to the winds of thought.

Ramana traces this malaise to our divisive approach to meditation. The Self is one. The moment you introduce the division of a separate subject, the individual, then your attention is also divided. The duality of subject, object, the pairs of opposites automatically come in. The unity of a holistic approach alone can be the medicine, the cure for this.

While making this position clear, Ramana does not discourage those who prefer to do so, by natural inclination or

long habit, from continuing to pursue the sadhana they are used to. It may be mantra japa, yoga or ritualistic practice. He would remark that 'When a car is travelling at great speed applying the brake suddenly would not do'. The accident of loss of faith in one's practice without switching over to the direct path could take place. The problem is really that of exposing one to the truth without treading on one's corns, pet ideas and predilections.

While considering the relative merits of spiritual practices one has to remember as a constant undercurrent the inescapable fact of life's transience. Does one know his date in karma calendar? The quit notice on the exhaustion of this body's karma may come at any time. How much time do we really have? Even assuming that we are destined to live for the Vedic span of hundred years, is not much of it lost in work-a-day schedules, ill health, infirmities and so on? So one cannot afford to travel by indirect long-winded routes, or lose ground due to detours and bylanes on the way.

This inescapable fact should provide the compelling motivation for 'non-objective meditation' and give the energy and drive to pursue such a path with vigour and steadfastness. In such meditation from A to Z the attention is on the subject, on the meditator, it is the process of holding on to the thinker by questioning his identity and questing for his source. By this search a mortal blow is dealt to the subtlety of the ego and the elusive ways of the mind. Because this enquiry goes to the very root of the ego's existence. Preliminary skirmishes against thought intrusions and infiltrations may be there initially or for some time. But once we learn to cling to the mind's core then we are away from this mental movement. We would be holding on to the consciousness in the mind which is the scent for leading us to its place of origin, the heart, the Self.

It would also be seen that in this way the means and the goal merge. For the attention is only on the subject which leads to the discovery of the one Self, shining within, without and everywhere. One becomes aware that nothing exists apart from

it, be it the individual, the world or God. Firm confidence in Ramana's teaching and his guidance enables one to find out that all this is not Greek and Latin but is as simple as 'a goose-berry in the palm of one's hand'.

Every rule has its exception. In the spiritual path the exception is that duality is permitted in relation to the Sadguru. So one is welcome to think of Ramana's purifying name, be lost in the breathtaking beauty of his form and live in the salubrious peace flowing from practising Ramana's presence. It is for the individual himself to experiment and discover what is the best means for him to link himself to Ramana. It may be reading his books, singing his praise and so on, or it may well be a combination of all these. There is little doubt that in this there is the division between the devotee, the disciple, and the Sadguru, the subject 'I' and the object. Yet it is the one division which will in time cut at the root of the very division on which it is based. So the scriptures say and Ramana confirms. What happens is that imperceptibly, the division between the two is lost in the union resulting from growing surrender until there is the awareness that he alone exists, eternal, imperishable, as the One.

Can there be doubt that it is some rare penance, done by us or our ancestors in the past, which has brought us to Ramana? Therefore is not a duty cast on us to ponder whether we should continue on the beaten track, in our good old ways? Should we not let Ramana be a vital influence on our sadhana by working at non-objective meditation? We have the opportunity of freeing ourselves from the frontiers of the mind, from its joys and sorrows, from its stifling limitations, if only our faith keeps us on Ramana's track of self-enquiry. But we allow ourselves to be tricked out of it by our mind.

One is reminded of the case of Sikhidwaja, who filled with dispassion renounced his kingdom, his wife and family and chose many years of solitude and suffering in a forest. In the end he was made wise by his wife Chudala who convinced him that if

Holistic Meditation

only he had pushed home his dispassion to its logical extreme by finding out to whom it related he would have discovered the truth years earlier. Are we wiser than the king in this story? How far are we getting in spite of our well meaning sacrifices, in spite of our earnestness? Where is the freedom and bliss of the vastness of heart's space? Our trust in him has brought us to Ramana. The breakthrough is just there for the asking. Truth is beckoning us. Are we going to miss out on it in this life also?

8. Blossoming Spiritually

M: Do not fix your attention on all these changing things of life, death, and phenomena. Think only of that which sees all these things. That which is responsible for it.... The results of this concentration will soon show themselves in all sorts of unconscious clairvoyance, in peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round, always unconscious power.

Glimpses of Life and
Teachings of Ramana Maharshi,
F.H. Humphreys.

Isn't it strange that among the teeming millions of the world, the genuine spiritual seekers, those who care for the beauty of the inner life, are hardly in thousands? Many are called. But few remain steady and vigilant. One wonders what the endless grind of daily life offers? The same things over and over again, the same dependence on others, the same desire and fear filled life holds its grip firmly. Many are far too given to the fascination. Is it because its joys alone are in our field of experience? We know little or nothing about the much talked about experience of Self-abidance, of the natural state which is so much eulogised in the scriptures. Those who are serious about reaping the dividends of the Ramana Way must make an earnest attempt, should they not, to find out and eliminate the obstructions to the awareness of this state?

The first thing which strikes is the inability to stay on track, minding one's business. We give our attention to non-essentials, to others. A few questions put to Ramana would illustrate. An American lady wants to know from him about samadhi. He patiently explains but the lady keeps arguing in circles till Ramana closes the session by saying 'You will know when you are in samadhi'. On another occasion there was a regular free for all in the hall among the devotees about various philosophical schools, about the relative merits of Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita and so on.

After sometime Ramana said, 'This kind of dispute itself is eternal. Do not engage in it. Turn inward and put an end to all this. There can be no finality in disputations'. Someone who had been told in detail about self-enquiry said, 'Meditation on God is difficult' hearing which Ramana remarked, 'Leave God alone. Hold on to the Self'. There would be so much interest about what happens after death in past lives, the state of jnanis, and so on that Ramana would appear to be annoyed at the waste of energy by such peripheral and futile drift of thought. A visitor wished to know how the state of Vasishta and Janaka differed. Ramana advised "Why do you seek to know the state of others, even if it be of jnanis? What do you gain by knowing about others? You must know your own nature". Another chipped in with the question, 'Can one disappear from sight like the yogis Vasishta and Viswamitra?' Ramana asked, 'Is this the essential object of our interest? These are only physical matters. You are not the body. Think about essential things'. Such concern about the body would keep cropping up time and again evident in such questions as 'What happens to the body after realisation? Does it or does it not exist?'. Ramana would merely say 'This question can be asked after realisation, should the need arise then'. Instances like these are so many, one can readily observe that the 'Talks' is replete with them notwithstanding the persistent way in which Ramana would bring one back to essentials, the natural state and self-enquiry.

Another common malaise is the mourning about disturbance of meditation by thoughts. Without putting in the necessary inputs, without working hard and vigilantly at self-enquiry we want our minds to be under control. We 'run with the running mind, keep the company of our thoughts, endlessly seek our worldly goals and then, have the temerity to make a grievance of the slow progress.' The gentle master would simply say that one wants to become a jnani instantaneously. 'They overlook the effort involved.

One should ask oneself 'Have I used the weapons given by Ramana, the enquiries 'Who am I?' and 'Whence am I?', 'Have I shifted my attention from thoughts to the thinker?' These razor sharp instruments are allowed to be blunted and rusted. Conceptualisation is never nipped in the bud for attention is seldom paid in the beginning to the movement of thought, to the externalisation of the mind. We also have the other side of the coin being made a grievance of, namely sleep overcoming and eating into the meditation time. One old devotee who was practically an inmate of the Ashram once complained, 'Look Bhagavan, the others are so lost in meditation. But whenever I sit for meditation I am overcome by sleep'. Ramana's salutary remark went home, 'Let them sleep or snore or meditate. You look to yourself'. Sleep may be because of non-moderation, lack of balance in food, speech and sleep. Or it could be just lack of attention when sleep overtakes. Or it may be due to boredom which comes from listless, and directionless spiritual practice. Whatever be the cause, faith in Ramana's words and the path of self-enquiry would help to make full and proper use of the 'time allotted' for meditation.

Then there are the spells of self-pity and self-condemnation. When thought vacuum is created all that lies hidden seems to surface, frightening one with the extent of impurities in us. Generally Ramana would console, 'When you keep water on a stove for heating, it will boil and spill over, will it not?'. But here again all these thoughts are only ego's tricks for its perpetuation. Our essential nature is pure. It is only our habits and thoughts which have become contaminated. We have to remember our true nature and get over the encrustation by questioning the reality of the one to whom it relates.

All this is said to highlight the constant seepage of energy which we allow to take place. After all, life itself is pretty short. The time in which the goal is to be achieved is so limited that we just cannot afford any loss of energy or any wastage of time. So we need a constant check-list of attainment, of the progress we are making. In our worldly pursuits are we not keeping a watch over

what is happening? Do we not keep the goals clear and keep measuring performance? Why should we allow so much blurring of goals in the spiritual field? Should we not be sure that we are working towards the discovery of our innate happiness; towards the discovery of the state where we are free from chattering and pestering demands of the mind? True, it is easy to measure progress in things of the mind, in worldly gains and losses. There seems to be no certain yardstick of progress in sadhana, in spiritual effort. At the same time has not Ramana himself taught us how to find where we stand in terms of attainment? The signs of progress are to be found in not being anxious about action or its results in not seeking action. There is also the growing detachment to ideas, to possessions. This is not to be mistaken for indifference, for simultaneously the warmth of a loving heart keeps glowing. Then there is also the capacity to relax, to let events happen in their ordained course. Intangible hallmarks no doubt. But they are there as we blossom spiritually, as we lose ourselves in that bliss of Ramana.

9. Unhurried and Recollected Life

- D: How can the mind be still if I have to use it more than other people? I want to go into solitude and renounce my job as headmaster.
- M: What is the under current which vivifies the mind, enables it to do all work? It is the Self. Simply become aware of it during your work and do not forget it....Take your time; keep remembrance of your real nature alive. Avoid haste which causes you to forget.

Conscious Immortality,
pp. 130-132.

A visitor to Ramanasramam told Ramana, "I have been meditating for several years. Yet I have to force myself to do it. Please guide me as to how I should meditate." Even persons who used to be practically inmates of Ramanasramam would express their disappointment to Ramana that their meditations often ended in sleep. Wherever we turn in 'Talks' we find this sorry story repeated. A Maharani who is in tears, speaking in a choked voice tells Ramana, "I have all that I want, a human being would want...But...But I. ...I...Probably my destiny". Another, a Maharashtrian lady, also in tears says, "I know it is impossible to attain 'Mukti' in one life. Can I not at least have peace of mind?". Pannalal, Chief Secretary to the Government of Uttar Pradesh complains of lack of peace and wishes to know if he should abandon his previous sadhana and take to the direct path of Ramana to attain it.

What is the common factor in all these woes of the different seekers, having different backgrounds and varying degrees of spiritual earnestness? It is obvious that they are missing out on the desserts, the fruits of their effort. It is also obvious that they had lost spontaneous interest in meditation, and were hanging on to it for want of an alternative. Having given up a totally worldly life and having lost absorbing interest in it they are in no man's

land. Neither do they have the taste of the natural bliss nor does the sensate life hold its old unqualified attraction. This is all the more sad for after years of meditation, after years of effort at an inner life if one is back at square one, or rather thinks he is back, then somewhere along the line he has missed out on essentials. For, in the spiritual field as in any other effort, sadhana if properly directed should produce results. Here it should be in terms of happiness and peace born out of inner and outer harmony.

What exactly has gone wrong? Let us ponder over our life. Is it not always one hurry-burry from jumping out of bed, scurrying to catch the bus or train, social calls on well wishers and helpers, chats with friends, enjoying T.V. and video and so on? It is an endless list of things we want to do. We find time for gossip too in our daily milieu. Would this not be a far cry from the contemplative and reflective way of life so repeatedly advised to Paul Brunton by Ramana? Should we be caught up in this business of trying to chew too much, of nibbling at different things, of concerning ourselves with 'others'? What are we here for? Why this human chance? Is it for this external whirl? If only we care to look we can readily see how loaded we are with purposeless thoughts and actions. Proper management of time is not only a virtue in the field of business but in all walks of life. More so in the spiritual life. It is of utmost importance. It is the thing which matters. This demands a constant look at our daily doings to prune away wastage of time on non-essentials, to find time for the inner life which fortunate karma has opened up for us. Once the heat of mental pressure is off, there would be time for cool headed meditation.

Having found the time, we have to remember constantly, in season and out of season, our essential nature. The forgotten truth that the Self is ever blissful, that it is the fullness of consciousness, has to be recalled time and again. What we are aiming at is to cut at the root of the illusion of separateness, the thought that something has to be done for getting happiness. This process is hastened by repeatedly recollecting the truth of our real nature. Then gradually "false knowledge would end and

the memory of the truth would dawn". It is due to our carelessness, our 'avichara', our loss of the Spirit of enquiry, that we have been reduced to this plight. The remedy lies only in regaining what is lost by attention to the essential truth of our nature, attention to ensure that we do not lapse back to our old ruts.

Then of course there is the need to steer clear of compartmentalising of meditation, of treating it as a thing apart. It is generally regarded as one of the jobs on hand to be attended to religiously, willy-nilly. This takes the joy out of it. Why not treat all free time as meditative time? Why not utilise the idle time for it? Why not avail of the all important sattvic moods which each has a share of every day to turn the mind within? This alone would dovetail spiritual effort into the life stream. Then the meditative mood becomes a constant undercurrent, pulling us to the magnetic zone of the spiritual heart within.

Often we stultify ourselves with negative thoughts. We literally seem to cover ourselves with such thoughts as 'Self-knowledge is difficult', 'it is not for me', 'it will take time' and so on. Ramana says it is precisely 'the thinking of hindrances that forms such hindrance'. There is really no truth in them. Our essential nature being always the same it has to be so even now. This reminds one of the case of Ramaswami Pillai. Once he searched for a key. After some time he found it. Ramana said "The key was in the usual place. It was not lost. Only he did not remember it. The Self is always there, everywhere. Not being aware due to lack of experience we keep searching for it."

There is also the paramount need for being aware of the presence of the Sadguru Ramana within and without. Though his grace has no preconditions, in practice one becomes aware of it only to the extent to which one has done all one can to work towards understanding of one's true nature. The interweaving of grace and effort gradually opens up the door to the experiencing of Self-abidance, during 'abhyasa', during practice. Until at last, we are always that bliss steadily.

10. Being Still

A cultured lady, daughter of a well known solicitor at Madras asked:

What is one to do to be free of thoughts as advised by you?

M: Only to remain still. Do it and see

Talks 322 p 285

It is commonly said that if one were to summarise the teachings of Ramana in a few words it would be 'I am that I am' and 'be still' (Summa iruttal). The first is the statement regarding the natural state and the other, 'being still', is the method for experiencing and abiding in that state. So we have to dwell on the import of these words. In practice the experience of the natural state takes the form of feeling the ceaseless shining of the true 'I'. The expression 'true' is used in contrast to the false notion we have about it, that it is the body. The shining is without a break. Hence the expression 'I-I', then one is abiding in one's natural state.

Next we have to go into the question of what are the implications of 'being still'. So long as thoughts are there, till the ego is merged in its source, the mind would always be externalised. It will be moving out and can never be one-pointed. This external movement is in turn caused by partial or incomplete action which leaves behind a trail of tendencies (vasanas) imbedded in the memory. Pleasure-pain complexes from relationship with objects are in-built. So the question would arise as to how one would deal with the problem which has two parts - the existing load of tendencies and the continuous add-ons flowing from current action. One method, which has been handed over from time to time is to cultivate good thoughts and to negate desires. Seems easy. So we keep making resolutions to be on good behaviour, to discipline and drill the mind into moulds which are virtuous. Since action is continuous, even if one succeeds in smothering some desires, in getting rid of some unwanted thoughts, new

Being Still

ones, more and varied ones, take their place. We seem to be no better for our effort. This can be quite frustrating if all one's pains do not help in making any real headway in stilling the mind. The solution seems to be elsewhere, does it not? Is this why Ramana said that "there is no need to give up desires, only, one should give up thoughts"? This would not be begging the question. It is meant to emphasise the limitation which springs from the approach of looking at the thoughts, instead of the real source of trouble - the thinker, whose attention has given life to these thoughts.

Some other methods are in practice. There are techniques of concentration, like keeping the mind fixed on the tip of the nose or the centre of the eyebrows. Ramana advised Paul Brunton against such practices. For, the mind must not be stunned but kept alive to pursue enquiry about itself. Any method which stupefies the mind is retrograde as it would only put the clock back by producing long periods of dullness of mind. What about the control of breath? It is fine. But it is only a temporary aid. Only so long as the mind is held on leash by holding the breath, with which it is connected, the silence will prevail. The old friends, the thoughts, will soon be back in business. Ramana compares it to a brake in a car or the reins to a horse. One cannot obviously run his car with brakes on all the time nor can one permanently keep a horse reined back. As Ramana told N.N.Rajan, we should look for some way which would de-fuse the mind, which would take away the factors which cause the thought-thrust. Ramana gave N.N.Rajan the analogy of a steam engine which cannot move when the steam is let off unlike its coming to a temporary halt by applying the brakes. Hence we must come to the conclusion that the solution is elsewhere.

It is here that the Ramana Way provides the key. If one reads Ramana's advice to different seekers in the 'Talks' we find him tackling the problem from two different angles. The first is paying attention to the first thought 'I am so and so'. The validity of the add-on to 'I am' by the identification 'so and so' is what has to be examined. How does one do it? Intellectually by the analysis of the three states, of waking, dream and deep sleep. The purpose of this analysis is very limited. It is to become

Being Still

pin-pointedly aware that this individuality is something which comes and goes. It is not always there. It is sometimes different in dream and is not there at all in deep sleep. It is absent in sleep. If I am 'so and so' can I exist sometimes and be non-existent at other times? Quite obviously not. Hence, there is the need to enquire into the assumption of identification and the consequent superimposition of separateness. If one enquires earnestly, saturated with the spirit which marks all earnest search, one would have started on the road to still the mind. The enquiry about oneself and about the birth of individuality would do the trick. What trick? It would turn the mind inward in contrast to its present outward thrust. Inwardness is the key for an inturned mind is paying attention to its source, which is the fullness of consciousness. It would have escaped from its preoccupation with others, with the second and third persons, instead looking at itself. The mind remains within, plunged in its source, experiencing the feeling of 'I-I'.

Should one think that he is temperamentally unsuited for enquiry, then an alternative solution is offered. To surrender one's sense of doership, to recognise that one's power for action and its success is the Sadguru's who is identical with God, identical with the Supreme. If one has that faith, if one can unhesitatingly offer his doership idea at the altar of this faith then the mind will remain silent and inturned. The giving of the general power of attorney to one's Sadguru in the certainty of his omnipotence and omniscience would therefore be an equally effective method. Then too the mind's movements cease. Where then would be the need for a particular desire thinking it is good, or the necessity for cutting off something else as bad? Because what is given is the best in the judgement of the one in whom faith has been reposed. As for success and failures they do not have any special meaning for faith has taken us to a different dimension of life.

Either way, be it self-enquiry or surrender or continuing both along the way, when one succeeds in in-turning the mind the elixir of life would be experienced. Should we trade it for the tinsels of sensuous joys? Should we care for the fleeting see-saws of joys and sorrows instead of 'Being Still' and experiencing the bliss of the natural state?

11. From Time to Beyond Time

G.V.Subbaramiah, an Andhra devotee, mentioned something about time.

M: What is time?... If the mind is not made use of there is no conception of time. Time and space are in the mind. But one's true state lies beyond the mind.

Talks 601 p 554

Strange but true. Our interest, our fascination for the shadow and not for the substance. We have never really questioned what time is. Or what it is to end it or to find a way to stop its ticking away. When one reads the questions in the 'Talks,' or in 'Day by Day' one can readily see this. A visitor Girdharlal asks Ramana about the classification of time into ages and wishes to know when the 'Kali Yuga' would end. "I don't consider time as real. So I do not take interest in such matters" says Ramana but the visitor continues with his own pet theories. Many including ashramites would sometimes wonder why they could not know about their past lives as some yogis are reputed to be able to do. May be they had wanted to be reassured that in their past lives too they had been associated with Ramana. Ramana would joke and ask "Won't you be puffed with pride if you knew you were a virtuous lot in the previous lives?" Then he would seriously add, "Thank God for his mercy in withholding this knowledge. Even the memories of the past events of this life are a load enough. You will be over-burdened with memories if you were to know the past lives also." The trouble with all of us is that our interest keeps moving back and forth either wanting to unfathom the secrets of the past lives which are so mystifying to us, or we like to crystal gaze into coming events, into future lives. How sad. For the secret of life is in the present, in each moment of one's life. For all experience can only be in the present. Also, more crucially, the truth behind the experience can be known only when we do not indulge in these habitual thought swingings between the past and the future. Ramana made this point when Jivarajani,

an earnest seeker, was being carried away by his interest in matters like life after death. He told him firmly, "Find out about your present life. Why do you worry about life after death? If you realise the present you will know everything."

Again Ramana would stress that both 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow' are with reference to 'to-day'. He would say "Yesterday was called 'to-day' in its time and tomorrow will be called 'today' tomorrow. To-day is ever present." So absurd is this interest in the unknown past and future and the lack of interest in the ever existing present, that Ramana says it is as much a matter for laughter as it would be if one was presuming to count numbers without the number one.

Caught up in the mental movements caused by our insatiable interest in the past and future, we superimpose the concept of time in our sadhana also with dangerous possibilities. We presume that Self-Knowledge is something to be attained at some distant future. We also assume that the experience of this state would come to us at some future date. It is something wholly in the lap of future, so we think. Miss Merston gave voice to this undercurrent of thought when she told Ramana that "it would take some years for Self Realisation". "Why years? The concept of time is only in your mind" was Ramana's pregnant reply. It is quite on the cards that unless the experience of the inherent joy is there along the way during sadhana one would be apt to lose interest in the joyous pursuit of spiritual practices. Like the lady who had her necklace round her neck and thought it was lost, one would forget that the Self is here and now and that the whole purpose of practice is to reveal it, to make one aware of it.

What then is time? Time, says Ramana, is something which rises when ego rises. This would be clear if one examines the meaning of the 'daily wonder' of sleep and waking. In sleep, time stops. Does it not? What happens in sleep is a matter of recollection

on waking and not one's current awareness. During sleep when the ego is not, time, the movement of thought as present, past and future, too comes to a grinding halt. It starts all over again on waking, on the rising of the 'I' thought. So if we have to tackle time, if we have to master it, quite obviously we have to learn to consciously stop mental movements; we have to learn to keep attention fixed on the present. Why? Unless the thought waves stop, unless one is able to stay with the present moment, no enquiry about the rising ego is possible. The search for the eternal, for the ever-existent feeling of 'I-I' would be possible only in a situation when we shift attention from time, which keeps changing, to the changeless substratum.

This brings us back to that infallible weapon of Ramana, self-enquiry. Here we have his assurance that time is immaterial for Self-Knowledge. Why? In self-enquiry the focus of attention is the individual and not his parasitic thoughts. The movement of thought away from the focus of attention, the individual, would be quickly detected. It functions like pesticide, for the "poisonous weed of conceptual thought" is tackled as it sprouts. The thoughts wither away because attention is not on them. When the individual attention is withdrawn from thoughts it can be focussed steadily on the feeling of 'I-I'. This Self-attention, this staying with the 'true Self', is the experiencing of the natural state. Experience of the joy of that state is direct and immediate.

One should however stay with the experience, knowing it to be one of the natural state and not move away from it. All that is needed is to remain still. Not to do anything wrongly thinking that something further needs to be done, is the wisdom needed at this crucial stage. When one has tasted this atmosphere of happiness, self-enquiry needs no pushing and cajoling. Interest in it would be automatic. All that is needed would be the steadying of the experience which happens by practice. The way has become the goal for they were never really apart.

12. The Inundation of Joy

M: It is an inundation; but it is very delightful, the loss of ego in the real Self, the destruction of falsehood, the attainment of Truth.

Talks with Maharshi
and Sat Darsana Bhasya
p xxi

Our daily experience is three dimensional. The waking hours with their bustle of activity, pulsating with thoughts, with people, full of things which we call life. We hug its joys and go through its sorrows for we know no better. We keep chasing, unendingly, the pleasure of the senses, afraid to look beyond, afraid to adventure beyond the confines of the mind.

Then we have our daily quota of sleep which overcomes us when the exhausted mind and body demand it. We know little or nothing about this state. How can we know of it when individuality and thoughts are absent? All that we know of this experience is indirect, through recollection. On waking we recall its pleasantness its refreshing quality, its peace. Yet we would certainly not trade our waking for sleep, for where is vitality and vibrancy in it?

We also have our dream experience in which we have all that we enjoy or suffer while waking. However, there is often a confusion of identity. A king may be a beggar in his dream moving from door to door piteously begging for alms. A virile youth may be an ailing heart patient living in constant dread of death, kept alive by a pacer. The solution for dream problems are found within the dream's framework. Neither the king's wealth nor the youth's health can be transferred from the waking person to the dreaming person whose identity is different. Yet on waking we look down on what we have dreamt about calling it 'unreal' in contrast to our waking experience which we are so sure is 'real'

The Inundation of Joy

Some go through these three states with their illusory experiences, content or discontent, happily or sour-facedly. Can there be anything more tragic than the ignorance of the ignorant who do not look beyond the immediate and waste the wonder that is life?

For the fortunate the Sadguru steps in. One cannot rationally understand why, among the teeming millions, they have been chosen. Does it matter when we are the recipients of the Sadguru's grace which opens up the gates of knowledge? Ramana is the epitome of the timeless wisdom which he directly experienced. Not only was he revelling in a constant state of bliss but he also broadcast its secret.

What is Ramana talking about in the statement quoted at the outset? What is the joy which inundates when truth is attained? What is the real Self? What is the loss of ego? All this is Greek and Latin to us. For, our experience is confined to a mental framework. What lies beyond or behind is unknown to us. We do not know. Nor have we cared to find out. But then should we not care? Should we not try to find out?

When Ramana refers to the real Self and attainment of it, what is he drawing our attention to? Ramana's use of the words 'real Self' and 'attainment' is for the limited purpose of communicating the idea that one should seek to find out what one really is. One has to become aware of that bliss which is naturally ours. The purpose is to take a good look at our assumptions so that our life may be radically changed, so that we may tap our inner strength.

The first necessity is to cut away from ego's debilitating suggestions, that Self-knowledge is difficult, it needs time, it needs preparatory purification, it requires renouncing of home, of activity and so on. For, impurities and lack of strength of mind and mental dissipations have come about due to 'avichara', out of the failure to enquire who we really are. These are encrustations of the ego which itself will fall 'crest-fallen' once an enquiry about it is afoot. Integral to this step is the remembrance of the essential purity of our nature.

The next step in the process of self-discovery is patience and trust in Ramana's timings. The impatience for instant or speedy results, typified by the case of the ladies who requested Ramana to bestow Self-knowledge immediately as they had to catch a train, is often one's undoing. Though for convenience of understanding we say Self-Knowledge is the goal, it is pre-existing. Only the awareness of it is not there. This is what is increasingly fostered and secured through self-enquiry.

The next step is to stay with the experience. The mind, used as it is to doing something or the other, to be active for achievement, sometimes misses out on the 'sattvic' mood of peace when it is on. It comes unnoticed and one has to be sensitive and hold on to it and not lose it due to lack of experience or under the usual impulse of getting on with the job. For here the job is altogether of a different kind. It is the opening up of the heart. The arteries which have been hardened and clogged by many lives lived in exclusive self-concern are being opened up, rejuvenated. Ramana would say that spiritual life is the flowering of love. When the limited idea of looking only for what is good for oneself and the attitude 'What is there in this for me?' ceases, then this expansion of the heart happens automatically.

As we steadfastly pursue self-enquiry we get exposed to the bliss of the Self. For self-enquiry itself makes the mind dead gradually. One might wonder what is gradual death of the mind. Is not the mind's death instantaneous? Does not its sudden death happen the moment the mind merges in its source? It is not so since the thrust of tendencies would be pushing the mind out. However, these spells of merger would purify the mind increasingly, and the mind would be on the way to its ultimate death. Here we might remember, Ramana has explained to Kapali Sastri that the death of the mind only means its complete purification resulting in its capacity to reflect consciousness fully, without distortions born of limited identification. This stage of going in, enjoying the natural bliss, and moving out again in the world of senses could

The Inundation of Joy

perhaps be termed 'turiya' or the fourth dimensional experience. For, in this state one has gone beyond the three mental modes which cause the normal three dimensional experience, but has not yet become stabilised in it.

Gradually the dipping in of the mind is almost instantaneous, till it does not rise again. When this happens we are in the fifth dimension, 'turiya atita' a joyous state where contact with objects, activity, thoughts - nothing can disturb that fullness of existence. Then the statement of Ramana quoted in the beginning ceases to be mere words, ceases to be merely intellectual. The bliss of steady Self-awareness becomes one's own experience.

13. Should Self-Enquiry Be Only One More Method?

- D: What is the relationship between 'vichara' self-enquiry and repetition of mantra (sacred syllables)?
- B: 'Vichara' itself is the mantra, japa, tapas and yoga.
- D: Does it mean that for those practising vichara it is unnecessary to repeat mantras?
- B: Vichara is the source or the essence of all mantras. Can vichara or japa take place without the 'I'? In both one has to fix attention on the source, be it the 'I' or the mantra.

- 'More Ramana Reminiscences'
The Ramana Way, Jan 92, 12, p. 345.

Practically at the turn of this century Ganapati Muni had found out from Ramana the true meaning of 'tapas'. It is to search for the source of the 'I', the source of the sound. By blessing the Muni thus Ramana blessed all of us too by focussing attention on the need for source-consciousness. Whatever else we may do, whether we follow the path of traditional wisdom, of karma, bhakti, yoga or jnana or the direct path of self-enquiry, the primacy source cannot be overstated. However, it is tragic that we lose sight of this central truth in our sadhana. Why else should the question like the one in the quote arise forty years after Ramana had clarified the position to the Muni. We pursue our habitual inclinations, the sadhana routine we are used to, thoughtlessly. I say thoughtlessly because, if thought is given to what we are doing, if we are attentive to our practice, two things should always be before us. The need to attain, and usefulness of the path for achieving it. Otherwise would we not be mere driftwoods? Would not clear sightedness be blurred by want of direction? Awareness of what is happening is needed. Quite obviously we can get nowhere. We would be losing on both counts. We would neither be 'worldly' nor 'spiritual' but half baked sadhakas.

Should Self-Enquiry Be Only One More Method?

Should we let this happen to us having come to the royal road of Ramana? Yet are we not letting it happen? How serious are we in being not only devotees of Ramana but his disciples as well? Once one is exposed to the magnetic form and name of Ramana one is bound to become his devotee. But the question 'Is this enough?' would always remain. Quite obviously 'No'. For we would have failed to utilise the full potential of that relationship, its full potential for regaining the 'lost' natural state of bliss. This is all the more so for the very purpose of Ramana's advent is to provide a path suited to the needs of the modern man beset with all the tensions of a jet-age. He has come in order that we may discover the truth for ourselves, while being in this world, by enabling a transformation of mental attitudes to events of life. So should we not let him do his job of transforming our lives in full measure? We can or rather we must. But there is one condition for it. One should care enough, one should have faith enough in the infallibility of the quest for the source incessantly emphasised by Ramana.

No doubt it is difficult for us to accept the position that we lack sufficient faith, or that there is any fault in our sadhana. But then one has to face facts himself even if he wishes it hidden from others. The basic problem is that we have all come to Ramana with our backgrounds. We have already travelled on a certain path, according to our inclinations and what life has opened till then. A chaste and virgin mind like that of Muruganar is just not there. According to Ramana it is precisely the merit, the purificatory effect of what you had done earlier, which has opened up the opportunity of being exposed to the Ramana Way. Ramana has set at rest the trepidations and doubts of devotees like Subbaramayya and Balarama Reddy, and through them our fears as well by making this point. "Just because you have done so much of japa, its merit has brought you here. Why should you now fear while enjoying the fruits of your japa?" But this statement is lost on most of us. We are not willing to give up our earlier practices and approaches partly because of this unexpressed fear

Should Self-Enquiry Be Only One More Method?

of letting go the known and partly because of our incomplete faith in self-enquiry being a cure all. So we plod along keeping our old methods essentially untouched and adding self-enquiry in a manner as we would add spices to our food or some side dish to our main menu. This of course is better than not doing self-enquiry at all but it might have the adverse effect of lulling one into the false belief that one is adhering to the Ramana path. All this is said to stress the need for giving meaning and depth to our sadhana by a constant awareness of what exactly is happening. Also, Ramana is opening up such a wonderful new path, should one let go of the glorious opportunity.

Perhaps our inability to give self-enquiry the pride of place in our sadhana springs from its very simplicity and directness. A great devotee who had moved closely with Ramana for several years and had many a dialogue with him on every aspect of practice ended up doubting whether self-Knowledge could really be that easy as Ramana's answers would imply. He said, "Hearing all this I am puzzled. I cannot understand how one can get such a great experience by simply bearing in mind the sayings 'See the seer', 'Know thyself', 'I am Brahman', etc.". Ramana gently replied, "It is not impossible once you are earnest....you must have the touch of grace." Effort and vichara act and react and make the seemingly impossible possible. But all of us have this gnawing doubt in greater or lesser measure. Hence we would do well to remember this assurance which would act as an invigorating and energising tonic for adhering to the path.

Also, some give way to the debilitating negative thoughts, "I am not ready for self-enquiry" "I am still impure", and the like. To wait for the day when you think that your mind is pure and ready for self enquiry is as futile as to wait for the waves to stop before swimming in the sea. More important is the fact that thanks to self-enquiry "the process of acquiring virtues is reversed. We do not need to seek them, for they come according to advancement along the path."

Should Self-Enquiry Be Only One More Method?

Once the corroding factors are got over, a confidence and certitude in the efficacy of self-enquiry develops. Even so one has to meditate constantly on Ramana's words for he is the inner guide of all those who choose the path. Time and again he draws our attention to the inescapable necessity of Janma sthana gaveshana', the need to search for the source, be it the source of sound, breath or individuality. For in it lies the key. Our source is the fullness of consciousness. A conscious and steady merger in it destroys all the hordes of thoughts which lie latent in the heart. Then thoughts get burnt out. Intuition takes the place of reason. Thinking gives way to feeling. Life blossoms forth in all its gentleness and love.

14. The Past is the Present Misery

D: Having heard the truth why does not one remain content?

M: Because Samskaras (inherent tendencies) have not been destroyed. Unless they cease to exist there will always be doubt and confusion. Their roots must be cut. They are rendered ineffective by practice as prescribed by guru.

Talks 289 p 248

In each birth we bring forward thoughts in seed forms as psychological memories and the marks of experiences we have been through. To this opening stock is added a further load of incomplete experiences in the form of more seed thoughts. There is also factual memory required for functioning, be it as a student, as a professional, a businessman and so on. Factual memory is fine, for without it one cannot live at all. Without such memory everything would be a regular jumble. To illustrate, one's wife's name would be forgotten, the route to the office would not be remembered, and the know-how of a job would not be there. But what about the dead-weight of the psychological and needless experiential memory of the past? Quite clearly it has no use for it makes for a blinkered or jaundiced view of life. The thought clouds of the past prevent the joy of a spacious mind freed from them. It is not that we voluntarily choose the crowding of thoughts in the mind, though we do hug some memories, the pleasant ones. Generally, however, we do not wish to be victims of the past. But still we are. Why? Because the thoughts are latent in the heart in seed forms and they keep sprouting up as thoughts. Sometimes they even become a holocaust. Occasionally, unable to curb them or prevent their sovereignty over us we are devoured by their momentum. Actions follow which we often regret in retrospect.

The question therefore arises as to how such memories can be reduced to ashes. How do we prevent their constant overflow into the present? One of the methods suggested is to

allow these thoughts to sprout forth. It is only when the seed thought becomes active as an actual thought that one can tackle it. In order to be aware of the rubbish heap within, the rising of thoughts good and bad is necessary. It may be for this reason that when Rangan wondered whether he was actually becoming more ego-ridden, Ramana told him, "If the ego has to go all that is hidden inside has to come out. When you keep water on a stove for heating, it will boil and spill over, will it not?" In his reminiscences, Venkatakrishnayya recollects the case of a devotee who kept complaining that he had not changed. He told Bhagavan, "I have been coming here for the past several years but still there has been no progress. I am just as bad a sinner as before." Ramana chided him mildly saying, "How can you be sure as to how far you have travelled?" Because we wish that only auspicious thoughts should arise, we get scared when the ugly side shows up. Let it come up, for what has been hidden comes to the gaze of one's attention. Otherwise one might be immersed in ego's negative forms, that one is a 'sinner', that one is 'impure'. A capacity to handle such thoughts as they surface is the best antidote for this negativism.

Then we also have the time honoured method of cultivating the opposite thoughts, the sacred ones and the strength giving ones. Repeated dose of this medicine would wean one away from enervating thoughts arising due to negative tendencies.

However it would appear that all these techniques are in the nature of palliatives. The root and branch remedy lies in learning to be Self-aware through vigilant self-enquiry. Ramakrishna Swami, a long time resident and disciple, was bothered about his predisposition and wanted to know how best its annihilation could be effected. Ramana told him that the tendencies "will themselves be scorched if only you remain as you truly are". Constant linking with the pure Self will serve to dry up the thought seeds, to dry up potential thoughts. They will become lifeless. The mountainous accumulations of past tendencies need not and cannot be tackled individually. The sure way to make a bonfire of them is to be attentive to the surfacing of thought itself by focussing attention on its source.

The Past is the Present Misery

A devotee enquired of Ramana whether it would be sufficient to practise self-enquiry in the mornings or whether it should be always. Ramana told him that it has to be pursued “until one is established in the state of pure being”. Ramana would also repeatedly point out that incessant self-enquiry is possible because it can be practised in all circumstances. It will be the undercurrent of action and its benefits will overflow throughout the waking time. It might be added that the question itself appears to be by one who has not already deeply taken to the path. For, once the taste of the natural state is experienced through self-enquiry that itself would act as an automatic spur to it.

If it is so simple why is it not being attempted with full faith and confidence? As Ramana once told Chadwick, the very directness of this method makes one wonder whether it is not a tall claim. Our minds are used to complications and simplicity is anathema. Hence we find the tendency of some devotees to question Ramana’s assertion of the simplicity of self-enquiry. A devotee told Ramana, “You say it is easy, but we find it difficult”. Ramana advised him, “Find out who it is that is weighing the paths. Find out who it is that is finding it difficult”

Another hurdle on the way is the inability to take advantage of the Guru’s grace. Ramana told Rangan that it is difficult to overstate the value of the Guru, “For they weave the yarn and give the cloth ready-made”. But owing to want of sufficient reverence on the part of the disciple, “Grace may become effective only after a long time”. One would do well to remember the identity of the Guru with God and the Self. When you can feel the Master’s presence, “the doubts are easily overcome, for the Master’s role consists in removing the doubts of the seeker”.

Leaning heavily on Ramana’s grace if one sticks to self-enquiry then the past can be totally negated. Functional memory alone would survive when the mind is submerged in its source. Thereafter everything would be perceived with a new look, with breath-taking freshness and joy.

15. Is Surrender Possible Without Self-Enquiry?

D: Surrender is said to be bhakti. But Bhagavan is known to favour self-enquiry. There is thus a confusion in the hearer.

M: Surrender can take effect only when done with full knowledge. Such knowledge comes after enquiry. It ends in surrender.

Talks 462, p 437

Devaraja Mudaliar the diarist of the happenings in the presence of Ramana, had spent several years at his feet. As the years rolled by a fit of depression overcomes him. Why is it that there is no total transformation? Why is it that the mind is not anchored in the heart? Why cannot Ramana take over completely the job of cutting the attachments? So he decides he would have it out with the Sadguru who of course is always accessible. Mudaliar begins by reading from one of the works of Sivaprakasam Pillai who too had gone through this phase. Having thus prepared the ground he asks Ramana, "What do you intend to do with me?" This boldness was possible because he was sure that he had placed himself wholly in Ramana's hands, that he had surrendered himself unreservedly to him. Ramana kept quiet for a few minutes and then said, "Whether I do or don't do anything, you have simply to surrender and keep quiet". Ramana had put in a nutshell the essential meaning of surrender. It implies the unquestioning acceptance of the wisdom of the Sadguru and the course of life which he charts out for us. If we imagine that we have surrendered and yet make a mental grievance of the events in life when they do not go our way or if we doubt that Ramana is not doing enough for us, then we are mistaken in thinking that we have placed ourselves in his hands. Subbaramayya records in his 'Reminiscences' that in one of the letters received by him from Sri Ramanasramam it was said, "So long as the mind keeps classifying the events as 'good' and 'bad', there is no real

Is Surrender Possible Without Self-Enquiry?

surrender.” For, a devotee should be certain that whatever happens is for the good since the omniscient and omnipotent Ramana has been put in charge. There must be faith, complete faith, “that he knows best what to do and also when and how to do it”. When this confidence is total, then the burden is shifted from our minds to the Sadguru. Till then with our load of worries we are no better than a traveller in the train carrying his luggage on his head. It is the train which carries us and our load but we seem to forget it. If the entrustment has been truly made, then the load of our ‘karma’ becomes his and he would be guiding us to the destination, freedom from the karmic cycle. As for the way, he knows best how to shield each individual devotee. Sometimes Ramana would say, “Why don’t you have as much faith in the guru as the first class passenger in the guard?” All that the passenger does, even when he has to detrain in a midway station in the middle of the night, is to tell the guard of the train and go off to sleep soundly. So sure is he about the duty consciousness of the guard.

Where does the fault lie? True, we are dull witted and turn to the Sadguru only in the hour of despair. But even so we find it hard to believe that we have any reservations about our trust in Ramana. He is all we have got. So this necessitates going deeply into the question of ‘surrender’, the question of unquestioning faith in the master.

The root of the problem is the sense of ‘doership’. As surely as we think we are a particular name and form we also feel that we are the actors. This sense of doership is the necessary inescapable concomitant of the sense of separate individuality. It is the practical expression of it. It is the purposive force of the ‘I’. We are convinced that the strength for actions and their results are of our making. Even if repeated failures cut at the assumption that we can shape the results of our action, we still cannot get away from the idea that it is our action. Fine, if so what is the source of the intelligent principle which makes action possible? What is the source of consciousness in us? If this question is put as indeed it must be, then one goes back to the fundamental questions ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Whence am I?’. Questioning thoughts

Is Surrender Possible Without Self-Enquiry?

then and there, as conceptualisation takes place, focussing attention on the thinker one turns inwards to the consciousness within. It is this linking with consciousness which is the true source of strength for action, not the thought "I am the doer". This idea is a superimposition and so long as it is not tackled, we have to carry the burden of our worries. For, these worries are the direct product of this notion.

All this would seem to suggest that self-enquiry and surrender are integral and not two alternative ways on the Ramana path. One might ask, "Has it not been said that either one should seek the source of ego so that it may disappear or one should let the Sadguru strike it down?" But this is only an apparent division. In practice it is not. This point would be clear if one refers to Ramana's statements like, "Surrender is to give oneself up to the original cause of one's being, one's source within. That makes you seek the source and merge in it". Or again he would say, "Surrender takes effect only after enquiry".

All this is to say that if we wish to give a practical turn to our love for Ramana, to our faith in his power of protection and guidance, we have to demonstrate it by steadfast adherence to self-enquiry. Then only 'I am the body' idea and its companion 'I am the doer' will be put to the sword. Otherwise we will be like the images on top of the temple tower which have a harrassed look on their faces. They imagine that they bear the load of the tower little realising that it is the foundation and masonry structure which matter. Wrinkles, long faces and a problem ridden life will be our lot if we miss out on self-enquiry. Should we not put Ramana at the helm to direct our endeavour of ending the sense of individuality which separates us from him? To the extent to which we do so we have learnt to leave things to Ramana.

16. Days Pass Into Months and Months Into Years

M: Throw all responsibility on God. Do not bear the burden yourself. What can destiny do then? In course of time partial surrender will lead to complete surrender.

D: Partial surrender - well - can it undo destiny?

M: Oh, yes! It can.

D Is not destiny due to past karma?

M: If one has surrendered to God he will look to it.

Talks 244 p 195

Each passing day added to the anguish of mother Azhagamma. Her dear son had left home on the 29th of August 1896. All leads and clues about his whereabouts were proving wrong. Days were passing into months and months into years. Yet there was no trace. After two years she had reached the point of despair. Were all her prayers falling on deaf ears? Were all the great gods really cold and indifferent to human sorrow and suffering? True, her son had left a message of consolation, a message that he would be well taken care of wherever he was. He had told the truth, that he was leaving home at his Father's command. Surely one who commands, one who directs would also know how to take charge, how to protect. But can Azhagammal be blamed if she did not have this confidence in the certainty of the fact that no one can care more than God for his devotees? Could she be sure of a protection which would be even more than what her own motherly love could give? She was desperate and helpless. Therefore the mood of surrender was fully on her.

Though the laws of grace are mysterious, beyond the mind's comprehension, one thing is clear. When one realises the utter futility of all human endeavour and recognises that God alone is

our true helper then the support is very much there, unfailingly there. So, here too we find the response. In one sense Ramana has no particular name or form. He who could not sign the note he had written before leaving for Arunachala chose to reveal to his mother the necessary information by which she could find out where and how he was. One government official insisted on his writing down his name. 'Venkataraman- Tiruchuzhi' was what he wrote. What more definite data could be given? One is filled with wonder at this act of grace. For Ramana has never written his name after leaving home, except on this solitary occasion. During the 54 years of his life in the body since he left Chokkappa Naicken Street, Madurai, this was the only instance of his having done so. For, he knows the suffering of the heart separated from its dear one. One might ask why he did not help earlier. The reason is that his mother and his relatives were putting in their efforts. They were confident of success. But when the dead-end situation came, when mother had no other recourse, Ramana responded to her prayers and revealed what perhaps could never have been discovered. He allowed himself to be traced.

What is the meaning of all this for us? Let these events make us ponder and consider what we are doing with our lives. How many days have turned into months and how many months into years since our great good fortune brought us to Ramana. Where are we going? Are we not complacent? Are we not cock-sure that we can handle our lives? Isn't it a great pity that we keep acting as if our actions alone matter, as if the result and success depend on what we do or don't do? Where is the loosening of the tight grip of doership? Its strong grip is almost as firm as it was on that wonderful day when Ramana entered into our lives. Can there be a greater denial of his grace? Is it not time that we leave things to his care? Is it not time we passed on our petty cares, our needless worries and endless problems to his gigantic shoulders?

This is indeed the crux. For we are letting go of the great opportunity which has opened up for us. Our constant beggary, our constant prayers to Ramana to grant us this or that which is

looming so large at the moment can only be because we do not know what is good for us. Or should we say we know but do not work towards it. The joy of life surrendered to Ramana is unknown to us. Should we not find out why? Should we not do something about it by directing our sadhana rightly?

Ramana would repeatedly point out that one need not think surrender has to be total or not at all. It is not an either or proposition. The attitudinal change from a strong sense of doership to leaning on Ramana's strength comes about gradually. The corrosion of the idea of doership does not happen overnight. It is not instantaneous. But as self-enquiry leads us more to the heart, as we become increasingly aware of the evident power and grace of Ramana, our ego starts hanging down its head in shame. It is difficult to overemphasise the fact that the change will happen by and by so long as we are learning. This feeling is a source of great strength for it gives us hope.

Hence it would be useful to refer to a conversation which Ramana had with a visiting Maharani. It runs thus:

Maharani: Surrender is impossible.

Bhagavan: Yes. Complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. Partial surrender is certainly possible for all. In course of time that will lead to complete surrender.

Until we recognise that 'individuals cannot act of their own accord' until we learn to feel the divine force and keep quiet, we have to give, from time to time particular powers of attorney to Ramana. As and when we are confronted with 'No-Hope' situations or when things go out of hand let us be aware of our helplessness. Little by little we will become conscious of the gracious power of Ramana to relieve us of our needless loads. Then we will be ready to place the ball in Ramana's court, unreservedly. We will be ready to give him a general power of attorney. Our sense of doership which would already be losing its edge will be swallowed up lock, stock and barrel. But it would be a folly to think that we

Days Pass Into Months and Months Into Years

have become Ramana's instruments. Instruments we might be but it is not for us to think so. It is precisely the thoughts that we are the 'thinkers' and 'doers' which have been our enemies within and such thoughts would keep us still in the firm grip of the doership idea. Until all such thoughts also end we are only on the threshold. When the last vestige of the doership idea dies through repeated acts of surrender, time ceases to be. There are no more days, no more months, no more years. In the vast space rid of ideas, rid of thoughts, the bliss of freedom from them is felt in its limitless abundance.

17. Learning and Unlearning

M: The author of 'Vritti Prabhakara' claims to have studied 3,50,000 books before writing the book. What is the use? Can they bring realisation of the Self? 'Vicharasagara' is full of logic and technical terms. Can these ponderous volumes serve any real purpose?.. Only enquiry into the self can be of use.

Talks 332 p.299

We begin our lives with a carried forward balance of innate tendencies or inclinations to act in particular directions. Actions in our past lives have left their marks on memory, pleasure-pain evaluations and a particular momentum of actions. Unless one learns to be aware of these as they sprout up, one is apt to be carried away by thought and action channels into which such tendencies push one.

Learning is one of the important fields in which such tendencies operate, for more often than not we live by our intellect. We are ruled by ideas. Ramana has explained that in this field the tendencies fall into three broad categories, addiction to reading books which means sacred literature. One would endlessly gobble them up or keep reciting their contents. The second category is meticulous observance of details of daily life prescribed in the sacred lore, the third one being delving into the meaning of the words of the scriptures. It is so delightful to go into dialectic debates over what this Upanishad means or does not mean, which interpretation is right, and so on. If one gets caught in this trap he is really holding on to chaff and giving up the substance. To illustrate this Ramana cites the example of Sage Bharadwaja. Highly respected for his erudition he became its victim. His goal in life was mastery over Vedas and Vedanta. As he neared hundred years of life he got panicky at the thought that he had hardly begun reading them. So he prayed to Indra to grant a boon extending his life by another hundred years so that he could

complete the studies. It was granted. But where was he at the end of the new lease of life? He had progressed but was nowhere near completing his studies. So a second request was made and this too was granted. As he was nearing three hundred years of his life he was still to cover a substantial portion. Indra took pity on him, so the story goes, and produced a vision before the sage in which there were three huge mountains and some puny creatures attempting to carry the mountains to their place bit by bit. The point was to drive home to Bharadwaja the hopeless nature of his endless study, gathering more and more information and reflecting on whether it meant this or that. It is said that the rishi realised his folly and concentrated on self-enquiry and became Self-realised.

One has necessarily to keep in mind the purpose of the scriptures, and the works of the Sadguru. The purpose is as Ramana would say, "To draw pointed attention to the need for Self-knowledge and also to suggest ways of attaining it". Once this is assimilated the rest is useless. All that is needed thereafter is only tireless effort.

It is for this reason that Ramana would never encourage display of scholarship. He would say that the purpose of some people's lives seems to be to read voluminous tomes like 'Vritti Prabhakara', 'Vichara Sagara' and to load themselves with a 'forest of ideas'. Ramana would jokingly say "To read them to discover new doubts and solve them is the source of pleasure to them. Encourage them once and there would be no end". Logic, technical terms and numerous and varied ideas would only deflect one from the true purpose of spiritual practices which is to become Self-aware.

In all this, one should never lose sight of the fact that time allotted to us by our karma which has fructified, is not known. It may be long or short. In any case the longest life does not permit the wastage of energy Every bit of one's energy and zest has to be for self-enquiry and Self-knowledge. To steer clear of the temptation of scriptural vasanas is to choose wisely.

All this is not to say that books are not valuable. In fact they serve a crucial purpose and many lives have been transformed by just one book which has made all the difference to its reader. Taking Ramana literature one can readily see the significance of Paul Brunton's 'Search in Secret India', Devarala Mudaliar's 'Day by Day', Osborne's 'Ramana Maharshi', Sadhu Om's 'Path of Sri Ramana' just to name a few.

In fact Ramana himself has written 'Upadesa Saram' and 'Sat Darsanam' dealing only with Self, that too pointedly, and the method of self-enquiry. One can of course never tire of reading his 'Arunachala Stuti Panchakam'. He has also translated some of the works of Adi Sankara from Sanskrit into Tamil and many of the Agamic scriptures. All this would show that what one needs to study and assimilate is the core of the sacred works and not a vast mass of information. One has to remember that the scriptures are intended for people of diverse temperaments and are adapted to the development of seekers. Quite obviously, it is unnecessary to know about matters which have no relevance for our sadhana, or have meaning to someone else.

It is for this reason that time and again Ramana would highlight the fact that mere scriptural learning is not what one should seek. An incident relating to Sub-Registrar Narayana Iyer, a long standing devotee, is appropriate. Once a few learned scholars were discussing some portions of the Upanishads and other spiritual texts with Ramana, he was clarifying a number of points to them. Narayana Iyer who was present felt depressed at the thought that his knowledge of the scriptures was zero when compared to the vast erudition of these scholars. After they left Ramana, who easily read his thoughts, told him, "This is only chaff. All this book learning and the capacity to repeat the scriptures from memory is of no use. Be concerned with knowing the Truth. For that all that you have to do is to 'Be Still'."

So much for learning. Why do we have to unlearn? Why do we have to unburden all knowledge? To tax one's memory with vast number of spiritual texts which have no relevance for one's sadhana or life is only to carry dead weight. Unless space is created in the mind, unless the mind is freed from the plethora of useless data it would not have freedom to function. It cannot renew itself.

Learning and Unlearning

There is no point in rambling, extensive reading and attempting to hold on to it mentally.

As Ramana says what one really needs to know is how to “wipe out the letters of destiny (fate) by enquiring whence the birth of the one who knows the letters”. And the knowledge is not learnt by being bookworms, by poring over the voluminous spiritual literature. It is given only to those who steadfastly pursue self-enquiry knowing that Ramana would ensure its fruition.

18. Common Fare

M: A bachelor, a householder, a forest-dweller, a sannyasi, a woman may enquire into Brahman, if ripe.

M: Even for a householder, if he is completely detached, the supreme light shines forth.

Raman Gita

Chapter VIII verses 2 and 8.

M: In liberation and Self-knowledge there is no difference between men and women.

Ramana Gita

Chapter XIII verse 9.

A distraught young housewife comes to Ramana for guidance but she is too shy to open up, to express her fears and doubts. She returns a month later, for the urge within is too strong to be denied. She gathers courage and asks Ramana if the spiritual path is open to one like her. She felt her youth, her sex and her status as a 'grihini' would come in the way of serious pursuit of spiritual practices and reaping the fruits thereof. Another person comes along and queries, 'How does a grihasta fare in the scheme of Moksha? Should he not necessarily become a mendicant in order to attain liberation?' Yet another would ask, 'Can a married man realise the Self?

Ramana's replies would have two basic strains of thought. One would be to point out that 'spiritual fare is common to all. It is common because it is natural and therefore universal. Self is here and now. This truth is revealed if identification with the body ends. For, all the attributes of marital status, sex and age are related to that. One, however, is not the body but the fullness of consciousness. How can these limitations apply to that which is permanent or for seeking that which is eternal?

Let us examine, to begin with, the question of sex and the doubt if a woman is handicapped in the scheme of things. This issue was posed before Ramana as early as 1917 by Visalakshi, wife of Ganapati Muni. Her question was whether the scriptures permit women to renounce home and become a renunciate. The question itself was of general significance. Because it pertained to the practice of dharma and the correct ethical code. While clarifying the point Ramana gave an authentic ruling that for Liberation and Self-knowledge there is no difference between man and woman. It all depends on the strength of the inner urge. Granted this, all are at par and distinctions based on sex cease to have any significance.

Ramana demonstrated this in practice, in his attitude towards women inmates of Sri Ramanasramam. 'Ribhu Gita' is an ancient work to which Ramana would refer for elucidating some points. It contains the distilled essence of the path of 'jnana'. It was this book which he presented to Sampooramma. He took the trouble of writing a chapter which was missing in that copy before giving it to her. He firmly ignored her protests that she was a 'mere woman' knowing little about Vedanta. On her very first visit Ramana agreed to give his own copy of 'Upadesa Saram' to Santamma, when she asked him for the same. Yet another member of the kitchen staff, Lokamma, was asked to read 'Vasudeva Mananam'.

As for youth, who knows the spiritual age of the seeker? Would it not be wrong to judge one's state of spiritual evolution and capacity to grasp the core of Ramana's direct path with reference to age? In fact for spirituality no one is of the same age as another. For, this life is a karmic link between the past and a possible future. All that is worked for and gained in the past is not lost but is available in the struggle to push forward to the thought-free state.

As for one's status in life, whether one is married or single, it does not make a vital difference. True, if one's fate lies that way, or if one is under a compulsive and mature urge to take to the ochre robe then that life would be conducive to concentrated

efforts to become Self-aware. But for the rest, the fact of marriage need not be a dampener on spiritual effort. Ramana would say, 'Married or unmarried, a man can realise the Self because it is immediately available. It is natural and therefore permanent'.

The second way in which Ramana would deal with the mental blocks based on attributes would be to emphasise that whatever be one's life situation, it is the mind that needs to be tackled. The mind haunts one whether one is at home or retires to solitude. Ramana made a pointed reference to this when his classmate and staunch devotee Rangan wanted to take sannyasa. He asked him to bring the book 'Bhakta Vijayam' from the library and started reading from it. It was about the story of saint Jnaneswar's father Vitobha. When Vitobha wanted to take sannyas his saintly son advised, 'Whether you remain here or go into the forest, the mind is the same, is it not? It remains with you'. Having read this Ramana added, 'You can attain Self-knowledge even if you remain a householder'

Another difficulty experienced by devotees would be to find an environment congenial for 'sadhana'. A visitor would tell Ramana that he felt 'unhappy in Vellore and happy only in his presence'. Or we would have Duncan Greenlees vouching the feeling of the fellow devotees that the serenity and joy imbibed during the stay at Sri Ramanasramam lasted only for a short period after which one would lapse back into the old stupidities. Quite obviously all could not be permanent residents of the ashram. Here again Ramana would point out that the obstacle is the mind for it superimposes difficulties on daily realities. As a result one might find a comforting excuse that had the circumstances been different then everything would have been fine. One must not however let one's resoluteness slacken because of the environment, but work away, for self-enquiry can be made at all times.

The common notion is that it is one's duty, one's work which comes in the way. It is this bubble which Ramana pricks by pointing out that the paramount duty to discover the natural state can be performed in harmony with worldly duties in all

situations. The fault does not lie in the duties. The mistake lies in one's attitude of mind. The mistake lies in one's inability to tackle the mind. For this the solution has to be sought at a different door. It lies in the vigilant practice of self-enquiry, in the constant undercurrent of our urge to find out the true import of 'I'. It is given to all to make this effort, for is not the discriminative faculty an essential human characteristic? Once the mind is strengthened and purified by practice it becomes capable of pushing within and abiding at the source immersed in bliss.

19. Angles Of Vision

Gul and Shirin Byramjee two Parsi ladies of Ahmedabad, arrived this day. They spoke to the Maharshi.

D: If 'I am' is always here and now why do I not feel so?

M: Give up body-consciousness. It is done by seeking the source of 'I'.....seeking its source it will vanish.

Talks 197 pp.162,163.

The scriptures abound with statements belittling the body. 'The body is inert matter'. 'The body itself is the disease'. 'Death is welcome for the burden of the body would end with it'. 'Just as a labourer would heave a sigh of relief as soon as he unloads a heavy load, so too would a Jnani on dropping the body', 'The body is vile', 'It is just flesh, bone and marrow'. These are some of the statements. However, it would be wise to remember the purpose behind them. Why are they made? They are made from a particular point of view, from a particular angle of vision. What is it? It is to act as a counterweight to our folly of identifying ourselves with the body. Ramana used to make humorous remarks about our 'body mindedness' when referring to us as the biggest 'idolators'. When answering an American visitor, who was horrified at the thought that the Supreme should be worshipped as particular forms and names, Ramana just drew his attention to the way in which we treat our body. We brush our teeth, comb our hair, bathe the body and dress it and so keep worshipping it in various ways.

While the condemnation of the body is to free one from identifying with it, we also find the other side of the coin in the scriptures. The body is given its due place. The human body is said to be a necessary prerequisite for working towards discovering one's true nature. The body is regarded as the abode of the Self, a temple housing God. This is so because once born one has to find a physical locale for the Self in the spiritual heart. At the

same time a note of caution would make it clear that while there is no need to mortify the body or to hold it in contempt, one should not pamper it or pander to its weakness.

Actually the label which we give to the body does not really matter. For the problem to be tackled is something else. It is our idea that we are the body. It is the identification with the body which is the real fallacy. Body's births are endless and automatic as long as the karma which gives rise to them is not exhausted. Attention has to be focussed on the fundamental error of mistaking the body to be our self.

How does one who has severed his connection with the body live? Ramana's life itself is the best example of it. In the first few years of his stay at Arunachala his body would have perished but for the loving care of his constant companion Palaniswami. Even while at the Virupaksha cave Ramana and his intimate circle just had a spare meal once a day and sometimes not even that. In the later years too, while Ramana was always solicitous about ensuring that the devotees were properly fed, he himself would neglect his body. All this had a heavy toll on his body. In the last few years before Mahanirvana, he had severe pain in his joints and used to suffer also from hiccups or jaundice or skin ailments every now and then. The devotees in their eagerness to cure him would load the ashram with all sorts of medicines which they thought were sure cures. Ramana's reaction was typical. One day he called for a big container and filled it up with the variety of medicines received and was about to drink it. How could he please some of the devotees by accepting their prescription while refusing those of others at the same time! He was totally unconcerned about the possible damage to the body. The devotees present and the ashram doctor had quite a job dissuading Ramana from taking that concoction of medicines. During the fourteen months of Ramana's terminal illness, time and again he demonstrated what detachment to the body means. His refusal to allow amputation of the arm infected by sarcoma, his insistence on giving darsan to devotees even on the

days of the operations or when suffering from extreme exhaustion and pain are just illustrations of it. The pain and suffering related to the body and he was not that.

We have the example of Ramana before us. How are we to arrive at the state when the root of identification with body is cut? All spiritual effort is only to get rid of this misconception, for the truth is ever existent. 'The real 'I' is always there'. The first step is to become intellectually aware that one is not the body which he takes himself to be. Ramana makes certain points to counter the false idea. In deep sleep there is no identification but at the same time there is no gap in the existence of consciousness. Why not pay attention to this daily occurrence? Again if one is the body it should protest when the pall-bearers take it for cremation. The case of those dying young would also be a pointer. Their bodies are so beautiful before death's pallor sets in. Yet something which had given vitality to the body is missing. It has fled from the body. An attractive form has become a corpse. This should set one thinking as it did Ramana when his father died. He was barely twelve years old then. His father's body was lying as if in sleep. Yet everyone around was mourning and weeping. Ramana kept thinking for hours after the cremation, and came to the conclusion that there must be some force which enabled one to see, walk and act, the true 'I', and that his father was dead when that 'I' had left his body. This trail of thoughts led, a few years later, to his famous 'death-experience' when he could witness the death of his own body while being aware simultaneously that he was the deathless spirit.

This necessary first step, the intellectual grasp of truth, cannot be held on to as the final one. 'Only jnana can wash away the false notions clean'. So some further steps are needed. It is important for one to rely on the grace of the Sadguru constantly. As Ramana told Mrs. H.R., the theoretical understanding can turn into experience only when the doubts of the seeker are removed by his Master. This grace is best invoked

Angles of Vision

by keeping 'vichara' active. The flame of enquiry into one's true identity, the pursuit of the source of one who has the erroneous notion of 'I', will lead one to the inner realm. There all conceptions end in the full blast of Self-knowledge. When one is certain about what one is, that he is the fullness of consciousness, where is the possibility of the 'body-consciousness' disturbing one's true vision again? Fear of death will vanish because that fear springs from the equation of death with the ending of body's life. When the quest within culminates in constant Self-awareness, the continuance of the body or its death is no longer important for its purpose would have been served.

20. Death, Continuity and Freedom

D.G. Mehta: Is there rebirth?

M: If there is birth there must be not only one re-birth but a whole succession of births. How and why did we get this birth?..... it is the ego which is the cause of all.... If it is dissolved by enquiry all this crumbles immediately and Self alone remains.

Day by Day, 19-6-46.

The year was 1912. Ramana was only 33 years old then. He was returning from Pachaiaimman temple to Virupaksha cave. Vasudeva Sastri and other devotees were with him. Suddenly but gradually the view of nature in front of him disappeared and got covered up as if by a sheet of white cloth. He stopped and started walking again. It happened again for a second time. When it happened for the third time circulation of blood and the beating of the heart stopped. Vasudeva Sastri took him to be dead and started weeping. Ramana was fully conscious of what was happening. His body's condition did not worry him at all nor did he swerve in the least from his Self-rootedness. Ramana's blood circulation and breath revived later after ten or fifteen minutes. Why the miracle took place is a divine mystery. It may be because long years of spiritual ministration lay ahead for Ramana. Or it could have been because of the jnani's freedom, as Ramana himself told a devotee - Ananthanarayana Rao - in later years. The jnani is free to cast off the body only when the certainty of his existence even after the body is dropped off, has been established in the minds of the disciples and devotees. Or it may be because, though the jnani does not have any volition of his own, his body's purpose is linked with the establishment of his message which would be the most appropriate one for the age. Though the reason for Ramana's resurrection is beyond our comprehension, there can be little doubt that in a physical and clinical sense, the life force had for all intents and purposes left his body after the third attack. When the attack was on, those

were Ramana's last moments. How were these last moments? Ramana had no thoughts concerning his body for his mind lay 'dead' submerged in the Heart. For him, the timeless one, the last minutes were therefore not different from the earlier ones.

But the position is wholly different for those like us born to work out our karmas. It would be worthwhile to look at the anatomy of what happens at the death-bed. Then we may be forewarned and be ready to meet the only certainty - 'death'. In the case of an exceptionally fortunate devotee, Meenakshi, Ramana was physically there by her bed-side. It happened in the same way as it occurred to Ganapati Muni at Tiruvattiyoor years earlier. Ramana blessed her with his touch. May be her having drunk mother Azhagammal's milk along with Ramana was responsible for this blessing. From our angle of vision it is an exception. What should we do to ensure Ramana's presence with us at that crucial time?

As usual Ramana himself throws light on what happens normally. At the final hour there is a regular tussle, a battle-royal between the deep-rooted attachments to this body and the body to which the 'ego' is about to transfer itself. Gasping of breath towards the end is indicative of it and violent gasps at intervals would mean that the present attachments are not yet snapped. If such a situation is to be avoided one should have learnt to turn the mind inward through self-enquiry. Lot of preparatory work needs to be done well in advance to ensure that.

The last thoughts being all important, one has to reflect whether there would be any difficulty for channeling thoughts Ramana-ward when the time comes. The difficulty was explained to Chadwick by Ramana himself. While cycling round Arunachala, Chadwick once thought of an easy way to liberation when a bus passed by. He felt that since last thoughts are vital, the best course would be to think of the Self and then throw himself in front of the bus. When he told Ramana about this he explained what would happen. Ramana told him that fear and shock would cause thoughts and the continuation of life in another body after death.

Ramana also clarified that the only sure way to avoid rebirth would be to still the mind.

While we might expect that our spiritual practice would enable us to still the mind one cannot overstate the danger of the hidden desires and attachments cropping up. The case of Madhavaswami illustrates. He was an exemplary attendant of Ramana for many years and was therefore very much liked by the devotees. He had a secret desire to be free of any authority, a desire which Ramana alone knew. When a vacancy of the head of a monastery in Kumbakonam arose, Madhavaswami agreed to go there and assume the headship. Soon after that he died there. An unvoiced desire had led him astray at the all important time and deprived him of Bhagavan's physical proximity at the time of his death.

As Ramana told the mourners, instead of merely feeling sorry for the dead on such occasions one should worry as to what would happen when one's life is to end. If one thinks deeply about this it would be evident that one should strive his utmost to be conscious till the very end. Thoughts have to be consciously pushed back to the thinker and the thinker into his source by enquiring into the source of the thinker. So any sadhana which would stupefy the mind and deprive one of mental alertness at the required moment should be avoided. It is for this reason that one finds Ramana advising Echammal against meditation for a long time on the tip of the nose and other such methods of concentration.

One has to earn Ramana's grace by sustained self-enquiry which is the most effective means for turning the mind inward even when life's sojourn is about to end. Ramana has also made it clear over and over again that so long as individuality lasts, effort is inevitable. Effort backed by faith alone will enable one to feel Ramana's ever present grace.

Again if we look at death it means the dissolution of a particular ego and its rebirth in another body. It is the continuity

of the ego. If one learns to demolish the ego-sense 'at its very root' then death would be with full awareness. This also emphasises the paramount importance of self-enquiry. When the ego is the constant focus of attention, as in self-enquiry, it would have to fall back on its source and strength, the Self. If one has, through repeated practice of self-enquiry, even tasted, though intermittently, the bliss of the Self then at the appointed hour also one can manage to turn within and lose the separate identity. Ramana's aid can be banked upon if one has done his sadhana. With Ramana at hand the mind would be filled with liberating thoughts ensuring at the very least good rebirth. If one has entrusted himself to Ramana and also kept up effort till the end to stay within, then the mind would merge in the Heart, its source. At the point of death there would be no thoughts, the attachments would have been uprooted. Thus liberated, the person is for ever freed from death's hands.

21. To Me, to You, and the Whole World, He is the Guru

Natanananda: What are the marks of a Sadguru?

Bhagavan: Steady abidance in the Self, looking at all with an equal eye, unshakable courage at all times, in all places and circumstances.

- Spiritual Instruction

Some say that Ramana was the complete one, a sage of steady wisdom from his birth. He was born free. For his body had no karmic purpose. Was not his only purpose to be the voice of the truth, to enlighten the modern minds on the glory of the natural state of bliss? How else can one explain the throb of Arunachala in his heart from the age of innocence? How else can one explain the total lack of preparation for the death-experience, the complete absence of any sadhana, or spiritual effort associated with attainment? How else can one explain his steady Self-abidance after an experience which hardly lasted some minutes? But then one might ask what about his childhood and student days in which he was apparently not different from others? Was it all just a sport, this 'transformation' after the death experience? Was it to encourage human effort at liberation? In a way it does not matter. For there is little doubt that after that memorable day, the 17th of July 1896, he was steadily abiding in the Self. There was no difference in his state from that point of time till his 'Nirvana' on 14th April 1950. The seeming tapas in Patalalinga, the period when he observed silence, the period when he remained alone except for the company of Palaniswamy, the later years when the hundreds and thousands thronged round him, were all the same. His state was one of steady Self-awareness despite these apparent differences from the 'onlooker's point of view'.

Even so, the 17th of November 1907, was an important landmark in Ramana's life as the teacher of the world. For it was on that day that Ganapati Muni realised Ramana's supreme state

and broadcast it to everyone. The 'Muni' had already a large following, including earnest seekers and erudite scholars like Kapali Sastri, Deivarata, Karshni and the like. The Muni wrote to them individually about Ramana's stature and his acceptance of Ramana as not only his own guru but as the universal teacher who has come for imparting the direct path to Self-knowledge. One might ask, 'What difference does it make?' Is Ramana's stature as Sadguru heightened in any way by this event? Though the event does not add anything to Ramana's stature, nonetheless it is significant for the seekers, for you and me, for the earnest ones yearning to be guided by a Sadguru. Knowledge of the availability of Sadguru Ramana's guidance and his easy accessibility is indeed a great boon.

However, mysterious are the ways of providence. For many years after this Ramana's glory was 'plundered' only by a handful, the Muni, Humphreys, Natanananda, Muruganar, Viswanatha Swami, Vasudeva Sastri, Narasimhaswami and some others. They almost had Ramana to themselves. Even in the early thirties the sharers increased only in dribblets. Paul Brunton, Nambiar, Munagala and so on. Then came the flood tide of the forties when so many enjoyed not only the beatitude of his physical company but his clear guidance on the path of self-enquiry, and even on their own cherished spiritual practices.

What was Ramana's way of teaching? For one thing he would not disturb people's faith, their natural inclinations. To cite an example, Ramana took great pains to explain to Karshni the importance of self-enquiry, its purificatory effect and so on. Yet after hearing him Karshni wished to know whether other methods like japa, pilgrimages, and worship were not effective. Ramana told him that they too would, in the end, lead to Self-knowledge, for any steadfast sadhana would purify the mind and make it ready for diving within. Invariably there would be questions on mind-control. Ramana would focus attention on the need for knowing what the mind is before one can seek to control it. The point and emphasis would hardly seep in on those accustomed

to regard the mind as a separate entity. They would take their own individuality to be real and seek objects of concentration, the sacred syllable, a chosen form of God and so on. To them Ramana would say that the worship of the Supreme in any form would lead them to the goal. There was such a bewildering variety of seekers, devotees and visitors that only a Ramana would manage to guide them. Such was his Olympian stature that Ramana's words carried the power and depth of truth. Each could find solace, strength and encouragement in sticking to the spiritual path. Sometimes one might wonder at the seemingly different advice given, like cautioning T.P.R. against over-emotionalism, while encouraging Dilip Kumar Roy by pointing out that devotion is the forerunner of knowledge. These differences are only if one forgets that the advice was intended for the particular seeker and was not necessarily of universal applicability.

But one thing was clear, there were no favourites, no chosen disciples. Each could benefit to the extent to which he would give himself to Ramana. But for him there was no difference. Any suggestion to that effect would also be promptly rejected by Ramana as he did when it was said that Subbaramayya was the 'high priest' of the devotees. Be it the Governor's adviser, Ramamurti, Chief Secretary to Government, Pannalal, or the Maharaja of Mysore, to all the same even-handedness, the same love, the same guidance was given by Ramana as was done to the lowest of the lowly and the humblest of the humble. Ramana was the complete one. He had nothing to gain, no fear of losing anything. Hence he stands out as the 'Sadguru' in whom there was not the slightest trace of partiality, as one whose majesty and courage are breathtaking.

Though individual advice might differ, invariably Ramana would bring one back to fundamentals, the need to find out one's true identity, the need to search for truth. All effort which ignores the primal need for self-enquiry would at best take one to the threshold. For, without tackling the ego, without understanding the nature of the mind, effort would be no better than rowing an

anchored boat if the goal be Self-knowledge. This has to be necessarily so because the special purpose of Ramana was to make available the straight path to Self-knowledge to the modern man who has to find the truth amidst activity. The path is therefore free of dogma, of dialectic theories, and is one which is capable of practice at all available times and in all given situations. Hence this way was emphasised and incessantly stressed by Ramana.

Yet another aspect which Ramana would repeatedly stress is the availability of his guidance always because he is the inner guru. The guidance is there if only one is sensitive and receptive to it instead of being cheated out of it by a crowd of desires, thoughts and the momentum of ceaseless activity.

As the mood of devotion, of inwardness, comes on one wonders at the rare good fortune of having come to Ramana. Did we choose him or did he choose us? Let that controversy go on or stop; only let us strive to hold on to him for he is all that one need care for in life.

22. Ramana as Sadguru

Talking of the innumerable ways of different seekers of god Bhagavan said, "Each should be allowed to go his own way; the way for which alone he may be suited. It will not do to convert him to another path by violence. The guru will go with the disciple in his own path and then gradually turn him to the supreme way at the right time".

Day by Day 22.11.45

The doors of the old Hall at Sri Ramanasramam would open at 3 A.M. They would close only late at night. Except for short spells Ramana would be there throughout. The stream of visitors which would start at 5 A.M. would be continuous. The devotees and visitors would be people with varying temperaments and backgrounds. Some would be votaries of Rituals, others of Karma, yet others of Yoga and also of Jnana. People of all religions, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Zorastrians, Buddhists, and from modern reform movements, Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj and Theosophists, would be there ready with a medley of doubts. Family people with their long list of worries and simple rustic folk would flock alongside with erudite scholars. It is not as if these people had any particular fascination for the direct path of self-enquiry. They just came because of the magnetic pull of his presence. The aura of peace radiating from him drew them. One can say that it was quite a motley crowd. Yet in their own way each would return happy just at having been in Ramana's physical proximity. They would be hungry for more of the peace radiating from the Maharshi. While at the ashram, which meant the 'Old Hall' where Ramana held court, none was required to observe any particular discipline. The accessibility of Ramana was only matched by the freedom to follow one's own path. Hence some would call the 'Old Hall' the 'Liberty Hall'.

How did Ramana handle this vast variety of people whose only common bond was love and reverence for him? He would never disturb a person's faith, saying that it would not be of much

use. For each person would tend to follow with enthusiasm only that path towards which he was inclined. It was quite common for many devotees to seek visions of their chosen deities. They knew of Ramana's position that attention should be only on the one who sees the vision and that one would be well advised to pose the question, 'For whom is the vision?' in order that it may cease. Once Ramana told Kapali Sastri, "Even if the 'Trimurtis' the three Gods, appear before me and ask me to choose a boon, I would tell them 'Be pleased, let me have no more darsan'." Yet, when Sundaresa Iyer fervently prayed for a vision of Rama, Ramana gave it to him. When Ragavachari wanted to see his true form Ramana gave him a vision of his formless state. But he would, at the appropriate time, explain to them the need for being stabilised in the Self instead of hankering after phenomena which come and go, however auspicious they may be.

A devotee from Kashmir, Pandit Bala Kak Dhar, was a strong votary of image worship and had firm belief in 'mantras' and 'puja'. Once he had the 'darsan' of Ramana he felt he had come to the journey's end. Of what use were his idols and practices? So thinking he asked Ramana 'Now that I have had the darsan of Sri Bhagavan and it is enough for me, may I throw away all charms, tantras, and pujas into the river?'. Ramana told him, "Daily puja as prescribed in the 'Dharma Sastras' is always good. It is for the purification of the mind. Even if one feels too advanced to need such puja, still it must be performed for the sake of others." Ramana knew that if one uproots himself from his background under a sudden impulse, he might lose all his moorings. Also perhaps Ramana did not want the devotee to feel that all his previous sadhana was a waste of effort. Ramana's position is that the purificatory effect of any sadhana sincerely done cannot be underestimated. 'It will do its work' he would say. When someone said that he would have been far more fortunate had he come to Bhagavan earlier, Ramana told him that it was precisely those past practices which had brought the devotee to him. Every form of sadhana is to be respected as limb and part of the overall effort towards Self-knowledge. If self-enquiry is

added, then the process would be quickened for the goal would be achieved sooner by tackling the ego initially itself and effectively.

Some with deep faith in mantras would question him about how to choose what was best for them. Everything he had heard or read was imbedded in Ramana's photographic mind. Appropriate passages from Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, or Puranas, would be readily selected by Ramana. Drawing on these freely he would enter into the line of the questioner's thought and give answers suitable for that devotee.

In the pre-Ramanasramam days Ramana's guidance would almost wholly be through his potent silence. While one would feel uplifted and elevated by the contact, still a lingering doubt would remain whether one had been accepted and directed on the path. Typical of this is the case of Natanananda who told Ramana at Skandasramam, 'I wish to learn about and experience what your anugraham is'. The Maharshi's reply is pregnant with meaning. "I am always giving anugraham. If you cannot apprehend it, what am I to do?" In later years, though the predominant mode of Ramana's teaching was still by silence, he would give concession to the limitations of disciples, devotees and visitors. The questions of genuine seekers would be answered and their doubts about practice solved leaving no room for ambiguity. Here too Ramana would almost invariably give first a 'piercing' look filled with compassion to make the questioner receptive and to free him from the tyranny of his notions and web of thoughts. The mere look would have been enough. But Ramana would also take the person along and give a practical turn to his sadhana. What matters is experience, even if it be, to begin with, in fits and starts and varying intervals. That experience which Ramana has ignited will keep beckoning. There can be no looking back for one cannot give up what 'one has experienced and found to be true'. Ramana's directed grace would be at hand aiding in moments of weakness till Self-knowledge becomes steady.

23. Invigorating Positivism

M: All such thoughts as “attainment is hard” or “Self-Realisation is far for me” or “I have many difficulties to overcome to know reality” must be given up as they are obstacles created by ego. They are untrue. Do not doubt your reality; live in that understanding.

Conscious Immortality p 58.

When we take exclusively to the spiritual path, there is a complete shifting of our goals, from ‘worldly’ achievements to becoming Self-aware or to be liberated from the karmic cycle. While our resolve or intellectual conviction is firm initially, due to the lack of experience to back it up one is likely to feel that he is at a loose end. Apparently this is more so when pursuing the direct path of Ramana. Why so? For in it one is not clear about the role of the mind. If one is to be free of thoughts where is use or scope for the mind? We generally feel that we are active only when the mind is having thoughts, when it is result oriented. In the straight way, the mind is used initially to ward off thoughts. That far the mind’s functioning is not different from what we are used to. But it is only when we are off the mental movement, it is only when we have succeeded in creating the vacuum, that the problem arises. What happens when the thoughts are not surfacing? Are we to do anything further if we do not find that peace which must be felt when one is not asleep and thoughts too are absent? Should one consciously let thoughts come to the surface in order to be able to deal with them? Or else should one remain passive until one feels the peace which overwhelms?

It appears that there is the need for the mind to be fully operative by keeping the attention fixed on the source of thoughts till the natural and inherent joy is felt. Then, as Ramana told Cohen, one should do nothing to disturb that peace. One should ‘do nothing’. This seems to be a twilight zone in the direct path which baffles and one might abandon self-enquiry labelling it as

‘difficult’. Here lies the need to overcome such thoughts by meditating on the invigorating positivism of Ramana’s counsel to various seekers.

Ramana would always counter every trick of the mind with strengthening suggestions for, these mental blocks, by dampening enthusiasm and effort, would deny one the joy of the natural state. As for the so called difficulty Ramana would say that the very idea is wrong. It is only a self-imposed obstacle which will evaporate once effort is made. The notion would then be recognised as a mere myth. In any case we have only to scorch it with the question ‘For whom is the difficulty?’ When a visitor remonstrated, ‘You say it is easy but we find it difficult’, Ramana remarked, ‘Find out who is weighing the path? Find out who it is that is finding it difficult?’

Time and again Ramana would emphasise the need for faith, the need for confidence in our capacity to deal with the hordes of tendencies which press in when a mental vacuum is created. ‘Many have succeeded’ he would say ‘because they believed they could’. What can ‘vasanas’ do when one is concentrating on their core? Or we draw encouragement from a conversation Ramana had with Subba Rao who complained of the power of the ‘vasanas’. Ramana categorically told him, ‘Your repeated effort will erase them’.

Some would be quite genuinely concerned about ‘downfalls’, about slipping back to old ways. One step forward seems to be negated by two steps backward when one is inattentive or even in spite of oneself. Here again Ramana would reassure. Things would be alright in the end. What can failures do against ‘the steady impulse of determination’? Will it not put one back on his feet? Then, as one keeps at it ‘success would beget success’. Ramana would also give the analogy of conquering a fort by laying siege of it, and destroying its man-power as they come out of it. Once the thinker is besieged, how long can distracting thoughts survive? Also, no effort is ever wasted, as he would say. What strength pours into us as we read of his assertion that “even

a single effort to still a single thought, even for a trice, goes a long way to reach the state of quiescence”!

Sometimes there is the feeling that we are not fit or that circumstances will not permit steadfastness or success in attaining the goal. What is natural cannot be denied to us. Even so the doubt arises. An intelligent lady from an aristocratic family comes alone. She makes a short trip, puts some superficial questions and goes away. She returns soon to seek Ramana's guidance for a way out of her problems. She is a woman, and a married one at that, having many inescapable family obligations. Plaintively she asks, “Am I worthy of being a devotee?” Straight came the Master's succour, “Spiritual fare is common to all and denied to none, be the person old or young, male or female.”

Ramana would also encourage by assurances of his protection, which knows no preference or limitations of time and space. He would say if a guru chooses to be gracious to a particular devotee because he is an ashram inmate or a frequent visitor, he could not be a jnani. As for the need to be near he would remark, “The frog stays near the lotus but it is only the bees which suck the honey of the flowers however far they may come from.” As we learn to draw on Ramana's strength the ‘difficult’ direct path becomes what it is in fact, an ‘easy’ one.

24. Is it the Purpose for Which They Have Come?

D: Bhagavan says, "Contact with exalted souls is one efficacious means of realising one's true being."

Does the good flowing from the contact hold after the dissolution of the physical body of a Jnani?

M: His contact will continue even after his form vanishes.... If one Jnani exists in the world his influence will be felt by or benefit all people in the world and not simply his immediate disciples.

Day by Day, 9.3.46

It was 11 PM at night when a group of persons from Guntur reached Sri Ramanasramam. They had brought with them the corpse of a boy aged about eleven. The mother of the boy was sure that Ramana would bring him back to life. She pleaded with him to do so. Ramana was aware of her anguish and faith. He spoke to her tenderly and explained to her that if he did revive the boy's life, Ramanasramam would be flooded with corpses. If the laws of nature were transgressed there would be no deaths, no cemetery, no cremation.

Birth, life and death are regulated in accordance with the laws of the Creator. The question would arise whether these powers are also vested with jnanis since they are not different from God. The answer is, 'Yes'. There are recorded instances, though very rare, where such a power has been exercised openly as was done by Jesus, Jnaneshwar and Ramana himself in the case of Jagadiswara Sastri. On many occasions it is also exercised without the knowledge of the devotee who would have escaped certain death due to the intervention of the Sadguru to whom he has surrendered. A fatal accident might have been averted or cardiac arrest prevented by timely medical help, and so on. There is, therefore, little doubt that this power is inherent in jnanis.

Is it the Purpose for Which They Have Come?

'Ramana Gita' records Ramana's confirmation of this position while clarifying Amritananda Yati's doubts. He categorically states that jivanmuktas are equal to Siva and can grant any boon. Many regard Ramana's role in liberating his mother Azhagammal at the time of her death as proof of this statement.

Though the power to perform miracles is inherent in a jnani we find it is not always that this power is exhibited. Not only is the ultimate miracle of restoring life rare but even lesser ones are minimal. It might however be mentioned that even if an overt display is avoided the power of the Sadguru is such that 'automatic' miracles would be taking place. Day in and day out letters and telegrams would be despatched to Sri Ramanasramam by anxious devotees and the relief sought for would arrive even on the posting of the letter or the despatching of the telegram. They did not have to reach Ramanasramam. For, a jnani is the embodiment of the divine and the moment a matter is brought to his notice relief would flow. Nothing more is needed.

However, generally speaking while the devotees would be the beneficiaries of the guru's grace in innumerable ways, the guru himself may not openly admit his role. This is because the guru's purpose is to encourage and sustain serious search for truth. Anything which would deflect one from this purpose would be detrimental. The devotees might start looking for or seeking such 'miracles' wrongly regarding them as a sign of the special grace of the guru. Competition for favours and jealousies might start. Presumably because of this we find Ramana underplaying his role as a boon giver.

Ramana has given yet another and more fundamental reason for the reluctance of the jnanis to openly sport their powers. In the incident relating to the Guntur boy, narrated earlier, after the persons concerned left, the devotees present expressed a doubt. They asked whether the power of reviving the dead existed in a jnani. Ramana's reply is telling. He said, "Jnanis and Siddhas can restore life but is it the purpose for which they have come?" The

Is it the Purpose for Which They Have Come?

jnani's purpose is not to throw around little trinkets and gifts within the framework of the illusory world. By his very existence he benefits the entire world.

This leads us to the question as to why they enact the human drama. Why is it that they bear all the travails of the body? They are born for the welfare of the world. Therefore their resplendent presence 'restores dharma, gives strength to the virtuous and renews earth's life'.

Even more direct is their purpose as the voice of truth. They come to wean away men and women from dogmas, false notions, rituals and ruts of habits into which spiritual practice might degenerate if fresh life is not breathed into them. The jnani's purpose is to rehabilitate and shed light on forgotten truths. They also reveal new paths of wisdom based on the authority of their experience. That this is the purpose of Ramana's advent is obvious. Ramana opened up for all the 'vichara marga', the path of self-enquiry. On that holy day in July 1896 in his famous death experience Ramana was straightaway on the trail of the enquiry whether one is the body. This opened up for him the awareness of the truth that he was not the body but the deathless spirit. This experience he shared with all day in and day out for the next fifty four years till his 'mahanirvana' in 1950. He readily gave his own state of bliss in order that we may be able to find for ourselves the beauty of 'sahaja', the natural state.

It is difficult to overstate Ramana's contribution as a discoverer of the direct path to self-knowledge. His emphasis on practice and experience has given a new dimension, a new edge to spiritual practices. Brahman, Atman and God would be mere concepts, lofty concepts no doubt, till one has the experience of the natural state. Such experience is not possible unless one finds out the truth about oneself. By making the individual the focus of attention, Ramana has brought sadhana down to earth. His anatomy of the mind, the spiritual heart and the relationship between them, has placed on a platter a new understanding about

Is it the Purpose for Which They Have Come?

ourselves. Ramana has also scissored the weight of the past in the form of innate tendencies by advising shifting of attention from the thoughts to the thinker. The vast background of thoughts wither away for want of attention on them. The inner journey, abidance in the source and the experiencing of the natural joy becomes possible as a consequence. What a treasure has Ramana laid before us! What new vistas open up, be it gradually or spontaneously!

25. Ramana, Who Are You Really ?

If one longs to know about
Ramana guru, the mendicant ruler of Annamalai
Surely he is ever present everywhere
Encompassing the entire world.

Muruganar,
Sri Ramana Deva Malai, Verse 44.

The one constant note in Ramana's teachings, the basic note is that one should find out one's true identity by enquiring who one is. But even earnest seekers of this path not infrequently wish to know who Ramana really is. What is his identity? Does he have a separate one? Who is it that keeps showering bounteous gifts both materially and spiritually yet almost always keeps trying to hide his true glory? In one sense it does not seem to matter. For Ramana has made it clear that the Sadguru is not different from God, not different from the Self. Yet how can one resist the temptation to conjecture, the desire to know the one who, though apparently embodied like all of us, is so wholly detached from the body? What is the secret of the aroma of peace surrounding him? What accounts for the atmosphere of bliss which envelopes everyone in his presence? Is there no explanation for this 'Ramana Lahari'? But then is it possible to really know? Where are our limited minds and where is he revelling always in the Heart, dancing his cosmic dance of joy? Can one know unless he chooses to reveal his true stature?

Quite clearly one can say that unless he himself graciously chooses to let us have a peep behind his hidden mystery, we cannot know. That is for sure. How else can one explain the unfortunate fate of the ignorant ones who would come and go away 'unimpressed' by the glory which was before their very eyes in flesh and blood radiating the divine. "Like a cock that throws aside the diamond taking it for a pebble, they would even belittle this Arunachala Ramana mistaking him for a common fellowman". For the same reason, the idly curious who came to visit the sage

of Arunachala' just could not understand why on earth anyone should choose to become an inmate of the ashram, to give up the dear things of life just to be in his physical presence, just to hear his nectarine words. One recalls the case of the Australian journalist who kept pestering Major Chadwick for the reasons which prompted him to settle down near the Maharshi. How could a Westerner, used to an active life, choose to be a recluse in a far away jungle hermitage? This was something beyond his comprehension. Chadwick tried in vain to impress on him that what he had traded in was the triviality of life in the world in exchange for steady peace and joy. How could anyone do such a thing was the thought still lingering in the journalist's mind when he left.

What do the blessed ones who have been bestowed with the inner vision say? First we have Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer who spent a few rapturous days in Virupaksha cave enjoying Ramana as Arunachala Siva incarnate. In his 'Ramana Stuti Panchakam' Sadguru Ramana is seen time and again as auspicious Siva, the one who shared his body with Sambhavi. Then we have the halcyon days when Ganapati Muni was a resident of Arunachala overwhelmed by Bhagavan, the Maharshi, the sweet Ramana. It was in those years that he repeatedly had the divine visions in which he saw Ramana as Subrahmanya, supreme teacher of Knowledge. In joyous exultation he proclaims, "Surely he is 'Senani' the auspicious commander-in-chief of the celestial armies, come to proclaim the truth, to deal a lethal blow to the poisonous weed of conceptual thoughts. He is the same Sanatkumara who taught Narada the truth about the Self, Karthikeya in comely human form. He has left mother Uma's lap and father Siva's endearments and come to Arunai hiding his supreme state in a humble human frame. Who can be deceived except the unwary? Ramana has come to fill the throne of the world teacher, the Jagadguru, left long vacant for centuries after Sankara reigned. One must be blind as a bat if one cannot see the resplendent sun of Jnana, the same Kumarila Bhatta, and Jnana Sambandhar come again to trumpet the supremacy of the path of knowledge

for destroying ignorance.” In this train he goes on in rapturous and mellifluous Sanskrit poetry in the eleventh and eighteenth chapters of ‘Ramana Gita’ and in his verses in praise of his guru thanks to whom his arduous penance came to be fulfilled.

Then of course we have the words of Ramana’s divine cuckoo, Muruganar. Ramana had made him his own by his blazing, bright, unwinking eyes, at their first meeting itself. Thereafter for Muruganar all gods were only Ramana, the God of Gods. He was also the compassionate Buddha, the redeemer, Christ. When he is the all embracing whole, can there be any God whose essence is not Ramana? While this was the general drift, he would often speak of Ramana as Siva, the same auspicious one who had left Mount Kailasa and come in the ancient days to Perundurai to listen to Manikkavachagar, now come again to Arunachala. It is such a feast to joyously bathe in the Ganges of inspired poetry of Muruganar on Siva Ramana. Thanks to it we enjoy the beauty of Ramana as everyone of the infinite variety of forms and names and also the formless source of all. Even so where is the language, where are the words to capture the breathtaking splendour of Ramana?

Then we have the sweet melody of Sadhu Om’s compositions with its constant reminder of Ramana’s role as the Sadguru guiding the world on the direct path of self-enquiry. Ramana is the Aruna Hill putting on the human garb to proclaim the truth and to save the seekers from their self-imposed delusions.

Looking back we enter into the world of Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer and see Ramana as the great saviour for was he not a direct beneficiary of his mercy? Or we have Lakshmana Sarma, Kapali Sastri and Jagadeeswara Sastri trying to extol Ramana’s glory and ending up confessing the inadequacy of words to describe one who is the source of sound itself. For, if any were to ask, “What is the nature of your Master?” one can only hang down one’s head and remain silent. What can we know about the mysteries of Ramana?

Ramana, Who are You Really?

Only Ramana himself can tell us about himself. Fortunately, we have his direct reply to Amritananda Yogi in 1914. The Yogi had wished to know from Ramana whether he was Hari, or Subrahmanya, or Vararuchi or the chief among Yogis? Ramana's reply is most telling. He is the intelligence in the hearts of all beings be it Iswara, Hari or the world of individuals. It is Ramana's light which shines on the mind making life possible. Having said this, he identifies himself as Arunachala Ramanan confirming that Arunachala and he are not different. Years later while completing a verse in praise of Muruganar in 'Sannidhi Murai', Ramana repeats the same words 'Arunachala Ramanan' underscoring once again his oneness with that blazing fire of knowledge, Arunachala. This verse was composed while describing the magic which Ramana had wrought on Muruganar as the in-dweller of his heart.

All this is a rich tapestry. But should one be content with seeing Ramana through others' minds and eyes? Even his own words are inadequate are they not? Should we not seek to know him directly, experientially? True, it is his grace which has made us turn to him even though we may not have even the faintest idea as to who Ramana is. Some rare penance of the past has begun to bear fruit. But should we not sustain and strengthen this link by pursuing with unflagging vigour the Ramana Way? For in it lies also the way to our opening ourselves to him. The inwardness, the passivity necessary for being drawn more fully by his magnetic pull, is fostered by self-enquiry. As we keep consciously merging in our source, keep entering into our Heart we find there would be no need to ask who Ramana is. For we would ourselves know the answer. That he is the fullness of consciousness - bliss, in which he immerses all who are ready to lose their individuality in that vast space.

26. Do Not Be Taken In

On his devoted head he carries

As if they were His own, all burdens

That His devotees should wear.

He tells me 'Fear Not' and protects me,

Ramana, the Lord of Aruna.

- Muruganar,

Ramana Sannidhi Murai,

Verse 937

Giddaluru Satyanarayana Rao's daughter Rukmini practically grew up in Ramanasramam. She enjoyed Ramana's company with a natural ease which only a child knows. She had also heard from her father about the liberation of Palaniswami and Bhagavan's mother Azhagammal at his sacred hands. This had made a deep impact on her young mind. One day her father lay dying. His breathing had become heavy and the end seemed near. Spontaneously Rukmini ran to Ramana and reported the matter to him. Ramana said in Telugu, 'Nannu emi cheyamantavu?' 'What do you want me to do?'. Rukmini knew how tender Ramana's heart was. She was not taken in by Ramana's seeming indifference. She picked up Ramana's stick and literally took him to her father's death-bed. Ramana sat there for about fifteen minutes re-enacting the old and memorable scenes in Virupaksha cave when Palaniswami was about to die and at Skandasramam on the 19th of May 1922 when his mother's condition was critical. In a like manner he kept his left hand on Rao's head and his right hand on his heart till the life force was absorbed in the heart. One cannot say how many thousands would have been helped by Ramana to be free of their karmic bonds though the modes might not be exactly the same. But in our ignorance we keep enumerating these happenings, one, two, three and so on, though

in fact they are countless. Few know of the miracle wrought in Rao's case for it is Ramana's way to keep his loving care a secret between himself and the devotee. Whatever be the reason, such was his way of maintaining a seeming facade. His tender heart and love were hidden. Only one should not be taken in by this.

Still one is tempted to refer to a couple of instances more of Ramana's 'care'. A woman in the eighth month of her pregnancy came in deep distress to Ramana. For, she had already had four abortions. She was in the grip of the stark fear as to what would happen the fifth time too. Would the same fate overtake the child in the womb? Fortunately her faith in Ramana matched this fear. She stood before Ramana transfixed and in prayerful surrender to him. At that time Ramana was about to start on the 'pradakshina' of Arunachala. She expressed her ardent desire to join him. Such was her confidence in his protection. No thought crossed her mind of the consequences of circumambulation at such an advanced stage of pregnancy, that too with her medical history! For her sake Ramana told everyone that they should cover the distance at the rate of a mile per hour. Everyone was filled with a rare joy. The mood was ecstatic, for Ramana's motherly care permeated the atmosphere. A couple of months later a well formed and beautiful baby was born to the lady. One wonders how many pregnant mothers must have received Ramana's quiet protection.

Dandapani Swami had been an inmate of Sri Ramanasramam for many years and its manager for a couple of years. He left for Haridwar due to differences of opinion with some of the other residents of the Asramam. Though physically far off, his heart remained in the Asramam. He kept longing for the day when he could be with Ramana again. He knew only too well how impractical this wish was. He had no money of his own nor could he expect monetary help for the trip from anyone else in that new place. 'Penniless and helpless' he remained, in the constant thought of how he could get back to Ramana, till a 'believe it or not' kind of incident happened. Suddenly one day

a group of well-to-do Kashmiri ladies surrounded him. Not only did they insist on giving him a 'biksha' but they also provided him with required money to cover the train fare to Tiruvannamalai. What can we say of this wish-fulfilling Ramana? Only the yearning must be there. He knows how to satisfy it.

The event now narrated happened in 1916, at about 8 P.M. at night, when Ramana was staying in the Virupaksha cave. Thirty devotees who had come for Ramana's 'darsan' were stranded because of very heavy train. Ramana noticed how hungry these devotees were. He asked one of those present. Narayana Reddiar (the first publisher of the 'Five Hymns to Arunachala') to distribute the available food to those present. The food available would normally be sufficient only for two or three persons. Yet wonder of wonders all were satisfied and felt that they had eaten their fill on so little food! This extraordinary incident has been recorded by Ramana Dasa Sadananda in his "Ramana Stuti Dasakam"

There is so much common misconception about a jnani. One assumes that in his lofty state Ramana would be unconcerned and indifferent to the little details of a devotee's life. To assume so would be a serious mistake for we have quite obviously the need for his help and guidance on a day to day basis. For, each trivial event appears so mountainous to us. Yet, we do not wish to 'trouble' Ramana about our 'petty' worries and cares. Perhaps we doubt if it is fair and also think that his help would be available only for the so called 'major' events. But the old devotees knew better and they would keep reporting to him practically every small thing in their lives. They were conscious of Ramana's ready and loving response. N.N.Rajan's 'Leaves' abounds with such instances. To illustrate, his wife Kamala was down with smallpox. From day one Rajan would keep pouring into Ramana's sympathetic ears, the medical bulletin about her condition. Ramana would suggest one effective home remedy or the other, such as the use of neem leaves and rose water and the like, to alleviate her suffering. Ramana's identification with Rajan's woes is seemingly so complete.

Why should Ramana bother? We do not know the why of it. Each devotee must be aware how in so many 'small' and 'big' ways Ramana keeps helping. Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer, Narayana Iyer, Subbaramayya are among those who have turned to Ramana for help in providing suitable husbands for their daughters. Happy results flowed from it. These devotees were not overwhelmed by Ramana's gigantic stature but turned to him constantly for help.

Ramana's ways are mysterious for who can know of the jnani's responses which are intuitive and straight from the heart. The mystery is all the more for Ramana's mind was 'dead' and he did not have any specific 'sankalpa' or wish to help. Also, one cannot understand how Ramana could take such interest even in the minutest detail in the lives of so many thousand devotees. But as Sundaresa Iyer would say, he alone knew what it is to love, what it is to give with the fullness of heart. One had only to ask and it would be provided. What about those who did not ask at all. They are a happier lot. For them, the responsibility becomes wholly that of Ramana's. He becomes their helmsman. What better thing can happen?

27. Vicarious Penance

He who was crucified and rose again
has taught the noble dharma

That for the sins of others too
We should do penance
and redeem them.

May this dharma of compassion
Taught by the true brahmin, Venkata
Flourish ever, this dharma of the cross
The Dharma of vicarious penance.

- Muruganar
'Ramana Sannidhi Murai'

The spotless pure one suffered long from sarcoma. The pain must have been unbearable though he would not mention it. Even if asked he would say that it was the body's pain. He was not the body and so the pain was not his. The way he would talk and joke about it would make it appear that the disease did not relate to his body at all! The disease itself was dreadful and on top of it the devotees in their anxiety for his getting cured would suggest some new line of treatment or the other and he would patiently oblige. Such was his love and compassion for the devotees feelings. However painful the treatment it did not matter. One heartrending event brings this home. Dr. Moose who was entrusted with the treatment, at one stage, would apply leeches to his tumour. His idea was that they would suck the bad blood out of it. One afternoon they clung on after a heavy bout of blood sucking and could not be easily detached. Consequently removing them caused terrible pain. Not only did Ramana not complain but he humorously said, "These leeches, like so many jnanis, seem to have gone into samadhi.' When the Lord incarnate was suffering thus, those to whom he was everything used to ask themselves, repeatedly, the question why it happened to the immaculate one while they themselves in spite of their deeds appeared to be relatively free from due desserts of fate.

Vicarious Penance

Ramana would sometimes say that the disease which racked his body with pain would bring home to the devotees the truth that he was not the body. Its purpose was to establish in their minds the certainty of his continued existence even after his body dropped off. Ramana said so specifically to Dr. Ananthanarayana Rao, the ashram physician. Ramana's purpose was to remove the illusion of body-consciousness by a practical demonstration of heart-based life. In what better way could it be demonstrated than by Ramana exuding joy while his body was subject to the ravages of a fatal and malignant disease?

But this is not the whole story. Though Ramana would not admit it, it was the case of vicarious suffering which his body was undergoing. Ramana was always accessible to all. There was no screening of visitors or limited timings at which only devotees and visitors could be with him. In the early years on the hill, this was not such a problem. The devotees were relatively few and many who sought him were ripe and evolved spiritually. But as his name and fame spread, particularly in the forties, there was a vast concourse of people coming. In the years before Mahanirvana it had swelled into thousands. Their backgrounds were varied - seekers of truth, saints and people of different types of motivations. Ramana was equiminded. All were the same and could partake of his munificence. They could come and pour forth their tales of woe into the patient ears of Ramana. The very reporting would be enough. Since Ramana was a jnani automatically divine rescue operations would start. Was there a simultaneous transfer of a portion of the bad karma of the devotees on to Ramana's body? It seems so quite clearly if we look at the evidence of events which tell their own tale.

Once when Ramana was going round the Arunachala Hill, news reached him that Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer had taken ill suddenly and was dying. Ramana went immediately to the spot where he lay dying. His condition was precarious. He was having violent palpitations of the heart suggesting pre-death pangs. Ramana sat near him, placing his right hand on his head. Within a few minutes Iyer got up and looked normal. Ramana himself

did not get up but sat fixed to the ground causing anxiety to everyone. Special almond oil was applied to his head. It took an hour for the Maharshi to get up. Was it because he had taken on some of the karma of Iyer's body on to his?

Subbaramayya was a regular visitor to the asram. The New Year day in 1948 began badly for him. During a visit to Skandasramam he had a sudden attack of diarrhoea. He managed to get back to Ramanasramam but was none too well. On hearing this Ramana sent word suggesting that a particular diet could be tried and also asking him to desist from taking fruit juice. Two days later Ramana himself came to the window of Subbaramayya's room and enquired about his condition. The enquiry itself cured Subbaramayya though it appeared as if the medicine given by the asram management had effected the remedy. Though Subbaramayya recovered Ramana vomitted that night as though he had taken on the ailment himself.

Ramana had to step in, the devotees left the compassionate one no choice, even for dealing with the primal need, the need to live, need for continuance of life. We find a graphic account of one such case reported by Kapali Sastri in his book 'Maharshi'. This related to Jagadeeswara Sastri, the author of 'Ramana Sahasranama'. He was ailing for some months before it was diagnosed as cancer of the abdomen. Everyone is aware that cancer unless diagnosed early could be fatal. One of the doctors who was a devotee of Ramana, did some plain speaking to Sastri and told him that it would be a matter of only a few days unless Ramana's grace intervened. Jagadeeswara Sastri knew Ramana's general position that the divine law would take its course. He had once told Devaraja Mudaliar in his presence, "What can we do? That is the law". But Sastri also knew that Ramana could never refuse the pleadings and prayers of those to whom he was the only refuge. Sastri had faith in the omnipotence of Ramana. So he composed eight verses of prayer on 'Prapatti', on surrender, each word of which brimmed with devotion. These verses also reminded Ramana of his undoubted power to save life. Save he

did. Sastri not only recovered but had a second innings of many more years. Did it have a toll on Ramana's body? One wonders.

While Sastri's case was of course an extreme one, several acts of protection were a daily occurrence. Once Nagamma became unhappy about the way in which Ramana would get some ailment or the other because of his response to the devotees' prayers. When he got eczema she wrote to Subbaramayya, "Just as you said it is our praradbha which is affecting his body". Ramana's love of course was for all life. So we find him trying to save a squirrel from a dog by putting his walking stick between them and risking losing his balance. In fact it did result in the breaking of his collar bone.

One could say that Nagamma had hit the truth about Ramana's bodily ailments. His eczema, the cracking of the collar bone, arthritic pain or the dreadful sarcoma were all perhaps due to the transference of the karma of devotees on to the Master's body. Had he not imposed the limitation of the human body, in the first place, to protect humanity? So it was that his sacred body, which had no karmic cause and therefore no need for any ailments, had to bear the scars and wounds of others' karma. His body had to bear the cross. For him this was a matter of no consequence, because, he was never identified with the body and its happenings.

Once, a few months before his Nirvana, a lady devotee told Ramana, "Please give your disease to me". Ramana could not help smiling. What an illusion! He had taken on their worries regardless of the price which his body had to pay for doing so and here was one of them talking in blissful ignorance of the cause of his body's suffering! Could Ramana have helped it? Clearly 'No'. How could he? Was not compassion his very nature? Was not taking on the devotee's karma its inevitable consequence?

28. Invoking Ramana's Grace

Lord supreme whom all the world
Extols as golden - handed
Our God whose generous gifts fail not
Even though the seasons fail.

Muruganar,
Ramana Sannidhi Murai, Verse 486.

Ramana fulfils himself in many ways. It is a delight to see it for oneself at the Ramana shrine. A lady comes, bows her head and proceeds straight for the tray containing the sacred 'ashes', and 'kumkumam'. She reverentially applies the kumkum on to her 'mangalasutra' lost in deep reverence. Perhaps her husband is ill. Ramana's protection is needed. A young couple in love walk in hand in hand chatting. Suddenly the great silence comes over them too. They kneel lost in prayer. Ramana has to unite them in marriage. A small boy rushes in followed by his parents garland in hand, to offer to Ramana for the well being of the child. It is the child's birthday. A middle aged devotee enters, circumambulates the picture of Ramana, places a cover on the plate as his contribution. It is his mother's death anniversary. May be Ramana's motherly care is on his mind. Another comes, places the plan of a building in front of Ramana and stands for few minutes. He is apparently about to invest his whole fortune in his residential building. Ramana's blessing is needed for its completion without a hitch. Three or four boys drop in with books. They are making last minute preparations for writing the forthcoming examination and graduating in flying colours. They study for a couple of minutes, gaze into the eyes of Ramana and leave. An old person comes in with weak and faltering steps. It is sometime since he had the 'darshan' of Ramana. Somehow he manages to come and linger as long as possible. A group of visitors to the garden come in to find what they did not bargain for, the holy presence. Who is this Ramana, unknown to them, yet so charming?

They buy a couple of books and Ramana music cassettes to know more about him. Then there are the regulars who just cannot miss the daily offering. They are there, come rain or shine. To be present and to join in the repetition of his holy hundred and eight names is a must for their day to be complete. Then there are those who come for the 'talks' and 'programmes'. The love to hear of his glory at least occasionally and be reminded about the need to be more regular in their visits to the shrine. Truly the world is there. It is a complete cross-section. The young, the old, the rich, the poor and so on. No one is left out. Would so many have come in vain? Would they keep coming? Would they pin their faith and hopes on Ramana unless each of them has found something for himself? What indeed is the mystery of this endless attraction of Ramana?

Quite obviously he is a great boon giver. The prayers find a ready response. What is sought is given and given in full measure, be it progeny, wealth, power, just name it, and the results are there to see. This of course is an old story which keeps repeating itself. Devotees have poured their problems into the patient ears of Ramana almost from the turn of this century. For human problems are many and all have them. Ramana's quiet miracles have kept softening fate's blows and making life livable and enjoyable for those whom good fortune has brought to his orbit. Being a jnani, the very reporting of a problem would start the healing process, for it would set in motion automatically a divine remedial action.

All this is not to say that we are drawn to Ramana only because he is a 'Kamadhenu' and 'Chintamani' rolled into one. It is only to say that each one can, and does turn in his hour of stress and strain to Ramana. For, by doing so one finds not only solace but also solutions to the problems faced. It begins with faith in his powers. It gets reinforced and strengthened by repeated acts of his protection until what he does or does not do ceases to matter.

Again what is said is not to imply that every wish, every prayer is answered. Sometimes the very denial of the boon is the boon. For we are prone to act on impulse, to be taken in by the immediate, to be victims of weak and uncertain desires. When the grip of these thoughts are over, like passing clouds, in retrospect we are grateful to Ramana for saving us from our follies either by ignoring our pleadings or even sometimes obstructing the course of our plans.

We are all so used to his pampering care that we are apt to forget his guruhood. It is so tempting to pray to him, knowing of his omnipotence and compassion, that we just forget all these gifts add up to nothing. By getting more involved in the vortex of desires which externalise the mind are we not forgetting that the Sadguru's advent is to remind us repeatedly of our nature and guide us back to abiding in it? Self-knowledge is what should be sought and yearned for. All else pales into insignificance. What waste of an opportunity! Truly our worries are innumerable but should we not seek Ramana's aid for ending of sorrow which keeps showing its head perpetually in some form or the other in each person's life? Is he not the doctor, the 'bhavaroga bhisak' for cutting attachments which are the root cause of our anxieties and fears?

It is time, time indeed to learn to entrust our affairs to him. Do we know what is good or bad for us better than him? Are we crystal gazers and fortune readers to be able to judge what karmic force lies in each event, whether it is to lead us to great good fortune as we imagine or to plunge us in unforeseen dangers? Did Munagala Venkataramayya know that the loss of his job and the failure of the efforts to get it back was indeed a rare sign of luck for him and to generations of Ramana's devotees? Did Suri Nagamma know the magnitude and importance of her work when sisterly love prompted her to write those midnight letters from Sri Ramanasramam to her brother?

Should we not open up the floodgates of his grace by diligent pursuit of self-enquiry? Not that grace is not there now.

Invoking Ramana's Grace

But one becomes aware of its fullness, its limitless expanse, the more we put in our homework. The more we 'work away tirelessly' at self-enquiry, the more active is Ramana's grace in our life. For, the awareness of it is felt more deeply. It is an interaction, effort and grace leading one on to spells of bliss of Being, free from thought, yet fully alive. We slip into the natural state and learn to abide there steadily. This indeed is Ramana's greatest gift.

Ramana is ready to give us his own state of bliss if only we wish to hold fast to his sovereign feet. Are we ready?

29. Where Does Wisdom Lie ?

D: Does the guru take control of the disciple's worldly affairs also?

M: Yes, everything.

D: Can he give the disciple the spiritual spark he needs?

M: He can give him all that he needs. This can be seen from experience.

The Mountain Path.

Ramana is an endless bestower of boons. You cannot turn to him in vain. Ask and it is given. Often he would refuse to acknowledge his miracles. Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer was a chronic dyspeptic who had lost all interest in life. He came to Ramana in the hope that he would work a miracle as Jesus had done and cure him. He said so quite truthfully. When he put his problem to Ramana, he simply replied, "I am neither a physician nor a magician. What am I to do?" Yet, shortly thereafter, Ramana cured this devotee by inviting him to a picnic in which a rich repast was served.

A lawyer devotee is not doing well in his profession. He comes to Ramanasramam for the sole purpose of seeking Ramana's counsel as to whether he should shift to another place for a more lucrative practice. "Consult an astrologer or a palmist. Why me?" says Ramana. All laugh including the person concerned. However, thereafter his stars change for the better and the need to shift ends.

Devaraja Mudaliar was suffering from skin trouble from his fifth year. It was a sort of skin ailment occurring on the foot and sometimes up to the knee. He used to take some medicine or the other in the fond hope that it would cure him. He kept changing from Allopathy to Unani and to Ayurveda. Doctors changed, the systems of medicine were substituted but the ailment remained.

Where Does Wisdom Lie?

In 1940 when he wanted to become a permanent inmate of the asram, he made an intense mental prayer to Ramana to be cured of it not only for his own sake but also for the sake of other devotees. Ramana suggested that he could try 'The Essence of Neem'. In a couple of months, he was better and within two years, he was radically cured. What baffled the leading physicians for fifty years was cured by Ramana, by adding his power to the rather innocuous ointment for external application.

Dr. Melkote, a reputed doctor of Hyderabad was in the asram treating Ramana for eczema. Try as he did he could not effect any improvement. The doctor had a sudden and urgent necessity to go home. How could he go when Ramana was still under his treatment? Another devotee Krishna Bikshu suggested a way out. He asked the doctor to silently pray to Ramana to cure himself. Dr. Melkote did accordingly. From that night, Ramana's eczema responded to his treatment. The doctor literally wept at this miracle which enabled him to leave without compunction.

One can go on enumerating the instances. But is it necessary? Have not all of us found the ready response of Ramana to our overt and silent prayers? Who has not had his share of Ramana's munificence? But then are we not being foolish in referring our daily worries, our day to day problems to Ramana? 'Why foolish?' one might ask. Whom else to ask if we do not turn to our "compassionate Sadguru? Who else would grant our wishes seeking nothing in exchange?" This would be our line of thought. All this is true. We have a host of minute to minute difficulties which we blow up. Sometimes we do also have seemingly insurmountable problems. It seems so rational that we should turn to Ramana for succour, for continued help. As experience confirms our faith in him as a benefactor without a parallel we are strengthened in our desire to ask more and more from him. So life goes on till the appointed time when we are picked up by the merciless God of Death. When body's karma ends it has to fall off. The ego which gave rise to the body would abandon it and cling to another body. Where would we be then? Would we

Where Does Wisdom Lie?

not have wasted the unique opportunity of Ramana's entry into our lives? Rather, should not our request be for the greatest of boons? That he should give himself fully to us. Should we not feel that he should bestow on us his own state of overflowing bliss? This is not to say that we should not pray for the things of the earth but to point out the danger of being caught in their endless grip. Wisdom demands, does it not, that one should harness the guru's immense power for progressing spiritually, for developing inwardness? For as Ramana told Paul Brunton the guru can give the devotee all that he needs. Both his worldly and spiritual interests are safe in his hands. They will be well looked after if only there is entrustment. There can be little doubt that intelligent prayers should be for support in sadhana, for support in Self-abidance. In Muruganar we have the best example of what Ramana does to one who seeks nothing for himself. In the first few years from 1923 to 1926 Muruganar used to pray to Ramana for his mother's liberation. He would keep composing songs pointing out to Ramana what he had done for his own mother, and for those like Palaniswami who had attended on his body with more than mother's care. He would then add 'please do the same thing for my mother'. This wish Ramana granted as Muruganar confirms in his later verse. Thereafter Muruganar just stopped asking anything of Ramana. Being in Ramana's physical presence all the time filled him with bliss. There he would sit open-mouthed, content to look, content to take in the ambrosial words of the Master. His eyes were for beholding Ramana's beauty. His mind was for soaking itself in the sacred words which fell from his lips. When thus there was no request, no prayer, Ramana, the giver of boons unasked to those who leave things to him, bestowed on him his own state. The state of steady wisdom became Muruganar's too by the grace of Ramana. So we find Muruganar specifically saying in one of his songs "Keerthi Tiru Ahaval" (Ramana Sannidhi Murai) that if one asks one is sure to find his wishes fulfilled. But if only one has the wisdom to be aware, to feel that Ramana knows best then he is sure to be clothed in his wisdom. It becomes Ramana's duty to ensure it.

Where Does Wisdom Lie?

Choosing wisely therefore is a matter of developing faith in Ramana's omniscience and omnipotence. It lies in developing the confidence that he is the best judge of our good and bad, not only spiritually but also materially. For, as Ramana told Swami Pragyananda, the Sadguru takes over the total responsibility of the welfare of the disciple, of the devotee. So long as we keep labelling events and seeking to change them we have not really got out of the habit of assuming that we are the best judges. But as we turn inward, as we keep at self-enquiry we come to see by and by the utter folly of this assumption. It is only ego's demands which have reduced us to constant beggary to the Sadguru for non-essentials. Once this is corroded by vigilant effort backed by Sadguru's grace we drop the self-imposed burden. The disciple discovers his own natural 'state' of bliss by the grace of the Sadguru.

30. Where Has The Passion Gone?

D : To see the glory of god, divine sight is needed.

M : Allright. Find out Krishna and the problem is solved.

D : Krishna is not alive.

M : Is that what you have learnt from the Gita? Does he not say he is eternal? Of what are you thinking, his body?

D : I want a living guru who can say the truth first hand.

M : The fate of the guru will be similar to the fate of Krishna.

Talks 336 p 305.

Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer comes for a couple of days to Virupaksha cave for the darsan of Ramana. He sees before him Lord Siva incarnate. Inspired poetry flows freely and we taste its ever increasing beauty, as 'Ramana Stuti Panchakam.' Ganapati Muni sees the Brahmana Swami and straightaway recognises in him consciousness vast and pervading, like the great God Vishnu. Later from 1907, he becomes Ramana's disciple in the rapturous beauty of Ramana till his mahasamadhi in 1936. One has only to turn to chapters eleven and eighteen of the 'Ramana Gita', the 'Chatvarimsat' and the 'Epistles' to see how deeply he was soaked in the enchantment of Ramana. F.H. Humphreys is on his second visit to Ramana in 1911. Following this visit he is so intoxicated with bliss that he does not care if he is bitten on the way by many rabid dogs which keep barking at him. Muruganar becomes Ramana's 'bonded slave' at their very first meeting. He could never keep away from Ramana's physical presence enjoying every second the glory radiating from Ramana's body. He would keep playing endlessly the eye-meeting game with Venkata 'the eye of his eye'. Thirty thousand verses were not enough for him to pour forth his love for the timeless and eternal one. Narasimha Swami comes to Tiruvannamalai to write a biography of Seshadri Swami and is unable to resist Ramana's charms. He stays on for years at Sri Ramanasramam

Where Has The Passion Gone?

and ends up writing an appealing biography of Ramana. Paul Brunton comes in spite of himself only to become a powerful exponent of the Maharshi and his message. Subbaramayya with his frequent visits becomes Ramana's 'chief priest' enjoying unrestrained freedom. The saintly Munagala, the childlike Devaraja Mudaliar, the midnight chronicler Suri Nagamma, the diarist Cohen, the humble Viswanatha Swami, the ever happy Kunju Swami, the gentle Swaminathan, the correct Chadwick, the inspired bard Sadhu Om and the editor Osborne all keep presenting before our mind's eye the atmic power and mind bewitching enchantment of Ramana. How completely they could be his! There was never a second thought. Hence their blissful state.

Why is it that we are unable to partake of the same relationship with Ramana? Why do we not feel his continuous presence, which he had asserted? If we do not enjoy Ramana's presence the same way in which the vast galaxy of devotees had done during his life in the body, does not the fault clearly lie with us? If we do not fall head over heels in love with him we have to find out why. For one thing it seems that we do not care enough for the inner life. The compulsive interest which many seekers had in the search for truth, in the strong urge to be free from the karmic cycle, seems to be absent. The deep motivation which used to spark the fire of renunciation is missing. One has to be wary and keep away from the vast number of allurements which modern technology is offering; T.V., the video and so on. The strides in chemo-therapy, in environmental hygiene etc., have made us feel less dependent on the divine. Apparently the situations in which we have to throw up our hands in helpless prayer are becoming far less. We imagine that we are bosses of our circumstances and ignore the real power behind.

While all this has undoubtedly corroded faith and bolstered the ego it is precisely this kind of situation which Ramana, as the modern teacher of the age, has taught us to deal with. By pinpointing everything to the mind he has made it unnecessary for anyone to make the kind of sacrifices which the spiritual seekers of the earlier era were called upon to make. There is no

Where Has The Passion Gone?

need to give up work. There is no need to do this or that. There is only one thing to be done and that is to understand the nature of the mind. If one makes his outlook right he deals with the world with the eyes of wisdom. What needs to be tackled is the mind which in any case one has to do irrespective of his faith in the guru, irrespective of his beliefs, irrespective of his egocentric way of life. And for this one has to set in motion the inner-current of meditation. This can be done even if the time allocation is minimal, say barely fifteen minutes. For those fifteen minutes would work wonders as Ramana told Humphreys. One **will** come to possess unconscious power, the power to handle the changing relationships, ideas and circumstances in life. If one can add to his meditative mood by linking oneself with the undercurrent of meditation set in motion through brief but intense sessions earmarked for it, it would be reinforced. Can anyone be less demanding than this? Is it not up to us to rekindle the lost fire, the lost enthusiasm for the search when so little is asked in exchange for so much?

Also we have to examine why there is the constant need for the physical presence of the guru. So much has been dinned into us about the necessity for a living guru, meaning that the guru must be in flesh and blood that we don't pause to consider the exact stature. Was he ever the body in which he sported? Is he not eternal? Besides has not Ramana often said that the guru's work is within, meaning that the guru is present always as the inner guru? When Dilip Kumar Roy asked Ramana why he emphasised the need for a guru though he himself did not have one, Ramana replied that it all depends on what one means by the term 'guru'. Is he always an external physical presence? Ramana added, "Have I not composed verses on Arunachala regarding it as the guru?" True, the great manifestation of God-head like Ramana takes the human form because that is the best way by which human beings can be attracted to a guru. At the same time they have an alternative purpose of proving that one's identification with the body is the primal error. Ramana would time and again point out that one felt separated from him only

Where Has The Passion Gone?

because one identified him with his body. Be it when he joined in the singing of 'Ramana Sadguru', or be it when he consoled devotees who had to go far away physically, he would stress the universality of his presence. One could always relate to him for he was not the body.

Even granting the need for physical communication with the guru it is also necessary to remember that the physical frame of Ramana was only apparently time bound. Though his body was interred on the 15th of April 1950, in the holy place where Ramaneswara Mahalingam is worshipped, he continues to live physically in a very real sense. Is there any photograph of his which does not speak? And there are so many of them. Often one finds it impossible to turn away from those lustrous, serene and peaceful eyes. Can we help being captivated by the smile on the countenance? How can it mean so much to so many unless the life force is present in the photograph in some mysterious way? When one is in the spiritual mood there is nothing more alive, more deeply meaningful than Ramana's photograph which compels attention and makes one feel that he is very much there as if in flesh and blood. So why not let the photo do its work? When one has the living presence of Ramana, and his direct path to Self-knowledge why should one dissipate it and let go the unique chance? We have only to open the window of our mind and allow our hearts to become captive to the immense silence of Ramana.

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ISBN:81-85378-26-6