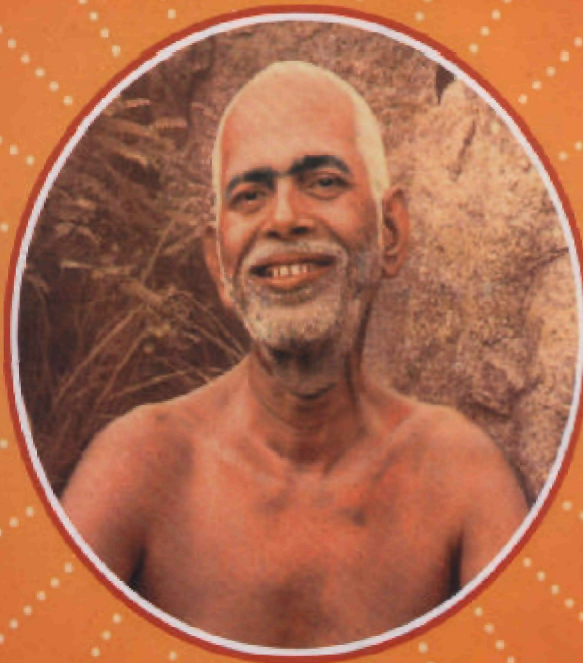


SELF DISCOVERY



**BHAGAVAN RAMANA'S CENTENARY OF
ENLIGHTENMENT PUBLICATION**

SELF DISCOVERY

**Understanding The Mind
The Ramana Way**

A.R. NATARAJAN

Published by

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Chapter 1

SELF DISCOVERY

Every waking moment we are thinking. This is so in dreams too. One doesn't even seem to pause and reflect why. It is taken for granted that this is the way the mind is. If this is true one cannot help it. We have countless descriptions of the vagaries of the mind, its fickleness, the difficulty in controlling it and so on. We go along with this idea. For it tallies with our experience of a mind with its anxieties, desires, fears, competitive search for achievement and so on. Addiction to thought is so ingrained that one has come to accept its consequence, the sorrow of a mind divided against itself with its supplementary, cross purpose, negative, positive, purposeless thoughts and so on. The mental environment never abandons you. One functions in that for better or for worse.

While we are taking it for granted that thinking is natural Ramana says that it is not. According to Ramana it is natural for the mind to be silent, to be peaceful - a peace and silence which is untouched by the different roles one has to perform in life. He keeps making this point time and again. Truth bears repetition. He told Gambiram Seshier in 1900, in the very beginning of his role as a World Teacher, 'Mind is, in reality only consciousness, because it is pure and transparent by nature. In that state the mind is free of thought. It is spacious, unitary and powerful. If one superimposes the contrary idea of a contaminated mind it is only because 'one is oblivious to the mind's primary nature'. It is pure like ether. Its basic nature is not affected by the contents of the mind.

Then the question would arise, 'Are there two minds, one pure and another impure?' Not really. But as long as we are under the wrong notion about the mind, there is need to enquire, find out and experience the mind's inherent peace and to abide thereafter in that state. Any enquiry, any method to be successful has to be tentative, and the underlying attitude should be one of doubt.

If we pose the question, 'What is this thing called the mind?', we discover two things. That there is a common thought, the 'thinker', the individual, to whom the thoughts relate. Without the thinker, there can be no thought. This general thought 'envelops' all thoughts. One also must notice, if watchful, that the surfacing and subsidence of thought depends on the attention of the individual, of the thinker. There is an automatic censorship by the mind. One does not think of the movie to be telecast at night while having breakfast. Nor does one miss his friends while intensely at work in the office. Sometimes this regulation happens by a firm resolve, say for instance when one is trying to get rid of some obsessive thought, or uninvited thoughts. What follows from this? It is that one can really say that it is the individual, the 'I' the thinker who matters. He is the core, the centre, the root. Therefore understanding the mind's true nature can come about only when one focusses his attention on the centre, away from the thoughts which have no independent existence.

Ramana says such attention is possible by enquiring 'Who am I?'. This enquiry is called self-enquiry since it is an enquiry about the mind with which one has identified himself. We think of it as the subject and all else as objects. The efficacy of this enquiry is stressed by Ramana as a direct and simple path to understanding the mind. Because this questioning, if done with intensity and persistence, would enable one to focus attention on the mind's centre, away from thoughts. In contrast tackling thoughts with a view to pruning them or changing them would be like cutting the leaves and branches, ignoring the tree's root. Such focussed attention on the mind's core cuts the individual's attention from his constant companions, his thoughts. When this association is severed, the individual discovers the falsity of the notion under which he was labouring thus far, the notion of a separate existence, of a separate identity. One discovers one's own true nature as the fullness of consciousness and the vast expanse of a silent mind.

When this happens, all fences are washed away. How can the basic ignorance of limited identification withstand the floodtide of bliss of the natural state? It is impossible to describe the joy of an experience without an experiencer. Even if it is described, it would be beyond one's comprehension. For it is not a creation of the mind. Even so this much can be said that separative notion, 'I', gives place

to the feeling of 'I', 'I', which is a ceaseless throb of joy in the heart.

One might ask 'What is the role of the Guru in all this?' Where does he fit in? Can we not say that self discovery is a result only of 'Tireless and joyous practice'. The answer is an emphatic 'No'. While 'practice and more practice' is undoubtedly a must, the Guru's constant guidance too is equally important, if not more. The Guru's bodiless presence as the inner guide is always there. As one grows in inwardness, one becomes aware of this presence and guidance. One also learns how immeasurable the help has been in sustaining effort and steadfast abidance in the natural state.

One might wonder 'What is the impact of this self-discovery in one's daily life? In what way would one be transformed? Would one abandon all his duties and give himself exclusively to meditation? Here again, the answer is 'No'. Ramana would say that there is 'no conflict between work and wisdom'. Even while practising self-enquiry, one would find that the tranquillity and joy induced by it would be there as an undercurrent in all the activities of the day. One's actions would tend to be focussed, cool, calm and done in an atmosphere of peace created by the enquiry itself. When knowledge of one's true nature becomes firm then nothing can disturb that fullness, that inner poise.

What would be one's attitude to work after self-discovery? One would neither seek work nor shun it. Whatever role one is called upon to play will be performed to perfection with the intensity of a professional player playing in a Grand Slam final or a professional cricketer playing the last few overs of an innings. At the same time, one would not be attached either to the action or its results. Having off-loaded the burden of the mind caused by attachments, one never loses sight of the fact that he is only playing different roles. He is aware that he is not the actor whose mantle he has temporarily donned. Whatever be the task, simple or difficult, sacred or profane, it would be executed zealously without doubt or fear. One would then sport in the world living wholly in the present. Filled with radiant joy, one would be a beacon light of knowledge. One would be the boundless ocean of bliss which is shared by all.

Chapter 2

UNDERSTANDING RAMANA'S TEACHINGS

What Ramana taught had a single focus. It was based on his direct experience of one's essential bodilessness, of one's essential immortality. What happened on the 17th of July 1896 in Ramana's uncle's house was the basic note of all Ramana thought. It is that on the death of the idea that one is the body, the Self, consciousness, focuses attention on itself compulsively. One discovers experientially that consciousness alone exists and that all mental states are movements in it. This was revealed to Ramana through self-enquiry, an enquiry centred on the individual. Fear of death turned his mind inward and made him enquire whether the body's death was the end. This enquiry ended his identification with the body and revealed simultaneously the spontaneous awareness of the throb of consciousness, in the form of 'I'-'I'. Thereafter Ramana remained in a state of overflowing bliss, in the natural state. For him, all fear ended once and for all. His teaching based on this experience was simple. Self-knowledge can come about only through self-enquiry, an enquiry about one's true identity and the source of the feeling of individuality. The enquiry takes the form of the now famous questions "Who am I?" and "Whence am I?" The feeling of 'I' would replace the thought I - am so-and-so, on such enquiry.

The very directness of the path is baffling. Can Self-knowledge which is regarded as the ultimate in spiritual experience be attained that easily? What about the uncontrolled mind? What about the elaborate system of do's and dont's so commonly believed in? This is the first hurdle in understanding Ramana's teachings. Truth is always straightforward, uncomplicated. It is the mind which lays such great store on ideas, on intellectual mosaics which are so appealing. Ramana

emphasises that truth is universal, and hence its availability to one and all without any preconditions. Only one has to be vigilant and attentive to the obstructions to abiding in one's own natural state.

Ramana's teachings put the blame wholly at the door of the failure to understand the true nature of the mind and its ceaseless thought movement. Ramana points out that since consciousness alone exists, the mind cannot be an independent entity. It can only reflect that consciousness. The separate entity, mind, based on the need to find a locale for thoughts, is a myth. This myth will last only so long as one does not enquire about the nature of the mind, its presence on waking and its absence in deep sleep. If one is attentive to the birth of, or death of thoughts, then the mind merges in its source. What remains is consciousness and its pure reflection called the 'pure mind'.

The expression 'destruction of mind' used in Ramana terminology is much misunderstood. This has scared many away. For the mind is the instrument with which one functions, it gives the feeling of aliveness. What would one do if the mind is destroyed? So one has to pause and understand what this means.

First as explained earlier there is always a mind. It will be a pure mind, a mind which reflects consciousness fully without any distortions, born of attachments and prejudices. All the mental faculties of thinking, reasoning, memory, discrimination, would be very much there. What would not be there is the dissipation of mental energy, seepage of energy, in the form of innumerable thoughts. A unifocused, integral, thought-free mind will replace the emaciated mind, weakened by unending thoughts.

Another general fear about Ramana's path springs from the idea that if one abides in consciousness the world would cease to be, it would not be perceived. This is a clear misconception. For both the wise and ignorant the world is very much there. The ignorant gives permanence and reality only to name and form. The wise are aware of the consciousness underlying all names and forms and also the names and forms.

The possibility of opening up for oneself the full hidden power of the mind, and overflowing bliss of the natural state should make one reflect on the sacred words of Ramana. For such reflection would uncover many secret fears and doubts which keep coming in the way of holding on steadfastly to the Ramana way. Many are like railway passengers who keep detraining in one of the many stops enroute to the destination. The journey is seldom completed. It is such a pity that they get off halfway. For by doing so they have missed life's opportunity, missed the joy of an unbound mind.

Chapter 3

THE PURE MIND VS EGO BASED MIND

Devotee: I am unable to experience the bliss of Self.

Bhagavan: The flower has to blossom before bees can enter it. If the petals are closed how can they enter? Once the flower blossoms the bees do not have to be invited. They will come automatically. Similarly if the ego veils the Self how can we have Self-knowledge?

More Talks with Ramana Maharshi, 25.10.43

Self-knowledge, says Ramana, is self-evident. Therefore awareness of the Self is easier than even seeing the gooseberry in the palm of one's hand. For, in order to perceive the gooseberry even if it be in one's hand, the perceiver, the act of perception and the object of perception, the gooseberry, are needed. Even such an obvious thing might not be seen because the sight may not be there or the attention of the mind may not be on it and the needed object may not be available, whereas the Self is the subject, eternal, the consciousness in all life. Even so, we have always been used to, habituated to the idea that it is difficult to be Self-aware, and that it is only ultimately, after much effort through the mental disciplines and purification, that one can experience, be aware of the ever present Self. Ramana says that this is inevitable so long as one posits the concept of a separate mind, without going into the question of the true nature of the mind.

The first recorded conversation which Ramana had was with his disciple, Gambhiram Seshier. Ramana has explained the "Nature of the Mind" in great detail to him. After dealing with the usual concepts on the subject Ramana says "Mind is, in reality, only consciousness, because it is pure and transparent by nature... The wrong identification of one thing with another is the work of the contaminated mind. That is to say, the pure, uncontaminated mind, being absolute consciousness

on becoming oblivious of its true nature mistakes the 'I', the ego, for reality".

This raises the question whether there are two minds, one the pure mind and another the contaminated mind. This is somewhat similar to the question whether there are two 'I's, the real 'I' and the false 'I'. The answer is that there is, and there can be only one mind, which being a reflection of consciousness is integral and powerful. However when this knowledge is veiled, one is not conscious of this truth. Because of this ignorance one thinks and acts as if his mind is an independent entity apart from the Self. Until this curtain is lifted, one must remain dwarfed and alienated from his own true strength. This rooted ignorance can end only through an enquiry into the true nature of the mind and the abundance of Guru's grace. Ramana emphasises the need for enquiry because if one takes for granted the idea that he is his mind and body then necessarily one has confined himself to the limitations arising from that idea. For, that idea sets in motion the process of becoming, I am so and so, I am the son or daughter of so and so, I am a lawyer, etc. I am 'this' and 'that', the whole structure with which one is familiar starts. Each such add-on imposes further outer directions in the form of attachments to people, ideas, possessions and so on. As a result desires, ambitions, fears and anxiety contaminate the mind.

However it must be made clear here that this does not affect the essential nature of the mind, which as we have seen is pure. Ramana gives the example of ether which is unaffected by the atmospheric pollutions. Consequently once the concept or the idea of a separate mind is seen to be false, then what remains is only a pure mind, which is a perfect and powerful instrument. This is the consequence of a unitary and undistracted mind.

How is one to be rid of the false notion which is standing in the way of awareness of the blissful and fully energised mind? When ignorance of the true nature of one's mind is the cause, knowledge can dawn only by setting in motion a process which will provide the

understanding into its nature. A process which would help discover it. It has to be experience - based knowledge. Any intellectual appreciation might flounder at some point unless backed by one's experience. Ramana would say "The torch of self-enquiry destroys the wrong idea and reveals the truth". He would also point out what it means. "Self-enquiry is the most simple and direct means. It helps you to know the natural state devoid of the ego. Whenever any distracting thought occurs, question to whom the thought has arisen. It will be for 'me'. Then, who am I? Instead of allowing thoughts to spring forth, search for the source of that - Go inwards. Cut the root. It is the effective way."

Ramana would also clarify its implications. When someone complained that no results were evident Ramana told him "It is not a regular mental enquiry to expect an answer. It is only a tool to direct the mind back to its source... You should be steadfast in practice. By repeating the process you fix attention on the ego, the 'I' thought... Try to reach the source of the ego. Once you reach it by your single-pointed effort your peace will not be disturbed".

Two things are evident from these statements of Ramana, one is the need for regular practice in which the attention is on the 'I', and inwardness, and the second is the proper understanding of the method itself. For both these, one has to depend on and be aware of Sadguru Ramana's guidance. For he has compassionately explained, for over fifty four years, all the nuances of self-enquiry. One can turn to these replies. Then each would find the guidance appropriate to him, at a particular stage of what one may call "his growth in inwardness". Ramana's grace would also work through other disciples and devotees who are practising his path. If only one looks for it, Ramana's guidance, unfailing guidance would be there. Knowledge of the true nature of the mind would blossom. Gradually the knowledge would become steadfast. Then the thoughts will arise and subside spontaneously. So too action. When the need for it is there one would be involved in it. When the need ends there would be no seeking for action. The

mind which is only a mental form of consciousness would be immersed in its inherent bliss.

Chapter 4

GOODBYE TO THE PAST AND HELLO TO THE PRESENT

A few of us were having lunch together. The lunch was rather heavy with a number of dishes and side dishes. Even so, the minds were quite bright and the conversation started about each one's experience about his or her mind. The first one said, 'I really can't understand the ways of my mind. Sometimes it is over active, sometimes lazy to the core and sometimes very peaceful. When the mind is peaceful one is on top of the world. Work also seems to make me so happy, but when there is no work all sorts of muck keeps gushing up. I really can't say why the mind is so unpredictable!'

Your guess as to the cause is as likely to be wrong as mine. Let us put the lid on this problem which we may call problem one and come back to it later.

Another person had a different problem with her mind. We may call it problem No.2. Just when everything was fine, when I was going great guns, when I seemed so close to uncaused happiness there would be a sudden switch over in the opposite direction, she said. The mind would become dry. Everything would be boring. There would be no zest or fun in any activity. Ramana's work too would be uninteresting as the office work. Why should the mind play ducks and drakes and not be steadfast? These ups and downs, she said, were quite bugging.

The third person too had her problem which could be labelled for convenience as problem 3. She said, I was just 29 when I realised that the only thing which mattered in life is Self-Knowledge. All else seemed so ephemeral. I stuck to sadhana not only in the traditional way but also as taught by Sri Ramana. If I look at the present position as a sadhaka, I wonder as to what kind of progress I have made over

these thirty years. I am still so worried about little details, inefficiency of domestic servants, and general sloppiness in approach to work of co-workers.

A young student too expressed her problems. Often her mind would be day-dreaming, not paying attention to what was going on in the class. Her attention was not on what was being said by the teacher and what was going on around her but was in her world of thoughts and imaginations.

The last person had the common malaise. It was the overcrowded mind, the mind in which there is stiff competition among a host of thoughts for the attention of the individual. The mind is always, he said, like a river in spate, flitting from thought to thought, inattentive to everything. Nothing is in clear focus. My mind is de-energised because of this splintering.

It will be seen from the various problems that each person's mind is different because the content of their minds is different. In fact one could say that there are as many minds as there are people on the earth because their mental projections are different. The play of gunas, modulations of mind, the dullness, activity or peace varies for each individual. It is not possible to come to any universal conclusion about the mind's nature based upon such diversified minds.

No solution is possible so long as one is looking at the mind's movement in the form of thoughts. Innumerable memories are embedded in the mind and when circumstances are favourable, the tendencies surface as thoughts, good, bad and indifferent. What happens when you look at the thoughts is that you are looking at the whole of your past. That would result in one getting caught in its grip. It is this burden of the past which one must escape from. 'Burden' because it is a dead - weight which prevents living in the present, prevents present - mindedness. As Ramana says the very paying of attention to thoughts would 'fatten them'. The more the attention, the more the power of the particular thought to distract. It is for this reason that one finds great meaning in Ramana's jocular remark, 'There is no

need to give up desires, only give up your thoughts'. For there would be a surfeit of thoughts as long as one is consciously paying attention, to them. As long as we pay attention to the contents of the mind we will be its victims.

What then is the solution? Ramana stresses time and again that one should not pay attention to the content of the mind as thoughts. On the other hand he emphasises the need to look away from the content of the mind, away from the rubbish heap of the past. What is required, he would say, is to understand the mind. This means focusing the mind's attention on the thinker, the one to whom all these thoughts relate. Relating back the thoughts to the thinker, to the subject, is a must. Some of the questions and answers of Ramana on this point may be noted.

Q: How is the mind to be stilled?

A: Looking at the mind, with the mind, stills it.

Q: How does one get rid of the hinderances to the realisation of the true Self?

A: Seek for the Self through meditation in this manner, trace every thought back to its origin, which is only the mind. Never allow thought to run on. If you do, it will be unending. Take it back to its starting place-the mind again and again, and it and the mind will both die of inaction. The mind only exists by reason of thought. Stop that and there is no mind. As each doubt and depression arises, ask yourself. 'Who is it that doubts? What is it that is depressed?' Go back constantly to the question, 'Who is the 'I'? Where is it?' Tear everything away until there is nothing but the source of all left. And then-live always in the present and only in it. There is no past or future, save in the mind.

In relating back thoughts to their centre, one cuts across the thought multiplicity and the vast ocean like content of the mind. If one is able to bring the mind back to its core and stay there the mind becomes like an iron filing. The spiritual current within pulls it inward

and draws it to itself by its magnetic force. One's mind would become immersed in the totality of consciousness, of the spiritual heart. Thereafter its fragmentation ceases. It may be clarified here that the mind in its purity would have all the normal functions which we attribute to the mind like memory, reasoning, discrimination etc. The only difference, is in the place of its egocentric core it would now be centred in the Self. Such a mind will respond as and when response is needed and to the extent of that need, fully and completely. It may be said that the pure mind is the Self in action. The mind would have been freed from its fragmented and uncertain ways. There would be abundance of joy for the mind would be immersed in the Self and experiencing its bliss. One would have bid good bye to the past and future, and learnt to live in the fragrance of the Now.

Chapter 5

WHO IS ALIVE? WHO IS DEAD

Oh conqueror of Time
Your Lotus feet are my refuge
Let them protect my mother from death
What is death if scrutinised?

Prayer for Mother's Recovery, Verse 2, Bhagavan Ramana

You who wish to celebrate a birthday, enquire first who is it that is born? One's true birth is when one abides as the Self which shines forever without birth and death.

Stray Verses on Birthday, Verse 1, Bhagavan Ramana

For conceptual understanding one has to be clear about certain basics. In Ramana literature we find the use of certain expressions like body's birth. Ego's birth, or mind's birth, destruction of the mind, new birth in the Self. Body's birth and death are easily understood. For it is purely physical. A person is born when the body comes out of the mother's womb and is dead when the life force leaves and one is pronounced clinically dead. Both the birth and death of the body are said to be karmically caused in order to go through certain pre-ordained experience. Such births of the body are endless so long as one's mind is not dead, in the sense that one has not awakened to the reality.

One has necessarily to go deeper if 'death' of the mind is to be scrutinised. One can see that the mind, as it is now, is only a movement of thoughts which keep changing but are built round the central, 'I' - thought. They depend on the individuals's attention. In deep sleep, which happens daily, thoughts automatically cease. Both the thoughts and the individual to whom they relate are non-existent. This may be called temporary death of the mind. It ceases to exist for a couple of

hours each day. On waking the sense of individuality and the thoughts to which the individual pays attention surface and last, even as dreams, till sleep again overtakes. Therefore one might say that the mind's birth takes place on waking. You may say it is its temporary birth for it exists only in two states of waking and dream and dies again in deep sleep (albeit temporarily).

Ramana focuses one's attention on this daily phenomenon firstly to wean one away from the fear that absence of thoughts is something calamitous. It is happening each day and one is not only none the worse for it but is also refreshed by it. The second point to which Ramana draws attention is that the same result can be achieved consciously through self-enquiry. Attention to 'I' - thought prevents proliferation of thoughts. For they cannot arise unless attention is paid to them. Then the 'I' - thought also ceases. It merges at the same place from which it originates on waking. This source is the locale of the divine within, the locale of the Self. Enquiry therefore links one with the immortal consciously, with the Self. Such a link gradually frees the mind from its habitual externalisation, from the tendencies of the past which locate happiness outside of Oneself.

Once this scissoring of the link between the individual and his thoughts takes place, one discovers the mind's true nature. What is it? It is only the reflection of the Self and therefore ever pure. Such a mind responds spontaneously and intuitively in contrast to the impure mind which is caught in the endless thought chain. Life becomes harmonious and joyful not only for short spells but always.

So much for the theoretical structure. How did Ramana arrive at it? One has to go into it because whatever he taught was based on his direct experience which he shares with one and all. Ramana had encounters with death five times in his life. Each of these experiences has a lot to teach us. The first happened in 1892 when he was just twelve years old. His father's dead body was there. His mother, brothers and relatives were weeping. This made Ramana investigate as to what had left his father's body, making his live body a dead one. He himself

was alive. Then what made the difference? He was reflecting and pondering about this problem for several hours even after the cremation. He finally came to the conclusion that it is some force 'I' which makes the body to see, to run, to walk and to eat. "I am aware of this 'I' but my father's 'I' has left the body". Though very young he had brought the question of "life" and "death" close and examined it.

The next was the epoch making event on the 17th of July 1896, when gripping fear of death made him totally involved in experimenting on the meaning of death. With the death of the body am 'I' dead? This was the question which drove his mind inward and led to the discovery that he was the deathless spirit, immortal and eternal. This knowledge remained steadily as an undercurrent experience, as the 'sruti' note to music. Ramana's mind was dead. Because the tendency of externalisation had ended. It became a pure reflection of the fullness of consciousness. Ramana had become enlightened, a seer of truth, timeless and deathless.

The next event happened in 1912. Ramana was returning from Pachai Amman Koil to Virupakasha cave along with some devotees when a bright white curtain completely shut out his vision. What happened is stated by Ramana himself.

"Suddenly the view of natural scenery in front of me disappeared and a bright white curtain was drawn across the line of my vision and shut out the view of nature. I could distinctly see the gradual process. At one stage I could see a part of the prospect of nature yet clear, and the rest was being covered by the advancing curtain. It was just like drawing a slide across one's view in the stereoscope. On experiencing this I stopped walking lest I should fall. When it cleared, I walked on. When darkness and faintness overtook me a second time, I leaned against a rock until it cleared. And again for the third time I felt it safest to sit, so I sat near the rock. Then the bright white curtain had completely shut out my vision, my head was swimming and my blood circulation and breathing stopped. The skin turned a livid blue. It was the regular death-like hue- and it got darker and darker. Vasudeva

Sastri took me in fact to be dead, held me in his embrace and began to weep aloud and lament my death. His body was shivering. I could at that time distinctly feel his clasp and his shivering, hear his lamentation and understand the meaning. I also saw the discoloration of my skin and I felt the stoppage of my heart beat and respiration, and the increased chillness of the extremities of my body. Yet my usual current of “thought” (Dhyana) was continuing as usual in that state also. I was not afraid in the least, nor felt any sadness at the condition of my body. I had closed my eyes as soon as I sat near the rock in my usual posture but was not leaning against it. The body which had no circulation nor respiration maintained that position still. This state continued for some ten or fifteen minutes. Then a shock passed suddenly through the body, circulation revived with enormous force, as also respiration; and there was perspiration all over the body at every pore. The colour of life reappeared on the skin. I then opened my eyes, got up and said, “Let us go. We reached Virupaksha cave without further trouble. That was the only occasion on which both my blood circulation and respiration stopped.”

The crucial facts to note are that he was not in the least afraid and his Self-awareness never wavered bringing out the truth that body’s death does not affect the immortal ones who have discovered the truth.

The next time when Ramana had a look at death was in 1914, when his mother was delirious with typhoid. It was on this occasion that we had his famous ‘Prayer to Arunachala’ for her recovery, the first quote in this article. If only his mother too could become Self-aware then death of the body and its cremation would have no meaning. Hence the Lord had to free her from identification with her body.

The last was on the 19th of May 1922. Mother had stayed with Ramana from 1916 to 1922, and had ripened under his guidance. She had surrendered to him and therefore the responsibility of liberating her was cast on him. He made his mother go through the experience

of several life times in a span of twelve hours. His sacred touch enabled her mind to subside into its source, the spiritual heart. This highlights the importance of Guru Ramana's grace if one were to succeed in being free from the thralldom to the notion that one is limited to the body.

What more is there to know about life and death?. On five occasions Ramana has taken us through death and revealed its true meaning. One is reborn anew deathless only when diligent self-enquiry backed by Ramana's grace reveals one's own immortal nature.

Chapter 6

BIRTH OF THE BODY, DEATH OF THE MIND AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

When you come to Ramana's teachings and reflect on its meaning you go deep into basic issues which have been troubling seekers like birth, death, control of the mind, and Self-knowledge. We know precious little about what causes birth, about the relationship of the mind with and its enjoyments through the body. We are totally unaware of our true nature. But all these are inter-related. Integral.

Let us look at birth. In our perception the birth of the body is our birth and its ending on the funeral pyre, is our death. Birth and death are taken to relate to the body and are accepted as inevitable. Logically since we relate birth and death to the body and identify with it, a question is often raised "Is there rebirth?" If so, "How soon?" and so on. For this Ramana says that unless you go into the question as to what caused the body's birth, you will have to live in fear of death. Again since the body's cause is unknown, a succession of its births in various wombs would be automatic.

Ramana points out that body's cause is the mind. Let us pause. The body's cause is the mind? We wonder, why does he say this? Because the mind is constantly seeking pleasure and avoiding pain on the basis of its experience. The vehicle for such enjoyment is the body. When one body's life ends what has happened is only that a particular body has ceased to be the mind's vehicle of enjoyment and suffering. The mind has opted for another body for continuing its enjoyment. The mind cannot exist without a body. It also follows that a mind does not die with the death of a particular body but continues, linked with different bodies.

The extent to which the mind succeeds in its search for happiness

through the body would depend on its ethical balance sheet, the good and bad deeds done through thought and action. The circumstances in which the body is placed is dependant on this balance sheet and is regulated by the Creator for ensuring universality and even-handedness. Hence it is called a karmic body and it is created only by the mind's need to perpetuate its pleasure - hunt.

What follows? Since the body is a mere instrument, do not pay any attention to it. Ramana's view on the insentient nature of the body and the folly of paying attention to it is seen from his statement, "The body was not there before birth, it is composed of the five elements, it is absent in sleep and it becomes a corpse..... therefore cast aside this insentient body as though it is truly a corpse." The expression 'cast aside' is strong. But it is used in order to shift the focus of attention to where it should be, viz., on the mind and the need to understand it.

If we look at the mind what do we find? 'If' is used for one has never really paid much attention to it. It has been taken for granted. But if we do look then there is quite a lot of talk about controlling the mind. This talk usually ends by throwing up one's hands, by coming to the conclusion that it is impossible to control it, that its nature is restless.

Ramana questions these assumptions. For they are based on the idea of the existence of a separate mind. To begin with, Ramana puts aside the various means of mind control on the ground that if one tries to control the mind, it will stay controlled only till the means of control are operative. For instance if one controls the mind through yogic practices the mind will remain quiet only so long as the regulation of breath is practised. Once it is withdrawn then the mind becomes once again uncontrolled.

The result can be seen to be purely temporary. However Ramana does not stop there. He asks, "Is there a separate entity called the Mind?" Is it not only a series of thoughts of the thinker?" The thoughts keep changing as the thinker's attention shifts from one to another.

Hence the truth can be found out only if we know the thinker, only if we try and pay attention to the subject 'I'.

Then Ramana takes us through some home truths which one has lost sight of. He remarks "The mind is born, we see it; even without the mind we exist. There is everybody's experience to prove it". Ramana says that it is everybody's experience. It should be? But is it? Each day in deep sleep the mind too goes to sleep. It comes back on waking. So we could say that the mind is born each day on waking. In deep sleep there is its temporary death in the sense it is non-existent. All this is stated to indicate the need for looking for the source of the mind. This source is revealed if one pays attention to the thinker as mentioned earlier. Attention to the thinker which frees one from associated thoughts, will result in the mind merging in its source. This source is the Self, consciousness, and divinity within. By regular practice the mind will gradually stay merged in the source. The mind would be dead in one sense but it is its true birth. For its nature as consciousness, would be revealed. Power of the intellect, memory, logic, discrimination, would become perfect. The mind is called the pure mind or the satvic mind. As Ramana puts it "it may seem paradoxical to say that a dead mind is most alive. But it has to be accepted for that is how men of steady wisdom live and act."

When this happens the mind's use of the body ceases. It is enjoying its own inherent bliss. There is no need to use the body for purpose of enjoyment. Once the body's purpose as the mind's pleasure instrument ceases, there will be no rebirths of the body. It might continue till the karma which gave rise to it originally lasts. But it would no longer be merely a physical frame. The resplendence of the mind, sunk in its source, would be reflected on the body as well. The body would have become a temple of God when Self-knowledge dawns.

Chapter 7

THE ELIXIR OF YOUTH

When we refer to an elixir of youth, generally it is understood to refer to rejuvenation of the body. An aging body is made young through a medical system known as ‘Kaya Kalpa’. This used to be quite in vogue under various indigenous medical systems of India and was much sought after. There is reference to this process by Bhagavan who mentions that such kalpas are based on a 100 year old neem tree, camphor, etc and he remarked ‘Who’d care to take such trouble over this body?’. By its very nature the ‘Kaya Kalpas’ are repetitive and do not last. When we refer to elixir of youth it is not to these methods.

What about the mind? Can it be made young? Is there any elixir which keeps the mind young and vigorous? In many cases the mind becomes old and works on habitual and routine lines even though the body may be young. The mind becomes prematurely senile. Can this be altered? Is there an elixir for this? One needs to go into the question because therein lies the key to a way of life different from what one is used to now.

While we are young and reasonably circumstanced everything is so joyous. You wish to go to parks, listen to the chirping of birds, go to the beach, drench yourself in wave after wave coming in their ceaseless succession. Or may be you would like to trek on the mountain, walk on the untrodden forest paths. The mind is innocent, ready to observe and learn. It does not put its shutters down in fear and prejudice. There are desires but there is nothing obsessive about them. The desires are not deep rooted but only on the surface. One can be easily dissuaded from them. The body too is bubbling with energy. Everything is so beautiful. There is a song in the air and joy and beauty in life.

Somewhere along the way the rainbow disappears. The mind is soiled by a thousand and one thoughts as ceaseless as the waves of the sea on the new moon or the full moon days. There is the information oriented education, the competitive edge to do better in schools and colleges, and all the rest of it. Between the parents and the society, one's innocence is crushed by the value given to the intellect and achievement. The budding flowers are seldom allowed to blossom in their fullness, in the freshness of different ways of life in which joy is not smothered by what is happening all round. There are a few oases here and there. But these are exceptions. As a result the youthful zest, the free flow of mental energy becomes a thing of the past to be nostalgic about.

It is in this context that Ramana's teaching assumes the greatest importance for if rightly practised it is indeed the elixir of youth. Do you become physically young? Does baldness or grey hair stop? Does the face remain unwrinkled? No, for the body's condition is not of any significance to a mind freed from its psychological shackles, to the mind which is not blocked by many thought barriers.

The first and foremost point which Ramana keeps making is that happiness is our nature. Being natural it cannot be lost. It is only hidden, like the midday sun by the monsoon clouds. Therefore you can discover it. Even to our fragmented minds 'discovery' is still exciting. Therein lies the hope. In this attempt one is not left high and dry. For the Sadguru Ramana himself is a constant companion guiding you away from the by - lanes and keeping you on the royal road of self-enquiry.

The second point which Ramana makes and emphasises is about the location of happiness. Is it 'within' or 'without'? These expressions need a little clarification. 'Without' means the idea that happiness is outside and experienced when the mind is related to possessions, to ideas, to relationships etc. But if one examines these it would be evident that none has experienced through an externalised mind joy which is untainted by sorrow. Inevitably it is dependent, it may be

lost. Someone else could always have more of it. One may be jilted in love nor can find anyone whom the mind accepts at all times and in all circumstances.

Hence we have to look 'within' for such happiness. On the basis of his direct awareness of the Truth Ramana locates it as the spiritual heart on the right side of the chest. According to Ramana this is the source, the fountain head of happiness which we have lost and which we are trying to discover. Actually travelling along the Ramana way one finds it to be so. Only, repeatedly this awareness is lost because of old habits, which make one go back to the clutches of the delusive mind.

The third important point which Ramana makes is that this kind of inherent, non-mental happiness can be experienced 'here' and 'now' and by one and all. Are there many conditions, innumerable strict rules to be followed? Only two important ones. Never lose faith in the Sadguru which really means in the validity of his experience which he is sharing. In some mysterious way Ramana cares for each and everyone of his 'flock'. Then also there is need for 'practice and more practice'. Practice is important for one is so steeped in the false idea that the source of happiness is outside, that it comes through others. Practice also helps one to discover how true indeed are the guru's words. There is joy in every rightly directed step.

As the grip of experience of the past weakens, then one is more and more in that bliss, that joy. This joy is not a mental product. It comes about when the mind is still, interned and merged in its source. All seeking would have ended, for the sought after joy has been discovered, within. Then this mind, the still mind, which is also termed as the pure mind, is ever blissful, floating always in that joy. Who can describe that state which the Primal Guru Dakshinamurthi chose to reveal in silence?

Chapter 8

AN OPEN INVITATION

Suppose you are given an invitation for a thought free mind, what would you do? Accept it or reject it or feel baffled? Probably you will reject it. Why? Because intellect is on the pedestal in our way of life. Reason, logic, memory, concentration are given importance. Ours is a world of thoughts. Each day we are woken up because the innate tendencies start the wheel of thought and set it in continuous motion. Some thoughts may be repetitive, some functional, some because of fear of being without thoughts. We are never alone. We have constant companions, thoughts. So long as they are pleasant, so long they lead us on to success, it is fine. But do we know anything about the mind to put a full stop when there is intrusion or invasion of negative thoughts, of overwhelming depressive thoughts?

Diametrically opposite is the thought free mind. What does one mean by it? Why should we care for it and work towards it? It is an alert mind. An ever attentive mind. An undistracted mind. Yet at the same time, it is a silent mind. A silence which comes about naturally because the nature of the ego is understood, it is traced back to its place of origin. Thoughts come and go like the clouds in a clear sky. The mental space is not always overcast with dark and thick clouds of thought clusters. Thinking takes place naturally like breathing. If there is necessity for communication, for clarification, for doing a job, thoughts arise and subside after the necessity is over. Ordinarily, however, there are no thoughts because there is no need for them. In that state as Ramana mentions it would be “as difficult to call in thoughts as it is now to quell them”. Ramana cautions against mistaking some negative states like deep sleep to be thought free states. He points out that in sleep the absence of thoughts does not arise from understanding the nature of the mind but from a mere

absence of thoughts, when the mind is neiscent. It is a transitory state. The bliss experienced is temporary. On waking one is back to square one, thoughts, more thoughts, thoughts galore.

We have assumed that happiness is in objects. We have conceptually located it there. Hence, the subject 'I' keeps thinking about some object or the other. Since happiness is object related, the mind is not aware of its own inherent happiness. Consequently it keeps whirling in thoughts seeking happiness outside. Habituated to thoughts one relates his existence to them. 'I think, so I am'. If one is to be free of this thought addiction, one is to look away from the objects and look at oneself. Otherwise one would remain ignorant of the silent mind, its potency and a blissful way of life. The importance of facing the 'I' has been stressed by Ramana in the course of a series of conversations with his first biographer B.V.Narasimha Swami.

B: The intellectual and relative concept of 'I' as subject does not exist apart from the other similar concept, the object. The subject and object appear together and disappear together. The first person, second person and third person all jump into and jump out of consciousness together. But is there no consciousness apart from these intellectual concepts?

N: I see none.

B: Did you have your intellect in deep sleep? That is, were you then perceiving, comparing and contrasting, remembering and judging things or objects.

N: No, there were no objects to think of and no intellectual play at that time.

B: Yet as you already admitted, you felt happy did you not?

N: Yes.

B: What is this general feeling, this happiness unrelated to any object or thought, this feeling or consciousness in which

the intellect has no part? You have already found that the nature of 'I', the Self, is to be happy, and here you find the happiness when you transcend the intellect. Can you therefore conclude that 'I', 'Self' and 'happiness' are one and the same thing, felt as one, though not intellectually perceived as one?

N: I am now convinced that it must be so, but I do not yet feel it clearly. I do not feel this unrelated or absolute happiness transcending the intellect.

B: That is because of the fact that it has all along been your habit to think of and identify yourself with other objects and that you have never faced your 'I' in the above manner. You have always been exercising your intellect and never your intuition. If you now reverse your course and take to inward vision, shutting out all external images and falling back on intuitive feeling, in that dark chamber of your mind you will catch the true picture of yourself. This is the real, the realisation, the realizer or the Self-the One which words cannot describe and the mind cannot reach, and which is merely suggested by the term often used for describing it, namely sat-chit-ananda, that is existence or reality, consciousness or illumination, and bliss.

Ramana has pointed out that if one learns to face the 'I', one would become aware of a way of life in which feeling and intuition take the place of a purely intellectual and thought-ridden life. The question is, what exactly does one mean by facing the 'I'?. What is the method given by Ramana for preventing a proliferation of thoughts? It is in the field of everyone's experience that often without being aware the mind is crowded with thoughts. Ramana once narrated a happening which brings out the speed at which this takes place.

“When I was staying in the Skandasramam, I sometimes used to go out and sit on a rock. On one such occasion there were two or three others with me including Rangaswami Iyengar. Suddenly we

noticed some small mothlike insect shooting up like a rocket into the air from a crevice in the rock. Within the twinkling of an eye it had multiplied itself into millions of moths which formed a cloud and hid the sky from view. We found that it was only a pinhole and knew that so many insects could not have issued from it in such a short time.

“This is how Ahamkara (ego), shoots up like a rocket and instantaneously spreads out as the Universe”.

In self-enquiry, one's attention is on the subject at a point before the mind has become filled with thoughts. If attention is paid to the 'I' - thought or the first thought then such attention prevents the association of the subject with the objects. The mind would become intuned, and would be drawn by the divine force within. This association of the mind with its source would free it from its anchorage in objects. A cow which has been fed with luscious grass in its own home gradually ceases to look for outside pastures. Similarly, the mind having enjoyed the bliss of the source would begin to lose interest in its earlier habitual outside movement resulting in innumerable and complex thoughts. The mind would not be cluttered but would be spacious and passively alert. It would be ever immersed in its own bliss.

Chapter 9

BEING IN TOUCH WITH CONSCIOUSNESS

Ramana would always focus attention on the truth that one is the fullness of Consciousness, that the mind, in its purity, is only a reflection of this fullness. Consciousness cannot be fragmentary. Of this truth only a rare few, men of steady wisdom, jnanis, are aware. The rest live in the illusory world of fragmentary, divided consciousness, created by the concept, the idea of separate individuality. As part of this illusion the mind is given an independent separate status. The mind is labelled as uncontrollable and all effort is directed towards taming it, towards bringing it to order. Ramana puts the blame for this forgetfulness of one's essential nature as consciousness on 'avichara'. It is the failure to enquire about the reality of concepts of a separate mind and a separate body apart from the Self. If one does not go into the fundamental question one has perforce to live and die within the confines of a fenced mind. Such a mind does not and cannot know the wonder of spaciousness, the joy and exultation of it.

Fortunately those who have earnestly taken to the spiritual path have crossed the first hurdle of an unthinking mind wedded to the immediate. They have found out, to some extent, the vanities of human ways, and are not taken in wholly by an ego-centred life. The search starts and after knocking at many wrong doors, one is attracted to the direct path of Ramana. Direct because the disease is avichara, lack of the spirit of enquiry and the consequent failure to enquire into one's true identity. The remedy obviously lies in 'vichara' or 'enquiry' directed to find this out.

The sure Ramana method of self-enquiry, of doubt about one's

identification and questing about it, through the enquiries “Who am I?” and “Whence am I?”, has been practically rendered ineffective by intellectualising it. The questions have been transformed into dry as dust questions being put mechanically. The question ‘Who am I?’ is posed when thought arises. God knows how innumerable thoughts are. One is bound to lose faith if this sharp weapon is used without knowledge about its potency. There is need to clothe the enquiry with all the passion one is capable of, for therein lies the key to freedom from the mental prison.

For, the purpose of Ramana’s teachings is to bring one in touch with consciousness, with the divine, with the Self, by bringing attention back to the point where the illusion starts. When you are caught in the mental movement, you are in a whirlpool of illusion and cannot stay free to enquire into this truth. Hence the effort to move away from the mind’s movement by paying attention at the very beginning when the thoughts start arising in the mental horizon. Attention paid to the thinker instead of to the thoughts has the effect of stilling the mind. How can any thought exist unless the individual pays attention to it? Hence the importance of the individual. Hence also the total negation of any importance to the thought content of the mind.

At this point the mind is almost in full bloom, at the height of its powers. Only the single first, ‘I am so and so’ thought, is there and the mind’s power is not yet disbursed in myriad thoughts. Paying attention to the sense of individuality, of separateness, at this stage is like focusing a most powerful searchlight on a single point. Then automatically this illusion drops like a snuffed candle. Thereafter fullness of consciousness alone is. The pure mind experiences its ceaseless throb as the continuous feeling of ‘I’.

This experience, the joy of an unshackled mind would keep beckoning, pulling inward. But in the beginning the counter pull of illusion in the form of thoughts, of residual past experience called tendencies, would pull the pure mind out. Again starts the first step

of the individual 'I' thought, followed by his varied thoughts. This time the dice is no longer so loaded. For one has the awareness of a different experience as an undercurrent. The mind's attention would be back far more quickly at the initial point of illusion, the rising of the first thought of individuality. One is at the threshold of fullness of consciousness, of the divine. There is no alienation as yet from it in the form of innumerable thoughts which dissipate the unitary mind. If one's attention remains undisturbed at this point, then even the first thought will merge in the fullness of consciousness automatically. The fragmentation of consciousness through ceaseless flow of thoughts ends. One remains steadily in one's true natural state, the joy and wonder of which no words can convey.

Chapter 10

UNASKED QUESTIONS

What is the use of life without the spirit of enquiry?

– *Bhagavan Ramana*

The direct path of self-enquiry for Self-Knowledge is based on experience of the natural state of steady and unalloyed bliss. If one moves away from it, it is only because one does not value enough the importance of a reflective way of life which in turn requires continuous questioning of various fundamentals. Without such questioning one cannot be focused on the path or be aware of the deflections and stick to the right track.

A reflective way of life requires, as a pre-condition, mental space which permits such a reflective way. What does one mean by a spacious mind? Such a mind is not always busy, not always pre-occupied with thoughts, not caught up in a continuous chain of associated thoughts. Even though the mind may not be totally still or in a state of perfect silence, during practice it can be comparatively free by vigilant self-attention, by attention to the rising thoughts. When such attention is paid there would be gaps between thoughts which permit looking at the panorama of one's life. One would be able to look at the moment by standing apart from it and viewing it. Quite obviously, the free time earned by vigilant self-attention is not to be wasted. It has to be harnessed in furthering inwardness. Such inwardness is promoted by asking many questions which have remained so far unasked for want of mental leisure. The asking of relevant questions, relevant in the sense that they are related directly to the practice of self-enquiry, prevents the mind from becoming dull, unthinking, wooden in practising self-enquiry. Asking of essential questions keeps the mind alert and interest in the path alive.

Each person knows best what basic questions should be asked for strengthening practice. Even so, one can readily see that some questions can be usefully asked by all. Keeping in mind the need for clarity about the goal, the first question which one must ask is ‘Why am I practising self-enquiry at all?’ ‘What is the goal of the enquiry and in terms of that goal where exactly am I standing?’ If you practise some regimental meditation, do’s and don’t’s are clearly prescribed whatever be the label given to such meditative practices. Times are stipulated for practice, the methodology is given, the goal is stated to be control of the mind. Apparently this looks very attractive because it falls in line with the regular drill of life and its orderly daily pattern. Here one has to ask the most important question whether the goal is rightly perceived. Is the goal of a quiet mind, still mind, a right goal? Or does it deflect one from being totally free from the mind’s framework?

In sleep one is free from thoughts and during a swoon or under comatic condition one is free from thoughts. Merely being free from thoughts is labelled as ‘Manolaya’, lull of the mind. The volcanic, eruptive, explosive nature being caught up in its past vasanas, the past tendencies will remain untackled. Anytime, any moment, one may trip. In fact it is for this reason that Ramana discourages all practices which merely still the mind and thereby make it benumbed. He would compare it to hitting a bull on its head and stunning it. He has clearly explained the difference between the goal of stillness of mind and the right goal of a mind freed from the tentacles of past experience. If one questions therefore, repeatedly, ‘Why this spiritual practice?’ then one would see the importance and validity of freeing the mind from the past.

When one is free from the conceptualised approach to spiritual life and when one is on the direct path of Ramana, the questions to be asked are ‘How much do I really care for self-enquiry and its practice?’ What is its position in my system of priorities? These have to be asked because many begin with great enthusiasm but allow this to peter off

gradually. It becomes merely one more addition to our eventless life. This evaporation of interest happens without our being aware of it. One has to ponder and ask oneself the question 'How much time do I really have?' If this question is posed one would discover that there is hardly much time for practice given the workload at office, illnesses, unavoidable socialisation etc., which take away large chunks of time particularly if one is ambitious and eager to accelerate achievements. If one reflects on this truth it would inject automatically a certain intensity to the self-enquiry. One would also have to ask the question 'Am I diluting the limited time available for self-enquiry itself by adding many inputs from the past?' It is very common to hang on to some practices of the past mainly because of the fear of letting such practices go. Ramana points out that these practices alone have brought one to the path of self-enquiry and made one ready for facing the truth about one's 'I'. It is these past practices which have given the strength, the purity of mind for being concentrated on this one question, the question. 'What is my true identity?'. Once a person has hitched on to the correct path, then automatically the past having fulfilled itself will drop off naturally. Otherwise the basic freshness of self-enquiry and its immense potential of freeing the mind from the boundaries of conceptualisation would be lost. The ego would remain not fully tackled because of half-hearted adherence to self-enquiry. One would also get back to self-enquiry if he recognises its purpose, which is to understand the mind by becoming aware that the mind, when it is rid of concepts, is only a reflection of the truth.

Supplementarily one could ask the question 'What are all my activities for? I am placing so much importance on wealth, name and fame, hierarchical superiority, political clout etc. Have these been the source of sustained happiness? If not can these transitory means give me permanent happiness?'. Unless these questions are asked one would continue to go in the wrong direction in the externalisation of mind, instead of discovering it, within, in the spiritual heart.

The list of questions to be asked would include the question 'Am

I alone on the spiritual path?’ ‘Are there no companions, to encourage and stimulate? If one asks these questions, one would himself discover the truth that Ramana’s guidance is there all along. It may come through the books, through satsangs, through answers and guidance received at times when the mind has become silent by itself. While travelling on the path often guidance and help comes from other seekers who are also earnest on the path.

All said and done the need for focusing attention on unasked questions is to create a sustained and continuous interest in self-enquiry. It is to ensure that eagerness in it never wavers. By such questioning one finds the answer in the experiencing of the natural state with its abundant and overflowing bliss.

The importance of questions and clarifications is clearly seen by the willingness of Ramana to answer at all times questions by serious seekers. In the course of 54 years of spiritual ministration, while in the body, he had answered more than thirty thousand questions. While he would not encourage any idle or merely intellectual questions, no question by earnest persons would remain unanswered. In fact one can say that he would encourage it as would be seen from a few illustrations.

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.

D: What is the nature of life after death?

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

Ramana would bring the questioner back to the focus of self-enquiry for in it lies the key to freedom.

Chapter 11

SELECTIVE CONTROL OF THE MIND

That which we call the mind is the thinker and his thoughts. These thoughts are in a continuous flow. There is no time when we are free from thoughts. Why thoughts? What causes them? Though the thinker and his thoughts co-exist always, really one can intellectually be aware that the thinker is at the centre of his thought world. Why? Because each and every thought is the thinker's thought. It is his attention which gives life to it. Consequently when the attention is withdrawn, or transferred to another thought, immediately that thought vanishes. It gives place to the other thought on which the thinker's attention rests for the time being. Actually there is a reservoir of potential thoughts, called tendencies, which sprout when circumstances are favourable for their surfacing, because of the thinker's response to an object. There is no break in this process. Hence the perpetuation of thoughts.

Attempts at mind control are really foredoomed because they are essentially based on the effort to stave off some thoughts which are termed unwanted and to hang on to particular ones, considered desirable or good. This selective or preferential approach fails because it ignores the key position of the thinker in the thought world. Hence one is forced to stay on sometimes with negative and fearful thoughts which keep nagging. This, because one fails to recognise that the control switch is with the thinker turning attention away from the thoughts. As a result despite strenuous practice over a period of years one remains a novice in meditation, losing most of the allotted time to the thoughts which have to be warded off.

The solution to the problem lies elsewhere. Mental space has to be created by understanding the nature of the mind instead of being choosy about thoughts, which in the last analysis do not matter. For

they are dependent on the thinker. Logic therefore demands a shift in attention to the opposite direction, from thoughts to the thinker.

Grappling with thoughts is counter-productive for one would be up against “an army of thoughts”. The strength of numbers would be numbing. If one recognises the unimportance of thoughts then one would be ready to discard all thoughts, lock, stock and barrel, instead of wishing for some and wishing away others.

Once the key role of the subject, the thinker, the ‘I’- thought is recognised then this splintering, this frag-mentation, would gradually begin to ease and natural control of the mind would start. The mind which was split up into many rivulets would be gathered together. It would be unitary.

What would happen when attention is shifted away from objects, from thoughts, and turned to the subject? Then the mind would merge in its source the spiritual heart, an assertion which one can make based on Ramana’s experience. What happens when the thinker turns away from objects, away from his thought companions, from his associated thoughts is that the thinker would also drop off. Where? Into his source. For he has no strength of his own, separated from thoughts one would find anchorage in the source.

The expression source needs some explaining. Not difficult, for it is there to see. The thinker, the ‘I’-thought must have a source for the thinker disappears in sleep and rises again on waking. A revitalising happens each day suggesting that the source must be Self-conscious, an unlimited energy source.

This approach to control of mind is holistic in contrast to the conventional methods which are based on duality, on a near permanent subject-object set up. Once Ramana’s self-enquiry is afoot, the assumption of separate status for thoughts apart from the thinker and the thinker apart from the Self would cease. This false assumption of duality would be corroded by an attitude of doubt. The doubt is generated by questioning the assumption of identification with the

body and the mind. And the enquiry about the mind's source is of great significance since it causes remembrance of one's conscious source. This in turn leads one on to the revelation of the true nature of the mind as a pure, unsullied reflection of the fullness of consciousness.

While pursuing inwardness with vigilant self-enquiry often the power of past in the form tendencies and the habit of looking outward for happiness become stiff road blocks. Ramana counsels the need for 'Patience', 'Practice,' and 'Grace dependence'. As Ramana would say, self-enquiry is like laying a siege round the fortress of thoughts. The thoughts inside this fortress would be starved by the inattention of the thinker to them. When some of them surface because of the thinker's attention arising from past habit, it would be easier to deal with them individually using the weapon of self-enquiry. One would not have to deal with the collective strength of thoughts. This process of course requires patience. As for practise of self-attention it is a new technique which turns one away from thoughts to oneself. Hence "practice, and more practice" is required for becoming an adept at it. And grace dependence is the sensitivity of the mind to the ever available guidance of Sadguru Ramana. This is always at hand. One finds a friend and guide in Sadguru Ramana who initiates the effort, sustains it and ensures it fruition in the experiencing of the pure mind. Surrender to him and prayer for his help would constitute an integral part of a successful effort to stay within. Then the mind would be immersed in its own bliss.

Chapter 12

THE ALTERNATIVES:

PURE MIND : STILLED MIND : DIVIDED MIND

Seekers of truth, troubled by thoughts like a festering wound, often think in terms of a quiet mind, a mind free of thoughts, as the goal. They want to still the mind in the belief that the mind is thereby controlled. They forget that a dormant mind does not really mean much. We are experiencing such quietness of this mind in deep sleep. Are we not? Then are we any the wiser on waking than before going to sleep? Likewise, many yogic practices can quieten the mind for hours on end. Some meditative courses are conducted where one is steeped in what one might call, 'induced stillness' for long hours. But one has to be on guard against such lulls in thoughts for it might well be a lull before a storm. When one does not know anything about the nature of the mind, the mind's potential for a volcanic explosion of thoughts would remain to unexpectedly destroy the hard earned mind control. Hence Ramana would always caution one against looking for a mere absence of thoughts. In 'Upadesa Saram' he points out that the mind in 'laya', quietness, will rise again propelling the mind into its former continuous movement of thoughts after the lull is broken. He advised an ardent early devotee, Echammal, against practising concentration on the tip of her nose since it would only produce a temporary cessation of thoughts. To Swami Ramanananda Suvarnagiri, Ramana pointed out that a quiet mind is actually one of the dangers on the spiritual path, for one is apt to mistake it for the real peace of Self-abidance which is of a totally different dimension. Such is the grave danger of mistaking the temporary thought absence, and the resultant peace therefrom, as the real thing, that Ramana would in some cases intervene to save a devotee from that state. One devotee used to lapse into such a state while meditating in the old Hall at the Ashram. Noticing this Ramana advised another devotee to take him

for a walk and bring him back. The mind must be very active, of course not in pursuit of thoughts but in pursuit of the thinker and in the steadfast pursuit of inwardness, in the search for its source. Periods of temporary absence of thoughts stun and dull the mind. Thereby one is actually weaned away, diverted from the enquiry to discover the source of the mind. Therefore such methods become obstacles on the path.

One might well ask why this faith, deluded as it may be, in the 'still mind'? What we are trying to do is to move away from a divided mind. Divided because of the splitting of the subject 'I' from the objects perceived by it. In this lie the seeds of conflict. Because the division is false. All thoughts are mind's projections. This fact would be discovered if we recall and reflect on the dream experience in which one projects a whole world. Again the so called subject 'I' has no reality apart from the Self.

However, the way out of a divided mind is not in stilling the mind but in understanding the mind's nature. This understanding comes about by self-enquiry. In this, enquiry is focused on the subject. First one gets separated from the objects, thoughts. Then without any further effort this very delinking from thoughts pushes the mind back to its source. When the mind does not arise again, which means that the first thought 'I', the subject, and the other thoughts, objects, do not surface again, the mind is free of thoughts. It is at peace, naturally at peace. This is in contrast to peace induced by mental gymnastics. This natural peace is dynamic and exhilarating. This is technically called a 'dead mind', but it is really a mind while is ever alert, ever blissful. What about thoughts when needed? Of course there would be a necessary thought response when called for and only to that extent. Relating her experience about this a devotee says 'One afternoon somebody showed Maharshi some verses written on paper. He read them, made a brief comment, and clarified it by narrating a story from 'Yoga Vasishtam'... The Maharshi had narrated that story going to the spirit of it like an aimed arrow and then lapsed into his speaking silence'.

The process of arriving at the Silent Mind has been explained by Ramana so clearly that it seems like child's-play. However, before looking at it let us see the limitation in the methods of mind control. In all such methods concentration is on an object, be it a sacred syllable, name or form of the Guru or chosen God. The attempt is made to create a thought vacuum in order to be with this favoured thought. The attempt is not successful because the nature of the mind is not understood. As Ramana remarks "Your thoughts are part and parcel of the mind whereas only when one enquires, 'What is this thing called the mind?' one will be on the right track. When attention is shifted by enquiry to the mind's core, and simultaneously a question is raised 'Wherefrom does this mind arise', then the mind is devoid of thought and in turn merges there. It is not a subject perceiving an object.

"When the room is dark a lamp is necessary to illumine it and to recognise objects. But when the sun has risen there is no need for a lamp, the objects are seen. To see the sun no lamp is necessary, it is enough if you turn your eyes towards the self-luminous sun.

"Similarly with the mind. To see the objects the reflected light of the sun is necessary. To see the Heart it is enough if the mind is turned towards it'!

Thus the subsidence of the mind into its source happens automatically because of the magnetism of the Heart. Then the unitary mind takes the place of the divided mind. Thereafter it is only bliss, bliss and bliss, endless bliss, in which the mind would be submerged.

Chapter 13

TIME OUT

The religious rites connected with the 70th birthday were just over. 70 is considered to be the watershed stage in one's life. A thousand pardons had been asked of the Supreme for innumerable trespasses in thought, word and deed. The list enumerated was quite staggering. But there it is, the endless breaches of the ethical law by demands of self concerns, of ego based life.

A friend who was there asked the person concerned, "Do you wish to live longer?" Prima-facie, it would appear to be quite harsh and callous question on such an occasion. However to scorch any debate a simple reply was given, "It is upto Ramana".

The question and the answer should set one thinking. Should they not? It is only those who have surrendered everything to Ramana who can truly say, "Ramana's will be done". For the rest it is time for reflecting over the question of what this life is all about. How would the remaining years of one's life, whatever they may be, be spent? Would there be marked departure or any departure at all from the past? Would there be any sense of urgency to discover the truth, to be sustained in self-enquiry for achieving this? Would one's life be more Ramana dependent? Would there be a growing consciousness of his ever flowing grace? Or would the coming years be more or less the same, just as habitual, routine, dull and restless?

These are some of the questions over which not only the old but the young too should ponder. For, many things are uncertain. The life span itself is an uncertain factor. When the final whistle of time is blown marking the end of the body's existence, would one be pleading for extra time? If so, why? Supposing it is granted what would one do with it? Would it also be converted into a purposeless drift or would

there be an ardent desire to open up a new chapter in one's life?

Such questioning would take us deeper into issues like, 'What is time?'. Ramana says that time is ego, the notion that one is the body, the idea that one is the mind. Time is linked with the past with all its vast load of experiences. Unless this link is scissored, ended, the joy the life with all its immensity would not be felt. One would remain imprisoned by experience, by thoughts, by endless secession of thoughts. Breaking free from the tyranny of the past is a must if one's life is not to end as it began, in ignorance of the fascinating beauty and engulfing nature of inherent bliss.

If one succeeds one would be living each moment fully. The mind would pay total attention to that very moment undistracted by intrusions of the past and future. It would be a life wholly lived in the present. While all this seems fine, intellectually acceptable, few, alas very few, opt for it. This is not surprising for instinctively the new challenges are deterring any serious attempt to move away from the present state of mind. This fear is there because one does not know where one is heading. There is a way of life which one is used to. What is being suggested seems to be wholly different from this, the mind gets scared at the prospect.

It is necessary, however, to get over such understandable but needless fears. The past is a dead-weight which leaves its burden, the load of hurts, sufferings of the past. Their impact, their mark, is so strong that one continues to relive these sorrows unable to be free from them. True there are some sweet memories but it is the negative emotions and thoughts whose imprint lingers longer and more deeply. However it is important to practice the method which would lead to a new way of life in which there is abundant joy.

The question would arise as to what is the requisite effort for arriving at and remaining in this state. The question came up before Ramana when a seeker from Colombo sought out the clarification, "What is the best way to arrive at the state of effortless and choiceless awareness?" The words used by the speaker denote living each

moment fully. Mind's attention would be wholly in the present without any mental movement. Ramana's reply is extracted here under.

“Effortless and choiceless awareness is our real nature. If we can attain it or be in that state, it is all right. But one cannot reach it without effort, the effort of deliberate meditation. All the age long vasanas carry the mind outward and turn it to external objects. All such thoughts have to be given up and the mind turned inward. For that effort is necessary for most people. Of course everybody, every book says ‘Be quiet or still’. But it is not easy. That is why all this effort is necessary. Effortless and choiceless awareness is reached only after persistent meditation.”

What meditation can be better than Ramana's method of self-enquiry? Its focus is on the meditator, the subject, the ego, and therefore direct. Through practice of self-enquiry, one learns to steer quickly from the chaos of the mind and to stay with the ‘I’ - thought. Once this happens, the mighty magnet, the irresistible attraction of the Self, pulls one within the Self. Time, ego would disappear into its source like a river merging in its source, the ocean. Egoless living would commence.

Thereafter, one's body may be in the time but not the mind. It would be timeless and spaceless. This is called the death of the mind. Really speaking it is the real birth of the mind for it becomes supple, free and joyous. Death of the body is neither dreaded nor welcomed. The body too becomes an instrument of the divine continuing until such time as the Supreme chooses to retain it for its purposes. It is this state which Ramana offers to us on a platter, to which he is constantly beckoning us, to which he is guiding every earnest seeker of truth.

Chapter 14

THE MORTAL AND IMMORTAL

It all happened so suddenly, so swiftly, this bolt from the blue. He was a fine man, ever helpful, genial and active. He complained of chest pain and two massive attacks stopped the functioning of his heart. His body was brought home from the hospital. It was heart-rending sight. The mother's loud lamentation, the wife's inconsolable sorrow, the deep mourning of the sons not withstanding their brave fronts, the continuous stream of condolers.

Amidst all this there was the need for informing close relatives who would like to have a last look at the dear face which could be seen no more, the need to make funeral arrangements to make the minimal arrangements for food and so on. For life had to go on.

The air was thick with sorrow. Every new condoler would add to it. Strange! A body which was so full of life only a few hours earlier was now a mere corpse. It had to be preserved till the next morning by putting it over ice blocks.

The dreadful night hours dragged on and were somehow over. Lady members were asked to bid the last farewell. The heavy body, from which the life force had fled, had to be brought down with utmost care. Then the last journey. It was through a burial ground where hundreds of dead had been buried, rows and rows of them, before reaching the electric crematorium. How many graves! They kept reminding one about the way of all flesh. The body made up of five elements will be dissolved into the very elements from which it is made at the pre-appointed but unknown time. At the crematorium there were jarring formalities, sets of rules and regulations. The clerk incharge had gone for a cup of coffee. One had to wait. The waiting seemed so long. One last look was permitted. One last homage and

then the body was pushed into the electrical oven to be seen no more. They said that the ashes and bones could be collected next morning. Only a handful of ashes remained that too to be scattered at sacred places.

The dear one had departed. No more could he call his daughter on whom he doted, his wife who had served him so well, nor for that matter any one who was dear and near. The curtain was down on a good life of a humble and devout person who had come up in life by sheer dint of hardwork and intelligence. The torch of his life burnt no more. The sharp edge of sorrow would be blunted soon by the great eraser of memories, time.

Sitting amidst this sorrow and sharing it one does feel a sense of disgust about the way one's life is proceeding, our petty concerns over trifles, our short sightedness, our self-centredness, and what not. One does feel deeply that life is but a passing show and that one must look deeply within to find out its meaning and its purpose.

At the same time this sense of transience, the feeling about the ephemeral nature of the body, its earthly sojourn, around which everything else is built, does not last. Soon the old ways of life capture the mind.

Some, however, escape and begin to question the mortality of the body in the face of scriptural pronouncements about the immortality of the Self. It may be because of the immortal element in each of us that one refuses to accept the ending of the body as the finality of everything. If one starts reflecting and pondering over this issue over and over again, then the death of a friend or a near one would start transforming one's life. That sorrow would lead to a questioning which would lead us to a new awakening.

It is more or less the kind of situation which Ramana had faced when his father Sundaram Iyer died. It was in 1892, at Tiruchuzhi, his birth place. He was 12 years old then. Surrounded by grieving relatives, in the midst of the encircling sorrow Ramana wondered

what made the difference between his father's body pronounced dead and his own which was full of life. This introspection made him conclude that his father's 'I' had left the body and turned it into a corpse whereas his 'I' was still in his body.

A similar situation arose in Ramana's life when his mother Azhagammal fell seriously ill on her way back from a pilgrimage. The sole refuge of Ramana was Lord Siva, embodied as Aruna hill. His mother was not yet ready to be liberated. While praying to Arunachala for her recovery Ramana posed in that prayer itself the fundamental question 'What exactly is death?' He says 'Enquire what is time? What is death? Quite obviously death is the physical ending but what about the mind? What about the divine presence? Is there anything in us which is deathless, because of which both the mind and the body become conscious?

Ramana has explained that at the time of the body's death the mind gathers the vital forces and gets attached to another body, be it gross or subtle. Consequently there is a continuous birth and death of the body till such time as the mind itself dies. Hence it is important that one should tackle the mind and understand its true nature. Otherwise, it would continue to be a bundle of thoughts and innate tendencies based upon the experience of pleasure and pain of past action.

Another point which Sri Ramana makes is that the death of the mind only means the merging of it in its source. Self-enquiry being an enquiry relating only to the subject, the 'I', results in the merging of the mind in its source. Then one's pure mind which is a reflection of consciousness would take the place of what is now called the mind.

Consequently those who wish to be free from the womb to womb travel should work consistently and vigilantly towards the discovery of the true nature of the mind. Self-enquiry being directly focused on the subject, would ensure it.

While undoubtedly the steadfast practice of self-enquiry would

lead to knowledge about the mind's real nature, one's own effort by itself would not be successful. One has to remember the need for the constant dependence on Ramana's grace and protection. This is because one's innate tendencies are like potential time bombs. Consequently, using the five senses they can capture the mind and pull it down to abysmal depths. In one's weak moments, when seemingly all the fruits of one's hard earned spiritual practices are in jeopardy of being lost, who can save except the compassionate Sadguru Ramana? He has to stand guard against the sudden and often unexpected attacks of the embedded memories of the past.

Ramana also assures that this discovery of immortality in each of us is possible here and now while being in this body itself. This is possible through persistent practice of self-enquiry going hand in hand with the constant awareness of Ramana's grace. If one fails to use the opportunity which life offers for inward search, one's journeys to the grave, life after life, would be inevitable.

Chapter 15

THE MASTER PHYSICIAN

The scriptures emphasise the need for desirelessness. The jnanis, persons of wisdom like Ramana, are fearless. This is because they are desireless. The question would therefore arise as to how one is to become desireless or fearless, which means the same thing.

Two methods are always being tried to achieve this object. One is to fulfil the desires in the hope that once the desires are fulfilled there would be satisfaction from such fulfilment. A visitor asked Sri Ramana.

D: Must not one become satiated with the fulfilment of desire before they are renounced?

R: Fire might as well be put out by pouring spirit over the flames. The more the desires are fulfilled, the deeper grows the 'samskara'. They must become weaker before they cease to assert themselves. That weakness is brought about by not losing oneself in desires. Pleasure derived from the fulfilment of an earlier action leaves a residual memory. This would make one choose, repeatedly, the course of action which had given pleasure before.

Because of this some have advocated that the best way of checking desires is to suppress the same in the expectation that the desires so suppressed will not trouble the person later. However suppression by its very nature can only be temporary in effect. This is also pointed out by Ramana in reply to another devotee. The question and answer are as follows:

Q: How am I to deal with my passions? Am I to check them or satisfy them? If I follow Bhagavan's method and ask,

“For whom are these passions?” they do not seem to die but grow stronger.

A. That only shows you are not going about my method properly. The right way is to find out the root of all passions, the source whence they proceed, and get rid of that. If you check the passions they may get suppressed for the moment, but will appear again. If you satisfy them, they will be satisfied only for the moment and will again crave satisfaction. Satisfying desires and thereby trying to root them out is like trying to quench fire by pouring kerosene oil over it.

Given the fact that both satisfaction and suppression do not result in desirelessness, one may come to the conclusion that desirelessness is not possible at all. However this conclusion is also incorrect. The jnanis are in that state and they exemplify the joy of that state. Again Ramana points out that in deep sleep everyday each one is desireless and without any feeling of want. Not entertaining desires did not make one miserable. On the contrary there is repose and peace in that state.

Even though one mentally accepts the idea of desirelessness, fearlessness, in practice one is quite half-hearted and halting. A conversation which Devaraja Mudaliar (diarist of ‘Day by Day’) had with Ramana would perhaps explain the reason for this. He once told Ramana “We run after sense enjoyments because we know by experience that they are pleasant. The state of desirelessness and bliss has no doubt been extolled by saints. However we do not have faith in it due to lack of experience of it.” The question would therefore arise as to how this experience has to be brought about. Ramana points out that all desires relate only to the ‘desirer’. If one understands the true nature of the ‘desire’ by focusing attention on the subject ‘I’ and source from which the feeling of individuality arises then the state of desirelessness would come about. Quite obviously the suggestion of Bhagavan takes one straightaway to the simple and direct path of self-enquiry taught by Sri Bhagavan. Therefore one must constantly

have the backdrop of doubt about one's true identity all the time be it during the time set apart for self-enquiry, while working or idling. The attention so focused by the mind on itself, on its core, would inturn the mind. The mind would then get within the magnetic field of attraction of the divine, of the Self, of the spiritual heart. Bliss would be experienced naturally. The idea that happiness lies in fulfilment of desires would fall off like a ripe fruit from a tree.

One must of course remember that the cardinal rule for the success of self-enquiry is firm faith in the guidance of Ramana on the path. Otherwise the mind might trip one at any stage of spiritual practice. Ramana's steady, gentle and unobtrusive support can be taken for granted till we are steadily in the state of desireless bliss.

The other alternative mode for tackling this problem is to look at the question of doership. Presently one's actions are fuelled by the idea that it is because of one's strength that results are achieved and failures are avoided. If this question is gone into deeply it would be noticed that the success does not depend on the strength of one's desires. According to Ramana the fruits of all effort flow from the divine laws of Karma and Grace. If this is recognised then the strong attachment to desires for achieving success and goals weakens. The resultant tentativeness about one's capacity to fulfil desires through action would supplement one's effort to find out about the true nature of 'I' and quicken the discovery of the state of desirelessness, of fearlessness.

Chapter 16

WHY THE COMPANY OF THE WISE?

1. In the company of the sages, attachment vanishes, and with attachment illusion. Freed from illusion, one's mind becomes silent and one becomes liberated while alive. Seek therefore the company of the sages.
2. If association with sages is obtained, to what purpose are the various methods of self-discipline? Tell me of what use is the fan when the cool gentle wind is blowing?

In the supplement to Forty Verses, Ramana has begun by including five verses about the value and importance of association with the wise. These are not original compositions but translations from Sanskrit works of Adi Sankara or from Yoga Vasista.

It would be convenient to reflect and meditate on the second verse initially because there is an interesting story behind it. Echamma who was a staunch devotee of Ramana, used to send food everyday to him and his devotees. Sometimes she would send the food packet through her young niece Chellamma. Echamma used to fast frequently on some pretext or the other. On those days her niece too had to fast though she was young and hungry. On one such day she sent food to Ramana through Chellamma. What happened is narrated by Ramana himself. "On a kirtika day she brought me food even though she was fasting that day. How could I eat when she was not taking food? I told her that she should not indulge in such fasting being young and somehow prevailed upon her to eat. Next day when coming up the hill with food she found a paper with some sloka (verse). When I saw it I found it contained the second sloka. I said 'Look, it contains the same thing which I told you yesterday'. I translated it into Tamil and

explained the meaning to her. Thereafter she gave up her fasts. She had great faith in me.”

One can surely assert that association with sages is obtained by God’s grace as a blessing for meritorious deeds and penance done in the past.

For Sat Sanga means association with the ‘sat’ or ‘Reality’, or with those who are rooted in it like Ramana. A mere gracious glance of such a jnani would purify and make one ready for self-enquiry. The process has been explained in the first verse. Attachments to the body, the mind, to wealth and so on will lose their grip. An internal detachment towards all transient things would develop. This would break the illusions of ‘body am ‘I’ idea. Once this happens the mind remains in its conscious pure source. Such inherence in the source would end bondage to the idea that one is bound. The awareness that one is ever free would dawn.

The influence of the sage however would do its work steadily and unnoticed. Consequently one might not be aware of it and start questioning its efficacy. This happens even to the most ardent of devotees at some time or the other. Since the change is intangible in terms of growing detachment and expansion of heart it would be assumed that it is not there at all. In his own sweet way, Devaraja Mudaliar refers to this problem. In 1935, in Ramanas’s hall one Venkatarama Aiyar brought to Mudaliar’s notice the first five verses of the Supplement saying ‘For people like us the best thing is only this’. Ramana would also refer him to some of the verses in sacred texts like Bramara Gita, Kurunthirithi and Jnana Vasistam which extol the importance of ‘Sat Sanga’. Vasistha says ‘The imperfect will become perfect, danger, good luck, inauspicious, auspicious by association with sages.

Various stories from the epics illustrative of the merit of the association with the wise came to Mudaliar’s notice either through Bhagavan or through books and journals. However, after some years he began to doubt and mentally question the validity of these statements. Being free with Ramana he once asked him, ‘Are all these

things which are said about Sat-Sanga literally true or are they exaggerations common to poets?.

While one can understand impatience in the absence of tangible proof, on closer reflection it would be clear that the problem arises because we set the pace, the time frames for the Sadguru to do the work. We are unaware how deeply nailed in our minds are the tendencies based on past experiences. Hence Ramana would point out that when it comes to the timing of grace it is best known only to the giver, the Supreme one. Many fail because they do not persevere fearing lack of progress in the face of seeming unconcern of the guru, seeming distance of the goal. But one has to remember that the words of the great ones and the scriptures are never in vain. Once unreserved entrustment of our fate and future is placed in the Guru's hands association with him will certainly lead to inner freedom, joyous freedom which no sorrow or thought can touch.

It needs to be remembered that the company of the wise does not mean a physical association. It only means a remembrance of their presence, remembrance of their abiding in the Self and being mentally related to them, in every way. Some of the questions to and answers of Ramana make this point abundantly clear.

D: I am reluctant to leave your presence and return to my home which is far away.

R: Think that you are always in my presence. That will make you feel all right.

D: I am unable to visit you as often as I want.

R: You need not come and you need not feel disheartened about it. Wherever you are do not stray from the Self.

When one devotee expressed great sorrow at parting from Ramana, he told, 'No one can be out of sight of the Supreme presence. Since you identify one body with Bhagavan and another with your self, you find two separate entities and speak of going away from here. Wherever you may be, you cannot leave me'. This aspect of the sadguru's

availability and the essential bodiless nature of the Sadguru must be remembered particularly now when one cannot bask in Ramana's physical presence. However his timeless presence, his grace is available to all who are fortunate to be aware of it.

Chapter 17

WORSHIP OF THE SUPREME

In a Sahasranama, the Supreme is being worshipped as embodied in a particular name and form. It consists of one thousand attributes for adoration and contemplation. These cover the matchless love and unlimited powers of the Supreme radiating from that form and name. It also asserts the potency of the prayerful recitation of these attributes, both for fulfilling one's desires and for attaining Self-knowledge.

In Sri Ramana Sahasranama the Supreme is adored as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. For centuries two sahasranamas, one in praise of Goddess Lailtha Tripura Sundari written by Sage Agastya and the other in praise of Lord Vishnu written by the Sage Sanaka are being regularly chanted by the devout. There is little doubt that prayerful recitation of Sri Ramana Sahasranama would have the same potency. Time is bound to prove this.

Appropriately Sri Jagadeeswara Sastri takes one to the background of this Sahasranama. Goddess Parvati after hearing from Maharshi Gautama about the glory of Arunachala requests him to tell her about the great soul 'Ramana' also, as he is the human embodiment of the same Arunachala. Maharshi Gautama responds for he recognises at once that this question is being put for the welfare of the world. As a preamble, Gautama refers to the path knowledge (Gnana) as being the best for liberation. Then he states that in the path of gnana the matchless way is self-enquiry as revealed by Sri Ramana for it could be practised at all times, by people of different religions and backgrounds. Therefore he agrees to reveal the secret of secrets, the glorious state of Sri Ramana.

In any sahasranama, the under current is devotion. What purpose does it serve? Such questions would of course arise only for those

who have not experienced the growing influence of these sacred words in their lives. The first benefit of course is the fulfilment of one's desires. The Supreme is the store house, the reservoir of all powers. Simultaneously universal love is its essential nature. When there is devout recitation of the thousand names be it of Sri Lalitha, Sri Vishnu or Sri Ramana there is an automatic divine response. The students would do well in their education, bachelors and spinsters would get married according to their wishes, businessmen would build their empires, politicians will stay in power and so on. The gain even in material terms is far more than one could imagine.

In 'Ulladu Narpadu', Ramana gives a special reason for the seekers of truth. The worship of the Supreme loosens one's bonds and prepares one for liberation. Why? Firstly the Supreme is the repository of all auspicious qualities. In reciting the Sahasranama in prayerful mind one's mind is thinking of these qualities and begins to partake of the same qualities. The mind becomes purer and more ready for recognising the value of self-enquiry. Seemingly implicit in any worship is the recognition of the fact that one cannot achieve one's goals on the imagined strength of one's ego, 'I am the doer' notion. This false notion is eroded and the truth dawns that one's true strength is only the Supreme.

Many are used to the idea of worship of Gods and Goddesses through sahsranamas in their praise but they have their own doubts about a sahasranama on the Supreme when it is embodied in a human form as Sri Ramana. In their ignorance they would presume that such worship would lead to what they see as 'Personality cult'. There are many fallacies in such a train of thought. The Scriptures repeatedly assert that God, Guru, and the Self are identical. Since 'bhavana' or attitude of mind is all important one should, while expressing one's adoration for the guru, remember always this identity of Guru and God.

Besides one who steadily abides in the Self, like Sri Ramana, is the Self itself. It would also be wrong to think of Sri Ramana as that

particular form. He is all forms which exist now, existed in the past and will come into existence in the future. Are not all forms mere lifeless puppets unless he inhabits their hearts as consciousness. Again Ramana has demonstrated to some of his devotees his essential bodilessness. It is a strange but true enigma that when the Supreme is embodied in a human form for the welfare of the world that form and that name too remain for all times, deathless and eternal.

One would do well to go through the introductory verses in which the Maharshi Gautama stresses the special advantage of Sri Ramana Sahasranama Stuti. He declares that whatever path one may tread ultimately it is only through gnana that one can attain Self-knowledge. And for this the simple and direct path is the path of 'Vichara' or self-enquiry, incessantly taught by Sri Ramana. For those on this royal high road there can be no better support than the Supreme as Sadguru Ramana.

Sri Ramana Sahasranama Stuti is part of the daily worship of Sri Ramaneswara at Sri Ramanasramam. For this treasure the world owes a great debt to Jagadeeswara Sastri who composed it. As one keeps reciting these holy names many things become clear. The work has been inspired, by Ramana himself. For to praise the Supreme in the human form of Ramana is a task which is beyond the most gigantic intellect.

One also finds the total inadequacy of language, any language, to communicate the glorious state and life of Sri Ramana. We can definitely say that except for Ganapati Muni, Jagadeeswara Sastri has no peer in his mastery of the Sanskrit language. His association with Bhagavan Ramana was from his young age and his love for him was abundant. Even so he is able to give us only a glimpse of Ramana's glory and uniqueness.

One also finds that when one recites these attributes, the impact on the reader would depend on receptivity, on the attitude of surrender to Ramana. Its charm grows as one is drawn to this supreme force

Ramana. So one might find the recitation increasingly meaningful, increasingly transforming, increasingly magnetic.

One may pick any of the thousand attributes at random and savour its sweetness. Each one has sufficient depth and elevating force to permit meaningful reflection and absorption in Ramana.

The grace of Ramana place one in his constant debt, a debt of such magnitude that it can never be repaid. There can be no greater blessing than the remembrance of the presence which Sri Ramana Sahasranama Stuti ensures.

Chapter 18

GRACE IS NEEDED MOST

Ramana was the embodiment of grace. Its totality. For he was abiding always in the Self, in the awareness of his true blissful nature. Yet many who saw him while he was in a physical body, many who lived in his close proximity seemed to have missed out on being aware of that ever flowing grace. For them the perennial Ganges of his grace was as good as not being there. This danger is even more so now because his presence as the inner guru is apt to be missed out unless one is sensitive to secret operation and even open guidance sometimes.

If one reads the ‘Talks’, or ‘Day by Day’, one common prayer of devotees and visitors would be for Ramana’s grace. Those who pray thus overlook the important point that the ever existent grace of Ramana can be felt only if one also works hard at self-enquiry, hard at being related to Ramana in as many ways as possible, through worship, remembrance of his holy name and form and the protection he is extending day in and day out. They are like lotus eaters. Ramana would sometimes tell such persons that he was not keeping his grace under lock and key. Or he would say that one who goes for drawing water from a river with a tiny vessel cannot complain that the one who took a big vessel could carry more. Grace is always there and readily and equally available to all in one sense and only to some in another sense, for many fail to tap it.

In his book on the modern teacher U.G. Krishnamurthy, Mahesh Bhat records an interview which he had with Ramana. This serves to bring out the need for preparedness in receiving grace.

K: Is the theory about liberation really true?

R: Yes.

K: Are there gradations in it?

R: No, it is a state. It is abiding in the natural state.

K: Can you liberate me?

R: Remains silent.

Annoyed K : Can you at least give me whatever experience you may have?

Looking sharply at K, Ramana said:

R: Yes, I can give it. Can you take it?

This became the starting point for U.G.K's search for truth.

The recipient can receive only if and to the extent to which he is ready to surrender to the Sadguru. On this point there is so much mix up. The analogy of the kitten is given. The cat picks it up. All that the kitten has to do is wait to be picked up. Ramana does not seem to subscribe to this view. For as long as ego is there, so long as the sense of doership and individuality are there, how can success in spiritual practice alone be left out as the exclusive job of the Sadguru? The one who has the individuality has to enquire, has to search, has to quest earnestly to find out his true identity. And while so searching he should depend more and more on the Guru's grace because of which alone he had the desire to search in the first place, because of whom he remains steadfast in enquiry. For, while effort is a must, while practice and grace must go hand in hand, success of the effort depends on the Guru's grace alone. In this context one might recall a conversation which Kapali Sastri had with Ramana in 1929.

K: When after a long struggle and development in and by sadhana one attains results (siddhis), is the attainment his act or the action of the Spirit or Power which is the object of his Upasana?

R: It is the action of the Power (current)

K: So it is not the aspirant's act that makes him get siddhi but it is the act of the power.

R: Yes

Ramana would make this point time and again and emphasise that in the last analysis, success in the spiritual point is not so much dependent on practice only but on the grace of the guru.

It is difficult to lay enough emphasis on this point. For in the first flush of self-enquiry, the enquiries 'Who am I?' and 'Whence am I?' seem so appealing to the intellect. It is devoid of all that goes into religious practices. There is no long lists of 'do's and don't's. The various types of rituals are not there. Hence it carries a strong appeal to the mind. Since we live by the mind and lay such great store by it one is apt to get carried away by the idea that there is no need for any kind of guidance or support. But once one gets into self-enquiry it will become more and more clear that it is the only spiritual method in which the use of the mind is minimal and dependence on grace is most. For once we talk of the source and getting there, the question would arise about the nature of the source. The source is the divinity pulsating and throbbing in every heart. This indeed is the grace of Ramana. Ramana brings us to the threshold of his grace and swallows us alive only to clothe us with a new life, a life about which we know nothing at all now, tasting which one is filled with the ambrosia of immortality.

Chapter 19

SADAGURU'S GRACE IS A MUST

It was Monday, the 18th of November 1907, Kartiga Shukla Chaturdasi. There were 'people, people everywhere'. Devotees, in their thousands, had gathered in Tiruvannamalai to celebrate the Karthigai festival in the holy city of Arunachala. They would throng to the Virupaksha Cave, just to sit in the peace giving, silent presence of the 'Brahmanaswami'. The Swami had remained silent, indrawn, and often oblivious of his body for eleven years since he had arrived at Arunachala on the 1st of September 1896. Earnest seekers had questioned him but his replies were written on sand, or on slate. But on that momentous day the divine took a hand. At 2 p.m. in the afternoon, he was sitting alone in front of the Virupaksha Cave, waiting for his disciple who was to reveal to the world his role as the universal guru. The Swami was only twenty seven years old. Yet, because of his steady abidance in the natural state, his golden body was shining with the radiance of the Self. He was verily the Self embodied.

On that day, Ganapati, an ascetic, just a year older than him, barely twenty eight, was suffering from pangs of spiritual hunger. From his young age, he had been steeped in spiritual practices. By the time he had come to Arunachala, for the first time in 1903, he had pronounced the sacred Panchakshari mantra, 'Om Namah Sivaya' more than a crore of times. He had also simultaneously pronounced the other sacred texts like 'Srividya' and observed the required restraints and practices. But yet, he seemed to be getting nowhere. A feeling of being at the dead end began to grip him, for he was tossed between his firm faith in the scriptures and his inability to succeed. He was ripe with tapas, steeped in it, a Muni in the true sense of term. Yet the Truth deluded him. Was it the lack of the Guru's grace? It is well known that Guru's grace alone can fructify sadhana, however intense it might

be. And he had not found one. He had been on a casual visit to his Brahmana Swami in 1903 itself having heard of his exalted spiritual state. Yet he was not ready to surrender to him as to a guru. He himself had a large number of disciples but he had no guru.

In this water-shed state of his life, he remembered the Brahmanaswami and it suddenly dawned on him that he alone was worthy of being accepted as his guru. Had he not reached the farthest shore of tapas? Was he not steadily abiding in the Self? With bated breath and eager anticipation, with an irresistible desire to learn the true meaning of tapas, penance, from him he climbed the hill, not minding the burning heat of the day. His spiritual hunger had to be assuaged. He had to know what tapas meant from the one who was steeped in it. It is evident that at this point of time he had accepted the Brahmanaswami as his guru. For the very first thing he did on reaching the Virupaksha Cave was to hold the Swami's feet and bathe it with his tears.

It was to be an unique event in the spiritual history of mankind. For it was for the first time, after his enlightenment, the young seer, began his divine role as the universal guru. He broke the silence of many years. Was he waiting for this worthy disciple? There can be little doubt about the Muni's fitness to broadcast to the world that his guru was the universal guru, the one worthy to occupy the throne of Dakshinamurthi and Shankara. What happened at this meeting is described by the Muni thus. "Now when I came to him in spiritual agony, prostrated at his feet and was imploring him for a direction to follow, his compassionate look flowed into me. He was the first among those who had conquered the senses. He who comprehended my state and situation in a moment showered upon me a soothing rain of mercy and bliss from his fully open compassionate eyes."

The counsel that the Muni got from his Sadguru needs repeating as it is the very core of Ramana's teachings.

"When the mind enquires from where the notion of 'I' arises and dissolves right there at the origin of its birth, that is tapas. The enquiry

as to the exact origin from where the sound of mantra arises and dissolves the mind at the origin itself that is tapas”.

While the first portion is now well known as the famous ‘Whence am I?’ question, the enquiry into the origin of the sound of mantra has been given only to the Muni and through him to the world and is of immense potency for those having faith in the efficacy of the sacred syllables.

It is significant that in his instruction to the Muni, Ramana had emphasised the need for Source Consciousness. For it was given to him to emphasise this in Ramana Gita. One can say without fear of contradiction that in the entire Ramana literature, the best exposition of the ‘Science of the Heart’ is in Ramana Gita. There is a detailed discussion about the spiritual heart, the source of consciousness and also of all thoughts. The relationship between heart and the mind has also been spelt out in clear terms.

As for the alternative path of self-surrender also, Ramana has given clear guidance to the Muni. The advice was also given in (1907) when the Muni wished to leave for Tiruvottiyur for more penance. The Muni was firm in his belief that India would be regenerated only by the power of penance. Ramana told him, ‘Place all responsibility with the Lord of the Universe who controls everything and who is omnipotent. Let your mind be always focused on the Absolute, residing in your own heart’. You will obtain the good and the auspicious through your single minded devotion. Let all your activities be offered to Sri Sankara’. The foremost of the jnanis, Ramana is communicating the truth that the Lord alone is the actor, giving the strength to perform action, and fulfilling auspicious purposes at the appropriate time.

Chapter 20

NON-DUAL CONSCIOUSNESS - THE FLOOD TIDE OF BLISS

The holy feet stand watch within the hearts of disciples whose suffering is at an end, infusing them with the pure joy of their daily companionship. As if drunk on reality itself, they came to me in my time of need, saving me from the sorrow of my own delusion, the holy feet of our Lord.

MURUGANAR-SRI RAMANA ANUBUTI-VERSE 654

The scriptures are replete with praise of a Guru whose grace alone can reveal the truth to a disciple who has surrendered himself to his holy feet. However much one might strive with eager yearning in the spiritual path, one can reach only the threshold of the Self-knowledge. Though our egoistic mind might presume that by its own efforts it can withstand ‘whirling onslaught of thoughts’ it would founder. For the mind has been ‘muddled’ by its habitual externalisation. Without the Guru’s grace the host of accumulated tendencies will derail one on the path.

Even though the grace of Guru flows in his holy silence or through his penetrating eyes, it is his feet which is referred to in all sacred poetry, as refuge of the disciples. In this work Sri Ramana Anubuti, the disciple Muruganar pours out in ecstatic poetry the feelings of a grateful heart which remembers the glory of Guru Ramana’s feet which enabled his being established in the immense silence of the blissful natural state. The holy feet of Ramana floods ‘our meditations and enriches us with an abundance of supreme bliss’. Ramana’s feet ‘watch over his devotees so that they no longer wander over earth sunk in the mire of births’.

Disciples and devotees of Ramana sadguru are bound to him not

by bonds of time but through a timeless connection which frees one from his endless cycle from womb to womb, birth to birth and death to death. Murugunar explains what happens.

Out sole refuge is at the feet of Him who took from me my own self and exchanged it for his own, so that the bitter error which kept me apart from Him was removed, and, as he revealed to me the inward realization of his true nature, my heart was bathed in his own transcendent light.

This is an exchange from which the Guru gains nothing for he is already established in the fullness of Consciousness. He has escaped from the clutches of time. Nothing can add to that fullness. In contrast, the disciple gains a whole new world of a life lived in the ‘glorious non-dual state’. The Guru removes his darkness of ignorance by lighting the fire of knowledge. The natural state of overflowing bliss, of a non-dual existence is what the Guru’s grace bestows on a disciple who seeks nothing from him except steadfast devotion to his holy feet.

When disciples and devotees sought to know from Ramana about the Guru’s grace he would not hesitate to extol its importance. He would also refer them to scriptural passages where the importance of the Guru is stressed. Once quoting from the Suta Samhita, Ramana referred to the following passage:

Those who are seen by the eyes of jivanmukta (those who are liberated while they are still alive) are freed from many kinds of sins and become themselves jivanmuktas. The family of Jivanmukta is purified. His mother herself is a person who has done what needs to be done. The whole earth is purified by him.

After saying that there were many other passages in the Suta Samhita, which glorified jnanis, Bhagavan went on to say, ‘when a jnani is born in this world, the devotees, the disciples, those who are indifferent to God and even sinners are all benefitted.’

Ramana would also refer to a couple of passages from Tamil Vedantic

text Kaivalya Navanitam in which the disciple thanks the guru for blessing him with his grace which had enabled him to realise the self:

Lord, you are the reality remaining as my inmost Self, ruling me during all my countless incarnations! Glory to you who have put on an external form in order to instruct me! I do not see how I can repay your grace for having liberated me. Glory! Glory! To your holy feet. The Master beamed on him as he spoke, drew him near and said very lovingly: 'To stay fixed in the Self, without the three kinds of obstacles (ignorance, doubt and knowledge derived from the false premises) obstructing your experience, is the highest return you can render me'.

The guru is the greatest alchemist because taking the disciple with all his follies and foibles he transforms him into a seer of truth. In the case of an alchemist changing a base metal into gold, the converted gold would not have the property of changing any other metal. However the disciple who is a recipient of his guru's grace and has consequently become self aware can himself bestow his grace on others and give them that egoless state.

The beauty of Ramana would dazzle. It was bewitching. The luminosity of his eyes, their power and grace has a compelling attraction to one and all. This was so even when his body was neglected, unwashed, with long and dirty nails. Surely this was not because of his golden hued, well proportioned, handsome body. It was not the physical beauty, but the radiance of Self in which he was abiding without a break, which compelled one's attention. The one who abides in the self becomes its very embodiment.

Chapter 21

TRAVEL AS YOU PLEASE

In the 40's Indian Railways used to issue 'Travel as you please' journey tickets. The holders of these tickets could go anywhere they wished to. There was no restriction about the destinations. Only the total distance was stipulated.

It would appear that many on the spiritual path have also similarly purchased such 'Travel as you please' tickets. They are quite foggy about the purpose of their efforts. As a result their spiritual journey is wayward and directionless. They drift along to various gurus, listen to all distinguished speakers and keep reading a large number of books. As a result of this their mind is like a 'Kichidi' (special mixed dish) and they keep floating like logs of wood in the mighty Ganges. The unfortunate thing is that though they can travel as they wish they are wasting their time because the body's life span is 'Karmically' fixed, like the total distance in the 'Travel as you please' ticket. Hence when their energies are dissipated they have to start all over again to be free of the jumble of undigested ideas. Ramana used to point out the fruitlessness of such intellectual diet, "Vichara Sagara is full of logic and technical terms. Can these ponderous volumes serve any real purpose? However, some people read them and then seek sages only to see if they can meet their questions. They read them to discover new doubts and solve them. This is a source of pleasure for them. Knowing it to be sheer waste, the sages do not encourage it".

Therefore one should be clear from the beginning about the goal of his inward journey just as surely as he is about his worldly activities. This is particularly so in respect of those whom divine grace has brought to the ambit of Bhagavan Ramana's direct path. The advantage of the Ramana path is that the goal is immediately visible at all times. From the

first step one knows where he is going. The goal is Self-awareness, abidance in the state of Natural happiness. The means is self-enquiry.

In this method the goal and means are so intertwined that you cannot miss the goal at any time. The measuring rod is always there before one's eyes as it were.

If one is not experiencing the natural happiness of practice of self-enquiry there is need to check up and reflect on what has gone wrong, where exactly the practice has strayed. The reason is that 'ultimate' experience and 'immediate experience are not different in their essence. The happiness experienced is inherent happiness. The awareness of this inherent joy is fleeting in the beginning, more steadfast as a result of properly directed self-enquiry and unwavering in the end. One has to keep at self-enquiry untiringly till the experiencing of the natural happiness is firm. When the awareness of one's true nature is steadfast one is termed a "Jnani", a person of steady wisdom. Once this awareness is unbroken there is no more need for or possibility of any further effort. One remains spontaneously and effortlessly immersed in the overflowing bliss which is being continuously experienced by a pure mind.

Since the ultimate experience is available 'Here' and 'Now', the Self is not somewhere far away to be reached. "You are always that. You have to give up your habit, a long standing one of identifying yourself with the non-self. All effort is only for this". By practising Ramana's path of self-enquiry, one has to remove the obstacles to self-enquiry. For this there should be conceptual clarity before experiential certainty can be had. For convenience the Ramana Way basics in contrast of general ideas are set out below.

RAMANA WAY

GENERAL IDEAS

1. The mind is only a link between the Self and the body. It is the notion 'I am so-and so'. It has no independent existence.

1. The mind is a subtle body.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 2. The mind is by nature silent and restful. | 2. The mind is restless and has to be controlled. |
| 3. Any attempt to control the mind based on a distinction between subject and object is bound to fail. | 3. By proper effort the mind will become controlled. |

In some scriptures the mind is called a ‘subtle’ body in contrast to the physical body which is termed as the ‘gross’ body. Ramana points out that if one goes into the question of the nature of the mind it would be found to be comprising only of two types of thoughts. The first is the basic core, ‘I’ - thought which may be called the general thought; second there are the other thoughts which keep changing depending on whether the central thought ‘I’ is paying attention to them or not. Therefore the mind would be seen to be continuously changing. The change can be tackled and can be stopped if the subject, the individual, does not pay attention to the changing thoughts. Then what will remain is the core thought only and attention would be exclusively on that. When such attention is paid it too would disappear into its conscious source. Then there would be no mind as one knows it now. Ramana says, “The mind will exist only so long as you think of external things. When you draw it from the objects and make it think of the mind, or ‘I’, in other words introvert it, it ceases to exist”.

The next question is what would happen to the mind when it merges into its conscious source? Would one become a mindless idiot? No, says Ramana, because this thought-ridden mind would be replaced by a thought-free, subtle, alert, spontaneous mind. As Ramana says, “There is no difference between the mind and Self. The mind turned inward is self; turned outward it becomes ego and the world; the mind does not exist apart from the Self”. Such an intuned mind is called pure mind, which reflects fullness of consciousness. The mind’s energy is integral and uni-focused. Because then the mind will be functioning within its legitimate field, namely, attending to the daily avocation, professional or business needs etc. It will not be harassed by the past nor concerned with future. The moment alone would exist.

Then automatically the present frantic efforts to control the mind would not be there, for the mind would be silent and immersed in its bliss, seeking nothing from its activities.

Here it may also be mentioned that as a result one also discovers the real 'I' or true subject as fullness of consciousness. The present multiple 'I's, the 'I' of waking, the 'I' of dream and the causal 'I' of deep sleep would all be only the movements, mental projections of the subject. Thereafter all journeying ceases. What need is there for it, when one is experiencing the abundance of peace within? The once befuddled seeker becomes a beacon light to the world.

Chapter 22

CAN I STILL LOVE MY HUSBAND, KIDS, RELATIVES AND FRIENDS?

Our joys are built around our people, be it husband, wife, children or friends. Of course there is also the pleasure of our ideas, possessions and our bank balances. It is relationship-based with all its pluses and minuses. We would very well have a rough time from disobedient, obstinate or inconsiderate children. The other person's response may be halting and incomplete. They may not know the meaning of giving themselves to a relationship, wholly, unreservedly and passionately. And money has its heavy toll of worries, anxieties and fears. Even though aches and sorrows are a part of the bargain we don't seem to mind them. For where would we be but for such individual and personal love? We would be isolated, narrow and shrivelled at heart. The mere touch of the hand, the meaningful exchange of glances, the intellectual delight of an argument and so on are understandably sought after.

Is there a love without thorns, without pangs and suffering? Would such a thing be a mere ideal, utopian and unattainable? Not so. For we have the towering example of Ramana. He became steadily Self-aware at the age of sixteen. His Mahanirvana was in 1950 at the age of 70. In these years he exemplified what universal love, what Ilove without mental barriers of 'I' and mine is. His love flowed towards one and all. The high and low, the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the learned, were all seen with an equal eye. His love was not exclusively reserved only for the few. In this regard even his disciples and devotees were on par with the rest of the world. Does this mean that there was no place for individual love for him? Did not Ramana care in a personal way?

This question arises because it is taken for granted that universal love and individual love cannot co-exist. The issue came out in clear light when a devotee attending a talk on Ramana's teachings sought clarification on the point. After hearing about Self-Knowledge and universal love she asked, 'Sir, will I be able to relate to my dear ones in the same manner as I do now if I give myself wholly to the practice of the Ramana Way? If Self-Knowledge dawns, what would happen to all these relationships? Would the resultant universal love sweep away all these special loves?' She was in a dilemma since she was quite keen on pursuing the Ramana Way to its logical end.

She had got the drift of the talk all wrong. Even so she had raised an important question which needs reflection. What is the place of an individual's love when one's heart embraces the whole world? Each and every devotee could feel that Ramana was showering his love in some special way on them. He bathed them in his grace. Some would regard him as their father, some father and mother, some as a dear friend, some as their saviour in adversity and so on.

When some old relative or classmates came for a visit to Ramana, he would refer to that relationship, to those years together and make them feel at home. Sab Jan, a Muslim classmate used to be a very close friend whom Ramana would take to his house at Tiruchuzhi during weekends. Then after his illumination and arrival at Tiruvannamalai, they lost touch. Sab Jan joined the police service. One day he saw Ramana's photo in a shop in Wandiwash. This kindled a strong desire to meet his old friend. But he hesitated. The doubt was very much there whether he would at all recognise their old friendship. With this doubt he went, only to find that Ramana had not changed in his friendship, though he was in the lofty state of Self-Knowledge. The same thing happened to another friend Rangan whom Ramana kept in his special care to protect him from the 'adverse influence of planets'. Subbaramiah wished to see his dead wife in his dream. Devaraja Mudaliar wanted the injury to his eye to be cured instantaneously to enable him to continue staying in the ashram. Sub-registrar Narayana

Iyer wanted Ramana's blessings for his daughter's marriage. All these were granted by Ramana in his most natural way. These are but a few illustrations which would indicate that Ramana's individual love was unhampered by the universal breadth and sweep of his love.

All this would show that after Self-realisation every relationship acquires a new meaning and new strength. The element of expectation, the desire for response would not be there. It would be a case of giving, more giving, and the joy of such giving will add a wonderful perfume to each and every relationship. Gone would be the days of possessiveness, greediness, which are so much there now in individual relationships of love. The undercurrent of fear which is never altogether absent, even in 'hey-days' of personal love, would vanish. With these barriers gone, it would be joy and more joy.

Chapter 23

DOES ONE HAVE COMMITMENT TO ONESELF?

One wonders if one ever asks the question ‘Is there any commitment to oneself?’ One talks of commitment to the family, to an organisation, to a cause and so on. An old acquaintance suddenly dropped in. Without any hesitation he said, “I have fulfilled my commitments in life. I have nothing to do. My sons are well educated and doing very well in U.S.A. My daughter too has married a nice young man and she is also residing in U.S.A.” His face was beaming with pride and he was the picture of contentment. Looking around, one does not find much difference even if one is unwed or has no children. One’s responsibility is by and large confined to a close circle of relatives. Quite obviously the obligations considered a must are narrow and limited.

The fundamental question of one’s own purpose in life is not viewed independently of the relationships. Does life have a purpose and if so am I fulfilling it? Alternatively ‘Do I have a commitment to myself and if so am I attending to it?’ It is this vital field which is overlooked, practically universally. Concern about others considered dear ones rules the roost. This ignorant attitude to life is so vast and so widespread that one is at a loss to explain the why of it. In the absense of a rational explanation it is labelled, ‘Maya’, or veiling of the Truth, uncaused and ancient.

Though a fisherman may cast his net wide, though his bait may be very tempting some fish escape getting caught. Those who have found time for themselves, those who have found the need to search for Truth are like these fish. They have escaped from the bait of worldliness. The why of it is not important. It is only the fact which

matters. Joyous pastures of inherent happiness await them provided they do not lose their way and get caught once again in the binding chains of transient attachments.

Such ones feel the presence of Ramana in their hearts as the Sadguru. For the Guru awaits the earnest and sincere. The very purpose of his taking a human form is that. His is a living presence providing guidance at every step through visions, dreams, and through seekers on the direct path of self-enquiry which he has revealed.

In Ramana's path the practice is in order to move away from time to a timeless dimension of living. The mind, the ego is the link with the past and future. The movements of the mind may be likened to pushing the REWIND or FAST FORWARD buttons of a V.C.R. Only this happens involuntarily, not by choice. For one does not always like to ruminate about the past which has its own load of hurts and disappointments. Nor does one really wish to moon about the future. It happens because one has not developed techniques, a methodology, for holding on to the present. In the absence of such a tool, the past and future are sweeping away the present. And it is only when the mind is Silent, without its back and forth movements that one is in the timelessness, in the now, away from the mind's movements.

Ramana steps in, providing means by which one is able to stay in the present. In this the attention is unifocal, the mind's attention is turned on itself, to the sense of individuality in each one of us. An enquiry, or doubt about one's true identity is initiated by questioning to whom the movement is away from the 'I', from the first person pronoun. The question has the effect of restoring attention to the sense of 'I' away from the distractions. Since the distractions are for 'me' when attention is not on them these distractions in the form of thought movements stop by themselves. When put theoretically it appears difficult and sometimes intellectual. In actual practice it would be quite simple. It is only being attentive to the ever present feeling of 'I', since awareness opens up the door to the joy bursting in the heart. Attention, single focused is important in every field. One cannot afford

to lose concentration when a crucial move is to be made on the chess board or in the last few balls of a nail-biting 'One day cricket match' or a see-saw tie-breaker of a Grand Slam event.

In one of his poems 'Bee Messengers Reply' the poet saint Muruganar expresses this with great clarity.

Dear maiden, you entrust to us
 This message having carelessly
 Missed the state of natural bliss
 And being bitten by pain. Why send
 Words of worship through us? Wordless
 Stay, stilling the wandering mind.
 Falling from your own Self-state,
 Golden maiden, forlorn, you sweetly pray
 With numerous uttered words. The way
 Of restoration, if you care
 To know it, is to BE, still, still
 For ever the same, and still.
 Afraid of entering and enjoying
 The garden of your friend, the Heart,
 You are distressed, you cheat yourself, for
 Within the Heart, the Bright One stands
 And shines. Join him and drive away
 Your fear and pain.

Carelessness, inattentiveness to the conceptualisation takes place when one is not aware of the feeling 'I'. Carelessness because if only attention had been on the 'I', the one to whom the thought movement relates, then stillness alone would have prevailed. It is a stillness which remains undisturbed, unaffected by action, by the fluid dynamics of life. One lives each moment in all its fullness submerged always in joy.

This carelessness has arisen because one's paramount duty has been forgotten. In Ramana Gita, one of the questioners Deivarata questions Ramana closely on this point.

D: Bhagavan, what is the paramount duty of a human being caught up in the cycle of births and deaths? Please decide on one and expound it to me.

R: For those desiring the highest, discovering one's own true nature is most important. It is the basis of all actions and their fruits.

It will be noted that the questioner seeks a categorical reply on this point from Ramana and also a detailed clarification on it. Therefore Ramana not only clarifies what one's paramount duty is in the context of Self-knowledge, but has also gone further and explained how it is to be achieved. He points out the need for effort to focus attention on the 'I'. This is termed as non-objective enquiry, since attention is withdrawn from thoughts and turned to the thinker. By steady practice of such attention one's paramount duty to oneself is discharged by discovering the exalted natural state.

Chapter 24

WORK, IDLE TIME AND HOLIDAYS

We all look forward to leisure when we can laze around. We purchase time - shares in holiday resort companies and generally look forward to the time when there would be no pressure of work. One wonders why. Is it because the work is so boring, so routine, so lacking in challenge that we have had enough of it and wish to escape from it? The need seems to arise to question whether one's approach to and attitude to work is correct. What is the present situation? We are keen on overloading our schedules. Our eagerness to achieve various targets and goals keeps us constantly rushing from job to job. Besides, even when we are not at work our minds do not know rest. They are de-energised. Why? Because we allow the mind to be dissipated in a thousand and one thoughts, by our failure to be focused, to be attentive to the jobs on hand. Even in sleep one continues to lose mental energy through dreams which are no different in character from the thought-ridden waking state.

Ramana makes this point in a conversation with Subbalakshmi Amma a kitchen helpmate at Sri Ramanasramam. She was keen on meditating in Ramana's presence in the 'Old Hall', but the kitchen work did not leave spare time for it. The conversation runs thus.

Ramana : Your mind seems to be yearning for meditation.

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

Ramana : You are the one who is ever free from thought, the unmoving one. Problems will arise so long as you are not aware of this. Work would be difficult. Even if you cease to work the mind would be wandering.

Ramana exposes us to the truth that so long as we keep functioning the way we do, hanging on to the load of thoughts, there would be no alternative except for finding ways for idle time, for lazing around, holidaying etc. Since thought addiction is sapping work energy one should experiment and find out states when there are gaps in thoughts. These occur when there is no need to respond, to communicate, to be related to given situations. One might think now that such states would be dull and quite boring. This is because of the present false value attached to the thoughts.

Besides, what is being referred to is not a state in which there is mere absence of thoughts. It is something vaster, much more beautiful and joyous. This is because it is the purposeless thoughts which stand between one and Self-abidance. Here one could refer to a humorous remark of Ramana. When asked, 'Should one give up desires?' he replied, 'No give up thoughts'. Self-enquiry, by enabling the cutting of the individual's attention from particular thoughts, would enable one to experience the joy of a state in which the mind is thought-free and alertly passive. When the congestion of thoughts eases, when it tapers off, mental space is created providing time for reflection and retrospection. Just as an expert cricketer would make adequate room before executing a shot, seasoned practitioners of self-enquiry would quickly provide themselves the mental space. Then the vast and immense silence of the Self would be immersing one in overflowing bliss, endless joy.

What happens when we get merged with the Self is that we are in touch with the divine force which vivifies both the mind and the body. By themselves neither the mind nor the body is self-conscious. They derive their energy from the Self. The divine presence and energy source is felt as a continuous feeling of 'I' as 'I' in the heart.

This fact would be evident if we investigate to find out if the body is an independent conscious entity. What is the difference between a body and a corpse? Ramana himself went into this question at the age of twelve when his father's dead body was placed in the

courtyard of their Tiruchuzhi house. “On the day his father died he felt puzzled by death and pondered over it. Whilst his mother and brothers wept, he thought for hours. After the corpse was cremated he got by analysis to the point of perceiving that it was the ‘I’ which makes the body see, run, walk and eat. ‘I’ now know that ‘I’ but my father’s ‘I’ has left the body.”

What about the mind? It needs constant replenishment of energy through deep sleep. This takes place unconsciously by a divine plan which makes for a total cessation of thoughts at that time. When such cessation takes place the mind gets in touch with the Self. Once one learns to be directly and constantly in touch with the divine force, consciously, through diligent practice of self-enquiry, the mind is ever energised and bubbling with energy. There would no longer be any need to escape from work if any. Work and absence of it would be both joyous.

What happens to the seeking of idle hours? That need would disappear. For one would be ever active, ever related to the Self. Hence we find Ramana, who had no need to work, joining in every activity in the Ashram, be it in the kitchen, or the proof reading, or in binding books. Of course he was ever ready to answer the doubts of seekers of truth on the spiritual path. Hence Ramana says in ‘Ramana Gita’, that such a person would be performing ‘Tapas,’ the most exalted penance, every moment. There would be joy in each and every action, unflagging and infectious.

BLOWN INTO THE WIND

Life provides a series of opportunities. Of course life itself is an opportunity, an opportunity to become Self-aware, to discover the truth about one's own natural state of happiness. Often one is insensitive to the 'tides which would lead one on to fortune'. Opportunities are quite often blown into the wind. A candidate appearing for an important interview has to give of his best in the allotted time. So too an artiste singing or dancing on the National Television Network in the allotted twenty minutes or half an hour. A cricket team must peak at the final and not during the league matches. A tennis player has to give of his best when playing the big points, and during tie-breaks. If not, however good one may be, one would fail to win Grand Slam titles. If opportunities offered by life are not held, if they are allowed to slip through one's fingers then one has to cry a lot over "spilt milk".

When it comes to sadhana or spiritual practice, though undoubtedly there is need for vigilance, things are not so tough. Why? Because Sadguru Ramana keeps giving opportunities galore to his disciples and devotees. It is almost as if "another door is opened when one is shut". He keeps lifting up every earnest seeker trying to tackle the ego, trying to steadily enquire into the question 'Who am 'I'?' Given firm faith in Ramana's omnipotence and his compassion one cannot miss out on the goal Self-knowledge. For his helping hand is readily and repeatedly proffered to those who have relapsed into their old ways of giving reality to the mind apart from the Self, of allowing the mind to wander in the world of concepts and ideas and the habit of not looking within.

While Ramana's guidance, visible and invisible, keeps one on the path of self-enquiry, is it not the duty of each one of us whose task

has been made easy to make the fullest use of it? What does this mean in practical terms? This is that one should be focused on the need to tackle the ego and to enquire into its true nature.

As long as the ego's nature is unexamined, so long as the mind's source is not searched for, there would be little transformation in one's life. One would be moving along set patterns of thoughts, set modes of worship, set ways of meditation. The benefits would undoubtedly be there. But if one asks if there be real change, a fundamental change in outlook, 'Am I reaping the full benefit of the Ramana Way?' the answer has to be 'No'. While a new way of life, a life lived in the abundance of joy is available, one would have opted for less. Yet another case of lost opportunity in this short life. The full benefit of association with the Sadguru would have blown into the wind. A silent powerful mind ever active yet ever immersed in bliss would not be there.

There are many deflections from the chosen path. This is more so as one advances on the path when more and more vigilance would be required. The first perhaps is a tendency to get involved with matters which are outside one's concern. We find Ramana advising Sivaprakasam Pillai, to whom the instruction 'Who am 'I'? was given, to steer clear of 'others' affairs'. We all know only too well that one is tempted to give gratuitous advice, though unasked for which is sure to go unheeded. In this context one may recall Ramana's jocular reference to the way in which people would get involved in the affairs of Sri Ramanasramam. On the first occasion they would be totally involved in just enjoying its blissful atmosphere. On the second occasion they would begin to notice some defect or the other and on the third occasion they would start giving advice to the management and make a grievance of it if it is not accepted. Gradually they would forget the very purpose of their visit to Sri Ramanasramam and get caught in their unnecessary involvement in its affairs.

Paul Brunton in his REFLECTIONS, published posthumously, refers to many dangers against which one must be on guard. The first

is the secret but lurking desire for name and fame. One would like, say, to be known as an authority on Ramana's teachings, as one who has moved intimately with his disciples and devotees or generally as a know-all of Ramana literature and teachings. Here one could refer to the verse in the Supplement to Forty Verses in which Ramana strongly condemns such a desire. One would do well to remember that in the last analysis name and fame is part of karmic results of one's past and have no definite relations to one's true stature. The same mouths which praise would be ready to condemn. Both could well be unjustified.

Another temptation referred to by Paul Brunton is desire for wealth, for a comfortable way of life instead of an austere and simple inward life which is the hallmark of the truly spiritual person. In the course of the search for truth one gets related to the divine force. Automatically a certain charisma comes to the person. Many would be willing to do his bidding and they will be ready to provide a palatial house, luxurious car, requisites for a high life style etc. Or else these may come from one's own wealth which would grow if there is a desire for it. It is better that these are shunned for one would become obliged to those who have provided these conveniences and also get used to non-essentials in life.

The last danger is bodily attractions. One has to constantly remember that one's essential nature is divine and we have had many lives of bodily enjoyments in the past. If one gives way to temptations, one more bout of body's birth and death would be inescapable.

All this is said not with a view to scare the genuine seekers to whom of course the protection of Sadguru Ramana is there. Even if one fails, his help is certain, but the moot question is should one fail? Then one would be blowing away the great advantage of Ramana's entry into his life and the wonderful chance for Self-Knowledge that it provides.

Chapter 26

SPORTING IN THE WORLD

Seeming to have enthusiasm and delight, seeming to have excitement and aversion, and yet without attachment, play, O hero, in the world. Released from all bonds of attachment and with equanimity of mind, acting outwardly in all situations in accordance with the part you have assumed, play as you please, O hero, in the world.

Supplement to Forty Verses, Verse 27

Ramana places before us the way to a joyous life, a way in which the mind is always at peace. The turmoil of the dynamics of life, the vagaries of changing fortunes, anxieties, fears would all be behind us. The outer circumstances and the situations would be unable to make any dent on or make inroads into the mind enjoying to the brim its own inherent bliss.

The background to the verse, the original of which is from ‘Yoga Vasistam’, is Vasista’s advice to the prince of Ayodhya, Sri Rama. He is the heir to its throne but develops distaste for worldly actions as a result of realising that everything around which the individual builds his world, his dreams, including the body itself, is impermanent. Had Sri Rama continued in this train of thought, the future of the kingdom would have been in jeopardy. So a duty was cast on the preceptor, the great Vasista, to bring home to him the truth that worldly life and life of inwardness do not contradict each other. Even when one is fully conscious of the transience of all life, one can act as if everything has a meaning and purpose of its own. For the fault does not lie in the action but in one’s mental attachment to it, the way one plays the given role in the divine drama.

This point comes out in clear focus in some of the conversations Ramana had with Paul Brunton.

PB: The yogis say that one must renounce this world and go off into secluded jungles or mountains if one wishes to find truth. Such things can hardly be done in the West; our lives are so different. Do you agree with the yogis?

R: The life of action need not be renounced. If you will meditate for an hour or two everyday, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea, the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities.

PB: What will be the result of doing that?

R: As you go on you will find that your attitude towards people, events and objects will gradually change. Your actions will tend to follow your meditation of their own accord.

PB: How is it possible to become selfless while leading a life of worldly activity?

R: There is no conflict between work and wisdom.

PB: It is easy for you to attain and keep spiritual serenity in this jungle retreat where there is nothing to disturb or distract you.

R: When the goal is reached, when you know the knower, there is no difference between living in a house in London and living in the solitude of a jungle.

Why does Ramana assert that there is no conflict between work and wisdom? For the mind is released from the entanglements of attached action by rightly directed, subject oriented, meditation, revolving round the two basic questions, “Who am I?” and ‘Whence am I?’

Basically the allotted work or the Karmic load cannot be renounced, nor can one withdraw from life even if he wishes to. Being aware of this truth one must find the way of converting this life with all its ups and downs into a sports field. Every non-professional enjoys the game which he is playing. It is good fun. Life too would become rosy and sweet if it is regarded as the game in which we are playing a part, an assigned part. Hence the importance of the words in the quote “In accordance with the part you have assumed”. The parts to be played by each individual each day are changing, as father, as husband, as friend, as doctor and so on. There is a smooth transition because in all there is a common link of attachment, of ‘mine’. But one does not remember these are only roles which he has played many times over in the past several lives of identified existence. The same roles become free of anxiety and fear provided they are seen in the right light, namely that they are roles to play like the role of an actor in a T.V. serial or movie. What would be the fate of the actor if he imagines himself to be in real life also the roles which he has played in the T.V. or cinema? Ramana also gives an analogy of a cashier counting cash in the bank who is fully aware that what he is counting is not his money and that it belongs to those who have deposited the money there. He does not identify himself with the cash he is counting. So he is free of worry even if he is handling cash bundles aggregating to several lakhs. How panicky would he be, how suspicious would he be of the many people around, had he thought that he was the owner of the cash which he was handling?

In this context one has to stress the importance given by Ramana to this analogy of an actor. While replying to Maurice Frydman’s doubts, he said “Although the same man may play the role of all characters in a play his actions will be determined by the role he is playing at each moment. In the role of the king he will sit on the throne and rule. If the same person takes on the role of the servant, he will carry the sandals of his master and follow him. His real self is neither increased or decreased while he plays these roles. The jnani never forgets that he himself has played all these roles in the past.”

When life is a sport, one enjoys everything, even being checkmated and defeated, as in the game of chess. It is a battle of wits, moves and counter moves. One accepts that a win or lose position is inevitable and takes it in a sporting spirit. The inevitability of competition, of success or failure in the game of life becomes ingrained as one develops the 'life as a game' idea as part of one's psyche. Indeed, every seeming setback is seen as an opportunity to face the challenge and forge ahead.

Another way of handling the same problem would be not to lose sight of the Reality. While all that appears must disappear and is therefore transient, behind the phenomena there is the unchanging Reality. If this truth is held firmly in the mind and as an experience, then too one can treat life as a play. This takes us to another advice given by the sage Vasista to Sri Rama. "Know the truth at the heart of all experiences. Without turning away from that Reality, play in the world, O Lord".

Once the link of identifications to one's various roles in life is cut, one becomes free from the stranglehold of attachment. The abundant overflowing joy which is our true-nature surfaces. Then one sports in the world enjoying each minute of one's assigned role in the great cosmic unfoldment.

SELF DISCOVERY

Every waking moment we are thinking. This is so in dreams, too. This addiction to thought results in tensions, anxieties, and worries. The mind is splintered by multifarious thoughts. The question therefore arises as to whether there is an alternative to this chaotic mind. This is found in the method stressed by Ramana Maharshi known as self-enquiry. In self-enquiry, the attention is on the core of the mind, the central 'I' thought, on the thinker, away from the innumerable thoughts. Such attention, backed by Maharshi's guidance, leads to the discovery of the naturally peaceful and silent mind, and the joy of it. Then one works in an atmosphere of tranquility and inner poise. Life itself would be a sport to be enjoyed to the brim. The mind would be unifocussed, alert, attentive. There would be a confluence of work and wisdom.

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