

the Ramana way in search of self



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by
Kumari Sarada

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PREFACE

'Ramana' has endeared itself to its readers thanks to Kumari Sarada. She is blessed in many ways, having been 'caught young' in Ramana's net of Grace. What marks out her editorials is the simplicity and clarity of communicating ideas centred around the life and teachings of Bhagavan. This springs from her basic approach based on an intuitive understanding of the Master's teaching, an unerring comprehension of first principles and total dedication to Him. What she writes, therefore is well suited to the Ramana way with its directness and emphasis on practice and experience. This special mark in her writings is seen in the papers she has read on Maharshi's teachings - 'The Liberating Question' and 'Goodbye 'I', Hello 'I'-I". For the past few months, in her editorials she has been writing on the technique of self-enquiry as a cogent series, which has been compiled here. It would be of use to all earnest seekers. One can only express the hope, and pray, that Bhagavan would keep her 'ever-vigilant', that she should continue to be a channel of His mighty transforming power.

Ugadi Day
March 22
Bangalore

A. R. NATARAJAN

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IN SEARCH OF SELF

‘RAMANA’ - the very name is sweet. ‘Ramana’, the sweet one, we say. But most often the name passes from our lips coated with mechanical habit. Its special, its unique taste is lost on us. We mouth it as we mouth most words, with practised ease and pausing not a moment to flavour its particularity, to ponder on its meaning. ‘Ramana’ - what does it mean?

I was particularly struck by this question. Here was I, writing every month in a journal called ‘Ramana’ and I had not paused to ask what it really meant.

There was this feeling that ‘Ramana’ meant ‘one who revels in the Self’. The dictionary, however, described ‘Ramana’ as ‘pleasing, gratifying, delightful, charming’. He who is the source of all Joy and Delight, He is ‘Ramana’. And suddenly, I recalled a verse from the *Bhagavatam*. Pingala, the dancing girl, in a moment recognises the futility of her wait for the King and turns inward saying: “Ignoring *Ramana* ever near me, giving me delight and all round happiness, I resort to one who causes only misery, fear, sorrow and delusion.”

What is that which is ever near, giving delight and all round happiness? The Self - and the Self she refers to as ‘Ramana’. ‘Ramana’ is not just ‘one who revels in the Self’. ‘Ramana’ is

the Self, shining in every one of us, the source of our every delight and bliss. 'Ramana' is the most beloved, for He is ever near in the Heart, the source of all love, Love itself.

A scholar devotee confirmed this by saying, " 'Ramana' is the same as 'Rama'. When Vasishta was asked to name Rama, he said, 'Since He is That in which all sages revel, let Him be called Rama'."

Little wonder that the name sounds so sweet, for, is it not naming the source of all sweetness? As 'Ramana' is the Self shining in every one of us as the Heart, He may be described as the Light. 'Ra' is the Sun, 'Na' the Moon, and 'Ma' is Fire, thus 'Ramana' is all light. He is the Self, which is effulgent Consciousness, the Immortal Being and the Joy of Grace. We cannot better describe 'Ramana' than in His own words on Arunachala:

"Ocean of Nectar, Full of Grace,
O Self Supreme, O Mount of Light!"

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'Ramana' is the resplendent, blissful Self, ever in us and everywhere, the One without a second. The One without a second? Aye, there's the rub. How do we know Him, love Him, serve Him? If He is our very Self, how can we adore

Him? Adoration implies an adorer and an object of adoration and the process of adoring. We can look at something outside us, respond to, love, something that is apart from, different from, us. But our very Self?

How can we have any knowledge of Him or relationship with Him? For, as He is the Self, as He transcends the mind, we certainly cannot know Him with the mind. The mind deals only with phenomena, it is externalised, associated with matter, a constitutional materialist dealing with concepts of time and space, dealing only with relative phenomena. The mind can comprehend the past, present and future, but can it comprehend a Power before time, beginningless and endless, ancient yet ever fresh?

It appears to be every disheartening, Here is Ramana who we say is the source of all joy and life, the very core of our existence. And yet we cannot serve or love Him, we cannot know Him.

‘Don’t worry’, Bhagavan seems to say, as, with His infinite compassion, He anticipates our problem and dissolves it. ‘How to know the Heart, the inner Being free from thoughts? He asks in the very opening of *Sat-Darshanam*, and answers: ‘To know it is to be it, in the Heart’.

The true way of Ramana love, of Ramana service, is to abide ever in the Heart, in the Self, in Ramana.

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Once, as we drove along the luscious green valleys and slopes of Himachal, the river Beas travelled beside us. Wide and torrential in its gushing flow in the valley, conjoined with the force of many tributaries, it dwindled upwards into just a forceful stream as we moved towards its source among the high peaks. And then we reached its source, the Beas Kunj. But we were told, deep within the glacial ice the river flowed from some unknown spot till it reached this, its visible source. And I thought that if, perhaps, we had the right attire and machinery, we could enter the glacier and follow the river to its true source.

The feeling of individuality, the sense of 'I' in every one of us, is much like this gigantic river. So much is it the very core of our daily existence: wide, wild, gushing, torrential, an insurmountable force. Without this feeling of 'I' there is no existence, no world for us. It is because 'I' exist, that I cognise the world and everything other than 'I'. And it is this 'I' which permeates our entire existence - things and people exist for me only in relation to me. Every

thought is linked with the 'I'- thought even as the river is fed by many tributaries.

Let us pause a minute and move inward, towards the source. Let us strip the 'I'- thought, this feeling of 'I', of all its relations and see it in its utter nakedness. Let us for a moment observe the 'I', just the 'I' - not as we are wont, with 'I think', 'I want' or 'I see', 'I feel' or 'I' anything.

Yes, we observe just the 'I', now not the huge river fed by related thoughts, but by itself, a smaller, gentler stream. What is this 'I'? Where is its source? To track this 'I' to its true source we must don the special attire of eternal vigilance, of constant, joyous attention and we must use the special machinery of self-enquiry given to us by Bhagavan. Through attentive and persistent self-enquiry we can follow the 'I' back to its source, the Heart, and abide there.

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“Through attentive and persistent self-enquiry we can follow the 'I' back to its source, the Heart, and abide there.” When such a statement is made, many doubts may arise in the mind of the reader. What is this 'I'? Why is it thought that it has a source, which, in turn, is identified as the Heart? What is self-enquiry, and what attentive and persistent self-enquiry?

No, there seems to be a mistake here. The first question is absurd. Why should anyone ask 'What is this 'I'? After all, each one of us have been living with ourselves all our lives. It would be ridiculous to suggest that we don't know ourselves. I, for instance, know quite well enough that I am Sarada, having a particular form and a particular way of thinking. Funny though, what happens to this form, this name and this thinking in my dreams. I am a different person! And, what happens in deep sleep is more alarming. I seem to disappear altogether! But when I awake, there I am again, saying 'I slept well'. It is these experiences of dream and sleep in my daily existence which make me wonder whether I can be all that sure about knowing myself.

One thing, of course, is common to both my waking and dream personality - I am aware of my existence and I am identified with some name and form (though they may be different in waking and in dream). At all moments I know, I am aware, that I exist. So, I can confidently say that I know this much of myself - 'I' is a feeling of existence and, almost simultaneously, it is a feeling of identification (I exist as *someone*).

But there is still that problem of deep sleep. What happens to me then? Certainly there is no feeling of identification. In fact, even the feeling

of existence seems to be absent. No, not quite, for, there is a recollection of existence when I say, 'I slept well'.

So, I can surmise that 'I' is the feeling of existence (not even the feeling of identification which disappears in deep sleep). Yet, I am not satisfied. After all, this is only a surmise. Where does this feeling of 'I' disappear when I am fast asleep? Why is it that I must only *recollect* my existence in sleep? Is there something more to 'I' than I am aware of?

This question is the beginning of self-enquiry - the attitude of questioning our own nature, our own identity. Who am I? This puzzle, a genuine attitude of doubt, is the first step of self-enquiry. And the path of following up this puzzle is the process of self-enquiry. A process it is, which Bhagavan has given to us on the basis of His own experience. The intense fear of death, in that sacred July, drove inward the mind of the boy Venkataraman. He enacted death and enquired about its nature, 'Who is it that dies? 'Do 'I' die with death? And the enquiry brought in a flash the awareness of the Truth, which stayed ever as a stable experience in Bhagavan. And this experience He translated for us into the method of self-enquiry. So, let us too now sow this seed of doubt about our own nature.

The question 'What is this 'I'? has led, not to an answer but to an awareness that we are not fully conscious of our own nature. We have grown to understand that the 'I' daily sets in deep sleep and rises on waking, hence it must have a source into which it disappears and from which it reappears. But what that source is, we are not aware.

Hence, donning the garb of inward explorers, let us solve for ourselves the enigma of our own true nature. We are now armed with the questing spirit, the basis of self-enquiry. How do we proceed? How do we track the 'I'-thought to its source? Simply by observing it.

It is known that the baboons of the African deserts have their secret water sources even in the slakiest of summers. The bushman of the Kalahari simply holds a baboon captive, feeds him salt to make him sufficiently thirsty, and then lets him loose. The baboon rushes to the water source followed by the bushman and both quench their thirst.

The 'I' - thought is like our African monkey. It must return to its source and gain succour, and so it does daily in sleep. But then, we want to track it to the source while we are awake and conscious. For this we must isolate the 'I'-thought and rivet our entire attention on it.

The 'I' - thought occurs only in association with other thoughts: 'I feel', 'I see', 'I enquire'. It assumes an independent identity for itself linked with a particular name and form and thereafter linked with associated thoughts. When we rob the 'I'-thought of these supports (of its linkage with other thoughts) and scrutinise it on its own, it immediately falls back for support into its source. And as we observe this, the observing mind, along with the 'I'-thought, merges in the source, the thirst for knowledge is quenched. This is self-enquiry, the victorious path! Bhagavan expresses it thus in *Sat-Darshanam*:

“On the rising of the ego everything rises
with its subsidence all subside
The ego is therefore all
Tracking it is the way to victory over
everything.”

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The victorious path of self-enquiry taught by Ramana is a simple one. Bhagavan has said so repeatedly and emphatically. In *Upadesa Saram* He declares:

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

This is the straight path.”

By terming self-enquiry 'simple' and 'straight' it is implied that the intellectual understanding of this method is simple. And, though the practice of it is by no means child's play, if pursued properly it is absolutely direct.

The question would naturally follow, 'What is the 'proper' pursuit of self-enquiry? When the 'I'-thought is isolated, attentively observed, and attacked with the intense enquiry 'Who am I? it falls back into its source, the Self, and abides there - this is true self-enquiry.

However, in practice, the 'I' - thought often resists the attack of self-enquiry. Instead of immediately falling back into the source it takes refuge in the long habit of associated thoughts or in the lull of false quietude. What happens as we observe the 'I'-thought and attempt to isolate it (in order to track it to the Self) is that it refuses to get isolated. For a split-second it seems to us our entire attention is focused on the 'I'-thought. We have it pinned under the searchlight of enquiry. But no! It has run away again into a labyrinth of other thoughts. Very often it is a few seconds or even many minutes before we are aware that the attention has wandered away from the 'I'-thought. But the moment we are aware of the presence of other thoughts let us tackle them with the question 'For whom are these thoughts? The answer

naturally follows, 'For me'. Then, 'Who am I ? The attention, with this question (and the attitude of doubt that accompanies it), is back on the 'I'-thought. How long the attention stays there depends on its intensity. Attention is the key word in self-enquiry - observation and attention. And as often as the mind wanders away in the maze of varied thoughts, attention must be brought back to the observation of the 'I'-thought.

This may appear to be a tedious process, for, attention may waver anywhere between never and a few hundred times even in a few minutes of self-enquiry. But if we are genuinely gripped by the attitude of enquiry, the whole process would be an exciting adventure. Madame Curie, for years melting masses of pitchblende (to isolate radium) in a dingy garage, against all odds, did not give up, thinking the process 'tedious'. Surely, we who wish to isolate the 'I'-thought, the basis of our entire existence, cannot afford to find the practice tiresome. As Bhagavan instructs in the *Appalam* Song, we must "ever, unwearied, joyously" pursue self-enquiry. And what a discovery awaits to fulfil this constant vigilance - the ever-effulgent, overflowing Bliss of the Self!

With an intense attitude of enquiry we have isolated the 'I' - thought and observed it with consuming attention. Now, we are sure, it cannot escape into dissipating thoughts but must necessarily fall back into the Self, its succour.

But alas! The 'I' - thought has other tricks up its sleeve. It will not so easily relinquish its falsely independent identity. The force of attention is so strong on it that it cannot now escape into other, associated thoughts. So it brings about a lull, or quiet of mind. This lull is dangerous, for it is a false quietude and yet is attractive (as any quietude is a relief from the constant tension of thoughts). The danger lies in mistaking it for the true Silence of the Self.

One might wonder, 'How do we recognise whether our quietude is a false lull or the true Silence? There are two factors which help us distinguish between the two. The moment when there is absence of sorrow can hardly be equated to the moment which pulsates with joy. Even so, the lull of the mind or *mano-laya*, as Bhagavan terms it, is merely the absence of thoughts, it is not the positive, vibrant Silence of the Self. Bhagavan narrated the story of a Yogi who practised such quietening of the mind. After asking for a glass of water he once fell into a trance of quietness for many many years. The moment he awoke he shouted, 'Water, water'.

If this was the case with the last, superficial thought, Bhagavan pointed out, what would happen to the deep-rooted tendencies? And the most deeply rooted, the limited identity of the 'I' - thought, would naturally remain unshaken.

Also, when the mind is thus temporarily quiet, there is an awareness of quietness for someone. That is to say, I am aware that *I am quiet*. That means there is 'I' and there is 'quietness' and the quietness is for the 'I'. The Self is itself peace, the Self is Silence (the Self is not 'silent' - there is no process, just Existence.) Hence, a quietness which is 'for me' indicates that there are still two separate identities, the 'I' - thought is not merged in the unity of the Self, but has linked itself now with quietude (instead of with other thoughts). It is still linked and not isolated. So, Bhagavan says, pursue the enquiry further, ask, 'For whom is this quietness? The answer will come, as before, 'For me'. Then, 'Who am I?'

When the 'I' - thought is thus pursued beyond even the false lull, all its escape routes are cut off, it has to retreat into the Self. Then shines forth the Peace and Silence in which there is no one to experience quietness, no one to pursue the enquiry and no one to give the answers. For, the pursuit, the answers, the

quietness, the experience, are all the One, the Self.

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When the 'I' - thought is finally merged at its source, the Self, and abides there, there is no one any more to ask questions or to give answers. All is the Self. 'Then, what happens to me? Do 'I' die? Will there be a void? How will I exist? How will I function without any thoughts? These are some of the doubts which assail a seeker who wishes to set forth on the adventure of self-enquiry.

It is a wonder that we should so fear. All navigators feared that their ships would fall off the edge of the flat earth until one made bold and sailed the invisible corners of the round earth. What he met with was not death but the death of fear (for himself and all navigators thereafter) and the discovery of a far greater Earth to roam free on.

The loss of the 'I' - thought in the Self is not a death but the gain of true Life. For, the 'I' - thought, only a reflection of the Consciousness of the Self, has merely been 'masquerading' as the Self. Merging back at the source, we discover the Kingdom of Bliss as our very own, no, as our very Self. Bhagavan describes the sheer ecstasy of this state: "the whole body

becomes a mere power, a force - a current... it is an inundation; you, a mere straw, you are swallowed alive, but it is very delightful, for you become the very thing that swallows you."

The river of the 'I' - thought, which we began to trace alongside the Himalayan Beas, is now back at its source, the Heart. This Heart is not the physical, blood circulating organ, explains Bhagavan. It is the spiritual Heart, two digits to the right of the centre (a digit is approximately the width of a finger). Bhagavan has repeatedly pointed out that the Heart is the source, the Centre, itself the Self; thus giving us all an invaluable clue. It is much easier to locate an object in a large house if we know the exact room and spot in which it is placed. Searching as we are for the source of the 'I' - thought, the location of the spiritual Heart is an important clue in our treasure-hunt. If, as we try to track the 'I' - thought to the source, we know that it rises from the Heart we can focus our attention in that direction. This would also prevent futile focusing of attention in the brain. There is often a misconception that the source of thoughts (and so also the 'I' - thought) is the brain. Bhagavan categorically says this is a mistake. The source of the 'I' - thought is only the Heart. Thus, from the very beginning of our search we can travel in the right direction. Bhagavan has

given the very Centre of the Self, we have only to track the 'I' - thought to this Centre and experience as our very Self the resplendent throb of the Heart.

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We had reached the Heart of Bliss, the incessant throb of light, the Self. Are we still there? If we are still rooted in the Self there is no more to say. But, perhaps, we have strayed away again. Yes it often happens in the Self-ward way that having once reached the destination, we yet return to the habitual sway of the masquerader, the 'I' - thought.

But the path of self-enquiry, by leading us to intermittent dips in the Self, has whetted our taste for that Bliss and like one drugged we return again and again to drink of that Peace, until, one day, we return no more for we have not moved away at all.

Till then, however, eternal vigilance must light our path, all along the way, from the very beginning. Even as we begin the search our attention to the 'I' - thought and its source must be both intense and continuous. Self-enquiry is not a pill to be swallowed once in a while, a method for our Sunday practice; it is the life-breath. It must be a part of our everyday

moments. The attitude of self-enquiry must permeate our entire way of living and enquiring attention to the 'I' - thought must occupy every idle moment.

Again, fear rears its head among seekers of the Truth. It is true perhaps that Galileo talked only of physics even to his house-keeper's son or that Ramanujan perceived extraordinary mathematical relationships even in a taxi number. But we, we only want to know about ourselves (and more often than not, though we claim to have the attitude of enquiry, are quite smugly confident that we already know ourselves.) For that there is ample time. The things which need our urgent attention lie elsewhere, our work, our food and sleep, our daily pleasures and pains. 'In the midst of all this how would it be possible to continually and attentively track the 'I' - thought? we wonder. It is a sad plight.

But Bhagavan is Compassion incarnate. Don't worry, He assures us, it is enough if you devote a few minutes a day to self-enquiry. If it is properly practised in this time its current will automatically continue throughout the day. Breathing is so natural to us that it does not require our constant attention. However, when our nose is blocked we may have to put some nasal drops and perform breathing exercises to

breathe normally again. We have forgotten our Natural State, the Self, and self-enquiry is the exercise to clear this blockade of forgetfulness. A little of this medicine will clear the way for the natural current to resume its force.

However, for such of us who intensely yearn for Self-knowledge and are burning with enquiry, Bhagavan has advocated continuous, joyous self-enquiry. Then, 'Lo! Very easy is Self-Knowledge. Very easy indeed!'

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Why is it important to use self-enquiry as the tool in the Self-search? Bhagavan never discarded any method as useless. On the other hand, if someone told Him about a method they were practising, He would often ask them to continue the same. This sometimes led to the impression that Bhagavan advocated all these practices for Self-experience. However, Bhagavan has in many places stated with emphasis that all these methods are only aids for purifying the mind and self-enquiry must be resorted to before Self-abidance becomes an experienced reality. Hence, He has pointed out, it would be much simpler to begin the inner journey with self-enquiry itself.

But why is it that self-enquiry is a must for Self-knowledge? Because, only by tackling the

'I' - thought can we get back to it's source. All other thoughts are dependent on the 'I' - thought. So, when other thoughts are being handled, the 'I'- thought still continues to reign supreme, unaffected.

'What if?' we may well ask, unless we examine again the nature of this 'I' - thought. What exactly is this 'I' - thought or 'ego' (as it is often called)? This 'I' - thought, we analysed earlier, is both a feeling of existence and a feeling of identification. The 'I', however, is just the feeling of blissful existence which continues even in deep sleep. But the 'I' - thought exists only during waking and dream and is also a feeling of identification with a particular name and form.

The 'I' - thought is important because, it alone of all thoughts partakes of the feeling of existence which is the quality of the Self. Bhagavan gives the vivid example of a dog tracing its master by his scent. Even so the 'I' - thought has the scent of awareness, (of existence) of the Self. At the same time it is also linked with the body by a feeling of identification. Hence, only the 'I' - thought forms a bridge between one's current knowledge of oneself and the Complete, True, Self. The 'I'-thought in short, is a reflection of the consciousness of the Self identifying itself with, and limiting itself to, the body.

Thus, with the help of this bridge alone can we cross back to the experience of the Self. The 'I'-thought must give up its false sense of independent identity. It must recognise that it's power comes from the Self alone, fall back into the Self, and abide there. But will the 'ego' face the fact that it has no independent existence apart from the Self? Will it accept that it exists only as a reflection of the Self? Will it commit 'suicide'? No, the masquerader is enjoying the power he commands, the 'ego' will not so easily relinquish it's falsely independent existence. It will only do so if it is weakened and perforce has to return to its source for renewed strength. And how else can it be weakened but by enquiry?

We would wonder why the ego cannot be tackled by other means. By meditation, worship, and discrimination will not the ego be sublimated and understand its mistake? No, says Bhagavan - the mind will certainly become pure and one-pointed, ready to plunge within, but the ego will yet remain to be dealt with. In any other method, the ego itself becomes responsible for the practice, it disguises itself in subtle forms like, 'I meditate very well', 'What a devout person I am', 'With what dedication I worship the Lord'. Even a person, absolutely humble in the Lord's service and the inward search, may one day find himself faced with an ego which rears its head, 'How humble I

am'. The forms which an ego can take are endless and it is a master of elusive disguises.

The only thing it cannot face is the searchlight of enquiry, like the imposter who attached himself to a bridegroom. All the time the bridegroom believed he was an important man in the bride's party and the bride's people thought he was the bridegroom's dear friend. Finally, his behaviour being unbearable, they began to enquire about him from each other. The next moment the imposter took to his heels. Even so, the ego will take to its heels only when faced with an enquiry about its identity. Bhagavan says in *Sat-Darshanam*:

“Born of forms, rooted in forms
Feeding on forms, ever changing its forms
Itself formless, this ego-ghost
Takes to its heels on enquiry.”

One thing, however, must be understood clearly that 'enquiry' here is not an intellectual process. 'Enquiry' does not mean a mechanical repetition of the question 'Who am I? It is both an attitude of doubt about our identity and a question used only to draw the attention back to the 'I'-thought. This also indicates that no answer should be given to the question 'Who am I? Giving an answer, any answer, would imply that we already know our Self and hence

need not enquire. But, it is because we do not know, experientially, the whole truth of our Self, that we are enquiring. The enquiry should be made and no answer attempted. Only, attention must be riveted on the 'I'-thought. It has then no alternative but to merge in the Self.

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Grace is the pulsating awareness of Bhagavan's Presence. It may be that we feel His Presence when a prayer is fulfilled. We may experience it in the sweetness of His Name and Form or just the blooming of a flower, the rainbow spray of a waterfall. That moment when His Presence is an experienced reality is the moment of Grace. It is like the first overwhelming glimpse of a snow-caressed Himalayan range, cool-lit by the moon. It has the overpowering majesty of the silent mountains and the tender love of the soft, blue-white snow.

For, Grace experienced is the Self savoured. Grace and the Self are the same force of Powerful-Peace. And the Sadguru, as the throbbing luminosity of the Self within us, draws us to Himself through Grace.

Some may wonder how Grace and the practice of self-enquiry are interlinked. But the

very understanding of the unity of Grace and the Self makes apparent its absolute necessity in the Self-ward way. The bliss of the Self is known to us only in the recollected peace of deep-sleep. But Grace is a waking joy. Thus, it provides us with a conscious glimpse of the Self. And this opiate taste of vibrant awareness tempts us to plunge within repeatedly, away from the habitually externalised lures of the mind. It recharges our quest with renewed vigour.

Bhagavan explains that Grace and self-enquiry interact. The very attitude of enquiry is a result of Grace, of the magnetic pull of the Self. And self-enquiry, in turn, re-opens the flood-gates of Grace. But in moments of despondency, when all effort seems futile, it is to Grace we must turn. There sometimes arise, in the Self-ward path, problems special to the individual which no book or knowledge of the spiritual methodology can solve. Turning to Grace is the only refuge. At such times when we consciously turn to it, and at many moments when we do not even do so, Grace overwhelms with its ecstatic power. The operation of Grace seems secret. Yet, what if we can never comprehend its mystery, it is enough, more than enough, to taste the eye-misting, bone-melting sweetness of its Glory.

HEART'S FESTIVAL

THE LIGHT

The glow of light from a red-brick building makes a gentle outline in the already blue-lit moon-filled sky - the chanting of *Arunachala Siva* mingles with this brightness. *Arunachala Siva* in children's voices echoes within lovely grey stone walls - a circle of soft light surrounds the endearing picture at the centre. A fire is lighted in a cauldron of ghee surrounded by the echoes of *Arunachala Siva*, the fire looks up to the fire atop the glowing red Hill of the Holy Beacon. The scenes are at Ramana Kendra, Delhi, at the Ramana Centre, Bangalore and at Sri Ramanasramam. The day - *Karthigai Deepam*.

On Deepam days not only was the sky bright with the full moon and the earth with myriad lamps and Arunachala with its beacon, but devotees describe Bhagavan's special radiance on those days. As the time for the lighting of the beacon neared, He would fix His luminous gaze on the peak and then exclaim, with tears pouring down His cheeks - 'It is lit'. Bhagavan, explaining the true meaning of Karthigai Deepam in a verse, says that the true perception of the Beacon is to merge in the Heart, the source of all light, the only Light.

Viswanatha Swami once wrote to me after Deepam saying, 'This time the beacon was hidden by dark clouds, we could not see it as it was lit. Even so the Self is lost to our perception because of the perpetual thought that form a cloud screen'. Deepam is indeed the time when we should submerge this barrier of thoughts into its very source, by holding on to the chief-thought, the 'I'-thought and tracking it back to the Heart.

It beholding the light without can be so joyous, how much more must be the joy of being engulfed in the light of Arunachala-Ramana!

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JOY AND NEW LIFE

1984. One more group of 365 days have rolled by and another group has begun. It is 'New Year'. What makes the year 'new'? The fact that the Earth has begun one more orbit round the Sun? That can hardly be new - it is the age old pattern. Every dawn we do not wish each other 'Happy new day'! Then what makes the turn of the year so special?

It is a time of reckoning and a time of 'new' hope. In every festive wishing of 'Happy New

Year' is the hope that this fresh beginning will bring a period of joy. And for us, for devotees of Bhagavan, what else can be more joyous than loving Him, serving Him and losing ourselves in Him as the Self?

Indeed, the very words, new life, new hope, 'new' - can mean to us only turning more steadily within and inhering in the Self. For, that alone is hope, joy, life and, ever new. As if to emphatically bring home this fact to us, He who is to guide us, draw us within, took on the most comely human form, just at the turn of the year. Our Master Ramana's Jayanti falls on the 30th of December, according to the English calendar - just a day ahead of new year. This Jayanti both reminds us of the true import of 'new year' - to turn within with renewed vigour - and gives us the assurance that His Grace is always with us, His presence made available even as we wish for joy and new life.

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EVERYWHERE AND IN ALL TIME

Friday, April 14, 1950. 8.47 p.m. Thousands of people witnessed a unique blazing star shooting into the sky from a point at Sri Ramanasramam, with unparalleled luminosity moving slowly

across the sky, and disappearing behind the peak of Arunachala. Just at that moment Bhagavan had attained *Maha Samadhi*.

On Jayanti the eternal clothed itself in human form and came to us as our Bhagavan. For, only if we saw Him in human form showing us every moment that He transcended it, could we understand that we too are not limited to our respective bodies. If Jayanti is thus the dawn of awakening Aradhana (the day marking the *Maha Samadhi*) is the steadying of Wisdom. On this day Bhagavan showed us emphatically that He was not limited to the human body, that He is the light in every one of us. And from that day on we have felt His Presence as we turn within. Aradhana is the day affirming His continuous Presence. As He Himself repeatedly pointed out 'Where can I go? I am here'.

And instances have been numerous when those who yearn for Him, have automatically experienced His Presence and guidance.

It is not as if He was ever limited by the body. Even when He was in that comely form people felt His Presence miles away from Tiruvannamalai. Yet at the time of His *Maha Samadhi* devotees wept. Many thought the Ashram would never be the same again. Soon they realised they were wrong. The very same

Peace pervaded. They came to know that the Sadguru to whom they had constantly turned for guidance was shining within them, as the Self, drawing them inward. And many are those who, never having seen Him while in that lovely form, are drawn to Him, and feel the companionship of His Power and Grace as they tread the inward, spiritual path.

Aradhana, Ramana Aradhana - the word means 'worship'. How better can we worship our Master than to be united with Him, to be drawn into His unerring net of Grace and abide as Him, as the Self?

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THE NIGHT AWAKE

29th February. It is Sivaratri night. For those who know the meaning of the word '*Svaratri*', this sentence must be tautology. For, '*ratri*' itself means night. Hence, it is Sivaratri - the night of Siva. Why the night? All other festivals are celebrated during the day. True, on Deepavali we burn lamps at night - but, even that is not termed '*Deeparatri*'. Why then is this festival, 'the night of Siva' and not 'the day of Siva'.

Our normal activity (or non-activity) for the night is slumber, deep-sleep. But on this, Siva's

night we are expected to stay awake, to keep vigil. The very term 'awake' brings to our mind its close relative, the term 'aware'. To be awake is to be aware, while to be asleep is to be unaware of all things, including even oneself (as we know ourselves)! To be awake to Śiva is the purpose of Śivaratri. Not to slumber in the ignorance of wrong identification, in the darkness of thinking ourselves to be only the limited body-mind, but to awake to the true awareness of the Self, to arise into the light that is Śiva.

Still, why must we awake to this Śiva awareness only in a night of vigil, why not a day of vigil? Because, the day brings with it the domain of the mind, even as we awake, the 'I'-thought rises and along with it rise the hordes of associated thoughts. But, as we fall asleep the 'I'-thought merges at its source, the Self (to rise again only the next morning). However, we are not aware of this merger in sleep. If, while awake we can track the 'I'-thought back to the very source where it merges automatically in sleep, Self-awareness would result. So it is that the 'night' of the 'I'-thought losing itself in the Self, must occur simultaneously with the Awareness that is Śiva. Hence, Śivaratri. And every moment of our lives must be Śivaratri.

To help us in this constant vigil of tracking the 'I'-thought back to its source and abiding there, Bhagavan shines as the Self drawing us from within. And from without He creates the situation conducive to our turning within.

Let us, as we pursue constantly this vigil of Sivaratri, remember a beautiful incident of Siva Ramana which Viswanatha Swami narrated. One Sivaratri, a devotee approached Bhagavan and requested: "Bhagavan, please explain the meaning of the *Dakshinamurti Ashtakam*. Listening to You will be the best way to spend this night". Bhagavan assented and was silent. Before anyone knew it, it was morning! When the devotee reminded, "Bhagavan, you had said you would explain the *Dakshinamurti Ashtakam*", Bhagavan smiled and said: "That is what I have been doing all this time!"

WHY RAMANA?

The life, the light, which pours forth from Bhagavan Ramana's vibrant eyes infuses meaning and fulfilment, life in our lives. His serene presence draws us in silence, envelops and permeates every tiny detail of our daily existence. His loving grace and gentle smile solve all problems, answer every question and wipe confusion clear away. His presence, ever available to all, is the source of perennial joy.

To satisfy such sceptics as may look down upon this 'subjective experience' (as they would term it), I would like to emphasise the universal relevance of Bhagavan's method of self-enquiry, which stands always as the simplest solution to every problem. I say this because self-enquiry as taught by Bhagavan only requires keen, alert and constant search for one's own true identity. Observing the source of the 'I'-thought and merging there is self-enquiry. Since the mind is only a bundle of thoughts and all thoughts revolve around the 'I'-thought, watching that thought introverts the mind back to its source, the Heart, our true identity.

The *process* of self-enquiry could be termed 'scientific' in that it's logic can be clearly grasped by the reasoning mind. Yet, self-enquiry transcends the 'scientific'. For, even science is to be grasped only by the mind; self-enquiry takes one beyond the limitation of the mind and its

reason. Again, the sceptic may state that he has no faith in that 'beyond' the mind. But self-enquiry does require this faith, a faith in doubt, faith in the knowledge that one does not know the whole truth of oneself and hence, an eagerness to question one's current identity. Constant awareness, alertness and keen, continued questioning is advocated.

Now it may be the turn of the emotional to protest that this process of questioning is far too dry and intellectual. Far from it. It is *hridaya vidya*, the Knowledge of the Heart. One who is aware, through self-enquiry, of the Heart's immense power, experiences its presence every moment. Even a routine activity like reading the newspaper performed with total absorption and spontaneity. Every act is natural and complete - how then can it be merely intellectual or dry? The alertness to every minute of life is not an intellectual process. It is an awareness and aliveness of being which responds fully in all naturalness and hence, most appropriately.

Perhaps the method of self-enquiry appears too simple. 'Here is something so simple and direct, could it possibly lead to the perfection, the truth?', the mind may wonder. The human mind, having conquered many magnificently

complex areas through scientific research, prefers not to accept that in such a simple method lies the answer to everything. Many may prefer practices more complicated and elaborate, for, the mind could then revel in the glory of mastering such techniques. Bhagavan's teaching, clear and direct as it is, gives no scope for this pride of mastery. Yet, to master the mind; which masters the world, alone would be true mastery. And the mind can be mastered only if it is understood and merged at its source through self-enquiry. Besides, the method of self-enquiry is, in fact, attractive to the mind, as the mind itself is the fulcrum of the process. Attention, in self-enquiry, is turned on the mind itself, on its root the 'I'-thought which is tracked to its source.

Self-enquiry as taught by Bhagavan Ramana is the greatest adventure as it is the adventure into the world of Self. It includes the adventure of science in its rational analysis, that of the explorer, as it explores the very nature of one's being. And it is the adventure of the artiste in its spontaneous creativity. What does it create? It creates and infuses life and beauty in our routine habits of existence. It is the simplest of methods but, being the greatest of adventures as well, it does not allow us to wallow in ease.

Why Ramana? Because His life was a living of this method, not in order to practice what He preached, not as an intellectualisation, but out of the spontaneity, the naturalness synonymous with self-enquiry. I say naturalness because, self-enquiry implies the constant awareness of our true nature. For, self-enquiry is not just the method but the goal as well, not merely the process of attention but also the absorption in the Self. No wonder then that it should be Ramana, as He is not just a way of life, but life itself.
