

# MEDITATIONS



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# **MEDITATIONS**

## **THE RAMANA WAY**

By  
**A.R. Natarajan**

Published by  
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# INTRODUCTION

What is standing between us and the peace and happiness we are seeking? It is our inability to handle the thought flow which keeps gushing as from a perennial spring. We are unable to switch off thoughts and be consciously free of them. The thought-free state is outside our experience and is therefore dreaded. What we want really is only partial freedom from thoughts. We desire to be rid of the ‘unwanted’ thoughts, while clinging to chosen ‘pleasant’ thoughts. Is this possible at all? Or is there a more radical solution which frees the mind of thoughts while at the same time heightening the power to think whenever required?

For the control of the mind Ramana’s method of self-enquiry, an enquiry into the nature of the mind, is most effective. The control which it brings about opens up the beauty of life which is hitherto hidden from us.

The theoretical structure of self-enquiry has been set out clearly in Ramana’s ‘Upadesa Undiyar’ and ‘Ulladu Narpadu’. But for a proper understanding of their practical import one has to turn to Ramana’s conversations. Fortunately they have been recorded right from the beginning. Reflecting on this material, meditating on it alone can clarify doubts and help to get over the hurdles on the way. ‘Manana’, contemplation on the meaning and practical implications of the words of scriptures, or a Satguru, is a time honoured method which is the penultimate step. It leads to inwardness leading to the experiencing of bliss, of joy which is independent of circumstances.

The ‘Meditations’ were published in the monthly ‘THE RAMANA WAY’. The quotes have been selected keeping in view the common problem of a cross-section

of persons. In particular the ‘mind’ has been the focus of attention for we are made or marred by it. It is generally thought that for solving the problems of the mind one has to turn to psychologists from Freud downwards. But solutions which are within the framework of the mind, however effective for the time being, are unlikely to produce lasting results. The mind is bound to play its hide and seek. It will always be upto its tricks most unexpectedly and bowl one over. If, however, one gets into the root of the matter and enquires about the nature of the mind, its subtleties cease to be of any consequence. It would then be seen that there is no separate entity which can be identified as the mind. If the thoughts are not there, where is the mind? As Ramana jocularly told a devotee ‘Does the mind have a form? Does it have a moustache and beard?’. Once this is comprehended, and an enquiry begun on the lines of Ramana’s clear guidance, the mind would become naturally quiet. It would be at once peaceful and vibrant.

There are other problems which worry us. Is work only a drudgery? What is wisdom in action? How does one fit meditation into one’s busy schedule? Where does effort end and grace come in? Should one pray or not and if so for what? Do ‘visions’ and dreams help? When indeed will we reap the results? Is it only an endless wait, this transformation, this promised joy of spiritual life? Is death the end of life or does it continue beyond? These have been meditated on in this book. For, clear light has been thrown on all of them by Ramana.

Bangalore  
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**A.R. NATARAJAN**

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# THE EXPERIENCE

Yes. Experience is the word. Knowledge implies subject and object. But experience is non-terminous, eternal.

-Talks 128 Page 114

The experience referred to here is of the natural state, the state of bliss. This bliss is inherent and is not dependent on others or situations in life. What little we know of it is vicarious and is based on the authority of the scriptures. The scriptures are clear on this point that our true nature is eternal, pure and is one of happiness. We do believe this to be true. However, the foundation of faith is not the product of one's own experience and under stress it clearly falls like a pack of cards. This is why we find Ramana being categorical on one point that experience alone matters, for doubt will always linger, hidden, to disturb faith and to break the fabric of the edifice built on concepts. One has, therefore, to learn to be aware of this bliss, a taste of which would draw one to the deep within, to the core of one's heart.

Here it may be necessary to be sure on one point. The experience which is spoken of is different from what we are used to. What we know is the happiness of the subject derived from an object or from relationship born of identification. In the experiencing of the natural state there is only the experience, for the subject alone is. Perception is unitary and not divisive. This oneness of perception, being total in its sweep, is of a different dimension. Yet it is our own. Hence it is that we are always drawn by an inner urge and we are sure to discover it as surely as the river would find the ocean. But often we wander away to far off pastures pulled by our past, pulled by what we have taken so far to be means for happiness. One has to remember that any new experience is possible



only to the extent to which room is created, mental space is created by removing the burden of the past. All life renews itself by the withering away of, by the dropping off of the past. The trees totally without even a single leaf in winter become a rich foliage of greenery in spring. Why? Only because the dead leaves have been dropped to give place to vibrant life as fresh leaves.

Why do we hang on to the past, to the memories of experiences which have come and gone, which can have no meaning when they are over? Why are we so scared of living totally in the present, not escaping from it by shifting attention to the past and future? The answer seems clear. We are afraid of losing what we know for what we don't. The experience of the joys and sorrows of the externalised mind is within our field of knowledge. We know precious little about the breadth and sweep of a mind firmly anchored in its root, of a life where the mind is sunk in the heart. It is precisely here that the Satguru Ramana steps in. Having taken the human form he literally pushes the mind within by the power of his steady knowledge. Many would come to his presence with rutting minds, only to find instant peace, a mind at rest. It may happen during the evening hours after recital of the Vedas when the power of Ramana's silence would radiate or it may happen just by a furtive glance of Ramana.

Unfortunately we would never permit him to do the job fully. The frightened mind would send its s.o.s. As Ramana told Major Chadwick, so long as one does not know better, so long as one is unaware of the experience of a unitary life, fear would surely show its head. The solution quite clearly is only the medicine of diving within which enables the savouring of life's true sweetness.

Some would complain that the experience which they had in Bhagavan's presence lasted only a few days or at the most a couple of months till they were back in their old grooves. Ramana would not encourage them in this train of thought. For, what is natural is capable of being found wherever one may be. Practice is what is needed. Persistent practice, unflagging practice, which indeed would be the true measure of our faith in Satguru Ramana's words. He would encourage by gently reminding one of the universality of his presence. He would remark that 'Bhagavan's feet are everywhere, where can you gather except at his feet?'. He would give a message as to Mrs. Merston, that she 'could carry Bhagavan in her heart' even if she went to London leaving the old hall at Ramanasramam. What was told to them is equally true for each of us. Being the 'hound of heaven' his outstretched hands are available always in sustaining steadfastness of practice.

Then there is the problem of intermittent experience for the intuned mind. Because of the inability to stay within, firmly, the mind is externalised again. The problem of the straying mind, however, need not disturb. For, once the experience of staying within is tasted, all else pales into insignificance. One is bound to be back for more of the joy of questing, or finding for oneself what has been so elaborately described in the scriptures. If one is prepared to become food to the Satguru, to the fullness of consciousness, then nothing can bar the loss of individuality and the discovering of the universal. The scriptural statement that joy is the substratum of all life becomes real. One is then bathed always in bliss.

# LIGHT AND SHADOW

Mind - mind: What is it? It is a mixture of 'chith' (intelligence) and 'sankalpas' (thoughts). Therefore it forms all this - the mirror, light, darkness and reflections.

Talks 589 Page 541

From May 1935 to April 1939, the period covered in the 'Talks', many persons came to the Maharshi to quench their spiritual thirst. Some had renounced home, put on the ochre robe for an exclusive pursuit of truth. Some were erudite scholars, veritable authorities on the sacred scriptures, yet others were householders caught up in the humdrum of daily routine and enmeshed in ceaseless worries of family life. There were also the simple folk, peasants and shepherds, naive and guileless. But one common thread is found in all questions over these five years. The most important and general problem which seems to be bothering a person pertains to how the mind could be controlled. This concern arises because of the failure to get a real mastery over the mind after years of practice. The battle to hold on to a single thought seems just as difficult if not more than the battle of life with all its scars and wounds.

Ramana's reply would depend upon the questioner himself, for, what one would give serious thought to and what one is likely to practice depends upon the individual background and preparedness. One of the methods would be easy for one person and another for another person. To those given to social concern and reform Ramana would recommend it, but always with a rider that it has to be done unselfishly. If so done the mind would become pure and ready for single pointed attention to the goal. To those who believed in the efficacy of the holy name,

Ramana would read out the story of Namdev from a magazine or narrate the tale of Tukaram, every pore of whose body chanted the name of Rama when he was forced to remain silent. A simple peasant with undiluted faith would be asked to carry on with the repetition of the holy name 'Siva' 'Siva'. Ramana would elaborately clarify the doubts of the scholars but would also bring them back to the idea that in the last analysis all learning has to be unlearned, for truth transcends all the pairs of opposites. Thus each person would be taken gently along the path without disturbance of his faith but at the same time he would be trained for diving within.

Ramana would never fail to emphasise that the only sure way for mind-control is to understand it. The direct path is to find out its nature. By enquiry into the source of the mind the truth is revealed. Having said this, Ramana does not allow one to guess at what the mind is and involve oneself in a world of concepts. He therefore explains simply what it is. Reflecting upon the light so thrown by Ramana on the mind one finds that the mind can be said to consist of two kinds of thoughts, the individual 'I'-thought and the 'other thoughts'. The 'I'-thought, the sense of individuality, reflects the consciousness or intelligence since it springs from a conscious source, the heart. It is 'chith', intelligence, the light giving portion of the mind referred to by Ramana in the quotation on which we are meditating. The other thoughts, however, are really the impressions of the past trying to get a foot-hold by seeking the person's attention. They constitute the dark side of the mind. The first step would be then to manage the separation of the conscious 'I'-thought from the other thoughts. This is achieved when the mind's attention is not paid to other thoughts. These cannot survive in the absence of such attention.

It is best to constantly keep the goal in mind. When it comes to mind-control, the goal is the full use of the dynamic power of the mind. It is the only energy source available to us and we operate with it throughout the waking time. However, we are unable to harness its full potential, for, the energy of the mind is wasted and dissipated because of endless thoughts. Many thoughts are those which we do not want, but having given attention to them in the past their hang-over is still there. Also, we often indulge in thoughts, leading sometimes to actions, which leave one with a sense of guilt and regret. The wanted thought is pushed out by the unwanted thought. So, the panacea lies in finding a technique, a method which would free us of the harassment of thoughts which we do not wish to entertain.

While such a wish is only natural, there is a fallacy in wishing away some thoughts while holding on at the same time to other thoughts. Hence we find Ramana labelling all thoughts as sorrowful. They are all in the same bracket. To try to choose between thoughts would leave us with this problem of preference among thoughts eschewing some and sticking on to others. Such efforts are bound to fail because we are hammering away at what may be termed the non-conscious part of the mind, at thoughts other than the conscious 'I'-thought. Effort is misdirected and has to be brought back to the core, to the conscious 'I'-thought.

Ramana would therefore have one stick to the thinker and let thoughts severely alone-good, bad and indifferent are given the same treatment, the same neglect, the same inattention. Their place is the dustbin and they belong to the rubbish heap. Why give them life? Why let them sprout by letting the conscious portion of the mind dwell on them?

Since attention, exclusive attention to the thinker, is all that matters, one has necessarily to learn methods by which one can stick to the conscious portion of the mind. When one enquires into the source of this feeling of individuality, the mind acquires the strength to stay within. As a result it would reflect the consciousness in all its fullness. Then the darkness of the mind in the form of thoughts which are purely psychological, which have no functional necessity, would be scattered. The pure light of the mind thus freed would enable perfection in every action.

# THE DIRECT PATH

D: It is so difficult to spot the mind. The same difficulty is shared by all.

M: Mind, ego, intellect are all different names for one single inner organ. The mind is only an aggregate of thoughts. Thoughts cannot exist but for ego. So all thoughts are permeated by ego. Seek wherefrom the 'I' rises and other thoughts will disappear.

- Talks 473

Pages 449 and 450

Our mind is so used to dualistic thought, the subject and object relationship, that it is baffled when attention is sought to be fixed on the subject only. When dealing with an amorphous whole, the mind consisting of innumerable thoughts competing with or complementing each other, one feels frustrated. This is the logical consequence of efforts to eradicate a few thoughts, or groups of thoughts considered to be undesirable, while cultivating certain other thoughts regarded as desirable. The conflict arises because of the gap between what is desirable or not desirable according to one's ideals and the reality of one's inclinations. Such attempts, therefore, are like trying to dry up the waters of the ocean with a ladle. So long as the rivers keep flowing into the ocean, can the ocean ever dry up? Similarly, as long as there is desire oriented action leaving memory marks, thoughts would be steadily fed into the totality of thoughts called the mind. The thought-stream would then be perennial like the Ganges. The question would, therefore, arise whether the present approach for achieving the goal of a thought-free state needs to be changed.

Ramana would like us to leave the thoughts severely alone and suggests ways and means for doing so. As a first and necessary step he asks us to examine the atmosphere, the environment in which thoughts flourish. How are thoughts fattened? What is the best way to starve them? Having posed this question, Ramana points out that the mind is fattened by new thoughts rising up. So, our attempt should be to prevent the rising of thoughts and to render powerless the vast and seemingly impregnable thought-world.

The first question poses the next one automatically, as to what it is that gives life to thoughts. Experience would indicate that it is the individual's attention to them that matters. If the individual's attention is not bestowed on a thought, it cannot rise. Persons living close to the railway track or the airport are oblivious to the noisy movement of trains and the landing of planes, because they are able to insulate themselves against the noise by ignoring it. A child fully absorbed in a comic, or those watching a cricket match or a serial on the TV are totally unaware of anything else since their attention is exclusively on what they are presently interested in. Examples can be multiplied to illustrate this. Therefore, it can be stated that latent tendencies can come up into the arena of thought only when the individual pays attention to them. Otherwise, they remain dormant.

While other thoughts depend on the individual 'I'-thought for sustenance, the 'I'-thought in its turn derives its power from its conscious source. Ramana has explained in 'Ramana Gita' the process by which consciousness spreads from the heart to the mind and thereafter to the body. Consciousness spreads through various 'nadis' from the heart, through the mind, to the body. At the first stage, as soon as consciousness rises, it



is free and is limited only because it identifies itself with the individual current as 'I am this'. The general current 'I am' first links itself to the individual current and thereafter keeps irrigating other thoughts. In this quote, Ramana therefore suggests that we should reverse the process. The backward movement is from the thought to the thinker and then from the thinker to the consciousness and back to the heart. This process of in-turning the mind would bring it within the magnetic zone of fullness of consciousness beaming the light from the heart. One has to stay on at the source. For this as soon as the consciousness rises and gets mixed up with the limited individual current it has to be turned back on its track before further conceptualisation takes place.

The very simplicity of the Ramana Way seems to be disconcerting. One wonders how the whole world of thoughts brought forward life after life and stored up in the memory can be negated. One can straightaway say that it is not as difficult as it might appear to be. If one is not faint-hearted and does not chicken out on the way, self-enquiry will do its purificatory work. Hence, we find Ramana encouraging persons to get on with the job. When a devotee complained that distractions make such enquiry impossible, he told him, 'Make it and it would be found to be not so difficult'. To another person, he said, 'Many have succeeded because they believed they could'. To yet another he advised, 'Go beyond distraction by questioning for whom is the distraction'. Growth in purity happens steadily, though unnoticed. The all pervasive ego would be substituted by the all enveloping consciousness.

A related question to be meditated on is the nature of the thought free state towards which we are working.

What happens to the world we know if we opt for it and give ourselves whole heartedly to an inner life? The answer is that the option is undoubtedly for the better. To be free from thoughts is not to be benumbed. It is not to lose the capacity for creative living. What we are freed from is the tyranny of thoughts, from the ceaseless pestering of thoughts. Whenever needed by the situation, required thoughts will come up. When the need is over, that chapter would be closed. In other words, it is the continuity of thoughts which comes to an end. Liberated from the self-imposed individuality, we sport freely in the world.

# THE RESTING MIND

- D: How long can the mind stay or be kept in the heart?
- M: The period extends by practice.
- D: What happens at the end of the period?
- M: Unity in the heart is replaced by variety of phenomenon perceived. This is called the outgoing-mind. The heart-going mind is termed the resting mind.

- Talks 27 Page 27

It is only natural that one should wish to know what awaits one at the journey's end. In what way would one's life be different? How would the mind function? Would all the old follies and fancies be behind us? How does one reach the cherished goal? These are some of the doubts initially and on the way.

Peace and silence is our nature. All spiritual effort is to systematically cut at the root of obstacles which prevent our remaining steadfastly in this state. The basic problem is the superimposition of limited individuality on consciousness, which is full and untrammelled. It is the mind which fences one in and creates the delusion of separate existence. Such a mind is perpetually seeking happiness externally. In contrast, when the mind learns to taste inner joy it would turn automatically within where only such happiness can be experienced.

Spiritual life is therefore a matter of bridging the gap between the mind's present tendency to be constantly on the move, to be constantly hunting for pleasure, and its natural repose of unmoving inwardness. Or, one should say it is the problem of switching over from the present mind-based life to a heart-anchored life.

Ramana explains in this quote that unity is the hallmark of the mind resting in the heart. Not that variety is not perceived. Only its bewildering multiplicity and beguiling nature do not deny one the awareness of the essential unity of all life. One sees the paper on which the newspaper is printed and not only the printed news. The gold is seen and not only the exquisite beauty of the artiste's skill in shaping different ornaments out of it. The sugar is seen in dolls made of sugar and not only the charming forms, and so on. Attention is not distracted from that because of which the vast panorama is possible. In contrast, the outgoing mind sees only difference, variety, endless variety, and is lost in it. It is distracted by one thing or the other which catches its fancy, just as surely as a child would be by different playthings, but only for a little while. The less the mind is aware of what it means to stay within the more it would be a prey to a thousand and one distractions.

One might say the management of distractions is what we have to learn if we are to make any progress at all towards the heart. Ramana's way is of course to tackle the one who is distracted. By focussing attention on the centre of distraction one is able to lay a siege on the fortress of inherent tendencies. As each thought arises, the very questioning as to whom it has arisen for puts it to flight. If one then waits attentively for the next enemy to come forth it could be assailed in like manner. The consequent gradual strengthening of the mind enables it by and by to remain undistracted and to go back to its source. Ramana likens the process to one of laying siege to an enemy's fort and conquering it by slaying its man-power one by one as each one comes out of the fort. Though self-attention is not mere negation of thoughts, to begin with, in practice,

it often means questioning every thought as it springs forth in order to deny it the power to distract one from oneself.

In this process of getting back to the heart, one is welcome to and should avail of every single weapon in the armoury. The goal is far too important to let it slip by through our carelessness or prejudices. Initially, or when the mind is weak, attention to the breath is fine. It is what Ramana calls a 'natural sedative'. When attention is fixed on the breath, on the life-force, the mind cannot afford 'to jump at its pets - external objects'. The advantage thus gained is to be utilised to the hilt by pushing the mind within. Well, if the word is important to you, if the book on Satguru Ramana's life or teaching can make for one pointedness, let it. Or if the sound of music or rhythm of the dance woven round Ramana will do the job, let it. Staying within is what is important and for that every way, or, better still, every combination of ways is worthwhile. For, heaven alone knows the uniqueness of each human mind and the variety of natural inclinations.

One should have the strong desire to cling to the heart and feel the need for it as intensely as an infant would wish to hold on to its mother's apron strings. The strength of the desire would be the powerful motivating force ending at one stroke all squabbles and reservations as to whether this one or that is the right path. If one is pushing within, if one is able to stay there for longer and longer spells, then one can be confident of being on the correct track. Then Ramana is truly the helmsman.

# WHAT HAVE YOU COME HERE FOR?

An elderly man from Ananthapur, after hearing the Vedas recited in the hall, stood up and asked:

“It is said that the non-Brahmins should not hear the recital of the Vedas.”

Maharshi: Mind your business. Take care of what you came here for. Why do you waste your time in these matters? “I heard the recital,” you say. Who is that ‘I’? Without knowing the ‘I’ you are using the word. If its significance be known there will be no doubt. Find the ‘I’ first and you may afterwards speak of other matters.

- Talks 161 Page 137

At Sri Ramanasramam, both in the mornings and in the evenings, there would be Vedic recitations in the hall in the presence of Bhagavan. The elevating atmosphere created by it was helpful to all seekers. Even so, this orthodox visitor chose to raise an objection forgetting the purpose for which he had come to Sri Ramanasramam. However, the doubt raised by the visitor is by no means an unusual occurrence. Rather, it is typical of the way in which our minds function. In the “Talks” we find quite a few instances of such wastages of time earmarked for ‘sadhana’. This is all the more a matter of regret since these persons had come seeking the sanctifying presence of Sri Ramana and in fact were quite serious about their search for truth. Yet they had allowed their attention to be distracted from the purpose for which they had come and had failed to hold on to essential matters. Instead of concentrating on finding

out about the validity of one's notion about the 'I', and eradicating the false idea that one is a particular name and form, attention would drift on to concerns which had no direct or indirect relevance for the search.

A look at the cross-section of doubts raised over the years would be helpful to highlight this. Two devotees in the hall were very much upset by the death of King George V. They started discussing the matter ignoring the presence of Ramana and other devotees. King George was certainly not their kith and nor were they bound to him by strong bonds of attachment. Yet, in the very holy presence of the Master they were frittering away the time until he himself gently pulled them up by saying 'What is it to you who dies or is lost? Die and lose yourself, become one with love'. Quite often the devotees would start questioning Ramana as to what would happen to a jnani's body, whether disappearance of the body from sight is possible as it is stated to have happened with respect to Vasistha and Viswamitra. Ramana would ask them 'Is that the essential object of our interest? Why trouble about other matters? You are not the body. What does it matter if the body appears or disappears in one way or the other?' Again, many would load themselves with scriptural knowledge and start discussions about the validity of the various view points set out in the different texts. Ramana would never encourage doubts which were merely intellectual, which were not concerned with the seekers' practice, for there would be 'no end to polemics'. As Ramana once remarked, "The author of 'Vritti Prabhakara' claims to have studied 3,50,000 books before writing that book. What is the use? Can they bring about realisation of the Self? 'Vichara Sagara' is full of logic and technical terms. Can these ponderous

volumes serve any purpose?" Another pet diversion of the seekers was their interest in the past. Whether it is possible to know about it, and also about coming events, whether they could be predicted. The questioners would not pause to think how futile it would be to dig into the ashes of the past or to crystal gaze into the future. For, such interest only distracts attention from the now which alone matters. When someone asked Ramana about the report in Paul Brunton's book 'A Hermit in the Himalayas' relating to the sages who could recall past incarnations, Ramana observed, 'The load of the past forms the present misery'. For, it is memory, vasanās, which has caused this birth and which is at the root of the division of the mind, its pulls and cross-purposes. Self-enquiry is aimed precisely at cutting these tendencies at their very root. Strangely, the by-lanes of the spiritual path seem to hold more attraction for us than the royal path of self-enquiry.

What we are meditating on is the tyranny of purposeless thoughts. Unless thoughts are held on a tight leash the mind will be flitting from one useless thought to another. Useless because they are not conducive to the gathering of the mind in a single thought stream. If any headway is to be made at all on the spiritual path, there is no alternative to cutting this wastage. This would be made possible by being alert against interest in extraneous matters which are constantly puncturing holes in our pursuit of self-enquiry. In the beginning, of course, there is the apparently endless job of warding off thoughts and bringing attention back to the 'I'. The analogy which Ramana gave to his attendant Rangaswamy brings out this point clearly. A nest of squirrels was above Bhagavan's couch. A cat had eaten the mother of the young squirrels and



the responsibility of looking after them was taken over by Ramana. He remarked, ‘These little ones do not know that wisdom lies in remaining in their nest. All trouble lies outside, yet they cannot remain within. Similarly, if the mind is not externalised, but remains sunk in the heart, there would be happiness.’ When Rangaswamy questioned Ramana about the way for doing so, Ramana replied, ‘It is exactly the same as I am doing now. Each time a young squirrel comes out, I keep putting it back into its nest till it realises that happiness lies in sitting in the nest’. As one learns to rivet attention on the ‘I’ more and more, then there would no longer be any need to stay wary about thoughts. The mind, strengthened by the quest, would turn within at once. Then these peripheral questions about others, arguments in circles, and dry intellectualism would drop off as a ripe fruit would from a tree. Meditation would then be a sheer delight. The time set apart for it would overflow first into idle time, and on to the busy schedules, until all time becomes meditative time.

# WHO IS THE MEDITATOR?

D: On what should we meditate?

B: Who is the meditator? Ask the question first. Remain as the meditator. There is no need to meditate.

- Talks 205 Page 174

Meditation has come to mean different things for different people. The mad rush for meditation classes and for tuition on meditation is indicative of the belief that in meditation one has a means of escape from the sorrows and tensions of daily life. As it is generally understood, meditation means exclusive contemplation on a particular sacred form, name, sound or all these together in some measure. It is hoped that this single thought stream would enable one to have peace of mind, to progress spiritually and ultimately to be free from the bondage of karma.

Meditation is mental - the meditator and his thoughts. Those who take to the spiritual path are quite earnest and often steadfast in their meditative practices. Even so, the fruits of meditation seem to be elusive because neither is there waning detachment nor is there that deep peace of mind which makes life harmonious and happy. One has to examine why one is faced with frustrating failure leading to dryness and loss of interest in serious spiritual endeavour.

Ramana would lay the fault at the door of our inability to understand the nature of the mind. Based on his direct experience which Ramana shares with us, he has given certain leads which could be applied in practice to experience the natural state of meditation. In this state, there is only meditation, the beatitude, the fullness of peace and bliss. The meditator, a separate entity, is not there to meditate

when we arrive at this stage and are able to stay steadfast in it. There is, as Ramana says, ‘No need to meditate’. For, where is the one who meditates? How does one arrive at this state?

In nearly all meditative practices there is an object of meditation considered holy. Hence we find the devotee querying as to what one should meditate on. In Ramana’s reply one notices that Ramana straightaway shifts the attention of the questioner from his concern about the object of meditation to the subject, the meditator. Ramana has explained the reason for this in various ways. All the thoughts in their seed form lie nascent in the sense of doership. Though there are hordes of thoughts only some of them come up on waking, depending on the individual’s response to the objects at a particular point of time. The first thought to arise, and the thought which is always there during waking, is the ‘I’-thought or the ‘I am so and so’. After this first thought arises some other thoughts arise. These are those thoughts on which the attention of the ‘I’-thought is bestowed. Consequently there are thought-clusters with a central core thought and the other thoughts on which, for the time being, the attention of the ‘I’-thought is bestowed. This thought cluster keeps changing based on contact with outer stimuli. Though the thought content of the mind is in a flux always and is different at different points of time, the thinker for whom the thoughts exist is continuous and central to all thoughts. Logically one could say that a good look at the mind indicates that there is a part of the mind, the ‘I’, which does not change whereas the other thoughts keep coming and going. There are also thoughts which never rise at all

because the circumstances are not propitiate for them. Ramana takes care to explain in great detail this basic difference between what he calls 'Aham Vritti' and the 'other vrittis'.

One vital point which also requires to be stressed is that unless the attention of the 'I' is given to the other thoughts, they die as it were of neglect. They are not in the horizon of the mind. It is because of this that the variations in the content of the mind take place. To illustrate, on waking, attention may be on those thoughts required to get ready for the day's job, to be followed by thoughts connected with the work on hand. They in turn would yield to thoughts on recreation, enjoyment and so on. When the attention of the 'I' is not on them, the other thoughts recede to the background and will have to await the attention of the 'I' in order to surface again.

It will be seen from this analysis of the mind's nature that what matters is the 'I'-thought. The rest of the thoughts, being dependent on it, can be safely ignored.

'Why is this 'I'-thought so important?', one might ask. It is because the 'I-am' portion of it is a pure reflection of the consciousness from which it springs. As such it illumines whatever it pays attention to. When its attention is fixed on itself it leads one back to that fullness from which it has originated. If we can hold on to this core 'I'-thought alone, our attention would be on the essence of the mind and the befuddling caused by attention to other thoughts would end. Hence Ramana suggests in this quote that we should go into the question of who is the meditator and remain as the meditator. Questioning who the meditator is, is the 'Who am I?' enquiry in another form. It is the first question to be asked, for it is the most vital question. The need for more questions would arise only if attention

strays away from the meditator to the objects of the meditator's attention.

Some of the devotees would complain to Ramana that turning the attention on to oneself is difficult as there does not appear to be anything concrete to meditate upon. Ramana would point out that this kind of problem arises because of our deep rooted attachment to forms which makes an object of meditation an imperative necessity. Actually non-objective meditation or enquiry into the subject is the 'easiest'. Lack of familiarity and experience would give the contrary impression. If, however, through persistent effort, attention is shifted from the object to the subject, then the joy experienced by the intuned mind would egg one on in the inward journey. Clinging to the 'I', to the meditator, consciously, turns the externalised mind within. If at this stage one can ward off sleep or one does not lapse back into thoughts, the mind plunges into its source. The meditator, the separate 'I'-thought, is lost in the fullness of existence.

# LEAVE LIBERATION ALONE

M: Coming here, some people do not ask about themselves. They ask: “Does the sage liberated while alive (Jivanmukta) see the world? Is he affected by karma? What is liberation after being disembodied? Is one liberated only after being disembodied or even while alive in the body? Should the body of the sage resolve itself in light or disappear from view in any other manner? Can he be liberated though the body is left behind as a corpse?”.

Therefore I say to them, “Leave liberation alone. Is there bondage? Know this. See yourself first and foremost.”

- Talks 578 Page 534

Maharshi would be most patient with seekers and visitors questioning him on essentials, on self-enquiry, on mind control, the spiritual practices conducive to purification of the mind and so on. However, he would not encourage a person indulging in theoretical issues unconnected with that individual's life. Once a well educated person asked Bhagavan ‘What is the cause and origin of the universe?’ Prompt came his reply, “Have you no worries of your own?” For, the labyrinths of philosophy which leave one no wiser than before are essentially futile. In this quote on which we are meditating, Bhagavan is also referring to some of the usual questions which are asked about the liberated state. One school of thought insists that liberation is possible only at the time of death, ‘Videha’, and not earlier. Elaborate arguments are built up on the fact that the liberated person's body is seen to be undergoing the kind of suffering associated with the bound. To this school of thought, the argument that the suffering is only from the

onlooker's point of view and not for the person concerned does not sell. Other theories classify liberation as being three-fold, that with the body, without the body and with and without the body. There is also the phenomenon of some saints disappearing physically, some merging with the light, some voluntarily entering into 'samadhi', or leaving their body in the normal way.

So far as the spiritual aspirant is concerned, it is best for him to let the scholars quarrel amongst themselves about these differences. One just cannot afford to waste the limited time allotted to him by karma on such intellectual gymnastics and vain disputations. As Ramana says, theories are endless. Unfortunately, life is not. It is for this reason that attention should be focussed on the one who feels bound and is trying to be liberated. Self-knowledge alone holds the key to the riddles of dualities and multiplicity. Wisdom demands that one should get down to the business of finding out the truth about 'I', about one's own individuality. For, all concepts, including the opposites - bondage and liberation, revolve around the individual to whom they pertain.

Perhaps the kind of difficulty in which one can get bogged down, unless one sticks to fundamentals, will be evident if we look at a few of the typical questions asked of Ramana on this subject of liberation. A visitor wanted to know if he could keep the motto 'Liberate Yourself' constantly before him. Another wished to know whether he should abandon his wife and children because they constituted 'samsara' or the bondage from which he was seeking to be free. Yet another person doubted if there could be such a thing as liberation at all for one can keep slipping back into the old ways because of the outward pulls of the mind. Again a person would say that he did not want liberation

but only perpetual happiness, little realising that the liberated one is immersed in bliss always. Ramana would turn the attention of these persons back to the foremost need, the need for finding out about the real import of the feeling of individuality. To progress in the spiritual path one has to move away from the grip of ideas and conceptualisation to the realm of experience.

Since what counts is experience, the time spent in spiritual practices should be effectively harnessed to lead one to that state. What should one do to arrive at the state which reveals the truth? The common mistake is that of trying to give up thoughts. Sure enough, such efforts at negating thought are 'frustrated by the very attempt'. Denial always has the opposite effect on the mind. Persuading the mind not to think about something is the surest way of making it dwell on it. Bhagavan gives the illustration of a doctor advising a patient to take the prescribed medicine with only one condition. The condition is that he should not think of a monkey when he takes the medicine. Ramana asks whether such a patient can ever take the medicine. Will he not think of a monkey whenever he tries not to do so?

Therefore Ramana switches to the positive approach of paying attention to the consciousness behind the 'I'. All thoughts begin with the 'I am so and so' thought. Attention to the first thought would in turn lead one to attention to the 'I am' which vitalises the mind. Though in the beginning practice starts with the 'subtle watchfulness against intruding thoughts' gradually one becomes aware of the consciousness behind the individual. With practice, the seeking questioner is pushed within and is 'swallowed alive' by the fullness of consciousness. Refreshed by this dive into consciousness, even though one surfaces again by the contrary pull of the



mind, one cannot rest content. The experience forces one to seek more of it by diving within again and again. 'What has been experienced and known repeatedly to be the truth can neither be denied nor ever forgotten. That which IS gives the constant strength to persevere'. Experience of this state becomes steady gradually. Then the knowledge dawns that one is ever-liberated and never bound.

# POWER OF THE MIND

- D: I long for bhakti. I want more of this longing. Even Realisation does not matter for me. Let me be strong in my longing.
- M: If the longing is there, Realisation will be forced on you even if you do not want it. 'Subhechcha' is the doorway for realisation.

- Talks 275 Page 219

Here we find a categorical assertion by Ramana of the mind's power. For, the power of thoughts is the reflected power of the Self itself. The light of consciousness is thrown on the individual, the thinker, and thoughts derive their strength from it. When the mind is not weak, when it is not scattered, it becomes a most powerful instrument. Nothing is barred to such a mind. A long time inmate of Sri Ramanasramam, Major Chadwick, writes about the strength of intense desire. In his letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, he says that 'a jnani' used to tell his friend that if he desired Self-realisation sufficiently he could not even die till he had attained his goal. Such indeed is the potency of the mind. Hence the responsibility of channelling the mind's strength properly, on dharmic lines, on lines which lead one on to liberation. As Ramana puts it 'it should be an auspicious desire' - 'Subhechcha'. It is needless to say that thoughts can pull one down into the mire of binding attachments or cut these bonds at their very root. Bondage and liberation are only ideas in the mind.

It seems strange that while our sights are set on a state where the mind itself is destroyed, the sole weapon we have is the mind itself. Destroying the mind through the mind becomes possible only by purifying it. Gradually as its 'sattvic' content increases, as the tendencies get corroded through meditation, through action dedicated

to God, through self-enquiry, the inner journey becomes smooth. Straying away from the source becomes less and less and the externalisation of the mind decreases.

One can therefore readily see the significance of the longing, intense longing, to tread the path of wisdom. It follows logically that we should have a good look at the factors which eat into this enthusiasm. There is always the fear that we may not succeed or succeed quickly enough in attaining the goal. 'Are our attempts sure to succeed?' is the doubt. Beginning with Natanananda this is the assurance which many have sought from Ramana. It is easy enough to understand this fear and the consequent anxiety, for our minds are result oriented. Ramana's reply would invariably be that 'realisation is our nature and there is no room for doubt'. Alternatively he would say that one is already realised and one has only to eradicate the factors which obscure this knowledge. One can therefore be not only optimistic about the result but can also be sure of success provided one is steadfast in practice. Why this proviso? It is because practice alone makes the mind strong enough to sustain and water the desire, the longing for awareness of the truth about the 'I'.

Let us look at what happens in practice. After a while one becomes dispirited and loses the flush of initial enthusiasm. Instead of 'joyously' pursuing sadhana, as suggested by Ramana in his 'Appalam Song', the slow paralysis of a dull and mechanical approach creeps in. To combat this Ramana's assurance about the inherent efficacy of the mantra, the name, the form and of course self-enquiry, has to be remembered. Potency for what? Of course for making the mind unitary or for eradicating the latent tendencies. 'One must therefore entrust himself to his mantra or God and wait for its grace'. One cannot

be like the Kumbakonam devotees whose visit has been narrated by Santhamma graphically. These visitors were in a desperate hurry to catch the train by which they were booked. In the interval between their arrival and the scheduled departure of the train they pestered Ramana to bestow on them, quickly, the fruits of spiritual practice. They urged Ramana to hurry his ministration so that they may not miss the train. Small wonder, therefore, that Ramana would counsel the need for ‘patience and more patience’. For, one cannot really say at what time the hard and intense spiritual effort would fructify.

It seems strange but true that we are ready to recognise the time factor in the ordinary things of life, say for instance that child birth would follow nine months of pregnancy, that plants would flower after a certain period and trees would bear fruit after some years, but when it comes to spiritual practice, impatience and restlessness are allowed to gain ground. Some try to push forward by redoubled effort for which they are not yet ready. Consequently we find them complaining to Ramana about head-ache and other bodily ailments when they attempt to concentrate for longer periods. Such consequences are danger signals of trying to force the pace or accelerating too soon. This is not to say that one should be devoid of passion, be devoid of a strong urge to experience the bliss of ‘the source’, but it is only to suggest that things should be on an even keel. Neither can a tiger’s prey escape its jaws nor can the Satguru’s rescue operations fail.

Another common fear expressed is that effective spiritual practice is possible only in the atmosphere surrounding the physical proximity of the Satguru. Grant Duff used to complain about it when he was away from

Sri Ramanasramam. An English devotee echoing the general feeling expressed the fear whether it would be possible at all for her to be steadfast in practice at her home far away from the Maharshi. When such thoughts were expressed Ramana would remind that every one is free to remember his presence in the heart. Confidence in the time-space transcending, limitless nature of the Guru would enable one to invoke his presence wherever one may be, in whatever situation one may find oneself in life. Given this confidence, the flame of longing is bound to remain unflickering. Who can then be stopped from the joyous trip inward? Who can be denied the exhilaration, the bliss of the inner journey itself? The tasting of such bliss would make one return for more of the experience, till at last the bloom of life bursts forth in all its natural fullness.

# IT IS YOUR BUSINESS

Ishta Devata and Guru are aids - very powerful aids on the path. But an aid to be effective requires your effort also. Your effort is *sine qua non*. It is you who should see the sun. Can the spectacles and the sun see for you? You yourself have to see your true nature.

- Talks 28 Page 30

Spiritual life is an interplay of grace and effort. What are their relative roles for the success of spiritual endeavour? We find the Maharshi stressing at every opportunity, effort, vigilant and ceaseless effort. The reason for this is not far to see. For, one is already 'neck-deep in grace'. A spiritual aspirant can be sure of one thing - the constancy of the Satguru's grace. It need not be asked for, since it is already given unasked. Yet, we find devotees pestering Ramana for grace and getting repeated assurances about it from him. This is understandable, for the actual working of grace is intangible. One is unaware of its operation. Major Chadwick once asked Ramana why there was no evident change in him in spite of his being in his physical proximity as an inmate of the Asram. Ramana pointed out that 'though the change would undoubtedly be there it was not felt because it was not measurable'. Guru's grace is there all along the way, aiding effort by sustaining and strengthening the spiritual mood. It cannot be present sometimes and absent at other times since it is 'directed' by the Satguru, whose very nature is grace. In a manner of speaking, therefore, one can take for granted the invigorating flow of Ramana's grace extending protection and guidance in one's moments of despair and in every situation.

Since grace is always available in abundant measure to those linked to a Satguru, what has to be focussed on is the effort required, the other factor in the search for truth. It is only through effort, through meditation, through self-

enquiry that one awakens to the flow of grace. Hence Ramana says that grace is vouchsafed only for those who put in the necessary effort. Grace is active for them.

If there is no ‘vichara’ grace becomes dormant. Yet again there is so much emphasis on practice in the ‘Ramana Way’, because what matters is the experiencing of the natural state of bliss for oneself and remaining steadfast in it. This experience has to be earned by hard practice. God, though ‘kinder than one’s mother’, does not spoon-feed one with experience. One may ask why. It is only for those who have completely surrendered their individual volition that the Satguru can take over completely. Such persons are rare. For the rest actions are performed with a dominant sense of doership. So long as one acts with the feeling that it is the individual effort which matters, the responsibility of finding out the truth also rests squarely on oneself. In fact, we are constantly engaged in some action or other since our restless nature would never let us relax in peace. One might say that Ramana is only drawing pointed attention to the necessity of putting one’s will power to the best possible use, for discovering the natural state.

Since effort is of paramount importance, Ramana would gently remove all dampeners in the form of negative thoughts. The first thing which has to be tackled is the repeated expression of fear that one cannot do justice to sadhana when caught up in the turmoil of daily life. Ramana would encourage one to get over this false notion. He would point out that if only one keeps steadily at meditation, even if it be for a little while, then life would no longer be strife and worry ridden. The mental environment of one’s functioning would change when the peace generated by the meditation is felt in the background of work. This

happens as our true meditative nature takes over more and more.

The second negative stumbling block which one has to deal with is the feeling that spiritual life is too tough and is therefore not worth attempting. Here again we find Ramana doing his best to dispel such ideas and consequent handicaps. When someone asked Ramana whether we must give up lust and anger, Ramana humorously replied 'You give up thoughts, you need not give up anything else'. Here one has to remember that in the 'Ramana Way' one does not discard habits and thoughts one by one. They dry up when through self-attention one learns to push within and stay at the source.

This brings one to the basic issue of the effort about which Ramana is talking. The effort referred to here is to hold on to the core 'I'- thought and to ward off the distraction of other thoughts. The mind has to be gathered together by practice. Attention presently given to other thoughts by the 'I' has to be turned on itself - 'seeing the mind with the mind'. Attention has to be sustained till peace, alert peace, prevails.

One might ask, 'How long is there need for effort?'. So long as the mind becomes externalised. Till such time as the mind has not acquired the strength to remain sunk in the heart, effort would be inescapable. One would find that along the way the mind experiences the peace and contemplation of the natural state. Then as Ramana told Cohen, one should learn to switch off the positive attitude required for effort. The consciousness behind the mind would take over, and the need for effort would cease. One would have arrived at the destination, the natural state.



# TAPPING GRACE

M: If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out different from what they may look apparently.

- Talks Page 40

Ramana would often say that for Self-knowledge there are only one of two ways. Either thoughts should be eliminated by holding on to the 'I'-thought and pushing within or there should be unconditional surrender to the higher power. The first implies putting the mind to the best possible purpose, for discovering the truth about 'I'. However this requires strength of mind, the harnessing of its energy into a single thought stream and sticking to it. A weak mind dissipated by the tendencies of the past and externalised by the attraction of objects cannot achieve the necessary break-through. Bhagavan's second alternative, namely, surrender to the Supreme, would be the only recourse left. This again requires complete and unqualified belief in the justice and power of God. It is possible only if one recognises that everything is achieved by the Satguru's strength and not by one's own will power. Therefore, surrender, though apparently easy, is not really so. For, it necessarily implies that after surrender the right to question the ups and downs of fate ceases. Whatever happens has to be seen as the grace of the Guru who knows what is the best and how things are to be ordered to achieve it. No grievance can be made of it. Even though we might genuinely think that we have surrendered, we seldom are able to accept events without questioning their usefulness for us, particularly when they go against what is wished for. We even think that the Guru in whom we place the trust has not responded fully. Devaraja Mudaliar gives expression as it were to this common feeling. He was

intending to leave the Ashram for some time. He fell into a mood of deep despondency at the thought that Bhagavan was not doing enough for him but was allowing him to drift in his own way. He went to the old Hall and started reading out to Bhagavan a few lines from a work of Sivaprakasam Pillai in which he too had expressed the same kind of feelings. Bhagavan kept quiet for a minute or two and then replied 'Whether I do or do not do anything, you have simply to surrender and keep quiet'. The idea is that we cannot claim to have surrendered and at the same time continue to feel that the Guru is not extending his protection in every way. Another devotee, Eknath Rao, once grumbled about his not being able to feel grace. Ramana pointed out to him that surrender should not be merely verbal or conditional. The question always remains whether we are prepared to give the Guru a general power of attorney. The true answer can only be 'no', for we are not fully aware of his prowess.

If both paths, enquiry and surrender have their own practical difficulties and if there are only two paths available, the question would then arise 'Is one helpless?' What can one do? Is there no solution? Here we find that even though Ramana often stressed these two as alternatives and opposites it appears that this was only for clarity of understanding and for the practicing of the paths. One can say this because he was always aware of the limitation arising from human weaknesses. He would therefore encourage the practice of self-enquiry with simultaneous efforts to surrender even if the surrender be only partial. As one learns to use the technique of self-enquiry taught by Ramana, the mind is able to perceive its own incapacity to return to the source consciously, unaided by the grace of the Satguru. Likewise, as one learns to lean on the Guru's grace, one becomes more

fully aware of the need to put forth the effort required to be able to feel the presence. While on the question of partial surrender and the progressive deepening of faith, one can refer to the case of the Maharani of Baroda. She had everything except peace of mind, for which she prayed to Ramana. When Ramana advised her to surrender, since she was diffident about self-enquiry, she rather adamantly asserted that it is impossible to surrender. Ramana then encouraged her saying that partial surrender is possible for everyone and that the capacity to surrender fully would develop gradually. In spite of this assurance, the Maharani continued protesting that the guru could not alter destiny. Ramana had to promptly pull her up by stressing that the guru knows how to take care of his devotees' burdens. The point here is that we often fall between two stools. Neither do we pursue self-enquiry with confidence nor do we place ourselves fully in the hands of Ramana. Assurances of the kind given to the Maharani should really buck us up and give the strength for steadfastness in the practice of self-enquiry. Simultaneously one would rely more and more on Ramana's grace.

But our weaknesses would nevertheless show up. We are often back in the old groove of thoughts that life is giving us a raw deal. When prayers are not answered, when things do not work out as we hope, the grumbling begins all over again. Ramana tackles this rather widespread feeling which worries everyone at sometime or the other in two ways. The first would be to reiterate the message of 'Bhagavad Gita' about the certainty of God's care for those who care for him. Ramana would be quite categorical on this point. When asked by Swami Pragyanaanda whether the guru would take control of the disciple's worldly affairs also, Maharshi replied 'Yes, everything'. For, his is the burden and he has the capacity

to bear it. The second way in which Ramana would tackle this problem of lack of faith in times of stress would be to point out the folly of presuming that a seemingly adverse event or the lack of response to a prayer is calamitous. On the contrary it might well be for the good. As he says in the quotation on which we are meditating ‘things may turn out differently from what they look apparently’. Perhaps each one of us can see for oneself, in retrospect, that we have been protected from a seemingly good event which could well have been disastrous. The power of the Satguru sees things through and if we do not recognise this fact we would be no wiser than a passenger in a train who carries his own trunk on his head thereby straining himself unnecessarily. One’s limited understanding, one’s incapacity to take a long range perspective leads to questioning God’s wisdom. As one strives on, as the ego melts and dissolves, as one develops reliance on Satguru’s strength, life ceases to be a burden. There is only the joy of a life free from care.

# ASSOCIATION WITH THE WISE

A floating body may be loaded with weights and made to sink. So also, association with the wise will make the mind sink in the heart.

- Talks 223 Page 186

Why should the mind sink into the heart? This is because it is the only way to discover for ourselves our own natural state of bliss. Only a strong mind can stick to self-enquiry and push inward in order to stay steadfast in the heart. By strength of mind is meant the power to hold on to a single thought, the power to pay attention to the mind's core. Attachments to objects and the power of latent tendencies being what they are, the mind is often weak and dissipated. The grip of the vast world of thoughts is firm and tight in chasing away the wanted thought and in distracting attention. Breath regulation by watching its flow with the mind is an effective support against intruding thoughts. The mind is effectively quietened. But the benefit is only temporary and one is back to square one. One is back to the battleground of thoughts. It is in this context of the need for a support which strengthens the mind for a long period that one has to consider the significance and importance of the company of a sage of steady wisdom.

For those familiar with the daily schedule of Ramana when in the body, it will be worth recalling the evening hour when an overwhelming sense of peace would

saturate the atmosphere around him. Ramana would sit motionless with a far-away look and it would have a blissful and binding effect. All those who were present could share this benediction. People would come bursting with questions, but in that presence the asking of these would cease to matter. For, the compelling silence gave them an experience of a new dimension, a vibrant peace, which they did not like to lose.

Though the aroma of the sage's influence is subtle, we have Ramana's explanation as to how it operates. Its grace is both mental and physical. It pushes one within from outside and as the heart it sucks in the inward-bent mind. The sage's mind, immersed as it always is in the source, operates as a magnet to silence the weaker minds and to draw them within.

It is for this reason that in the 'Supplement to Forty Verses' Ramana has selected five verses extolling the value of the company of sages. Of particular interest is a verse found by Ramana in a newspaper which Chellamma, the adopted daughter of Echammal, had picked up casually as it contained a Sanskrit Sloka. Ramana translated it into Tamil for her use. It was only on the previous day that Chellamma had fasted because of some religious observances at home. Ramana had coaxed her to share his food. After hearing his explanation of this verse, Chellamma lost all faith in fasting. Where was the need for it when she had Ramana's company?

Here it is necessary to pause and understand what exactly is meant by sat-sang. Sat-sang means keeping the company of the Self or to abide in the Self. Since one is

unable to do it, the nearest thing that is possible is to seek association with sages who are Self-aware always. But then, there are many practical difficulties. Heaven knows how rare true sages are. Where can one find an exalted yogi who has dissolved his ego? Even if one does find such a sage how is one to deal with life situations which may not permit close or frequent association with such sages. A complaint of a devotee to Ramana highlights this point. That person had a job which kept him continuously on the move away from Ramana. What was he to do? Ramana talked to him about the true meaning of sat-sang - that it is to be aware of the immanence of the Satguru's presence. He is not the body but the formless source supporting all life. Limitations of time or space do not bind him. It is for each one to experiment and to find out the best means suited to one's temperament for establishing contact with Satguru and keeping the flame of union with him alive and glowing. Maybe, a particular photograph with a tender and beautiful smile or the one with a piercing look or a book on his life and teachings, or a composition of his, or his sweet name or all these in some measure would do the trick. They would act as a spur to be established in the same wavelength, to stay immersed in the pervasive silence of Ramana.

We find in the 'Talks' complaints from several devotees that the elevating atmosphere which they had felt while in the company of Ramana was lost after some time. Few had even felt that there had been a set back. Does this mean that even the benefits of sat-sang are short-lived? No, says Ramana. He says that such fluctuations in the quietness of the mind cannot be avoided in a situation where the latent tendencies have not yet been erased. 'Peace cannot abide side by side with vasanas'. The disciple having acquired true knowledge

and right experience in the presence of the master has to slog away and work hard if the experience is to remain unshaken. It is always worth remembering that it would be wrong to identify the Satguru with his body and thereby miss his peace when not in his physical presence. One can never be away from him or fail to feel the peace currents emanating from him if the fact that he is our Inner Guru is remembered.

The effort which has to be made is therefore for linking oneself with the Satguru and feeling his presence as a constant under-current. The 'I' rid of thoughts, being a pure reflection, would then be the bridge back to Satguru Ramana. Once the companionship is firmly established there would be no end to sat-sang and its beneficial fall outs. All the weaknesses of the mind would be washed away in the flood-tide of his radiant company which destroys the sorrow of separate existence.



# LET IT DO THE JOB

Maharshi: Even if instructed to do Japa, Dhyana, they do it for some time but are always looking for results e.g., visions, dreams or thaumaturgic powers. If they do not find them they say they are not progressing or the tapas is not effective. Visions etc., are not signs of progress. Mere performance of tapas is itself progress also. Steadiness is what is required. Moreover they must entrust themselves to their mantra or their God and wait for its Grace. They don't do so. Japa even once uttered has its own good effect whether the individual is aware or not.

Talks 103 Page 99

Our actions are result oriented. Doership and effort directed towards particular goals are the characteristics of our efforts. We can and do measure progress or failure against known yardsticks. When it comes to spiritual life too we don't leave this approach behind. We want some tangible results, and that too in record time. Patience is a virtue marked by its absence in spiritual life. Since we are in the realm of the mind, if we have a vision of the deity or of the Satguru, we feel immensely happy and regard it as a sign of progress. Ganapati Muni had repeated visions of Ramana as the commander of celestial forces, Lord Subrahmanya. Bhagavan's mother Azhagammal saw him bedecked with serpents, as a veritable Siva. On another occasion she saw Ramana's body disappear and become the 'lingam' at Tiruchuzhi, only, the 'lingam' was particularly luminous. Raghavachari, wishing to see the true form of Ramana, had a vision in which Ramana merged into the picture of Dakshinamurthi behind him on the wall and then disappeared altogether before

reappearing in a blinding blaze of light. Paul Brunton, while staying near Ramanasramam, had a vision in which he became a little boy holding the hand of the Maharshi who had become a towering figure.

These visions no doubt are auspicious, and they help at a particular stage in the spiritual development of those having them. But the question remains as to whether visions are essential to the spiritual path. Also, could the presence or absence of such visions be taken to mean that one is progressing or stagnating in spiritual evolution? Ramana is pointing out that there is really no such connection. The vast majority who do not have any visions because their natural inclination is not that way need not feel disheartened, or dispirited. Nor should one hanker after visions. For, such longing is only a product of seeking some sign of spiritual success within the mind's framework. All real progress is only when the inner journey commences, when the frontier of the mind is transcended by diligent self-enquiry.

While visions are somewhat rare, dreaming is a daily occurrence. So why not dream about one's own guru and spiritual mentor? In fact we find in the lives of some devotees there is a continuous stream of suggestions and guidance, even in matters of detail, by Ramana through dreams. Nambiar has recorded a series of dreams in his book, beginning with Ramana requisitioning a note book of a particular size. Such dreams continued after Ramana's Mahasamadhi, as for instance, when Nambiar received detailed instructions about the location and measurement of the place where the Master's body was to be interred. Souris records in her reminiscences that though she had visited Sri Ramanasramam several times there was no

need for her to seek any guidance from Ramana by putting questions for she got what was needed through advice received from Ramana in her dreams. But here again one has to say that while the desire for such dreams might be natural there is no point in laying great store by it. For, when spiritually awakened even the waking state is like a dream. So, one might say that the things which happen to a dreaming individual are a dream within a dream. Again, the dream state is a mental movement on the screen of the Self. Hence, attention should be on that because of which perception is possible rather than on that which is seen.

As for occult powers, the less the attention paid to them the better, for they are distractions on the path. They would mesmerise the mind and lead one off the track, from the true goal of all spiritual endeavour. The search for truth would be replaced by the pleasure of name and fame which is as transient as anything else.

Ramana thus brings one back to the straight course and does not let one pursue anything except the discovery of one's true nature and the awareness of the 'I'-throb. It is integral to right attitude in sadhana to leave things to the safe hands of Ramana. Having started with faith in his holy name and form, we often let the faith falter at the altar of our impatience. We have an instance of an inmate of Sri Ramanasramam who had renounced his all for staying with Ramana. After some years he sought an assurance that Ramana's grace would pull him through. Ramana gently replied, 'Your faith has brought you here. Why doubt it now?' The thought that one is not progressing enough, which sometimes takes the negative form of a feeling that the Satguru is not doing enough, is a constant bee in the devotee's bonnet. Everyone assumes that he is

gunpowder material ready to be ignited and that the fault for tardy progress must therefore lie in the insufficient grace of his guru. Ramana would counter such thoughts in various ways. He would discourage evaluation of progress. For, the change in mental attitude, the development of detachment, is imperceptible. But it is bound to be there if the spiritual practice is steady. There must be persistence and doggedness in the practice. Ramana would also inculcate and reiterate faith in the particular practice itself by stressing its utility. The 'mantra', the holy name, the contemplation of the sacred form and the pursuit of self-enquiry would do the necessary job. What is the job? - the job of ridding the mind of its accumulated tendencies and pouring the necessary strength into it for holding on to a single thought stream. As Ramana says in this quote one must 'entrust oneself' to the mantra, or God and wait for 'its grace'. One can proceed with the confidence and the certainty that whatever effort is put in will not be wasted. The results would be far beyond one's expectation if only one does not chicken out and maintains the required steadiness along the way. This is one more assurance from Ramana to our weak minds that there is inherent strength in steadfast practice with firm faith. When the mood of doubt dominates the mind it would be wise to remember the compassionate Ramana.

# CAN ONE MEDITATE FULL TIME?

Natesa: I have my professional work. Yet I want to be in perpetual meditation. Will they conflict with each other?

Maharshi: There will be no conflict. As you practice both and develop your powers you will be able to attend to both.

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Here a busy man with an unfulfilled longing to devote more time for spiritual practice is really seeking an assurance from Ramana that his professional work would not come in the way of 'sadhana'. In 'Talks' we find many seekers having this problem. They have their duties to discharge, family obligations, daughter's marriage, son's education, and the like. How can they in the thick of all this really find even a little time, let alone a lion's share of available time for spiritual practice? It is also a common idea that work and meditation, a contemplative way of life and life in the world are an either or proposition. One finds it hard to get over the sub-conscious idea that they are alternatives, that all said and done one can pay attention to only one thing at a time. Time and again this doubt crops up. Paul Brunton found it difficult to accept the firm statement of Ramana that, given the right mental attitude, one can hold on to the inner peace flowing from meditation not only as a recluse in a jungle hermitage but also amidst the demands of a busy life in London. We also find that some persons have a compelling urge to give themselves more completely to meditation by taking the plunge and opting for sanyasa. Natanananda did so

notwithstanding repeated advice from Ramana not to do so. It is only later that he learnt that the ochre robe or white cloth made no difference to his sadhana. The example of Janaka, who 'fenced with two swords' of karma and jnana, and that of Chudala narrated in 'Yoga Vasista' are regarded as exceptions.

One has to have a close look at the assumptions underlying this approach. Duties are regarded as 'worldly', often to be performed because circumstances leave no choice. What is regarded as 'meditation' is the time set apart for spiritual practice. How valid are these distinctions? Are we right in regarding each as a separate water-tight compartment? Is each of them a full time job? Can one be totally absorbed in the supposed alternatives even assuming we decide to choose one exclusively?

Taking up the last question first, let us see if whole-time meditation is possible. If one is ripe, ready to jump straightaway into a single thought stream, then, and only then, the mind would naturally slip into its source. Generally speaking when the mind is still weak and dissipated by innumerable thought, meditative sessions might become slumber sessions; 'tamas' and laziness may be mistaken for calmness and equipoise of the sattvic state. A devotee once asked Ramana why one should not meditate incessantly. 'Try and see' was his reply. Ramana told the questioner that the inherent tendencies would not let one do it. The mind would be repeatedly pushed out and one would be forced to engage himself in some action, physical or mental. It is only later, as meditation gradually erases his vasanas, that withdrawal from work would be possible. One might say that the idea of meditating ceaselessly is impractical.

What about the opposite? Why not engage oneself all the time in work? This too is equally impossible in practice. First of all, to many the work itself is not absorbing enough to have such a compulsion. To them the job or the profession is only to keep the pot boiling. Also, work is not always to be had even if one were to hanker after it. To work or renounce is not really in one's hands as it depends on the individual's karma which is unfolding.

Since it is impractical generally either to be at work or be absorbed in meditation all the time, what is one to do? Here we have the guidance of Ramana. He would reiterate time and again the need for meditation and work going hand in hand, step in step. In course of time the distinction between meditation and work would be obliterated. One would only be meditating, no matter what one is engaged in. For this, one has to remember constantly that self-enquiry is possible at all times and in all situations. It would do its work of purifying and strengthening the mind. One other thing to be remembered is that what makes work burdensome is not the work itself but the idea that it is because of one's efforts that work is possible and fruitful. When the sense of doership is strong and constant, then worries about the manner of performing the job and fears relating to the results are inevitable. Meditation and self-enquiry would cut at the root of this idea.

Success in meditation depends on the mind's strength to remain undistracted. This in turn depends on the purity of mind. Work which is dedicated to God, and done without attachment to results, purifies the mind and enables proper meditation. Meditation, the effective use of time set apart for spiritual practice, makes for smooth

and concentrated work. The benefits of contemplation, of search for truth of the 'I', are not limited to that time only but spill over as an undercurrent enabling work without constant fear and worry. The approach to work itself would be free of tensions. Thus meditation and work act and react on each other during sadhana.

Is one really the doer? Is the strength for action and success in action based on our individual will power? It is no doubt difficult to think, particularly when success is coming our way, that the strength for the action itself is not ours. Self-enquiry, the vigilant effort to find out the truth about the 'I', would gradually reveal that everything is regulated by the supreme power. Ramana would point out 'if one accepts this position he is free from troubles; otherwise he courts them'. The mind has to be strengthened by repeated doses of meditation, self-enquiry and recollection of the need for the right attitude to work. The important thing is to introvert the mind and keep it active in the pursuit of its source. Then, as Ramana points out in this quote, a hundred and one things can be done at the same time without prejudice to any of the jobs. Then activity or inactivity, work or meditation are both the same. Nothing can disturb that silence, that environment of bliss.



# EVERYTHING IS WORSHIP

So long as the daily life is imagined to be different from the spiritual life, these difficulties arise. If the spiritual life is rightly understood, the active life will be found to be not different from it.

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One generally regards pursuit of Self-knowledge and daily life as two water-tight compartments. Activities are classified as ‘worldly’ and spiritual life as ‘other-worldly’. The underlying assumption is that there is a conflict between work and wisdom. This idea is deep-rooted and long cherished. When one leaves home for penance, when one joins a monastic order or a nunnery, tearing away from attachment, or when one wanders in Himalayan heights, it is only to give a practical turn of this belief. The belief is that withdrawal from whatever activities one is engaged in at that time, or from the present situations and circumstances, is essential for reaching spiritual goals. Some are therefore willing to pay the price and prepared to sacrifice the comforts of family life. But one may not be ready, spiritually evolved enough or have the necessary passion to keep one going. If the necessary inner ammunition to hold on steadfastly is not there, impulsive vairagya would leave one only with regrets. Also, one’s lot in life may not permit such a cutting off of the bonds held so dear.

It is in this context that one has to examine in depth whether the mental division of activities as those belonging to God and those belonging to man is justified. What we are doing is really to split activities vertically. Ramana repeatedly advises that it is this divisive approach which is at the root of many of our problems. Ramana never tires of pointing out that what matters is only one's attitude of mind to the panorama of life as it unfolds itself with all its ups and downs, with all its joys and sorrows. When a devotee told Ramana of his intention of leaving his wife and children 'in order to be free of samsara', Ramana jocularly remarked 'What harm did they do?' and added, 'samsara is in your mind'. When another devotee wanted to resign his job in order to be near Ramana, he was advised that it would be enough to remember his presence in the heart. Again, when Paul Brunton insisted that ceaseless self-enquiry would be possible only in a jungle hermitage and not in London, Ramana firmly told him that for self-enquiry the busy world and a jungle retreat are the same. We also have the recorded conversation which Maurice Frydman had with Ramana. The position of the devotee was that it is quite impossible to be totally spiritual and be at the same time involved in activities. Ramana repeatedly brought him back to the position that it is essentially the state of mind which counts and that outward circumstances could make no difference. Ramana would also refer to Sri Krishna, Adi Sankara, Janaka and Suka to stress this point.

Borrowing a time honoured expression, how is one 'to be in the world but not of it'? It is of utmost importance to know this if Ramana's teachings are to have practical relevance for us. God knows that for most of us life gives no respite, no time for quiet contemplation, no time to just relax doing nothing, to be free, just free. If we are to bridge

the gap between endless duties and activities and the search for truth, what should we do? How are we to achieve this and break the idea that these two are poles apart and it is therefore impossible to bridge the gap?

The first thing to forget is the notion that it is difficult. Such thoughts would be ‘the surest way of handicapping oneself’, for they are not true. The next point to remember is our essential nature which is one of uncontaminated bliss. Then we have the need for making the most of whatever time we can manage for meditation. Let it be just five or ten minutes. It has to be used fully, to the hilt. The duration is not of such consequence, for, intense meditation, intense plunge within will do its work. What will it do, one may ask? To begin with gradually, work would not come in the way of meditation. Then the time given to meditation would generate the inner current, a special inner feeling of peace which will be the substratum throughout the day. Action would be in this atmosphere, in this enveloping mood of inner silence which activity, whatever it may be, is unable to disturb. Jobs get done better, for the mind is cool, undistracted and on the job all the time. As we develop in what may be termed ‘inner sensibility’ we find that the call pulling us within may come any time in the day. It may come when one is reading a newspaper or one is engrossed in a magazine or a TV serial. But when it comes, Ramana says that the mood must be held and made the best use of.

There is the need to add to the meditation time. Proper use of idle time by each of us, however busy we may be, is important. Some spare time could be stolen for this purpose during the day. Why waste it? Why not use that time too to generate more of the inner current? After

all, in the last analysis, it is the only thing which matters, for we can readily see its use in maintaining the mental equipoise, a balance which is undisturbed by our efforts. Imperceptibly, one's mental perspective gets transformed. Tendencies to belittle or blow up wane till the mind is always in a state of equilibrium. Then activity is no longer a burden. It is as relaxing as meditation itself. The difference between the market place and the shrine ceases. Everything is sacred. Active life and spiritual life are then not different. All activities are on par. Everything is worship in the rich glow of life.

# IS IT ONLY KITCHEN WORK?

Bhagavan : Your mind seems to be yearning for meditation.

Subbalakshamma : What use is it? Here it is only kitchen work.

Bhagavan : Let the hands and legs do the job. You are not the hands or legs. You are the unmoving one. Problems will be endless so long as you are not aware of this. Work would be difficult. Even if we cease to work the mind would be wandering.

- Reminiscences - 'The Ramana Way' March 1989.

Upto the mid-thirties, the kitchen at Ramanasramam was like a school of Vedanta. While helping in the kitchen work, Ramana would mix advice on the culinary art with words of practical relevance in sadhana. Almost all the assistants in the kitchen had readily agreed to the labour and drudgery of working in the kitchen only because it provided them an opportunity for being in Ramana's company. Even so, practically every one of them would long to sit in Ramana's presence in the hall enjoying the vast silence there or sharing the exhilaration of the question and answer sessions on diverse topics. Kitchen work would leave them little time for meditation. Hence the remark of the lady that only useless kitchen work was her lot. This kind of feeling, the thought that our duties are coming in the way of meditation, is a common one. Since much of our waking time is spent in work, the key to our happiness lies in our attitude to the work.

Actually, the work which we have to do is not necessarily what we would have voluntarily chosen depending upon our natural inclination and preference. Perhaps it may be said that the work is allotted by the karmic force which gives rise to the body itself. Because of this work often becomes a mere matter of bread-winning. It is something to be got over with, so that one can hasten back home and relax with T.V., video and so on. Sustained enthusiasm for the work being absent, life becomes a grind.

In contrast we find Ramana, for whom there was nothing further to be achieved after his death experience, fully enjoying whatever he was doing. Be it the cutting of vegetables, the correcting of proofs, the stitching of notebooks or explaining some abstruse philosophic doctrine, the same cheer and interest would be there. Ramana would advise devotees to pay attention to what they were doing and not to treat the work as humdrum or mechanical. One evening while he was coming down the hill followed by an attendant, Rangaswamy, a sweeper who was also coming that way wanted to prostrate to him. Ramana told him 'Doing your job diligently is prostration' and then entered the hall. The persons seated there got up and re-seated themselves after offering their respects. Ramana remarked 'true prostration is not this sitting or getting up. It is doing the job with shraddha'. In the kitchen, he would give detailed guidance so that the dishes may be tastily prepared. He used to lay stress on proper grinding, the need for putting the lid on the vegetables and so on. Once when Lokamma misread a verse in 'Tevaram' due to inattention, Bhagavan noticed this and told her, 'It is not like that, read again'. Though she re-read it several times, she continued to repeat the

mistake because her mind was not on the recitation. Bhagavan insisted on her reciting the verse correctly before she returned to the kitchen for work.

While we do sincerely wish to perform our jobs and duties happily, somehow, in spite of our resolve, we feel so bored with them time and again. Ramana's example and guidance seem to be in vain. The malady is so deep, perhaps the fault does not lie only in the fact that the work is not necessarily of the kind we would have chosen or which is suited to our temperaments. The trouble lies in our inability to handle our mind. Thoughts keep pushing one hither and thither so that there is no concentration on the work and one is tired and listless at the end of it. The dissipation is of mental energy. The inability to give oneself fully to the work on hand is not due to the work itself, it is because of the mind being scattered while working. Such a condition arises from the weakness of the mind. It appears, therefore, that one has to get out of the clutches of the thought vortex if one is to learn to work in a relaxed, yet attentive manner. Self-enquiry is the direct means available to tackle this problem.

The next hurdle on the way is the result-orientation of the mind. We regard ourselves as the architects of action and its fruits. Effort no doubt is a must. However, there is no guarantee that the work would give the desired results. This apart, our effort is often woefully inadequate and yet our desire for reaching the goal is strong and nagging. Hence worry is bound to be our lot. Repeated blows from the experiences of life alone can teach us to recognise the truth that results are 'divinely ordained'. This result fixation of

the mind is also seen in a heightened form when it comes to spiritual practice. We expect the guru to do the homework for us and graciously give Self-knowledge. We feel annoyed at the tardy progress, in spite of what we term 'surrender to the guru'. As Ramana once told Rangan 'As soon as they come, some want to be jnanis. But they ignore the effort involved'. Here also we must unlearn the habit of looking for results. Be it in terms of visions, dreams, siddhis or any other yardstick one may have. One has to gradually learn to lean on the strength of Ramana. Otherwise work and meditation would both be tense. The soothing peace currents of meditation would not flow into work. For a seeker, for those with an inward bent of mind, time is spent either on work or on meditation. It would be a pity if he makes a mess of both. Unless care is taken, one would be left to slog away through life missing the joy which is our essential nature.



# WHAT IS LIFE FOR?

D: What is the purpose of life?

B: To seek to know the significance of life is itself the result of good karma in past births. Those who do not seek such knowledge are simply wasting their lives.

- Talks 558 Page 519

Ramana straightaway turns the questioner's attention to the importance of the quest for finding out the meaning of life. It is upto each one of us to work at it and find it out for ourselves. Experience is always for the individual and any explanation or statements made by another can at best be only hearsay. Most people carry on from day to day fully engrossed in the immediate, in their jobs, professions, relatives, friends and entertainments. They are the unfortunate ones, for, their lives are superficial, skin-deep, lost in pleasantries and trivialities. Apparently no event in life has stirred them to their depths. Nothing has moved them enough emotionally to startle them into having a good look at the total waste of their lives. Generally it is sorrow which shakes one at the very root and makes a person question the assumptions of his life. It was the shock of a chain of calamities, death of the husband and death of children in succession, which wrung the heart of Echammal and brought her to Ramana. The double tragedy of the death of both his son and daughter, who were drowned in the well of his own house, filled Narasimha Swami with renunciation and led him to Ramana. Likewise, the 'recorder' of the 'Talks', Munagala Venkataramayya, turned to Ramana at a very critical period in his life. Subbaramayya sought consolation and guidance from Ramana perplexed at the death of his infant child. It is true that sorrow makes one question cherished values. Even our prayers are more intense at times of distress when events appear

to be beyond us. But one has to pause and introspect whether it is wise to wait till the sorrow beckons to contemplate on life's meaning and purpose. Should we be so dull-witted as to wait till doomsday?

Time does not wait. It relentlessly ticks away. Everyone's life span is determined at the time of one's birth itself. It is a product of karma. The body has to go through certain experiences, good, bad and indifferent. That done, death takes over. It is only in the case of jnanis that the Lord of Death has to wait in attendance to find out whether they are ready to cast off their bodies. For them the human garb is only for the welfare of humanity and has no karmic cause. For the rest of us, when karma folds up, life too ends. It is only in exceptional cases that extensions are granted by the Satguru's grace. We have the instance of Jagadiswara Sastri pressing his demand on Ramana and recovering from a fatal illness. We also have the case of Ranga Iyer who managed to ward off fate by sticking Casabianca-like to Ramana's physical presence. It is also true that in some instances the life span has been increased without the particular person's knowledge, by the secret operation of Ramana's grace. Ramana told the Rani of Baroda that everything is possible for the omnipotent guru. However, it has to be remembered that such changes in the ordinary course of events are minimal and dependent on the extent of surrender to the guru. It is safe to regard exceptions as exceptions and not to lay store by them. Death may therefore ring the bell at any time, any minute, any second. Since one does not know when exactly the operative karmic force would come to an end, one has to be ready for the call.

The question is, 'Ready for what?'. Ready to explore the purpose of life to its very depth and to find out

what it is all about. It is because of this that Ramana says even the very desire to find out life's purpose is the product of past good karma. Such is its importance. Here the past must be taken to mean not only actions preceding the body's birth but also those which have been done till such time as the questioning of life's intent starts.

Again, the use of the expression 'good karma' by Ramana has to be meditated on. Altruistic actions for the society's well-being are commonly regarded as good. One can understand this. But the problem is that, stealthily, the desire for recognition, for name and fame, would creep in to sully the motives. Therefore, the litmus test is really the attitude of mind with which an action is performed. This criterion in mind, action has to be classified as good and bad. Bad action is such which binds one more and more to sticking attachments and egocentric existence. On the other hand, good actions are those which turn one Godward, which turn one inward. Ramana makes this distinction in the second and third verses of 'Upadesa Saram'. Action can lead us to more and more of it resulting in our inability to look beyond the nose, inability to stop and ponder about life's meaning. The other type of action, which is done with the attitude that it is an offering to God, leads one out of the dense forest of karma. Therefore, one who acts with the dominant idea that he is the architect of actions and their results reaps only the real tragedy of dying more ignorant than he was born. The doership idea is the undoing. Unless this is tackled by good karma one's goose is well and truly cooked.

The significance of good karma, therefore, lies in the fact that it is a vacuum cleaner which cleanses the mind by sucking up the dust of negative and selfish

thoughts. By purifying the mind it enables one to be successful in self-enquiry leading to Self-knowledge. Once the mind turns inward, half the job is done. Instead of 'wandering with the wandering mind', the wanderer is not only able to question life's purpose but is also able to find it out for himself. Sustained attention on the 'I' keeps the intuned mind at the source. Then and only then life is an opportunity, a blessing and not a mere chronological interval. When the inner work started by good karma and sustained by self-enquiry continues, the myth of doership vanishes in the fullness of existence.

# MIND-DAZZLERS

Although powers appear to be wonderful to those who do not possess them, yet they are only transient. It is useless to aspire for the transient. All these wonders are contained in the one changeless Self.

- Talks 616 Page 578

‘Master, can I perform miracles as Sri Krishna and Jesus did before?’ asked Humphreys, the first westerner to come to Maharshi. ‘There are yogis with occult powers. What does the Maharshi think of them?’ queries Evans-Wentz, a research scholar from Oxford. Is it not good to acquire occult powers? Is not invisibility evidence of advanced wisdom? Does Self-realisation imply occult powers? Leadbeater describes his past births by clairvoyance. Is it useful to acquire such powers? Does the jnani have only peace, or does he have powers also? Can we not regenerate the world by power of austerities? These are some of the questions which are typical of our hankering, overt or secret, for acquiring more powers through spiritual practices. One sometimes wonders whether we care as much for peace and happiness as we do for power, the exercise of which fills us with a sense of well-being. The display of super-natural powers is always a matter of wonder. It dazzles the mind and leads to the adoration of such powers.

However, a seeker of truth should not give in to the undeniable attraction of ‘siddhis’ but must ponder over their real utility. One has to ask oneself some basic questions. Why am I a sadhaka? What am I seeking? Is it Self-knowledge? Will siddhis lead to a conscious linking with the divine? Is the siddhi-path a by-lane or a royal

path? Will it distract one from the search for truth or would it help in spiritual practice? It is important not only to pose these questions in the beginning itself but also to keep remembering the purpose of spiritual endeavour. If we let the goal out of sight, if we let the objectives be blurred, there is grave danger of wasting the spiritual ammunition.

It is because of this that Ramana would always try to wean one away from the lure of power seeking, the lure of siddhi hunting. Talking about clairvoyance which opens up the vision of one's past births, Ramana would ask 'What use is it in daily life? After all these are in any case body's births. Such knowledge is not worth aspiring for, it does not make one happier or wiser. Actually if we look at it properly, we are having enough trouble from past memories of this life itself, which we are unable to push out at will. Why add to the memory burden?' Similarly, talking of clairvision Ramana would again apply the acid test of the extent of its utility for daily life. Does it really matter whether our vision is near or far? Sight is for the seer. Should we not find out who the seer is? When someone referred to Paul Brunton's description of a yogi in Madras who could communicate with his guru in the Himalayas, Ramana pointed out that it only meant that the power of hearing of the yogi had been extended. Its range had been extended from the normal hearing distance to the distance between Madras and the Himalayas. But here again, the hearing, be it near or far, needs the subject, the hearer. One has to find out the truth about the hearer instead of seeking a capacity to hear distant sounds. Ramana would say that what is fundamental is the knowledge about the subject to whom these powers relate. When a visitor

asked about the powers of a superman, Ramana replied, 'Whether the powers are high or low, whether of the mind or the super-mind they exist with reference to him who has the power. Find out who he is'.

Ramana would also point out the limitation of these powers from the angle of worthwhile spiritual goals. In the last analysis, all effort is to become aware of one's inherent happiness. Let us assume that through assiduous practice one comes to acquire some occult powers. Thereafter naturally one looks for opportunities to exhibit these powers and receive applause and approbation. It may or may not be forthcoming. Again the field of 'siddhis' too is competitive. There may be others more skilled or having vaster powers. The public might flock to them leaving one to one's jealousies. In essence the attempt to go up the ladder of powers is like the worldly person's pursuit of success. For, one can bet that there would be someone or the other higher up in the scale. The unconscious desire for name and fame is yet another danger which should not be under-estimated. Even assuming that in this hurdles race one manages to survive the desire for more powers, the fear of losing what one possesses already would be a nagging companion. Where then is happiness in all this?

In the quote meditated on Ramana poses the further question whether the siddhi seeker is not bartering away permanent happiness for transient gains. This danger springs from the fact that occult powers which are acquired through certain spiritual practices might be lost if one is not steadfast in adherence to such practices. In the merry-go-round of life one might become lax in practice and then the powers too would be lost.

This is reason enough for a seeker to shy away from occultism and the hunger for spiritual powers. It is quite on the cards that some of these powers might come to a spiritual seeker without conscious effort on his part. At this stage, one is at the cross-roads. One would go down if one yields to the temptation of acquiring powers. The courageous ignore them and push them aside. Then one moves forward with unwavering faith in Self-knowledge as the goal.

The hall mark of the occult powers which we are considering is that they are within the mind's frame work. Mental powers are directed in a particular way by the possessors of such powers who have developed strong will power. It is against this that one must be wary.

The natural flow of powers of the great saints, seers and jnanis is of an altogether different category. Why? They have no individual volition, having surrendered it to the Supreme. Their mind is anchored in the spiritual heart. Their minds are dead in the sense that they have no more 'sankalpas'. They are desire-free. The question of their using the mind to perform siddhis does not arise. But yet they work many miracles. Narasimha Swami has given a graphic account of how Ramana's body levitated from Virupaksha Cave to Tiruvottiyur where Ganapati Muni was performing penance. Ramana blessed him by touch and returned. Ramana had not consciously wished it. But still it happened because he is a pure channel for the divine powers. The explanation for the 'miracles' of Krishna, Jesus and other jnanis is the same. The power of jnanis is the fullness of the power of the Self which works through them and they sport such powers



spontaneously and without effort. It is the power of such worshipful ones which is a true wonder for it is unsought and unlimited. It is the true siddhi.

# THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

“When I travel from Calcutta to Madras there are sign-boards and time-tables to guide me on my travel. But what is the guide in my search for Self?”

- Talks Page 395

Are we making progress at all? How long would it take to reach the goal? Such questions will crop up in the mind every now and then. The urgency of these questions would of course be dependent on how much one cares for Self-knowledge, how much one yearns for it. But everyone desires to know how he is faring, how far he has actually travelled on the spiritual path. In respect of all our other activities there are definite yardsticks of measurement, say, increasing bank balances, climbing up the social and official ladders, enlarging political following and the like. The evidence of success spurs one on to further effort for achieving the goals on which one's sight is set.

But when we come to the quest within, to the search for truth, there seems nothing tangible, nothing specific on the basis of which one can judge what is actually happening. Is one anchored at the start? Or is one making some headway? Or is one near the goal? Progress or lack of it cannot be readily perceived. The problem is inevitable in a situation where one does not have objective means of measurement. ‘There are no signboards and time-tables to guide’. Also, in a sense there is no journey to be undertaken at all. For, one is already at the destination. This is not said in terms of a riddle to be solved, but because it is just the truth, the plain truth. Why? Because one is never divorced from the Self which one is seeking. One is neither far away

from it nor apart from it. Self being fullness of consciousness, it is its light which energises the mind and body and enables action. However, in practical terms this truth has no meaning for us. We are enmeshed in a world of false concepts and delusive ideas. Effort has to be made to move away from the thought world, from the grip of the mind, and to discover the natural state.

The spiritual journey, therefore, is a matter of unfoldment, a matter of gradually discovering the capacity to draw on our own inner strength by the removal of all that restricts and limits consciousness. This raises the question whether there are no tests at all during this period of 'sadhana', by which one can know for oneself if any transformation or meaningful change is taking place or not. If there be no criterion then one might become either smugly content, or diffident or overconfident and drift along. Fortunately one can notice the change if only one is vigilant. There is one mirror, like the one which the step-mother had in the fairy tale 'Snow-White', which always speaks the truth. This is the mirror of our thoughts and deeds. Only, we have to be sensitive enough to read the message which it is recording as we function daily through our series of relationships with people, ideas and things. Tentative observation would tell its own story and such observation is a must if we are not to fail on both fronts, 'here' in this world, and also 'there' in God's abode.

To begin with, one is generally faced with the problem of a weak-mind, a mind divided against itself and working at cross-purposes. Meditation becomes a battle dwarfing even the mighty Kurukshetra battle

between the Pandavas and Kauravas. As one persists valiantly despite this, the mind acquires the strength to stay with a single thought. As Ramana puts it, 'The degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts and the degree of concentration on a single thought are measures to gauge the progress'. For, it is the capacity of the mind to be gathered together purposively which marks an important break-through. The peace of the meditative hour is not confined to that hour. It becomes the under-current of the atmosphere in which one functions.

This leads one on to the second sign of success in spiritual practice. The mind acquires the capacity for meeting success and failure with equanimity. No one has come up with a scheme which ensures unfailing success. The mental power acquired by assiduous practice would be seen when disappointments galore come, when dejection stares one in the face. As Ramana told Humphreys the results would show themselves in all sorts of ways, 'In peace of mind, in power to deal with troubles, in power all round - always unconscious power'.

Ramana also says that if one is breaking ground then there would be evident 'Vairagya', dispassion for worldly values, a distaste for sensual pleasure would develop. This 'distaste' is not the negative 'No, no - these grapes are sour' attitude which may come about from failures in life. It is a positive attitude born of the growing feeling that the highest sensate happiness cannot match what we are losing by giving in to it. The awareness that the bliss of the Self is being traded in develops. What happens is that there is a positive shift in the value judgements as intelligent effort enables one to push within and partake of the inherent joy of life.

Here it would be worthwhile cautioning against pessimism and self-judgement of any sort. Ramana has said that 'a single effort even for a single minute' would bear fruit in time. What more can one ask for than this assurance? Or perhaps Ramana's conversation with Rangan is more encouraging. Rangan was feeling discouraged at the thought that in spite of his close companionship with Ramana his ego was more strident. Ramana told him 'If the ego has to go, all that is hidden has to come out. When you keep water on a stove for heating, it will boil and spill over, will it not?'

As one journeys along one can feel the real pulse of progress for oneself. As the popular saying goes 'One does not need a magnifying glass to see a sore on the finger'. It would be self-evident. Similarly, no one else need confirm or deny what is happening in the spiritual life. The beauty of it will blossom forth in a thousand ways.

# SHOULD ONE PRAY?

Dr. Syed : If a person prays for a spiritual good for say two years and it is not answered, what should he do?

Bhagavan :It may be, it is for his good that the prayer is not granted.

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Devotee : Are our prayers granted?

Bhagavan :Yes, they are granted. No thought will ever go in vain. Every thought will produce its effect sometime or the other. Thought forces will never go in vain.

- Day by Day  
Pages 25 and 230

Should one pray? Does not the omniscient God know our needs? Is it necessary for one to express his desires and wants to the higher power? Would it not be reasonable to assume that our desires are already known to that power? Should one be ashamed of praying for mundane wants instead of sticking steadily to seeking the blessing of Self-realisation from the Satguru? Are prayers answered? If not, why not? In the course of our daily sadhana these are some of the doubts which arise about the need for prayer and its efficacy.

Prayer is a recognition of the fact that there are situations in life when we feel utterly helpless, when we are compelled to take recourse to and seek the aid of the Supreme. In its highest form, prayer is to surrender fully and unreservedly to God, to the Satguru. Such surrender is possible only if one's sense of doership is dead. It implies constant awareness of the truth that

action and its results are regulated by the divine. If there is such a surrender, the question of individual prayers from time to time would not arise. One becomes God's ward and this confidence and trust makes for unquestioning acceptance of what life brings about, the seeming good and bad.

Most of us, however, do not seem to be spiritually ripe enough to execute such a general power of attorney in favour of the Satguru. Our strength and weakness is our trust and faith in ourselves. But fate is ready, unseen and potent, to deal its bitter-sweets of life and baffle us with dead-end situations. When we reach this stage we turn to the Satguru for help. Prayer, thus, is natural and inevitable with our mental attitude being what it is. Hence we find a continuous stream of prayers day in and day out, out of a sense of want, because one is unaware that one is the fullness of consciousness. Ours is a long shopping list submitted to God. The devotees, old or new, of Satguru Ramana are no exception to this. The reminiscences of many of them are a frank confession of this fact. Suffering from acute dyspepsia, Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer seeks Ramana for a cure of this ailment. As he admits, in the first instance he did not go to Ramana for any spiritual counsel. He was sick and wanted to be cured. And cured he was, though Ramana tried to put him off by saying that he was 'neither a doctor nor a magician'. Devaraja Mudaliar would not have the slightest hesitation in reporting to Ramana every single problem of his, be it his poor health or his worries as an Official Receiver in the Chittor District Court. This reporting was as normal as a child's to its parents. Only, in the case of Mudaliar, he was sure that the very fact of bringing these problems to the notice of Ramana would solve them, because of the implicit prayer behind it. Instances can be multiplied when Ramana's help was sought for marriage of children or for progeny.

Ramana was to his devotees the celestial cow, ‘Kamadhenu’, fulfilling their prayers and wishes. One does not find Ramana discouraging such prayers, for he was aware of the human frailty. Only, he would never admit the fact that the needed help came from him. One can see, therefore, that it is perfectly legitimate to press our demands on Ramana. It would be needless to burden ourselves with a sense of guilt about it.

So far fine, but what about prayers which are not answered. What are the implications of such unanswered prayers? Ramana points out in the first quote that the very non-fulfilment of the prayer is the boon. The fact is that we are short-sighted. The karmic picture is unknown to us. We often desire things which, in retrospect, are seen to be either foolish or pregnant with sorrow. The life of the Saivite saint, Sundaramurthi Nayanar, abounds with instances of the ‘strong mercy’ of God which saved him from many self-sought calamities.

One might think that this applies to worldly matters only. Not so, says Ramana while answering a specific query. Even in regard to matters relating to sadhana one’s wishes need not necessarily be accepted, for, in that field too the very non-fulfilment ‘may be good’. Prayers for spiritual progress suffer from the same infirmity, ignorance of the total picture. It may be that the attempted acceleration of pace would have proved a long term detriment to the progress of inwardness.

Prayer is the solidified form of intense desire for particular things just as ice is of water. Thoughts have their own momentum, their own power. This is so because



thoughts arise from the heart and when they have the backing of repeated attention from the individual, then the desire is bound to be satisfied. It becomes a powerful karmic force giving direction to what one has to experience. If, in the meantime one becomes steady in Self-abidance, then fulfilment of his prayers when it does happen is a matter of indifference to the person concerned. Individuality having ended, the satisfaction of an earlier ardent prayer would leave one unaffected. On the other hand, so long as individuality lasts, one might have to rue a prayer which is granted, in the sense, when the thought-force fructifies in time it might have disastrous consequences. Therefore great care and circumspection are needed about the prayer itself. One has to be particularly choosy about the ethical content of the prayer. Otherwise, when thought force snowballs, later it could boomerang. Praying wisely implies turning to the Satguru for creating an environment of peace in which one can pursue the inward journey unfettered by ceaseless thoughts.

# DREAMS

Visitor : When we get a dream we emerge out of it without any effort on our part. If this life is a dream, as it is said to be, then how is it that we are called upon to make efforts to end the dream and wake into jnana?

Bhagavan : In a dream you have no inkling that it is a dream and therefore you don't have a duty to get out of it by effort. But in this life you have some intuition by your sleep experience, by reading and learning, that life is something like a dream and therefore a duty is cast on you to make an effort and get over it.

- Day by Day - Pages 76 and 141

Each day we pass through the experience of waking, dream and deep sleep. At the end of it what do we know about these states? Just nothing. Time is ticking away and we let it go by. Should we not reflect about the nature of these experiences and the one to whom they relate? The topic we are meditating on is 'dreams'. Dreams are the experiences which we go through when we are not awake or in deep sleep. They come and go. On waking we label them as dreams and regard them as 'unreal' in contrast to the waking experiences which seem to have a continuity, and which we experience for longer spells. How valid is this distinction? When we are dreaming if we are hungry dream food is needed, if we are sick a dream doctor has to attend. The realities of the waking state have no relevance when one is actually going through a dream. The fact that before going to sleep the person had a hearty meal or was in perfect health does not matter. In

the dream he experiences hunger and sickness for which dream remedies alone are called for. As for corroboration in a dream there is an integral cogency though what takes place in a fifty years span of waking may be experienced in a matter of say five minutes in a dream. This is so because the time measurements are different for the different states of waking, dream and sleep. Again, though apparently the dreams seem automatic and effortless, they are the products of karma as much as waking experiences. One's allotted karma may be worked out either in dream or while awake. The karmic force which gives rise to the dream decides how long it should last and when it should cease. The experiences in dream are as real, while one is dreaming, as those in the waking state to one who is awake. An illustration given by Ramana is telling. A person is asleep in the old hall in Ramanasramam. He dreams that he has gone around the world, roaming over hills, dales, deserts and forests, across various continents. After many years of strenuous and weary travel he returns to India, reaches Tiruvannamalai, enters the ashram and walks into the hall. Just at that moment he wakes up. While he was thus wandering and suffering in the dream was not that experience real? Did he not go through hell for the duration of the dream? It was a karmic unfoldment in which such sorrow was condensed intensely in the dream-time which may appear short by waking standards. While we feel the reality of the dream experiences while dreaming, on 'waking' we look upon them as unreal. Similarly, if we can experience a state different from waking, we may see the 'unreality' of those experiences to which we had clung. Maybe then we can treat them as 'dreams'. It is this possibility which is focused on in the scriptures and by the Satguru. We are told that there is a fourth state, 'turiya', other than the three daily states of

waking, dreaming and deep sleep. Ramana keeps bringing our attention back to this state which, being natural, is within the grasp of everyone.

To get back to the natural state does the dream state hold out any possibility? No. Why? Because dreams come about involuntarily and end automatically. Presently, that is during their occurrence, there is no individual volition. The deep sleep state too has to be written off for this purpose. For, the mind is nascent and is submerged in ignorance during deep sleep. Because of this Ramana says that no duty is cast on the sleeper or the dreamer to make any effort. In fact, then effort itself is impossible.

Since the waking state is likened to a ‘dream’, we find some devotees questioning Ramana as to why any effort at all is needed for ending this ‘dream’. ‘Would it not end as automatically as the dream-state?’ is their doubt. This is based on faulty logic. When dreams end the dreamer is not wiser than when they began. If the required effort, which is possible, is not made to move into and remain stabilised in the ‘turiya’ state one would continue to regard the waking experiences as ‘real’ and not as dreams which they are essentially.

While on the subject of dreams one has to consider ‘auspicious’ dreams which are so vivid that they leave their impact throughout one’s life. We have the graphic description by Paul Brunton of a dream he had while at Sri Ramanasramam. He saw himself as a lad of five being led by hand, firmly, by a gigantic Ramana to the top of a hill. On the summit he is asked to look down and finds that the whole Western hemisphere is spread out at the bottom. After that, for

all the ups and downs of his sadhana, Paul Brunton could never lose sight of the fact that Ramana had made him over to 'That' Supreme through this experience. We also have K.K. Nambiar's moving narration of his dream. In it Ramana had confirmed Nambiar's faith in the chanting of sacred verses. These dreams are products of the good karma of the fortunate ones. But there is no point in hankering after them, for the dream-state has no spiritual potential at all. Again, if you seek some dreams as worthwhile you must be prepared to accept the inauspicious ones as well.

What about jnanis? Do they have dreams? 'Why not?' Ramana would say. If they can have the other two mental states of waking and sleep there can be the dream-state also for them. Ramana once narrated a dream which he had. In that he had gone up the hill with Chadwick and others. While returning they were walking through a wide street with skyscrapers on either side. Showing the street and the buildings to Chadwick and the rest Ramana asked them 'Can it be said that what we are seeing is a dream?' They replied in one voice "Which fool would say so?" They walked along and entered the hall when the dream ended. Does this mean there is no difference between the jnani's and our attitude to dreams. Only apparently so. In fact there is a world of difference. The jnani is aware that he is dreaming while he is dreaming and that the dream is 'unreal'. Sleep, dream and waking are seen by him as transient mental movements on the fullness of consciousness in which he is established.

# CAN LIFE END?

Jivarajani : What is the nature of life after physical death?

Bhagavan : Find out about your present life. Why do you worry about life after death? If you realise the present, you will know everything.

Day by Day 31-5-46 Page 289

Lady : Is it possible to know the condition of the individual after his death?

Bhagavan : It is possible but why try to know it? All the facts are only as true as the seeker.

Talks 276 Pages 232-33

We find that most of those who sought Ramana's advice on birth, death and reincarnation were not asking about the fundamentals. 'What is birth?' or 'What is death?', 'Who is it that is born?', 'Who is it that dies?'. The questioners were an ordinary run of people like us worried about the need for the continuity of a relationship beyond death. If a dear son or wife or friend dies can one's relationship with that person be continued? Does death mean the end of the relationship or is there a way to go beyond the reach of death? Will the relationship be extended to our next life? This is because 'the birth of the person, his being with us and his death are real to us'. It is not possible for us to dismiss this problem of the death of a dear one by reminding ourselves that bodily relationships are subject to time. True, Ramana would gently draw one's attention to essentials by saying 'Did you think of your son before he was born that you should remember him after his death?' or 'The birth of 'I' thought is one's birth, its death is a person's death', and so on.

He would, however, patiently explain the various theories from the scriptures and sacred lore pertaining to continuation of life after death. For, so long as one acts with the sense of doership one would be automatically sowing the seeds of future births and deaths. Residual memories of such actions, 'samskaras', lie dormant in the heart and become alive when circumstances are favourable. The same force which gives rise to the birth of this body must perforce 'lead not only to rebirth but a succession of births'. Unless the tree of life is uprooted by Self-knowledge, through self-enquiry, rebirth is inevitable. The ego, the mind, does not die but only attaches itself to another body. Ramana has described, graphically, how this takes place. There is a last minute tussle between the present body and the new one to which the ego is to get attached because of the karmic force. This is evidenced by the heavy breathing in a dying person. And the violent spasms at that time only indicate the lingering attachment to the dying body. It is only when an identification is finally established with a new body that the link with the old one is severed. Thus there is no time gap in one's bodily existence. Some may be reborn on earth again immediately. Others may have their innings in other worlds in subtle bodies and ultimately come back to earth to go through their quota of unfinished karma. The interval is unpredictable but rebirth for working out karma is certain. They come back with their intellectual and emotional background stored up in their hearts. The past is never given the go by until one lights the fire of knowledge to it. Of course, all this does not apply to the jnani who is absorbed in the universal.

While the certainty of continuity is there, it does not really satisfy us. Presently we have no link or

attachment to the future bodies and all that is sweet in our lives is based on the current attachments. Hence we find a typical response from a lady from Uttar Pradesh whose son had died. After listening to Ramana about life beyond death she raised the second query on which we are meditating. The doubt is whether we could continue to be linked with the dead person and find out what is happening. Ramana pointed out to her that not much importance should be attached to such enquiries because the enquirer himself is unreal. However, out of compassion Ramana would comfort the grief stricken relatives appropriately. T.P. Ramachandra Iyer has narrated one such instance. Once, soon after the Ashram Post-office was opened, a couple whose only son had died came and told Ramana, 'We loved him dearly. After his death joy has fled from our lives. We have but one wish. At least let us see our boy in our next birth'. Ramana advised them, 'Father, son, birth – know the real meaning of these first. Afterwards we may go into the question of the next birth'. But the couple's sorrow would not be assuaged until Ramana told them, 'You will certainly see him. You will see him in the next birth as vividly as you have seen him in this birth'. When T.P. Ramachandra Iyer questioned Ramana as to why he gave such an assurance, Ramana told him 'What can I do? Otherwise their faith would be uprooted'. He then cited a verse from the Bhagavad Gita. The gist of the verse was that truth can be pressed only upto the point to which one can absorb it. There is yet another instance of Ramana's compassion in helping a distraught devotee to have a vivid dream of his wife. At first he tried to dissuade the devotee by remarking, 'What? Do you find comfort in a dream-vision?', but did not refuse it to him when he persisted.



While thus consoling the seekers, Ramana's constant refrain would be, 'It is the body which dies. It is the body which reincarnates. But are you the body?' Having come to redeem us from the sorrow of ignorance flowing from the first attachment, the thought I am the body, Ramana would never tire of exposing us to the truth. The truth of our deathless natural state would be stressed along with the fact that birth and death pertain to the karmic body only. The 'I' is not what we take it to be but is the fullness of existence, the fullness of consciousness which is unborn and can therefore never die. Incessant self-enquiry reveals this truth to us by and by. When we find out the reality behind our present life, all links with the past and future are scissored. We would then be awake to our own true eternity.

# HOW FREE ARE WE?

Free will is implied in the scriptural injunctions to be good. It implies overcoming fate. It is done by wisdom.

- Talks 209 Page 177

Ramana's first spiritual instruction to his mother Azhagammal, was that the best course in life would be to accept the flow of karma. It would be futile to take up arms against what is bound to happen. What is not to happen cannot be brought about even by herculean efforts. This was in 1898. Years later, in the 1940's Devaraja Mudaliar recorded Ramana's categorical statement that not only the major events in one's life but also the smallest things are pre-determined. From these statements one might erroneously conclude that Ramana regarded destiny as irrevocable. If so, it would logically follow that free will has no place in the shaping of one's life. Such a view would be quite contrary to the teachings of Ramana where we find the importance of free will being stressed quite often in the context of destiny. He would say that destiny and free will co-exist as long as there is a sense of doership. One transcends them both only when through self-enquiry the feeling of doership ends.

Let us have a close look at the exact domain of destiny and the role of free will in Ramana's teachings. According to Ramana 'destiny concerns only the body'.

Identified as we are with the body, it is hard to accept the idea that destiny affects only the body. For the logical implication of such a proposition is that the mind and the body are distinct and separate.

It is therefore necessary to go into this deeply. First we have to ask the question ‘Why has the body come into existence at all?’ The great ones do not have a karmic cause for their birth. They come for the welfare of the world and can retain the body as long as they wish. Ramana told Rangan that Yama would have to wait and take the permission of a jnani, and only when the jnani is ready to cast off his body can that event happen. As for the normal run of men, birth is part of the cosmic law, as a result of which one goes through the experiences consequent on this ethical balance sheet. It is because of this fact that we find infant mortality, the death of the young, sudden unforeseen deaths and the lingering on of the old. Many people often question God’s laws and wisdom when children or the young die. Since, however, the body has come into existence as a result of karma, when that force is exhausted life becomes extinct. We find that the body, linked as it is to a particular karma which gave rise to its birth, comes to an end when that force is over. The mind may well be at the height of its powers, the body in perfect health, but its karma being over, death cannot wait.

We can also look at this from another angle. The great ones have demonstrated in their lives as to how one can completely delink oneself from one’s own body and remain unaffected by its changes or sufferings. Ramana’s body went through intense pain, caused by sarcoma, for over fifteen months. Not one moment did he complain of it though the pain must have been excruciating. When asked by Major Chadwick whether he was suffering, Ramana said ‘No’. But at the same time, he said ‘There is pain’ – the pain pertained to the body and not to him. Hence his bewitching smile and

divine splendour, even on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1950 when he chose to give up his body which had been racked with intense pain.

If the mind and body are distinct and karma refers to the body, one may ask why is it that the mind too appears to be under its sway. This is only because of its attachments. Because of the pull of the past it is unable to dis-identify itself from what destiny brings to the body and is therefore affected by sorrow or joy which karma is yielding. If one learns not to pay attention to the event, if one learns to be detached from it, then where are destiny's pleasures or pangs? This is quite obviously so, for any event can be blown up or belittled by the mind. One may go under its weight or meet the event with equipoise and calm strength. From this arises the first basic point of Ramana that one is free to exercise his will either to identify himself with the event or to be unconcerned with it. His reply to one Mrs. Desai would indicate this clearly. Mrs. Desai, quoting from the Gita, asked Ramana that if one is compelled to do the work for which he is destined, then, the question of free will could not arise at all. Ramana explained to her that it is open to each one to be 'free from the joy or pains, pleasant or unpleasant consequences of the work by not identifying oneself with the body'. Let the body experience its allotted destiny, but it is upto each one to be unaffected mentally by it by exercising free will and untying the bond of attachments.

One has, therefore, to develop through spiritual practice to this state. Even at the very threshold there is freedom. Free will can be exercised to direct action on the right lines. Were it not so there would be no

meaning to spiritual injunctions and the code of ethics enjoined therein. One has to discriminate between good and bad, between what is pleasurable and what is liberating, and choose wisely. To believe that one is a helpless victim of karma is to fall into the trap of the mind's making. If only we pause to think we can readily see that it is impossible to be truly passive, to be a mere onlooker of an event – one's own nature will assert itself in one form of action or the other. When the feeling 'I am the doer' is alive and kicking it will leave no room for rest. Exercise of free will and action are inevitable. Free will has to be channelled in pursuit of such action as would purify the mind and enable one to escape altogether from destiny's shackles.

It is necessary here to clear one point. To say that one must give a purposive turn to action should not be taken to mean that success is assured. A dispirited devotee told Ramana that he had come a couple of years earlier and had cultivated his will power thereafter but had met with a series of failures in his efforts. Ramana clarified that what will result is only the strength of mind which would enable one to react to success or failure with equanimity. He also made it clear that 'will power should not be taken to be synonymous with success'. For, success or failure is the product of destiny, whereas free-will enables one to neutralize it by insulating oneself with an attitudinal change of mind.

Destiny and free-will: their interplay lasts only so long as one does not enquire 'who is it that is bound?' and 'who is it that is free?'. Through constant vichara, ceaseless enquiry, one ends this doership notion. Then both destiny and free-will are cut at their very root as

the person to whom they pertain has lost his separate identity. What remains is only the Self, ever liberated, always free.

# THOUGHTS AND HAPPINESS

Visitor : I suffer in both body and mind. From the day of my birth I have never had happiness.

Bhagavan : If there should be unrelieved suffering all the time, who would seek happiness? That is, if suffering be the natural state how can the desire to be happy arise at all? However, the desire does arise. So to be happy is natural; all else is unnatural.

- Talks 633 Pages 593-94

In sleep we are happy for there are no thoughts to disturb our happiness. Surely one does not wish to sleep through even the day let alone throughout one's life itself. What is sought is happiness when one is wide awake. But sleep is certainly a pointer to the link between happiness and absence of thoughts. Ramana says that misery is only the presence of the unwanted thoughts. A weak mind is unable to push out the thoughts which haunt it. One is forced to stay with the thoughts causing sorrow. Sometimes the turmoil of thoughts is unbearable. Thoughts are our ancient legacy following on our heels from life to life. Every action leaves a memory residue which is stored up in the Heart in seed form. Its hold, though latent, is potent for it can become alive at any time, often unexpectedly. The desired objects and circumstances keep changing but the past in the form of tendencies often pulls us in counter directions. Let us suppose that we now want to move God-ward. Our thoughts in that direction would be countered by the opposite set of thoughts, arising from past sensate experiences which have been stored up in the memory. So a battle royal follows filling us

with disgust and sorrow at our inability to make headway or even to make the full use of the time set apart for meditation. This extends all along the line. A dear one passes away but our attachments do not end. So, even if we want to forget, our thoughts about that person would not let us do so. This is equally true of its opposite, happiness, which is felt at other times when pleasant thoughts come, when the desired object is near or the memory of it is strong. Happiness and sorrow thus keep fluctuating and it is always a mixed bag. In the world of thoughts there can only be pain-tainted pleasure and not unalloyed happiness.

The question arises whether it is possible at all to move from transient pleasure to lasting happiness within the mind's framework? It is possible but only to a very limited extent. Through association with the wise, worship of the Supreme, breath-control and other means which are suited to one's temperament, the mind becomes purified and strengthened. It acquires the capacity to ward off thoughts which cause sorrow, either by early detection of their surfacing or by a quick counter-attack of injecting the opposite thoughts. On the positive side, one is able to stay with the desired thoughts for longer spells and enjoy the happiness which flows from them. When desires are fulfilled the mind is stilled for the time being and it then reflects the inherent happiness of the Self.

While a strong mind, a purified mind, thus acquires the capacity to stay happy, this capacity is always brittle, uncertain and circumscribed by 'others' and 'events'. For, we find circumstances are sometimes so overwhelming that we may go under their onslaught. We have a record of such instances in 'Talks'. These



also highlight Ramana's guidance in such situations. The Maharani of Baroda came to Ramana in great anguish seeking his blessings against the seemingly impregnable wall of adverse circumstances. Ramana asked T.P.R., who was present in the Hall, to read out and explain to her the meaning of some of the verses from Muruganar's 'Ramana Sannidhi Murai'. The songs were selected with reference to their appropriateness to her state of mind. When she slowly recovered her mental balance, Ramana pointed out to her the advantages of surrender to the guru, and coaxed her to try it out gradually. The Maharajah of Mysore held Ramana in utmost reverence having read about his life and teachings. Yet circumstances of the royal court did not permit his open homage to the Maharshi. He came for a bare fifteen minutes, all the way from Mysore to Tiruvannamalai. Ramana could readily see his need and mood. He literally poured forth his grace. Hence the Maharajah could absorb the potent silence with which Ramana's presence was saturated. Yet again, Pannalal, Administrator of Allahabad Corporation, had come seeking peace which his high office did not give. To him Ramana emphasised the naturalness of happiness. These illustrations indicate that as long as we remain in the mind's domain there is the danger of the mind playing truant and tripping us.

The real solution lies in moving on to a thought-free state. When the mind rests at its source then the burden of thoughts is lifted. When a young squirrel was waiting for an opportunity to come out of its nest, Ramana remarked 'All want to rush out. There is no limit to going out. Happiness in objects, in the externalised mind. Ramana is asking us to look in the

opposite direction, within, by in-turning the mind. The search for happiness without is inevitable so long as there is the wrong identification of oneself with one's body and mind. For, then one superimposes happiness on persons and events just as erroneously as an 'infatuate lover would foist chastity on a prostitute'. This ignorance has to be tackled if the mind is to be thought-free, if the right path to happiness is to be opened up.

The obstruction being the veil of thoughts, the means to be adopted should be such as would make the mind silent. Once the right means are adopted, happiness untainted by sorrow must come. For, as Ramana would always point out, happiness is natural and unhappiness is not, just as surely as good health is normal and ill health is not. The very seeking of happiness is proof of its naturalness. Else, as Ramana says in this quote, we would be content to stay in sorrow if only that be our lot. Just as one would wish to get rid of a headache and be restored to sound health, so also one would desire to end sorrow and get back to natural happiness.

Self-enquiry is the direct and simple means to arrive at the thought-free state. For it quickly turns the mind inward. Through constant vigilance against marauding thoughts, through persistent self-enquiry one pushes within. As the taste of inner happiness is felt increasingly, the hankering after sensate pleasures weakens and the folly of the old ways is seen in clear light. What begins as a rivulet swells in time into a perennial river and into the vast expanse of the ocean of bliss.

# WHO SAYS THE GURU IS NOT NECESSARY?

Dilip Kumar Roy : While all say that a guru's direction is necessary it seems Bhagavan has said that a guru is not necessary.

Bhagavan : I have not said so. But the guru need not always be in human form.

Roy : But in Bhagavan's case there was no guru.

Bhagavan : It has been already said that the guru need not be in human form and that the Self within, God and guru are the same.

- Day by Day, Page 28

Ramana did not have a human guru. His position was that for a jnani there are no 'others'. Consequently he could not accept that he was the Satguru of those who had chosen his path. What follows? Does it mean that Ramana did not have a guru or that he was not a guru. No. He was born with the awareness of the glory of Arunachala shining within his heart. The very utterance of the word 'Arunachala' by a relative acted as the 'initiation' sweeping him into the state of steady Self-abidance. His ecstatic hymns on Arunachala are proof of the fact that Arunachala, as the Self within, was his guru. For those who regarded him as their guru he was that. As he explained to one visitor, those who were attracted to his form and name were his devotees. To seekers for whom self-enquiry was the way and goal of spiritual practice, he was their guru. Their 'initiation' then, as now, may take place by a piercing look, or by a furtive glance, or when his silence overwhelms.

Who can be regarded as a guru and what is his role? Some would wish to transfer all responsibility to him and rest on their oars. Others would recognize their role but are too weak-minded to practice what they theoretically perceive to be right. The third set of people do their very best to pursue 'Vichara' incessantly while recognizing all along that its fruition depends on the grace of the guru. While all these categories of persons benefit from the Satguru's guidance, it is only those who make the required effort, blending it with a mental surrender to the guru, that profit most. Their minds get purified quicker and their return to the natural state of peace is expedited.

The role of the guru is best seen through the gentle and firm guidance of Ramana. Some instances will illustrate. Ramana would always take the disciple along his chosen path while simultaneously encouraging him to practice self-enquiry. As he once remarked, 'Suppose a car is going at top speed. To stop it at once or to turn it at once would be attended by disastrous consequences'. We find an application of this in the case of Pannalal, a senior official of the government of Uttar Pradesh. He was instantly attracted by the directness of Ramana's teaching. At the same time he had all along been repeating the holy name of 'Hari' as instructed by his guru. He was therefore in the horns of a dilemma. Should he break with the past or give up the obvious advantages of Ramana's 'vichara marga'? He put the question straight to Ramana himself; Bhagavan taught self-enquiry whereas his guru had instructed him to put all his faith in the repetition of the name of Hari. What was he to do in future? Ramana simply referred him to an article on Namdev and the glory of Lord's name which appeared in a monthly – 'Vision'! This confirmed the questioner's

trust in the holy name while helping him to appreciate at the same time the usefulness of self-enquiry. Again, for the kitchen helpers with traditional backgrounds Ramana would advise the ‘parayana’ or the repetition of sacred works. Sampooramma was asked to read the ‘Ribhu Gita’ regularly, over-ruling her objection that it was ‘Greek’ and ‘Latin’ to her. Similarly Lokamma was given ‘Vasudeva Mananam’. When she said that she could not remember even a little of it Ramana joked, ‘We forget what we should remember and remember what we should forget’.

We find Ramana taking care to put self-enquiry in the proper perspective, even when he was dealing with purely theoretical matters. For instance in ‘Upadesa Saram’ Ramana particularly deals with the various paths of traditional wisdom before explaining the ‘direct path’; the enquiry into the nature of the mind. Again, in ‘Ramana Gita’ we find Ramana categorically asserting the fact that self-enquiry by itself is enough for the purification of the mind. However, he later clarified to Karshni that other methods for the purification of the mind, devotional music, pilgrimage, charity, and austerities also have their usefulness.

Ramana would lay great stress on the disciple’s faith in the path shown by the master. Once when there was some criticism of a guru, Ramana sharply cut it off by his remark ‘What is your capacity to judge and evaluate? In fact the guru is not as important as the disciple himself’. Has not the transforming effect of such implicit faith been extolled in the scriptures? It can make ‘the dumb eloquent and the lame cross mountains’.

Ramana would always emphasise the naturalness of Self-realisation, that it is not new or acquired but is our own natural state. When faced by bouts of depression on the path, this constant, strengthening reiteration of truth by Ramana would be the best tonic. In this context Ramana would mention that the guru's role is to remove obstacles to the perception of truth.

The capacity of the guru to take on the job of maturing and ripening his disciples springs from the fact that the guru is no different from God, from the truth in which he is rooted. Ramana was fond of quoting from the 'Kaivalyam' the statement that the guru has been with us as the inner strength, guiding us from life to life. He takes the human form because one is not conscious of his luminous inner presence.

The guru is always alive. The casting off of his body makes no difference to his continued guidance. Perhaps the reiteration of this truth is unnecessary for those to whom Ramana is the Satguru. For, do they not know the daily wonders he is working within their hearts?

# INWARD JOURNEY

We have to talk of movement, of journey, because we do not feel unfettered. We are ignorant of our natural state of silence. The starting point is the present state of mind, dull, chaotic and out of control. The destination is the state where the mind is free from the tyranny of thought. In the beginning there is variety, multiplicity and a mind riven by division. In the end there is unity in the Heart.

While the objective is clear enough, one finds a reluctance to go all along the way, a reluctance to give one's heart and soul to it. The reason for this is not far to see. To us the mind is the only source of consciousness. Only thoughts and feelings give one the feeling of being alive. We wake up with thoughts. The mind is active throughout the waking hours. Though the thought content may vary, there is no break in thoughts. Even during our best meditative periods we are only bravely attempting to hang on to a single thought and are not altogether free from mental movements. True, all of us have moments of self-forgetfulness, but they come about not due to freedom from thoughts but the intensity of particular thoughts and feelings.

One might say that at heart we are scared, very scared indeed of the state of 'mano nasa' or the state where the mind is dead. We do chant the verses in 'Upadesa Saram' relating to it and read the clarification of Ramana in the 'Talks' but we find it difficult to comprehend it. This fear is put squarely to Ramana by Brunton when he expresses the apprehension whether one would become an idiot acting without a sense of direction and cohesion if one travels beyond the

reaches of the mind. Again we find Chadwick also voicing this misgiving when he talks about the fear which used to grip him after he had meditated for some time. The mind is ready to put in a last-ditch battle by creating fears of what might happen when it is not functioning. One cannot be rid of this fear by logic, by analysis, by intellectual conviction. We have to look to Ramana for guidance and support.

Ramana says that while by habit we believe that it is natural to think, the opposite is the truth. Silence is natural and thinking is not. In that state thoughts will arise as and when required and subside when their purpose is served.

When the mind has subsided we do not become unconscious. The limited consciousness of the mind gives place to the fullness of consciousness. Ramana compares the mind to the moon and the mind's source to the sun. When the mind is anchored in its source, it is like the moon during midday. Where is the need for it when one can tap the sun at its brightest?

To drive home the point, Ramana would draw one's attention to the lives of Jesus and Buddha. Their natural state of silence did not at all come in the way of their having the thoughts necessary and appropriate for the occasion. The difference would be that their thoughts would have a purely functional purpose with no psychological add-on. The rising and ending of thoughts would be automatic. Ramana's life illustrates this tellingly. Sab-Jan, the class-mate of Bhagavan, arrives after many years. Ramana recognises him and talks to him about their school-days. For Ramana's sarcoma Devaraja Mudaliar arranges a consultation and



visit to Sri Ramanasramam by a famous physician, Dr. Guruswami Mudaliar, but the devotee is not present. Ramana asks for him recognising his special service. A sick devotee would be unable to come to the Hall. Ramana would visit him, unnoticed by others, and make tender enquiries about his health. In the early hours of the morning Ramana would be in the kitchen giving deft help and converting unpalatable dishes into 'manna' from heaven. Or one would find Ramana explaining patiently to a visiting sadhu the hallmarks of different types of 'samadhi', before emphasising that what matters is only the 'Sahaja' or natural 'samadhi'. In the evening hours he would be in the 'transcendental' state simply radiating his Peace. His relationships were so utterly normal, so utterly human in the sense that all the faculties associated with the mind, memory, reason, inference and discrimination, were there in their perfection. Yet his mind was rooted in the heart. What is the conclusion which can safely be drawn from this? It can only be that consciousness is not essentially mind-based. It springs from that which gives strength to the mind itself - the spiritual heart. Once you reach there you can talk, walk and act in harmony of symphonic orchestra at its best. Quite obviously, the ending of the mind's sovereignty does not usher in blankness. It is a myth which experience can and will shatter. On the contrary, while one is engaged in the activities which the body is destined to go through, the cup of inner bliss is full and brimming.

Once we are rid of this basic fear springing from locating consciousness in the mind only, half the job is done. How does one arrive at the state beyond the mind? For this we have Ramana's direct path. Thought flow and conceptualisation are nipped in the bud by enquiry about the truth of one's individuality. Such

enquiry, if constant and vigilant, is bound to cut at the root of identification with a particular name and form, the identification 'I am this'. One can say that the mind consists of two parts, the pure consciousness 'I am' and the thoughts beginning with 'I am this'. The effort is to cut across the thought barrier and reach the pure portion of the mind. Once we are linked to the consciousness in the 'I', it would lead us on to its source. Just as it is natural for the birds flying in the sky to get home to earth, just as it is natural for rivers to reach the ocean, it is natural for the pure 'I' to fall back to its source which is the fullness of consciousness. One can say that as surely as gravitational laws apply to the physical world, consciousness is reflected unhindered in an intuned mind. The magnetic pull of the source would take the mind within effortlessly. The journey ends in the abundant bliss of the spiritual heart.

# THE PRESENCE

An Australian journalist on a visit to Sri Ramanasramam was mystified as to why Major Chadwick, a westerner, chose to settle down at the jungle hermitage. After beating round the bush for some time, he could not help asking Chadwick pointedly as to why he chose to waste his time there. When Chadwick told him that he had come and stayed there for peace of mind, the journalist nodded his head in disbelief. How could anyone give up everything for such an intangible thing like peace of mind, was his feeling. But for Chadwick as indeed for the thousands who kept visiting Ramana and who are drawn to him even now, it is precisely that peace which Ramana's presence brings about, that draws them irresistably to him. In the Ramana Ashtotra, we have an adjective 'hrit shanthi kara sannidyaya namaha' - meaning: prostrations to one whose presence brings great peace in the heart. It might as well be made clear here that when we talk of peace of mind it is not something which is merely negative. It is not absence of thoughts, not only quietness of the mind, for we have such lulls in the thinking daily in our deep sleep and sometimes in trance and swooning. Therefore, the peace which we talk of is altogether of a different dimension. In that state, as Ramana has explained when talking of his 'death experience', the full force of one's personality is felt. It is a vibrant 'throb' 'spurana', which is felt in the heart as the fullness of bliss.

The last message of Ramana is found in his famous words, 'Where can I go, I am here'. The eternal one's presence can be felt as much now in the present day as when he was in the body. If one is experiencing this presence one must be living in an atmosphere surcharged with peace. Since we don't know its joy and exhilaration, the question would naturally arise as to how one can be consciously aware of the presence?

Generally the link with Ramana begins with the physical pull. Rooted as we are in a particular name and form in our present state, the physical magnetism radiating from Ramana's steady abidance is felt strongly. It is the pure undiluted 'atmic power' flowing from Ramana which cleanses the minds of those coming within the orbit of his grace. It is so difficult to cut across the physical basis of this relationship which after his 'mahasamadhi' has taken the form of chanting the holy name of Ramana and being drawn to his holy shrine at Sri Ramanasramam and elsewhere. This also explains the understandable attraction to the wondrous photograph of Ramana. Often one just cannot take one's eyes away from the darling face whose beauty grows on you the more you look at it. It is understandable because Ramana points out in 'Sat-Darshana' that so long as one regards oneself as the body, the worship of the Supreme in the bodily form comes naturally.

While recognising the reality of the physical factor, we have to avoid the danger of linking ourselves only with the golden hued brilliance of Ramana's body. For, Ramana is the Satguru transcending body, time and space. Ramana was aware of the reality of this danger and would use every opportunity to drive home the truth that he is not only the body which the devotees loved dearly, but the Self, shining within, without and everywhere. Through the many months when Ramana's body was racked with sarcoma, he picked up every opportunity to demonstrate that the disease and its consequences pertained only to the body and that it could in no way affect his state of bliss.

Unfortunately this lesson which he so patiently dinned into all of us was lost as it were on us. Hence we had to witness the phenomenon of the great exodus from

Ramanasramam immediately after the ‘maha samadhi’. Hence also the various complaints even by the devotees who had many opportunities of moving closely with Ramana about their inability to find peace away from his physical presence.

The question naturally arises as to how one can cut across this time-space barrier springing from the limitations which we impose on ourselves by the idea that we are the body. The scriptures say that if one attaches oneself to the Satguru, this very attachment leads the person on to freedom from all attachments. It is important therefore to care enough to establish a continuous relationship which gives us the company of Ramana. Here the means to be adopted depend upon one’s natural inclination and often several means have to be combined to achieve the object of a sustained relationship with Ramana. In this context one has to remember that the relationship with the Satguru is a two way traffic. One must do all that one can to stoke the fire of love for Ramana and to keep the flame burning ever-bright. For, the Satguru’s grace is operating all the time, to push the devotee within and guide him along the inward journey.

As mentioned earlier, the methodology for turning oneself over to Ramana is varied because of the diversity of human temperaments. The instance of Mrs. Kamat, a visitor to the Ramana Shrine at Bangalore, illustrates. She found that when she was strenuously trying to follow self-enquiry, her mind would wander all the time, whereas the moment she opened any book on Ramana’s teachings the mind would turn inward in a jiffy. Such is the power of the word for her. Mrs. Kamat is typical example of many whom Ramana attracts through books, be it Paul Brunton’s ‘Search in Secret

India', Arthur Osborne's 'Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge', Cohen's 'Guru Ramana' and so on. The growth of Ramana music and dance in this decade is evidence enough of the drawing power of bhakti centred on Ramana. Each has his treasured moments with Ramana and none has the right to look down upon other means which may not be his cup of tea. So long as one does not lose sight of the fact that what matters really is to be in Ramana's presence, every single step towards this is the right step. Once the mind is possessed by Ramana, when it is filled with thoughts of him, then it is only a step from this single-mindedness to the state beyond.

One has to be always wary of the mind's ways which can trick us of the companionship of Ramana. Cohen records how after several years of sadhana at Sri Ramana's feet at Ramanasramam, suddenly he felt the need for a change, the need for a pilgrimage. He himself was aware that the holy company of Ramana, for which he had left his home, was all that was needed. Yet, bitten by this pilgrimage bug he lost several precious years of physical proximity to Ramana. Swami Ashishananda recalled that just when he was on the threshold of highest experience he was persuaded to leave the Ashram by his relatives, and it took years and years of sadhana to get back to the state. Mind has its deceiving ways, yet it is the only instrument one has, the only vehicle to our natural state of bliss in which Ramana is revelling. For, the mind has a conscious content, the 'I am' which makes it a bridge back to the natural state. Attention to the 'I', or more accurately, to its source, makes for inwardness leading to spells of experiencing the joy of the natural state. The progress is always a matter of gradual ripening which comes from this 'Upasana' of steady relationship with Ramana through any means to which one is naturally

inclined. To these other means, self-enquiry can be usefully added as a most potent instrument. Imperceptibly the barrier of duality ends. The individual current merges in the universal. Then we are truly in Ramana's domain, the spiritual heart.

# LET THERE BE AN ARMY OF THOUGHTS

Life is a movement in time. Each moment is different from one which has gone by, the metabolism of the body changes every minute, there is growth and decay all round in creation. When one feels this sense of transience, a yearning dawns for finding out what life and death mean. Janaka was a generous and virtuous king worshipped by the people of his country. But he was content to let life go by till the divine took a hand in transforming him. Once while enjoying his beautiful park, he suddenly heard the songs of invisible siddhas. Their message was clear for Janaka, as for us: the longest life is but a ripple in the ocean of time.

How does one make the best use of the time allotted to each one by karma? Given the compulsive desire to be immortal, to be timeless here and now, what should one do? Freedom from time's shackles is certainly possible, assures Ramana. If one abides in the natural state there is no fetter of time. This state is 'available to all, at all times, under all conditions'. What veils and shrouds the truth, clouds our understanding? If one enquires what it is that obstructs, one discovers that it is only the screen of thoughts. We are heirs to the multitude of thoughts born of incomplete action. As Ramana points out, our actions 'are performed with part of the mind and with frequent breaks'. This is inescapable in a situation when the mind is splintered by various desires pulling at cross purposes. The desire to hang on only to pleasant thoughts also adds to the difficulty. The consequences of such action are the indelible memory marks which make the past an integral part of the mind. The thought force so created



would give a directional push to current action thereby shaping the future as well. The very vastness of such thoughts and their variety is responsible for the diffidence felt and the fear expressed to Ramana that one may always be a victim of time, bound hand and foot to the past, to karma. Ramana would never countenance such thoughts and would point out that thoughts such as, 'attainment is hard', 'Self-realisation is not for me' or 'I have many difficulties to overcome' should be given up as they are obstacles and are not true. Why worry? Others have succeeded. Why can't we? For, in the Ramana way, the past consisting of thoughts, good, bad and indifferent, is just to be swept away without a second look. Why fear the army of thoughts? 'The objects are many, but the subject is one'. Hence the repeated emphasis of Ramana on the need to focus attention 'on the thinker behind the thought', 'the one behind the act of willing', 'the actor behind the action'.

What is being attempted is to gear spiritual practice to bestowing attention on the consciousness behind the phenomenon. This was the advice Humphreys got way back in 1911. 'Do not fix your attention on all these changing things, life, death and phenomenon. Do not think even of the actual act of seeing them but only of that which sees all these things'. What is advised is to 'remain fixed in a steady, non-objective, enquiry'. It is the individual's attention which waters the thoughts and gives life to them. It is common experience that only to the extent to which we are aware of other thoughts they exist for us. Just as the life of a tree is in its roots and not in its numerous branches of thousands of leaves, so too it is the individual's attention which matters. If it is not given, other thoughts just wither and fade away.

One has to pause at this point to consider whether the mind is an independent energy source. Reflecting on one's daily experience, one finds that the mind (the individual and the other thoughts) is non-existent in sleep even though there is no break in our consciousness, which is continuous. So the mind, the individual, is not self-conscious. If this is so, what is the source from which the individual derives this consciousness? Ramana helps by indicating it to be the spiritual heart. From this it would follow that the shifting of attention from thoughts to the thinker, to the 'I', is not an end in itself. It is only a step 'in the process of withdrawing attention and interest from what one is not'. Attention of the mind on its core has to be sustained till one reaches the 'magnetic zone' of the heart. 'The attitude of self-enquiry must permeate our entire way of living'. Diving within with attention clearly focussed on the 'I' leads on to the point where the power of the heart takes over. The individual current merges with the universal and one travels beyond the shores of time. One is born anew to an awareness of oneness of life.

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