



SURGING JOY

(SELF DISCOVERY)



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(Self Discovery)

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**Ramana Maharshi Center for Learning
Bangalore**

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INTRODUCTION

The moon is born anew every month, trees in every spring. Yet really, the moon is never 'new' but the same old moon going through the same old phase of waxing once more through the bright fortnight, dissolving into the dark, once more to appear and be called 'new'. Trees are not new in spring, only bedecked with fresh gay blooms and soft green leaves. There is really no ending and no beginning, the day never ends, it only moves into another part of the world, night never falls suddenly, only flows in from elsewhere.

Yet to see nothing as new is only to be caught in the routine of habit. For there is a great miracle in the dawning of day, in the budding of trees, in the spreading of night and birth of the moon. There is perhaps, no birth in fact, but in experience there is a glorious birth, and what is ever existent wondrously comes into existence once more. Such is the birth of the birthless, the coming of Bhagavan Sri Ramana in his enchanting human form. Bhagavan was not 'born' on the 30th of December, 1879, as there can be no 'birth' for the infinite. But, as we know him now, as the immaculate beauty of Ramana, he was 'born' on that holy Punarvasu day a hundred and fifteen years ago. And why was he born? Why did the infinite freshly don the human garb? Only to give Itself anew to humankind, no, to all beings; human and other.

And this new way in which Truth has revealed itself is the 'Ramana Way'. Sri Ramana has not taught a 'new Truth' (for Truth is neither new nor old, it always is), but has forged a new way of approaching the Truth. This way is not 'new' as opposed to the 'old' and yet, it is 'new' in that it differs from the 'old'. The 'new' leaves on the mango tree are not different in structure or nature from the old. They do not begin to resemble peepul leaves, they continue to be mango leaves, but they are not the old leaves. The waters of an old river are ever new. If they were not, they would stagnate and decay. It is the renewal of the old as the new which makes for life. The Self is hailed both as 'ancient' and as 'ever

new'. That which ever is, continuously renews itself and reveals itself in the immediacy and relevance of the now.

The newness of the Ramana way lies in its relevance to our current manner of living and approach to things, its aptness to the needs and responsiveness of our time. Bhagavan Ramana's teachings are eminently relevant to the crucial business of living in the current context.

The special emphasis of Sri Ramana is on natural happiness. He never tires of pointing out that happiness is our own nature, which is why we seek it so persistently, at all times, consciously or unconsciously. What prevents our being aware of this flood of happiness, this surging joy, is simply the fact that we are out of tune with it. Having forgotten our true nature, we identify ourselves with a limited entity, a name and form which alone we take to be our self. The magic revival of Self-awareness will occur when we are rid of the false notion, the illusion that we are limited.

Here we find Sri Ramana's unique path of self-enquiry which leads us directly to Self-awareness. We are directed to examine the nature of the mind and upon doing so we find that it has two aspects. One consists of the crowd of thoughts that are ever changing, ever moving. There is the other, the continuous element in the mind which is the 'I' - thought. Every other thought depends for its existence on the attention of the 'I', every thought exists only in association with the 'I'. The 'I'- thought also appears to be equally dependent on other thoughts, for throughout our waking and dream experiences we are plagued by the continuous rush of thoughts. However, the very fact that thoughts are changing but the 'I'-thought is continuous implies that it exists when one thought goes and another comes, that is, it exists even in the gap between thoughts. Hence, it is really independent of thoughts and only due to force of habit clings to them. Sri Ramana says that if we cut at the root of this habit through self- enquiry then the 'I'- thought will be isolated. If we question the very validity of the 'I'-thought with the query 'Who am I?', it will have no locus-standi to associate itself with other thoughts. What happens then? As the 'I'- thought

cannot take pointed scrutiny it will shrink back into its source, the Self. One may wonder how we can say that the 'I' rises from the Self, that the Self is its source. This is evident to us through the daily experience of deep sleep when the 'I'-thought is absent, when there is no consciousness of identity, but existence is untrammelled. That is why we are able to recall the peace of sleep on waking. It is also on waking that we become conscious once more of the name and form. The identity, the 'I'-thought rises again. Thus we infer that the 'I'-thought merges into the Self in deep sleep and rises on waking. To experience this merger consciously is the purpose of self-enquiry.

What happens when, through enquiry, the 'I' is merged in the source, the Self? Does it imply a cessation of thinking, will it result in a void? Far from it. Sri Ramana describes it as an inundation of bliss. One is 'swallowed alive' as it were, he says, but then one becomes or is the very bliss that swallows one. It is like the river merging in the sea and dancing as the sea. It is surging joy. Thus one comes full circle from the seeking of happiness to experiencing it.

The other factor which Sri Ramana highlights is the immediacy of the experience. Since happiness is natural, since it is the kingdom of heaven that lies within, it must be here and now. It is not something to be created, or reached after death or even attained in the normal sense of the word. It is ever present. All effort is merely 'to rid ourselves of the notion that we are apart from this bliss, that we are limited and mortal. The significance of self-enquiry lies in turning attention Selfward, in breaking the habitual dependence on thought and identity. However, along with the enquiry, while seeking one must remember not to distance Self-knowledge and put it away as a goal to be reached in some distant future. One must seek always with the faith that it is ever available. Finally, then, even the process of seeking would cease, attention alone would remain. The Self would reveal itself. All things would be bathed in a glorious freshness, all would dance with surging joy.

This book, therefore, commences with the search for happiness. It addresses itself to those who will not be satisfied with trinkets but desire the highest, only infinite bliss, nothing less. For, this is the promise which Sri Ramana holds before us. The next step, then, is to travel the path. It is the royal-path of self-enquiry lighted by Sri Ramana's ever-present Grace. Still our habitual limitations create many ups and downs along the way. We are sometimes even travel - weary and have to recall the Sadguru's great love and revive strength to pursue the path. We would do well at such times to remind ourselves of the great treasure that lies in store. Indeed, we would do better to dwell on its immediacy. This is done in the second section of the book by exploring Sri Ramana's declaration that the present is the only time, by understanding the implications of this statement and the wonder it reveals. The third section of the book dwells on Sri Ramana's composition 'Arunachala Pancharatnam'. What is presented is not so much a direct explanation or commentary on the work, as a delving into its implication for practice. Whatever Sri Ramana has said or composed carries great practical import. Thus the way in which these verses become an integral part of our everyday lives, the response they rouse in us and how we apply it in varied ways to our spiritual practice is dealt with.

The approach throughout is of one who seeks to tread the path. It deals, thus, with problems which one experiences and how Sri Ramana's teachings and his unfailing grace keep one on the path. Doubtless, then, his legacy will be ours too, the legacy of surging joy.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Dr. Sarada has an original and intuitive understanding of the Ramana Way. Her first book 'THE RAMANA WAY IN SEARCH OF SELF' has been very popular. After many years, she has agreed to this publication which gives a deep insight into the teachings. Sri T.V.Ramachandran and Dr.Sarada have corrected the proof carefully. Sri Muralidhara Hegde has designed the extremely beautiful cover. Settype Graphics (India) Pvt. Ltd., have done a fine job of typesetting. Modern Process Printers have printed this book excellently.

To all of them, the Centre offers its heartfelt thanks.

**PRESIDENT
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CHAPTER I

FOR THOSE DESIRING THE HIGHEST

In spite of everything, we are not happy. We know where happiness lies, yet we fail to seek or seem to seek in vain. Not a single one of us can lay claim to having achieved happiness. Are we happy human beings? And by asking are we happy I do not mean that on the whole we are happy, most of the while happy and so on. By posing the query I wish to ask if there is any among us who is content, who is happy enough to cease seeking, who has attained all that he or she wished for from life. Is there any who could confidently declare "Life has given me the best, all that I could ever want, there is nothing more I can desire?" Most of us are life's fortunates - for one thing we have all or most of our faculties and limbs intact, we are not in a desperate state of ill-health, we are not starved of our next meal, we do not have to wonder where to look for shelter every night, we do not have to wear garments which carry more holes than cloth. We are not alone. We have a family, friends, many or at least a few who care for us, share things with us. Our minds are able to function within the parameters of normalcy - we are not mad or retarded. In more ways than many we are in control of our lives - of body, mind, society. Life is good to us. Are we happy? Are we content? Does the calm of fulfilment flow in our actions? Does the grace of joy adorn our speech and silence? No, No, No, No to every question.

Despite having so much we cannot call ourselves happy, we cannot say we are at peace, we do not feel our life is full, complete. Restlessness dogs our actions and thoughts. Longings occupy our idle moments. We are seeking, still seeking, ever seeking. What? Happiness, fulfilment, peace. We have believed that these will spring from comforts. Comforts have come but peace is still far

away. We have believed that joy will come from relationships. Relationships blossom, bring joy and then become mundane, fade away like the best of flowers. Not that the tie breaks but the wonder that it brought dulls, like beaten gold, like blackened silver. Time wears away our interest in the best of things. We believe art, culture and sport can enliven us. But existing hobbies become reduced to mechanical routine. New objects of prestige or beauty cease to carry charm. We are not alone in our seeking, everyone around us is seeking too and seeking the same things - food, clothing, shelter, education, family, friends, entertainment, acquisition of objects, achievement, beauty, glory, fame, power, riches. The list is not endless, it is quite possible to catalogue the desires of the human mind. There seems to be an endless variety in seeking but again and again it is for a given set of things, there is a certain pattern of seeking. History tells of all those who have sought these very things - around us and in ourselves we see this very seeking. We also see that history does not record a single man or woman who achieved joy through this seeking of objects, of externalities. Nor do we see in our daily lives anyone who has attained the pinnacle of happiness through these pursuits. As for ourselves, if we would but take a moment to seriously look at our lives, we would know in a flash that we are no nearer lasting peace or surging joy for all our achievements through life. In a minute we can be drowned in the depths of sorrow, a moment's loss could make us view life as a sea of despair. Of what use then are all the wonderful things that have happened to us? Of what use then are the marvels that are strewn around us? Of what use is this endless seeking that can never give us lasting joy, that has never and can never give anyone a lasting peace?

If we are prepared to ask ourselves this question, in earnest, with the urgency of seriousness, then the path to fullness lies open to us, then the road to infinite bliss curves before our eyes. If we are prepared to look at life and its endless activity, both physical and mental and see how utterly insignificant it all is, then the gateway to heaven is here and now. Let us take our every goal

and examine it, let us put our every desire and every thought and every ideal under this microscope called the test of joy, the test of worth. Not a single action, not a single thought can survive, can pass the test. And if we remember life's dark companion, the shadow of death, then we will be doubly convinced about the triviality of our lives. All this which we believe belongs to us will be taken away, all whom we hold dear cannot touch us. Acts which we believe are our beholden duty can no longer be performed by our lifeless body. Works that we leave behind for posterity may well survive - but what of it to us then? Life itself will not halt - it will go on inexorably, mercilessly. Others will eat the food we loved to eat and they too will believe that it brings joy. Others will study, others will educate, others will talk and dance and write and sing and earn, other governments will rise- and rule or misrule and other kings will fall. Nothing will change because we no longer participate. But how we value our role, how we exaggerate it and give it inflated importance. How we use our duties and ideals as excuses to believe in the supremacy of goals, of seeking, of achieving.

Yes, if we look at life or if we look at death, if we look intensely, if we look intently, the absolute superficiality of our lives must hit us like a brick, to say the least. And if it does, then we begin to ask the pertinent question - "Is there something beyond all this? Is there something of lasting significance? Something that brings true joy and quiet and marvellous meaning? Something that makes every moment of life fresh and beautiful? Something that defies death and dullness? And the answer is yes, yes. It is an answer not new to us. We have heard Sri Ramana say so repeatedly. He has said that happiness is our nature. He has explained that this is the reason why we seek it. And he has said that Self-awareness is the paramount duty - the highest goal - for it is the basis of all actions and their fruits - it is the source of all energy and joy. Bhagavan has pointed out that we are thus looking for happiness in the wrong places for, every place outside of ourselves is wrong. Happiness does not lie without, peace does not lie without, fullness does not lie without - they are the very Self.

We have heard all this, read about it time and again, discussed it, known that Bhagavan has shown the direct way to attain it. In spite of this, we are still in the clutches of the habit of seeking outside. We are not drawn to the joy of the Self.

‘But’ we protest, ‘we do desire the highest. Otherwise we would not be here.’ In a sense the protest is valid. We would, all of us, certainly like to attain Self-knowledge. We do know that it is a worthy goal. Yet, how eagerly do we wish for it? Do we yearn for it? Do we really believe that it is the only worthwhile goal? Does all else pale into insignificance in the presence of our desire for Self-knowledge? For the most part we are not so intense in our longing. We wish for it as we wish for many things, for a degree, for a feast, for a lovely home, for a dream holiday. We wish to have it along with the other goodies that we imagine life brings. This, however, is a contradiction in terms. To say that we wish for Self-knowledge along with our other desires is, to use Bhagavan’s example, like searching for darkness with a light in hand. So long as we continue to want things other than Self-knowledge, it implies that we still continue to believe in happiness that lies outside the Self. Thus we would be denying the very nature of the Self - then what of our seeking it? By making Self-knowledge one of the many things we seek, we are in effect denying Bhagavan’s statement that Self-awareness is the basis of all actions and their fruits. When Self-abidance includes all actions, if one practises it what need would there be for any other action? When Self-awareness is the only goal and includes all goals, why pursue other goals?

This idea cannot be over-emphasised, for we worry about our ‘duties’. If we are busy pursuing Self-knowledge who will study for the examination? Who will clear the files? Who will practise the songs? Does it matter really even if all were to be neglected in the pursuit of Self-knowledge? If we could be so one-pointed as to brush everything aside, ‘everything’ would take care of itself. For one thing, we cannot in any case achieve a hundred things or even ten with any measure of success in life. M.S. Subbalakshmi is not worried that she is not an adept at mechanical engineering nor would

Kalidasa have been anxious that he never mastered Kathakali. Amateurs don't win the Grand-slam in tennis. In any walk of life it is those who are prepared to give up many things who succeed or reach fullness in one. Neither do the other areas suffer a loss by their absence. Medicine does not complain that I am not a doctor. So, we need not worry about all that we leave undone. Even if we were to live for two hundred years and work to the hilt every single moment there would be a million things which we would still leave undone. And if these things need to be done they will get done even without us. As I said, life doesn't halt when we cease. So it matters little if things are left undone. Anyway, the very question is merely an excuse to keep ourselves away from the pursuit of Self-knowledge. For when we are truly keen, no call of duty or love can keep us from the desired goal, and this applies to the pursuit of Self awareness as well. Besides, as this pursuit calls for a mental attitude and not physical action - it need not disrupt our normal activities in any manner. Every action, every so called 'duty' can be performed while the mind turns within and refrains from the attitude of seeking. As Bhagavan told Subbalakshmmamma 'Let the hands and legs do the job'-

This again is not something that needs to be forced but will come naturally with an eagerness to attain Self-knowledge. When we are in love nobody need force us to think of the beloved. We do not complain that our busy schedule gives us no time to think of him or her. When we are hungry - any amount of work cannot keep us from thought of food. If we care enough for Self-awareness - no activity can prevent us from turning attention Selfward. It will be an automatic undercurrent.

This then is the groundwork, the preparation for a steady treading of the path. When we have come by this conviction that all else is trivial, that it cannot bring us joy, that happiness lies only within and we must seek it at any cost, then the way is not long. When a time comes in our lives that readies us to look in earnest at its utter insignificance then all that Bhagavan has said comes back to us with new meaning, with true meaning. It is then that we

are truly ready for self-enquiry and then it reveals itself to us as the easy path that Bhagavan has proclaimed it to be. These moments in our lives, these insights of conviction may come and go and come again. When they come let us hold on to them, to cultivate and cherish the mood and allow it to grow on us. When the mood is not - let us try to recapture it, let us strive to belong to the company of those desiring the highest.

CHAPTER II

THE PREAMBLE

The fact that we ask 'Who am I ?' means we accept our ignorance about our own nature. If there is a mike in front of me, and I know it to be a mike, I would not ask 'What is this?'. If I meet a friend I do not ask 'Who are you?' unless perhaps to express some anger or in fun, in which case I am pretending I do not know the person. Unless there is ignorance the question 'who?' or 'what?' cannot arise. When there is knowledge, or when knowledge is presumed, there can be no questioning. The fact of questioning, therefore, means ignorance is conceded. If we put ourselves the question 'Who am I?' we imply that we do not know ourselves, or that our knowledge is deficient in some way. What makes us doubt our identity? What do we normally take ourselves to be? A given form, a body with a name and certain mental propensities which we call mind. There comes a point when we suddenly recognise that the body which I call myself cannot really be 'I'. Why? Because it is similar to a machine, it seems to have no consciousness or volition of its own. Like a puppet it obeys the orders given by the mind. If the mind orders the hand to move, it moves. If it is ordered to stop, it stops. Sight, hearing, smell, touch - all the sensory and motor elements of the body are under the mind's command. The eyes may see. Yet nothing will be seen if the mind is elsewhere. The ears may function perfectly, but if the mind is wandering, no sound will be registered. In yogic practices even the apparently automatic functions of the body can be modified. So, at best the body is a very complex machine. If one knows how to operate all the controls, one can do anything with the body. Otherwise, one can handle it to the best of one's skill. Like any other machine, the body will give trouble if wrongly handled. It can have breakdowns or may become totally decrepit and beyond repair and this we call death. But that it is a machine is obvious from the way it is controlled by the mind. As it is thus mechanical and insentient, it cannot be 'I', which is conscious, which is the actor, seer, listener, experienter.

The body is merely, then, an instrument for the 'I' to enjoy or suffer various experiences. It is, in fact, so redundant even as a vehicle of experience that in dreams the mind happily assumes various other forms and goes through various experiences. So, the sense of 'I' continues regardless of awareness of the body. When we reason thus, we recognise the fallacy of thinking that we are the body. We are convinced that 'I' is not the body but merely linked to it or housed in it.

The next step in the logic is that if I am not the body, then, who am I? This is the seed of enquiry because a certain doubt has been created in my mind about my identity. However, this is not the process of self-enquiry. This is just the preparatory step before commencing self-enquiry. This first step is the understanding, the intellectual conviction that one is not the body. However, one still identifies oneself with the mind. It is the mind which controls and vivifies the body. The mind is conscious. It is also continuous, in waking and dream. So 'I' must be the mind. Suppose we accept this proposition. Our problem is still not solved. For, we must ask ourselves, "I am the mind, okay. But do I really know what this mind is?" Unless I know the nature of the mind, simply be saying 'I' am the mind, I would be no nearer to self-knowledge. Supposing a person has amnesia and asks me 'Can you tell me who I am?' And I answer knowingly, 'Of course, you are Sriram.' The person, if his amnesia is genuine, would only say 'Who is Sriram?' Thus to simply say 'I am the mind' without knowing what the mind is, is as good as saying, 'I am gidelingoo.' For none of us can claim to know what 'gidelingoo' is. So, the important question is 'What is the mind?' Is there such an entity similar to the body, only subtler? Does it have a continuity? It seems to have. But if we look at it closely, we realise that the mind is only a series of thoughts following in quick succession, is it not? For example, there is a thought. 'I want to sleep.' This is a thought that may enter my mind soon after lunch, especially if I am doing something boring. By saying that this thought has 'entered my mind' I am saying that the mind existed before that thought came in. The thought has been allowed entry into the mind. If needed the thought can be chucked out also, by allowing another thought, 'No this is not a good time to sleep'. In effect, we are saying that there is such a thing as mind into which one thought

may enter, in this case, the thought of sleep. Alright then, what was the mind like before that thought entered? The mind existed then, did it not? What was it like then? Was it like an empty container awaiting the entry of the thought? Or, like a house into which someone can enter? What was the mind like before the thought? What will the mind be like after this thought has gone? Why, there will be another thought - the thought that I should not sleep. So, if we examine the mind, we find that it is a series of entries and exits of thoughts. But entries and exits of thoughts into what? What is the basic entity? What is the screen on which these thought pictures play? Or who is the actor who does the various thought-roles? Or who is the continuous witness to the passing of the thought streams? There is one common thread. All the thoughts are for me. There is one single thought that runs constantly, in association with all the other thoughts, that is the 'I' - thought. Every thought that is permitted entry is on account of my attention to it. When 'I' withdraw attention from it, that thought vanishes. 'I' feel, 'I' want, 'I' care, 'I' suffer. There is no thought that can exist unlinked to the 'I'. Hence, says Bhagavan, it is this 'I' which is the mind. So if we want to understand the nature of the mind, if we want to discover that which is continuous through all our waking and even dream experience, we must hold on to that I. Focus attention on it in isolation, instead of focusing attention on the thoughts which come and go.

The process of focusing attention totally on the 'I' - thought to the exclusion of all other thoughts is the method of self-enquiry. Why must we focus attention on the 'I' - thought? For two reasons: one, because we found that all other thoughts are merely like guests - they come and go - so they have nothing to do with the sense of self which is continuous. How do we say the sense of self is continuous? Because we are constantly aware that we exist. We never feel any break in our existence. So, if we are in search of self-knowledge, we should send away all the intruders and isolate the 'I'. Only then can we know what the 'I' is. If we want to identify the host in a party, where guests are so intimate that each one seems like the host, we have to wait till all the guests have left. The one who remains is the host. If there is no thought in the mind, if no guest is allowed entry that which remains in isolation is the

'I'-thought. And, as we have seen, this is the central and continuous thought. Hence, holding on to it can reveal to us our true nature.

When we have isolated the 'I' - thought, would we then be Self- aware ? No, because the 'I'- thought is also not really continuous. It disappears in deep sleep to rise again on waking. However the 'I' does not cease to exist in sleep because we recall the repose of sleep on waking. That into which the 'I'- thought sets and from which it rises is alone one's true nature. As the 'I' - thought daily rises from and sets in the Self, it forms an important clue, a bridge back to consciousness. By paying attention to it, it can be tracked back to the source resulting in Self-awareness. This is the significant role played by the 'I' - thought, that of leading to the source.

Thus, self-enquiry is the fixing of attention totally on the 'I'-thought and tracing it to its source. The consciousness that one is not the body and that thoughts and the mind are also insignificant, is only a preamble to self-enquiry. It forms the basis of the questioning, from which springs the query 'Who am I?' But once the question 'Who am I?' is aroused, the rest is simply remaining attentive to the 'I'- thought, to its source.

CHAPTER III

RUNNING BACKWARDS

The conviction that the body is 'I' and that happiness is to be attained through this is so deep-rooted that we are nowhere near serious about tackling the illusion. The fallacy in our seeking is revealed in our very methodology of practising self-enquiry. We set apart time for it each day. Good, we tell ourselves, that we at least give sometime to it in the midst of our busy schedules. In doing so we forget that self-enquiry is not a part-time job, it is an attitude of doubt about our very nature, how then, can it be restricted to ten minutes or half-an-hour? Supposing we strongly suspect a worker of thieving, if we have ample circumstantial evidence about it and are only on the look-out for concrete proof, would we disbelieve the worker for half-an-hour a day and trust him for the rest? Would one say, 'Half-an-hour I will lock my almirahs and for the rest I will leave the keys with him because I have already established my distrust for the first half hour'? And, once the seed of doubt has been sown, is it at all possible for us to trust him even if we intend to do so? Can suspicion and trust go hand in hand? Where there is trust, doubt has no room. But once doubt enters, it shatters trust at once. Then, if we really doubt the validity of our identity, if we are truly convinced that the body idea is a mere guise, how can we function with happy faith in it? The moment we seriously question the truth of what we have taken ourselves to be, that question must necessarily possess us, haunt us, permeate our every action, our every thought. The very fact that we are able to make self-enquiry a part of our schedule, instead of it dictating and governing our life, means that it is merely an intellectual exercise, it is not the urgent question that it ought to be. This further leads to a false complacency, a feeling of having understood and performed self-enquiry. Yet, to reduce self-enquiry to a sadhana, to a practice, is absurd, for the emphasis here is on the sadhaka, the 'practiser' the subject. To think 'I have understood what

self-enquiry is' or 'I have performed self-enquiry' are contradictions in terms. For, the question is 'Who is the 'I' who has understood?' 'Who is the 'I' who practises?' 'Who seeks to attain?'. In fact, any thought being present means self-enquiry is not. Or, we have reduced self-enquiry to an intellectual question.

If the appreciation of the fact that one is not Self-aware is only intellectual, can there be any seriousness in the question 'Who am I?' Will it then be the identity shattering weapon? There are some who honestly confess, 'When we hear a talk, when we read an article, we are able to see that we are not the identity, but later we still feel that we are the body and the thoughts. It is difficult in practice to question the basis of these'. So we are really in a strange or absurd position of believing in our identity and simultaneously believing in the efficacy of self-enquiry. How do we explain our situation? Doubt and faith cannot co-exist, it is true. However, they can exist alternately. For a moment we may be suspicious about someone. Next moment that someone may convince us that he is worthy of trust once again. Then, the next time we are hurt by his actions, our questioning would again be aroused. If the trickster is truly clever, again we might end up trusting him. This is probably the case with our self-enquiry. At moments we are convinced that this identity is a hoax, an illusion. Or, to put it correctly, the mood of self-enquiry is intense one moment. But the next instant we are in the grip of identity once again. Hence our effort has to be directed to fanning the flames of enquiry, to be vigilant that identity does not trick us into accepting it. It takes so many subtle forms that we are practically unaware of its presence.

From morning till night it poses as the doer, as the actor, as the agent of all actions and the enjoyer of the fruits of action. 'I wrote this book', it thinks. Let's stop it here. 'Who wrote the book?' 'I'. 'Who is this 'I'? Silence for some time, then another action is performed, another thought creeps in. Someone reprimands us, our bristles are up at once. How dare she scold me, after all the work I have done!' How we wallow in self-pity. 'Who has done the work? Who has been scolded? Who is upset?'. 'I', in every case it is 'I'.

But who am I? Silence again. Then yet another thought. 'If I did my self-enquiry well I wouldn't get upset about these small things'. Who should do self-enquiry? Who is getting upset? Who is thinking about getting upset? 'I', it is 'I' in every instance. But who am I? There must necessarily be silence again. In this manner, self-enquiry must be used as a missile against every rising thought, and attention should be turned back to the 'I - the thinker, the seeker, the actor. Continuous vigilance is essential. One moment's lapse and we are back to thinking of a hundred unnecessary things.

What about necessary thoughts which are needed to perform work? But then, who is labelling thoughts as necessary and unnecessary? Who feels the need to work? 'I'. But who am I? When the 'I' is not known where is the question of its working or not working? We protest, 'What about our duties?' Whose duties? Whose indifference? Whose joy? Whose sorrow? Whose anger? Whose tenderness? Whose ideas? Whose mistakes? Whose accuracy? Whose carelessness? Whose success? Whose failure? Mine, mine, mine. Who am I? Give me a single thought that can withstand the fire of enquiry. There can be none.

If thoughts continue to plague us, it is because we are not performing self-enquiry. If we have sorrows it is because we are not gripped by the spirit of enquiry. If we are indifferent or complacent, it is because we haven't yet truly begun to question our identity. If we still have our dreams and plans intact, we have not breathed the rarified atmosphere of self-enquiry. If we are gripped by that question 'Who am I?' nothing else can matter truly to us. So long as we remain with the attitude of enquiry, no care, no thought can even approach.

Yes, in the white heat of self-enquiry there cannot even be the thought of sadhana, there cannot be even the consciousness of trying to do self-enquiry - even that must be questioned. Does that mean there is no sadhana at all? Does this mean one should not or cannot practise self-enquiry? That is not so either. There is sadhana, but not the thought of sadhana. How is this? One does not think "I must ask myself 'Who am I?'" Nor does one repeat the

question, nor does one mentally say, 'I am not this or that.' To say 'I am not this' means, I know what I am not, and thus, in a sense, what I am. But when I really wonder who I am, I can neither say what I am not nor what I am. There can be neither affirmation nor negation. It is simply an alert suspension of all thinking. The effort lies in the cessation of effort, the effort lies in maintaining an intense attitude of doubt. The effort is there alright, but it is not towards attaining something, it does not move in the normal forward direction, it is not focussed on an object. Hence, Nayana aptly equated it to running backwards. When you run backwards you cannot see where you are heading, you do not know what awaits you. All expectation is suspended. There is simply the movement backwards and awareness of it. Self-enquiry is similar. Normally the mind's energy is focussed outward. Here it is turned inwards, it has to run backwards into its source. It cannot see or anticipate or think. It can only remain vigilant, open, ready to land wherever it will. It cannot anticipate a goal distant or near. Thus, we cannot think. Self-knowledge is far or near. Yes, we cannot think at all. And like running backwards it needs greater alertness because nothing can be taken for granted. Hence, far from saying it is effortless, it is a total all-consuming effort.

Why must we perform it when it takes so much and when the goal itself is not for me, when 'I' itself will cease to be? The first answer to this question is the counter query, 'Who wants to know why?' But that apart, Bhagavan also points out that what awaits is an inundation, a flood of bliss. This assurance, this bait is given for those moments when we are tempted by identity. For, really speaking, who will experience the bliss? And every question that we pose is merely one more thought, one more escape from paying attention to the 'I'. So, let us waste no time in getting back to self-enquiry, let's start running backwards right away and not wonder what awaits us. For who asks?

CHAPTER IV

FOR WHOM IS DESIRE?

There was a small little vase with a bunch of miniature roses. Pale pink with a tinge of deeper rose at the edges, the flowers formed tiny globes and the whole arrangement was closely clustered together. Noticing that one bud seemed to have remained submerged in the vase itself, I shifted the arrangement a little. The next morning, promptly, the little bud spread a couple of petals and happily promised blooming. But a day later there was no growth. Thinking the flower asked for yet more space. I tried moving it again - but only a tiny petal fell off, I let it be and forgot about it for the time. The following morning, the flower was still in bud, but the petal which had fallen off was radiant. Light passing through the transparent vase was playing wonders with the petal. It shone like a gem, as if lighted from within, pearly, yet brilliant at its red spot like a ruby. It threw light in exquisite angles and reflected itself back on the vase with a brilliant playfulness. None of the flowers, all blooming, had the marvel of this little petal, round as a baby's finger tip, separated from its rose yet shining, for it alone had caught the rays of the gentle morning sun. If a simple petal reflecting sunlight could hold such immense beauty, how tremendous must be the grandeur of the mind that truly reflects the Self resplendent, I wondered.

In rare moments of beauty and joy, in fulfilment and peace we sense the magnificence of the Self. However, for the most part its beauty is unknown to us. It seems specially for this reason that Bhagavan has written a prayer for our use in Arunachala Siva. Therein he says, "The mind, O Arunachala, will not leave its wanderings through the world. But if it beholds you, it will be silenced. Hence, reveal your true beauty." Only if we perceive the true beauty of Arunachala, of the Self, will the mind cease to pursue other goals. Sadly, that beauty, that wonder for the most part is not

real to us. How can the mind comprehend, how can it even imagine a glory far transcending its utmost limit? Tennyson's Ulysses declares that he wishes to seek knowledge 'beyond the utmost bounds of human thought' and one marvels at his determination to cross the mental barrier. Yet, soon after he declares that his purpose is to 'strive, to seek, to find and not to yield'. A laudable purpose indeed, but one which still protects the seeker, the finder, the unyielding one who strives. The mind is prepared to cross any horizon so long as its sovereignty is maintained. If it is told that there is one extraordinary realm, to enter which it must be left behind, it questions the validity of that experience. For all its seeming acceptance of the goal of self-knowledge, it is not head over heels in love with that pursuit. It follows this goal also more with a hope of encasing it within its folds. It is much like the well frog which mocked at the ocean frog saying no ocean could be larger than the well, to say so was a mere vain boast. The mind is happy enough to strive for Self-knowledge as it is a promised land of happiness. However, it has no real taste of its supreme glory and is hence not willing to relinquish its habitual holds.

Wherever, for instance, there is a choice between the pursuit of Self-knowledge and time plus thought spent on the fulfilment of an immediate desire, the latter will win. Very often there is the unspoken fear that after Self-knowledge none of these desires would be fulfilled so better to get them over with right away. Sensing this doubt the Muni has put it to Bhagavan, 'What happens to pre-existing desires after the attainment of Self-knowledge?' And Bhagavan answers, 'Though they are fulfilled it brings no joy'. Does this mean it will be a joyless vacant state? Is it like saying we will get all the crunchies in the world to eat but will be toothless and cannot bite into them? Is it like saying we will have the most beautiful sights to see, we will be taken on a world sight-seeing tour, only we would be blind and can see nothing? It would be absurd to interpret Bhagavan's statement thus, although we are not incapable of such absurdities. It is more like a boy studying for his tenth standard examination. In the process he gets deeply interested in a certain scientific angle. He writes his examination and then immediately concentrates on experimentation on the new angle. Even before the results of the examination are out, he has made

an extraordinary world changing discovery. He is awarded a doctorate by an eminent university. And then wins the Nobel Prize as well. Subsequently, he also gets high distinction in the S.S.L.C. examination. Would this bring him any joy? Would it matter to him at all? The joy that comes from the fulfilment of the greatest desire would be but the twinkling of a star in the blissful sunlight of the Self. Therefore, it would cease to be of any account.

Is this not enough reason for us to bundle up our desires and throw them into the dustbin? Does it not convince us that happiness lies not in the fulfilment of desires? Even if it does lie there that is nothing, just a tiny speck in the oceanic happiness of the Self. Bhagavan has pointed out the mistake in comparing the Self to an ocean. For the ocean too has its limits. The bliss, the Grace that is the Self is boundless. After all these arguments, we feign conviction. We are logically coerced into accepting defeat. For, it is proved to us that even the 'happiness' that seems to spring from the fruition of desires is really a foretaste, a glimpse, a peep into the joy that is the Self. It is explained that when a desired object is obtained, thought ceases for ever so short a time. For that span of time when this thought has dissolved, has left, and another thought, another longing has not crept up, there is a silence. The clouds of thoughts that hide the brilliance, the sweetness of the Self, have temporarily dispersed. The spontaneous joy of the Self is experienced. However, we link the joy with the movement of the clouds. Because the clouds moved we got light, so let us keep the clouds moving. Then we can enjoy continuous sunlight. Thus, we keep pursuing desires. It is then pointed out to one again and again that so long as clouds move they will also hide the light at times and expose the light at other moments. So there will be the play of light and shadow, of happiness and sorrow. Only when thought clouds are dispensed with altogether will there be the perennial sunshine of the Self.

What if we need thoughts to function? What if we need clouds for rain? if we have got such a perfect understanding of the mind, certainly we can use it when the need for it arises. Computers may have numerous functions. If one does not understand these may

suddenly lose valuable data also. For instance, when a T.V. film was being edited, the editor forgot to press the memory button after the scene was done. A minute later there was an electricity failure and the whole edited scene got erased entailing hours of work. In another instance, working on the titles, he wished to centre the title and shifted it a little. A wrong move was made and a colour strip ate up half the title. The title had to be reworked. To transcend thoughts is to recognise their limitation and their use and hence to be truly able to handle them expertly. This apart the question here was not so much the role of functional thoughts, but the validity of desire as a means to happiness.

The absolute redundancy of desires being proved to us repeatedly we cannot reasonably hold on to them. Yet, in our heart of hearts, we do not believe in all this. We still hold on to our faith in the efficacy of desires to bring us joy by their fulfilment. However, we cannot state this, for we would be out-argued and called fools. So we bring forth a different proposition. We sadly declare, 'I strive to give up desires, I really want to, but the desires do not leave me'. Another of our absurd statements. Does the desire belong to me, is it 'my desire', or do I belong to desire, am I desire's Sarada? The desire is but a thought in my mind. How can it hold on to me if I do not hang on to it? It is like clutching an iron bar with all one's strength, refusing to open out the little finger and saying, 'see, I just can't let go'. Even if one opens all fingers of one hand, one may be holding on with the other hand. Unless one lets go both hands simultaneously, the hold will never cease. One has to keep hanging and say the arms are aching, crying for help, not accepting that two inches below lies firm ground if we will only let go. No, desires will never leave us unless we leave them. And leaving one or two is no solution either for there are always others waiting to ensnare us. A good friend once shocked me by saying that the means by which money is earned is unimportant. After all, it is right that one must provide one's family with the basic necessities which all others enjoy. And what are these 'basic' necessities? A fridge, a TV, a car, a 'good' school, a 'good' wardrobe, etc. etc. The 'etc.' was not his statement. I added it as the most significant part. For, a fridge will yield place to the need for a bigger fridge or a more modern one, and so on with every 'necessity'. Is there an end to

it? How we justify the endless futility of desires ! So tackling desires one by one will get us nowhere. We must be convinced that joy does not lie in that direction. Based on that conviction it is we who must root out all conceptualisation, mercilessly, relentlessly by questioning the validity of the very one to whom these thoughts pertain. Then, tiny though we be, we could become like that pale pink petal capturing the sunlight. Yes, the pure mind, the 'mind' if it could be called that, shorn of boundaries, of separate identity, would reflect the marvel of the Self in infinitely joyous patterns.

CHAPTER V

POISONED NECTAR

Fresh green leaf-plates took on patterns of sumptuous food. Crisp vegetables, juicy fruits, crunchy snacks, fragrant soups and delicious desserts augmented the main course. When all was ready the guests were brought to the richly laden table. The very sight of it was enough to tempt even the disinterested, and many of the guests were very hungry with waiting too. They were all but ready to attack the food, eagerly awaiting the signal from the host. As he looked around, someone entered hurriedly and whispered something in his ears. His face fell, he got up from his seat and solemnly announced, 'Dear friends, I am deeply distressed that I cannot feed you all as I wished to. I am now informed that the food is unedible. Mingled with it, I am told, is a small quantity of lethal poison. Forgive me.' So saying, he began to move out of the room expecting his friends to follow.

A strange thing happened then. A few guests left the table but many did not. Some harangued the host, 'You are doing this just to spite us,' they declared. Others knowingly corrected, 'It is evident you are trying to teach us many values at once.' 'The value of compassion', said one, 'by keeping us hungry in the very presence of such food you want us to remember the plight of all those who always go hungry while we dine richly. You wish to help us to be more humble, and simple and sharing'. 'No', said another, 'this is a lesson on discrimination. The question is whether we are determined enough to discard the greatest of temptations when warned of danger.' 'Just the contrary, what is being taught is not discrimination but faith, total faith in the words of one who is known to be a true friend.' The host smiled at the observations of his friends, 'What does it matter how they interpret the situation, so long as they do not eat the food,' he thought. But he was in for a shock. They had not finished talking and they continued, 'All these lessons

are fine, friend, and we are touched that you have taken all these pains to educate us. We are sure the impact of this event will work on us in time. But as of now we are not ready for those high values. Hence let us eat'. So saying, they began their meal. 'No, no', said the host, 'I am serious. Do not eat. Please, please believe me'. He ran from friend to friend snatching away their leaf plates, toppling the food, not heeding their angry protests and cries of hunger.

In the midst of this commotion, even as a few were theorising on the philosophical overtones of the situation, some had already taken law into their hands. They concocted marvellous logical excuses to be able to get at the food, 'Certainly the fruits could not be poisoned, they are fresh, let us eat only those'. By discriminating between what they believed to be 'good' or 'bad' on their plate, they thought themselves safe, conveniently dismissing the host's declaration that all the food was poisoned. There were even those who thought, 'The poison may not be fatal. After all, only a small quantity is said to have got mixed with the food. We have never had such sumptuous food served to us in our lives. Here is our heart's desire right before us. Why not reach out to it?' Still others reasoned, 'We are mortal anyhow. If death is to come after such a wonderful meal, let it.' With all these thoughts, some guests had already begun to eat, unnoticed by the host who was trying to save others.

No sooner had some food entered their system, many of the unfortunate people began to writhe in pain. Some continued to eat, despite the mild beginnings of discomfort. The host called in expert doctors to save his friends. Lives were eventually saved due to the timely action of the host, but what of the needless suffering? Who could help it though? Was it not entirely self-created? The suffering could only be alleviated to the extent possible.

We too suffer life in the world by choice, not by force. Would there not be a thousand complaints that we put forth about life's unfairness to us. Why is it that our 'legitimate' desires often go unfulfilled? We forget that so long as our lives are poisoned by the illusion of identity we have to undergo the effects of poisoning. Nor

can we claim ignorance of the presence of poison. Repeatedly we are told that if we cling to our limited identities, if we nurture our sense of separateness, we are bound to be plagued by sorrow and fear, by anger and distress, by conflict and tension. Yet, we are not willing to relinquish this tempting fare. Like the guests in that story, we find a thousand ways to partake of the poison. Have we a right then to complain, 'I only desired good for the community. Why has my dream been crushed?'. If we do protest thus, we are like those who reasoned that the fruits on the plate were untouched by poison. Any desire, any thought springing from the sense of 'I' carries traces of the same poison. True, my dream may have been altruistic, still it is 'my' dream, it is what 'I' believe is good for someone, or for the community. It is 'my' desire for the world.

Good actions, good thoughts, good motives, all these become polluted when the idea of 'my' or 'I' is superimposed on them. 'What is wrong if one has ideals?' some may protest, 'surely it must be good to have a purpose in life and to be determined about achieving that goal.' However, determination and attachment do not mean the same thing. In fact, attachment could well undermine courage and tenacity by creating tensions and depressions. From attachment springs fear that the dream may not be fulfilled, disappointment when there is any shortfall in the fruition of the dream and anger with those whom we believe have thwarted it. Thus one gets more and more deeply entrenched in one's sense of separateness. If one starts thinking, 'Why is no one helping me? Why are people so selfish?' and so on, what is one doing in effect? How do such thoughts help in the fulfilment of the ideal? In no way at all. Rather, attention has shifted from the good action to the doer of the action - 'myself' and to all people and things in relation to myself. Healthy food has been poisoned and is consumed too, imagining it is still healthy.

It is the same in any kind of concern for others, be they dear ones or just other living beings. While an expansion of love is marvellous, attachment to a larger circle is not of much help. It does take one beyond a self-centred existence, yet it is very much in the realm of identity. Instead of being attached to oneself and one's

family, one begins to worry about a larger family, about institutions, about ideas. It then becomes merely a trading in of one bond for another. In fact, one is called upon to root out identity so totally, that even the desire for liberation is said to be a hurdle to Self-knowledge. 'Who is to attain?' is the question asked. Even this ideal is eventually to be dissolved through self-enquiry and no trace of identity should remain. So much for the altruistic and subtler desires. The problem is more obvious when the desire is personal. 'All people are enjoying life. Why should I not fulfil my simple desires?' we ask ourselves. No problem would arise so long as our desires bear fruit, but one simple failure could turn our lives topsy turvy. Whom should we blame? If people around us eat poisoned fruit because they look tempting, should we do so too? Saddest of all is our addiction to desires. We know our pursuit of the limited is creating havoc in our lives, yet we declare, 'We are unable to get rid of desire, we have not that spiritual ripeness.' Does this not amount to saying, 'Yes, we know our food is poisoned, but it looks so delicious that we cannot help eating it'?

Where does the solution lie? In eternally going hungry? No. In identifying the poison, in recognising how it tends to infiltrate the food, and in preventing it from entering our diet. Sometimes it may be necessary to totally keep off the food if it is known to be poisoned. At other times, one may eat heartily, seeing to it that the food is wholesome. We can pursue every ideal, fulfil every dream, achieve every goal, providing we remove the poisonous thought, 'my ideal', 'my dream', 'my goal' from it. Then the very pursuit will be joyous and fulfilling. Bhagavan has not asked us to keep away from life in the world. But he has certainly asked us to inoculate ourselves against the poison of identity by injecting the serum of self-enquiry. Every thought must be monitored and only those necessary for the present action, for the actual work allowed entry. Any thought that has a trace of identity, of the 'ego', of 'I am the doer', must immediately be nullified by self-enquiry.

CHAPTER VI

WEAVING DREAMS

Desire poisons our lives. It leads to sorrow. Why? Because desire implies a 'desirer', for whom the desire arises. The presence of that 'desirer' is in fact the cause for sorrow, not the desire itself. It is because I believe I am a limited entity separated from the rest of the world that I pursue goals that are apart from me, I wish to obtain and possess things that are not me and thus, to make them mine. The source of sorrow, therefore, is not the presence of desire, but the mistaken identity, the illusion that I am a limited being. Hence, the process of combating desires is not to cut them off one by one but to strike at their source. By destroying that which gives life to them we will naturally be suffocating all desires. What has to be tackled is this source of desire, this identity which is called 'ego'. It is the same for any other problem that we may face, be it fear, anger, conflict, disappointment, disinterest, disgust. Name it and you'll find it in the list of ego's creations. It is because 'I' see the world as different from me that 'I'm afraid of certain things, 'I' fear that they will impinge on my identity and disturb it in some way. I am angry when something challenges 'my' identity. I am in conflict with others who differ from 'me'. What can I be afraid of if there is nothing apart from 'I', whom then can I be angry with, disgusted with or disinterested in? It is obvious that all these problems arise simply because we perceive ourselves as independent, limited beings facing and interacting with a world outside us. Breaking this illusive boundary is thus the key to all of life's problems.

This means one must become aware of one's true nature, one must know who one really is. And how does one get to know something truly, really? Naturally by the process of enquiry. If one wants to know the changed telephone number of a friend what does one do? Call the telephone enquiry. If one wants to know the time of a train's arrival or departure, one contacts the railway enquiry. If

one wants to find the cause of a crime one investigates. No process of knowledge can be fully described without the term enquiry featuring prominently. The pursuit of any knowledge necessitates enquiry into that field. Naturally, to know the self one must enquire into its nature. The way to Self-knowledge must necessarily be through self-enquiry.

‘Sorry, wrong number’, declared a friend. ‘Once I too was interested in pursuing the question. ‘Who am I?’ but it does not interest me any longer. I simply want to improve the quality of my life. I want to be a better person, more compassionate, more peaceful, never losing my cool, never getting angry, a happier person. That is enough for me.’ What can one say to this? Exactly what the postman will say if one declares, ‘I want to make a poor man rich. I have plenty of money with me and he is abjectly poor. I wish to send him a money-order every month’. Then the postman would answer, ‘Well sir, give me his name and address’. ‘Sorry, I do not have them’ answered the rich man. ‘Then sir, do you know where you can find him? Do you know of others who can find him? Do you have his photo that we can print in the papers to trace him? Or can you at least describe him accurately?’ the postman would ask. If one were to answer, ‘Oh! I know none of this. In fact I have never seen him and so cannot even describe him’. The postman would laugh and say, ‘Then how do you know he is poor and would like to be made rich? You do not know his face, his name or his place. How can you presume he needs your help? Even if he does need help how can you reach it to him without knowing anything about him?’ If we cannot send a simple money-order to one whose name we do not know, how can we radically improve the life of a stranger? If we are strangers to ourselves, how can we make ourselves better? If I do not really know who I am, how can I make myself more peaceful and compassionate?

‘But’, says the protester, ‘I am not a stranger to myself. I know who I am. I remember my name and address. Why can’t I improve my life?’ If we really know who we are why does our identity change in dreams? Why is it that the man chased by a dream-tiger runs for dear life? Why is he not aware that it is

only a dream? At that moment of experience it is taken to be totally real. If the dream identity seems so real while dreaming, the waking identity which appears very real while awake could also be part of a greater dream, could it not? Then who is it that dreams? Am I the dreamer and all this a dream? If one knows oneself so accurately and intimately, why is it that one is never aware of what happens in deep sleep? Why does one have to recollect the joy of sleep only after waking? Why is one not conscious of oneself in deep sleep? Aren't we really cheating ourselves through life, lavishing all our love on one who is a stranger? Can we really claim to know ourselves when our identity is subject to total change in dreams and disappears altogether in deep sleep? Sarada might become Surekha in dream. Of course, in deep sleep there is neither Sarada nor Surekha, there is no awareness of the body, nor any thought of 'I'. Yet there is no denying that the 'I' existed in sleep. For, on waking one is able to recall the dream as 'my dream' and also the joy of deep sleep by saying 'I slept very well'. What is that common thread which keeps the continuity through these three varied states of waking, dream and deep sleep?

The next question from the doubter, 'Why should one presume there is a common link between the three states? Perhaps the only reality is change'. The proposition is self-defeating for 'change' requires a given entity to start with, a basis. An egg changes into a chick. There is a basis, the first entity in relation to which change is perceived. Also, the first entity is not destroyed in the second but is only transformed. Only an egg can turn into a chick, only a seed into a tree. It is only because there is a continuation of a single entity that one can declare 'The seed has become a tree'. Similarly, it is because of the single entity 'I' continuing in all our three states, that we are able to perceive and register the changes.

If the dream and deep sleep 'I' were totally disconnected with the waking 'I' how could one say 'my dream' or 'I slept'? In fact, after waking, one could no longer remember 'I am Sarada' for 'Sarada' would have become someone else, a new person in dream, and again in deep sleep. How could those new entities

know anything about 'Sarada' unless there is a common link? It is therefore obvious that all these are only surface changes, like the moving of a motion picture on a white screen. Just as the movie is only an optical illusion, even so the changing 'I' of waking, dream and sleep is also an illusion. Without knowing the basis, the Self, to be engaged in improving the quality of the illusion is like building tanks to store the water of a mirage.

In the darkness of the night some mistake a rope for a snake. There is division of opinion among them. One set declares that the snake must be beaten to death. Another group insists that it must be lured away, by offering it some milk to drink. Which method will prove effective? Neither, for there is no snake there. One person suggests, 'Let us get a light and see what kind of snake it is, or whether it is a snake at all. Then we can tackle it well'. This enquiry into the nature of the trouble maker is the only way to deal with the problem. Would not all other means be but a wasting of time on that which is non-existent?

If what one has taken to be 'I' is really non-existent, purifying it would amount to decorating a horse's horns. Efforts to subdue it would then be like trying to shackle a snake's feet! Does one have so much time to throw away? Would it not be far wiser to understand first the nature of the 'I' and then tackle it suitably? In simple matters of everyday life we are prepared to use the tool of enquiry. If we wish to sing well, we make the effort to understand the nature of our voice, its spontaneous range and tone, and so on. Yet, to improve the quality of our lives we do not deem it necessary to fully know the one whose life it is! 'I' want to live well without knowing what the 'I' really is. When the absurdity of the situation strikes one with full force, then one will automatically take to self-enquiry. The question 'Who am I?' and the consequent attention to the nature of 'I'-thought and to its source will absorb one totally. Until then one is engaged only in weaving dreams, be they plain or rich with golden tapestry.

CHAPTER VII

DEAR DEATH

There is no half-way house. There are no soft alternatives on the Selfward way. It seems there is no way one can continue to have a taste of desire and at the same time get back to Self-abidance. Like one with jaundiced eye, all action must be tinted with a yearning for Self-knowledge. Muruganar sings 'What else can I behold with the eyes that have seen Ramana's eyes?'

Does this mean one should become indifferent to the beauty that is strewn around? Should our eyes be closed at a glorious sunset? Should our ears turn deaf to the flute's melody, to the morning song of the birds and a child's laughter? Should our hands be numb to the velvet touch of a rose, the round smoothness of a pebble? Should our nose be blocked to the earth smell of the first rains, to the fragrance of the night queen? Should we know no longer the tang of tamarind, the juicy crispness of an apple? Should one say 'no' to the million bounties, the million wonders of life?

Certainly not. There is no call to become a stone, to be callous and disinterested. But it must be remembered that if we wish to participate in the laughter of life, we must also be willing to share its tears. When we enjoy the cool breeze through the windows of our cozy homes, it would be well to remember that for many homeless the open breeze may be biting chill. Rich cakes would taste better mixed with memories of hunger. The sight of the magnificent starry canopy may bring thoughts of the sightless, it may be tinged with an awareness of the transience of one's own sight. This awareness is not to create a sense of hopelessness and despair, not to generate in us feelings of fear and self-pity. Rather, our joys and sorrows would be more intensely lived in the awareness of this fragility, in their contrasting and thus heightening each other. It would be like the expert cook who always adds a

pinch of salt to heighten the sweetness of desserts and a dash of sugar or jaggery to add punch to salty and spicy dishes. Our greatest joys are often touched with a hint of sorrow and our greatest griefs carry silent echoes of peace.

But we do not really wish to savour our joys, let alone taste our sorrows. So totally caught up in expectations of the future we hardly taste the present joys. So busy comparing experience with the moments past we push the present back with carelessness. The joy of the present moment is ever clouded over with some fear or anticipation if not comparison. If we would only care to stop and look at our lives for an earnest moment, we are likely to discover that we hardly derive joy from the desires we cling to so tenaciously. There is always something lacking, some lacuna that prevents our cup from being full to the brim. Again we convince ourselves that if only that bit were filled, we would be happy. And we strive for that. But a thousand lacunae filled still leave us with thousand new dissatisfactions. If one has everything that one could ever want, then one is simply struck by 'ennui' as the disease of boredom is described. One is simply bored because there is nothing new to be achieved, no motivation, no challenge, they say. Then why is it that those with motivation, those with desire, those with goals are also unhappy? Does it not clearly indicate that happiness lies neither in the pursuit of desire nor in its conquest? Yet, we are repeatedly told that happiness is our very nature, our eternal companion. Then why are we ever alienated from it? Because our attention is on all things other than that joy which is here and now. Unless attention is totally rivetted in the now, that joy cannot be tasted. And the now is the very atomic second, with no awareness of a single moment past or a single moment yet to come.

How is one to wipe the slate clean? How is one to make this clean break from all propensity to think? For, it is clear it must be the perfect cut, the total break. There are many ways advocated to create this sense of complete detachment. The awareness of transitoriness of things is one. The precious bliss to be obtained as a result of detachment could be remembered as the positive counter-pull. Of course, the intense attitude of self-enquiry

immediately scorches every second thought. If one believes that one does not know oneself, where is the question of thinking of anything else? However, such intensity in self-enquiry also is not easily cultivated. Even when one intellectually believes that one is not limited to the body, to this identity that one has taken oneself to be, one continues to be habitually attached to it. It is to break the habit that continuous self-enquiry is advocated. If the attitude of self-enquiry is not intense enough to keep it continuous, aids are suggested to create this intensity. One such aid is the awareness of temporality. To be aware of the transience of all things is an aspect of this. But more important is to be acutely conscious of death, to recognise that death may come the next minute.

And it must be just that, 'the next minute' and not a thought that death may come in the near future. There is a world of difference between the two. When one thinks death may come soon one may wish to cram into that time all the fulfilment of one's desires. Thought may well take the turn 'I must satisfy these yearnings somehow before dying'. On the other hand, if death is coming the next minute then there is just this minute to live and it must necessarily be intensely savoured, here and now. If each minute is lived in this awareness there would be no room for desire to grow. Time and death would no longer be enemies to defeat but dear friends who introduce us to the deepest joy, the pulsating life.

CHAPTER VIII

ON LIFE?

We are terrified of death. At times, though, we may sing its praises as the 'happy end' or 'rest at last', 'relief from the agony of life'. Still there would not even be a handful of us ready to eagerly embrace death. Even those who end their own lives, experts say, would indeed be glad if they were prevented from the act in the last moments. As death nears it becomes more and more fearsome, love of life shines rosy and sweet. Yet, how many of us welcome life with open arms? Are we not as unprepared for life as for death? Are we moved by its million little bounties? Do we stand courageous in the face of its tiny potholes, let alone its major chasms? Can we respond to fear without violence? Is our answer to relationship warm and full, devoid of judgement and resentment, contempt and condescension? Can we reply even to loving advice without the least trace of self-defense? The answer is 'no' to each one of these questions, to every one of these questions.

We are paupers amidst treasure, we are hungry before the banquet that is laid specially for us, we dress in rags while owning the most exclusive boutique in the world. Yes, we long for life and miss it everyday, every minute. Life comes to us, as a friend very dear but we turn her out, we are too busy for her. We treat her with scant affection, with only superficial attention exactly as we do even our dearest one who comes to us in the midst of a heavy schedule - say, the day before the final examination. At least for dear ones we make some time - during holidays and vacations, but for life itself we have no time. Why? Simply because we are too preoccupied with living! Indeed a great paradox, but the tragic truth. We are so tense with living that we do not stop to examine the quality of our lives. We do not stop to ask ourselves the questions, 'How much am I giving to life? What am I getting from it? Have I dived its depths to bring up the pearls of rare beauty or am I merely floating on the surface like so much worthless flotsam?'

Do we know that there are flowers of such extraordinary beauty growing wild in the grass- a miniature universe? Can we drink in their beauty like the numerous honey-sipping butterflies, simple white, pale yellow yet exquisite in their lively fluttering? We are lucky that we love beauty enough to try and possess it, to adorn our tresses with flowers, to decorate our houses with vases and our gardens with plants. Would we not be far luckier if we could love beauty regardless of possession? That is why the mountains and the seas, the stars and the sky move us so deeply because we can never dream of possessing them. We can lose ourselves in their wonder, we can swim and dive in the ocean, we can ride on its waves and travel from shore to shore, but can we possess the ocean? We can fly into the sky, over the soft cotton clouds, nearer and nearer to the sun. We can rocket through space and land on the moon. But can we hold a piece of sky in our showcase containers? Can we switch on the moon to light our gloom? Can we stitch a garment of stars? We try, through our paintings and photos, through tinsel stars and gold and silver on our garments. Yet, we know that the sky and sea and mountains are not in our grasp, so their mysteries and wonders are ever fresh. If only we could recognise the same for every bit of life, that its wonder is fresh and lasts only for that moment like the morning dew, how much more precious it would be! We are too busy wanting to possess to enjoy beauty as it comes, or we are too afraid of losing what we possess already - a lovely ornament, a costly saree. Its joy on being worn, the wonderful imagination that created it, all these thoughts are forgotten once it is acquired. Then on, it becomes a property to be protected and presented - a mere showpiece. And we have so many items to guard, so many to be freshly conquered, where then is the time to enjoy things in their simple, natural loveliness?

If it is not possessiveness, it is prejudice or self - defense or fear. Can we see that the man whom we term 'ugly' has the most beautiful smile? Can we sense the eagerness that is housed in a distorted body and mind? Can we feel empathy for the utter tragedy of a criminal life, for the barrenness of vice? Can we admire the sleek swiftness of a lizard's movement or the 'cool softness' of a snake? So many things stand between us and beauty - our pre

- conceptions, our longings, our fears. Never, never is our cup full and overflowing, always it is empty, at best, half-full. Where is the question of tackling life's earthquakes and blasts? Even a little cloudiness leaves us in despair. A cheque that bounces, a favourite dress torn, a programme unattended, leave not sanctioned, a room unclean, a co-passenger dirty, or a lizard in the bathroom. Even these things can make us believe we are long-suffering martyrs. Can we at such times remember the wonder that is life - the miracle of just breathing? Can we remember how marvellous it is to dance, to sing to see the evening flight of birds? If we cannot dance, if we cannot even walk, can we marvel at our power to write, to sew, to breathe beauty into paper with a mere flick of our fingers and some simple folds? If we cannot move our hands can we marvel at the wonder of sound? If we cannot hear then, at the joy of sight? If we cannot see, at the mystery of touch? If we cannot even touch, can we harness the power of thought and travel beyond it? Those among us whom we call 'handicapped' often seem to lead richer lives, for they earnestly seek positive options and find them too! Whereas we who are whole can never have enough because we have been spoilt with the taste of plenty.

Perhaps that is why sorrow is thought to be a great teacher, a sobering influence, something that makes us pause and take stock, a chance to put our accounts in order. Yet, we are so unprepared for sorrow. If we cannot savour the joys of life, how can we face its sorrows. We do not emerge stronger from it, but wither under its glare. We become bitter and frustrated and vengeful. We do not feel compassion and a greater understanding of pain on account of our own but question the rightness of our suffering. 'Why should I suffer? Let me then inflict the same suffering on those who are responsible for my grief'.

And so the process goes on endlessly. We are deaf to every lesson of life. She tries through reward and punishment to set us on a glorious path, but we always evade her, escaping into gloomy and crooked by-lanes. Is there a single thing that is full, that is whole, complete in our lives? A single thing about which we can say, 'In this I am content, I ask for nothing more and it is ever to me a source of joy'? We may even say so in our moments of

rare happiness, but our lives belie that statement. Is there any relationship that is unscarred by anger and resentment, by irritations and self-defense? The moment somebody says, 'You are thin, what's wrong, are you ill?' the bristles are up. 'I'm okay' we retort. Perhaps the latter is truth, perhaps there is really nothing wrong. Yet the question was a statement of concern, was it not? Then why parry it? Why not enjoy it as an expression of affection? Does not the moment then become so meaningful, the response so warm and happy? But no, we would rather take it as a negative comment on our person and rise in defence of our marvellous self. It is the same when somebody shows concern for excess weight or even disapproves of a manner of dress! 'Why does my father not object to X,Y and Z wearing salwar-kameez suits but asks me to dress in a saree? It is unfair!' There could be another way of looking at it. For one thing my father has no liberty to tell X,Y and Z what he feels. So, by telling me he establishes the greater intimacy of our relationship. Secondly, it matters little to him whether X,Y or Z look or do not look good, whereas he likes to see me at my best. In his eyes, of course, but to him that is the best. There is also the third possibility that the particular dress doesn't suit me though it looks well on others. Who else then, but one close to me, can make me aware of this? Instead of looking at it this way, we are already defensive at the outset and aggressive as time goes on. If, on the other hand, one viewed it positively, one could make a compromise and both people would be happy. In fact, it would be no compromise but a willing affectionate response. This is but a simple example of the million situations that crop up in our changing, moving, volatile relationships with people. And more often than not we are unhappy, frustrated, hurt, bitter. Why not this colour for the book? Why not this movement in the dance? Why not this or that? The moment we are questioned, the moment there is even a hint of suggestion we are shaky, insecure. Aggression is the answer, mental, verbal, physical, always the transference of blame. Offence is the best form of defence it is said. But why defence in the first place? Why not a welcoming? Why not acceptance? Why not growth and warmth and love which come with acceptance?

It is merely logical. When you have taken such great care to build a fortress you must necessarily defend it, must you not? We have all built around ourselves the fortress of identity, of thinking 'I am so and so', of limiting ourselves to a name and form. It would not matter had the fortress been valid. Then, it would have accepted those things that make for its growth and strength and rejected those that were harmful. The body is such a natural fortress. Left to itself, it assimilates what is needed for its growth and rejects and fights the unnatural. But identity is not a valid fortress, it is imaginary, it has no locus-standi of its own. Naturally, it feels constantly threatened, it is constantly putting up fresh and more devious barriers against life itself, for, it takes all life as an encroachment. Life is real, identity is false, so truth is always a danger to identity. It builds illusion upon illusion to safeguard itself. Yet, is it really happy? Are we happy for all our self - protection and self-justification and self-pampering? Have we found peace and joy? If not, then what is the purpose of this never- ending battle? Neither is death glorious nor life meaningful. We cannot face death or love life. What then are we fighting for? What are the spoils? Indeed, we do not even know who the victor will be, nor truly the one who fights! Could there be anything more ridiculous? We do not even know the one whose life it is! Yet, what do we care for life, we who so happily trample it under foot at the slightest chance, we who would massacre a thousand living temples of God to build one of mere brick and mortar? Can we create the life we so callously take? Can we find that divinity in four walls which we do not see enshrined in every living being? Can we ever find beauty if we do not behold it in each tiny atom? Can we ever value life if we have not squarely and truly faced death? Not death distanced and far away, not even that of a dear one, but our very own. Can we understand the miracle of every breath until we have probed death? And can we ever find joy and peace, can we find true life, except in the Heart?

CHAPTER IX

OH! TO BE RUTHLESS

The alarm has been ringing a long while. But dreams are sleep protectors. Either the dream is so intense that the alarm is not heard. Else its ringing is also integrated into the dream. One dreams that one has woken up already and is busy getting ready, when there is a persistent ring of the telephone bell. One picks up the telephone and speaks. Still the ring continues. 'What on earth is ringing like that?' one wonders, still in the dream. In the meanwhile, if the alarm is mechanical, it winds to a stop and the dream continues peacefully. One might even think in the dream, 'Whatever was ringing furiously has stopped. Perhaps it was the neighbour's alarm'. If, on the other hand, the alarm is electronic it continues to 'buzz-buzz', or 'beep-beep' softly into the ears, so that it becomes a happy background to the dream. It takes a while to register. 'Oh my god! That's the alarm! Am I already late for office? Will I catch my train?' So thinking one jumps out of bed and into the regular morning routine. If the call to work is not so urgent, one might simply switch off the alarm thinking, 'Let me first sleep for five minutes more, that's such a nice dream I was having'. Only if what one is waking to is sufficiently exciting can one be coaxed out of bed. Even then, the pull to get back to dreamland is often far stronger than the promised excitements of the waking state. There are a thousand excuses offered to postpone the moment of waking.

Self-enquiry is the marvellous alarm which Bhagavan has set to wake us from the dream of life. But we pay as little attention to it as to its clockwork counterpart every morning. If one gets so attached to a short dream, lasting but a few minutes, how much more reluctant we must be to wake up from our dream of ages? Throughout our life, if not through many lifetimes, we have been dreaming that we are a given name and form. The very foundation

of our lives is the thought 'I am Sarada' or 'I am Srinivasan'. Would we shatter this 'sweet' dream without resistance? No, there are queues of excuses lined up, conscious and unconscious, obvious and subtle. The most obvious difficulty, of course, lies in accepting that what we have taken to be ourselves may be a mere illusion, only a seeming reality. However, through our analysis of the daily experience of dream and deep sleep, we may come to recognise that the waking 'I' is certainly not the whole truth about oneself. Identity changes in dream and still the 'I' continues unchanged. No awareness of body, not even any thought exists in deep sleep and still the 'I' continues. Hence the 'I' must be in truth that continuous experience, the basis on which the three states pass as clouds in the sky or as reflections on water.

Intellectually, theoretically, we are convinced. Yes, the explanation makes sense. It explains our yearning for immortality. It answers our quest for happiness and peace. We long for joy because it is natural, Bhagavan explains time and again. Even as we wish to remain healthy because health is natural and ill-health is not. The spontaneous state of changeless bliss is clouded by the illusion of change. The Self is eternal. That is why we wish to be immortal. In fact, it is said to be the greatest of wonders that we hear of death everywhere in the world, we even see death all around us, yet we do not believe that we too may die any moment. None of our lives reflect the truth that death may come the next minute. Why does death seem so distant and unreal? Because in truth we are deathless. We have only superimposed a limitation on our eternal nature. Death and change are only for that limitation, not for the Self. Knowing this is naturally very satisfying. It places before us the goal of regaining that natural state of eternal joy and peace. Further, since it is our own, nothing can prevent us from experiencing it.

Then why do we dream still? The alarm of self-enquiry has been ringing persistently in our minds. 'Find out who you are', it says, 'wake up to the truth'. Yet we languish in limitation. Why? There is one serious problem. The goal of Self-knowledge is

marvellous. But we wish to enjoy the bliss of the Self with this identity. We wish to hold the ocean in a net of woven moon-beams. It seems a great ideal to be obtained. We tell ourselves that we must strive hard to attain Self-awareness. Perhaps we do put in earnest effort as well. And we often worry that the effort does not seem to bear adequate fruit. What we forget to ask ourselves are the all-important questions 'Who is to attain?'. 'Who makes the effort?', 'Who is disappointed?'

The thought that one must 'attain' can also be only in the mental realm. It is a 'good' thought in that it gives the impetus to shift attention away from objects, turn the focus inwards. Having once made use of that, the thought of attainment should also be scuttled by self-enquiry. Indeed, when there is the true burning spirit of self-enquiry all thoughts would naturally be scorched. Only attention can remain, with no thought that 'I am now attentive'. If such a thought be there it must automatically be questioned, 'Who is the 'I' that is attentive? Who am I?'. No answer, only silence without even the thought 'I am silent now'. If this thought arises it should also be attacked, 'Who is the 'I' that is silent? Who am I?' In this manner if every concrete and subtle vestige of limitation, every dreg of identity is eliminated then that which remains would be Self-awareness. It must be remembered though, that no thought whatsoever can be spared. Self-knowledge is not a utopian experience to be attained by 'Sarada' or 'Geetha' for its 'attainment' implies the very dissolution of that 'Sarada' or 'Geetha'. It is our fear of losing that identity which keeps us from waking to the truth. Either we are consciously afraid wondering whether we would end up in a blank state if the mind is 'destroyed'. Else we use a thousand devious means to cling to identity without acknowledging even to ourselves that we are loth to let go of it.

Ruthlessness is the only answer. Can we continue to dream and yet be awake? The dream has to be shattered in order to wake up. We cannot dream of limited identity and at the same time hope to experience the plenitude of the Self. This dream has to be thrown away, surrendered, dissolved through self-enquiry. When that is

done, the person, the individual we are familiar with will cease to be. The Self that is limitless joy will shine forth spontaneously. Knowing this if we still prefer to choose the illusion, till such time we can only be declared unfit for truth.

CHAPTER X

THE PRICE OF TRUTH

Oh! The tenacity of the wrong habit! A million times have we heard the truth, a million times repeated it to ourselves. We are not limited to this body, this mind, we are told. We believe it too, in a sort of manner. We do not have much of an option. It is proved to us logically, categorically, that what we call our self while awake undergoes a metamorphosis in dream and disappears altogether in sleep. Where to? What is it, that remains in the absence of the waking 'I'? 'Do you not wish to know?' We are asked and we dreamily nod, 'Yes, of course, we want to know. Who would not want to know themselves fully, truly?' All mere words. The habit of identity clings despite our protests. Why despite our protests, even despite our efforts to rid ourselves of it. For, through all our efforts we still cling to the maker of the effort, to the 'I', to identity. Indeed, our very efforts sometimes become means of escaping the truth.

Or else we find other escape routes. We discuss threadbare the means to get back Self-awareness. We dissect the efficacy of every method, affirm our faith in one, question the validity of another. We wonder at the clarity of our own understanding of the way. 'Is it right?' we ask ourselves and those around in whom we have faith. With equal liberty we debate on the clarity of co-travellers on the path. We refer to Bhagavan's words. Finally, with doubts dispelled, no current ways of escape open, a certain earnestness that makes a guest appearance, we re-dedicate ourselves to practice.

For sometime the mood seems to be great. We are floating on cloud nine. All things assume a simple beauty. The trees seem fresh green, the sky a clear blue, the heart is more easily touched by nobility, quickly moved to compassion. There prevails a greater empathy with all sorrow and yet, one is not oneself sad. A greater love for Bhagavan also wells up. And then strikes the awful thought,

What a great spiritual mood I am in. Finished. There begins the undoing. The old habit is back with redoubled force. Identity has not left, it reminds us, it had only taken a short holiday.

The aftermath is often worse than the time before the peace was glimpsed. Earlier, at least, there was only the effort to regain something that we had grown to believe was ours. Now there is the loss of that which we have experienced, though ever so fleetingly, and tasted as our own. One should think this would make it easier to get back the experience. Having known it once must convince us that it can be ours any moment and thus hasten the breaking of the habit. Yet, this does not always happen. Rather, one tends to give way to despair. How terrible is the hold of the habit, we think, that it can disturb even those glorious moments of hope. All that joy seems now but a vague dream, was it perhaps imagined? Only another trick of identity? Just a simulation of the bliss that is our real nature? Most probably it was so, we tell ourselves. How could we have thought that the habit could be broken so easily?

It is near impossible, something that will take lifetimes of effort. So we weaken our little remaining courage and give a new lease of life to the habit of identity. With every thought we distance ourselves from the land of truth. With every thought we shout down the voice of silence. With every thought we clutter the vast expanse of bliss.

Giving ourselves to despair is playing into the hands of identity. But then, so is complacency. That is the other side of the coin. When the intrusion of identity has jaded the freshness of joy and love, we still hold on to thinking that the experience continues. We mistake our indifference for detachment or our attachment for enthusiasm. We believe that the world to us is only a dream and we stand apart from it, contented, happy. Nothing really matters to us, not events, not relationships, not even our own bodily experiences. Thus we imagine ourselves to be living the truth. Worse this is than despair, perhaps. For, when we are sad, we still believe that we must make some effort to regain the truth. We might think ourselves currently incapable of putting in the effort, but at least we

would be aware that the effort must be made. When we are complacent, though, there is thought to be no need for effort, nothing more to be done.

Perhaps, one is really at peace. Would it not then be wrong to reintroduce motivation? If one were really in that state the joy and peace would spill forth spontaneously, they would be contagious. Besides, in that state it would be impossible to create any motivation. One might still act, but it would not then be effort, for, there would be no goal, nothing to be achieved. To think that one has no motive is, after all, only a thought. It is not peace but the thought of peace, it is not vibrant but a simulation of vibrancy, it is not bliss but an imagining of bliss. Again the same old habit in a new garb. Again thought clouding the clarity of truth.

What should we do? Where does the answer lie? Only in eternal vigilance. Yes, that is the price of truth. Vigilant, ever vigilant, neither slipping into despair nor complacency, neither wandering into indifference nor passion. In every moment questioning the validity of thought, questioning the validity of motives by striking at their very root. For whom is thought? Who am I? Questioning sorrow and despondency, questioning anger and fear. Rising from every failure, vigilant once again. What if one thought has ruled an hour, what if a million thoughts have ruled for years? Under the searchlight of enquiry illusion must fade. Switch off the light for a moment and they loom large again, like the craggy shores of a dangerous bay. With the lighthouse to guide, the ship would come safely to shore.

Many moments are wasted, hours upon hours are often lost. Sometimes days and even years of precious time go by unharnessed. But when the moment of recognition comes let us not waste one more moment in thinking of the waste. Many spells of bliss may be lost, wonderous glimpses of peace may have slipped by. But if we have slipped away let us not waste a second in imagining that glory or in bemoaning its loss. That very moment could well be given to vigilance.

Let us not squander that too away. For vigilance is the only answer, attention is the only key to awareness. Attention unbroken by thought, unhampered by motive. Indeed, when one is in the grip of the spirit of enquiry, it is impossible for any thought to enter. For whom can there be thought when the very locus-standi of the thinker is under question? Identity's every attempt to rise must be countered with the gun-fire of enquiry. Every waking moment, all day long. That is why self-enquiry is not an hour's exercise. It is not something that can be pursued within the limits of allotted time. To say 'I wish to practise self-enquiry for sometime' or think so is a contradiction in terms. Is not self-enquiry a very questioning of the 'I', of what one has taken oneself to be? If that is so who is the 'I' who sets apart time? Who is the 'I' who plans to get up after the allotted time and resume other activities? If the 'I' is not known how can the 'I' think and act? Can one say that Mr. X in Timbuctoo has all these responsibilities to discharge or those desires to fulfil? How can one vouch for a stranger? So if one does not know the 'I' there is no possibility of making plans for that 'I'.

There is then no scope for complacency. For who is it that practises? Who thinks of being in an exalted state? There is no room for despair either. For, who is the 'I' that despairs? There is, indeed, no place for thought, no loop-hole for identity to peep in. 'But, we are not able to sustain such vigilance. We are not able to strike at our fears and motives through enquiry...We...We...We.' Yes, the habit is tenacious, very tenacious. It holds us in its iron-grip, does it not? Yet, if we were to melt away then what would it be left holding? What would habit grip if 'I' were not? That is the answer, but it is the only answer. It has no easy alternatives. The answer lies in the willingness to suspend identity, in the readiness to suspend the 'I' in a moment of intense enquiry, a moment of total vigilance. And that moment must be every moment.

CHAPTER XI

NOT READY YET

Thoughts! Thoughts! Thoughts! Gay thoughts with red and yellow ribbons in their plaits, wearing bright pinafores, smart thoughts with bow-ties, suits and hats, graceful thoughts trailing long 'pallus' behind, musical thoughts, rhythmic thoughts tinkling anklets, discordant, cacophonic thoughts, old thoughts that are grey and wrinkled, sad thoughts that are pale white, and sickly thoughts that cough and tremble, well-fed thoughts, and thinning thoughts, dark thoughts that are heavy and ugly, fearful thoughts crowding in like nightmares, active thoughts that tick-tock like a clock and lazy thoughts that languish under sheets, creative thoughts like blossoming rose-buds, or flitting tiny butterflies, busy thoughts with the buzz of bees, angry thoughts that boil and hiss...

Yes, we think and think and think and think until we sleep. And then we think and think and think, yes, think and think in a world of dreams. And then awake and think, and think.... My God, this is awful, must we not put a stop to it, this awful tyranny, this mechanical fallacy? Why imagine that the world will stop when thoughts die? Why believe that a great void results when thoughts are dispensed with? Has not Bhagavan said it is fullness, bliss, our natural state, yes, let's do away with all thoughts herewith! A wonderful resolution no doubt, but a resolution by whom? A resolution through what? Isn't it only another thought? Goodness! The merry-go-round of thinking has got one so confused that one even begins thinking in rhyme! It's absurd, isn't it? But then, what isn't absurd about the think- kingdom? Why not just let go and stop all thoughts? There is a problem in doing so, as long as we make the need to let go also a thought. 'Liberation is to be attained', 'sadhana must be done', 'today I was in a wonderful mood', 'today was dismal, disturbed, the enquiry - hardly any' - all these are thoughts too.

Then is there no way out? Is all sadhana mental? Should there be no practice? Should there be no yearning? All theoretical questions, all escape routes. Does the man who is thirsty ever ask, 'Is it correct to long for water?' Does the starving woman wonder, 'Is it my duty to search for food?' If there is yearning, we would not wonder at its aptness. If there is practice, sadhana, we would not talk or think about the need for it, it would simply be done. If we recognise the utter triviality, the superfluousness of thoughts, they would cease. Full-stop. If we believed, truly believed for an intense moment, that we do not know ourselves, in that instant, all thoughts would dissolve, disappear, die. 'But, we do believe, we do know that thoughts are superfluous, that they are not our nature... it is only that there are these few duties to be performed, an editorial to be written, a class to be taken, a phone to be answered, suffering to be alleviated'... Who is to do all this? The body? Then 'I am the body who is to answer the phone or talk to students'. This is what I believe, otherwise where is the question of 'my' answering a phone? Who is to do all this? The mind, through the body. Then 'I am the mind which thinks, understands, explains, sympathises, shares, exposes'. This is what I believe, otherwise where is the question of 'my' planning an article, 'my' helping others, teaching, learning... So much for our professing that we believe in self-enquiry. It is but an intellectual game, a flight of fancy wherein the utopian state of Self-awareness may be enjoyed.

'No, it is not as bad as all that,' we reassure ourselves, 'We have made some progress'. Progress towards what? Towards that which is here and now? Can one move towards the here, towards the now? One must only stop moving away. One must only stop pretending that we wish to be Self-aware, stop pretending also that we are not Self-aware, stop all pretense, stop all excuses. Isn't this a rather harsh approach? Aren't we unnecessarily deriding ourselves? Well then, would it be better to complacently believe that we are travelling, we are enquiring? Really speaking, both are stances, both are thoughts, both are mental. To cry 'Enough! enough of everything!' is also a thought. To believe, 'This is the steady way' is also a thought. The only way really is to continually remind oneself

of the insignificance of this habit, to remind oneself of the need to enquire whenever we are carried away by the thought currents, to remind oneself of one's own nature. Thus, to keep fighting thought with thought, the thought that cuts at other thoughts, itself to finally dissolve... go on until we are ready.

We are only preparing for the war... All the sound and fury, this sadhana and self-enquiry, are but preparations. When the bomb is dropped - the explosion will be instantaneous - no survivors. And that is what we fear... all explanations, all arguing, all dodging (and every action in dodging, every externalisation is dodging) is an expression of that fear and all practice is to eradicate, to subdue, to do away with that fear. A French officer came to Bhagavan Ramana with a list of questions concluding with a statement that he wanted no intellectual explanation but experience. Bhagavan turned his glance upon him. In a second the officer burst out, 'No, no, not now, not now... I will come later.' No, we are not ready yet...

CHAPTER XII

THE MARVEL MEDICINE

“The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew
The furrow followed free
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.”

— Rime of the Ancient Mariner, S.T. Coleridge

One wonders whether much thought is the only plague when one is beset with too little thinking. There is the initial tussle with the rush of thoughts. Then, at last, there is the growing ability to keep them at bay, there even is, it seems a strengthening of quiet, a widening calm. And we are happy. We are moving towards the goal, the thought-free state of unsullied awareness.

We feel closer already in the capacity to tackle thoughts. Thoughts slow down of their own accord, in fact, for they no longer hold the former attraction. ‘Who seeks all these things?’ one questions repeatedly, reducing all motivation, all thought to absurdity. We are convinced it is stupid to think without knowledge of the thinker. We believe it is silly to care for externalities without knowing the one who cares. Hence there is a growing detachment. Or so we happily believe. Just as the mariners content with the fair breeze sailed unawares into the ‘silent’ latitudes of breezeless stillness. Where does this breeze take us? Is it carrying us in the right direction? These were questions they did not ask and found themselves ‘becalmed’.

They could neither go back where they came from, nor could they move forward. Being a sail-ship, they simply could not move without a breeze. Sometimes, unawares, we too could step into this no man’s land in our spiritual voyage. What we pride as our detached attitude could well be indifference, and then, where would

we be? Not caring for the world, yet unaware of the pervading bliss of the Self. Not given to thinking, yet unenergised by the vibrant silence of the Self. Not given to motivation and a work-psyche, yet untouched by the dynamic perfection of the Self. In the twilight zone we cannot say we bungle on, for it is no movement but stagnation. We cannot even say we are drifting, for drifting too has a direction, slow as the pace may be. We are frozen, emotionally dead but not spiritually alive.

“Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion.
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.”

— Rime of the Ancient Mariner, S.T. Coleridge

This is how our lives may well become, absolutely stagnant. And the greater tragedy is that we are ourselves unaware of this stagnation. We credit ourselves with detachment, when it is merely indifference. ‘How should one know the difference?’ some may wonder. Why, by the beauty that springs from detachment, by the marvellous love and compassion of which it is a fountainhead. Not merely by the absence of disappointment, anger or sorrow is detachment to be presumed. Very often, even these negative qualities may still be manifest subtly without our being aware. But even if no negative feeling is experienced for a long spell it does not imply the presence of detachment. Just as mere absence of thoughts is not the experience of the Self that is Silence, mere absence of attachment and its by-products does not denote detachment. The latter is a positive, dynamic experience, not a passive negation. Thus, if one finds waning interest in things external but no special joy in inwardness, one may well be approaching the danger zone of no-man’s land where one belongs neither to the world nor to the Truth. If we find we are increasingly restless and unhappy with things around, if nothing seems to bring the thrill it ought to, if we seek excitement in newer and different avenues yet fail to find it in any worthwhile measure, if we vainly seek to repeat old joys, we are perhaps in danger of entering the void zone.

Obviously we can no longer convince ourselves that joy comes from without. Yet, we are not in a position to relinquish our hold on externalities for the simple reason that we have no better alternative. For, the bliss of the Self is not as yet a reality, it is only a mental image. And how far can a mental image hold against the pulls of habit in a 'real' world as we believe it to be, deny it vehemently as we may intellectually? So we stand for ages on the threshold, loth to turn back, yet without the courage to enter the wide spaces that beckon. Or, perhaps like one who has jumped off a cliff and is holding on to a tender bough that grows on the cliff-side. There is no way one can climb up again, certainly there is no turning back. However, this knowledge does not alleviate our agony. Neither is our problem mitigated by the knowledge that what we will fall into, should we let go, is an ocean of bliss. For, our predicament is just this, whether or not we acknowledge it, that we care not for the world yet hold on to it, that we care for the Truth yet will not dive within.

And the most amusing part of the problem, if one may take the liberty of laughing at so serious a matter, is that the very indifference, the very restlessness, the very 'drifting' becomes a new hold. It is something still well within the realm of the mind. It is a problem to be tackled and thus something concrete, something the mind understands and likes to deal with. It is a new identification. Hence the only way to tackle it is to question its validity. Is it not also only a state of mind this so-called area of twilight? Is it not merely one more aspect of the mind like the 'positive' love for the Self or the 'negative' desires of the world? Well, if it is merely a part of the mind, what is the mind? Is it not merely a conglomeration of thoughts? Then the feeling of drifting, of not belonging, of not attaining, the sense of aimlessness are all only thoughts. For whom are these thoughts? For me. The thoughts are for me, the thoughts are not I. Who am I? If this query is intense then where is room for aim or aimlessness? Where is room for attachment or indifference? Where is room for any disturbance?

The way out of the 'silent sea' is to revive one's spirit of enquiry. At the same time it is also important to revive one's sense

of wonder and love, to be surprised, to be touched, to be moved - these should not be negated as attachment. Negation is also only an attitude. Let us remember the marvellous magic of the Lord's presence in all things, in a roadside tune, in a leaf's dance, in a lilting melody, in children's play and adults' banter, in work and idleness, in laughter and tears. This is a sure medicine to the ill of falling prey to indifference. Thus one must keep ever at hand the twin medicines of love for the Lord with wonder at His manifestation, and faith in His protection of our journey, faith in the fact that He lights our Selfward path through the torch of self-enquiry.

CHAPTER XIII

ENOUGH! ENOUGH!

“‘Enough’ - a strange topic for you” remarked a friend, “You never say ‘enough’ - always ‘let’s have more ballets on Bhagavan, more music, more of writing’.”

“But it is not Sarada who says ‘enough’. She is quoting what Muruganar said to her,” answered my father. Memories of Muruganar return, memories of silence, of his ever flowing tears at the very mention of Bhagavan’s name, of his being moved beyond words when we sang on Bhagavan. On one visit, an elder cousin reprimanded a younger one for excusing himself from Muruganar’s presence on some pretext. ‘He had no interest in what was going on’, I stated. ‘It matters little’, came the answer. ‘Whether one is disinterested or even totally restless at that time, one must somehow spend the maximum time possible in a jnani’s presence. The extraordinary good that comes out of even simply being in such a presence cannot be estimated by us’, he explained. ‘For sadhakas such a presence is invaluable. When you see a jnani you can concretely perceive what it means to be apart from the body’, he contributed, and added, ‘I have had the great good fortune of being with Muruganar on an occasion when he was extremely unwell. Yet it was so obvious that his body’s suffering did not even touch him’. To those who have seen Muruganar this would be quite evident. In fact, even to one so young and unlettered in spiritual lore as I, it was obvious at that time that there was really no ‘Muruganar’ before us. There was just this form that pulsated love for Bhagavan from every pore. Someone mentioned after going through the book ‘Ramana’s Muruganar’ that almost every article contained reference to Muruganar’s tears of joy on hearing Bhagavan’s name, I explained that this was not a mere repetition of a single fact, but that it was a continuous experience which is sure to have had an impact on all those who came to Muruganar. Just as it is impossible to speak

or write without words, even so it is impossible to think, speak or write on Muruganar without mentioning how he would melt with love for Bhagavan.

It was thus thought right when I encountered my first 'spiritual doubt', if it may be called that, to ask Muruganar for clarification. And so I asked him on our next visit, 'Is it enough if I think of Bhagavan as my Guru and practise self-enquiry?' The doubt arose in the context of mantropadesa by a Guru being stressed by our scriptures. On hearing the question Muruganar was deeply moved. He went red in face and his voice choked with emotion as he said 'Enough! Enough! Cent per cent sufficient'. After a moment's pause he added, 'More than hundred per cent sufficient'. He then stressed that Bhagavan is the only everlasting illumination within us and that His presence is the only existence everywhere and for all time.

How simple the answer seems. An affirmation that the Ramana way is open to anyone who wishes to tread it. An answer that satisfied the doubt at the level at which it was posed. Yet, the words of great ones have far deeper meanings than what we understand from them in the first instance. In relation to the answer when one looks back at the question, it is seen that the question itself was not really understood, let alone the answer. By stressing the all pervading presence of Bhagavan and saying that Bhagavan is the only everlasting illumination within, Muruganar, it seems, was turning my attention to the very question. He was telling me, without directly spelling it out, that if I firmly believed in and experienced Bhagavan's presence within and without, that would be more than enough. 'Is it enough to consider Bhagavan my Guru?'. 'More than hundred per cent enough, but do you know what it means to consider Bhagavan your Guru?' Muruganar's answer seems to be questioning in return. To accept someone as one's Guru implies investing total faith in Him, in what the Guru says. And what does Bhagavan say? He says that the Self alone is and that the Guru and Self are non-different. If one had total faith in Bhagavan, the moment one hears or reads, the moment one knows what Bhagavan says, those words should become one's own experience. Thus to

have total faith in Bhagavan as the Guru means to experience His presence as the Self.

‘No, no’ objects the mind. ‘That is surrender. We are not capable of surrendering totally. But we do have faith in Bhagavan’s words. That is why we are keen on practising self-enquiry. Has not Bhagavan advocated the practice of self-enquiry? Has he not affirmed time and again that the earnest pursuit of self-enquiry will lead to Self-abidance? It is faith in his words which keeps us at self-enquiry. I am not capable of such total faith that springs from surrender, but I am not faithless either’- thus the mind reasons and says to itself, ‘Muruganar has also said that it is more than sufficient if one pursues self-enquiry thinking of Bhagavan with devotion. Why should one read more into what he said than what he actually said?’

Thus thinking the mind satisfies itself with the pursuit of self-enquiry for awhile in a day. What is this self-enquiry that one strives to pursue? The process seems simple enough. Bhagavan has explained that the sense of ‘I’, one’s identity, the feeling that ‘I am so and so’, exists only in the waking and dream states. Even in dream it often undergoes drastic changes of name, form, circumstance and so on. And in deep sleep, the identity, this ‘I’ - thought as Bhagavan calls it, is totally absent. However, in deep sleep one is not conscious of the experience that exists when identity ceases. To consciously observe the dissolution of the ‘I’-thought into its source constitutes self-enquiry. Bhagavan has also clearly delineated the methodology for doing so. The means to track the ‘I’-thought to its source while remaining alert is to isolate it. The mind is a bundle of thoughts in which each and every thought is linked with or can exist only in relation to the ‘I’- thought. Without the connection with the ‘I’ - thought no other thought can subsist. The ‘I’-thought, although it is thus the central thought can also not exist by itself. That is, since it has no consciousness of its own but only reflects the consciousness of the Self, it cannot bear pointed scrutiny. Hence it camouflages itself by constantly associating itself with other thoughts. How to penetrate this camouflage is, therefore, the question. ‘By questioning the ‘I’-thought, by questioning its locus-standi’ answers Bhagavan. ‘When any thought arises ask of

yourself 'For whom is this thought?' The answer will come 'For me'. Then again ask 'Who am I?' This question will scorch all other thoughts and attention will rest on the 'I' - thought. Repeat this process as often as attention wanders to other thoughts and give attention invariably to the 'I' - thought. Then it will automatically merge in the source, the Self.

This is the process of self-enquiry which one diligently follows. One is happy to pursue this exercise for a few minutes in the beginning and then for more and more time. One is content to think that this will eventually lead one to Self-knowledge. Has not Bhagavan himself declared so time and again? Has not Muruganar also affirmed that it is 'Enough! Enough!?' Am I doubting their words? No, never. There can be no doubt that self-enquiry is the sure means to Self-knowledge. But we must be sure that what we are practising is self-enquiry as taught by Bhagavan. Where is the hitch? The understanding seems clear. The 'I'-thought must be isolated by posing the question 'Who am I?' What is the mistake we are making? Having understood the technique clearly we fail to remember the attitude with which the enquiry, is to be made. As often as he proclaimed the efficacy of self-enquiry has not Bhagavan repeated that it is not merely a verbal question? To ask the question 'Who am I?' one must really be in doubt about one's true nature. Otherwise the question has no meaning. Why ask a question if one already knows the answers? Is it not absurd to mentally ask oneself 'Who am I?' and the very next second to think 'I am getting late for office. Today I can do self-enquiry only for five minutes' or 'This afternoon I must contact my students and confirm the next rehearsal'. Who is the 'I' - that must go to office or conduct rehearsals? If one knows that 'I' then where is room for asking 'Who am I?' If one does not know that, then who is to think of things related to the 'I'? That is why when one seriously enquires 'Who am I?' every other thought becomes redundant, becomes totally irrelevant. If the enquiry is real, it is bound to prevent the rising of any other thought, of any motivation. Only the intense searchlight of attention on the 'I'-thought will remain and then the 'I'-thought will automatically dissolve into its source, the Self. That is why Bhagavan has explained, 'Of all ways this is the easiest', when Muruganar stated 'Lo! Very easy is Self-knowledge'.

That is why Muruganar said so emphatically, 'Enough! Enough'! More than hundred per cent enough'.

Thus self-enquiry is in effect no different from surrender, both resulting in immediate and total Self-attention.

CHAPTER XIV

NOT ENOUGH

It is indeed more than enough if self-enquiry is performed with the attitude of doubt. Then it will automatically lead to absorption in the Self. But is the intense quest merely verbal? If the enquiry 'Who am I?' is only mental and not felt intensely, then it is certainly not enough. As Muruganar has recorded Bhagavan's words in Guru Vachaka Kovai, to want to attain Self-knowledge while holding on to the body-idea is like trying to cross a river by clinging to a crocodile. Identity is to be questioned, it is to be cut asunder, it is to be rooted out. So long as one clings to identity, self-enquiry is not self-enquiry. Hence, it is not enough. It is like swallowing homeopathic pills which do not have the medicine mixed with them. The sweetness of sugar pills may be enjoyed but the ailment cannot be cured. It is like recording a song while the recorder is in the pause mode. The recording switches are all on, electricity is passing into the recorder, the mike is functioning, the song is sung. Yet, nothing is recorded because the pause button is not released. Only when the pause is released will the recorder function. Even so we must let go of the illusion that we are limited. If we hold on to the illusion and yet say we perform self-enquiry, then self-enquiry itself becomes one of the ego's pursuits, then it serves no purpose.

Serves no purpose! How can one say that? Even if the question be only verbal by sheer dint of repetition would it not become a real experience? Quite possible. Bhagavan would always encourage every effort in the direction. He would say that the name of the Lord spoken even once will have its own good effect. He would say that effort to silence even one thought could go a long way towards mind control. 'Do not think any effort is insufficient and thereby cease to make effort altogether' Bhagavan seems to say. For some effort is certainly far better than no effort at all. It is in the same spirit that Muruganar too affirmed 'Enough, Enough!', when

I asked him if I could pursue self-enquiry. He did not at the time question my understanding of self-enquiry. He did not ask, 'You say you want to do self-enquiry, do you know what it means?' He simply created faith in the method and allowed practice of it to the extent that it was understood. But he added emphasis on faith in Bhagavan. The Guru's grace would throw light on the path at the right time. But as and when intellectual clarity is given it is for us to put it into practice. Bhagavan has time and again stressed that effort is of paramount importance. Grace draws us to the path, it gives us an understanding of the way, it creates circumstances without and within that are conducive to self-enquiry, and grace bestows the fruits of self-enquiry. But the effort at self-enquiry must be made, that is our share of the work. If, after fully understanding the implication of self-enquiry we still practise it as a quarter-hour workout, if we would still separate it from our lives, compartmentalise it and not allow it to permeate our entire outlook, Bhagavan's direct path is wasted on us. We would be, as Muruganar says in Ramana Jnanabodham, like cocks that ignore a priceless gem taking it to be a mere trinket. We are like the farmer who was given the wish-fulfilling cow, Kamadhenu, and he used it to plough his fields. 'What can we do?' we lament, 'try as we might we do not seem to get that intensity'. Thus we revel in creating illusory obstacles. When the 'I' is not known where is the question of its practice being intense or not intense? The intensity lies simply in remembering to question it. Every time this unknown 'I' poses a problem it must be questioned, that is all. 'Who is worried about lack of intensity?' 'I'. 'But who am I?' 'Is it not wrong to force the pace thus?' says the mind again. Will it not result in a certain negativity, indifference or even, sometimes, depression and madness? It is quite true that all this could occur, if the enquiry is performed mentally. One thinks, 'I must perform self-enquiry continuously. I must practise intensely' and so on. In thinking thus, one errs. One creates an anxiety within oneself to perform well. Self-enquiry becomes an examination in which one is testing one's capacity to achieve spiritual success. Naturally the effort could backfire. Because Self-knowledge is not something that can be attained or won or grasped by the mind. After some time the unnatural pressure that is there on the mind to concentrate, to

pay attention, could break the mind, it could disturb one's equilibrium. And this results in the negativity that often follows what one revels in, as a happy spiritual experience. We are sorry that after scaling every peak we seem to fall into deeper troughs. But then, for whom was the climb? Should we not have questioned the very thought of being in a good spiritual mood? And for whom is the fall? Without knowing the 'I' how can one worry about its being in a bad state? Thus reminding one-self at every point of the utter irrelevance of all thought we must continue with the enquiry. Not continue the questioning in a forced manner as something that must be done, but rather, naturally, as something we cannot help doing. When we are watching a murder mystery on television or reading one, do we tell ourselves that we 'must' pay attention? Our curiosity, our need to know the answer is so deeply aroused that the attention is automatic. There is no scope for telling ourselves, 'If we pay such intense attention now we will soon get tired'. We just cannot help paying attention. It would be spontaneous and natural.

Let us suppose we have entered a labyrinth but we have been told to follow a thread that is nailed to the walls of the caves from the entrance to the interior along the proper route. Due to some distraction or inattention we miss this way and get lost in the labyrinth. After much wandering and nearing desperation, an extraordinary grace brings us back to a point in the 'thread-route'. Would we then need to remind ourselves every moment that we must not stray away again? Would not our joyous eyes be pinned on the thread as we raced down the correct way out into light and fresh air? Why then does it seem a matter of such great difficulty to be naturally attentive to the source of the 'I' - thought? Why is one not drawn, not irresistibly attracted to the process of self-enquiry? Why are excuses offered at every turn in order to avoid the pursuit? We complain of distractions but are not driven to ask, 'Distractions for whom, who is that 'I'? We speak of fear but are not motivated to question, 'Who is afraid? Who is that 'I'?'. We are not impatient with the numerous thoughts that are created by the illusory ego. Yet we are restless when we have 'performed self-enquiry' even for a few minutes. Why? Because, for all our

protests we are not convinced that what we have taken to be ourselves is not the truth, that it is only an illusion, an appearance, not the reality. We do not really long to know the truth. And here we would perhaps conveniently quote that even the desire to know the truth is a thought, must that also not disappear? We would remember Muruganar saying that Bhagavan destroys 'even the thought that the world is a dream'. True that even these thoughts must finally go, but they help stoke the fire of knowledge before being consumed by it. Unless one is convinced that what we think we know is not the truth, where would the need for questioning be? And without self-enquiry in all its fiery power, how could Self-attention result? We must be prepared to cry 'Enough! Enough!' to every intruding fragment of illusion. Then the spontaneous Self-attention would be 'Enough! Enough! More than hundred per cent sufficient'.

CHAPTER XV

SO NEAR, YET, SO FAR

The luggage is packed. The leave-takings at home are over. With a few dear ones for company one sets out on the long drive to the airport. There is perhaps a little sorrow at having to bid adieu, but there is greater joy and anticipation about the achievements, the experience that lies ahead at the destination. The airport is reached just in time to check-in, the boarding pass has been collected. Then comes an announcement. The flight is delayed, says the faceless voice, delayed by half-an-hour. The voice also regrets the inconvenience caused. Then starts the waiting, the fidgeting. One can never be sure that the said delay of half-an-hour will not extend to another hour or two. There is no way one can return home either, what if the flight is announced suddenly? Even assuming that there is a certain delay of a few hours, enough time to go home again and come back, what would one do there? All work there would have been completed or put away for the time. It would hardly be possible to pick up the threads and do anything worthwhile, just to pack up once again and rush off to the airport. Besides, mentally one would be only at the airport and the destination. All one does, therefore, is to fidget, curse the airlines or one's luck and while away the time in idle talk. Those who have come to see one off would be in no mood for talking either. For, they are not scheduled to catch any flight, they have their down-to-earth schedules waiting for them. How long can they spare? There is, of course, the possibility that they had even left before the announcement of delay came. It could be that one had already checked through security when a technical snag was discovered in the aircraft. Maybe one has boarded the aircraft and there is a sudden bomb-scare. It is not unknown that a flight takes off, reaches its destination and is unable to land due to the heavy downpour. It circles over the city awhile trying to land. There seems to be no prospect of the weather clearing in time to land safely. The flight returns to take-off base. Back where one started,

after the whole process was nearly over! So near, yet so far. Can one declare with joy, "Well I couldn't reach my destination, so I am back!" Impossible. Initially the frustration at the failure of one's endeavour. Then, again the efforts to get to destination. Are there seats in tomorrow's flight? Can one reach by train or bus? Even if it means reaching later, if the business that started us on the journey is any of consequence, then the destination must be reached somehow. And until one arrives, the tortuous wait too must be endured. There is no escaping it. If one has not had the great good-fortune of a no-hitch flight, then one has to cope with the waiting. The problem is not typical to air-trips alone. Any mode of journey could face the same problems. Trains too get delayed or cancelled. There are times when one goes to the bus-stop thrice a day for three consecutive days and finds no bus to take one to Arunachala, because there is some unrest in the State!

We who have embarked on the spiritual journey are often in the state of passengers waiting for their flight, their train or their bus. We have packed our worldly luggage, we are keen on re-experiencing the bliss of our home-land, our natural state, the Self. But we have not set out on the kind of journey which Bhagavan undertook in August 1896, reaching Arunachala on the 1st of September. We have not left behind all our people. Neither are we travelling totally load-free. We do have some luggage, perhaps even heavy, that we still have to cart along. That means we would certainly not be prepared to say, 'No flight, train or bus. Alright, I'll start walking. I'm bound to reach in course of time. And, in any case, there is nothing else I have to do other than reaching there, so let me keep moving in the right direction'. No, we are not in a position to say that, we have not yet abandoned our hold on the world, just packed our boxes for the time being. Yet, we do want to go. Even if we were to return home, our minds would be only on the journey. Even if we open our boxes and bring out some files to work on, our eyes would constantly shift to the clock, our ears strain for sounds of a positive announcement, the wrist turn every other minute to check our own time with that of the clock. Every minute of waiting would seem like an aeon spent in no man's land. The joys of the world no longer allure us, they no longer make our hearts sing or our lips lift in smiles and laughter. There

is no eagerness, no anticipation in that area. It has been left behind. Not totally, of course, but enough to loosen its grip. One may return to a worldly life because there seems no inner joy blossoming, yet sooner or later one would be plagued with questions, 'Why am I wasting my time here? Of what use is all this? Is it not time to reach the destination and fulfil the true purpose of life?' So thinking one sets out on the journey again.

Yet, again one may be obstructed at any point. Again, one may encounter inordinate delays. The experience of bliss may not be forthcoming. It is a depressing state. No joy in the world, no bliss of the Self, just an indifferent drifting in no man's land. Near, apparently near to the Truth because there is seeming detachment from the world. Yet far, probably because the detachment is not intense, or not real. The so called detachment may be merely indifference, being tired of life, fed up with it, not detached from it. Whatever the case, the pain of emptiness is real, the anguish at the delay, at the waiting is real. How does one cope?

Bhagavan's compositions on Arunachala seem to be created specially for our use at such times. 'Lord! The world will have me no more. It finds me of no use to itself. Death seems sweeter than this worthless existence. Cure this, my madness by administering the rare medicine of making me cling to your feet'. Then one may wonder, 'What use is clinging to his feet, if one cannot taste the nectar of the bliss that he bestows?' So one protests, 'Lord, I am ever at your feet like a frog clinging to a lotus-stem. Make me a nectar-sucking bee. If I died while yet clinging to your feet, it would be a standing pillar of disgrace for 'you'. So we plead with the Lord. After all, we did not, of our own accord, long to undertake the inward journey. It was the Sadguru's grace that attracted us to the life of Self-absorption. He is our travel agent, making us long to undertake the journey, advertising the glory of that state, clearing our papers, getting our tickets, informing us about all the procedures and details of the journey.

So we can boldly ask in Bhagavan's words, 'Why did you remind me of your blissful state? Well, you asked for it. Now, will

I leave you?’ No chance. For the Sadguru is not just a travel agent. He is also both aircraft and pilot. Hence, we can trust him to carry us without a hitch to the destination. Yes, faith is the other answer to cope with the transition. Faith in the wisdom of the Sadguru. If there is any problem in the aircraft it becomes the pilot’s duty to land mid-way or even return to base. Instead of fretting that we are making no spiritual progress we should then recognise that what has happened is only to avoid a greater disaster. At the same time we cannot lie back and sleep. We should keep ourselves in readiness for the ‘last and final call’. Keep ourselves in readiness to board the aircraft a million times if necessary, but not rest until we have reached the destination. We should not let the mind get bogged down by negative feelings of hopelessness and despair. While yearning for the truth leads to intensity in the search, despair merely leads to self-pity and dwelling more and more on one’s sorry plight. So, one should carefully keep away from any type of thinking that tends to center on the ego, ‘I am lost in indifference,’ ‘I am making no progress’, ‘I am having such bad thoughts’, ‘I cannot bear this waiting’. Whenever any such thoughts arise one must shift attention through surrender or enquiry or both to the positive inward movement. One may say to oneself, ‘Alright. This is my mental state. In any case, I am not in a position to move out of this state. So let me leave it to Sadguru Ramana, he will deal with it in the best possible manner’. Having decided thus, one continues in positive effort. Else one may ask, “For whom are all these, indifference, bad thoughts, sorrow, longing? For me. But I do not know who I am. Then where can I think of ‘my sorrow’. ‘my negativities’. Let there first be knowledge of the ‘I’”. So thinking, attention turns Selfward. Then one realises that it does not really matter whether one is far or near. What matters is faith in the Sadguru and keenness in the enquiry which he has prescribed. Then there can be no dampener of peace and joy on the journey.

PART II
HAPPY 'NOW' FOREVER

CHAPTER XVI

THE TROUBLE WITH RIDING CLOUDS

Now, don't dismiss me as a sheer pessimist. For, to deny the joys of the future may seem to some like a pessimistic approach. By stressing the importance of the present and negating the role of future would not one be denying a great happiness in life ? Is not one cutting off the wonderful joy of dreaming, of imagining wonderful things happening in the future ? In fact, it has often been said that the pursuit of a goal is far more interesting than its actual attainment. Imagine the sheer pleasure of an ice-cream on a hot summer afternoon. Even the real experience could not compete with the rosy beauty of such rich imaginings. Yes, starry-eyed thoughts of the future can often put one on cloud- nine. Why deny oneself such exhilarating cloud-rides by clinging to the earthly present? A fine question. Yet, one who rides a cloud must also be prepared for the cloudburst. Then, along with the downpour, one would be soggy, muddily back on earth. No matter, no matter at all if one is as happy playing in the slush as one was floating among birds. But what if one is bitter about the rain, that is in fact beautiful, simply because it brought us down from the cloud? What if one curses the bountiful earth because it bathed us in mud? Worst of all, what if one refuses to mount a cloud ever again for fear that it might throw us down once more?

Yes, that's the trouble with riding clouds, that's precisely the problem with chasing dreams. Undoubtedly there is a great joy in the pursuit. But the sad part is that it robs us of the awareness of all other joys. We get so attached to the joy that springs from riding our chosen dream that we become blind to the fact that there are a million joyous dreams strewn around waiting for us to climb on and soar. We lose touch with the fact that whatever happens is, in fact, a 'joyous dream'. When our particular ideal, when our chosen desire that we have been pursuing with great zeal fails to fructify, we get deflated, we get embittered, we perceive sorrow all around,

everything makes us depressed. We even cease to hope, we cease to desire. Why? For fear that once more we will be disappointed, that we may get hurt again. We decide that it is far safer to retreat into our little shells of negativity. Is this the wonderful joy that sprouts from chasing dreams?

Wait a little again. Don't get confirmed in your belief that I am a pessimist, an absolute negativist who doesn't understand the value of hope. Don't ask me why I should think only of punctured dreams. Just let us, each one of us, touch our hearts and see, do we really have that great faith in dreams ? Are we able to laugh while hoping for goals, and laugh through the shattering of hopes? Or is there really any one amongst us who can assert that not a single dream of ours has been deflated? That we have never been down and out, never fed up with life, at least for a few moments? Besides, even the pursuit of the dream may sometimes be an unhappy experience.

For, in our mind would be printed that lovely picture that seems so close, so possible, yet, never materialises. And in comparison with that picture reality is dreary. So we enjoy neither this nor that. Where then is the magic balm of hope? And then, we often forget that thoughts of the future need not necessarily be golden. They may be dark and dismal too. What then? Is it not better then to focus on the present? The attorney for future might argue that even then one should turn from dreary thoughts of the future to more positive ones. However, any psychiatrist or psychologist would be quick to confirm that this is an impossible task. To one who is undergoing depression thought of even the next few hours is a heavy burden, let alone being able to conjure up visions of a bright future. For such a one, therefore, it is important to concentrate on the task immediately on hand. People suffering from shock and grief are advised to take life a minute at a time, just one step at a time.

Yet, eventually they will beat their depression, will they not? Then it will be time to start hoping again, goes the argument. Then, it will be time to plan for a good future, to reconstruct purposes and

positive goals. Why? Would it not be more, much more than worthwhile to live each minute of life fully? The value of hope lies by no means in itself but only as a counter to fear. If one must think of the future it is better to hope than to fear, better to be positive than negative. But hope, that thus has relative value, has no intrinsic value. Does that mean life should be devoid of hope, of goals, of purpose? Would it not be an empty, worthless life? Far from it. We set ourselves goals to escape from the present. We need 'purpose' because we fail to find meaning in that which exists. We are constantly denying ourselves the taste, the fullness of the moment, continuously overlooking it. We do not see the carpet of flowers that are strewn around our feet but peer through binoculars at some misty far off flower fields. Then we walk to those fields. And when the fragrance of those flowers should turn us heady, we still have the binoculars and turn them to a third landscape that we deem more beautiful. Thus, we are ever moving, ever in pursuit of one goal after another. Is there a single goal that we have savoured on attainment? Every feather in the cap sets our minds on more exotic conquests. Yes, our aims, our motivation robs us of every present joy with foggy promises of joys to come. Let us cast all goals to the winds, throw every blessed purpose into the ocean and see what happens. To be absolutely purposeless is to be natural, to enjoy every moment fully, to be able, at last, to live. To destroy every dream would be waking up, to wash the gum from one's eyes and perceive all things with clear-eyed delight. It would be the ability to cry with abandon and laugh without fear.

'Fear', yes, that is the crux of the problem. We are afraid of unshackling ourselves. We are afraid of freedom from the future. To have absolutely no plans, no need, no purpose seems a strange void. True, a little freedom the mind enjoys, a certain degree of freedom. Yet the sentence is but a contradiction in terms. Can there be degrees of freedom? So long as freedom is partial there is some bondage implied, and where there is bondage how can freedom be? We are adepts in fighting for our freedom, while constantly living in fear of it. We claim we must have freedom to think, freedom to act, the way we want. Yet, we have never tried to explore what freedom really means. Freedom must mean not merely the absence of bonds

imposed by others but release from our own bonds too. When we lack the courage to open the very shackles for which we ourselves hold the keys, isn't it ironical to ask others to unshackle us? They would merely laugh and say 'What difference would it make to you? You would remain a slave in any case.' Yes, we are afraid of letting go of our attachment to the past and the future. Thinking, acting, planning, acting, thinking, performing, planning, pursuing. To block this endless stream of mental and physical activity geared to the future would be like a very throttling of our life breath. Or so we fear.

Why this untoward obsession with something that is totally non-existent? Does the future really exist? Of course it does, we assert. I go to sleep today and I'll wake up tomorrow. That's future, isn't it? 'But', Bhagavan might well ask us, 'when you wake up, will it be tomorrow or today?' When I wake up, at the time of waking up, it will naturally be today. Therefore, Bhagavan points out, all experience is only in the present. Future is something we have never experienced and can never do so. It is merely a creation of the mind, a figment of the imagination. What we plan for the future, when it actually happens, can only be present. So, where is future but in our minds? Hence this incessant chasing of the future is but running after a non-entity, a mere illusion projected by the mind. It is like trying to eat a chocolate projected on a movie-screen. And fear of the future is believing that the monster in the movie is clawing you really. The future being merely imaginary, to give it any value, positive or negative, is to imbue illusion with reality.

In days gone by many would travel in donkey-carts or mule-carts. These being extraordinarily obstinate animals they could not be easily trained. Nonetheless, being sturdy beasts of burden, they were much used for the purpose. The problem, though, was how to persuade these creatures to move on. One fine day a brilliant idea was hit upon. A long stick was tied to the back of the animal so that it projected a couple of feet in front of the head. And from this rod hung some tasty titbit, a radish or a carrot. The donkey in its attempt to grab the radish dangling in front of it would move forward. But the radish was ever just out of reach so the donkey

kept moving... Our pursuit of a future that never is, is similar to the donkey's pursuit of the radish. For the future is always ahead, it is always out of reach and hence we are always giving chase. Do hopes and purposes, aims and goals still seem worthwhile? Especially when the greatest of fortunes, when every joy is available in the present ? Do we still believe in endlessly running after dreams? We do make a sorry picture, don't we? What picture? See how we look, with that long pole above our heads and the dream dangling in front, just out of reach...

CHAPTER XVII

MILES TO GO?

How far is the truth? Is it a billion years away? Is it in the neighbouring galaxy or as near as Mars? Is it nearer still? Is it only a few births away? What is the 'truth' that we search for; this truth about ourselves? We are all seekers of Self- realisation, of Self-knowledge. We pursue the attainment of liberation, of freedom from birth and death. We earnestly study the methodology, the ways to reach this cherished goal. We carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of various paths, and by the grace of the Sadguru, start treading the apt road, that which is most suited to our intellectual and emotional approach. Even as we travel we clarify whatever doubts may arise, we analyse our understanding of the means, check and re-check whether we are on the right track and keep trudging along doggedly.

Of course, there are moments of dreary despair. There is the habitual, indifferent plodding at times. At others we are almost convinced that the goal can never be ours. It is too distant. There are miles to go before we can rest. Are we capable of travelling that far? Is it not necessary to take a break right away? Sometimes we forget the path altogether and get lost in a maze of attractive by-lanes. Eventually, though, we chide ourselves for our distraction and determinedly return to the chosen way. There are also some moments of joy, when at a sudden turn in the road one catches a glimpse of the destination. One may not even recognise it then as one's goal, yet would surely know that something wonderful awaits. And this acts as a spur to one's enthusiasm. But again the glimpse is gone, again the despair returns, again indifference and distraction hold their sway. Again too is a taste of joy and hope. The cycle seems endless. Not once or twice, but many times in the Selfward journey does one pass through tunnels and out into bright airy space, up mountain peaks and reaching down into deep ravines, to

enter one more tunnel to burst again into light.... On and on and on... In the happier, hopeful moments one ceases to think about this seemingly endless pursuit, but when one is moving through a dark phase one pleads, 'How much longer? Is there no end?' Or else we simply resign ourselves, thinking, 'Not for us is liberation in this birth. It is not that easily attained. We have to be thankful that we have started moving towards it and will attain it at least in the next birth or the birth after that'.

So long as we think of something as being far away, can we ever experience it as near? When something is yet to be attained, can it be enjoyed here and now? It may still be necessary to pursue goals that are in fact distant and external. But of what use would be a striving for something that is ever attained. Would it not be like chasing one's own shadow? However far one may run, however speedily one may pursue, can one ever catch it? Would it not be like the musk deer searching for the fragrant source, running hither and thither through jungle paths, twitching its nose through tender shoots and cool waters, head raised, nostril quivering with every breeze? Could the scent be discovered by chasing the breeze? That is why it is sometimes said that effort cannot give the state of Self-knowledge. How can doing create an awareness of being? The cessation of all effort, the conscious dissolution of all need to do, to act, results in Self-awareness. Yet, we bring to this pursuit also our sense of doership, our habit of action, we plan our spiritual practice, we strive to do more and more 'sadhana' and feel desperate if we cannot. We fail to remember that all this need to do something is itself a step away from simple being, the fullness of the Self that is ever present.

Then what is the purpose of the great teachers? Are the ways to Self-knowledge delineated by them useless? If effort cannot create Self-awareness, why any striving? It is important to understand the nature of the effort prescribed. If one pays careful attention it will soon be evident that all effort is directed to centre the attention on the now. No method focuses on the attainment of Self-knowledge at some future point of time. Rather, the purpose of every method is to cut attention from the past and the future and rest it on the

now. In the way of karma, we are told to think only of the action and not of its results. Thus attention is directed fully to the present. In japa and dhyana the mind is given an object to focus on, to the exclusion of all other objects. This naturally means there can be no thought of past or future. Nothing else would matter except the sacred name, the holy form. With intensity of attention, even the thought that one is performing the japa would vanish, the mantra alone would remain and finally, that too would dissolve in simple awareness. In the 'royal path' of self-enquiry also one is directed to isolate the 'I'-thought. What does this imply? It means stripping the 'I'-thought of all its associations, denuding it of identity. Associations are with reference to the past and the future. To be rid of all associations means to have attention wholly centered on the 'I' in the now, minus even a moment's past and future.

The efficacy of the method lies in that, questioning identity diminishes all possibility of associated thoughts, strikes them off at the root. If attention is to be only on the 'I'-thought minus its appendages where is the question of seeking to attain? Where is the room for pursuit of the goal? The thought of attainment is also only an associated thought, it is also a branch of identity. It must also be axed. It must also be questioned, 'Who seeks to attain?' 'I'. 'Who is that I?' In this manner attention is brought back to 'the 'I' alone, to the absolutely immediate now with no scent of a split second past or an atomic second of the future. When one talks of the intensity, the immediacy of self-enquiry, it is not something enormous, it is not something difficult of attainment. On the contrary it is an awareness of the utter simplicity of the method. We are not required to work for years to attain Self-awareness, simply to be totally attentive here and now. Yet, this simplicity is what we call difficult and invent thousand ways to escape from. Even in our longing to do more sadhana, even in our yearning for more 'time' for spiritual pursuit, we are merely side-stepping the issue. For, what can prevent us from giving ourselves entirely to the moment? Just a moment, here and now. Surely we can steal that moment even in the midst of the most hectic schedule. In that moment of ceasing to do, of ceasing to be linked with past and future, there would be awareness of the fullness of bliss, of the infinite glory of the Lord

that shines everywhere and is experienced within as the Self. Can anyone or anything snatch away the bliss of this moment? In the midst of the greatest frustration or the deepest sorrow all we have to do is stop a moment to enquire. What is it that causes the frustration, the sorrow? Thoughts of the unfulfilled past, fear of a dreary future, joys that have never been enjoyed, all the time lost, or joys that were once known but are now taken away for ever. But what about this instant that is our own which nobody can take away? What about the infinite joy that is here, right now, totally unstained by past, absolutely uncoloured by future, crystal clear, full? Beyond all description for description pertains to past and future, beyond all expectation for that too pertains to past and future. Why not savour this moment, this now that nothing can disturb?

What happens when the experience of the 'now' ceases? Will not one once more be thrown into the ups and downs of identified existence? Yet, why think about after the experience? Indeed, one cannot do so if one is totally given to the now. Besides, once the now has been tasted it is impossible for the past and future to affect us. There will always be the knowledge that an infinite bliss is available to us in every moment, if only we care to pay attention, if only we can cease to run and be still, if only we can cease to strive and simply be. How can the past or future touch us then? The next moment may not belong to us, the lost moment may not have been ours but the 'now' nothing can destroy, nothing can sully. To be ever conscious of the now is to be Self-aware.

Will our capacity to act cease? Would our will to execute our duties diminish. Again an intrusion of future, is it not? Does the future really belong to us? Has it ever been ours to mould? Do we in any actual sense have control over the future? A million things may happen in the next minute to foil our plans. We may have a sore throat and be unable to sing, we may fracture a leg and spoil the chances of a national sprint championship. And then, we may die. What will become of our capacity to act then? Who will perform our duties then? Will the world cease to be? Will the sun stop rising? Will the moon grow hot? Will not rain fall in and out of season? Will not flowers bloom and bees hum? Will people cease to cry from

hunger? Will cancer fade away? Will all suffering and anguish, will joy and exultation vanish? Then what control do we wield over the future that we exhibit such great concern for?

Why do we believe that the future is so dependent on us and rob ourselves of the glory of the current moment? No, the future is not ours to see or hear or act, it is not ours at all. But the present is, now in simple being lies the infinite bliss. It is ours. We can experience it, be it, live it, if we will. No, only if we cease to will.

CHAPTER XVIII

HAPPY NOW FOREVER

So, let me now wish a 'Happy now Forever' to all co-travellers on the Selfward path. It does seem to be a strange phrase, though. 'Good Morning', 'Good Afternoon', 'Good Evening' and 'Good Night' are all accepted forms of greeting one another, but 'Happy Now Forever'? I may explain it as a special greeting. For instance, we have 'Happy Deepavali', 'Joyous Jayanthi'. 'Merry Christmas', 'Happy Anniversary', 'Happy Birthday', and of course 'Happy New Year'. Although many would agree with me that 'Happy Now Forever' sounds almost like 'Happy New Year', they would still wonder what it means. This is because none of us has ever participated in the festival of 'Now'. Unless one has seen and experienced a festival, unless one understands what it is all about, one naturally could not recognise the greeting related to that occasion. So let us all first celebrate, as best as we can, the festival of 'Now', through a small experiment. The experiment is very simple really. All we have to do is think of something that is totally, completely in the now, that has nothing whatsoever to do with the past or the future.

What is it that we have thought of? This paper and the words on it that we are reading now? If our attention is fully absorbed in this would it not be solely in the now? It seems so, but is not really. While paying attention to words we certainly bring into use our knowledge of the alphabets, of reading, of the meaning of different words in different contexts and the manner in which they are to be interpreted. We are conscious of the one who reads and the one who wrote? Who is it that wrote? Sarada. Can one have an awareness of Sarada that is not linked to the past? Can one have the awareness of the reader totally delinked from the past? The moment you think of yourself, a form, it is a form you have grown familiar with through the years, a form you have taken to be yourself. When you say 'I am thinking about the present', the 'I' is included

in the thought and 'I' is certainly related to the past. Take any thought and examine it, it is bound to be connected with the past in some manner. The secret is that it is impossible to think of the 'now'. The moment one thinks, the past, the 'then' has already entered.

Thus, the 'now' is absolutely free of thought, it is free of identity. If one can savour the 'now' from moment to moment that is the experience of infinity. 'Now' is 'forever'. Past and future are limited in time. This is quite obvious to us. The past is that which is already over, finished. Hence, it has met with its limit. The future is yet to begin, so it has a limit at this end. But can anyone tell where 'now' begins and where it ends? When you say 'Now it has begun' the very statement passes into past and there is a fresh now. Looking at the clock if you say 'Now this moment is over' - where are you still? Only in the 'now'. In another sense one could perhaps say that 'now' is born every instance and dies every instant into a new now. Perhaps that is why it is said of the Self 'Navo Navo Bhavati', it is ever renewed. Even the word 'Navo' sounds so close to 'Now'. Yes, the 'Now' is eternal, it is forever, because it is ever renewed, ever fresh, it is in fact, outside the realm of time itself.

Bhagavan explains that the present not only transcends time. It is also the only time. Really there is no time other than 'now'. The past and the future are both myths, figments of our imagination, they are not real time. Many might take objection to the statement asking 'How can you say it is imaginary? I existed yesterday, the world existed yesterday. I may well exist tomorrow. But even if I don't, the world will continue to exist. What is imaginary about this?' The imagination is not with regard to the existence of oneself or the world, but it is with reference to our concept of time. Let us examine this proposition in greater detail. 'Yesterday the world existed'. True. But how was it experienced then? When we lived in yesterday did any of us declare 'Today is yesterday'. It would be an absurd statement. Today is always today. Experience is always in 'today', in 'now'. When we talk of 'yesterday' it is not of direct, immediate experience, but of experience as stated in the mind. 'Yesterday' and

'tomorrow' are only mental concepts. They can never be physical reality. 'Alright, we agree with you', comes the answer, 'but we still have some doubts'. What are they? Supposing a time machine is invented by which we can travel into the past and the future. Then the past and future could be experienced as physical realities. Could they not? Sorry, wrong assumption again. If you travel to the day of India's independence and find yourself next to the Mahatma, what might you say, 'Oh Bapu. I am so thrilled to share this moment with you. I am so excited that I could travel into the past and be here at this momentous hour'. What are the verb forms used ? 'I am thrilled', 'I am excited'. 'I am here at this hour. Is there any experience of the past? If you travel into the past, then, naturally, you must experience it as being present. If it still remains past, then you haven't travelled into it. It is the same for the future. The moment you enter it, it becomes present. If it doesn't, you haven't entered it yet. So, there can never be an actual experience of past or future. They are only mental concepts.

This much is now conceded, but the second doubt remains. 'Agreed that it is a mental concept. But the mind is very real. So if not on the physical plane, at the mental level past and future are real'. Seems to be a correct proposition. However, there may still be a hitch. I think, 'Yesterday I was travelling on the train with my friends. We had a good time'. At what point in time am I thinking of the past? Why, at present! Can I think of anything other than in the present? So, thoughts of past and future also belong only to the present. That is why Bhagavan declares that there is no time other than the present, just as there are no numbers apart from 1. 9 is only 9 ones and a crore is only a crore ones. To dwell in the past and the future without paying attention to the present, says Bhagavan, is like counting without one. If we insist on doing so we would be outright failures in mathematics. And we are failures in life because we ignore the significance of this primal 'one', the present, and try to live in the past and future. Is it at all possible? Could we call it life? That is why our lives are equated by great ones to a dream, because we are ever divorced from the reality that is only present, ever present.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT'S 'NEW' IN THE YEAR?

It is new year again. We are happy to call the year 'new'. Yet how can it be new when nothing about us is, when nothing around us is? We still hold on to the same old illusory identity, do we not? We haven't even changed our names and forms. Let alone choosing the beautiful option of discarding all attachment to name and form! Yes. The world around us is the same, our habits are the same, especially the primary habit of seeking to confine our true nature within the boundaries of a body. What's new then, about the year? For that matter, do we even know the meaning of that word 'new'? Is anything ever experienced in all its marvellous freshness, unconnected with past prejudice or expectation? If everything is perceived with a pre-coloured mind, which colour can be new? The year is certainly not new to us, nothing, in fact, is. Everything is merely a projection, a continuation of the past, a slight modification or an obvious rehash of the same old experiences.

There is the other option though. We can seek a 'new' touch. Then not only the year, but every day, every hour, every moment will be new - all that we see hear, touch, all that we experience. We wish for this option. We would be only too happy to enjoy that wonder. We may even declare that we are prepared to give anything in return for it. But as Major Chadwick succinctly put it, we would love to have Self-knowledge alright, only, without giving up the ego. So we cling to limited identity in many ways.

We go on complaining about non-progress, thus perpetrating the sense of the individual 'I' and 'my' progress! Else we get into an absolute depression on that account. Even a depression keeps us safe. After all the 'I' is not questioned, it is too busy feeling depressed. If not at this end, we are at the other end of the see-saw, filled with positivity and smugness. Comfortable in the thought that

we are travelling the right path, exhorting others to do so, wondering why so many are blind to the extraordinary beauty of Self-knowledge. What about us? If we believe we are travelling, if we expend thought on the one who is journeying, are we less blind? Are we really trapped in the lure of Self-knowledge?

If we are, how can self-enquiry slacken? How do we say it is lax? Why, by the presence of thoughts. Is there a single thought that can withstand the fire of self-enquiry? Can there be a single concept that will not wither under its fiery gaze? Yet, we sorrow about the distracted mind. Have we the courage to question, 'For whom is this distraction?' If I am longing to know who I am, if the entire attention is on the 'I', how can any distraction occur? If our bane is not distraction it is lack of time. Yet, what can stop us from pursuing self-enquiry through every spare moment of the day? Indeed, if we are in love, does not the thought of the beloved form an under-current to every activity? Do we ever regret that we have no time to think of the loved one? If self-enquiry were equally dear to us, it could similarly form an under-current to all our work. It is the same with every excuse we have to offer, every problem that we face. Self-enquiry would simply shatter it.

But our interest lies elsewhere. We are not in love with Self-knowledge. Certainly not so much as to put the ego in danger. Hence even as we awake in the morning we are filled with thoughts of things to do during the day. If we would only pause and wonder, 'Who is in such a hurry? Who is the achiever? Do I really know that one? If I know not who the achiever is, to what purpose are all achievements? Who is to be the beneficiary?' These queries will naturally cry a halt to the stream of thoughts that have us in their grip. Never mind the milk that waits to be boiled, never mind the songs that remain unsung, never mind that a programme must be planned today else the best hall will become unavailable. For, if we let life's hurry take hold of us, it will not be the milk that spoils, but the extraordinary chance that is given to us. If we value the music more than the need for enquiry, the unfathomable silent melody of the Self may ever remain unheard. If we are too busy

planning programmes, the day when all our programmes end will remain unplanned for. If we are always preoccupied, for ever keeping the company of friends, or of our own thoughts, we will be ill-prepared to face the absolute aloneness of death.

However, many of us are really serious. We are earnest about the need to attain Self-knowledge. Though not yearning for it with every breath, we do long for it as a very important goal. Doubtless it is not to us the only goal, still, we give this pursuit much energy. Why then are results not forthcoming? Where does the hitch lie? In the seemingly paradoxical nature of the search itself. It may seem strange, but so long as we seek, we cannot experience Self-knowledge, so long as it is perceived as a goal to work towards, it cannot be attained. Self-knowledge can never come tomorrow or the day after, it cannot be attained in some distant place at some future time.

Self-knowledge can only be here and now. For, the very relativity of time, the bondage of past and future is what is veiling Self-awareness. Bhagavan repeatedly states that Self-knowledge cannot be created afresh, for that which comes might also go at any time. Neither, then, can it be attained, for then, it could also be lost again. Self-knowledge ever is. Hence its pursuit is equated to the musk-deer's search for the source of its own musk scent. It searches high and low but cannot find it. Why? Because the scent does not lie outside, hence it cannot be found on searching for it.

Is the search irrelevant then? Never, its significance lies in creating the right atmosphere, in turning the attention Selfward, in making it of utmost significance to us, to the exclusion of all other goals. After this, even the process of searching must cease, the thought of enquiry too must be dropped. Only attention should remain. Then, the Self would reveal itself, says Bhagavan. Then, all things would be bathed in a glorious freshness. Then it would be 'Happy Now' forever.

CHAPTER XX

THE EXALTED YOGI

We take ourselves too seriously. Not that we are always earnest about what we do, but that we are earnest about what our action will bring to us. Examinations are bridges to be crossed to become successful. Sports are played to beat the competition, to win medals, or at least to burn fat. Dance and music are learnt to be culturally important. At a nobler level, these are treated as means of communication with other human beings or with one's self. So is literature. Perhaps it is a vehicle for education. Still, always something to be achieved. Yes, there is the all pervading regime of goals. As some journalists have taken to pointing out, even holidays are a time for achievement. Painting courses, clay-modelling programs, adventure plans, trekking tours, computer training, drama exposures, or intensive tuitions for the coming academic year! We are well and truly in the vice-grip of 'purpose'. 'Everything must have a purpose' we seriously say, 'it is folly to be purposeless'. And thus we solemnly sing the funeral dirge to the fine art of leisure, the great art of doing nothing. When somebody asks me, 'Have you completed your Ph.D.?' I smilingly nod and say, 'Yes'. Then I wait in half dread for the next question, 'What are you doing now?' 'Working with RMCL', I answer little vaguely. It has been my secret desire to answer 'Nothing. Absolutely nothing'. But I have not the courage to say so, neither, for that matter, the courage to do so. They are the blessed few whom Bhagavan describes in Upadesa Saram as 'Panileni vadu'. It means 'those with no work', but by implication, I am told it means 'Good for nothing'. What a phrase: 'Good for nothing' - it obviously means when applied to people, a person who is an expert, at simply being, at doing 'nothing'.

Mind you, it is no easy task this 'doing nothing'. We need to just try it for sometime to know what a stupendous task it is. The story goes that in a temple all the workers were given one share of rice each day. But there was a man who sat the whole day,

doing nothing, and he was given two shares of rice each day. After some years the workers were aroused by their leader and protested to the management. The wise manager smilingly said, 'You are also welcome to remain doing 'nothing' and will then be given two shares'. The workers thought it a marvellous deal. The next day they sat themselves near various pillars early in the morning. Others were deputed to do their work. For a while the old workers lazed, they dozed, dreamt and awoke. Then sleep would come no more. They were disturbed by the inefficiency of the new workers but could say nothing. Saying something would be doing something and that was against the rule of the game. Neither could they talk to their friends, nor read their favourite story books, nor sing nor hear music. They could watch what was going on around them, but this only agitated them more. At the end of the day they declared 'We are far happier with our one share of rice. Please let us work again. Without work we will go mad! Day after day of doing nothing! What would be the purpose of life?'

Absence of purpose seems madness to many. Purpose seems madness to the few. Stevenson belonged to the worshippers of leisure and tells a little tale of a man lazing by the road. Another busily came by, but was not busy enough, as people are now, to have no time for the man on the road. He stopped and asked, 'Friend, what is the problem? Why are you sleeping by the road? You look well dressed and of noble birth. Have you lost your job and fortune?' 'Sir', came the answer, 'My job and my fortune are in this. I enjoy relaxing.' 'Oh! Are you on a holiday?' asked the first. 'No, no' explained the lazer, 'It is my full-time occupation'. 'What! Are you wasting your life?'. 'Perhaps', said the man of leisure, 'but what do you do sir?', 'Oh!' answered the busybody importantly, 'I am an officer in a bank'. 'But why do you do the job?'. 'To marry and have a family'. 'And then?' 'Get my family settled, build myself a house'. 'And then ?' 'Build enough funds for a happy retired life'. Then?' 'Retire, relax and enjoy life'. 'Well, sir, what you work towards for forty years and then achieve, I am doing right away, relaxing and enjoying life'. So much for the purpose of 'purpose'.

Yet purposelessness is by no means a life of easy leisure, it is not languid laziness. Seeing the waves and brooks, the trees and

the flowers, the soft sands, the birds, the gay butterfly, one may be apt to think, 'Does nature work hard? Why should we?'. But who says nature is lazy? The tigress and her family must go hungry if she will not hunt, the deer and cattle must graze and chew their cud. The lizard keeps a wary sideward glance ever alert for prey and after remaining seemingly motionless for an hour makes a swift lightning dart. The butterflies and bees gather honey. The rivers are ever moving towards the sea and the sea itself rising and falling, swelling in waves, dashing rocks into sand, creating beaches, then swallowing them up. Even flowers do their job. They attract the bees and help pollination and propagation of their species. The stationary plants and trees are ever active producing food for themselves and flower and fruit for all who approach them. Sunday is not a holiday for the sun, nor Monday for the moon. They must shine always, all through the years, year in and year out. Monsoons do not fail because the clouds are too busy watching TV to attend to their work. Monsoons come when they come, when they don't they just don't exist. Earth does not take a break from rotation and revolution, and say 'Enough! I want to relax'. Yes, all of Nature is perpetually busy, ever at work. Then why must we alone seek to be lazy, seek to be without work?

Ah! There lies the confusion. The idea is not to become inactive, but to become 'purposeless'. What's the difference? The sun has the answer, says a poet beautifully. Why does the sun shine? Does he shine to give food to plants? Does he shine to light the earth? Does he shine to gladden the horizon? No. He shines simply because it is his nature to shine. He would continue to shine even if there was no earth to brighten. He would shine if all life on earth was extinct. He would shine if horizons chose green and blue for their evening wear, instead of his warm hue. So long as the sun is, he will shine. It is his nature, not his purpose. So long as trees are there they will give shade, it is their nature, not their purpose.

But is this not close to being mechanical, indiscriminate, without the moulding influence of thought? This is the fear that peeps in uninvited. We forget that there could be another name for it 'spontaneous', 'quick witted'. No, that is not really the whole answer.

The truth is that both purpose and absence of it could be binding. In the sense that being without goals may itself become a goal, just as the desire to remain without thoughts is also only a thought. The point is that we should not strive to be either one way or the other, there should be no striving, no need, no vacuum to fill. Yes, that is the crux - no vacuum to fill. Whatever happens to come one's way would then be enjoyed fully, but there would be no yearning before it came, no longing if it went away. Always, only fullness. Nothing further to be achieved, nothing not to be achieved, always only fullness, no vacuum to fill. Such a one indeed is the exalted yogi, the 'Panileni vadu'.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PURPOSE OF PURPOSE

We are incurable. We cannot live a moment without purpose. Tagore wrote a beautiful story about 'Worker's Paradise', where everyone was busy, where everyone had work and went about it unrelentingly. Into this paradise, by some error, was sent a wrong man. He lazed and lounged and never worked. The people of 'Worker's Paradise' were disturbed, but had no time to bother. Yet one day the man befriended a hustling girl who came to fill water at the silent torrent (silent because it wouldn't waste time singing). She pitied him for having no work and therefore asked if she could help. When he asked for one of her pitchers to paint on, she walked away, annoyed at his concept of wasting time. "But how could a busy person get the better of one who had nothing to do? Everyday they met, and everyday he said to her, "Girl of the silent torrent, give me one of your clay pitchers. I shall draw pictures on it. " So, one day she finally gave in. When he had drawn line after line, and filled colour upon colour, she looked at it and asked him what it meant.

"The man laughed.

'Nothing. A picture may have no meaning and may serve no purpose.'

"The girl went away with her pitcher. At home, away from prying eyes, she held it in the light, turned it round and round and scanned the painting from all angles. For the first time in her life she had seen something that had no meaning and no purpose at all."

And so Tagore's lovely story moves on. The purpose of the story is to highlight the beauty of leisure, to proclaim that art need

have no utilitarian end, it is its own purpose. Oh! Oh! Here we go again. The story is about purposelessness - and yet the story has a purpose. The purpose, doubtless is to support purposelessness, yet in doing so the story itself undoubtedly has an aim, a goal, something that the story seeks to achieve. The advantage of this story is that it redefines 'purpose'. Purpose need not be something that seems directly and obviously 'useful', it may be of subtler substance. Yes, there are concrete purposes and subtle purposes. Art in every form may seem but a waste of time to the utilitarian mind. Yet, one cannot agree that it has no meaning or purpose - they cannot say 'Art' and be done with it, they are forced to add 'for Art's sake', which means it is its own purpose. True, it may seem that beauty and love, creativity and wonder, do not need purposes, because they themselves are the purpose. Yet, why do we create? Because it gives us joy. Why do we love? Because it brings happiness. Why do we stop and drink in the beauty of a butterfly or an exquisite sculpture? Because perceiving that beauty makes us happy. Yes, deny it as we may, every action has a purpose, even inaction has a purpose. One may argue that sleep is purposeless, yet we go to sleep because we want to (a purpose, certainly) and we wake up with a purpose too. Of course, there is no sense of purpose during sleep, but we are not conscious of what happens either. So, to modify the assertion a little, every conscious moment of ours is filled with purpose.

And we have already seen that even so called lack of purpose is but a negative purpose. It is really like the changelessness of the changing moon. The moon appears to be ever changing, yet, it doesn't really change at all. The change we perceive in it is not real. The waxing and waning is only an appearance caused by the rotation of the earth and the revolution of the moon around it, just as sunrise and sunset are not real, but only perceived appearances. However, even in the apparent sense, there is really no change in the moon. Because, one can with certainty predict that on every thirtieth day there will be a full moon, similarly, once in thirty days, unfailingly, the moon will disappear and renew itself. Can that which falls into such a predictable pattern be termed 'changing'?

Yet, it is also true that the change is perceived. Only, the change itself is changeless. Even so, purposelessness itself may become a purpose. This is not a mere play of words in seeming paradoxes. The idea is that we should recognise our absolute addiction to purpose. Every little deed of ours, every single thought is imbued with it. When we say, 'I do not want to do anything today', we mean 'I want to do nothing'. Yes, in all things the want, the motive is present and that is the purpose.

It is for this reason that Bhagavan has never once asked us to discard purpose or to transcend it. He would certainly know that in the name of breaking our bond with purpose we would probably create new and subtler bonds with it. Hence, as a thorn is used to remove another, as a snake must suck its own poison out, as the germ of a disease itself is introduced into the body to prevent that disease, even so purpose alone must fight the purpose-epidemic. Thus, Bhagavan gives us the paramount duty, the highest purpose. If we hold on to that purpose, all other goals will seem insignificant. All other aims will wither away in sheer irrelevance. What is that supreme goal? It is Self-abidance, says Bhagavan. But we are not going to take his statement on faith, we are going to wonder why that should be the highest purpose. Knowing our propensity to doubt, Bhagavan has also provided an answer to our question. Self-abidance is the highest goal because it is the basis of all actions and their fruits. It is the power of the Self that makes any and every action possible. Therefore, when one holds on to the Self, when one abides as the Self, one would have infinite capacity for action. However, there would be no need to act. Because the Self is also the basis of all fruits of action. Having attained that which is the essence of all aims, all goals, what more would remain to be achieved? How does Self-abidance give us that which all actions aim at? To answer this we must first understand the essential purpose of action. Or, to play with words again, what is the one underlying purpose of all purposes? We act in order to attain something which, we believe, will give us happiness. We laze because that gives us happiness at that time. We produce objects of utility, of use, because we are happy when we use them. We

create objects of sheer beauty, which have no 'use', because the very creation gives us joy, because the experience makes us happy. We indulge our desires to be happy. We abstain from such indulgence also only to be happy. We eat ice-cream because we enjoy the taste of it. Sometimes we stop ourselves from eating it, because we are happier when we can sing well and eating ice-cream might disrupt the latter, greater happiness. Whatever activity we may pursue, both physical and mental, if we ask ourselves 'Why am I doing this?' the answer will invariably be, 'To get happiness'. But let us ask ourselves, 'Why do I want to be happy?' There can be no answer or, at best we may say, 'Because I want to be happy, that's all'. Only happiness is really its own end. Every other pursuit has a purpose beyond itself and that purpose is to attain happiness. Thus, though our lives seem to be filled with millions of purposes, in effect every living being has only one purpose - to be happy, and to be happy always. The entire panorama of changing wishes, of multiple pursuits is but a tool to achieve the single purpose of unbroken joy.

And where is this eternal spring of joy? It is the Self. Every stream of laughter and every wave of joy rises only from the blissful ocean that is the Self. It is for this reason that Self-abidance is supreme bliss, ever fresh, ever full. Naturally, Self-abidance is the basis of all fruits of actions. It is the ultimate goal, really the only goal, which we seek at so many wrong doors. When we recognise this error, all other purposes will fade away. The need to become Self-aware will occupy our entire energies. Every thought and action will be geared in that direction. Then we will no longer be addicted to purpose. We would have hooked our wagons to the supreme-purpose-engine which will drive us safely to the frontiers of purpose-land. And there, at the boundary, it will also disappear leaving only Self-awareness, beyond purpose and lack of it.

CHAPTER XXII

NO LOSERS

4th August 1992, Tuesday, 12.15 A.M. The hundred metres hurdles. Eyes that are not directly on the track are glued to images of the Olympic Games being relayed live on television. 'On your marks', 'get set' and the gun sounds. Everyone is racing down the track, leaping over hurdles placed one after another in close succession. Many of these hurdles are not cleared, they are toppled down but the runner keeps on nevertheless. Spectators at the edge of their seats. And, the winner! Great celebration and exhilaration. On the television the race and the finish are replayed from various angles. 'Hey!' I say suddenly, 'the winner also knocked down a couple of hurdles, he didn't clear all of them. How is he counted as the first, the gold-medalist?' 'Because,' comes the explanation, 'his pace was unaffected even after a brush with the hurdles. Whereas, the others slowed down whenever they toppled a hurdle, they took longer to regain their balance and momentum.'

Yes, there are very few of us who can fly clear over the numerous hurdles that block the Selfward track. For most, a direct encounter with at least a hurdle or two seems inevitable. Yet what matters really is the total disregard for the hurdle, the ability to remain untouched by it although it might have violently hit one on the shank or the heel as one tried to clear it. True, the hurdle was not really cleared, but it has been passed nonetheless and the race is very much on, so the athlete must keep on moving, and moving at his highest pace. Even so, after every 'fall' it is our resilience that counts, the capacity to keep on undeterred until the goal is attained. Bhagavan says one must not pay much attention to one's failings and disturbances, it is best to ignore them. Excessive attention to them will only bog us down, like those athletes who lose their speed after toppling hurdles. On the other hand, Bhagavan asks us to make the best use of every positive mood. Always one's

sight should be set on the goal, the finish line. Absolute attention, deep determination and the importance of the prize bring about marvellous feats in one person after another. Be it the 800 metres or the 'walking race', in the last few minutes of hair-raising excitement a person way back in the track is suddenly racing or trotting ahead of all competitors. Runner after runner is left behind, even the favourite finds himself or herself only in the fourth position. It is equally important for us to remember that at any moment we may emerge winners. And we must remain ever in preparedness for that moment. The going may often seem tough, the mind may be in absolute chaos, but at any point one may suddenly get charged with energy to race ahead of all thoughts and merge into the source. Where would this energy come from? From a single-minded yearning for the Self that is our goal. The miracles of such single-minded pursuits are visible daily in the Olympics.

Disregard for hurdles, disregard for breath that comes in sharp wheezes, disregard for aching limbs that beg to drop down, disregard for the fact that one is unlikely to win, indeed, disregard for all things except the goal 'I must win'. Old records are broken only to be broken again. Unbeatable feats are surpassed. Moments of glorious human endeavors are savoured. 'All wonderful indeed,' exclaimed a friend, 'but once the first three places are settled why do the others still labour on? There is no glory for them. What is the big idea of fainting in exhaustion when you know you cannot win?' Well, there are other goals besides winning. Each individual compares his or her Olympic performance with their own other performances in the past. Thus the headlines told us that Shiny Williams was happy even though she failed to qualify for the Olympic round. Because, she had fared better than her best till date and that was reason enough to rejoice. Even so, every attempt we make at self-enquiry is meaningful if we feel that a positive mood has been created, if we are more calm and happy, if we are more detached as a result of it. We may not have had a conscious dip into the Self but at least we are in the vicinity, we are making progress, so we would feel and be cheered. But what if some attempts seem to be an utter waste? We heard that the world record holder for walking was

nowhere in sight even after a dozen competitors had walked across the finish line. Would there be any reason for her to complete the walk, to try and reach the finish line? Why, the question cuts at the very root of the Olympic spirit! The Olympic motto declares that the struggle is more significant than the winning. What is the struggle for? To finish the race or match, competing as best as one can at the time. This is what makes it a worthwhile experience to every individual. Everyone cannot win the race, everyone cannot finish it in a rain of glory, but everyone can finish the race. That is what keeps everyone going - be they fourth or last.

The finishing line is common to all though the time one reaches there may vary. We too have a 'finishing line', one that belongs to every one of us, it is the very Self. We may not recognise its presence the moment we hear of it, we may not be quick to love it, we may not fly back to it in the shoes of winged enquiry. Our enquiry may be half-hearted or our minds more turbulent than others. In spite of this, in spite of everything, the goal cannot be denied to us. We too will race across the finish line in some glorious moment, a glory that brings no medals, but what over-flowing bliss!

But imagine the Olympics without the goals, without the prizes, without the timing of the games defined, without parameters, without even finishing lines. Who would compete then? Tell a person that he must run and run as best as he can but there is no end to his race. Would he run? Not until some fearful power were chasing him. And in that case he would have a reason for running. Here we have the all-important purpose once again. Unless our spiritual life is infused with purpose it could well become meaningless drifting. We need a purpose and we need to be head over heels in love with the purpose, it must mean more to us than anything else in the world. Only then can we emerge winners. To say that no purpose is needed because the Self transcends purpose is to describe Antarctica from the perspective of a Tiruvannamalai summer. So long as we do not experience the Self, so long as we perceive ourselves as limited beings and enjoy a sense of doership, we must pursue Self-knowledge. Otherwise we would merely be cheating ourselves

in the thought that we have no sense of attachment. Or else we may meander into the still waters of indifference where nothing moves because all is listless, lifeless. To avoid these dangers we must at all times stick to the supreme purpose of Self-abidance.

Yet, did we not say that chasing purposes amounted to running after dreams, that it is like lunging after a carrot dangling just out of reach? Are we not now contradicting ourselves by seeking a purpose, be it even the best? The point, however, is that we must not only remember the limitation of purposes, but also must recognise our own weakness of clinging to purpose at all costs. If we accept both these factors, we arrive at the perfect solution. Because 'purpose' is futile, we will drop pursuing mirages. Yet, because we are realistically aware that we cannot thus totally cut away our love for illusion, we will allow ourselves just one illusion, the only illusion that can get us out of the maze of all illusions. And that is the thought that Self-knowledge is to be attained and that all endeavour is to be directed to that one goal. Then certainly, perhaps even before we know it, that brilliant flame of knowledge that seems to shine in some distant tower would be experienced as one's own Self.

CHAPTER XXIII

NO AMBER?

Amber is a happy colour, it is not so much vibrant as gently beautiful, spreading a glow of warm contentment. It is quiet yet bright. The colour of the evening horizon, signifying a time when nature prepares herself for rest, or, for a briefer span, the colour of sunrise - a time when the world readies itself for waking activity. It is the transition colour, the colour that seems to say that when we take time to prepare, every change is experienced totally; in its fullness of meaning and depth, in its richness and beauty.

But we have no time for amber. There is the amber light at the traffic signals, for instance. As children we learnt to repeat in high pitched voices, " 'Stop' says the red light, 'Go' says the green, Get ready' says the amber light blinking in between." The chant never came out on the roads but remained enclosed in the nurseries it seems. I do not see a single rider or driver believe in the presence of the amber light. It is seen alright, as being visually different from the other two. However, the original signal it indicated is well forgotten. The amber light means one of two things to today's signal pandits. If it follows the red-light it means 'start moving at jet set speed' and in case anyone should misread the message and start fumbling with the ignition only when the orange is lit, a cacophony of horns impresses the shout, 'Hey, don't you know how to read signals? It's amber, get going!.' If the amber, happens to follow the green and precede the red, there is a different interpretation, 'Keep going, it's not yet red'.

We are in a great hurry, in all things - so much to be done so much to be achieved. Rush, rush, rush. Rush from the moment of waking, until the red of sleep clangs a forced stop to ceaseless activity. Rush, rush, rush. Rush from one thought into the next, tumble, roll, jog on, keep moving. Rush, rush, rush. From birth to

the full-stop of death. No amber for us, no pauses, no preparations. Jump at the sound of the morning alarm to get ready hurriedly for work. We do not wait to take in the transition – those golden moments between sleep and waking, that waiting which would teach us worlds of patience, which would inject a tonic of quiet into our sinews. No, even before we know we are awake, we are ready with the first thought. Yes, the red light is off, it's time to get going.

It's the same during the day. Even before one job is over we are thinking of the next. If this year's ballet is all planned and practised it is already time to think of the next production. Or, if today's task is done, it's time to plan tomorrow's. If hunger is satiated, it's time to worry about the siesta. If the siesta is done it's time to wonder whether the rest of the day can hold all the work it's supposed to. Then hurry, hurry through the work at top speed and keep working till sleep will be held off no longer. Once again we miss that twilight zone, between waking and sleep, that key to the land of silence, of bliss; once again we skip the amber light.

This means we never stop fully either, we keep the engine running, for fear we may not be able to start quickly otherwise. Yes, even our sleep is haunted by dreams, troubled by thoughts and motivations, confusions of continued mental activity. This itself is warning that physical laziness is no answer. Cutting off the hurry from life does not mean slumbering through it. For activity is as mental as physical. To be indolent, indifferent and sluggish physically does not mean one is pausing, preparing, utilising the amber zone. Of course, to be mentally slumbering would also mean the other extreme, the constant 'red' zone of no activity. Cutting the pace is not lethargy. Taking time to prepare, to watch, to be ready is not idling. We wrongly think that the gap between movement and non-movement, between activity and its cessation, between sleep and waking is meaningless. At best we think it is a lazy, passive extension of inactivity. It is not, though. It is really a space for recharging our energies to move. Otherwise it is the space which brings us to a gentle halt instead of the rude slamming of brakes.

In either case it is dynamic, not passive. But it is the power, the dynamics of peace, not tension.

Bhagavan asks us to pay attention to those daily transitions in our lives instead of speeding through them. He asks us to observe where the 'I'-thought rises from as we awake. It is absent in deep sleep. Where does it come from again at the moment of waking? Where does it set in sleep? What is its nature when the thought movement is cut off, when thoughts are put on pause? Pay attention to the amber area, the twilight hue, and this will lead one back to the Self. It is a process that calls for attentive quiet, for active silence.

If we learn to make these pauses before sleep and waking, if we get in tune with this quiet, the mood would continue throughout the day assures Bhagavan. Then, it would be increasingly easier to hold on to the pauses between activities even during the waking state. There is certainly a pause between two thoughts, it is not a continuous river-like flow. Rather, it is like the movement of a 'movie'. The speed with which successive stills are played out gives the impression of continuity. Similarly, the speed with which one thought follows another makes us oblivious to the gap between thoughts. When we grow into the attitude of watchfulness, when the speed is curbed then the pauses would begin to reveal themselves, then the beauty of silence, the wonder of calm would spread its glow. Then we would have allowed amber to enter where we can see the stops coming and slide gently into them, where we move into activity with equal ease and smoothness. This is why Bhagavan asks us to lead 'recollected' lives, where all things are gracefully completed in their time and where silence forms the keynote to all activity. Activity would no longer control us with the obsessiveness of habit, we would control action. We would act when we perceive the need for it, not act simply because we have lost the alternative of silence, of relaxed attention. Life would have marvellous variety, a clean break from the mechanical act-stop-act-stop-act. For, the pauses would bring new meanings every time. Pauses mean tentativeness, openness, a willingness to

take things as they come, to perceive things when they come. Pauses mean there is no pre-empting, no pre-casting, no 'pre-judice'. Naturally, all things would be fresh, an infinite kaleidoscope of experience would unfold. Just a little amber and a million rainbows light our ways.

CHAPTER XXIV

SUNSET AT ARUNACHALA

A sunset means many things. Awareness of the sky – its vastness, its stillness. If one lies on one's back, on the hill, or even on one's terrace, one is enveloped by the sky. There is the vastness of the sea too as one strolls on a beach, but one cannot enter the sea, not really, just play on its shores, just sport with waves. Perhaps a little swim in its waters. Those who dive within, they too must come out and come on to the shore once more. One never enters the sky in this manner, one just allows the sky to enter us, so that one feels part of that expanse. No, one feels as the expanse. It is an almost unconscious exchange. For the sky is everywhere, all about us, all around us. If one watches the sky from Arunachala the experience of silence is compounded. There is along with the silence of the sky, the magnificent quiet of the Hill. Above us, behind us, below us, is the Hill, radiating silence. The horns of trucks echo off the slopes. Some songs from radios are heard now and then, there is the occasional dialogue. Through all this, in all this is heard the continuous sound of silence, the vastness of silence is sensed.

There is also the chirping of birds coming back to roost. But now the trees stand still as the breeze stops rustling. The mosquitoes that rise in the stillness do not hum here. They are there, biting busily alright, but they make no music. There is only the silence, not disturbed by the stray sounds that are drawn into it. There is the expanse of the sky, not broken by the darkening silhouettes of trees. And between trees the setting sun on the horizon. The spreading landscape also seems part of the sky – hill sloping down in trees and across a thin meandering road, hillocks, merging into hills in the horizon, in turn dissolving into the reddening sky. Above us, the sky still clear blue behind the Hill, caressing it as it were with a few silk-cotton clouds. This blue sky

connecting back from red to blue in a spray of colours overhead. The one unbroken unity of all that is, the unbroken silence that is sensed. The glowing red sun, dipping simply, sliding into the hills across.

It seems as if the 'sun-set' will not be visible. There are clouds, thick and glowing violet, a mixture of their natural grey-blue and the sun's brilliant orange. The sun disappears behind one. There are many more waiting below to swallow it in succession and secretly send it to its hilly rest for the night. Or so it seems. This sunset from Arunachala has been long awaited, planned for and missed several times. After all this wait can we not really see the sun set? But in the fullness of Arunachala against the evening sky there is no regret, there is no disappointment. One does not mind whether the sun is swallowed by clouds permanently or sets majestically behind the outline of mountains yonder. Strange place this. Because one does not protest, mentally, because there is no more a wish, the wish that was, is fulfilled. What seemed like a cloud screen is but a backdrop to the sun. Emerging from the single layered cloud the sun comes before the other rain-bearers, does not travel behind them in secrecy, but in evident glory softly enters the hilly heartland.

There are moments in the inward journey that are similar to these. The magnitude of the Lord's silent presence overwhelms. The mind does not cease to converse with itself, it still holds paltry discussions on superficial subjects. It is, after all, a creature of habit. Yet, there is a sensing of the silence that underlies and pervades all the noise of the mind. In this silence there arises a feeling of being close to Self-knowledge. The scene is set for the beautiful sun-set. The setting ego, glowing purer as it comes within the proximity of the Self. Then, suddenly, there is the clouding. The sun will set anyhow, so why worry, may be the thought. True, the sun sets everyday and rises everyday too. We are oblivious, though, to its rising and setting. We function by its light, but hardly pay attention to it and certainly not to its setting and rising. So the ego sets daily in sleep and rises on waking. While awake we

work by its light, by the consciousness that it reflects from the Self. Yet we are unconscious of its daily setting and rising, unaware of its source. If it sets once more, clouded, unawares, unseen, it will be just another day. The important thing is to be aware when it sets or rises. But clouded as the scene is, this may not be. Thus we worry about the clouding, the obstacles, the depressions that come in the way of a conscious dip into the source, of a source-merger. If our worry had the power to dispel the clouds, it would certainly be worth the while worrying. If our willing would create for us the ideal sun set, cloud free, till the last inch of sun dips in, will-power would be the best power under that very sun. Neither will nor worry, however, can create a change of scene. What they can do, though, is disrupt the magic silence of Hill and sky, so untouched by all the ripples without. Why not, then, allow the silence to take over and forget the mind's innumerable hassles, simply ignore them?

If one recognises that all goal-orientation is thought, that all need to achieve, to experience is thought and it is the very thoughts that screen the Truth, then the clouds cease to disturb the view. One would then realise that the thoughts cannot touch the Self, that it is not affected by them even as noise does not disturb the stillness of Arunachala or clouds and trees that are seen in between do not break the vastness of the sky. One would recognise too, that the joy of seeming close to Self-awareness, and the sorrow of being away or disturbed are both projections of the mind. They are both for the experiencer, for the practitioner of the path. And who is the one who practises? Who is the sadhaka? Is he the joyous one? Is he the depressed one? Is he the one who makes progress? Is he the one who is obstructed on the inward way? Who is that 'I'? When one does not know, when the search is still on, what do the moods of that stranger matter?

Most important, what really is the power of the 'I'? Does it have power to search and find its own source? Wherefrom does it acquire the strength to do so? Does not the courage for the enquiry, the very ability to enquire, spring from Bhagavan's grace? Is it not Grace that drew us to Him, made us aware of His way and put us on the path? Is it not Grace that keeps us going?

And is it not Grace that is the very goal? What then is there to worry about? When we strive to remember this constantly, a striving too that is made possible only by Grace, then no cloud matters. Miraculously, clouds may dissolve too and the sun-set may be seen. But for us only the wonder of the atmosphere remains.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DANCE OF 'I'

A child asked her mother one day, "Amma, who is that child Lord Nataraja is stamping on, won't the child's mother feel bad?"

And all those around wondered how the mother would reply, without disturbing the compassion in the question, yet, without compromising the Lord's grace. The mother had no problem though. She answered easily, "The child was very ill and the mother prayed to the Lord, my dear. Then He danced upon the child and the child was full of health. The child was bad and mean before, but when the Lord danced on him, he became pure and full of love. The child was cursed to die and after the dance he was filled with immortal life. The Lord danced on the child to transform him, to give him back to his mother as a wonderful new person. Have you not seen the face of the child? In the best of images the face of the child has as much joy as that in the Lord's smile, the joy that the Lord gives him through His dance, through the impress of His feet. And do you think the Lord is heavy because He seems so large on the child? The wind is so much larger than us, so much more powerful, is it not? But when the wind blows it cools us. The huge river in which we dip seems to swallow us but really it cleanses us. So the touch of the Lord may be gentle, we cannot imagine how gentle and loving it would be. Yet again, my child, do not think that all pain is bad either. The rose bush is pruned by the gardener so that it may bear the best of blooms. The surgeon cuts the body to remove that which is disease and will eat away into all health. A mother may practically starve a child who has diarrhoea and vomiting. These seemingly disciplinary and pain inflicting methods are for the higher good, are they not? So, even if the child was pained by the Lord's dance the mother would bear it, knowing that after the pain would come infinite joy"

We are often like the anxious child, worried that when the Lord stamps out our individuality we would die, we would be in distress. We are afraid that as a culmination of self-enquiry when the Self engulfs us there would only be a void. And like the wise mother the Sadguru reassures us time and again that what awaits us is fullness, no void. The wonder of the Self is that it is perfect stillness like the ocean depths, like the mountain heights. Yet it is not dull - it is a dynamic stillness, a magnificent universal dance. When we see a table can we perceive the dance in it ? It seems so dull - so unmoving. So also the rock and the mountain. But then there is no stillness at all in the universe. Within every molecule of the table are atoms that dance. Within atoms are neutrons and protons that dance. And every particle is in eternal motion. This is the vibrant dance of the universe, the form of the Self-of the Lord. And as the Heart, in every being, the Self dances as 'I', as 'I', as 'I'. It is a sphurana - a throb - which Bhagavan describes as a dance.

“Ever as ‘I’ in the heart you dance.
Hence are you called the Heart.

– Arunachala Pancharatnam, V.2,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

Where movement is ordered in harmonious rhythm and grace that is dance. It is because of this that every aspect of the universe may be said to be dancing. For it is co-ordinated movement, never random. Always a marvellous pattern, as in the cycle of birth, life and death. And this pattern repeats itself in the individual as in the world, in the smaller as in the bigger- moon revolves round the earth, the earth round the sun. New galaxies are born and grow and are destroyed. Individuals too follow the same pattern and within the body millions of cells are born, they grow and decay. On a daily basis too this pattern, this rhythm occurs in our lives. Daily in sleep we die, it is as good as death - for there is no awareness of the world, or the body, or even a sense of 'I'. Immediately on waking, the sense of 'I' is born, as it were. We become aware of ourselves,

the body, the world. Through the waking and in dream this picture of life is sustained and then dissolves again in deep sleep.

But for all this movement to be perceived there must be an unmoving substratum, a picture screen that stays fixed while the movie moves, a stationary platform that makes it possible to register the movement of a train. The unchanging that can register all change. And that is the Self. For, unless there is silence who can discern the melodies that rise in it or know them to be such? If one has never visited a place before can one say that it has changed? It is because the perceiver remains constant that changes are perceived and registered. So the Self is silence in which the universe is heard, the Self is infinite in which things start and end, the Self is stillness in which all things move and dance and become quiet again. This part of the verse is easy to understand, we can accept this of the Self. But Bhagavan says the Self dances in the Heart as 'I', as 'I'. If the Self itself dances then what is the substratum for its dance? Why, it is itself the substratum too! The beauty of this description of the Self by Bhagavan lies in this very dissolution of opposites by merging them, the transcendence of paradoxes by uniting them. We tend to impose relative qualities on the Self. We say it is bliss. But it is not a bliss that is the opposite of sorrow, which can be sensed only when we know sorrow. It is inclusive of sorrow, and joy and transcends both. Similarly, we think of the Self as silence and stillness but it is also music and dance, voice and movement. Yes, it is all these and none of these.

So let us by no means imagine the state of Self-awareness to be negative, to be passive, to be dull. It is positive, it is a fullness that is active and dynamic and it is ever fresh. In fact, it is the mind alone that knows dullness. As it moves away from Self-attention it becomes increasingly dull. As it becomes purer, as it reflects more and more of the Self's brilliance, the mind too becomes increasingly sharper and clearer.

Can we ever think of joy as being dull? Sorrow can be dull, pain can be dull, but joy? The very word is so alive. And the Self, Bhagavan says, is bliss ever fresh, ever renewed. Dullness must

with away even in its proximity. Joy is dynamic - joy conjures images of flight and laughter, of dance and song. But joy must also be peace. True happiness must be complete, it must be full. The joy of the Self is total - thus there would be no more seeking, no more striving, an absolute, perfection would be experienced. In this sense it is silence absolute, it is majestic stillness.

It seems rather difficult to imagine what this state would be like. Difficult? It is impossible, for all imagining is with the mind. That is why the Buddha, it seems, refrained from describing 'Nirvana' lest it too should become a mere concept. Bhagavan, however, describes it, and repeatedly, as being fullness, most blissful, consciousness, the very basis of existence and here as the marvellous throbbing dance of the Heart. Why? Because to remember this is an important aid to enthuse inwardness. On the one hand is the recognition of the triviality of all our pursuits, on the other the magnitude, the marvel of the Self. When we are sufficiently convinced of both then the practice of Self-abidance would be unswerving. Hence it is helpful to remember the qualities of the Self in order to strengthen the search.

This description serves as a telescope - a peep into the promised land. It is not the same as to be there, as to have arrived - but certainly gives impetus to the journey. Thus with a desire for the highest, if we turn attention constantly to the dance of the 'I' in the heart - then ours would be the surging joy of Self awareness, the unalloyed bliss.

PART III
ARUNACHALA PANCHARATNAM

CHAPTER XXVI

OCEAN OF NECTAR

“Ocean of Nectar, full of Grace!
O Self Supreme, O Mount of Light
Whose spreading rays engulf all things
Shine as the sun which makes
The heart lotus blossom fair.”

– Arunachala Pancharatnam, V.I,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

(*Note :-* ‘Nectar’ as Bliss, ‘Self’ as Existence, ‘Light’ as Consciousness and ‘Grace’ are the words in this verse that have been taken to be dwelt upon.)

Happiness is not a stranger. She blooms from the earth at the touch of rain, casting her gay smile across the sky in seven colours. Sometimes peering at the artist from his well finished canvas, sometimes lost in joyous song and dance, smiling to herself as she pens the word most apt for a thought. Sometimes she gurgles toothlessly and then leaps from the child to the responding dance of the mother’s heart. She rolls, holding her sides, watching Laurel and Hardy or Charlie Chaplin on screen. Full of youthful health, she goes jogging on the quiet morning roads, invigorated by the bracing air, listening to the birds awake, watching the sun paint the sky with brightness. She casts a tender, warming smile at the old lady from whom she buys flowers for her hair or with total interest engages a boy at the scooter stand in vivid conversation. Her step is ever light, she hums a jaunty tune, a smile dances in her eyes and when she falls asleep the smile still plays gently on her lips and her whole being is graceful, totally in repose. She is Happiness. Wherever there is bounty, beauty, youth, health, wherever there is fulfilment and dedication, spontaneity, love and compassion, there she reigns, Happiness. Yes, she is no stranger.

Everyone sees her all the time, walking just ahead with equal pace, moving faster if one accelerates, ever maintaining that distance. Sometimes she may come closer, even walk hand-in-hand for a few steps, a few yards, a whole mile. Then again she seems to disappear altogether, or, at least moves away once more to her near yet distant post. Only few claim to have known her intimately and fewer those who have her for their partner in every business of life. As for others, life is one long search for happiness. Not a concentrated pursuit of happiness as a single aim, but a scattered yet repeated hunting for happiness in one thing, then another and another. Some recognise that they are in search of happiness, recognise also, perhaps, that they have been unable to find it in the degree that they yearn for it. They may feel disheartened that their search is futile and decide on life's meaninglessness. But for the most part people are not even aware that it is happiness that they long for. They believe, rather, that they long for the object. One longs to eat ice cream or see a movie, or to dance or sing or read, write, talk, and so on, not because ice-cream or the movie or dancing, singing, reading and so on are valuable in themselves but because of the happiness that they bring. It is often forgotten that one desires not any object or situation but only the happiness that springs from obtaining that.

However, with or without consciousness of what motivates them, human beings plunge into activity (or inactivity for that matter) only to taste happiness. While the courting of Happiness may take very subtle and even devious forms, all effort is directed only at winning her hand. Nobody performs an action with a conscious desire to reap sorrow. The apparent exception of a masochist who tortures himself is really no exception because by very definition he is one who finds pleasure in hurting himself. His motive also, therefore, is the joy that he gets on paining himself and not the pain in itself. Hence, all human behaviour, other than the automatic physiological functions, may be categorised into the twin aspects of pursuit of joy and avoidance of pain.

This universal motivation to perpetuate happiness raises two crucial questions. What is the reason for this quest? And why does

it seem never to end? In answer to the first query, Bhagavan Sri Ramana simply points out that all beings are in search of happiness because it is their own natural state. Just as ill - health is resented and good health sought after because the latter is natural. The search for happiness is not for something new, not even for something apart from oneself, but is only the manifestation of one's search for oneself.

Yet one wonders at this strange predicament. All beings perpetually seeking happiness have it ever with themselves, as themselves, yet fail to find it, at least they fail to find it in full and steady measure. Why? The answer, as is wont, lies in the question. The search is like that for one's spectacles while one is wearing them. The spectacles can never be found anywhere else. The moment one sees any other pair of spectacles resembling one's own, one rushes there eagerly believing that they are one's own, just to be disappointed on getting closer. It is only when someone points out that one is wearing the spectacles oneself that they are well and truly found. Even so, Bhagavan points out that we are carrying around our own happiness, we have only to turn our attention back to this perennial source of bliss that ever shines as our very Self. Indeed, every aspiration to happiness, every invitation to bliss is sent to us only from the Self, but we insist on going to the wrong doors and are naturally barred entry. With a card for a programme at Kalakshetra we cannot attend a concert at the Youth Theater. The invitation to bliss that is given us is immediate, it is in every moment, the gates of the joyous Self kingdom are ever open. It only remains for us to turn in and enter. For, happiness is not only natural, it is within the easy reach of every one of us, easier to reach than a gooseberry in one's palm. It is our very Self. All one must do is to get back to one's true nature by enquiring 'Who am I?' and tracing the limited identity the 'I'-thought, back to its infinite, blissful source. What remains then is an inundation of ecstasy.

"Questing within enquiring 'Who am I?'"

And 'Whence this thought?' all other thoughts
 Vanish. And as I, as I, within the Heart-cave
 The Self shines of its own accord,
 Such Self-awareness is the only Heaven,
 This stillness, this abode of bliss."

"The Sun of Self shines bright and real
 In the vast heart- expanse.
 Darkness dies; afflictions end,
 And bliss wells up."

"...And behold
 The effulgence of the Self within;
 The experience of Eternity; absence
 Of fear; the Ocean of vast Bliss."

— Anma Viddai, Sri Ramana Maharshi

When we thus see Happiness in her entirety, we see not her tripping gait nor her flying hair and swaying arms, nor hear her gay tune. But we see her standing lost in silent rapture, tears of ecstasy pouring down her cheeks, every pore of her being radiating bliss. And when once we have known her like this, she can never be separate from us. Happiness is then no more a fleeting companion, she is the surging joy not different from 'I'.



"I think, therefore I am" said Descartes. Perhaps we would agree with him. We have so linked our existence with our ability to think. Yet, it is a strange proposition for, if existence were to be directly related to thinking, the less we think, the less we would exist, the more we think, the more we would exist. Of course, when we cease to think we would become non-existent. It also implies that those things which do not think, those species who are not addicted to, or perhaps are not capable of thinking do not exist. If thinking proves existence, non-thinking must prove non-existence, which is certainly not the case. Neither does existence grow or

modify itself depending on the rate of thinking. We also have our daily experience of deep sleep where no thought can enter. Certainly we do not cease to exist then. On the contrary we are able to report on waking that we slept well, which means we very well did exist during deep sleep and have also been able to register the experience of good sleep.

Existence, therefore, is independent of thinking. What is it dependent on then? The answer is 'on nothing'. Existence is. That is all. It seems, perhaps, an abstract philosophical concept when the Self is spoken of as Existence, as 'Sat', that which Is. Yet it is really a simple fact of which we are spontaneously aware. We all believe we exist. It is because we exist that we then indulge in various activities, including thinking. I am writing, I am, therefore I am writing and I am, therefore I am aware of writing. If I cease to write, I still am. I eat, I dance, I think and so on. Each of these actions when they occur are 'I am eating', 'I am dancing', 'I am thinking of something that happened yesterday or is yet to happen'. Thus in all activity, 'I am'. If there is inactivity, 'I am lazy', 'I am doing nothing'. Here again 'I am'. When on a thirsting desert rain breaks, a cactus flower blooms into life, existence. From a perfect egg a fluffy chick emerges, there is life, existence. The chick is. A foetus growing in the mother's womb, taking shape, kicking the stomach from within, there breathes life. The child is. Existence is the simplest, the most basic experience on which our lives are built. From the moment of birth existence is unbroken. Identities may change, either in dreams or through status, from being single to being someone's wife or husband and so on. Identity may change through mental abnormalities where one may develop a split or multiple personality, like the famous Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But when one is Dr. Jekyll also one exists. Neither does one cease to exist when one has changed to Hyde. I am Jekyll or I am Hyde- Jekyll may change to Hyde and vice versa, but always 'I am'. Existence remains untrammelled through the vicissitudes of identity. Thus, 'existence' is a term very familiar to us through experience if not through vocabulary.

In fact, existence is so natural to us that we find it difficult to believe in death. We may see death all around us, yet, deep down we still believe we will live, somehow, on and on. Our talking of death, perhaps in some cases even wishing it on ourselves, is more an intellectual fancy than an actual invitation to death.

Yudhistira is said to have wisely stated that the greatest wonder on earth is that every day we see or hear of people dying, yet always seem to feel that death will not come to us. For, our actions do not reflect any belief in death. It is said of Yudhistira himself that when a subject came to him for financial help, he asked him to return the following day. Upon hearing this Bheema sounded the bell in the victory tower and cried, 'I rejoice to know my brother has won over death for a day, for he speaks the truth alone and he has asked someone to come tomorrow. This can only mean he is sure of living until tomorrow. Does this not imply victory over death, even if it be for a day?' Yes, our behaviour always implies our belief that we are not going to die in the near future. However, Bhagavan Ramana might not have called this a wonder. He would perhaps have said that it is natural for us to believe not in death but in existing because existence is our true nature. We resist only that which is not natural. We accept health and resist disease. Similarly we believe in existence and resist death. Sri Ramana points out that this can only be because there is something which ever is, as Existence, and this is our true nature, which is why every living being has an unshakable feeling of existing. Thus, Bhagavan declares :

“Without that which Exists always how can there
Be feelings of existence?
Free of thoughts it exists, the inner Being, named the Heart”.
— Forty Verses on Reality, Prayer V.1
Sri Ramana Maharshi



What is existence without consciousness? It is awareness that lights existence. Consciousness is vibrant, alive. Hence, one dreads

what is termed 'brain death' when life continues but one is not conscious anymore. One calls it a 'vegetable existence'. However, plants are not unconscious, they are alive to sunlight and water, to touch, pain and other stimuli. Perhaps it would be more apt to say one becomes 'rock-like'. In any case, consciousness, awareness, is what imbues existence with meaning,

There is a little plant that closes its leaves on touch, it is conscious of our touch. The millipede curls up if it is poked and the snail rushes back into its shell. The deer, sensing a tiger from the wind, pricks up its ears, stands still and then moves with windy swiftness - it is conscious of the smell of danger. The baby hearing a rattle to its left, gurgles, turns to it and reaches out, conscious of sound. The snake moves with the sway of the snake - charmer's pipe, conscious of sight, mesmerised by the vision of movement. All activity, all response in life, is an exhibition of consciousness of some phenomena or the other. We act and respond to stimuli within and without because we are conscious.

Naturally we would wonder what it is that makes us conscious of the world and ourselves. Consciousness of the world stems from the mind. This is obvious because in deep sleep, when the mind is not, the world or awareness of it is also non-existent. Even while awake if the mind is switched off, sensation is cut off. We can forget a headache or stomach pain by watching an interesting film or reading a gripping mystery. That is, by turning attention away from the pain on to something else. Of course, if attention is focussed Selfward, then, none of the bodily sensations may be registered. One is conscious of objects, therefore, only because the mind pays attention to them. The mind throws on them the light of consciousness whereby they become evident.

"The world is in the form of
five-fold senses, like sound,
The senses are known through the five
sense organs...."

"Eventhough both the mind and the
world rise and set together

It is the mind which lights the world....”

— Forty Verses on Reality, Vs. 6 & 7,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

The next question is whether the mind is self-luminous, itself the source of consciousness. Such a doubt arises because the mind ceases to exist in deep sleep whereas existence is unbroken. While the state of deep sleep seems almost an unconscious experience, one cannot say consciousness was absent. On the contrary, the fact that we recollect sleeping well indicates that we existed during deep sleep and there was consciousness of existence. Due to the absence of objective awareness one perceives deep sleep as a ‘nothing’ experience. It is rather like saying ‘I see nothing’ when it is pitch dark. It really means, ‘I see only darkness and nothing else.’ In deep sleep there is the experience of ignorance or ‘nothingness.’ An experience implies the existence of an experiencer, and thus of consciousness. This leads to the surmise that consciousness exists even in the absence of the mind or identity. And it is this basic consciousness, the Self, from which the mind derives conscious energy. In turn the mind sends its reflected consciousness to objects and results in the objective awareness of waking experience. The consciousness we are daily aware of, the consciousness of the mind, is limited. It is limited to the particular name and form with which it is identified and functions only within that realm. But the consciousness of the Self is fullness. It includes and transcends objective awareness. Again we have Bhagavan Ramana’s words:

“Neither sleep nor cognition of
objects is knowledge
In the true state, which is
different from both,
There is no awareness of objects.
But it is not a void
Consciousness alone shines.”

— Forty Verses on Reality, V. 12,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

To remember the 'I' - thought's link with consciousness serves a dual purpose. It undermines our sense of self - importance and makes us increasingly dependent on the energy source within, the Self, the Heart. Thus, it humbles us at times of achievement. For, we are aware that the ego, the 'I' - thought has no power of its own, it merely reflects the consciousness that is the Self. It can also act to counter our diffidence, for, when the power to act is not ours neither is the power to fail. Thus, it inculcates the spirit of surrender that brings a growing calm. Secondly, the awareness that the 'I' - thought reflects consciousness implies that it carries the 'scent' of consciousness as Sri Ramana describes it. Holding on to this scent we may get back to the source, the Self.



In the roundness of the earth, the revolution of the planets, the warmth of the sun, and the clarity of space is grace. Grace is in the burning of fire, the wetness of water, the smell of earth, the green of leaves, the footsteps of man. It is in the innocence of children, the song of birds, the blossoming of flowers, the joining of hands, the falling of ripe fruits. And it is in smell, sight, sound, taste and touch, in the rhythm of the seasons, in birth, growth and completion. In fulfilment, in beauty, in the ordered harmony of life, is Grace.

Grace is the sustaining principle by which all things have the bubbling awareness of life, by which each ripens to its full potential, Grace is the basis of existence, of consciousness, of bliss. Grace is the Self and Grace is the way by which we get back to our Self, breaking away from the limited identity of the 'I'-thought. Bhagavan repeatedly emphasised that Grace is now, always, ever present. He explained that it is Grace which puts us on the path of self-enquiry, Grace that protects us from within and without along the way and Grace that is the final experience of Self-abidance.

Yet, though Grace is ever-present, we feel it more powerfully only in those moments when we perceive the harmony of life, when we experience joy and relief, and when we tap the silent spring of

peace within. Though the sun's rays are everywhere, when focussed through a lens they become more intense in light and heat.

It is when we are aware of Arunachala ever throbbing within as the Heart, the Self, that we are permeated with Grace and know it to be every moment. Bhagavan simply, most beautifully, shows us the way to this experience, to an understanding of the Truth in his description of Arunachala. He brings out the principle of existence, when he calls Arunachala the 'Self Supreme'. The element of awareness, of consciousness is vivified in the phrase 'O mount of light'. And what happens when limited identity is abandoned and a merger in this awareness, the Self occurs? One is swallowed in the blissful ocean of all enveloping brilliance.

CHAPTER XXVII

YOU ARE CALLED THE HEART

“As on a screen a wondrous picture,
On you, fair Mount, is all this world
Formed and sustained and then withdrawn.
Ever as ‘I’ in the Heart you dance,
Hence you are called the Heart.

– Arunachala Pancharatnam, V.2,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

(*Note:* In this verse thoughts are presented on Creation (‘formed’), sustenance, and destruction (‘withdrawn’) and the ‘dance’ as the Heart.)

The current generated by the dynamo passes to the switchboard, the switch is clicked on and myriads of lights come to life, with splashing, gurgling colours and music. It is a whole creation, a world of fantasy: the Brindavan Gardens with its colour lights and musical fountains, as if just created, is freshly manifest to the excited observers.

Deep within a womb the child grows, takes shapes, moves and is ‘created’. Deep within the ocean, the oyster nurtures a pearl in its heart, giving it the lustre of created preciousness. Deep within the earth the seed gives out a tiny root and a tiny shoot, a tender plant, a growing shrub, and stands as a mighty tree. From the unseen depths of glacial snow, a trickle of water separates itself and flows downhill gathering speed, force and tributaries to be worshipped as a mighty river. An amoeba divides itself and from one comes two, the two in turn each divide and from two come many. When an amoeba splits itself more amoebae are created; when a sun splits and cools, a galaxy is created, and so earth and life and all of us perhaps.

Creation - both mysterious and magical. The process of creation always fills one with wonder and awe and curiosity - a strange mixture of emotions, but true. For, we immediately wish to know, to explain the basis, the process of creation. 'How was this created?' we always wonder. And creation is so important that we ever give high regard to 'creativity' or what we call the creative process in man. Art is this kind of creation and science too. Edison has practically 'created' the bulb by inventing it, that is to say, he has brought into existence a form of material which did not exist prior to that. Edison has not created the materials themselves. He has only given new shape to materials which existed outside him. But that 'new shape' is his creation.

'Shakespeare's creation' is different from Edison's. When Shakespeare creates, he creates whole worlds entirely from his imagination. His people, his places, are not concrete, yet they very often seem to be 'real'. They are from him, by him - they are literally 'of him'.

What is the material from which Shakespeare creates? From his own mind. And we need not assume Shakespeare to be supremely unique in this capacity to create, though he may be in the quality of his creation. For, almost each one of us creates his or her own world in our daily dreams. This, Bhagavan explains, is the secret of creation:

"Even though both the mind and the world
Rise and set together,
It is the mind which lights the world."

— Forty Verses on Reality, V.7,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

Bhagavan points out that creation, for each one of us, is a matter of perceiving the world with the mind. Everyday on waking we perceive the world and so the world is 'created' on waking. In dream, with our minds we create another world altogether and in deep sleep there is no world at all. So, the world is created by the mind, but the mind itself - a conglomeration of thoughts- is created

by the 'I'- thought in as much as the 'I'- thought is the root thought to which all other thoughts are linked. So, Bhagavan further clarifies:

“When the 'I'-thought rises, all this is perceived,
When the 'I'-thought subsides, all this subsides,
Therefore all these are but forms of the 'I'-thought.
Tracking it is the way to victory over everything.’

– Forty Verses on Reality, V. 26,
Ramana Maharshi

The 'I'-thought is absent in deep sleep but rises as one awakes. This rising of the 'I'-thought from its source, the Self, is the beginning of 'creation' and its immediately linking itself to thoughts of 'you' 'they' and the whole world, brings in the whole gamut of creation. It is like the switch deriving energy from the dynamo of the Self and in turn lighting up a whole 'fantasy world' like the Brindavan.

Hence the key to the mystery of creation and to life itself is to track the 'I'-thought back to the source from which it daily rises unawares, to track it back to the Self.

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As the mother goat suckles, the young kid drinks the milk, tail wagging vigorously in delight. And then it frisks and plays around, filled with new energy. The infant waves his hands and legs in glee, making important conversation using high pitched vowel sounds, mother's milk still dribbling from the corners of his toothless grin. The leaf feeds on sunlight, draws water from the root, and creates food for the plant. The caterpillar feeds on the leaves, grows chubby, wraps itself in a cocoon and breaks out in the rainbow colours of a butterfly. The army of ants marches steadily away with the housewife's sugar ration, transporting it grain by grain to its cosy anthill, to nibble at in leisure. Bees swarm to place in the safe deposit lockers of their hives the honey they have sipped from fragrant summer flowers. And everywhere, in its million forms, life sustains itself in apt ways.

While the biological mechanisms thus keep themselves ticking, the mind (which is what creates awareness of the body and world in the first place) observes, and feeds itself on the observation. As the body, so the mind has its own special brand of food, in the shape of names and forms. These the mind is constantly gulping in, chewing on, digesting and, sometimes assimilating:

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

– Forty Verses on Reality, V.25,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

The ‘ego’ or the ‘I’-thought is the crux of the mind. All thoughts are connected only to this ‘I’-thought, their root. Because all thoughts have to be necessarily only for me, or for the ‘I’. In this sense, the ‘I’-thought sustains the mind, a conglomeration of varied thoughts. But the ‘I’-thought cannot exist in isolation. It is constantly linked, consciously or otherwise, but certainly linked, with some other thought, like ‘I see’, ‘I think’ and so on (which is what Bhagavan describes in the above verse as feeding on forms’). If it is robbed of this sustenance, if it is isolated from all other thoughts, the ‘I’-thought becomes weak, it readily surrenders its thought- fortress, the thought-walls fall. Then the ‘I’-thought rushes to its real stronghold, the Self.

In reality, the ‘I’-thought has no consciousness, no power of its own. It only reflects the Light of the Self from which it daily rises on waking, awakening with itself the entire world and awareness of it, and sustaining this awareness and itself through continuous reinforcements, of concepts. When deprived of thought- food, unable to survive the isolation, the ‘I’-thought goes back to the Self and abides there. Then awakes a true awareness of the source of all things, the Essence by which all is sustained. As ornaments are made from, and sustained only by gold, gold is their truth and apart from it they cannot exist, even so the many forms of the world cannot exist apart from their Reality, the Self. They are sustained

only by the consciousness of the Self, explains Bhagavan. He emphatically clarifies

“Because we see the variegated world,
A single source, with unlimited powers has to be accepted.
The seer, the seen, the canvas and the light
Are all only He, the One.”

– Forty Verses on Reality, V. 1,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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The flower blooms, five curled petals, like a delicate, open palm, each petal pale pink at the heart, shading into deep magenta at the edges. For a week the flower nods to every passing breeze, brimming with the gaiety of life. Then she fades, droops, dries and drops away, her seeds perhaps fallen on the ground below to rise as a new plant or wind carried, bringing blossoms to some other nook. And she is no more, that flower. There are others like her, many others, all lovely in their own way, all blossoming and nodding to the breeze as she once did, perhaps some born of her even join in this breeze-dance, affirming the perpetual continuity of life. But she is gone forever, she will not return.

That is death's finality. As birth goes on continuously, as renewal and sustenance carry on their work, so with unbroken rhythm, death tolls. Death, the dark stranger one is ever afraid of bumping into, an appointment which every one must keep, yet, not knowing when. Perhaps he is just around the corner, perhaps he has boarded the train to our city, perhaps he appears very distant still... But he is never far away, if one but cares to look, one can always find him anywhere, everywhere. Wherever there is Life, there he too awaits, for he is Life's mysterious partner.

Mysterious - for, though one may see Death everyday he remains still a stranger, leaving one wondering on what wings he arrives, noiseless, silent. Where is his country from which no traveller returns? Does he swoop down like an eagle on its prey

or does he gently hold one by the hand and walk away? There is none to recall his face. And though there is the occasional one who is half in love even with him, he is mostly dreaded. His brother, Time, the more familiar face, is disturbing enough, not to mention Death's painful messengers - age, disease and accident.

For a million who dread him, there is one person who turns around and looks him full in the face. And this one person knows and smiles and says. "So, you are death, you are no stranger but a familiar face. And yet, you have no face, in fact, you don't exist at all." And under that steady gaze, Death himself does die.

How can Death have a familiar face! Yet, why not? Though every creature dies but once, and even cowards are said to meet death only a thousand times through life, the 'I' dies every day. That is to say the 'I' in every one experiences daily birth and daily death.

This appears to be, no doubt, a crazy notion, until we examine for ourselves Bhagavan's clear explanation of death's meaning. Having himself faced and conquered death as a boy of sixteen, he asks

"What is death if scrutinised?"

— Curing Mother's Fever. V. 2
Sri Ramana Maharshi

What constitutes the scrutiny of death? First of all, 'For whom is this death?' If I should ask myself such a question, my answer would be, 'For me'. But, who am I? What is this 'I'? If this 'I' is attentively observed it will be discovered that it is a feeling of existence combined with a sense of identity. 'I am Sarada' - 'I am' or I exist, as 'Sarada', a given identity. But what happens to this identity in deep sleep? In deep sleep one is not aware at all of one's identity. For all practical purposes the 'I' is as good as dead then. Where does it dissolve into to rise again only on waking? If one consciously traces the 'I'- thought to this source into which it sets daily, one has discovered the meaning of death and life. For, when one becomes aware of the source of the 'I' -thought and

abides there, then one has discovered one's own true immortal Self. When this 'I'- thought surrenders to the Lord, shining as the Self in all beings, that is, when the 'I'-thought dies, or dissolves consciously into its source, the Self, then what remains is immortality:

“For those who, out of fear of death,
Take refuge in the conqueror of Death,
The first to die is the 'I' -thought.
Then, by nature they are immortal,
Can they ever again be assailed by the fear of death?
– Forty Verses on Reality, Prayer V.2,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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The waters of the ocean rise as vapours, condense into dark, rumbling clouds and pour down in sheets of rain, illumined by lightning, dancing to thunderous rhythms, swell the rivers, plainwards flowing, majestically silting deltas, to be swallowed once more by the roaring sea. Or, touched by the cold fingers of polar atmospheres the vapours don the garb of glacial ice, break into the sea as mammoth icebergs, drowning Titanics, till they melt softly into warmer waters. Moon drawn, the wave rises, decking itself with white foam, and tossing its head on the damp sand castles of the shore, washing off names spelt out by happy toes, till, energy all spent, it disappears again into the sea.

The 'I'-thought rises on waking, thinking itself to be a separate entity. It sustains itself through the day by associating itself with myriad thoughts, all linked with the sense of identity, the sense that 'I am so-and-so'. And, tired by perpetual conceptualisation, into the Self again it dissolves in the quiet ignorance of deep sleep. The whole saga of creation-sustenance destruction unrolls within every individual, everyday. The rising of the 'I'-thought is creation, for, it brings with it an awareness of the whole world, of course, in relation to itself. Consequently, the setting of the 'I'-thought, its disappearance in sleep, is death. Then there is neither awareness of the 'I'-nor of the world. And we have said that 'I'- thought's sustenance is by 'feeding on forms', feeding on various thoughts.

But this tells only a part of the story. What is sustained by the multiplicity of thoughts is only the sense of separateness. The 'I'-thought maintains only its identity aspect by clinging to other thoughts. But what is it that sustains its very existence? Certainly the other thoughts do not constitute or support the existence of the 'I' thought. When their existence itself is dependent on the 'I'-thought, how could they, in any real sense, sustain its existence? Can the building sustain the foundation, or the film the screen? The 'I'-thought is truly sustained only by the energy of the Self, which continues as Existence even in sleep when the identity is absent. Only, one is not conscious of this Sustaining Power to which the 'I'-thought daily returns to recharge its batteries.

As ice is frozen water, water choosing form, rising from water, sustained by and melting into water; as the wave is the ocean, so the 'I'-thought, with its whole world, is born of the Self, sustained in the Self and dissolves into the Self:

"The body is within the Self. And yet
One thinks one is inside the inert body,
Like some spectator who supposes
That the screen on which the film is thrown
Is within the picture"

— Five Stanzas on the One Self, Vs. 3 & 4,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

"Consciousness, the Self is Real
The many forms cannot exist apart from it.
Can the different ornaments exist by themselves?
Are they apart from gold?"

— Forty Verses on Reality, V.13,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

To trace the 'I'-thought back to this 'Real' source of the Self and abide there is to die as the wave and be as the Ocean, it is conscious immortality.



The Eternal dances as the Universe. The rivers dance in their downward race, the wind dances on waves, leaves dance with the wind and the tree itself sways. The moon dances in and out of silver grey clouds, peacocks dance when the clouds break and a baby lamb skips to the tune of spring. The rain dances on rooftops, the flame on the candle dances, and Earth herself dances round the Sun. The dance of golden sun rays on the morning sea, the dance of the seasons in graceful circular rhythm, the dance of the baby kicking out its limbs, all is dance. The human voice dances in music, the eyes dance in laughter and the feet dance for joy. Life itself dances, for He dances within all as the throb of the Self.

Dance is movement, dance is music and rhythm, dance is speed and grace, firmness and fluidity, emotion and expression - and dance is stillness too. The silent, motionless sculpture captures the world of dance : the swift feet, the graceful arms, the captivating posture, the mobile face and momentous mood, the gay abandon and heavy sorrow, the rhythm and music mute, just about to brim forth exuberantly or in soulful melodies. There is the dance that lulls and the dance that disturbs, a dance that begins and a dance that ends. All creation, all sustenance, all destruction are dance, part of His cosmic dance - ever moving, ever changing, an unbroken rhythm. And yet, there is no movement, no change, only the perfect stillness of the Self. The perfect stillness of the Self contains the rhythm of all that exists.

“Though He is the ever unmoving One, yet,
In the temple hall (of Thillai) His dance of bliss
He dances, before the Mother moveless there.
Now that Power withdrawn within, His form
Here moveless, still, He soars as Aruna Hill.’

— Necklet of Nine Gems, V.1
Sri Ramana Maharshi

Thus does the Self swallow all in its pure, effulgent, motionless silence, only to commence its own dance as the brightness of the Heart, making the hair stand on end, every pore pulsate with joy and tears of bliss well up and pour down unchecked.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RIVER INTO THE OCEAN

“He whose pure mind turned inward
Searches whence the ‘I’ arises
Knows the Self aright and merges,
As a river in the Ocean,
In you, Aruna Hill!”

– Arunachala Pancharatnam, V. 3,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

(*Note:-* Self-enquiry and its implications have been explored here.)

Circumambulating Bhagavan’s picture in the shrine, I heard a sudden sharp sound nearby, somewhat like a squirrel’s call, yet different. The mind curious to discover the source of the sound looked around. No, there was no creature visible. But there, again that call ! Probably the sound was carried in from behind the shrine through the airduct. On searching in the airduct, there it was perched, a fluffy, sleepy owl, expressing its disgruntlement in short hoots! I recalled how often one is tricked into wondering how a bunch of flowers can coo a melody before scrutiny reveals a marvellously camouflaged little bird.

A car window was accidentally left open overnight at Sri Ramanasramam and the next morning the vehicle had turned into an amusement park for monkeys. Some sliding down the windscreen, others swinging from a branch to the roof and back, the little ones perched on other handles trying to find their way in. While those already within bounced on the cushioned seats and peered at the many knobs on the dashboard. Until one by mistake sat on the horn and the whole car was empty within seconds. Empty? Not quite, a hefty fellow, probably their leader, returned. He cautiously but carefully tried every knob, with the clear intent of

discovering the cause of that frightening noise. But, inadvertently he too set off the horn and beat a hasty retreat, without courage to recommence his quest a second time.

These are just a few instances of curiosity, which at a deeper level becomes the sharp spirit of enquiry, manifesting itself in varied forms of life in different ways, but surely evident everywhere. From the kitten's entanglement in a ball of wool, to the calf poking her wet nose wherever she can, and the human infant biting every possible object with toothless gums, the drive is curiosity. The need to question, to explore, to find out, to understand more fully, governs not just the scientist toiling day and night in his laboratory, but also the child who pesters, 'Papa, from where does the wind come? Who blows it?' 'Mummy, where does the sun go at night? And where does it come back from in the morning? What does it do at night?' 'Why is my hair curly?' 'Why do my friends have tuition?' 'What does tuition mean?' 'Why are you taller than me?' and a million other questions.

Though humankind may have discovered the answers to many such mysteries, and may continue to pursue those that are yet unresolved, seldom does man turn this searchlight of enquiry back upon himself. It occurs to him to question why the earth is round, why there is an eclipse, he discovers new continents and languages, he finds causes and cures for disease, he invents sciences which go into the nature of the functioning of his own mind. His yen for knowledge is endless and yet he does not pause a second and wish to know the knower. He who knows where the sun goes to at night, does he know where his sense of individuality goes at night? What happens to him in deep sleep? In deep sleep he has no awareness of himself, his body or any thought whatsoever. Where does his awareness set into, where does his sense of 'I' rise from again, on waking? Unless one turns one's spirit of enquiry upon oneself, to find out who one really is, wholly is, one must be content to live with a stranger, at least a partial stranger, for life. Would such a life be worthwhile?

“Of what use is this birth without the power,
The intelligence of self-enquiry ?

Come and fill this void, O Arunachala !”

– Marital Garland of Letters, V. 46,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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The day sets with the sun. Eventide. The sky is filled with streamlined formations of birds. Tall old trees chirp with the excitement of birds, hundreds, returned home, exchanging notes for the day, till they cock their heads under their wings and drop off to silence. Short legged cattle, their heavy frames resting, settle to slower paces of chewing until slumber takes over. Plants close their leaves, and flowers shut their petals in gentle sleep. And the mind forgets itself.

The night awakes. Bats flit across the moon. Frogs begin their croak-orchestra in monsoon ponds, snakes slither forth from pits. A stray crow opens its eye for a moment and caws, another flies in its ever uncertain direction, now augmented by the confusion whether it be night or day, wondering as to why it is awake. The owl dons its spectacles for flight. The ‘Night Queen’ shyly sends out enchanting fragrance hiding in garden bushes, and the blue lily opens wide her eye in round wonderment to match the full moon.

Day breaks and the stars begin to nod, the moon heavy lidded droops into bed, the owl returns to its hollow, the snake to its pit, the frogs cease to sing and ‘Night Queen’ awaits the next evening to show off her perfume.

Bed-time comes at different times for different creatures of the night and day. But come it certainly does with a swift joy and unknowing silence. (One kite is said to never cease flight and sleeps a few winks in flight itself, but it sleeps!) Bedtime comes at different places too. While one sparrow perches asleep on a window bar, another has the winter abode in the cup of a fan. Hard, cold floors, soft, cushioned mattresses, chill winter winds rattling window panes,

sweltering summer stillnesses or monsoon mosquitoes singing lullabies sleep is the common denominator. And the mind ever returns to it after hours, sometimes even days - yet the return is inevitable.

And in equal unbroken pattern, the dawn of day, the hen pecks on seeds, the mind pecks on thoughts and keeps itself occupied, escaping from itself until the next bout of ignorant sleep. Every creature knows its home, where it left at sunbreak or moonrise and to which it consciously returns when its time for rest arrives. Why then does the mind prefer to forget its own home of silence? Why does it prefer to think itself homeless when it has an abode of bliss, as its own ? Why is the mind alone not conscious of its disappearance into and reappearance from its place of rest ? Entering this abode every day and emerging from it daily, as it does, must there not be some occasion at least when it is conscious of the process ? But no. The mind is fully conscious of the waking experience, and dreams too are mostly registered and remembered, though perhaps with different degrees of clarity, but deep sleep is recalled as an absence rather than a presence of awareness, 'I was not aware of anything, I slept very blissfully'. Yet, even the absence is registered by an entity that continues and experiences it. What is that ? Who is that 'I' ?

How are we to become conscious of our true existence and not be aware only of the fluctuating mental framework? The only clue available to us is the mind itself. For, that is all we know of ourselves at the present moment and we can start only with what we know. To solve any problem one must first closely observe and examine the facts that are available. If, for instance, a deer is to be tracked, then one must understand what kind of footprints it leaves behind, one must understand its movements and habits. Even so, if the mind is to be tracked to the source from which it daily rises and sets (which at present remains a mystery to us), the first step is to understand the nature of the mind, to find out 'what the mind is'.

“What is the mind? If one searches to find out.
Then there would be no separate entity
As the mind. This is the straight path.”

— Upadesa Saram, V. 17
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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One day I saw a strange tree. It had lovely pink flowers hanging in delicate bunches. And it had striking magenta flowers keeping the pink company with paper-like crispness. I wondered how one tree could flower thus in varied manner. There are plants which when grafted with others can blossom flowers that are variegated, each displaying double hues. But this tree carried flowers not only of strikingly different colours but also totally different structure and texture. Closer observation revealed that the tree carried two varieties of leaves too! When one carefully scrutinised the tree, its secret was out and its mystery dissolved - there was a creeper growing on the tree. So widespread had the creeper become that its leaves and flowers had mingled indistinguishably with those of the tree. The creeper was not the tree, it was sustained by its own roots in mother ground, but the creeper unable to grow and spread on its own had sought the support of the tree. And gradually it had become so identified with the tree that hardly anyone saw the two as being separate from one another.

How like this creeper is the mind. I say ‘the mind’ and not ‘my mind’ or ‘your mind’ because while every mind is different in its thought pattern and in the detail of its make-up, yet, every mind has the same two basic qualities. Like the creeper the mind has a root, it is rooted in the ground, the Self from which it derives sustenance. The Self is its existence, that by which the mind exists. But this root goes unseen, unnoticed. And like the creeper the mind has an identity, a support on which it grows and spreads into its countless leaf-like thoughts; the mind has its identity of a given name and

form around which it twines itself like the creeper around the tree-trunk.

One might wonder, 'How can we thus clearly categorise the mind into two aspects?' This categorisation is possible if we pay keen attention to the nature of the mind. The first step in understanding the mind is to realise that the mind is only a conglomeration of thoughts and that all those thoughts revolve around the 'I'-thought: 'I eat', 'I watch', 'I feel', 'I experience' and so on. Hence Bhagavan says that the 'I' alone is the mind, it is really the crux of the mind and without it no other thought can exist. This 'I'-thought or sense of 'I' has two aspects, the existence and identity aspects. We all have, certainly, an awareness of existence. Nobody declares 'I do not exist'. Bhagavan clearly points out in Sat-Darshanam, how this sense of existence is unbroken. Even in sleep, when one is not aware of one's identity, the awareness of existence is continuous:

"No one says 'I did not exist in deep sleep',
When the 'I' rises all rise..."

– Forty Verses on Reality, V. 23,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

In all our waking and dream experience, this awareness of existence is coupled with a sense of identity. I do not just exist, but I exist as so-and-so, as a particular name and form, which, in fact, I take to be myself. So habitual does the identity become that it assumes great importance and its real source of existence is forgotten. If one is to get back to this existence, which is indeed an Ocean of Bliss, our true Self (the name and form identity is only an assumed support, assumed by the 'I'-thought, it is not really our true nature), one must isolate the 'I'-thought and cut away its identity by asking 'Who am I?'. When its identity is thus questioned, it will fall back into its source. For, by itself it cannot stand, being only a link between the Self, the Existence, the Consciousness, which it reflects, and the insentient body, with which it identifies.

“The body is insentient, the Self does not rise,
 Between the body’s limit an ‘I’ rises,
 Between the body and Self.
 It is named ‘ego’, ‘knot of matter and spirit’,
 ‘bondage’, ‘subtle body’ and ‘mind’.”

– Forty Verses on Reality, V. 24
 Sri Ramana Maharshi

Like the amphibian crocodile the ‘I’-thought can remain merged in the natural waters of the Self or emerge and lie, pretending to be a log, on the land of identity. But if ever it senses danger on land, if its identity is threatened by enquiry, immediately it will rush back into the waters where alone it is truly powerful. If one keenly observes the questioned ‘I’-thought as it falls back into the source, and abides there, that is Self-knowledge.

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A friend once fed a stray puppy in a park with a few biscuits and the little fellow doggedly followed her home. There was nothing she could do to shake him off. He was abandoned at the other end of the town but he would dutifully turn up at her doorstep the next day. Until everyone gave up and he was allowed to stay. He didn’t need any road map to reach her, nor was he a keen observer of the route. Had he been taken blindfolded to the next town, he would still have traced his way home with unerring accuracy. His magic pathfinder was his sense of smell, he could trace anyone by their scent.

A squirrel had built her nest and given birth to young ones in an empty speaker carton of a recording studio. Not knowing this, a boy shifted the box to another place in the studio. The mother squirrel, returning with some food, was naturally overwhelmed with anxiety. She ran hither and thither in search of her nest. Every now and then she would suddenly stop on her tracks, prick her ears and listen with total attention. It was the sound of her young ones calling. How she discerned those tiny squeals above the loudspeaker din of

the studio music is indeed a miracle ! But she heard them quite clearly and she discovered her nest by tracing that sound to its source.

With the coming of the monsoon, the damp gardens would often be turned into conference rooms and meeting halls for hundreds of earthworms. One would often be confounded as to how so many of them materialised overnight, as if from nowhere, transporting their segmented bodies in comfortable slithers. But the earthworms were in no way confused, each one knew precisely where he or she had come from and they would return to their earthy homes along the same track of silvery fluid which they had formed as they emerged and moved forth in the world.

Like the puppy, the 'I'-thought (the ego) holds the key, knows the clue to reach the Self, knows the pathway home to the Self. It carries the scent of consciousness. That is, the 'I'-thought reflects the consciousness of the Self, which, however, it wrongly identifies with the limited name and form. But using this scent, if attention is paid to the source from which this sense of 'I', this consciousness of 'I' arises, then Self-abidance results. That is to say, one must isolate the sense of existence in the 'I'-thought and observe that alone. Normally, the 'I'-thought exists only identified with some other thought as 'I work', 'I talk', 'I think'. This constant identification of the 'I'-thought must be cut away and attention paid to the sense of 'I' by itself, for, that alone is the pure scent of consciousness which can be tracked back to the source. If, for instance, the puppy is distracted with the smell of tasty food, he might, at least for a while, forget the scent of his mistress and home. It is only if he pays undivided attention to that single scent that he can follow-up the clue.

In like fashion, attention should be wholly given to the 'I'-thought, to the existence aspect of the 'I'-thought minus the identity aspect, in order that it may lead one directly back to the source. For this one must have that deep yearning to return to the Truth, as the mother squirrel had to reach her young ones. She could not

be distracted even by other overpowering sounds. Her ears were only for the sound of those tender calls. If one is struck so deeply by the fact that one has lost one's own true nature and is overpowered by the desire to reach it once more, somehow, then attention will automatically focus itself on the 'I'-thought without any distraction from its myriad associations. Then, like the earthworm follows its trail back home, with equal certainty, the 'I'-thought will dip back into the source from which it derives consciousness.

"The 'I' does not rise in the real state,
Search for the source of 'I' dissolves it,
How else can one attain the supreme state
Of one's own Self?"

– Forty Verses on Reality, V. 27,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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The 'I'-thought will not give up its independent identity limited and illusory though it be, so easily. Although it has no consciousness of its own and derives its awareness only from the Self, as the moon reflecting the light of the sun, yet by long habit it has forgotten this truth and has assumed for itself an independent identity. This apparent sovereignty it is now unwilling to resign without due struggle. The moment the attempt is made to turn it Selfward, for a merger there, it prepares for battle. Here we encounter its first commander - the overactive thought world. Thoughts and thoughts and thoughts, like an overgrown garden, appear and grow. Good thoughts may be, positive thoughts, constructive thoughts, perhaps thoughts about one's work, thoughts about what to eat, thoughts on helping a friend, thoughts about solving a problem, thoughts, maybe, about how best to serve Bhagavan, about how to worship Him, thoughts on the discipline with which one plans to perform self-enquiry, thoughts on thoughts...

As the gardener carefully prunes the rose-bush that the leaves may be few and the roses bloom large, so must we prune these

thoughts. And the pruning-scissors we must use are the scissors of self-enquiry. Bhagavan says that as every thought arises one must strike it down, patiently, attentively, with self-enquiry. Not allowing the thought to branch out in numerous directions and become a large tree, one must snip it at its very inception. As it arises, as one becomes aware of the 'I'-thought associating itself with another thought, immediately one must pose the question, 'For whom is this thought?' The answer naturally is, 'For me'. Then is the time to put the question, 'Who am I ?' This question must be posed not merely as a verbal, mechanical question but as a searching, searing attitude of doubt. So serious must be the doubt about one's identity that entertaining any other thought related to that identity becomes absurd and attention is automatically and wholly focussed on finding the source of the identity, the 'I'-thought alone:

"The mind is only a bundle of thoughts.
They are dependent on the 'I'-thought.
Know the 'I'-thought to be the mind."
"Wherefrom does the 'I'-thought arise?
If one enquires thus, it vanishes.
This is self-enquiry."

Upadesa Saram, Vs.18 & 19
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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A plant must be pruned if it is to grow well, remain healthy. Strange then that the tulsi plant, well pruned, affectionately watered and tended, should be turning dry, twigs breaking away in brown death. While some leaves were sprouting fresh green, others crumpled into brown-grey. Daily the dead leaves and twigs were broken off and thrown away and daily some more hung their heads, shrivelled and passed into oblivion. Mystified at first by this apparent unresponsiveness to our care, I soon noticed some black spots on the leaves and then a whitening and sickening process followed. The next day while watering the plant, I could see many insects hurrying out of the wet mud, alarmed by the sudden drenching. Now

the malady was known. The plant was sick, infected, infested. The proper medicines had to be sprayed, but that was not enough. Since life-destroying insects had made that very soil their abode which also nourished the plant, the two could not subsist in harmony. The soil of the plant would have to be changed, the tulsi would have to be 're-potted'.

There is a canker, an insect family that similarly eats away slowly at the very roots of spiritual life. This canker is negativity, depression. Depression visits the pursuer of self-enquiry in numerous guises. It may take on the form of diffidence, a feeling that it is impossible for one to attain the goal, that one is unfit for the practice of self-enquiry. It may step in, unnoticed, in the form of listlessness and disinterest. It grows as self-pity and sadness, one infected by its presence sees the whole world clothed in dreary grey. Depression doesn't bring the sharp, live distress of real sorrow, but the dismal blur of pathos. It is a slow poison, spreading like cancer through the mind. But unlike cancer it does not kill, it completely paralyses its victim. It is a malady more dangerous than over-active thought production by the mind. At least a profusion of thoughts can be actively faced, so long as they are constructive, there is always a positive effort by the mind to combat them. But not so this. Depression is not an absence of thoughts, it is the presence, the continuous presence in fact, of negative thoughts. And often one is more than half in love with depression, wallowing in it, getting lost in its serpentine by-lanes. As thoughts feed on thoughts and swell in numbers, so depression, amoeba-like, breeds itself. One who is depressed gets more and more depressed.

Before one is totally eaten away by this disease of depression, before one is drowned in its gloomy depths, one must somehow get a hold on oneself and get back to the cheerful pursuit of self-enquiry. Self-enquiry itself is the medicine. When one is filled with negative thoughts, whatsoever their nature, one should not succumb to overwhelming feelings of guilt or negativity. Instead, the depressing thoughts must be faced with the question, 'For whom are these thoughts?'. The answer comes automatically, 'For me'. Pat

must come the next question 'Who am I?'. In a state of depression it is all the more likely that this question may spring forth habitually, as a mechanical repetition. But such mechanism must be carefully destroyed. The question must be a meaningful, very real attitude of doubt. Do I know myself? Have I really experienced who I am? Then how can I think that I am depressed and sad, incapable and ineffective? How can I discern with such certainty the gloomy depths of a stranger? I must know myself first in order to know my depression (or happiness, or any other feeling of mine). So let me first find out who I am.

With this awareness, attention changes tracks from the vicious circle of depression to the purposive pursuit of self-enquiry. Yet, it may not be simple to wean the mind from its indulgence in depression. Sometimes, if the canker has taken deep root in the system, even spraying the medicine of self-enquiry may not suffice. Then the very soil has to be changed. One must firmly excavate the sick earth of depressive thoughts and re-plant one's spiritual life in the soil of faith and cheer. For, faith alone can re-infuse courage. Unshakable faith in the Master's constant affirmation that self-enquiry will purify the mind and take one back to the source, that self-enquiry can be pursued in every situation, in fact, that it must be a constant companion, this faith alone will enable us to shake off negativity with confidence. "What if I am unfit? " we will then be able to ask of ourselves. "The pursuit of self-enquiry will purify me. Bhagavan says it will, what greater assurance do I need? May be I am even unaware that I am travelling and this vehicle given by the Master would have carried me in its sure, unhurried pace and suddenly I will awake and find my Self, the Kingdom of Bliss. So let me be of good cheer as He has bid me be and cling to the hope that is self-enquiry."

And joy must be experienced not in the possibility of attaining a distant goal, however exalted, but in every moment of the journey itself.

"Take the black-gram, Ego-self,...
And grind it in the quern,

The wisdom-quest of 'Who am I?'
 ...In the heart-mortar place the dough,
 And with mind-pestle inward turned,
 Pound it hard with strokes of 'I', 'I',...
 Work away, untiring, steady, cheerful.'

– Appalam Song,
 Sri Ramana Maharshi

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Fascinating are Nature's devices to protect her kind. Every living creature is so constructed in body as to enable adaptation and survival in its own special environment. While the Siberian tiger has a thick coat of fur to face the extreme cold, its cousin sports a fine silken coat in the warmth of Bengal. And the hair on animals in the equatorial forests, daily doused with rains, has its own unique features. The equatorial ape doesn't have to worry as to how he's going to be able to climb trees when his hands are wet and slippery with rain. His forearm hair, growing upwards, prevents the rain from dripping down to his hands. And mammals in temperate climates have winter wear and summer wear. In winter they don their heavier, more furry coats, and shed the excess hair to remain cool in summer. Ducks and swans are waterproof! Their feathers are kept oiled by fat glands near their tails. So they can take off gracefully, unhindered by the weight of soggy feathers. With ease they fly away into the horizon, their water touched, oil painted feathers glistening in the sun. That's why we rarely see a duck coming out of water and giving itself a shake, sending a spray of water droplets all around as a dog would do. The adaptation of the camel to desert life is a familiar fact in our mental encyclopaedia. But we may not know that the ermine changes its coat from white in winter to brown in the summer to match his environment. Closer home, observable in all our gardens, is the chameleon, green amidst leaves and brown as it descends to the bark of a tree, switching on natural camouflage with unthinking immediacy.

What Nature naturally endows the living world with, the mind takes to itself as its own quality. The mind, or the root of the mind, the 'I' - thought, is as adaptable, as malleable to protect its own existence as any specimen of the physical universe. One could even say that the mind is more flexible. The chameleon only changes colour, a horse its coat of hair, but the mind is capable, in time of need, to change its entire identity, name, form and all. The mind has the great advantage over the natural world of having no fixed shape to call its own, thus, it can at will take on any shape. There is no limit to its techniques of camouflage, no ceiling on its defence equipment. Even abnormality of the mind and mental disorders are only techniques used by the mind to protect its own identity. When it is unable to face a situation in an adult manner it regresses into childhood, it returns to a time when it was happy and protected, else it retreats completely from the world outside into its own fancies. It might split itself into more than one identity where each identity is unaware of the other (or others) and all the new identities fulfill desires and longings which the original identity is afraid of indulging in. All these are 'abnormal' reactions of the mind to preserve its own identity. Among these 'defence mechanisms' most are used even by 'normal' people, though of course, on a less pronounced scale and there are also many more varieties of defences. The mind also defends itself, its own tendencies, with wish fulfilling dreams or day- dreams. It always assumes a strain of logic that makes its own actions seem the most sound, rational and along the correct lines. And it can with equal alacrity offer exactly the opposite strain of logic whenever it suits it to do so.

It is not surprising that the mind is such an adept at disguising itself for self-preservation. For, the mind is a conglomeration of thoughts clustered around, all linked to the I -thought. And the 'I' - thought itself is a link between consciousness and matter. Bhagavan explains that it is the bridge which identifies the unlimited, unborn consciousness of the Self with the limited body which by itself is only inert matter. The very essence of the 'I' - thought is this sense of identification that is superimposed on existence, on consciousness. As the 'I' -thought is thus an 'identity', it assumes

as its own all the qualities of that with which it identifies. Thus, it believes itself to be the limited, material body, and experiences as its own all the trials and tribulations, as also the thrills and pleasures of the body. It is natural, therefore, that it also makes as its own the body's temperament of adaptation for survival. Besides, the mind also is deluded that it is an independent entity, its own source of consciousness, forgetting the source, the Self from which it derives consciousness. While the body adapts itself because Nature, in her kindness, has given it the spontaneous ability to do so, the mind adapts itself of its own will in order to sustain its sovereignty. The disguises that it dons are therefore more powerful, more subtle and sometimes near impossible to discern.

Depression and proliferation of thoughts, negative and positive, are the mind's form of aggression against attack. They are like the snake raising its hood, like the porcupine pricking up its quills, the dog baring his teeth or the cheetah poised to pounce. They constitute the obvious forms of defence which the mind employs to sustain its identity against the onslaught of self-enquiry. But there are other techniques equivalent to camouflage. The 'I' -thought hides itself in numerous guises. It may appear as the subtle ego of achievement the satisfaction of self-control, the ego of intellect, the pride of devotion, the complacency at progress, even the pride of humility. The ego is adept at assuming the form of every activity and every non-activity. When 'active' it attaches itself to the spirit of activity, it revels in being quick, efficient. The danger is greater, not less, when the activity is rendered as service to the Lord, for, then the ego could take the subtle aspect of being His servant, there could even arise an ego of selflessness. If there is non-activity, the ego wallows in its sense of detachment, in its ability to stay without activity.

What a depressing thought! For our every attempt to subdue it, to sublimate it, the ego has a fresh trick up its sleeve and ever surprises us by ambush. When we least expect its presence, it overtakes us by its most devious tactics. If any course we take could well meet with potential failure, what alternative remains but

to be disheartened? But no, to fear failure is only one more of the snares the ego prepares. On the other hand there is one weapon the ego dreads, the Brahmastra, the weapon of self-enquiry. And, surely though perhaps gradually, it retracts, retreats inward towards its source. It does not suffice, therefore, to use this weapon of self-enquiry once in a blue-moon. At every turn the ego must be pursued with self-enquiry, relentlessly. Its every posture, every mask, must be stripped off by constantly questioning it. Who is it that is serving? Who is it that is active ? Who humble? Who detached ? Who efficient ? Who creative? Who is this I? For every identity that the 'I' - thought assumes it must be countered with the attack, 'Is not this also an identity? Then who is the 'I' at the root of this identity? Who am I?' Attention must be constantly focussed on the root of the 'I' - thought, attempt ever be to isolate it and turn it back to its source. All its disguises must be unearthed, ferretted out, smoked out as bees from a hive until it remains absolutely alone, and unable to withstand the scrutiny, falls headlong back into its source, the Self.

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How many guises of the ego did we count ? A hundred ? Well, we were wrong. We forgot the hundred and first. But no, our enumeration was far greater, we counted right upto two hundred and fifty. Unfortunately, we were still wrong. We forgot the ego's two hundred and fifty first disguise. Because, just when we feel that we are familiar with all its tricks, and are all prepared to tackle it, up it comes with a new one. How then are we to know whether it has really come to its strength's end ? Or will it continue to haunt us with hundred-fold vigour like the legendary demon, Raktabeeja ? In battle, if he was wounded, he would bleed, and if he bled, from every drop of his blood that touched the ground would rise another Raktabeeja. So, there would be not one but a hundred Raktabeejas to battle against. While the ego has its sway it remains content as itself, but the moment one turns attention to it, it assumes a hundred disguises, each and every one a different form of itself, it becomes the hundred Raktabeejas!

But then, we have already decided not to despair. For that Raktabeeja there came Maha Kali, as his blood dripped she drank it, so that not a drop fell to the ground and not one Raktabeeja arose, until, cornered alone, the original had to face destruction. For the ego-demon, the Kali is self-enquiry, swallowing up its disguises, cutting them away before they can drop to the ground and take root and sprout into yet another identity; nipping them in the bud as it were. We have already decided, that as every guise is donned we will tear the mask away by putting the new identity to the test of self-enquiry, by asking, 'Is this also not another identity? Then, for whom is this identity? It is my identity - but, who am I ?' Thus, the ego is unable to escape through camouflage. It is no use now to wear a white fur coat and merge with the snowy background like the Arctic white fox, for, we have found special equipment which can discern shades of white and see its white as different from that of the surroundings. The ego has now truly lost all its masks. It is defenceless and it is convinced that in another moment it will be shot dead, well and truly finished.

Being extraordinarily clever, the ego also realises that at this point aggression will not help. There is the weapon of alert self-enquiry ready at hand to cow it down. It knows it must act and act quickly if it is to live. But there seems to be absolutely no means for survival, no escape route. 'Alright', says the ego, 'If I am to die, I will kill myself rather than fall at the hands of the enemy'. So saying, it falls down, dead and absolutely inert! and we can celebrate our victory, exulting in the pride of having so easily conquered the prey not a single thought now disturbs the mind, - good, bad, indifferent - nothing. All is quiet on the ego-front, poor thing is dead after all.

But did we say 'quiet'? Ah! There's the snag. It's better to examine the kill a little more carefully before allowing for jubilation. We must not forget that the ego is not a candidate for suicide. Perhaps many of us have not heard of a little animal of America called the opossum or, more popularly, possum. But the ego certainly knows of that creature and is familiar with its habits. Possum. Does that word ring a bell? Yes, there's a phrase in the

English language, 'playing possum', which means 'pretending to be dead'. And that's precisely what the ego is doing, pretending that it is dead ! It has played its final trick, the trump card, and for a while it has got away with it too. The ego, or the mind, is in a state of false quietude, which Bhagavan calls 'mano-laya' as opposed to 'mano-nasha' or destruction of the mind.

The question naturally would be, 'How is one to distinguish between the two? How is one to recognise this last trick of the ego?' The answer is that for one thing, there is only absence of thoughts in this false-quiet, not the vibrant joy of Self- awareness which must result when the 'I' - thought is really destroyed. Secondly, the sense of identity is still not lost in this quietude. There is the awareness 'I am quiet'. Hence, 'I' is now identified with quietness instead of with an externalised thought. In this sense, the absence of thought is itself a thought, though, of course, of an extremely subtle kind (which is what deludes us into thinking there is no thought at all). Thirdly, this mental - state, for it is also only a mental state, leaves one unchanged. One is absolutely the same before and after the experience of this laya. There is no greater calm, joy and love reflected in life after awakening from laya. Therefore, this quietness must also be tackled with the enquiry, 'For whom is this quietness?' and the natural answer, 'For me' countered with the persistent attack, 'Who am I ?' If one does so, then its very last attempt to save itself proving futile, the ego has to dissolve in the Bliss of the Self.

"Control of the mind is of two kinds,
Its lulling and its destruction.
A lulled mind will rise again,
But not the one destroyed."

– Upadesa Saram, V. 13,
Sri Ramana Maharshi



The very last attempt of the ego to save itself is mano-laya or false quietude. When this final veil is drawn the ego has none

other to cover its naked shame and rushes headlong into the Self for sanctuary.

But there it does not abide. Again it returns to its habitual sway, again to the relative world of identity, of thoughts and more thoughts. And so, again it must be faced with self-enquiry, once more turned back upon itself. The very same defences may repeat themselves, in new forms or old. The wheels of over- activity and inactivity, of pride and depression, may once more begin to turn in apparently never-ending cycles.

Yet, it is no longer the same. For, even if the ego has once dipped into the Self, the taste of that joy will remain at least as a misty impression to draw it back. Consciously or, sometimes, inspite of itself, the ego will turn inward asking, 'Please sir, may I have some more ?' Some more of that indescribable bliss, unlike any it has tasted in all its realms of sovereignty. It will begin to hanker after inwardness. And, utilising this new desire (for, it is very much a desire, only, to re-experience the bliss of the Self and thus, the most worthwhile desire), if one adds the impetus of self-enquiry, the ego will let go its renewed linkages with identity with far greater ease than it earlier did. It will now be almost prepared to relinquish its independence in favour of a kingdom of bliss.

This is by no means the time to sit back and relax, satisfied that the ego has at last loosened its hold on identity. With much effort, after beating and kneading and pounding, the clay has become soft and is ready to be moulded into any shape the potter would endow on it. If now he sits back, then, alas ! the clay will again dry up and harden and crack. It will then be from the very beginning that he must begin, again pound and beat and knead. Would it not be sad to waste all that effort once put in ? True, effort once put in will certainly have its effect, no effort will be totally wasted. But much of the result will fade. So, the home stretch is where we must be most alert, giving all our energies to self-enquiry, cashing in on the inward mood of the ego to establish it more and more firmly in that experience. To quote Bhagavan's example, just when the cow that is used to feeding on other's pastures is being

lured back to its own by promise of rich grass and fodder, if suddenly one day the master fails to provide it with the tasty food, it will again rush back to its wonted ways. Whenever there is the inclination to do self-enquiry, it must immediately be done. Even if one be in the midst of some work, if it be possible one can lay it aside and use the valuable mood. If it is not possible to stop that job on hand, one can attempt self-enquiry along with the work and let it continue as an undercurrent.

Through repeated dips into the Self, the experience must be strengthened until, at last, Self-abidance becomes steady and natural. Then the Bliss of Awareness shines forth unbroken. The ego, the separate identity is no more, it has merged as a river into the sea. And what remains is the sea in all its immense majesty. Is the river 'dead', lost forever ? Yes and no, for it is really the sea that is re-discovered, and the river is the sea. Strange it then would seem that the river, ever running towards the sea, its only goal, should have run across the country, meandering away, losing itself in sands, flooding plains, dancing to its tunes as if it had nothing at all to do with the sea. So, the ego has its reign of identity while always it is in conscious or unconscious search of its true home, the Self. When this search is made conscious through self-enquiry and the ego is tempted with the joy of dips into the Self and assurance of vast bliss, then the merger may be any minute. But till that minute vigilance is the watchword. Eternal vigilance, it is said, is the price of truth. The search is not, however, eternal (though it might seem so when one is disheartened). What is asked for is constant vigilance till the 'I' - thought is dissolved in the Ocean of Nectar, the very Self.

CHAPTER XXIX

BEHOLD THE BRILLIANCE

"The yogi who, discarding external objects
 Restraining mind and breath,
 Holds you deep within the Heart,
 Beholds you, the light, Brilliant Aruna Lord,
 And rises to great heights.

— Arunachala Pancharatnam, V. 4,
 Sri Ramana Maharshi

(*Note:-* The efficacy of breath control and the need for inwardness are reflected on here.)

The little girl stood in the garden intently watching something on a plant. Then she came excitedly running to her mother exclaiming, 'Mummy! There's a tiny green velvet train on that bush! And it has a hundred black velvet eyes on its back. It is eating the leaves'. 'Yes dear', said the mother, who had long since ceased to be surprised by caterpillars or to make friends with ladybirds, 'that's a caterpillar' 'No mummy, its not a cat'. 'Not a cat - a Caterpillar'. 'Caterpillar', repeated the child to herself still quite unconvinced as to the suitability of the name. However, she had soon added the caterpillar to her list of friends and worried her mother with a constant report of its activities which consisted primarily of the feeding and fattening variety. 'Mummy, caterpillar never goes to school. He never does any work, he only eats and eats and grows fat. Why should I go to school?' 'Because you don't want to eat even when I ask you to, would you eat all the time?' And thus the friendship grew until one day the girl came running to her mother with tears in her eyes, 'Mummy caterpillar is very ill. Somebody has tied him up with white silk thread. "No baby, don't cry,' said the mother 'there's nothing wrong with him. He's only building a house

for himself from silk thread. But you must not break the house to peep at him, then he will die. You can't see him for some days because he'll lock himself inside the house and he won't even leave a window open. Inside he will grow and grow and when he comes out you will see him as a beautiful butterfly. Somewhat consoled the little girl waited and watched, until one day, the cocoon broke and out flew a radiant butterfly which came and sat on her finger fluttering its bright wings. When she had seen it fly away to a far off flower, she happily reported back, 'Mummy, caterpillar has grown and he can fly now, and he isn't green anymore but golden like butter. His wings shine in the sun. Is that why his name has been changed to butterfly?'

The miracle of the butterfly. From slow creeping to free flying, from dull green to vibrant gold, from gorging on leaves to the honey sipping wonder. This miraculous transformation is not the sole privilege of caterpillars. It is open to every one of us. The transformation from a limited identity to the bliss of the Self. But to awaken to the miracle within ourselves, we must, like caterpillars, shut ourselves off from the external world. What does this mean? Not to lock ourselves up in a room, not physical segregation (though that too may be used to an extent whenever the need is felt), for our transformation will not be physical, not physiological. To do away with things 'external' means to do away with the habitual tendency of the mind to be externalised.

What is this wonted practice of the mind? To understand this, one must first know what the mind is. The mind is just a congregation of thoughts constantly humming with activity like a beehive. But like the queen bee in the hive, there is a central thought to the mind, this is the 'I'-thought. Wherever the queen goes, there go the other bees, there the hive is built. Even so, all thoughts are dependent on the 'I'-thought. Hence, Bhagavan simply states that the mind could well be called the 'I'-thought. This 'I'-thought has two aspects to it - the awareness of existence, a sense of 'I am', and a linkage with identity, 'I am so-and-so'. Bhagavan explains that the 'I' - thought derives its existence, its awareness (for awareness and

existence are inseparable) from the Self and this existence it binds to, limits to, identity. The latter, the sense of identification, constitutes the externalisation of the mind and the 'I' - thought is so accustomed to it, to identification, that it cannot exist without it. If it is robbed of its association with other thoughts (which are the million aspects of identity), it slinks back to its source, the Self. Hence, if attention is paid solely to it, to the exclusion of all its associate thoughts, and it is thus driven back to its source and fixed there firmly through continuous self-enquiry, the natural state of the Self shines forth. The secret of the butterfly miracle in our lives is to wrap our caterpillar 'I'-thought in the cocoon of self-enquiry which prevents it from coming into contact with any thought other than itself, isolates it and forces it to merge in its source.

"Discover the real source of the ego,
By exploring within, with keen intellect,
By regulating breath, speech and mind,
As one would do to recover a thing
Which has fallen into a deep well."

— Forty Verses on Reality, V 28
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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A young man had just learnt to drive his car and was going on his first drive on the roads. The instructor sat beside him. 'Remember', said the teacher, 'if you have any problem don't get panicky. Just apply the brakes.' The student started the vehicle and had hardly moved a few yards when he saw another vehicle enter the other end of the road. He applied the brakes. The instructor corrected him saying, 'You don't have to stop now, come to the left of the road and keep going. You can drive slowly.' 'But I'm afraid I'll hit the vehicle', protested the student. 'If you want a road where yours will be the only vehicle you can't ever drive. And if you apply the brake every time you even see a vehicle or an object at a distance, you wouldn't have covered even a mile in hours. You must control the car by steering, through the level of

acceleration. The brakes should be applied only when you are required to come to a standstill or in case of emergency', the instructor explained.

What he said of the brake's role in driving applies to the role of certain mind-control methods in spiritual practice. We have found that in self-enquiry, attention should be focussed on the central thought the 'I' - thought, and on tracking it to the source. In order to do so, the mind must be weaned away from habitual externalisation, it must become inward, like a caterpillar wrapped in a cocoon. Only then can it be transmuted into the pure mind that is completely attuned to the Self. However, while the caterpillar forms an apt example for the miraculous transformation that results from inwardness, the cocoon is delicate and could easily be destroyed. So, the scriptures give examples of harder shells, like that of a tortoise. As the tortoise withdraws into its shell at times of danger so one must withdraw into one's shell if there be danger of externalisation. How is one to 'withdraw' in this manner? By controlling speech and breath, says Bhagavan, as one would do while diving in waters to recover some precious thing fallen in.

To control speech means not just to 'talk less'. It means to cut down on the proliferation of thoughts, to regulate not the mouth but the chattering mind. How can this be done? By using the weapon of self-enquiry itself. When one becomes aware that the mind has strayed into various thoughts, away from the single 'I'-thought, one should put oneself the question, 'For whom are these thoughts?' The answer comes, 'For me'. But, 'Who am I?' When this question, shaking the very foundation of identity, is asked, attention is automatically cut off from other thoughts. When I don't know who I am, how can I have thoughts about me? How can one think about something unknown and that too, think with a great deal of feeling? The very absurdity of the situation would once more turn the mind back to its pursuit of self-enquiry. 'Let me first know who I am, then I can have thoughts about myself', would be the natural, immediate reaction.

Yet, the force of habit being powerful, again attention might wander into the maze of thoughts. Sometimes these mazes are so complex that one may feel non-plussed and unable to check the thought movements. Then, the complementary aid of breath-control could be employed. For, when breath is controlled, so is the mind. Bhagavan explains in Upadesa Saram that on account of the mind and breath rising from the same source the two are linked and control of one controls the other. The yogic method of breath-control involves exercises in specified units of inhalation, retention and exhalation. Suggesting a simpler method of breath control Bhagavan says that watching the breath with the mind steadies the breath. He also uses the examples of brakes to a car, or reins to a horse to illustrate the function of breath control. However, if the brakes are applied constantly or the reins held too tight the car or horse would not move at all. It must be kept in mind while riding that the primary motive is to move towards a given goal and the brake or reins are only systems that must be used as control-aids and not as ends in themselves. Even so breath-control must be used only as an initial aid, or when the mind is too turbulent, for steadying the mind, after which attentive self-enquiry can be pursued.

“The mind becomes quiescent by regulation of breath,
Like a bird caught in a net. This is a means of mind control.”

“The mind stilled by breath regulation
Gets destroyed by pursuing a single thought”

— Upadesa Saram Vs. 11 & 14,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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Devotees were meditating in Bhagavan's presence as he reclined on the couch. One devotee had placed a plateful of fruits before Bhagavan. At some distance sat a group of monkeys eyeing the fruits, and Bhagavan's attendant, Madhavaswami, stood with a stick eyeing the monkeys. He vigilantly guarded the fruit. Some monkeys romped about with usual playfulness, others sat

quiet, apparently lost in their own world. There was silence in the hot, summer afternoon air. Suddenly, Bhagavan with great laughter and excitement exclaimed, 'He has got it! He has got it !' The devotees abandoned their meditation to see what had made Bhagavan so excited and amused that he had sat up and was clapping his hands! There sat the cause of his merriment eating away the fruit that he had won, outwitting Madhavaswami. One monkey had managed to get at the fruit.

Monkeys - the creatures that cannot stay still a moment, ever chattering or jumping, somersaulting, sliding down tree-trunks, climbing up a water-pipe - epitomes of ceaseless activity. So we believe, and, rather unhappily, we refer to our minds as monkeys, worried about our restlessness, using a variety of expressions like 'chattering like a monkey, monkeying around', and so on. But Bhagavan, the unbeatable positivist, draws from the monkey's behaviour not a negative but a positive lesson for us. Given this incident, our interpretation might be, 'When the mind is attentively meditating, an unwanted thought enters like the monkey and gets the better of us' . Bhagavan says the opposite, 'Even though the monkey appears to be playing around, his attention is fully on the fruit and he will not rest until he has got it.'

So, the next time we wish to complain about the 'chattering' of our minds and offer its restlessness as an excuse, let us remember that monkeys are not only over-active, they also pay full attention to what matters most to them. Then we too must, monkey-like, pay attention to the fruit that we seek, to the source of the 'I'- thought. Such attention is real inwardness. It is not a forcing of attention or concentration on the 'I'- thought and its source but spontaneously springs from one's total involvement in the quest.

When one sees the Himalayas for the first time, one stands wonder struck, mouth parted, eyes wide open and even breath stilled by its sheer grandeur. Nobody need coerce one into drinking in its sheer magnificence. Speech and breath are spontaneously silenced. Even so, if one has but a taste of the bliss that is the Self, the mind will naturally be drawn to it repeatedly. All externalities will lose their glitter in the overwhelming brilliance of the Truth.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TRIUMPH

“He who with heart surrendered to you
Beholds for ever you alone
Sees all things as forms of you
And loves them as none other
Than the Self, O Aruna Hill,
Triumphs, because he is immersed in you.”

– Arunachala Pancharatnam, V. 5,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

(Note:- ‘Sees all things’ - ‘all’ has been classified by Sri Ramana in Upadesa Saram as the five elements (earth, water, fire, wind, ether), sun, moon and living beings. Hence, our relationship with these and the manner in which they evoke inwardness has been considered.)

‘April is the saddest month’... when all nature around has shed old and donned new life, man still plods along the dreary desert sands of dead habit.

Old brown leaves blown away, tender pink leaves have sprouted, flowers are blossoming - it is Spring. And Spring, in North India, is symbolised by the colourful festival of Holi. The colours and laughter and playfulness emulate the vibrant gaiety of Spring-decked Nature. And the warm bonfires of Holi night, eating away dead winter leaves and all old, useless things, point to the coming revival, renewal of life.

When will we have the courage? When the courage to let dull habits perish in the bonfire of self-enquiry? When the courage to revel in the vibrant, exuberant awareness, the awareness of

the in-shining Self? When the strength to break from paralysing routine? When will we gather the strength?

How sad is an existence where even self-enquiry is mere habit. It is a desperate state of affairs. Day passes into night and night again brightens into day... Brightens? One wonders, for, there seems to be no brightness. No, not in this repetitive monotony is the brightness of every moment lived, fully lived.

Do we recognise how every minute of life is linked with the inner glory, the inward way? Sunrise is a reminder that another day has begun, the ego has risen again from its slumber in the Self and associated itself with the body. Have we ever really observed a sunrise? Have we ever watched the ego as it rises from the silence of the Self and like the twittering of the birds, the morning sounds, the mind begins to chirp, then chatter...? Have we watched the Sun set and the serenity of the night take over? Have we merged with the ego's merging in the cool gracious moonlight of the Self? Have we watched the sea roll on to the sands, on and on and on, like one thought rolling into another, on and on to the sands of life? Have we observed the miracle of a bud blossoming, a child's smile, the dancing peacock? Have we allowed the blossoming of the Self into the fullness of life, the dancing joy of knowing that He lives, He lives within our Heart?

Daylight and the roses, moonlight and the dark palms, the prancing deer, the slinking jackal - the ear for music, the nose's aroma, blessed, blessed sight - one and all are reminders, reflections of the inner Glory. If we but tune our work, our every activity to this wavelength, where is there room for routine? An eternal melody rings.



Walk towards the sea and the sea rolls towards you. The beach is cluttered with people and things, yet there is always solitude by the sea. Waves tumbling, rushing, laced with white foam. One wave washes your legs, drinks the sand beneath your feet and

returns, diverts its comrade moving towards you. Together they turn back into the sea. But another friend persists, he is eager to meet you, warmly circles your legs. He too will not wait long, though, for the call of the sea is irresistible. Must be more so to the wave which belongs there. Out at sea : the grey fishing boats, the sea itself, a deeper, clearer blue, the darkening horizon; the near hypnotic silence of the roaring waves, the softness of the sand, the vastness of the sea and the sky above, the same everywhere, unperturbed, watching, ever watching.

The mind naturally turns inward here, quiet, quieter, not sleep, but silence, near silence anyway. Not void, but fullness, the fullness of the sea, the eternal rhythm of life awaits to awake within. Take a walk sometimes besides this sea and enquire about the nature of the mind. There, overpowered by the stillness and the sound, it will not wish to chatter, it will turn within, give up its false identity and remain, ever moving, ever still, fathomless like the sea.

Take a stroll anytime on the sands of life, by the ocean of the Self, maybe taking an occasional dip. And one day acknowledge the magnetic pull, abandon yourself as a wave and be the ocean.

“To dwell without thought upon your boundless nature is to lose one’s separate identity like a doll of sugar when it comes in contact with the ocean and when I come to realise who I am, what else is this identity of mine but you; You who stand as the towering Aruna Hill ?”

– Eight Verses on Arunachala, V.3,
Sri Ramana Maharshi



Blessed rain. Falling in thin grey drizzles, slanting down on the tar road or in big blobby drops, falling almost like hail upon shoulder and head. Rousing the earth smell, fresh, ever fresh. Awakening green in leaves and trees.

Drops shining on thousands of leaves. Drops like the morning dew, the taste of clear, pure water, dissolving at a touch and trickling down the mid-rib of the leaf to reach the tip, tremble, dangle precariously, fall and mingle with the dust, rising again as the aroma of the earth.

Drops nodding on fresh bloomed roses or cooling the dreams of rosebuds, yet unawakened. Drops forming circles in ever growing puddles, or with the wind, drops running along the pavement, skimming over the slabs and hopping over the cracks, playing hopscotch.

Rain - gushing in muddy rivulets down slopes into drains, or waiting in patient puddles where the road has no slope. Waters divided by cycle spokes uniting once more in their downward run. Children putting out little hands from autorikshaws to catch the falling rain. Vehicles making furrows along watery roads. Office-goers getting drenched, cursing the unpredictable weather, waiting in bus-stops with kerchiefed heads - Rain.

Puddles for school children to remove their feet from the encasement of shoes and stockings and wriggle their toes, splash around with cool freedom. Puddles for children to rush out and begin their paper- yacht Olympics. Puddles reflecting the green trees, the brown bark and the sky now blue again specked with cloud.

The sky's tears that the earth may smile. Like tears of compassion that leave the mind pure, crystal clear, like tears of love that are full of joy. Like a river cleansing as it flows, the rain of Grace...

“Before your fire (of jnana) burns me to ashes,

Pour down on me your rain of Grace, O Arunachala !”

— Marital Garland of Letters, V. 55,
Sri Ramana Maharshi



The sky has many moods, many moods and many attires. One wonders at its varied wardrobe, I think the sky never repeats a dress. Of course, it often wears similar colours, but always in different designs. There is the startling clear-washed blue, with varying depths of colour, sometimes worn plain, sometimes trimmed a little with soft cotton cloud, sometimes full of streaming white clouds. There is the night velvet, with just a silver moon motif or studded with silver sequins, twinkling on the black. The joyous violet pink, tinged with rainbow shades is worn to greet the sun or to see him off at the end of day. Then, also the dull grey worn for raindrops or the dark stormy grey lined with efflorescent silver....

I wonder if behind all these alluring costumes, we ever really see the sky, or, is there really any sky to see? Are there only clouds and stars and light and dark and the infinite combination of these and no sky at all, only clothes but no wearer ? Above clouds, there are more clouds, flying in the sky there is more sky. We cannot touch it, smell it, hear it, taste it, sometimes, we wonder if we can even see it. Yet, it is all around us, the sky.

Lie on your back on a rooftop or a hillside, so that all other objects are removed from your vision. Then, you see the sky, no, you sense the sky, you experience it - its naked vastness, everywhere around, absolutely unperturbed. There the sky enters into you and you know that the sky begins right from where you are. But you cannot see it near you just as you cannot see your own face. You can see the sky only at a distance, but you can perceive the sky nearby; recognise that the clouds and stars are far away, but the sky, here, there and beyond, limitless, the sky is indeed space within and without...

“Annamalai, the Self,...

The Being which contains, reveals, perceives

The inner sky that shines within the Heart

When the mind free of thought turns inward,

Annamalai appears as my own Self,

True, Grace is needed; Love is added,

Bliss wells up.”

— Anma Viddai, V.5,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

The soft glow of the candle flame is yellow without, blue within, casting a perfect small circle of black on the floor, swaying gently with the flame as it eats into wax and wick. So soft indeed is the flame that one feels almost like touching it, stroking its edge with the hand. But oh, the touch of fire! That is the same in a small candle flame or a blazing bonfire. Fire, for us, is immediately associated with its heat. Fire burns. Yes, of course, fire also warms – life giving warmth.

There is another fire, the fire of death. Chugging along the Ganges at Varanasi in a motorboat after dusk has darkened the sky, there persists a horizon of light, of intermittent fires consuming dead bodies - the fires of numerous crematoriums.

As all life is created from the Self, sustained by the Self and withdrawn into the Self, so is fire. Fire - the mysterious power of creation, preservation and destruction – the heat of the mother's womb, the fire which cooks our food, the pyre which consumes us, and the fire which symbolises our festivities..

Deepavali has its fireworks and lamps - tiny fires dancing along compound walls and terrace walls, house after house. Christmas has its candles twinkling on pine trees. Bogi and Holi have their bonfires, warming hands, warming hearts - fire the symbol of life, fire the joy giving light.

A strange thing this, the seeing of fire. For, we see fire by it's own light. The might of the ocean, the movement of wind, the silent mountain are all at night but one mass of darkness, but fire is alive. Fire is not just warmth but light. Fire lights our eyes that they may alight on all things else. It is the Eye of the eye, and it lights itself, self-luminous, as the Self lights the entire universe and shines of itself-

“You are the sight within the eye and without eyes you see,
You are the all-seeing witness.

Who can see you but yourself, O Arunachala!"

— Marital Garland of Letters, V. 15
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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Who is it you cannot see, but know has arrived? Who is it knocking on the door in the dark of night ? "Mr. Wind, Esquire". But on a windy day you tell your child, 'See the wind is blowing' and he asks 'Where is he, mummy?.' How will you show him the wind? 'Look, look. There in the tree, he's hiding there and pushing the leaves. Up there, see, how he's driving the clouds. Close your eyes and he'll come and touch your cheeks, but if you open your eyes, he'll disappear. He doesn't want to be seen.' 'Oh, he's playing hide-and seek, is it?' And the child is happy trying to spot the unseen wind.

The wind is heard as it is seen, by the contact sounds it makes with different objects, rustling through leaves, roaring on the sea, clattering in windows ,hissing, gushing, whistling, knocking, The wind has more sound than shape...

The sound of the wind - all sound is of the wind; the human voice, the wind passing through vocal chords, the flute's melody, the harmonium range, the bird's song, animal noises - wind, all wind.

And the smell of the wind - may be the perfume of the flowers or the stench of garbage, the aroma of food cooking, the baby smell in the soft hair by a child's ear, the smell of petrol filling the nostrils. Any smell it chances upon, the wind carries with it.

The wind is a strange element, one element which does not still, does not in-turn the mind. The wind has no shape, no sound, no smell. Yet it has a being assuming any shape, any sound, any smell, beautiful and ugly, happy and sad, destructive and gentle... The wind is the element of the mind itself..

In fact mind and breath (another form of wind) are linked. Bhagavan points out that they both have their source in the Self, and control of breath helps in controlling the mind. So it may be that the racing wind fails to quieten the mind.

But the wind in its infancy, as the gentler breeze, is soothing, softening. Again perhaps as the mind which when powerful is disquieting but as it mellows, allows the Self to take over, cooling our entire being. It becomes the wind of quietude, the wind of grace.

“If association with sages is obtained, to what purpose are the various methods of Self-discipline? Tell me, of what use is a fan when the cool, gentle south wind is blowing ?”

– Supplement to Forty Verses, V. 3,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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The mountain has its magic, its mystery and its magic. Still, imperturbable. Even a cannon can only cause a scar down its face, hardly a scar, a beautiful trace, down which rivulets run in the rains. Dry brown, hard rock, the mountain is of the earth, earthy. Yet, green overnight with a few showers, grass and bush and tree, ‘leaf-giving’, sprouting, as from nowhere. The magic of the mountain. Comrade of the sky.

Nightfall on the mountains - the sudden setting of the sun, darker shilhouettes against a dark sky, tiny points of life, of light making a semblance of civilisation; soundless, totally soundless, an occasional call from slope to slope, the lapping of a lake or gushing of a river down the vally, heard along with the silence.

Standing on the peak, even of a small mountain, a huge hill, the clouds at one’s feet, but feet on solid earth, clouds ringing around, damp with rain, rain below and around, but we, above the rain, hearing in the stillness, the mountain speak. The mountain has its own language. Always the language of silence, but sometimes fear inciting, sometimes joy bringing, rarely tear - stirring, peace-filling. The mystery of the mountain.

This rare mystery is the mystery of the Red-Mountain, Arunachala. Hill it may seem to the casual glimpse. But one who has lived by it and loved it knows that Arunachala holds the

language of every mountain, more. It contains the grandeur and the gentleness, the awe-inspiring majesty, the lovable quiet, the hard rock, the green lush, streams, cataracts and birds in season, silence always. The Silence of the Red-mountain is deeper than that of any other, the Power indescribable, the pull irresistible...

“I have discovered a New Thing! This Mountain-magnet arrests the antics, the externalised life, of anyone who but thinks of it once, turns him towards itself, pulls him in, makes him perfectly still as Itself and consumes him. Understand this wonder and save yourselves ! Such is this mighty Aruna Hill, the life-destroyer shining in the Heart.”

– Decad on Arunachala, V.10,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

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The magnificent sun, the tender moon. The breath-taking loveliness of sunlight casting an outline of gold behind a mountain top, dancing with dust particles in beams into crevices, cracks, windows and doors of human habitation or casting mysterious shadows on undiscovered forest floors.

Golden yellow it rises in the morning, bringing life to all things. The alertness and beauty of dawn. Birds begin to sing, dew drops twinkle on grass and flowers, plants come to life unfolding their leaves, and the mind awakes.

The sun, by which is life on earth, is too bright for the human eye to see in all its glory, we must see it as it rises, or as it sets, or behind a cloud, turning it into molten silver, or refracted in raindrops forming the seven-coloured bow across the sky. The magnificent sun.

But the night-owl blinks at the sun, and the blue lily wilts in the overwhelming heat, to blossom again at the cool touch of the moon. Silver-blue it rises in the evening, the peace and beauty of nightfall. The moon plays with the clouds or shines from a clear sky,

sending shafts of silver across a black ocean or slightly silhouetting a mountain peak. The trees rustle in moonlight, silver anklets twinkling, tinkling on them. The tender moon.

The light of the moon is not different from that of the sun, but it is gentler and the eye can see it, face it. For those too weak to drink in sunlight directly, too weak to face the brilliance of Knowledge, is the tender moonlight of Grace.

“Arunachala, O moon of grace, with your rays as with cool fingers, touch my heart and open the nectar mouth within.”

– Marital Garland of Letters, V. 29,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

The sun is the blazing Fire of Knowledge, the moon, the cooling downpour of Grace.

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The real Sun, the fanciful Moon. The sun on his ‘tour’ of earth and other planets, sunshine travelling many billions and trillions of kilometres daily to spill light into every sleepy window, awakening the world, antidote to Wee Willie Winkie... The moon, she plays vagabond, days there are, she will give of herself fully, and others too when she vanishes from sight...

The piercing brilliance of the sun, the hand rushes to cover the eyes or draw a parasol shade between itself and the fiery light, the bird goes pecking for its worm, the photosynthesis factory chugs with hectic activity and the 9-to-5 man moves with automaton precision from suburban trains and trams and city buses into important looking buildings. Undaunted by this marathon clockwork that it has set in motion, the sun shines on.

The moon awakens dreams, fairy queens and elves dancing on dewy grass or travelling down moonbeams to float on the foam of waves, enchanted castles, sweet dreams or mysterious nightmares, and sleep. The sun-world of wakeful intellect, the

moon-world of dreamy imagination. All things too hard by the truth of daylight appearing soft, mellowed, almost beautiful. All things simple and accepted by day, assuming weird meanings, lurking shadows, eerie sounds. Illusions both lively and fearsome, by the playful light of the moon.

The sun is the true light, the Self of Awareness, the moon the reflected awareness. The sun always is, the sun always shines, of itself, and makes all things, therefrom, shine.

The moon reflects the sun's light, sometimes more and sometimes less (as it appears to us in its waxing and waning) as the mind, more or less intuned, reflects to that degree the Awareness, the Light of the Self.

“O Self Supreme, O Mount of Light,

Whose spreading rays engulf all things,

Shine as the Sun which makes the heart lotus blossom.”

— Arunachala Pancharatnam, V.1,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

“The glance of deathless sages who

live radiant like a hundred suns

Saves those who bask in it and makes

them too immortal, giving them soon

Their own supreme awareness”

— Garland of Guru's sayings, V. 1127
Sri Muruganar

For, the mind merging in the Self becomes as the moon in daylight and the Silent Sun, the Self alone, is.

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Have you sometimes, on an evening, watched the birds flying home? The green parrots streaking across to the accompaniment of their own shrill music, the crows moving in cacophony, yet others in silent white, streamlined against the darkening sky...

Have you seen the rainbow hues of dragonflies, hovering over tall whispering grass; observed the lizard, now absolutely still, now in a lightning flash catching a prey few feet away, movement so swift, there is no movement ?

Have you felt fish nibbling your toes in the shallows of a river as they dart to and fro and jump a few feet high out of the water trying to catch the bread crumbs you throw to them? Have you heard a cow moo from her grazing ground and only her calf answer from the cow shed many yards away ?

Have you sipped the honey from the tiny flowers that in a thousand colours cover the hillside, luring the blue-black bees ? Have you smelt the soft head of a baby? Heard the orchestration of frogs on a cloudy night? Laughed at the scorpions dance? Tinged at the breath of a baby elephant down the back of your neck ? Stood transfixed as the kingfisher makes a precise nose- dive?

Have you seen rage in the fangs of a tiger, fear in the feverish swiftness of a gazelle, the fascination of a python, the hypnotic movement of a cobra hood, the intelligence in the eyes of a monkey?

Have you observed the special gaits of the humans around you, caught their multiple expressions, the twisting of their nose and lips, the particular gestures of their hands, heard the timbre of their voices? Have you sensed their pain without seeing their tears, have you read the laughter in their eyes?

Have you felt the pulse of life ? Life in all its varied forms, the expressions of consciousness, of awareness, the pain and hunger, the joy and silence, the movement and stillness in an ever changing, ever moving, yet, ever perfect rhythm. The pulse which never misses a beat.

If ever you have felt that pulse, at any moment, and known it to be an expression of the Lord, and responded to it in that awareness, at that moment have you truly worshipped Him. So Bhagavan says :

“Worship of God in His eight-fold form, understanding that He is so manifest, is proper worship of Him.”

– Upadesa Saram, V. 5,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

To see him alone in the five elements, the sun, moon and all living beings and to love them as such is true worship, says Bhagavan.

Is he not the sun of blazing Knowledge; the cool moon of Compassion, the perfect, unmoving mountain of Silence; the fire of brilliance, the ‘I’ - throb in the Heart, the wind of Life, of inwardness; the ocean of Nectar ? Does he not shine as awareness, as consciousness in every living being, in us ? Is it not strange that we can look without or within and yet are not filled with the blissful presence of Ramana, the very Self ? Open to us is the triumphal path he has shown.

Let us cut asunder every veil that shrouds the light that is Arunachala Ramana

“The Supreme One who sports as consciousness
In the Hearts of all beings beginning with Hari
Is Arunachala Ramana.
With melting love dive within and enter the Heart Cave,
Behold with wonder filled eyes the infinite Space,
True Awareness.

– Miscellaneous Poems, V. ix,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FIVE GEMS IN A BRACELET

When one looks upon a great tree that blooms and bears fruit a multitude of reactions gush forth in the mind. One may think of the beauty of the flowers, dwell on the fullness of the fruit, be rapt in the diving of parrots into its hollow, the scampering of squirrels on its myriad branches, or an untidy crow's nest. One may see the delicate pattern that the leaves form against the sky, or the weathered strength of the trunk and bark. In this manner I have been looking at Sri Ramana's Arunachala Pancharatnam broadly commenting on these verses, keeping them as a frame of reference to dwell on certain aspects of his teachings.

However let us move back a little and see the whole tree, let us look at the five verses as a single unit. Recognising the glory of Arunachala and with a prayer for Grace, when one knows Arunachala to be the basis of all things, dancing as the Self in the Heart, and traces the 'I'-thought back to this source through vigilant self-enquiry, with mind and breath controlled, one shines as an exalted yogi who loves all things as the Self. This is the essence of Bhagavan's 'Five Gems on Arunachala'. The verses are interpreted as Bhagavan's explication of the four paths to Self-knowledge, the ways of Action (Karma), Austerity and Union (Yoga), Devotion (bhakti) and Knowledge (jnana).

The first verse, that turns to Arunachala, the 'Ocean of Nectar', in wonderment and love, is a prayer for Grace. This epitomises the way of bhakti, of the devotee placing all responsibility on the Lord, on His Grace. 'By Your Grace alone will my heart lotus blossom, O Arunachala. Then will I be immersed in the vastness of Your Bliss' sings the verse. The next two verses deal with the way of jnana. Arunachala is realised as the Self in which this 'world-picture' is created, on which sustained, and into which dissolved. The Self is

not some abstract entity but shines within every one of us, sports in every being as the Heart. The third verse carries Bhagavan's special stamp as it explains his method of self-enquiry. The traditional way of jnana, which Bhagavan explains in the second verse, is constant recollection of one's own non-dual nature as the all-pervading Self. Bhagavan provides an invaluable clue to experience this Self-abidance, to make it one's own, in his technique of self-enquiry. He clarifies that when one questions the nature of the 'I - thought (the root of identity) which makes one believe one is a limited entity, it falls back into its source, the Self. If it is attentively tracked in this process, it merges there as 'a river in the sea', one abides as the Self. The fourth verse, with its emphasis on control of speech and breath and the renouncing of externalities, is, naturally, seen as the path of austerity that leads to union, the path of yoga. The last verse brings a blend of bhakti and karma, of love and action, in stating that he who surrenders himself to Arunachala sees all things as forms of Arunachala and loves them as such. Herein is implied the way of action as well since one who loves all beings as manifestations of the Lord would spontaneously act in a perfect manner towards all things, yet, with no sense of attachment (because he does not care for them in themselves but only as forms of the Lord).

This is one manner of looking at the five verses, each as an independent unit depicting a specific path to Self-Knowledge, their unity lying only in their common pursuit. This way of looking at the work is like seeing an individual separately as a woman, a daughter, a mother, a wife, or a friend. While these are, indeed, various facets of a person they are by no means clearly separate like cubes of sugar in one box. On the other hand, they all interact upon one another to form a single unit, they are like the various ingredients that go in to make a single dish. Each ingredient is important and may be independently tasted even in the prepared dish. For instance, in sambar, one may say the salt is more, the tamarind and chilli insufficient, and so on. But one cannot segregate the salt or the tamarind or chilli powder from the sambar. And while eating sambar, though one might comment on the proportion of

various ingredients, the experience is of one single dish. One eats not salt and tamarind and various other things put together but sambar. It is the same while approaching Bhagavan's works. Each verse of the 'Pancharatnam' is certainly complete in itself, but Bhagavan has given it to us as one unit, as a prepared dish not as the various ingredients. In understanding the work, therefore, one must strive to understand its unity, strive to grasp the single idea of which the others are explanations and clarifications.

Bhagavan's emphasis is always, not on the multiplicity of approaches but, on the unitary nature of Experience. One cannot ask for a clearer statement of this fact than His own verse

"Abidance of the mind in the Heart (its source) is Action,
Devotion, Union and Knowledge."

— Upadesa Saram V. 10,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

It seems only right, therefore, that one should look upon the 'Arunachala Pancharatnam' also as a description of that One Experience.

The musk deer that carries the fragrance of musk within itself, searches for it everywhere and fails to find it. But when it looks within itself and recognises the presence of the fragrance there, not only has its search ended, but it has found the source of musk to be inseparable from itself. Then, it truly carries the fragrance with itself, and wherever the deer goes there goes the perfume as well. It was so even before, only now the deer is itself aware of this truth. So, when one forgets one's own true nature as the Self that is all-pervading, one must first realise its presence within oneself.

Like the water risen from the sea, falling as rain on land, running in rivers through mountains, into valleys, across plains, the identity, the feeling of 'I' in us, having risen from the Self moves through varied terrain. But as all waters run, ever searching, ever moving towards the ocean, their source, so one is ever in search of one's own source. Our longing for happiness, the yearning for

peace, and desire to know oneself are all expressions of this search. For, happiness and peace spring from the Self, they are the Self, our own natural state.

Only, so long as the search for them is unconscious, it is also likely to be at the wrong places, like the river winding through mountain and plain. But when the search becomes conscious, when one seriously longs to know the truth about oneself, then the Self draws us to itself. It first awakens in us an awareness of its Presence as the Supreme Reality, a recognition that by its Grace we may realise our true nature. Bhagavan's 'Five Gems on Arunachala', therefore, begins with a prayer to Arunachala to help us realise the Truth within, to make the heart-lotus blossom. Having searched in vain everywhere, having knocked at every wrong door, having constantly run away from oneself and lacking the courage to turn within, one is finally defeated and turns to Arunachala for Grace. 'You, Arunachala, who are the Supreme Self, boundless Ocean of Grace, you alone must help me', we pray. With the very prayer comes the recognition of Arunachala as the basis of all things. Simultaneously springs the consciousness that Arunachala is accessible to every one of us, present in every one as the Heart.

It is Grace which makes us conscious of its own Presence and being aware of Grace makes one turn to it more eagerly. Bhagavan has repeatedly emphasised that Grace and effort go hand-in-hand. It is Grace which makes effort possible and gives the right direction to the effort. In turn, effort attunes one to Grace. Thus, when we pray to Arunachala, the Self Supreme, to make the heart-lotus blossom, in His infinite Grace, He gives direction to our effort, He shows the path we must travel to get back to our natural abode. As Arunachala Ramana, He reveals the path of self-enquiry and blesses with the spirit of enquiry. He explains with simple clarity that since the identity has sprung from the Self, it can be traced back to its source. If one asks 'Wherefrom does this 'I' arise?' and then observes the 'I' carefully, unable to bear the undivided scrutiny it will fall back into the source, like the river merging in the sea. Self-abidance would result. When such abidance becomes steady

and natural, one could no more be tricked into the realm of limited identity, of the 'I' - thought. But until Self-abidance is thus steadied, 'inward' must be one's watchword. Though the Self is all-pervading, one must discover it first within oneself. This is important because if the Self is found 'without' it may also be lost, but when it is known to be one's own Self then the awareness ever remains, like the fragrance travelling everywhere with the musk deer. Therefore, one must reject all externalities and with united attention turn within.

Once the 'I' -thought has been completely dissolved in the Self, surrendered to Arunachala, then the Self is known to be not only within but without as well, in all time and space, everywhere, always. Then all beings are known to be forms of Arunachala and all action is worship of Him. One who is thus lost in the bliss of Arunachala is ever victorious, who can comprehend his state?

"Who can understand the state
Of one who has dissolved the ego
And is abiding, always, in the Self?
For him the Self alone is,
What remains for him to do ?"

— Forty Verses on Reality, V. 31,
Sri Ramana Maharshi

Thus, in his 'Five Gems on Arunachala' Bhagavan, as always, not only stresses the unitary Experience, the awareness of Self-abidance, but he also explains the unitary path of self-enquiry. He integrates what are apparently 'four' paths into one, pointing out that they are not really disparate. He clarifies that the unity of various means to Self-Knowledge lies not after attaining the goal but in practice itself. It is bhakti, devotion, and Grace that awaken one's interest in self-enquiry and sustain the effort. Self-enquiry must then be performed with the discipline, the one-pointedness and persistence that are associated with the way of yoga. The resultant attitude is the awareness of unity in all beings and action springing from this awareness. Hence, the 'four' paths are really one and the important thing is to practice ever, untiring, joyously.

“In the Heart Brahman alone shines
As ‘I’-‘I’ in the form of the Self.
Enter the Heart diving in with a questing mind,
With breath controlled,
And abide as That.”

— Sri Ramana Gita, II, 2.

What is surging joy? Something that wells up limitlessly, spontaneously from within. Can we think of this flood tide of happiness as being outside of ourselves? As something we can catch hold of, find or purchase? It is not possible because it is our natural state, our very being, says Sri Ramana. We have merely forgotten, moved away from the exhilaration of that natural bliss. Why? Because of the constant externalisation of the mind. To counter this, to turn the mind inward, Sri Ramana gives the infallible weapon of self enquiry. Through this attention is focussed once more on the source, on the perennial spring of joy. Then that takes over. The inundation of bliss 'swallows' one entirely, says Ramana.

In this book Dr. Sarada explores the technique of self-enquiry and its practical implications. She is the editor of the monthly, 'The Ramana Way'. Her writing is marked by an intuitive understanding of Ramana's teaching and a sure touch in her capacity to communicate it with clarity. She has presented several papers on the teachings of the Maharshi and regularly conducts classes on his works. Here she highlights Sri Ramana's unique approach to other methods as well. The various traditional paths to Self-knowledge also find new meaning in Ramana's teachings.

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