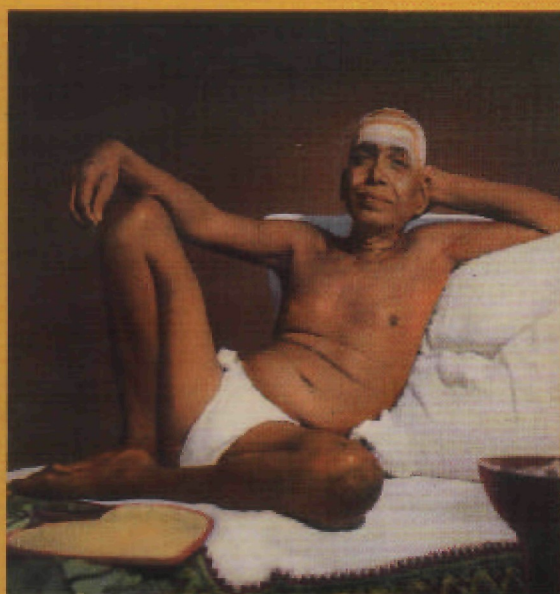


THE
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HIDDEN
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POWER



The Hidden Power

By
A. R. NATARAJAN

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

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Post Office Road, Sanjaynagar, Bangalore - 560 094.

Phone : 3512639

Third Print : 2000

1000 copies

ISBN : 81-85378-45-2

Cover Design :

M. Muralidhara Hegde

Typeset by :

Viswas Services

Bangalore - 560 003.

Printed by :

Modern Process Printers

Bangalore - 560 010.

INTRODUCTION

THE HIDDEN POWER

by
A.R. Natarajan

When we say something is 'hidden' it means it is available but not at present for us. We have to search for it as one would if he knows that a family treasure is buried somewhere in one's paddy field or one's ancestral home. But unlike personal treasures, the power for which we are now looking is a universally available one, to you, to me and to everyone. This makes a lot of difference for it means that it is open to one and all to find this power and to make it one's own.

The power we are referring to is also of a different kind. Usually we associate power with position, political or heirarchical, or that flowing from wealth or learning or excellence in particular fields. Such power is in the hands of a few thousands only. It also has its ebbs and flows. But the power now written about can be harnessed by everyone who is earnest, vigilant, and steadfast in the effort to discover the hidden power.

What is the nature of this power? It is the power of a silent mind, a mind which is alert, alive and yet passive. It is a mind whose calmness, whose repose, whose peace is undisturbed by relationships, by ideas, by the inevitable successes and failures of life. It is a mind which functions without loss of any logic or reason. It is the mind which we have lost and which we have to find.

In any treasure hunt, success depends on the leading clues by following which one can unearth the lost treasure. Otherwise, it would be a wild goose chase. Would it not? It is precisely here that Sadguru Ramana steps in with his various guidelines and his weapon of self-enquiry which is based on his own experience. The advantage of his method is that the path avoids detours, by-lanes, and diversions and takes one straight to the goal.

The first clue which Ramana gives is that one should somehow manage to squeeze in at least a little time for questing, for trying to find out what life is all about. Is there nothing more to life than its daily routines, its hectic holiday schedules, its endless seeking of money, position, and constant effort at pushing ahead at doing one better than the other person? If this idea is instilled into your mind, then, you may take a good look at your topsy-turvy values.

Of what use is it if you conquer the whole world, if your mind is in chaos, if your heart is shrivelled and you cannot even sleep without tranquilisers? If you do not put a brake to the hectic pace of life you have set for yourself, it might lead to an imbalance, overall, in your life. You may have the pride of your bank balance overflowing with funds, of watching the upward graph of the business group and so on. But you might be neglecting your wife, losing touch with your children, becoming friendless and lonely. What indeed is the net gain if as a result of your warped, sectional view you have elbowed happiness out of your life? Hence, Ramana's emphasis on taking things in their stride, on being conscious whether you have purchased anxiety and fear while grasping more than you can handle. This contemplation of fundamental values, of course, should be in the backdrop of

remembering the fact that all effort is in the last analysis only for power, peace and happiness.

The next basic clue of Ramana is to warn against the danger of identifications and excessive attachments. Ramana would say, “Why don’t you act as an actor on the stage or the cashier in the bank? Does either of them identify himself with the role he plays or with the cash he is handling?” After all, life is not made to order. It is a dynamic flow, a divine drama in which you have the option of playing your role well or ill. Each one has a multi-role to play each day, as a boss, as a son or daughter, husband, father, friend and so on. For instance, you cannot dote on your children at the cost of ignoring your parents. A certain degree of detached-attachment needs to be cultivated, being conscious of where to draw the line, to be free from the binding aspects of identifications.

Yet another vital clue Ramana gives is that thought addiction is just as bad as drug-addiction. What does one mean by thought-addiction? One can understand this by posing the question, how would we feel if we do not have thoughts, if we are thought-free? Scared stiff? Wouldn’t we be? This is natural for we associate the power of the mind with its capacity to think fast, and in an orderly manner. To us the mind is the only energy source from which one derives his vitality, and zest for life. For we foist on the mind, the power to reason, infer, discriminate and remember. This universal assumption needs examination if we are to break new ground. One has to go into the question as to whether thinking is possible without the mind. Is there ‘thinking without the mind’? Yes, says Ramana. For, the mind is not the primary energy source. We have wrongly located it there by habit. But

the primary energy source is the fullness of consciousness, the spiritual heart, from which the mind itself derives its energy. It is therefore only a secondary energy source and now it is emaciated, anaemic due to constant loss of energy in the form of a million thoughts.

One should, therefore search for the primary energy source, which is now hidden and untapped. If only one discovers it, one would be suffused with boundless energy and pulsating joy. How does one quest, search, go about to discover the hidden power? Quite obviously one has to get away from the mind loaded and polluted with an overcrowding of thoughts. The task is not easy for the only instrument which one has is the mind itself. Ramana tells us that if you try to deal with the content of the mind you will go under its numerical weight. Hence he gives a technique, a method which enables one to bypass the world of thoughts by paying attention to the subject, the individual to whom this entire thought world relates. One might ask, what is the advantage in doing so? The advantage is fairly obvious for attention can be single focussed instead of being multi-focussed as at present. The single focus makes the mind integral, unitary and its energy is gathered together.

Ramana has explained this clearly as early as in 1900 to one of his earliest disciples Gambiram Seshier (called as Seshayya also). Ramana explained to him that “the enquiry, ‘Who am I’? is the primal means. When thoughts arise due to residual impressions one should restrict the mind from flowing that way and endeavour to retain it in the Self-state. One should be vigilant before thoughts arise. If any room is given, such a disturbed mind will do us great harm. While posing as a friend, like a foe pretending to be a friend it will topple us down.”

The great advantage in questioning the true identity of the thinker, is that one is alert to the rising thoughts and their movement in a thousand ramifications. Caught in the mainstream of thought we are unable to stay with the wanted thought, the required thought. This questioning straightaway stills the mind and the thought momentum is dammed. The mind would cease to play its tricks, its games. Hence Ramana's emphasis on self-enquiry. He told Kunjuswami, who was his attendant for many years, "It is no use saying 'I am serving Bhagavan, I am dusting his bed, I am looking after his needs for so long'. There is no greater service than to be engaged in self-enquiry in all sincerity".

We are used to dividing time into meditation time, office time, leisure time and so on. If only one is able to build into these divisions some effective substratum mechanism which prevents the seepage of mental energy, the ups and downs of the energy levels would not be there. Ramana would sometimes cajole people to practise self-enquiry by emphasising that this is precisely what it does. Once, in 1934 a businessman came from Punjab seeking counsel from Ramana for mental quietude. He wanted to be initiated into some sacred mantra, or form of worship. Ramana advised "Please give only as much time for enquiry as you would for pooja and japa. It would amply repay your efforts. With practice it would operate in the busiest hours". Ramana would also warn that the alternative to "atma-vichara", self-enquiry, is 'Loka-vichara' or worldly involvement. The choice should be obvious.

Though constant vigilance is needed for an uncluttered and free mind, this by itself would not be sufficient. Awareness of the grace of Sadguru Ramana, who is the constant inner guide

on this path, is necessary. One is clearly indebted to him for being the path-finder and helmsman on the way though his 'extravagance of grace' would make it appear that it is he who is indebted to us. The path would be a bed of roses if there is constant remembrance of his unfailing support.

The purpose of this book is to provide some deeper insights into the path and to make its practice easier. The topics have been chosen with this end in view. 'Thinking without the Mind', the very first topic, is intended to make one sit back and question certain basic assumptions and to open up the way to intuitive living. One chapter dovetails into another. The last few chapters deal with surrender, for, as we move along and advance on the path we have to say with Cardinal Newman, 'Lead kindly light'.

As one progresses one would not "run with his thoughts". The mind would be always charged with primal energy. Consciousness would not be splintered or fragmented. Thoughts will come and go when they must and their particular purpose has ended. One would always be in repose, be he engaged in action or free from it. We cannot even imagine the beauty and the power of a fully conscious mind. Joy and power, what a two in one! The wondrous combination will fill our being. Though mortal we would have discovered our immortality and timelessness.

Bangalore
27th February, '95
Maha Sivarathri Day

A.R. Natarajan

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Sri. V.S. Ramanan, President, Sri Ramanasramam has kindly permitted the use of material in the Ashram publications. Dr. Sarada made many valuable suggestions. Sri T.V. Ramachandran has corrected the proof meticulously. Sri Muralidhar Hegde has designed the attractive cover. The typesetting is by Viswas Services who have done a fine job. The quality printing is by Modern Process Printers. To all of them the Centre offers its heartfelt thanks.

Bangalore
27th February '95
Maha Sivarathri Day

President
Ramana Maharshi Centre
for Learning

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1. THINKING WITHOUT THE MIND

Ramamurthy : Swamiji, I have read Paul Brunton's book, 'A Search in Secret India'. I was much impressed by the last chapter where it is said it is possible to be conscious without thinking. Can one think without the mind ? Is it possible to gain that consciousness which is beyond thoughts ?

Maharshi : Yes. There is only one consciousness which subsists in the waking, dream and sleep states. If it is known you will see that it is beyond thoughts.

R : Can one think without the mind ?

M : Thoughts are only like other activities, not disturbing the Supreme consciousness.

— Talks 143, pp.49,50

We identify consciousness with thinking, with the mind. Intellectually therefore we find it impossible to accept the state in which there is consciousness but there are no thoughts. Or we find it hard to accept a conscious state which is free of thoughts. Therefore we wrongly assume that the process of thinking - memory, reasoning, discrimination, determination can relate only to the mind. Hence the crucial question of vital import, 'Can we think without the mind ?' Also, what is that consciousness which is beyond thoughts, which enables thinking without the mind ? Putting it another way, what is it that vivifies the mind itself ? Does intuition take over where thought ceases? In the answer to these questions lies the solution to the fear of that which is beyond the mind, the fear of the state when the mind is dead, when the mind is submerged in its source. It is necessary to tackle this fear to be free from its grip. 'Else, all effort at

Thinking without the Mind

freedom from the mental world would come to a grinding halt after a particular stage. Effort would taper off because of the unconscious but deep rooted idea that we would be reduced to mere idiots, reduced to morons, reduced to indolence, be dead to all feelings. We fear that everything would be totally meaningless. All the affirmations about the wonder of that state, about its fullness, about its overflowing bliss would fall flat against this Frankenstein. One has to travel step by step uncovering certain basic facts, certain fundamentals on which Ramana has thrown such clear light.

What is this thing called the mind ? Do we know it ? Not really. Because there are thoughts, we assume that they have emanated from a source which we call the mind. But if we question we must find out that since mind and thoughts co-exist, that which we call the mind can relate only to waking and dream states. Thoughts are absent in deep sleep though we continue to exist. Consciousness continues in sleep. Otherwise we would not be able to recall the joy or repose of it on waking.

One may refer to Ramana's assurance to a French visitor, Mon. Georges Le Bot, "People are afraid that when the ego or mind is killed the result may be a mere blank and not happiness. What really happens is that the thinker, the object of thought and thinking, all merge in one source, which is consciousness, and this state is neither inert nor blank."

By questioning the break in the mind's functioning in sleep one would be sowing seeds of doubt about the validity of identifying consciousness with thoughts, with thinking, with the mind. Doubts as to whether there is a state beyond the mind, about a state of consciousness which includes sleep as well, would begin. One would start investigating if self consciousness is different from mind consciousness.

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If there be a state beyond the mind, how can one discover it ? If mind is only fragmented consciousness, because it is non-existent in deep sleep, what is the fullness of consciousness? What is that consciousness which is comprehensive, covering deep sleep as well ? For the replies to these queries, one has to look once again at the mind itself and be aware of its scope and limitation.

Hence, lest one should lose one's way, Ramana himself guides and shares his experience. Arising from the fact that the mind disappears in sleep and reappears on waking he points out that one should search for the source of its origin. Such a search would take one to the spiritual heart which is at once the fullness of consciousness and the place from which the mind springs forth and into which it subsides. If attention is given to the feeling of individuality, to the core of the mind, and not to other thoughts then the mind consciously merges in its source. Then the mind gradually 'dies' to use Ramana's terminology.

Pausing here one has to be careful in understanding this concept, for it raises the bogey that all mental faculties, creativity and activity may end. All that it means is that the mind is restored to its pristine purity. That the mind is rid of its habitual accretions of debilitating, weak, negative and bad thoughts.

As Ramana clarified in 1900 itself to one of his earliest devotees Gambhiram Seshier, "As without mind, there can be no experience, it is possible for the purified mind endowed with the extremely subtle mode to experience Self bliss". Ramana also makes it clear that in the thought free state "intuition, automatic action will develop".

When the river merges in the ocean it may no longer have its form or name but it is the vast ocean. Therefore whenever limited consciousness, the mind, merges in the fullness of

Thinking without the Mind

consciousness, the heart, it acquires greater strength of an uncontaminated, limitless consciousness. However, since we are too far gone in our false notion that thinking without a thinker is not possible, Ramana keeps injecting this truth time and again in his replies to the seekers. The point which he would keep hammering in is that the mind we take pride in, the ego ridden mind, is a weak one, its strength having been sapped by its inability to resist the intruding or torturing thoughts. In contrast, a pure mind, with which one functions, when the mind is merged in its source, is perfect and undistracted. Another point he would emphasise is that what we call the mind is an impure reflection of the consciousness, and its power can be compared to the reflected light of the moon. Who would choose it ? Who would opt for it when one can make full use of the sunlight ? The pure mind uses the blazing light of the Self. Hence where does any question of losing oneself in a maze of inaction, indolence or lazy dalliance arise if the present divided mind gives place to a unitary pure mind? It is time indeed that we dehypnotise ourselves from the false thoughts and premises on which we have built the edifice of fears.

2. THE BEAUTY OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

We try to order our lives according to a plan. We have definite goals towards which we are working. True the goals themselves keep shifting with reference to achievements. Each day, our work schedules, our time for friends, for ourselves are all clearly defined in our minds. The framework is there, and also the necessary details. In this pattern we also fit in meditation, fit in spiritual practices. Generally, each of these are water-tight compartments. Often one ends up with cuts into meditation time, for the demands of the world swallow everything.

One has to find out a way, should one not, to integrate spiritual practice with life, to make it an undercurrent. One cannot confine spiritual life to visits to ashrams, hermitages, to pilgrimages, to withdrawal, for these are necessarily short or occasional. Often circumstances may deny us the opportunities. Hence the need for combining “work and wisdom”. The beauty of spiritual life, its flowering, has to be found out in life itself, in action, inaction, at work, at play, and when one is able to be by himself. Otherwise one’s spiritual practices would yield only little fringe benefits, by way of detachment, a little peace of mind now and then, and so on. There will be no real transformation, no opening up, of a new and all enveloping happiness. It is in this context that the teachings of Sri Ramana assume importance and significance.

Ramana would say that ‘Meditation is systematic striving aimed at getting Self-knowledge’. Why ? Because only the one who is Self-aware can experience and abide in a state of ‘natural happiness’. By natural happiness one means non-mental happiness; happiness which is non-circumstantial; happiness which is unrelated to the ups and downs, to the ebb and flow of life. It is independent of life situations. One can readily see its

The Beauty Of Spiritual Life

contrast to what we now term happiness which is fluctuating, which is based on 'others'; on our relationships with people, to ideas and the like. Such happiness is necessarily brittle, fragile. Natural happiness is one's own, not given. It is inherent and has to be discovered by oneself.

Since Self-knowledge is necessary for experiencing natural happiness, one has to understand what Self-knowledge is. Ramana points out that this means awareness of the true import of the 'I', of individuality, of the subject. Presently we have never really gone into this question which is strange considering the fact that all our experiences are centred on the 'I'. All experiences are mine. The 'I' occupies a pivotal position because all thoughts revolve round it; the individual's attention sustains and nourishes them.

Notwithstanding this fact one seldom pays attention to this core 'I', and all the energies of the mind are directed towards objects resulting in the externalising of the mind. From this object orientation of the mind one has to turn full circle to subject orientation.

Once such a shift in focus takes place one will find out that many of one's assumptions and notions do not stand this test of scrutiny.

The first thing that one would find is the identification of one's body with the Self. We take ourselves to be the body. Self-enquiry serves to question this notion, to corrode its hold and explode the myth. If self-enquiry is practised one's true identity would be automatically revealed. Ramana lays great emphasis on this point for, his own experience, termed the 'death experience', had enabled him to cut at the falsity of this notion which alone veils the knowledge about one's identity with the divine, "The idea that one is the body must be uprooted. A flower has to

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blossom before the bees can enter it. If the petals are closed, how can they enter ? Similarly, if the false notion of individuality is not uprooted, how can Self-knowledge be attained ?”

In this context Ramana would refer to ‘sleep’, when one has no awareness of the body with which he had identified himself in the waking state, to dream where a different identity is quite on the cards, and waking in which we are a particular name and form. These changes must make one doubt if the waking identity is one’s true identity. Once the seeds of doubt have been sown, the first essential step would have been taken. This questioning should not be casual or intermittent. Every ounce of one’s energy would have to be poured into self-enquiry and that too constantly. Otherwise, “one’s tendency for action or inaction would gain an upper hand”. Hence the need for spells of equilibrium through steady meditation. Innate happiness is experienced during such spells. Ramana emphasises the need for an all out effort, the need for a total involvement when he remarks, “Remember that your next breath might be the last and focus your entire attention on self-enquiry”. For what is gained by such unceasing enquiry cannot be comprehended by the mind. When the particular identification ceases one’s true identity with the fullness of consciousness is revealed. Then one abides in the state of natural happiness, one lives wholly in the present. Each moment brings out a new beauty, a new fullness.

While self-enquiry needs to have the pride of place, needs to be put on the pedestal, practitioners on the spiritual path are prone to stray away from it due to their predispositions and inclinations. Some have lofty notions of helping others, certainly laudable provided first things are attended to first. A conversation which a seeker had with Ramana would highlight this.

Seeker: When I see the suffering of the people of the world I wish to do something according to my mite.

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Ramana : How are you going to help others without knowing yourself ? First of all put your house in order. First try to know who you are in reality. Are you just the human body sitting before me now? Find out who you are before trying to help others.

What happens when Self-knowledge dawns through self-attention is that a wholly new perspective comes about. You are at peace with yourself, you are full of bliss. You radiate it all round. Without this natural bliss ideas about helping others would be like a lame man boasting that he could easily put the enemies to flight if only someone could help him to his feet.

Ramana would always bring our attention back to the known, to that with which we are familiar. The mind is habituated to paying attention to the unknown. We concern ourselves with questions like predetermination, free-will, rebirth, the past, clairvoyance and the like. We have so many notions about God, about seeing Him, having visions of Him. Ramana would say, "Before knowing about God and His actions you have to know yourself first. Then you will know everything". Or, he would say, "We aspire to know about unknown things while the requirements for Self-knowledge are ready at hand". Why ? Nothing is more intimate than the 'I' for one's entire life revolves round it.

Questions like the time of meditation, how much, how often, when, or postures, padmasana, sthirasana, meditation with eyes open or closed have no doubt their value. But they will all fall into place when one seriously practises Self-attention. Meditation then ceases to be a fixed time affair. It is done whenever possible, as naturally as breathing. Posture loses its importance for self-enquiry might go on while travelling in a bus may be even hanging on to the rail, while watching T.V. sitting in a comfortable chair, while waking, while stretching on the bed. When the mind is turned inward, it does not matter if the eyes are closed or

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open. As Ramana would say, “If you are not looking out of the window does it matter if the window is open or closed?”.

While on the path, the greatest hurdle is really the fear of the loss of individuality if self-enquiry is pushed to its logical conclusion. This fear has been expressed by Paul Brunton and a host of others. What happens is that “you would have really found yourself” for you cease to be the limited individual. You discover that you are the fullness of consciousness, that you are not a mere wave but the ocean itself in all its vastness, majesty and power.

3. ILLUSIONS

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

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

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

Along the path problems crop up. All of us know only too well the deafening roar of thought crowding in whenever an

Illusions

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

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

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

What happens when the single minded focus is on the thinker is quite surprising. Surprising because we do not expect it, because we do not know how it occurs. It is totally unexpected but it happens. The idea of a separate thinker disappears. What

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is meant by this? The sense of individuality ceases. One becomes aware that nothing exists apart from oneself. The unity of the conscious source, the individual, and the world is experienced. All life pulsates in oneness. Oh! for the joy of it and the beauty of its benediction.

4. THE OPTION

V: Why is atma-vichara necessary?

M: If you do not make atma-vichara loka-vichara creeps in.

— Talks 186, p. 153.

Atma-vichara, self-enquiry leads one on to the discovery of one's own natural happiness. But it needs an in-turning mind, a mind which is always aware of the need for the Sadguru's grace. This is not said in the sense of its being a precondition, for self-enquiry is open to all those who yearn to find out the truth. Given this sustaining motivation one is bound to ripen gradually in inwardness.

However, one has to recognise the fact that 'atma vichara' is the opposite of 'loka vichara' which is a preoccupation with worldly worries. In the first the joy springs from the mind which is free of thoughts. In loka vichara, there is addiction to thought to the exhilaration of the thought momentum. How much we value pleasant memories! How nostalgic we are about them! However, since the two states are opposites one has to be clear that there is an option. One has to choose between them. Is it the one or the other? Unfortunately we do not see them as the alternatives that they are. We would like to hold on to the ego-based state and mix it with the ego-free state. Quite obviously one cannot ride two horses, keep one foot in the world and another in spiritual practice. One cannot be immersed in things which cut at the root of one's search for truth. This of course is the wrong identification of the body with the Self and the whole set of attendant hosts of misconceptions. Ramana says that the root cause of this malaise is 'avichara' the failure to enquire whether one's notion about oneself is valid or not. Without vichara there would be no

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end to the desire for more. The transience of objective happiness, the pleasure-pain linkage will be lost on us. The illusions born of the experiences of several past lives stick like glue. They are imbedded firmly in the heart as seed thoughts. Termed as 'vasanas' or tendencies they are waiting to fructify as thoughts on the mental horizon. When circumstances are favourable, when vigilance against thought intrusions and formations slackens, they envelop the mind. It is precisely this danger which Ramana highlights when he says that if you do not practice 'atma vichara', 'loka-vichara' will take over. The potential power of this take over bid, which is nascent, cannot be overstated. Alert 'vichara' alone can ensure freedom from thoughts, ensure natural happiness.

Is it not strange that even those who have had a raw deal from life should learn nothing from the buffets of fate? They just do not have faith in the words of Sadguru Ramana that bliss is our very nature and that awareness of this fact alone matters. We have an instance of one person, a visitor who told Ramana in a voice overcharged with emotion, "I have gone on pilgrimages all over the land. I have been regular in my spiritual practice but still the Lord has no mercy on me. I am forlorn". Ramana remained silent for sometime and then remarked, "Funny man. He weeps. What is there to sob about? Instead of being poised in the blissful Self he goes on wailing"

True, the journey is no bed of roses. While answering a question of a long time resident, an attendant, Ramana told him "Everybody complains of the restless mind..... If one wants to abide in the thought-free state a struggle is inevitable. One must fight one's way through before regaining the original state". The problem is that the enemy within is subtle, evasive, being our own thoughts. That the foe is internal will be obvious during meditation when even in the most congenial situations the harassment of thoughts persists. The thoughts are numerous,

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varied and have varying shades of power over a person depending on one's attachments to them. Considering the state of bewilderment one would be in when face to face with this internal foe one's deep gratitude is due to Ramana. For, has he not provided to all seekers an invincible weapon for dealing with this enemy within? Forget the multiplicity. Pay attention to the one to whom they relate. If you search for the truth about the subject, thoughts would automatically subside and their momentum would wane. A time would come, as for a jnani, when it would be as difficult to have a thought as it is now to be free from it.

This is not to belittle the obstacles on the route. In countless lives one has experienced happiness linked with the body, senses and the mind. The mind is tainted, coloured and its movement is propelled by tendencies inherited from the past. Though each day we enjoy thought free joy it is experienced unconsciously during sleep. "To the sleeper the bliss of sleep is too enthralling to be sacrificed for the work born of thoughts". Yet on waking one is only too ready to barter this quietude for the thought-ridden state with all its sorrows. This is because we have no conscious experience of the bubbling bliss which suffuses one when the mind is silent. Hence the importance of the conscious experience of this state through effective use of self-enquiry. Attainment would not be possible, is it not, unless the goal is clear to the seeker working towards it? Experience of thought-free conscious spells of joy would be the best indicator of the happiness in the inward journey. The first hurdle is the time factor. Irrespective of whether one has practised self-enquiry steadfastly and vigilantly or not, one is impatient for progress. Just as in nature one cannot force the pace, so too it is for the spiritual maturing. One cannot tear down the road crowded with thoughts. Everything would happen at the right time and none can be more perfect in his timing than Ramana. He once asked a devotee, "Can you not place faith in me at least to the same extent as a first-class

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passenger wishing to alight at a mid-station would in the guard of the train?" The analogy is striking. For, we are on journey from the transient to the real and the guard of the train is Ramana. The only difference is he would not allow one to drop off on a wayside station but would firmly guide one to the destination. Yet, it seems sad, though true, that the entrustment which Ramana asks of one seems too much. For, we keep nagging him about the lack of progress, about the insufficiency of his grace. We do not seem to remember that the spiritual blossoming is never wholly visible as it happens. No doubt there would be signs of it by way of growing dispassion for the transient, by the widening of love in the heart so as to embrace an ever larger circle. Then thanks to Ramana's grace, the day will dawn when the aura of true spirituality shines forth unmistakably. One becomes aware that one Self alone exists and that it alone is the vital energy in us pouring its strength to the body and mind. Then one would have found that joy which is natural and permanent.

5. DOES TIME MATTER TO US?

We were travelling by Brindavan in AC Chair Car. It was a journey of six hours between Bangalore and Madras. In the two seater in front two middle aged ladies were travelling. One of them, having nothing on hand, was happy to have found a patient listener in the co-passenger. She talked throughout the journey beginning with her Delhi days, her daughter's tastes, her husband's fussiness and so on. It was a non-stop flow of words. A little ahead there were a group of three young railway officers returning from a conference. Fresh 'masala dosai' came from the dining car and one of them ordered a round for himself and his friends. At Jolarpet 'hot bondas' were announced. So, another member of the group ordered them for himself and his friends. Soon, all too soon, vegetable cutlets, fresh from the oven, or so it was said, were brought. The third friend was not to be outdone. It was his turn to treat them to the cutlets. In between, of course, they had been munching chips, chickies and so on. They had nothing else to do and many hours on hand. Why not enjoy some tasty dishes? Such seemed to be their attitude. Even as we entered the compartment I had noticed that one of the travellers was already fast asleep. Must be tired, I thought. Soon there was a deafening snore which went on hour after hour at a steady unending pace. Ah! I thought, what happens to the three golden principles suggested by Ramana to Natanananda - moderation in speech, moderation in food, moderation in sleep? May be, they had not read about it. More striking seemed their utter indifference to the wastage of time. It did not matter to them what they did with their time. But then, is time a free commodity? Is it not the only thing which is scarce in life?

Soon, I asked myself what I was doing with my time. "Have you no other business than watching others wasting their time?"

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Why could you not plunge within? Why could you not convert your 'idle time' to slip into the source to enjoy the inner bliss?"

All this happened on a Saturday. The next day in our Madras house there was a regular scramble. It was about the worst day in a sense, being a Sunday, for there were too many 'good' programmes on 'Doordarshan'. So too on Star TV. And on top of it there were the programmes on the Cable TV. Not being an American home where each one could have his own TV, the one TV in the hall had to serve the diverse tastes of the members of the household. Some wanted Tamil cinema. But then what about the teenagers with their demand for Michael Jackson on channel two of the Star TV or the students' demand for the Jackie Chan show? It was such a medley, each persuading the other to let him see his favourite programme. Thank heavens the situation was not worsened by a Carnatic music fan or detective serial lover. But one thing seemed common. All had time to be entertained, hour upon hour, the whole day long. That a day of their life was being written off never seemed to cross anyone's mind. They had laboured hard throughout the week. Had they not? So the day was for relaxation, for lazy dalliance. What about really resting by turning inward? That would be asking for too much. Would not it?

As I was thinking thus, I once again pulled myself up. "Why are you bothering about what others are doing? Let them 'sleep or snore' or while away their time watching the TV. Why this concern about others? Is it not your duty to look to your own sadhana and progress in inwardness? Why don't you go about your self-enquiry? Why don't you merge within, and experience the natural bliss?"

Not wishing to be in the TV/Video trap, I went to a 'Ramana Satsang'. Some vague philosophical subject was being discussed threadbare. All were serious sadhakas. But yet how easily they

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had allowed themselves to be caught in words, in ideas? How much closer were they to the experience of the natural state, which alone matters, in the two hours spent in this 'Satsang'? Could they not concentrate on the practice oriented scriptures of Ramana? Was there any need to travel beyond the 'Collected Works' of Ramana? May be they were sure that their time was well spent. They must have thought that, instead of spending their time in reading a 'horror' book or some trash novel they were studying the ancient scriptures thus making good use of their time. But is there no third alternative? Could not that time have been spent in dwelling deeply on Ramana's words, spent in self-enquiry or in questing for the source?

As I thought thus, I checked myself yet again on the tracks. Had I gone to the Satsang to judge, to weigh, to be concerned about how those assembled there were spending their time? Had not Ramana cautioned, 'Mind your business'? Had I not idled away my time in useless thoughts?

So the mind is always busy. Thought follows thought in endless succession. Some thought or the other keeps occupying it when it has no activity, no immediate concern, no job on hand. The load of these purposeless thoughts which are neither psychological nor functionally needed is so heavy that one is as tired at the end of the so called change, or relaxation, as in the beginning. Only, one more day has been torn off one's karmic calendar. Time, precious time, is allowed to slip through.

Such is the mind's addiction to thought. How easily we see the danger of drug-addiction or the danger of being caught in a health destroying habit! But when it comes to thoughts we are so totally oblivious to the dangerous grip of the momentum of needless thoughts. "Thinking is not your nature" says Ramana but for us this statement is as good as not having been made.

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Is it not time that we reflect how day in and day out we thoughtlessly lose the time which could have been used for self-enquiry? Is there no need to reflect on the purpose of life? It is said in the scriptures that human life is a great opportunity for it enables one to use one's discriminative faculty to become Self-aware. This seems to ring no bells in our minds. How else can we explain this total lack of concern about the incipient enemy, the purposeless thought? We carry on so merrily unaware of the need for vigilance to harness the mind's energy, making it pay attention to itself.

What should one do to correct this situation? First, of course, is the compelling necessity for recognising the importance of managing the time which we regard as idle. The journey time in the train or bus, holidays, the post-working hours, all free time is unnecessarily lost because we lack a sense of time's importance. If one does not relate available karmic time to the search, to finding out the truth, would it not be merely frittering it away? Free will is God-given. The mind is totally free to turn within and be liberated from time. How little we do to nurture, to foster inwardness. Is it not time to be awake to the responsibility and opportunity of human life? How can one exposed to Ramana's direct path of self-enquiry be so lacking in vigilance? Should not the goal of Self-knowledge be always before our mind? Can there be any doubt that such conscious channelling of time would lead to an awareness of the exhilaration in the heart and to the discovery of life's meaning?

6. LIVING CORPSES

To seek to celebrate one's birthday is like delighting in and decorating a corpse. To search for one's self and to merge in the self, that is wisdom.

— Bhagavan - 'Stray Verses'.

It was about 9.30 p.m. I was still at the office writing something. The paper was before me and the pen was in my hand. But I was not there. Some thoughts had wafted me away, far away. I was startled by a voice which broke my reverie. I was back with a thud from my thought world. 'How did he gain entry?' was my first thought. The last person leaving the office was supposed to close the door and leave me by myself to escape from the world, to succeed in being with Ramana. That was hope and prayer anyway.

As for the stranger, he seemed perfectly at home; not in the least bit bothered that he had entered the place for the first time, at night and that too uninvited. I was slightly irritated at his intrusion. May be I was enjoying my sojourn in the mental world. But he was unperturbed. He said calmly, "I saw the board Ramana Library and Bhagavan's picture on it. So I have come in". The moment he said this, fresh bonds were forged, a Ramana brother had come, fine. May be he will add to our stock of Ramana reminiscences which could be shared, I thought. The following is a verbatim record of the conversation which took place with him.

N : Sir, how come you have been attracted to Ramana.

V : I have sat on his lap. Yes, sir, I have.

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N : Sat on his lap?

V: Yes, yes. I was just three years old at that time when my father took me to Skandasramam. My father, Dr. Ananth, a doctor in the army, was a staunch devotee. I cannot thank my father enough for this. He used to visit Bhagavan quite often. Whenever my father was on leave, darsan of Ramana was a must, for him and therefore, for us.

N: Has your father written some reminiscences or kept a diary?

V: Unfortunately No. But let me tell you something which I remember.

Bhagavan could immediately read the mind of the person coming in. Sometimes some rich person would drop in laden with sweets and fruits as an offering. Bhagavan would not even look at him. He would seem utterly indifferent. May be because he was aware of the motivation to get Bhagavan's blessings in exchange for the offering. But at the same time when some humble, poor or staunch devotee came in Ramana would go out of the way to show him compassion. He would put the person completely at ease, draw him out, find out his problems. That he was blessing them was obvious.

N: Could you tell me one statement of Bhagavan which has been imbedded in your mind?

V: Certainly. When people who were totally worldly, without even an iota of interest in spiritual life, came and left, Bhagavan would remark, "They are only 'Living Corpses'". Yes, 'Living Corpses' was the expression which he would use.

Living Corpses

The stranger excused himself and left as suddenly and abruptly as he had come in. He had to catch a train he said. When he left, a reflective mood came upon me. It was not one of those mental castles or purposeless day-dreams but thoughts centred on Ramana. What an apt expression the master had used, 'living corpses'! But wasn't it strong? Was it to shock us out of complacency? Why this message? Was it for me only? Was it to caution me or was the message for everyone? You and me. For we never seem to have enough of this life based on attachment to the body. One recalls the case of an old devotee, Lokamma, who once complained to Ramana that she was still unable to get rid of the body idea. Ramana gently told her, "That is because you have not had enough of it".

Was this not the first lesson Ramana himself had learnt, when he was twelve years old, when his father's body lay dead in their Tiruchuzhi house? The body was there. It looked as if his father was sleeping peacefully. What was it that was missing? The life force, the mind and of course the divinity within, the Self, which vivified both. The moment this happened, the body which was so dear had become a corpse, which was to be burnt before the day was over. Keeping the corpse longer would be polluting. In this context of life and death Ramana points out that while we are alive we carry our body even without stopping to think we are doing so. But when we die it takes four persons to carry the body. The difference is because consciousness, chaitanya, is no longer permeating it. Can we not see that it is consciousness alone which matters? What is the use of a life lived unaware of consciousness which alone constitutes the line between life and death?

Pondering over Ramana's words is not one who does not try to be in touch with the spiritual dynamo, the Self, as good

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as dead, even though he may be clinically alive? Life's very purpose being to discover and tap the inner fullness, to be dead to it would be no better than being physically dead. Would it not? After all this body consciousness has a daily birth and death. Are we conscious of our body in deep sleep? Are we without the identification with it while awake? Should we not find out how it originates and about what would result from such a search?

Ramana would sometimes point out how we pamper the body, bathe it, dress it, decorate it and so on, bestowing on it involved attention. The lot of those who know only about the body beautiful and the pleasures associated with it is really sad. For a wonderful dimension of life would be lost on them. How many Helens of Troy, how many Appollos have come and gone? How many Don Juans and Casanovas remain here to boast about their conquests? How sad indeed it is to be rooted in this decaying body! To barter the search for freedom and natural happiness and build a world of happiness around the transient body cannot be a wise choice. But this obviously wrong choice will be made unless one remembers the need for and the importance of paying attention to that which is lasting. Whenever Ramana seems to decry the body, calling it a 'corpse', he would simultaneously draw attention to the need "to search for the Self and abide in it" as in the quote reflected on. Ramana was fully conscious of the value of the human birth as an opportunity to become Self-aware and the necessity of the human body for practice and attainment. Hence what he is pointing out is only the folly of attaching importance to the shadow ignoring the substance, ignoring consciousness in "which is always with us". What Ramana would focus our attention on is the need for 'Being-Consciousness', or 'Self-consciousness in contrast to

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body-consciousness', in which one might get lost. In Sanskrit, the body is called 'deha' when it is growing, 'sarira' when it is decaying and 'shava' when it is a corpse. The whole process is a span of less than a hundred years at the most. If this inescapable fact is forgotten, life would be wasted. One would have become a living corpse. One's primal duty and opportunity lies in escaping this fate by trying to become 'consciously immortal'. Does it not?

7. REFLECTIONS ON DEATH AND LIFE

Referring to the death of Madhava Swami, an exemplary attendant of his, Ramana said, “Madhava was a good man. That is why we feel sorry that he is dead. Instead of merely feeling sorry at his death we should worry as to what will happen when our turn comes.”

– Letters, p. 70

Have you been alone with a dear one who is hovering between life and death? Life force is ebbing away. There is such a fight going on. There is a bedlam of experts attending on such a person. The general physician, the oncologist, the neuro-physician and so on. Each prescribes for his speciality and they are never together. With every specialisation team work seems so old fashioned. The nurses dither and delay while reading the various doctors’ scribbles. Literally a handful of medicines are fed through the IVC, hour upon hour. There are the endless tests of blood for which samples are taken every now and then. Then there is ECG, EEG, Scan of the skull, X-rays of the chest, and even from head to foot. It is such a torture for the patient’s attendant who has to watch all this helplessly. The hope that it would produce a miracle makes it bearable. The patient knows nothing of the infliction on his body or the havoc on the innate intelligence of his body which these biochemical drugs are producing. He is on the borderland between life and death. Occasionally the patient comes out of his semi-comatic condition and recognises, with evident happiness, the loved face nearby. Then he lapses again into deep slumber. Deep breathing and struggle of the body are evident for a regular tussle is on between the patient’s attachment to his body and perhaps the beginnings of his attachment to a new one which he must take on as a karmic inevitability. Then the end comes with its

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suddenness. One is filled with disgust at the soul-less system of highly specialised doctors and commercialised hospitals. Gone for ever is the human touch and warmth of the family doctor.

During the period of last illness of the dear person, one's mind often falls into a reverie recalling all the love and affection the sick person has showered. Will he not open his eyes? Can we not express our love? Can we not communicate to him in those hours which might be the final hours, how much we care? Interspersed there is the prayer for his recovery, if it be for his good. Then the mind moves on to other thoughts. Was all this medication necessary? Would he have been better off without such intense and varied drugging of his system? Then again, how can we know? May be, these efforts might mean a healthier life, less suffering for him. May be or may not be. Still how can one not give the medical support for the battle which the defence mechanism in the body is putting up against the disease? So the mind keeps debating about the correctness of the decision to call in the 'experts', to hospitalise the patient and about the whole set up.

When we are so close to death the mind gradually moves from its immediate concerns to deeper levels about death. Why is one born? What does death mean? Is it only a physical end? Can there be any end to the body's births when karma is not transcended? Is not death the beginning of a new birth? How is one to go beyond all the turmoil of the sweets and sorrows of life? How is one to scissor the chain of 'ego's births'?

The trail of thoughts continues. Then those, whose lives have been sweetened by Ramana's presence, start questioning the purpose of thought itself. What is the purpose of thoughts? Would one be better off without the thought-thrust, without the momentum of movement from one thought to another? Where is the respite? How can there be any respite when we are constantly

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'fattening' thoughts by paying them attention? How can there be a pause when there is a continuous input of new thoughts? But then do we want any break in thought, when we are free of them? Frankly 'no', isn't it? Are we not clutching to thoughts as such, relevant and irrelevant, for fear of what would happen if we were free of them? Is there a desire deep down within us to free the mind of this pressure of thoughts? Or has the edge of this desire been blunted by the fear of the unknown, fear of the state when the mind is totally silent?

The mind also becomes reflective of Ramana's guidance and his repeated counsel that there is no cause for fear. Has he not pointed out that such a state is in fact familiar to us? It is part of our daily experience. Is not one free of thoughts each day when sleep overtakes in deep sleep? Does not one seek sleep, more so when it is denied? Does not one recollect its refreshing and energising effect, on waking? Why then should one be so reluctant about consciously repeating the same experience while one is awake? Go ahead and try, would be Ramana's advice. You will learn to enjoy the same joy of relaxation of sleep even when awake. But then are we bold enough, courageous enough to venture beyond the confines of the mind?

One can also face this fear squarely by looking at the life of Ramana himself. What better example can there be of the bliss of the silent mind?

But all this is falling flat. The mind's frenzied fear of venturing into the unknown realm of a mind quietened by inwardness is too real. How can the mind be pulled out of the grip of this fear? Since fear is the root cause, the solution lies in breaking the ground, gradually, by giving the mind repeated taste of that state of natural joy, when the feverish activity of the mind slows down and comes to an end.

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This can be done only by learning to break the barrier of the externalised mind, the barrier of the mind's addiction to thought, by practising techniques which prevent conceptualisation. The method should also be such as to enable spells of mental silence and the attendant joy. The experience of that state cannot be postponed till what one is used to calling the 'ultimate' stage. For then there is the danger of the effort to be free being stifled by lack of experience of what is beyond or should one say what is behind the mind?

Ramana opens up a way in which the experience is there from the word 'Go'. When one focuses attention on the core of the mind, which is its conscious content, then the movement of thought grinds to a halt. It must be so, for such attention has prevented the attention of the mind being scattered on other thoughts. This shifting of mind's attention to the subject from the object would achieve what we have failed to attain so far. All our dualistic subject-object related sadhanas have left the thought processes alive. For one cannot be choosy about thoughts. Once one lets in a single thought, the loophole for the entry of many other thoughts would have been provided. So much for the need for primacy of self-enquiry in order to experience consciously the repose which the mind unconsciously enjoys in sleep. Steadily the joy of that silence and increasing periods of it would bring about a gradual but sure death of the fear which has so enervated our efforts.

Thus the thinking about freedom from thinking goes on. Can we afford to forget about the time when we too would be hovering between life and death? If we wait till that time what would be our fate? At that time our mind may be de-energised and rendered lifeless by disease and age. Also, where is the guarantee that death will claim us after due notice?

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Pausing here let us meditate on what we mean by facing death. What does it imply? Should one be scared at the prospect of doing so? In practice, all that it means is to be alert to the scattering of the mind which is happening all the time due to our inattention. Or rather due to our attention on the object. To be aware of the continuous of flitting of attention to thought 'A', then to thought 'B' and further on to thought 'C' even as thought rises is what is needed. Because this proliferation of thought may be termed death, for it prevents the dawn of a new life. When through self-enquiry we succeed in keeping attention focused on the subject, that very attention merges the mind back in its place of origination. The mind as we know it is there after dead. But is one dead? 'No'. As Ramana would say "One has not lost oneself but rather one has found oneself". Because the mind is then fully energised, fully conscious, functioning at full steam. One is truly alive. Freed from thoughts one 'sports in the world' enjoying the passing show as a beautiful creation of the Supreme. When physical death knocks such a person's mind gathers the life-force and simply merges in the heart. There is no passing away but absorption in the heart. Having conquered death, they remain immortal.

So the reflection and reverie goes on. It is so nice to be thinking about Ramana and his life giving techniques. But thought however lofty can only be the second best. Is it not? Where his dynamic silence does not reign, to dwell on him is fine.

So I tell myself but keep thinking of Ramana who has infused so much joy in our lives. The longing to wholly and unreservedly be his, fills one's being. If only this happens we would have travelled beyond the confines of thought to the vast timeless space.

8. DEATH AND IMMORTALITY

D: Fear of death is common to all. Of what use is it?

B: True, it is universal. But such fears serve no useful purpose. It does not lead him to non-attachment nor does it make him investigate the matter. Overpowered by latent tendencies the man dies a natural death.

— Talks 572, p. 531.

Is there anyone who is born who can escape the last journey to the cremation ground? The one certainty of life is the inevitability of death, the certainty that one day the body will become a corpse. Though everyone knows this as an irrefutable fact, though it is a common, universal fear, no one seems to be really afraid of death. One can say this and even assert it. For if only one is really afraid of death, then necessarily one would go into the question, of how to ward it off, how to prolong the body as long as possible. Or more fundamentally one would seek to find out if there is a way to become deathless, to be immortal, eternal, while yet alive. One would do what Ramana did as a teenager. One would meet the fear of death face to face and dwell on the question of death and deathlessness.

Why is it that one is not really afraid of death which ends all that with which one is identified and attached to in life? It may be because this fear itself makes one postpone enquiring into the meaning of death. We do not let the thought of death grip us. We dilute the fear and ignore it by thinking that it could be contemplated upon sometime in the future when one is at death's doors. The fact that no one knows the date and time of his appointment with death makes no difference. Somehow one keeps

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pushing the fear into the background, away from the mental horizon.

Another reason for this is pointed out by Ramana in this quote. Our innate tendencies keep externalising the mind. The overcrowded mind, the mind which is congested with thoughts, the busy mind has no room for thinking about fundamental questions, which go to the very root of one's existence. With no mental space, no inwardness, one lives from day to day concerned only with the immediate. Bound by the karmic round of duties to the pleasures and pains of the mind one would be missing the wood for the trees.

What happens is that nature takes its own course. When the body's karma is exhausted, the mind casts off its identification with the present body and shifts it to another body for a fresh innings of identified life. To use the words of Ramana "man dies a natural death". Here Ramana is not using the term "natural death" as the opposite of unnatural death like accidental death or suicide. What he refers to is the death of a person without his becoming Self-aware. It is only chronological death, the ending of a wasted life.

Is there another kind of death? Yes. It is conscious-death, the death of the ego, and the awareness of the everflowing inner bliss. Though termed death it is not really death but the birth of immortality. The central focus of Ramana's teaching is only to turn one away from chronological death, to the discovery of one's eternal nature by hammering away at the ego-based life. In every possible way Ramana would turn us away from our deep-rooted attachment to the body. He would joke and call us the biggest idolators for "day in, and day out, it is our occupation to bathe, dress, embellish, feed and thus worship our bodies so many times every day". Our bodies are our 'constant concern'.

Death And Immortality

Ramana would also make fun of those who from ages past have been striving for immortal life by using techniques and medication for the body's rejuvenation and prolongation of the body's life. One day a letter was received in the Ashram from a devotee seeking Ramana's opinion about the view that the body could be kept alive eternally. Such doctrines are in vogue in some Siddha schools of medicine and are tried by many. Ramana himself knew about a few of such methods, termed 'kaya kalpa' based on camphor, a hundred years old neem tree, etc. On reading the letter Ramana remarked, "All the people who wrote long treatises on the indestructibility of the body, after giving the recipes and yogic practices to perfect the body and keep it alive for ever, passed away one day!" The body made up of the five elements and caused by the karmic force must end. One has to look for immortality elsewhere, in that which is unborn and deathless.

To drive home this point Ramana would relate the story of the conversation between a great Saivite saint Prabhulinga and renowned Yogi Goraknath. It needs recounting in some detail.

Goraknath: That person alone who has gained immortality of the body by favour of Siva and by consumption of 'gulikas' (medicinal herbs said to be available in Sahyadri Hills) will never die. One who has not gained such immortality dies.

Prabhulinga: Your seeking to perpetuate your body by medication and divine force is like a sick man taking a medicine to perpetuate the disease. Do not be under the illusion that the body is the 'Self'. Seek the indweller. Then alone you would be rid of the disease of birth and death. The cave is your heart. The indweller is called God and you are non-separate from him.

This conversation underscores the need to quest within, the need to merge into the vast inner space termed the Heart,

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the Atman and the Self. Then alone can one be rid of the imagined mortality. Imagined because of the false notion, the illusion of a separate identity apart from the Self. In the merging of the ego in its source is the ending of the fear of death rooted in attachment to the body.

If one does not have the necessary strength of mind to pursue well directed and sustained enquiry into the self and its source, he has an alternative. Recognising his helplessness and inability to find out by himself the truth if one leaves it to the supreme power the job would be done. Then too there would be conscious death, or conscious immortality by the ending of the fear of death. For one would have discovered his own immortal, natural state.

9. AT THE CROSS ROADS TO IMMORTALITY

Lord, I had no idea thinking of you at all. Yet you drew me with your grace and stood as if resolved to kill me. Then what fault did I, poor I, commit that you should stop midway, Your task unfinished? What more is needed? Why do you torture me thus, keeping me suspended between life and death?

— Bhagavan Ramana
Decad on Arunachala, Verse 3.

Can one point out the exact time and date of his turning spiritual? It is true that in some rare cases a great tragedy or event hits one so hard that one decides to call it a day to the way of life he has been used to upto that point of time. But by and large the entry of God, of guru, is imperceptible, unnoticed. Also one cannot rationally account for it. This is not to say that earlier one was ungodly, steeped only in the world. It is only to point out that upto that point in a person's life an inward turn, a godward life was only peripheral, only on the surface. The change having taken place quietly, one cannot say with any degree of certainty when the transformation began. But it will start revealing itself. One would become less ego - centric, more keen on finding out the truth about oneself, be ready to give his time and thoughts to this quest, and be more compassionate. As Ramana would say, "the seeds of love" would have been sown" in our unloving hearts". The why of it cannot be explained. One might attribute it to the sadhana, to the practices done in past lives, to the good deeds done by us and our ancestors and so on. But all these are at best only guesses. The reason is really not important. What matters is that a new chapter would have started in one's life. One would have taken the first step towards freedom, for

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the spiritual journey, all said and done is a travel from mental bondage to the freedom of self-abidance. So significant is this vital entry of the Sadguru in one's life that Ramana calls it a gift of God, 'Iswara Prasadam'.

Even though many are called, sooner or later worldliness catches up with them. All the seeds sown by Ramana do not fall 'on good ground' to bring forth their harvest a thousand-fold. Waning attachments recoup their strength, the heart narrows down again, and the externalised mind resumes its sway. For such pilgrims who have fallen on the way we cannot but feel sympathetic, for they have let go the chances given by Ramana to board the ship to freedom. True, in some later life they will pick up the threads, start from where they left off, but this life is as good as written off for them. They would have wasted the opportunities that this life offered. But we have no time to tarry or to bemoan their lot for ours would be no better unless steadfast effort and unflinching faith in the guru's guidance keeps us going.

There is another category of people who though still adhering to the spiritual path have lost its grip and direction. They are loaded with intellectual data, with innumerable ideas. They have stuffed their minds with cartloads of 'spiritual' books, listened to all the 'best speakers'. They are also like the migratory birds, moving from teacher to teacher, never taking roots. The grave danger of scriptural addiction is on them and its grip is tight. One has to be on guard and remember what Ramana would literally din into us, that there is no substitute for experience. Not all kinds of experience but the experiencing of and staying in the state of natural happiness.

But even those who have steered clear of these allurements cannot remain complacent. Just when our ego seems uprooted, just when it seems as if Ramana has done his job of 'killing' one's ego, its fangs show up. Negative ego with its myriad forms

At The Cross Roads To Immortality

keeps haunting us. For, often there is loneliness on the way. The old values, the cherished ideas, the relished company, seem drab and uninteresting. Everything seems so dull, because the old order has gone but the new order is yet to come fully in its place. What is happening is a battle royal with the entrenched ego, with the hordes of vast mental tendencies and inclinations. The guru would be seen to be apparently idle, unconcerned, not giving his helping hand to lift us up and give a real push to our spiritual efforts. Doubts plague. The goal is seen as being far and unattainable. We want to see the distant scene, immediately. We are impatient for the guru's mercy. This is precisely the state referred to by Ramana in this quote being meditated on. As he says this is a half-way stage. It is such a torture. We have burnt our boats and cannot and do not want to go back. Yet the horizon of freedom seems too far off to be a reality still. We are literally 'suspended between life' meaning true life lived in God, lived in Self-abidance, and 'death' which of course is life given wholly to externalisation, to the immediate, to the pleasurable.

One has to hang on at this cross-road. The Sadguru knows the time of deliverance for he is omniscient. We do not know, for the sharpest mind is still limited. It is like a gruelling and exhausting five set tie break match, in which the players are battling out in the final set. The one with the 'never say die' spirit pulls through. So also is our predicament at this stage. We have to stay in the match with motherly patience. Here the analogy ends. For unlike in worldly life and sports, where success is attributed to the competitive spirit, the 'killer instinct', in spiritual pursuit the opposite is what is called for, passive alertness, the self surrender is the need of the hour. As one progresses in the realm of the spirit, one becomes more and more grace dependent. The growing recognition that without the moment to moment awareness of the Sadguru's grace, one would flounder and fall even though seemingly he has almost arrived at the goal. Ramana

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would never fail to point this out to us. Many believed that he did not have guru, and therefore he must have achieved the breakthrough on his own, unaided by the secret operations of the guru's grace. Ramana clearly negates this in a conversation with Dilip Kumar Roy which runs thus:

D: Sri Aurobindo and others refer to you as having had no guru.

B: All depends on what you call guru. He need not be in human form. Did I not sing hymns to Arunachala?

After all, Ramana left home because of the irresistible call of Arunachala which 'shines in the form of guru'.

Self reliance or ego reliance will gradually give way. Then the torture ends in the awareness that guru's power is all. 'It is his will' as grace which alone prevails. The surrender is complete. The individual's search ends in his merging in his source, the heart, in his discovering that he was never apart from the guru. Joy fills one's being. In that bliss of unity one would have discovered an eternal life. The mortal would have realised his immortality - his deathlessness.

10. COMPLAINTS, ASSESSMENTS AND JUDGEMENTS

Khanna handed over a piece of paper on which he had written something. After reading Bhagavan said, “It is a complaint. He says ‘I have been coming to you. This time I have remained nearly a month at your feet and I find no improvement in my condition. My vasanas are as strong as ever. When I go back my friends will laugh at me and ask what good has my stay done me”.

Then turning to Khanna Bhagavan said, “Why distress your mind by thinking that jnana has not come or that vasanas have not disappeared. Don’t give room for thoughts”.

— Day by Day, pp. 225-226.

In making this complaint against Ramana for not doing enough Khanna is not alone. All of us are in the same boat sometime or the other. Siva Prakasam Pillai, to whom the teaching ‘Who am I?’ was given wrote a few verses to the same effect. Their gist was that neither would he reform himself by following the direct path so clearly revealed to him by Ramana, nor would Ramana himself intervene and bring about a mental transformation. Often this mood of despondency would grip devotees. On the eve of his departure from Sri Ramanasramam, after many years of stay, Devaraja Mudaliar’s dominant feeling was that Ramana was not doing enough. Not in the material plane but in furthering progress in sadhana and enabling Self-knowledge.

This sort of complaint is not to be looked down upon. It certainly shows an earnestness and enthusiasm for success in the chosen spiritual life. However one is not conscious of, one

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does not quite realise the implications, of bemoaning and complaining to the Sadguru, in terms of dilution of faith. For the seekers who are finding fault are themselves filled with devotion for the Sadguru. It is there strongly in the background.

It may be hard to believe but it is true that sometimes it is only when one is progressing, when one has almost arrived that the negative mental holocaust occurs. The solution lies in more surrender, more prayer to overcome the last ditch battle of the inner enemy, the contents of the mind, which keep simmering up. Part of the problem about letting the mind dwell on and sometimes wallow in such thoughts, springs from some degree of grey area about what exactly one is to expect. Used as one is to tangible results, one loses sight of the fact that inner transformation, the unfoldment of the power of the heart, is intangible. It reveals itself in what Ramana terms as 'unconscious power' in a greater degree of detachment, waning identification with results, greater ability in handling inter-personal relationships, and the flowering of compassion. One cannot come to Ramana, pursue his straight path and yet be untouched by the gradual growth of the inner perfume. As Sundaresa Iyer recorded, "Though outwardly we may seem to remain very much the same persons, inwardly he was working on us and destroying the deep roots of separateness and self concern". The work of several life-times is being wrought by Ramana, inside, silently attacking hordes of tendencies.

If one lets one's thoughts run in the direction of progress or lack of it, if one starts making a self-assessment, if one starts sitting in judgement over oneself, this type of situation would be inevitable. Would it not? For it is the nature of the mind to oscillate and swing between the pairs of diffidence and confidence. When the mind is comparatively quiet, when the peaceful mood is on, everything would be rosy and fine. But when karma puts spokes

Complaints, Assessments And Judgements

in sadhana, when adverse circumstances steal away the meditation time, one understandably worries. Nothing seems to be happening. The goal seems distant and unattainable. The negative ego would sneak in and take over.

One has to remember that in any case progress in inner life can never be only a steady upward graph. It has its ups and downs, though it may not be as erratic as an E.C.G. chart of a patient under heart attack. To expect the opposite, to pin one's faith on steady uninterrupted inwardness is no better than asking for the moon.

Therefore Ramana would always focus, as in this quote also, on the need for not allowing entry to the free play of such thoughts, about the dominance of tendencies, about the restlessness of the mind, distance of the goal and so on. Lack of vigilance and the giving of the entry permit to such thoughts will lead only to 'distress of the mind'. As Ramana pointed out to another distraught visitor, such thoughts are part and parcel of the 'activities of the mind'. Ramana told him, "If you wish to liberate the mind from its restless nature, give it peace, train it to look inward; make this a habit".

A root and branch solution lies in freeing oneself from paying attention to the contents of the mind. It lies in withdrawing attention from habitual distractions of the externalised mind. A counter-habit, by steady practice, of paying attention to the feeling of separate identity, is the first most essential step to gain entry into the jurisdiction of the heart.

Ramana himself has given clear cut solutions and directions to overcome these mental ups and downs. When Viswanatha Swami referred to the impasse in his sadhana notwithstanding his single minded efforts Ramana told him. "If you awaken and nurture the growth of the power mightier than the senses within

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you, everything will be conquered". That power of course is the power of the Self, the power of fullness of consciousness with which we have lost contact, with which we are not in continuous touch. This happens because we are not vigilant to mental strayings, mental wanderings. We are aware of the movement away from our attempt to focus attention on the core 'I' thought only after a lapse of quite sometime and not at the beginning or even early.

Besides, as in everything judgement is God's, judgement is Sadguru Ramana's. He is the ever vigilant one. Also, he is the embodiment of compassion. If only we reflect it would be evident that on many an occasion he has saved us from our follies, forgiven our trespasses and pulled us back from the brink. He is the most zealous guardian of our spiritual practice and welfare. Why else has he drawn us to his world of grace? Is it to abandon us mid-stream? Is it to treat us like foundlings? Such tender and knowledgeable care as Ramana's will certainly ferry us across to his own realm of jnana, of steady wisdom, of ambrosial joy.

11. REAPING DIVIDENDS - THE RAMANA WAY

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

The first thing which strikes is the inability to stay on track, minding one's business. We give our attention to non-essentials, to others. A few questions put to Ramana would illustrate. An American lady wants to know from him about samadhi. He patiently explains but the lady keeps arguing in circles till Ramana closes the session by saying 'You will know when you are in samadhi'. On another occasion there was a regular free for all in the hall among the devotees about various philosophical schools, about the relative merits of Advaita, Visishtadvaita, Dvaita and so on. After sometime Ramana said, 'This kind of dispute itself is eternal. Do not engage in it. Turn inward and put an end to all this. There can be no finality in disputations'. Someone who had been told in detail about self-enquiry said, 'Meditation on God is difficult' hearing which Ramana remarked, 'Leave God alone. Hold on to the Self'. There would be so much interest about what happens

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after death, in past lives, the state of jnanis, that Ramana would appear to be annoyed at the waste of energy by such peripheral and futile drift of thought. A visitor wished to know how the state of Vasishtha and Janaka differed. Ramana advised "Why do you seek to know the state of others, even if it be of jnanis? What do you gain by knowing about others? You must know your own nature". Another chipped in with the question, 'Can one disappear from sight like the yogis Vasishtha and Viswamitra? Ramana asked, 'Is this the essential object of our interest? These are only physical matters. You are not the body. Think about essential things'. Such concern about the body would keep cropping up time and again evident in such questions as 'What happens to the body after realisation? Does it or does it not exist?'. Ramana would merely say 'This question can be asked after realisation, should the need arise then'. Instances like these are so many, one can readily observe that the 'Talks' is replete with them notwithstanding the persistent way in which Ramana would bring one back to essentials, the natural state and self-enquiry.

Another common malaise is the mourning about disturbance of meditation by thoughts. Without putting in the necessary inputs, without working hard and vigilantly at self-enquiry we want our minds to be under control. We 'run with the running mind, keep the company of our thoughts, endlessly seek our worldly goals and then have the temerity to make a grievance of the slow progress'. The gentle master would simply say that one wants to become a Jnani instantaneously. 'They overlook the effort involved. One should ask oneself 'Have I used the weapons given by Ramana, the enquiries 'Who am I?' and 'Whence am I', 'Have I shifted my attention from thoughts to the thinker?'. These razor sharp instruments are allowed to be blunted and rusted. Conceptualisation is never nipped in the bud for attention is seldom paid in the beginning to the movement of thought, to the externalisation of the mind. We also have the other side of the

Reaping Dividends - The Ramana Way

coin being made a grievance of, namely sleep overcoming and eating into the meditation time. One old devotee who was practically an inmate of the Ashram once complained, 'Look Bhagavan, the others are so lost in meditation. But whenever I sit for meditation I am overcome by sleep'. Ramana's salutary remark went home, 'Let them sleep or snore or meditate. You look to yourself'. Sleep may be because of non-moderation, lack of balance in food, speech and sleep. Or it could be just lack of attention when sleep overtakes. Or it may be due to boredom which comes from listless, and directionless spiritual practice. Whatever be the cause, faith in Ramana's words and the path of self-enquiry would help to make full and proper use of the 'time allotted' for meditation.

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

All this is said to highlight the constant seepage of energy which we allow to take place. After all, life itself is pretty short. The time in which the goal is to be achieved is so limited that we just cannot afford any loss of energy or any wastage of time. So we need a constant check list of attainment, of the progress we are making. In our worldly pursuits are we not keeping a watch over what is happening? Do we not keep the goals clear and keep measuring performance? Why should we allow so much blurring of goals in the spiritual field? Should we not be sure that

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

12. ARE JOURNEYS ENDLESS?

“If you devote the same time for the enquiry as you spare for japam or pooja it would amply repay your efforts. With practice it would operate during even the busiest time”.

– The Ramana Way, Nov. 93, p. 298

Our minds, yours and mine, are experience laden, stuffed with ideas and tendencies. For our mind unlike our body is coming with us from life to life. It is our companion through many lives. The particular body ends when its karma is over. Not so the mind. The mind goes only into laya, temporary suspension, during sleep, swoon and through yogic practices. It dies only when Self-knowledge dawns and the mind is absorbed in the heart. Till then the mind continues. It is the mind which gathers the life force and moves on to another body, be it subtle or gross, to new pastures to experience the unfinished karmic load. The mind of even a new born baby is old. There is no freshness, nothing new and original about our mind. Consequently, the presence of thought-thrusts is very heavy. To this mind which is already laden with the burden of past experiences, we add a new load of what may be termed as ‘doership acts’. Every action done with the said or unsaid idea of ‘I am the doer’, ‘this action is mine’, ‘the fruits belong to me’ is deadly. For new residual experience leading to more desire, prejudices, and so on are heaped on top. Unfortunately for us this camel’s back, the mind loaded with mental dead weights, never breaks. It only breaks us in the sense that we lose the beauty of life, the charm of it, the wonder of it. To some extent till past starts unfolding there is a sense of wonder in the child, as it grows, as it meets the challenges of the world. But then this sense of wonder, of looking at things with new eyes is lost sooner or later. Then the mind’s helter-skelter starts. Even the fastest human who clocks the best time in the

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Olympic cannot match the speed. Not even the thorough-bred horse can race with it. Its power is endless.

What does Ramana teach us? It is that one should not bother about the contents of this mind, with its innumerable contradictory pulls and counter pulls. It is old and woebegone. You cannot inject new life into it. No 'kayakalpa' can restore to it its freshness, its undistracted essential nature. You have to establish a direct link with consciousness. A detour, a bypass has to be found. Such a detour, such a bypass is self-enquiry. Even this new way, this royal bypass, we are unable to use. For our preconceived ideas, our pet theories lead to constant misconception about the implications and scope of this new and sharp instrument. We blunt its edge in our ignorance.

First we begin by complaining that self-enquiry is difficult. Already a mental block has been projected. Once a prosperous visitor from Punjab came to Ramanasramam. The year was 1934. The gentleman said he was pining for peace and had come in search of it. Ramana questioned in his characteristic way, "Who is it that is pining?" The visitor was puzzled. He had not got a conventional reply. So he asked for a simple solution. He told Ramana, "I am a busy man. Prescribe some japa or pooja". Bhagavan told him, "Please spare only as much time for enquiry as you can spare for japa or pooja, it would amply repay your efforts. With practice it will operate during your busiest hours".

To the visitor the life-giving words of Ramana, in this quote reflected on, had no meaning. So the visitor pleaded with Maharshi, "Do not send me back empty handed". Here was Ramana offering the ambrosia of life, self-enquiry, and the seeker in his ignorance thought he was being sent back empty handed. To satisfy him, Ramana had to pick up some verses from Yoga Vasishta and ask him to contemplate on them. Most of us are in the same state as this Punjabi visitor. Our closed minds, under the pull of

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the past, are unable to grasp the sweep and power of this new instrument placed in our hands by Ramana.

Before dealing with the sure fire method of self-enquiry, one has to recognise certain basic insights given by Ramana about the mind, its origin and its way of functioning. The first proposition is that consciousness, the 'real' or 'true' subject is all pervasive and all inclusive. There is nothing apart from it. So long as one identifies himself with this body, one should look for this consciousness within. One has to find its centre within. This is the spiritual heart from which the mind arises. The mind seems like an independent entity but is only a reflection of consciousness. Therefore it is also consciousness only. Pure and unsullied. But it appears sullied due to association with thoughts which in turn are caused by innumerable tendencies, attachments and so on. Once you succeed in cutting this association, this link, between the thinker and his thoughts, once you succeed in freeing consciousness of thoughts, then the mind, which is always pure, will be rid of its impure accretions, rid of its debilitating habits. The various spiritual practices which deal with associated thoughts are based on the premise that one has to purify his mind by such practices. The idea is fine but the problems remain even after much effort for changes in the content of the mind, with variations in thought flow, with its permutations and combinations, make the task long- drawn and often endless. Hence one has to remember that the mind need not or cannot be made pure for it is always pure and would remain so. Only, a technique must be evolved to delink the mind from the thoughts. This is achieved by minimal mental effort. The effort being to focus attention on the thinker so that conceptualisation does not take place or if it has taken place, it is swiftly ended. This method is self-enquiry, termed as the Brahma-astra or infallible weapon of Ramana. Just as a supersonic jet breaks the sound-barrier, this enquiry into the subject, the 'I', helps in breaking the time barrier in the form

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of associated thoughts. The past no longer operates to impinge on the present. For the enquiry immediately in-turns the mind. The inner journey into the vastness of consciousness commences.

Some would complain of the dryness of self-enquiry and contrast it to devotion where one seems to feel more fulfilled. Ramana would explain that this seeming dryness of the path springs from intellectualising it or by reducing it to a mantra. 'Who am I?;' is not a question. Perhaps one must paint one's mind with the collirium of faith in Ramana's words before starting the enquiry. For it is based on his experience and his categoric assurance to us of its success. You must have a feel for it, have the courage to stay beyond the blankness until the mind is cut free from its associated thoughts. Keeping quiet demands far greater effort than doing something. For it is the most intense activity. Hence we lose the patience to hang on. If only we do not give up so meekly, so early, we are bound to reap benefits far beyond what the limited mind can visualise. Waves after waves of bliss will flood the one who practises. Then one wonders at his folly at not having given himself a chance earlier.

13. LIVING IN THE PRESENT

One established firmly in the natural state is incessantly performing the most difficult penance spontaneously.

– Ramana Gita, Ch.XI, Verse 18.

Everyone has one common inheritance; that is the Karma which destiny has earmarked for being experienced by him. This represents the dead-weight of the past. One may call it 'natal karma'. For karma is a dynamic force, being created, negated and altered by the individual with the power of his mind. In the inter-related ever changing situations of life karma cannot remain static. However, for some the 'natal' karma also remains the final karma. They live a life of driftwoods, afraid to swim in the waters of life. For them every event holds a terror, the terror of the new. They remain spectators of events with no ideas of their own, no warmth of heart and utterly lacking in courage. They are unaware of what it is to participate, what it is to play the game and enjoy the fun of it. The karma of the womb unfolds, works itself out, and folds up. They come and they go. Their life of total non-commitment and consequent superficiality of their minds has denied them its beauty. They have lived as a mere plaything of the past, of the earmarked karma. There is no charm or freshness in any moment of their life, no exhilaration, no joy of the new.

At the other end of the scale are the go-getters. They are endlessly planning, working it out in the minutest detail, steeped in the notion that everything can be made to order. Their strident sense of doership, their reliance on ego-based life, their notion that their success is attributable to their own efforts, pulls them away from life. Why? Because they are always in the future, always looking for fresh vistas to conquer new castles in the air to build. The joy of the present is not for them. They do not know what it is to enjoy life. They do not know. The fresh breeze of

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the present is blown away by the wind of the future. The beauty of nature, with its changing seasons and bounteous variety of life patterns is lost on them. Their enthusiasm gets punctured when there are bad-breaks, when the going is against them, when their success stories receive a few hard blows. They too have wasted their lives. Victims of their over-active minds, which keep pushing them into one action after another, their happiness is sucked out of them.

It is because of this that Ramana emphasises the importance of what one may term 'present-mindedness'. When one says 'present', it should not be understood in the time-frame of past, present and future. Ramana's present is not in the time-frame at all. It is in the eternal 'Now'. It is when this momentum of thought, shuttling one back to the past and forward into the future, has stopped. You cannot hold it. For it keeps changing every minute, and every second. The quality of mind which can experience it is supple, the alertness of an unanchored mind. The mind anchored to its attachments, to its pleasure-pain syndrome can never be aware of it. Freeing the mind from its present anchorages, making it discover its real roots, its true moorings, its source, is the very purpose of sadhana, of spiritual practice.

If one were to ask 'Is this possible?', this looking at life as it opens up its beauty, moment to moment, one would have negated his chances. Possible, impossible are part of the dualistic mode of the mind. What we are working towards is a new way of life, the breath taking joy of which has been denied to us by our inability to understand the mind. One must bid good-bye, say adieu, to all the self-created obstacles in the form of endless doubts and misgivings, in the form of questions like, 'How soon?', 'When?', and so on. Inject yourself with the invigorating tonic of Ramana's assurance that the pure mind, that the non- fragmentary

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mind is yours. It is natural. The accretions are habit born and they get reduced to ashes when the fire of knowledge is lit. Make your effort and let the timeless surge up in your lives and it will, with the same gentle quietness of the entry of Sadguru Ramana. Ramana would say, 'Keep up your practice. There is no need to remind God about his business which is to keep an eye on your welfare. The mistake one is prone to make is to abandon effort under the impression that God's grace is absent. But one should not slacken, for God's grace is bound to operate at the right time'. Even this is a concession to our weak-mindedness, to our false notion of doership.

Ramana would also draw our attention to the need for right approach to sadhana. We make such heavy weather of it. What is the spirit of the mountain-trekker who has not set his sight on the peak but is immersed in climbing it? What is the spirit of the ocean-diver, diving deep into the ocean's bed? The adventure of it lures him, not the hidden treasures there. What is the spirit of a scientist concerned with the research itself? Is it not the very action, not the postponed, not the post-dated pleasure of attainment of something in future.

Remembrance of the vital fact that in the Ramana way the goal and means are not different is also of the utmost importance. One should not distance oneself from the goal by such a division. For it leads to the false belief that one day, God knows when that day would be, you will attain the goal. Proceeding along the paths of self-enquiry and surrender, both working in tandem, both working hand in hand, your sense of separate identity and doership get simultaneously corroded without your being aware of it.

These two debilitating mental chains of identity and doership are being cut, being sawed by vigilant effort on the one hand and grace on the other. The natural state of effortless, spontaneous

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joy would be experienced by the pure mind in the ever deepening silence, in holy silence, which grows on you. You would have arrived without knowing it. 'Utsaha', zest would be there in every action. You may not shout, 'Eureka', 'Eureka', 'I have found, I have found'. There is no need for any outward expression when the cup of joy is full, when you are brimming over with bliss. Then each moment you are in tapas. You are doing penance. Every moment of your life would be auspicious, an endless auspiciousness, for it is timeless.

14. THE TWO WORLDS

HERE YOU ARE BOUND, THERE YOU ARE FREE

“Prarabdha binds a man in all sorts of ways. But it cannot come in the way of self-enquiry or search for true identity. In this one field the mind is totally free. Since the true purpose of life is only to discover one’s true nature, one has freedom in the only thing which matters”.

– Giddaluru Lakshmi Narasimham,
More Ramana Reminiscences,
The Ramana Way, September, 1992.

In Talks, Day by Day, More Talks, Conversations, we find quite a spate of questions about destiny and free will, birth and rebirth and so on. Some are strong votaries of the destiny theory and others of the supremacy of free will. The issue has been beaten black and blue over the centuries for intellectually one can support both positions quite logically. It would be futile to go on traditional grooves of endless arguments on destiny vs. free-will. For whatever be one’s intellectual adherence it matters little till one becomes self-aware, or till one surrenders wholly to the Sadguru. For one will remain within destiny’s ambit so long as one’s sense of doership, the feeling that one is the actor, the thought one is the shaper of his destiny is at the root of one’s actions.

However, it would be necessary to look at it in terms of its practical import for spiritual practice. This vexed question has to be viewed from the overall perspective of the goal of self-knowledge and related infallible means of self-enquiry. In this quote we find Ramana emphasising that what is of consequence is the discovering of one’s true nature, one is totally free in this

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matter only. It is necessary to pause here. For this seems to be at variance from the very first message of Ramana, in 1898, to his mother that what is destined to happen is bound to happen. This of course has been interpreted to mean that destiny is paramount. However, such a view does not seem to be correct even apart from the question of interaction of grace and destiny. For one has to have an overall look at Ramana's teachings. If one does so, one finds that the areas of destiny and free-will are quite clearly earmarked by Ramana.

Ramana has a revolutionary look at the problem. He goes into the question of what is bound. What is the area of destiny? Where does freedom lie? He affirms that the sway of destiny concerns only the body. He would say, "All the activities that the body is to go through were determined when it first came into existence. The whole programme is chalked out". For, the body's birth itself is caused in order that it may experience a certain part of the ethical pluses and minuses of the past. One says part, the part which commences when life springs in the foetus, because that alone is earmarked for a given life-span. The total cannot be exhausted in a single life-span. The storehouse of karma is inexhaustible, till wisdom dawns. Hence the body's momentum goes on and on life after life, death after death to reap the harvest of karma. Only the bodies will change. But they are all karmic bodies. One keeps changing the karmic clothes in order to continue experiencing allotted portions of the ethical balance sheet which remain unexhausted. Hence one might declare that one is bound by destiny in so far as it relates to the body's experiences.

If one is able to keep in sharp focus this truth then one can proceed to the next step. What about the mind? Is it bound or free? It would appear to be bound. This is the logical consequence of one's sense of identification with the body, one's

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feeling of 'I' and 'mine' because of which one experiences, through the mind, the sufferings and pleasures of the body. One is not able to free oneself from what is happening to the body. As long as the root ignorance that one is the body remains and is untackled, related sufferings and joys, based on the identified relationships through blood, marriage, friendship and association are also added on. Consequently, the mental burden of karma, though only a related one, is no different in reality from body's karma. Both the body and the mind seem equally limited by destiny. But the mind's problem is self created. Though mind too continues from the past lives, its core is consciousness, and its source is the fullness of consciousness, the Self. It has the power to remain free from association with the content the mind which is the load of the past. Therefore, one can steer clear of the mental experiencing of the unfolding destiny and be free from it. As Ramana would say, "As for freedom of man he is always free not to identify himself with the body and not be affected by the pleasures and pains consequent on body's activities". As Ramana repeatedly points out one can nullify, cut asunder and be free from destiny by mental dissociation from its working on one's body. To witness the happenings to one's body as if it is someone else's body with whom one has no connection whatsoever would be the habit to be cultivated. The onlooker attitude- "I am not the body which comes and goes, which is subject to the destiny's purpose for which it has come into existence"- would have to be nurtured. Simultaneously remembrance of one's true identity that one's real nature is unbound and ever free is to be fostered. Ramana would emphasise quite often this point of not paying attention to what is inevitably happening to the body. He would say, "Let the body act as it may suit it. Why are you concerned with it? Why do you pay attention to it".

Ramana's life, and especially the intense suffering of his body through sarcoma, and multiple remedies which he allowed

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to be administered on it for the sake of devotees, was a practical demonstration of this truth. The pain, excruciating pain, was there for the body but he had no connection with it. It was the body's disease. It had to go the way of all bodies, like a used leaf-plate which has to be thrown away after eating. True, a jnani's body is not like our bodies. It is the temple of God. It is equally true that as Ramana told Rangan, the Lord of death would have to wait till the jnani gives him the green signal. But the example of Ramana is before our mind's eye demonstrating that what happens to the physical body can be treated as if it is not happening to us. For one is the Self untouched by disease, untouched by pain and sorrow.

One might say that such total detachment is easier spoken of than practised. For, one is only painfully aware of the ups and downs of the mind and its capriciousness. Often it is totally out of control. It can well push one back quickly into the maze of illusory identifications. Therefore, a root and branch solution lies in developing one's capacity to turn the mind inward and make it abide firmly at its source. To achieve this through self-enquiry one has full freedom. For self-enquiry is outside the control of destiny dealing as it does with the very core of the mind, its centre which is consciousness. The tainting and fall of the mind comes later on association with other thoughts, good, bad, neutral and innumerable. Ramana is also quick to add that the purpose of a body's existence is not merely to go through certain pre-ordained experiences. Its essential purpose is to be a necessary vehicle to enable one to work towards freedom from destiny and its ceaseless workings. The goal of life is to be restored to natural freedom and happiness. This goal and the means for it, self-enquiry are precisely the fields which are totally untrammelled and free. In this confidence, in this certainty one can proceed and discover for oneself the elixir of life, in the bliss of Self-knowledge.

15. SELF REALISATION- MISCONCEPTIONS

Nagamma: Is it a fact that while a platform was being constructed at the Virupaksha cave some stranger came and enquired of Bhagavan where the Swami was and Bhagavan had sent him away saying that the Swami had gone somewhere?

Bhagavan: Yes, it is a fact. One morning I arranged the stones, prepared the mud and was building a platform. Some stranger came and asked, 'Where is the Swami?' I said, 'The Swami has gone out somewhere'. Later Echamma teased me about it. Then I said, "Oho! Do you want me to tie a board round the neck saying 'I am the Swami?'"

— Letters, Suri Nagamma, p. 346

Bhagavan was so normal, so much seemingly like one of us that his state of steady wisdom would sometimes go unnoticed. The state of Self-abidance of a person could easily be missed. For instance, in the earlier years Ramana would be engaged in masonry work like any other ordinary labourer, cutting vegetables as a kitchen helper would, and so on. In later years he would be correcting proof of the Ashram publications along with other inmates, narrating tales as an actor would and the like. So it is natural for the unwary not to have even a glimpse of his Himalayan stature. As a consequence, time and again, the incidents of the type extracted from the 'Letters' would keep happening. To illustrate, one day while Bhagavan was cutting vegetables some persons going round the hill wished to know where the Swami was. He replied that the Swami had gone out and they went their way. When an inmate remonstrated, he said, 'What else to do?

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Was I to tell them that I was the Swami?'. It is so easy to be misled when notions about self-realisation and jnanis are as foggy and muddle-headed as they generally seem to be. When a visitor wanted advice from Ramana, since he was Self-realised he said, "You say you think I have Self-realisation. I must know what you mean by Self-realisation. What idea do you have in your mind about it?" It is the absence of this clarity which is at the root of many of our misconceptions about it.

Two visitors to Sri Ramanasramam for the Deepam festival recently met me and said, "We are going to visit Annamalai Swami. Could you please tell us whether he is a Self-realised person". The question which appears quite naive was put with the utmost sincerity. I gently told them, "Has Bhagavan asked us to find out the truth about ourselves or to find whether someone else is Self-realised or not?". How would one know in any case? I told them the Swami had been closely associated with Ramana in the early years of Sri Ramanasramam and that they would do well to spend time with him without any mental reservations.

This conversation sets one reflecting about the state of Self-awareness. What would be the hall-mark, the insignia, if one wished to find out? This question has been quite important to seekers of truth, for Self-realisation is the goal towards which one is working. The characteristic of a 'Sthithapragna', of a seer of steady wisdom, is something which one is keen to know about. In 'Ramana Gita', Ramana has himself explained to us what it means from the Jnani's own view point and that of the onlookers. The Jnani is aware that he is one because his mind is effortlessly silent, being rid of all tendencies which externalise the mind. 'Others' can be sure by his 'samabhava', from his even-mindedness.

The tests have been spelt out to satisfy intellectual interest about the supreme state. However, we allow ourselves to be

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diverted to judging the progress of others. Sure enough, it is an effort which is a futile waste of time and a totally negative mental trend, for one would not only be wasting his energies but quite possibly also arrive at a wrong conclusion. Because realised persons prefer to hide their state, to keep it a secret. Some years ago this issue came out in clear focus in the correspondence between a totally sincere and frank Bombay devotee and S.S. Cohen. Cohen's reply is so forthright and such an eye-opener, it would be worth extracting in full lest we continue this unexpressed evaluation of the spiritual state of other seekers on the Ramana path. "Your remark about my Self-realisation or its negation is so unbecoming that I took a long time to decide about the answer. It is given not in anger but indignation that like many disciples you have wished to judge from this distance. One of them went so far that he denied knowledge of any self-realised man among Bhagavan's disciples. I know six of them within and outside the Ashram. It is not that I am realised or not realised. It is the injustice of these fellows judging wrongly the inner life of their comrades which angers." The whole trouble arises because one is bothered about the post-self-realisation state rather than attaining it for oneself. If one did attain it, then one would 'see for himself'.

However, since this desire to know whether a person is Self-realised is so widespread, perhaps it may not be correct to attribute it to curiosity. It could well be because of the feeling that they would be able to derive greater benefit spiritually if they knew. Then they could more readily surrender to such a person. Apparently this line of thought is logical. However, the danger is that more often than not since our minds are not unitary we would end up by negating the attainment of another devotee. It is this kind of situation about which Cohen is so cross. One would also do well to remember, that even those who 'come to scoff would remain to pray' in the august presence of a spiritual

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Hercules. Do we not know what used to happen in Ramana's presence? The motive with which the person came did not matter. It is not that only genuine seekers of truth came to him. Some might have come to show off their erudition, some others to prove the superiority of their particular faith over others. They may even have started with an attitude of irreverence. Yet all could not but be drawn by his magnetic spiritual presence, so potent that it would work cutting across time and space. One should therefore consider whether there is any need at all to find out if a person is Self-realised or not? His very company would tell the story by plunging the visitor, the seeker in a flood of peace. One should also consider the possibility of misjudgement. Should not one do so? Suppose one wrongly labels a realised person as one who is not so, then one would miss out on the benefits of the 'sat-sang' of his company.

Again, there is yet another aspect to this question. Would we at all desire to know if we are clear about what Self-realisation means? Time and again Ramana has stressed that nothing new is attained in one sense. For if Self-realisation is a matter of attainment one can lose it too. What is gained may be lost. Is it not? The existing state of peace and natural happiness is revealed as we get rid of the obstructions. "Removal of ignorance is the aim of practice and not acquisition of realisation". As tendencies which externalise the mind get fried and destroyed in the fire of intermittent dips into the Self during practice, the mind acquires the capacity to stay within in the heart. Gradually one remains 'effortlessly in alert peace'.

It would be worth stressing again that the perfume of the presence of such a person would reveal its beauty in so many ways. An atmosphere of peace would pervade stilling the minds of those coming within its orbit. Call it a 'steady river of peace', the 'Ramana Lahari', the 'blissful atmosphere of Ramana' or what

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you like. But its stamp is the dynamic silence which envelops everyone. His words will be gentle and soft, his love vast and all embracing. In such an elevating presence we too become aware of what Self-realisation means as an experience.

For each of us there is hope. As we progress in inwardness the forerunners of the natural state would become evident. Work would be done without desire. Action would be rid of fear and anxiety which are now associated with it. Unconscious power, as an inner calm, as an inner detachment would develop, enabling one to take events in their stride. Gradually the joy of that state would become steady. Then all questions fall off. There would be no need to question or doubt the experience of another. Nor would there be a need for an intellectual comprehension of the implications of Self-realisation. Everything, all doubts, evaluations would be dissolved in the vast beatitude of experiencing the natural bliss !

16. IDEAS, IDEAS, AND MORE IDEAS

V: In meditation I try to eliminate the body thought and also the wrong 'I'. But I am unable to succeed.

B: I remember telling you, strictly, on the previous occasion to follow self-enquiry steadfastly and intensely. Who asked you to do round about things?

— Leaves

The Ramana Way, Oct 92. p. 256

When one is attracted to the Ramana Way he begins by gobbling up all available literature, 'Who am I?', 'Mahayoga', 'Teachings', 'Day-by-Day' and so on. A lot of information is gathered. The mind is full of ideas loaded on one another. Unbacked by practice, without reference to experience, it is like undigested food. Such half-baked ideas are exposed when one starts seeking clarification as in this quote under reference. Apparently, in spite of repeated clarifications by Ramana, the seeker was continuing in the old groove trying to tackle the ego by seeking its elimination instead of questing for its source. This visitor is not alone in being muddled about the exact implications of the Ramana Way. Even 'veterans' may miss out sometimes when they are not wary on steering clear of their mental cobwebs. T.K.S. who was for all practical purposes an inmate of the Ashram questions Ramana in a frightened state, "I was trying to meditate on the invisible 'chit-jada-granthi' and trying to visualise it. I got confused and frightened". Ramana reprimanded him mildly, 'Who asked you to resort to indirect and unnecessary courses?'. The 'Granthi', the knot, is a subtle bond linking a thought, the primal 'vritti', 'I' which is pure as it rises, with matter, the other thoughts. This explanation is given to use the scent of consciousness in

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the 'I' as a bridge to get back to the Self, by focussing attention on it. It is the subject and not an object of mediation. Not that T.K.S. did not know. Unfortunately he had allowed his 'excessive' study of scriptures about the knot affect his understanding about its significance in practice. How much greater is need for care in right understanding for lesser mortals like us? **We** could take the case of another devotee also to illustrate the importance of reflecting on Ramana's words instead of memorising them. Ramana has always pointed out that no effort would ever go waste, that it is bound to bear fruit when the time is ripe. A visitor, a doubting Thomas, had gone on a round of pilgrimages half believing in their efficacy. His lingering doubt was whether these pilgrimages could serve a double purpose of 'material benefit' and also 'spiritual progress'. Ramana had to advise him "not to expect immediate benefit" and that "in the usual course God's power will work effectively". Yet, impatience and insufficient faith are our constant companions. **We** are unable to remain patient and confident and keep hankering for some 'concrete' results. The sooner the better. So we think.

So we continue with our diet of dry as dust ideas because we have not built our structure on solid foundations. **We** seem to lack a proper intellectual grasp of basics notwithstanding the extent of reading of spiritual literature. The necessary understanding can come only from experience. As a result we have a string of doubts which seem to have no end. Is self-enquiry only the warding off of thoughts? How is one to overcome sleep during meditation? **Why** dullness or blankness? And so on.

Surely, one does not wish to be a toddler on the path for his whole life. One naturally wishes to grow in purity, in the capacity to handle the swinging of the mental pendulum, in the ability to stay in the source immersed in bliss. Presently all this is quite out of our hands. Ramana keeps enthusing us about the

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certainty of success. So, one must continuously reflect on essentials. For, if the moorings are firm progress is a must. What must one remember? First and perhaps the foremost is to keep in constant focus the feeling that Self alone is real. Also to feel that all that matters is to be aware of it. Next is to remember that the goal and means are the same. This needs to be stressed for in other methods of practice dualism is there, till the ultimate stage. Whereas, in the Ramana Way the method is the same from the start to finish. In practical terms it means one should be able to experience, from the start, spells during which there is cessation of thoughts, when one is still. As a result, at these times, which will keep extending with practice, one will be aware of a happiness which is not the product of the mind. Without such growing experience of the fruits of a silent mind, it is too much to expect sustained interest, too much to expect steadfastness in practice. Thirdly one needs to be conscious of the 'sattvic' moods of mental equilibrium, and to stay in that state. This is because 'the sattvic mind is free of thoughts whereas the rajasic mind is full of it'. Since there are no thoughts in a sattvic mental state it is not different from the Self. The prolongation of such thought-free states would really mean that one's Self-abidance and the resultant undercurrent of peace would be felt long thereafter.

The mental modes have a normal cyclical pattern of activity, orientation, inclination to laziness and quiet alertness. Hence Ramana would emphasise the need for not disturbing the quiet mind, the sattvic mind, during sadhana by assuming that something further has to be done to sustain it. The importance of doing nothing and just letting the peace take over, at this point, cannot be overstated. Because we are so used to doing something, because of our activity and thinking predispositions we do not stay in that quietness.

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It would be useful to recall a conversation which Cohen had with Ramana on this point.

“Mr. Cohen: I get into meditation and reach a point which may be called peace and a contemplative mood. What should be the next step?

Ramana: Peace is Self-realisation. The peace need not be disturbed. One should aim at peace only”.

One has to be ‘alertly passive’ and experience the ensuing joy.

These suggestions are not intended to mean that one should introduce do’s and dont’s in his sadhana. What is intended is to emphasise the need for experience of the natural state as one goes along the path. Such experience can be had only if we do not thoughtlessly let it slip out of our grasp. Unless we recognize the danger of an edifice of ideas unbacked by experience, we would be missing out on the purpose for which we have embarked on the spiritual journey. Should we, when Ramana has shown us such a direct way to turn within and be aware of the innate joy?

17. HANDLING LIFE

D: I am a family man. There is my wife and there are also my children. Is it possible for me to get release and if so how?

M: Do the members of your family bind your mind? Or do you bind yourself to them? Do they come and say we form your family? Or do you consider them to be your family and bind yourself to them? These thoughts are yours. You can entertain these thoughts or relinquish them.

— Talks, 524, p. 506

The world is teeming with its millions. For most of them, the immediate alone matters. To them the hopeless grind of daily life with its repetitive activities and habits is something dear. They hug it as it were. For them life is only a chronology. They are born and they die. Nothing has changed vitally in the interval. They think they have handled all the problems intelligently and live in their cocoons. “Really they have mishandled their lives, for to live is only an opportunity, a gift of God, a precious gift in order to free yourself from all that is shackling and binding, free of ceaseless thought pressure, born of innumerable attachments. To those who long to be free, God lends his helping hand, through a Sadguru, who gently, silently and unobtrusively takes over one’s life if only one would let him. Then the problems of life cease to be problems for you know how to tackle them. It seems so clear that it is the duty of those who have come under the protective care of Sadguru Ramana to recognise that he is the greatest treasure in their lives and to hold on to him with all the strength they can muster.

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A student almost grew up as an intimate member of the Ramana family. She had immense talent and Ramana gave her innumerable chances to express it. One would have thought that she would have taken her marriage in the stride and that it would not have made any difference. But no. One could hardly see her even at the shrine. Once when she happened to be around she was asked, "Why don't we see you? What are your obligations in life?". She replied unhesitatingly, "My first obligation is to my mother, next it is to my husband". Of course, when her children are born, they would be added to the list at the top. Yet she knew all the first principles. She was aware of the paramount duty to find out the truth for herself. As for 'your own' family members one has had thousands of them, yes, thousands through the long chain of births and rebirths. Yet, the grip of the family and her imagined duties towards them had submerged all the beautiful lessons she had learnt. This is not to say that Ramana had walked out of her life; that he never will. May be Ramana would be back the same way with a bang. One hopes and prays. But who can give back the lost months and years. What is lost is lost. And again if we lose our intense link with Ramana what is left except the torment of our prarabdha.

Another, a young alert, intelligent and lively college student was neck deep in the infighting, the constant bickerings of her parents. Fortunately, another co-student had exposed her to Ramana. Till then it was 'hell' at home. Her parents' was a love marriage. However, as the years rolled by this love had taken to its wings. It was only daily quarrels, doubts, suspicions and attendant flare-ups, sometimes uncontrollable too, that remained. The young girl treated her parents' problem as her problem. Should she not do something about it? Wouldn't she be failing in her duty if she did not? Should she not show her love by arbitrating between them and trying to resolve the problem? Her constant advice fell on the deaf ears of her parents till a point

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was reached when her parents told her to call off. "You mind your life. Allow us to handle ours". What could a sensitive young girl do? Wouldn't the situation appear desperate. Though said in anger, the parents had unwittingly uttered words of great wisdom that each person's life is independent and that the first obligation is to oneself, to the quest to know oneself. There is no duty which can override it. One shudders to think of what would have happened to this young girl, had not Ramana entered her life. What would she have done in her moments of desperation? Would she have slashed her wrists, gone mad, or become a victim of anxiety neurosis? Perhaps one need not conjecture. For Ramana has come into her life and once he comes he never lets go of one's hand. His soothing balm of consideration and care would ever be there.

Musing this way one thinks of many who are lured away from life's purpose by the tricks of their mind. A devotee used to live near the shrine which he would visit daily with great devotion. Then one day he had a bee in his bonnet. He was sure that he had an obligation to construct a house, for his wife had been longing for it. He had to do at least this for all that she had done for him. Where could he find a place to construct, within his budget? It was only some far off revenue site. The house has been built. He has made his wife happy. What about himself? He has 'distanced' himself from Ramana. With great difficulty he comes to the shrine once in a month or a couple of months and keeps pining for his good old days when he could come whenever he thought of it. His sense of family obligations had done him in the eye. One might ask 'How can you belittle the peace he got from a happy home?' But then, is that peace that happiness comparable to the vastness of the joy bartered?

All this is not to say that one should be self-centered, unconcerned about those whom karma has brought near and

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made intimate. All that is said is that it is you who are making 'family obligations' an alabross round your neck. It is you, through your thought, giving them such a high position in your scale of values. But also remember that it is not only the caresses but also the severest blows of karma which may be planned through the 'dear' ones whom you cannot negate or drop. It is only when two boxers are close that severe jabs and blows can be given. What is said is that nothing should be allowed to come in the way of one discharging one's primary obligation which is to search for freedom from all that is binding, all that is shackling. Family ties are referred to because they are the closest and therefore most binding. It is precisely here that the feeling of 'I' and 'mine' are strongest.

In this context let us look at the quote from the 'Talks', which has triggered off these reflections. These problems arise because your mind divides people and says that these are my people, my father, my mother and so on. It is thought which brings one near or pushes one far. Quite obviously all thoughts about family ties are one's own thoughts. Suppose you learn to delink yourself from your thoughts, suppose you learn to switch off thought formations, then what happens? You are free either to identify if you choose to, by trying to discharge your karmic debts or by detaching yourself when the relationship is destroying you. I say destroying you because you just cannot afford to fritter away one more life at the altar of any relationship, however dear it may seem at that time. You have to find out how to off-load the daily anxieties and endless cares. One has to face the problem and not seek escape routes like constantly engaging oneself in some activity or the other so as not to have a single free moment when the cares would haunt, or be addicted to entertainment. True, when the house is on fire one has to use a fire extinguisher or run for shelter. Hence, as a temporary reprieve you may find some palliatives. But long term solutions lie only in trying to find

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out the reality of the thinker who is enmeshed in these thoughts. You have to learn to enter the vast wonderland of inner space. You have to savour the sweetness of a mind which is not constantly embattled, of a mind which is rid of thoughts, of a mind which is free, supple and joyous. This can be yours if and only if you consider the goal and the means to reach it as far more precious than all things to which your mind has attached great value thus far. These topsy turvy values, this holding on to trinkets, this throwing away of the celestial 'chintamani' of self-enquiry and self knowledge, must end. Is there a better means, a more infallible means than what Ramana is teaching us? Knowing oneself one would have known how to handle life.

18. SAMADHI AND LIFE

Actionlessness and action are not hostile to each other. Fear of loss of samadhi while one is active is the sign of ignorance. Samadhi must be the natural life of everyone.

– Talks, p. 123

From time immemorial samadhi has been held out as the highest goal of all spiritual endeavour. There is a spate of literature on different types of samadhis, particularly Nirvikalpa Samadhi, where one is free of thoughts and body consciousness. Ramana talks about sahaja samadhi, a state of natural silence of mind when the mind is merged in the source, when one is aware of the dance of the 'I' - 'I' continuously in the heart. But in this state one is fully aware of the body and its actions without loss of Self-awareness.

Is this only a utopian dream, a distant horizon? 'No', says Ramana. On the contrary it is the only reality. For the samadhi is natural. That which is natural is also universal. It is not the exclusive property of only yogis, tapasvis, siddhas and saints. It is everyone's. Everyone's! One can surely raise his eyebrows in doubt, questioningly. But it is true that it belongs as much to those engaged in the whirl of activities as to the recluse.

What greater strengthening affirmation can Ramana give to seekers who are parched for peace and happiness? In nearly all the conversations recorded in the 'Talks' and 'Day by Day' one finds a common thread, the assumption that activity and work cannot go hand in hand with the inner poise, with peace and all pervasive silence.

The seekers are only too ready to write off wisdom for

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themselves because they cannot be free of activity. Hence the first target of Ramana is to remove their false notion, this delusion. We find in the quote we are meditating on, Ramana's statement that actionlessness and action are not opposed to each other and also that the fear that samadhi would be lost because of work is unfounded. It springs from ignorance. Of course, Ramana has been dinning this proposition into us through Paul Bruntons and Jivrajanis over the decades. But we seem determined to hang on to our false beliefs and debilitating notions. So Ramana tries to help the seeker by stressing several unassailable truths. Even if one contemplates on any one of them to its logical conclusion it would end once and for all the mental block and its consequences.

The first thing to be remembered is that one cannot voluntarily relinquish or grasp work. One cannot by an act of will decide to work, or work this much only or cease to work. Why? For, "all the activities which the body has to go through are determined when it comes into existence". As Ramana says, "The whole thing is programmed". "The same force which gave rise to the body will ensure that the body's purpose is fully worked out". Once this fact is understood then all seeking for work and all attempts to escape from it would end. For action would then be seen to be automatic and inevitable. One cannot court it or shy away from it. What the body has to do it has to do. It can neither add nor subtract.

Pausing here, does this truth require much proof? Is it not the experience of each of us? Have we been able to take a holiday, to run away to the hills or the sea-shore to escape from work? Does not something all too important which has to be done within a time-frame, come in the way? Contrarily, are there not times when we are fiddling our thumbs, or swatting flies when we would much rather plunge neck deep into work. The lockouts,

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the layoffs, the plight of 'retired' persons seeking some work to 'pass their time', the unemployed youth making all-out efforts for jobs in vain are all there before us. Work comes in sudden spells, steady pace or not at all. And in this interrelated world unless our karma lies that way, work or its absence cannot be chosen. When this inescapable fact is imprinted on the mind the attachment to action drops off. One will not bemoan lack of work or be elated by piles of it. Work would be done unhurriedly and in repose.

While the attachment to action is on the wane, is exiting, there are still mental hurdles to be jumped over, the main one being the ego-centred belief that the success of our actions depend on us, our effort, our involvement and that we are its architects. Here again we are up against ground realities. Effort and success have never been constant companions. For success and failure are divinely ordained says Ramana. It is the creator's laws which govern them. The sudden riches, the sliding into insolvency, the inability to put through sure - fire real estate deals, the puerile stuff becoming best sellers while solid gold is 'wasting its fragrance on the desert air' evidences this. Where then is the cause for clinging to the results, to result oriented actions? Action and its result are both outside the pale of one's control. They are part of the divine scheme of things. As we recognise it and experience it through our seeming failures, when all our efforts have come to naught, we cross the second barrier which is destroying our peace while we are inevitably engaged in action.

For crossing these mental handicaps to natural peace, to natural samadhi, Ramana keeps helping us by the invigorating suggestion, "Why don't you act as an actor on the stage, or the cashier in the bank? Does either of them identify himself with his role in the play or the cash he is counting?" You too are only an actor in the cosmic play in which you have been given a role according to the karma which has started to bear fruit. You have

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played many different roles in the past lives. Actually you are a seasoned actor, aren't you? Yet, why this identification with this particular role and the actions related to it? Cast off this robe, this covering of attachments. Be free. Then it is such a joy! Is it not? Be aware of the consciousness, the fire within, without and everywhere which ignites you and protects you. Why forget that your Sadguru Ramana's presence is always there devouring you with his smile of the spirit, of the Self, with his embrace of bliss?

19. THE FRAGMENTARY APPROACH

D: Is it permissible for ladies to do Pranava Japa (Meditation of 'OM')?

B: The ultimate purpose of Pranava Japa as for every other sadhana is jnana. For those who seek jnana through sadhana there is no prohibition or discrimination between men and women.

Bhagavan added "People often get attached to their sadhana and take it as an end in itself. They forget that sadhana such as breath control, japa, yoga, etc. are all means to a common end, namely mind control. So all these doubts arise".

— Reminiscences, G.V. Subbaramayya, p. 76

When asked as to what is the best sadhana Ramana would reply that it would depend on the individual's natural inclinations, his spiritual background, his earnestness and so on. Whatever be the advice and the spiritual stature of the one whose counsel is being sought, the individual would in any case continue in accordance with his predisposition. Those with 'sastravasanas', with predisposition to scriptures, would depend exclusively on 'pooja' worship, and the prescribed rituals even when exposed to self-enquiry's potency for Self-knowledge. Those with inclinations towards 'Shakti' worship would continue to pursue 'Kundalini' yoga, the awakening of the 'serpent power'. Those inclined to yoga would concentrate on Hatha yogic practices. Those with emotional and sentimental temperaments will find in devotional singing and drums and cymbals, the be all and end all. For the imaginative there are their ideas about creation, yugas, the fourteen worlds etc. It is such a medley. Each clinging to his pet sadhana, makes it into a water-tight compartment. There is no room even for a whiff of fresh air, for the entry of the modern

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man's best sadhana weapon self-enquiry, taught incessantly by Ramana. By and large, one is pushed along by vasanas, tendencies, which determine his path. At best a little of self-enquiry is added as a concession to their theoretical acceptance of its directness and utility. It is for this reason that Ramana would never disturb people's faith but would rather veer them around gradually by exposing them to the path, explaining the implications of self-enquiry and dealing with doubts with motherly patience.

The same problems of old traditions would come up in a different form to those who had different gurus in the past who had initiated them into certain sacred syllables or practices. Would they not be swapping gurus? Would not their failure to continue entail harm? Though only a few like G.V. Subbaramayya and N. Balarama Reddy have specifically posed this problem to Ramana, it is quite a common fear. A fear which is inescapable so long as you do not recognise the sadguru. A jnani is the repository of all power and that when one turns to him everything merges in that source of power.

It is for this reason that Ramana never suggested to anyone that they should give up anything, their attachments to what they were doing or towards which they were inclined. Being a 'bhavaroga bishak', the master physician to cure the malady of worldliness, he would handle this problem in three ways. He would ask them to ponder why they were doing what they were doing. Should the means be stressed forgetting the goal? What really was their expectation from their spiritual practices? As in the quote being meditated, this point is stressed: "People often forget and get attached to their sadhana and take it as an end in itself. If one is conscious of what one is working towards then the indices of progress would always be there. One would recognise that his method, whatever it be, is a means for

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'chittasuddhi', the purification of the mind. This point is made by Ramana to Paul Brunton.

Paul Brunton: What does the Maharshi say about Hatha Yoga or Tantric practices?

Maharshi: Maharshi does not criticise any of the extant methods. All are good for the purification of the mind.

Ramana makes this point in his 'Upadesa Saram' in which he highlights the fact that action performed without desires and dedicated to God would purify the mind. The mind would be prepared for the pursuit of the goal, liberation. Here again purification too has to be seen not as an end in itself but only a step in the direction of the goal towards which one is striving irrespective of his method.

The second way in which Ramana would tackle the problem of multifarious methods and innumerable practitioners with diverse temperaments would be to stress the primacy, the paramount nature of self-enquiry. He stressed this in 'Ramana Gita' way back in 1917, while answering Karshni. Ramana told him, "The result of self-enquiry is the cure for all sorrows. It is the highest of all results. There is nothing greater than this". Ramana added, "Marvellous occult powers are possible through practices other than self-enquiry. But even if one secures such powers ultimately self-enquiry alone gives liberation". The why of it has been stressed by Ramana. For it tackles that which stands between us and our awareness of our true nature; the ego. The nature of the ego, of the mind is gone into straightaway "whereas other modes of meditation can go on only if the ego is kept up. There is ego, and the object meditated upon. On the contrary, merging in its source the ego disappears. What is left is the Self"

The third way in which Ramana would handle the votaries of different paths would be by being accessible to them at all

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times. The doors of the 'Old hall' at Sri Ramanasramam were open all the twenty-four hours throughout the three hundred and sixty five days of the year. The seekers could clarify their doubts not only about their own path but also about the efficacy of self-enquiry. They could speak unreservedly. One such seeker asked:

D: If I follow Bhagavan's method and ask "To whom are these passions?" they do not seem to die but grow stronger.

B: That only shows that you are not going about my method properly. The only way is to find out the root of the desire and then remove it.

Alternatively Ramana would stress the need for grace, the need to recognise that by individual effort alone one cannot succeed. God reliance, reliance on the Sadguru's guidance and grace is a must. Ramana stressed this while replying to a devotee who was worried about the obstacles.

D: They say that sadhana is necessary and also that there are obstacles. We get confused.

M: Sadhanas are required for putting an end to obstacles. Finally there comes a stage when one feels helpless notwithstanding the sadhana. He is unable to pursue the much cherished sadhana also. It is then that God's power is realised.

As one journeys with firm faith in the Sadguru Ramana, the sadhanas which had brought them to him would have done their job. One may or may not keep up the outward practice. But inwardly he will no longer be attached to it. One has not abandoned them. They have fallen off like a ripe fruit from a tree. One will learn to view every effort in the right perspective as a step forward in inwardness, in Selfwardness, in the discovery of one's own natural happiness.

20. STAYING WITH THE EXPERIENCE

D: Thoughts cease suddenly, the 'I' - 'I' rises as suddenly and continues. It is only in the feeling, not in the intellect. Can it be right?

M: It is certainly right.... Feeling is the primary factor.

D: When I see outside, it disappears. What is to be done?

M: It must be held tight.

— Talks 24, pp. 21-22.

What is the 'ultimate' in spiritual experience? Is it available now but not known to us? Do spiritual practices give us something new or do they reveal what already exists? If it is revelatory, does the discovery come only in the end as a sudden flash? Or does one have glimpses of the experience all along the way? Does practice only prolong and steady the experience? Is the nature of experience during practice different from the 'ultimate' experience?

These questions have all been answered, and answered repeatedly by Ramana. Yet our weakened minds are unable to grasp it. They are unable to hold onto, unable to grasp the experience which is of a different dimension. What is this experience? Ramana says that it is only the experience of natural happiness. Natural because of its universality. Natural because it is not dependent on any circumstances, any relationships. Therefore it is non-mental. For the mind functions only through a series of relationships related to the 'I'. Natural also because it is not something which is present sometimes and absent at other times. It is ever one's own and cannot be given or taken away. Ramana also makes it clear that the nature of experience,

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this experiencing of natural happiness is not postponed till the very end. If it were so there would be no spur, no incentive to sustain and nourish spiritual practice. The first flush of enthusiasm would soon wane and fade away. Hence the proposition that the goal of experiencing ultimate happiness and the means to it are the same. Through practice larger and larger doses of the same experience are had till at last only that experience is there always and unwaveringly. One is in that state.

Many find it hard to believe or accept that the practice and goal are one and the same. But that is the fact which is of considerable significance for spiritual practice. The non- separation of the means and the goal gives a certain immediacy, certain sense of urgency to the practice. For it becomes totally experience oriented.

If you have to have an experience which is not of the mind, quite logically you should learn to put aside the mind, to deal with and negate its obstructive ways. Each one is aware of his own mental state. It is covered with smog, dust and pollution like the atmosphere in a big city. The rush of thoughts is like the rush of traffic with two wheelers, three wheelers, old cars, modern posh cars, buses, lorries and all competing to go ahead. Can such a mind burdened by thoughts be silent? A legitimate question no doubt. It ceases to be so after Ramana has made available his invincible weapon of self-enquiry. The thoughts are no doubt numerous. True, they are pulling us in contrary directions. A constant inner battle is on for claiming the individual's attention. But their numerical strength, their contradictions can be wholly put aside by turning one's attention away from them and thereby nullifying their momentum. The seemingly simple shift in the attention of the mind to its core, when the seeker becomes the sought, marks the beginning of the end of the mind's sway over us. The mind thus turned inward is silent. But then fear grips

Staying With The Experience

one. For it is a strange experience, an experience of happiness by seemingly not doing anything, by just remaining alert to the starting of thought movement. This doubt and fear abruptly end the joy being experienced. Lack of courage to stay with that experience ends it. The mind reminds one of a thousand duties on hand, the many jobs to be done and so on. This voluntary hara-kiri, this voluntary giving up of the beauty of life which is experienced when the mind is silent has long denied one the fruits of one's labour. For staying with that peace is a must.

Here one can refer to Ramana's counsel to practitioners. A young man Krishna Jivrajani from Karachi asked:-

J: When I reach the thoughtless stage in my sadhana I enjoy a certain pleasure but sometimes I also experience a vague fear which I cannot describe.

B: You may experience anything but you should not rest content with that. Whether you experience pleasure or fear, ask yourself, 'who feels this pleasure and fear' until pleasure and fear are transcended and reality alone remains.

There is nothing unique with such a thing happening or being experienced, but you must never stop with that.... When thought is quelled one must press on until all duality ceases.

Here Bhagavan has given his famous antidote to the fear of experiencing the state of non-doing, the state of just being. Question the one who has the fear. Let the fear not cheat you of staying with the experience of natural peace, the exhilaration of true silence. Since it is fear which has given strength to the mind's false alarms this root fear has to be handled in Ramana's way.

One could refer to the conversation which Cohen had with Ramana where again the need to hold on to the peace is stressed.

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C: I get into meditation and reach a point which may be called peace. What Should be the next step?

M: Peace need not be disturbed. One should be in that peace only.

C: But I do not have satisfaction.

M: Because your peace is temporary. If made permanent it is called Realisation.

Time and again Ramana would bring the seeker back to the need for recognition that positive alertness alone is needed when the mind is turned inward. It may seem like being inactive, but it is not. But one's action orientation allows the mind to resume its sway by entry of thoughts. A conversation with Mrs. Pigott could also be taken to be yet another example of Ramana's emphasis on not letting the experience slip out.

B: Try to realise the body is not you, the emotions are not you, the intellect is not you. When all these are still you will find-

Mrs. P.: What?

B: You will discover. It is not for me to say what the nature of the individual experience is. Hold on to that.

Each one who is serious about practice does experience this beatitude, a peace which envelops when the mind has become quiet through non-objective meditation, through inwardness. But lack of experience of this spontaneous experience, an experience which is non-mental leads to its being lost. Such spells must be hung on to for in the continuity of that happiness lies one's freedom.

21. TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Mon. Georges Le Bot, Chief of Cabinet of Pondicherry Government came to Bhagavan with a request, the gist of which is as follows: "I did some sadhana and attained a stage where the ego was near annihilated. I wanted the ego to be annihilated. But at the same time I wished to be there to see it being killed. This looked like having contradictory desires. Will the Maharshi please help me to reach this final stage and kill the ego?"

Bhagavan kept silent for a few minutes, all the while steadily looking at the visitor. After sometime the visitor left saying "I shall come again when I am able to assimilate Maharshi's spiritual help".

— Day by Day, p.63

Before leaving the visitor explained to Osborne why he had put the question: "I had the experience described by me, twice, first by own efforts, and the second under the influence of a French philosopher who held my wrist and brought me to the same stage. Both times I kept approaching the breaking point in waves but shrunk back."

The problem of Georges Le Bot is also ours. When we come to brasstacks we shy away. Some recognise this. Others don't. The fact remains so. We are not ready to receive Ramana's message when it is pushed to its logical extreme. N.Balarama Reddy, an old devotee and inmate of Sri Ramanasramam who was present in the Old Hall on that day would relate this incident frequently in the context of one's preparedness to receive Ramana's grace, fully. He would recall how the French visitor actually panicked on receiving the penetrating and powerful look of Ramana and blurted out "Not now", "Not now", "Later, Later". For the whole ground under the world we know is being shaken.

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All the attachments consequent on one's identification with the body and mind are being scorched and reduced to ashes. Our intellectual acceptance of Ramana's direct path would bring us to accept mentally the inevitability of the mind's death as a prerequisite for the awareness of the real 'I'. But when one reaches that point in spiritual practice, a host of fears grip the mind. Where would we be when our very existence has been related by us to thinking, to the thought process? The consequence of the ending of our existence based on this false notion, based on this illusion, is far too fearful to let one go beyond, to let one scale the peaks and reach the summit: Self-knowledge. The mind pushes back the goal itself to a later date, to sometime in future when it makes us believe we would be sufficiently ripe and ready. When that would be is a question which would not be raised for it has far too dangerous possibilities.

In this context one may recall the conversation which the renowned philosopher U. G. Krishnamurti had with Ramana. Having heard about the transference of spiritual power by a Sadguru, he asked Ramana whether he could give him Self-knowledge. Ramana's reply was "Suppose I do. Can you receive it ?" Kanakamma, an old devotee, also narrated an incident where a young man came to Ramana and said, "Sri Ramakrishna gave nirvikalpa samadhi to Vivekananda. Can you give it to me ?" Ramana's reply was, "Is the questioner Vivekananda?" meaning thereby 'He was ready, are you?' Ready for what? Ready for an egoless life.

When one goes into this fear, call it the fear of the unknown, or the fear of losing of the known, one finds a plethora of misconceptions. Numerous are the conceptual misunderstandings of what the ego's death means, of what destruction of the mind means. As a result what is most natural is seen to be unnatural, and what is unnatural is taken to be the natural. Therefore it is

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necessary to have a thorough cleansing of the mind. Just as a stomach wash is the remedy for an overdose of sedatives, a proper course of deconceptualisation is an unavoidable necessity if this gripping fear, which stands mightily in our way is to be tackled. In fact Ramana recognised the significance of this problem and would deal with it from different angles. We may take up one of the conversations, the one which he had with an Australian visitor who had studied the Hindu scriptures. It runs thus:

M: You existed in deep sleep. You are the same one who continues to exist. Are you not?

V: Yes.

M: With this difference: you are associated with your thinking faculty in your waking state and you are disassociated from it in deep sleep. Is it not so?

V: Yes.

M: Which therefore is your real nature (existence)? Is it to be associated with thinking or to be disassociated? Logically when one exists in deep sleep without thoughts, without the mind how can waking experience be the totality? One's existence is not mind based but is based on something else which is experienced unconsciously in deep sleep. This is to be experienced consciously, consciously through practice, through Guru's grace. Thus the eternity of one's existence independently of the mind's rising or its subsidence, or the birth and death of the body would be revealed.

As for that bug-bear, the scare-booby, the phrase "destruction of the mind", it has worked havoc because of one's failure to grasp what its implications are. Here again, Ramana has come to our rescue. He told a group of devotees, "People are afraid that when the ego or mind is killed, the result may be a mere blank, not happiness. What really happens is that the

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thinker, the object of thought and thinking all merge in the one source, consciousness. This is bliss itself. That state is neither inert nor blank. I don't understand why people should be afraid of that state." To yet others he has made it clear that all that happens is that, the innate tendencies are washed away. The mind is restored to its original purity, its distractions due to attachments having been rendered powerless. It is really not a case of 'no mind' vs. the mind but one of pure mind vs. the present sullied one. What indeed can be the option?.

Many of these doubts really arise because of insufficient experience of the fruits of the Ramana way. The goal and way are not different. Each day the mind which is intuned through self-enquiry would be experiencing the pure bliss of the natural state. Gradually this experience steadies until it becomes permanent. So one slides from one state to another without always waiting to take the plunge. It happens naturally. The world of doubts and fears comes to an end for the doubter, the separate entity is not there. There is only the awareness of that limitless expanse of bliss.

22. STAYING WITH RAMANA

Though illusion still often veils the vision of Reality revealed in the blessed silence of Your Presence still the inner urge to realise the Self remains strong..... What the soul has experienced and knows repeatedly as Truth, can neither be denied nor ever forgotten. That which is gives constant strength to persevere”.

– Letter dated 21st November 1938 from
Pascaline Mallet to Ramana. Talks, 603.

What makes for perseverance in sadhana, for unflagging interest in spiritual practice? Quite obviously it can only be the experience of job, of peace which comes during the allotted time for meditating, for self-enquiry, and the general sense of well being throughout arising from it. So long as we feed our mind only an intellectual diet, the enthusiasm is bound to wane. Dullness creeps in. Hence Ramana’s constant emphasis on the need for experiencing the natural state.

It seems that to successfully tread the path of self-enquiry, complete and undiluted faith in Ramana’s omniscience and omnipotence is necessary. Without such faith complete surrender is not possible. Here it would be worthwhile remembering that Sadguru takes over charge, fully, of the lives of those who have given themselves to him. Ramana states this position categorically while answering Paul Brunton in 1931. The conversation ran thus:

Brunton: Is it necessary to surrender one’s life to the Guru?

Maharshi: Yes. One should surrender everything to the dispeller of darkness.

Brunton: Does a guru take control of the disciple’s worldly affairs also?

Maharshi: Yes. Everything.

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Brunton: Can he give the disciple the spiritual spark that he needs?

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

The importance of unqualified faith in Ramana arises all the more because Sadgurus are indeed rare though gurus may be many. In the early years of this century Swami Natanananda had sought Ramana's clarification on the characteristics of a Sadguru. Ramana had told him, "Steady abidance in the self, looking with an equal eye, unshakable courage at all times, in all places and circumstances." How many can in fact fulfill these multiple conditions? Those to whom Ramana had provided the necessary insight and who had a glimpse of his glory are sure that the like of him come only "once in a millennium or two".

Here one has to remember that the mind is always upto its tricks. Promiscuity is the nature of the mind. Given this tendency, one might seek counsel or guidance from others well meaningly.

While on this point one will do well to recall Ramana's advice to Kunju Swami. The Swami, having had a thorough grounding in Vedantic wisdom, had a tendency to go to places where Vedanta was being studied in depth and to those learned in the scriptures. Urged by this desire he went to Santhalinga Mutt near Coimbatore where one Swami advised him to read and master the sixteen Vedantic texts.

When Kunju Swami sought Ramana's advice, he said, "Now you want to study Vedanta: later Siddanta, Sanskrit, Disputations, etc., etc. If you learn to be in your Self, that amounts to learning everything." At one stroke this advice erased the weakness for spiritual learning from the Swami's mind. This is but an illustration

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of a seemingly laudable purpose having the lurking danger of making one stray from the search for discovering the Self.

Again another instance relating to Kunju Swami could be cited. When the Swami went to other religious heads he had a problem whether to prostrate to them or not. When asked, Ramana told him the best course was not to go elsewhere when he did not feel the need. However, if for some reason he did, he should regard that particular person as the embodiment of his own Sadguru and then offer proper respect. Can we, do we, regard all gurus as none other than manifestations of Ramana? Since we cannot or until we can, is it not better for play safe and hold on until experience strengthens faith?

The best way to stay steadfast is of course to be diligent and single-minded in pursuing the Ramana path. One has to be constantly at self-enquiry, nipping all conceptualisation at the very beginning. How can we claim to be followers of the Ramana Way and yet be lukewarm to his central teaching? Bhagavan would frequently say to Kunju Swami who was his attendant for many years, "it is no use saying that I am serving Bhagavan, I am dusting his bed, I have served him so long. Besides service one should follow the path shown by the guru. The greatest service to the guru is to be engaged in self-enquiry in all sincerity". Ramana told Natanananda that a Sadguru is constantly preventing the disciple from swerving from the true path and "establishes him in his own real nature without differentiation". What is distant is brought near by Ramana. If only we let him, if only we yearn to be aware of his inner presence. Undistracted faith, a constant remembrance of the Himalayan stature of Ramana as Sadguru is a precondition for this.

Ramana was once asked what is the difference between a person who has never had the experience of abiding in the natural state and the one who has had intermittent experience

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of it. The former will keep circling in the whirl of his externalised mind. He is like a person caught in the movement of a giant wheel which does not stop. Caught up in his petty sorrows and joys he keeps going up and down hugging the very things which destroy the beauty of life. The person who has had the experience of the natural state for however brief a spell it may be, is bound to come back for more of it. As Pascaline puts it in the quote reflected on, "What one has experienced and knows to be the Truth can neither be denied nor forgotten". Ramana would illustrate it by referring to a cow which has been fed on luscious grass and rich fodder in its own place in contrast to a cow which is being allowed to feed on other's pastures. There is no hope for the latter. Not all the beating such a cow might receive would prevent its habit whereas the former is sure to come back and in time stay content at its own place. Similarly the taste of the joyous fountain within is bound to take one back. One may fall many times, but 'tireless striving' will be there to get one back, on course, to enable one to remain steady. All the dullness in sadhana would end. For then, experience not ideas would be beckoning. And of course the ever ready helmsman Ramana is always there at hand to ferry us across to the other shore.

23. BEING IN CONTACT

B: Contact with jnanis is good. It steals into the devotee in silence.

D: Does it hold good even after dissolution of the physical body of a jnani or is it true only so long as he is in flesh and blood?

B: Guru is not a physical form. So the contact will remain even after the physical form of guru ends.

— Day by Day with Bhagavan, p. 145

The bhajan is reaching its crescendo. Emotions are running high. Songs in praise of God and Guru have gone on for some time. The song says that guru is father, mother, relative, friend, wealth etc., one after another all the possible things to which one is attached are enumerated. Everyone is proclaiming loudly to the beat of the music that we have for the guru the kind of love which we would have for all our attachments rolled into one. At that moment, the singers would not be false to their feelings. There is a momentary swell of affection for the guru. The bhajan is over, offerings are distributed and one is back home. The feeling behind the songs sung with such frenzy earlier is forgotten. The guru takes his usual back seat, to be remembered, if possible, during the limited time allotted for meditation and of course at times of stress or when things go out of hand. This makes one wonder why we really care so little when we get down to brass-tacks. How much of our time is really given to Ramana? How easy it is for us to spend hours enjoying the prattle of grandchildren, to gloat over the achievement of our children and to generally earmark nearly all our spare time for our “dear ones” or should we say to somehow steal time to be with people whom we identify with and classify as our own? Is this because Ramana is so

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easily pleased, so ready to give his bounties even unasked, that we take him for granted? We don't seem to work hard enough, put our heart and soul to establish a firm, solid and continuous relationship with him. May be Ramana should not offer everything on a platter so that we can have an idea of how much he means, how much he is bestowing. But then it is asking for something which Ramana does not know how to do. He is compassion personified. How ready he is to forgive our daily trespasses. Holding back is unknown to him. There is only one word in his dictionary - 'Give', 'Give', 'Give'.

But what a grave injury we would be doing to ourselves if we end our lives without giving Ramana the pride of place in our minds and hearts. None in the world gives an iota of the love Ramana is so readily showering in return for our miserly exchange. "He alone knows what love means" as Sundaresa Iyer would say. His is not a distracted, fragmentary, divided give-and-take love but one which flows like a perennial river. Anyone can partake of its plentifulness. As Sadguru his silent inner presence keeps ripening us, helps in restoring our natural bliss, keeps opening up mental space. Gradually we are born anew, to freedom from karma relating to this body, free from the heavy load of a clustered mind.

When so much is at stake in terms of happiness one wonders why one does not care enough to bind oneself firmly to Ramana, to do all that one can for maintaining a continuous association. The old devotees seem so different. The impact of Bhagavan's presence was felt so strongly by them that they were filled with eager longing to grasp every opportunity of rushing to Sri Ramanasramam, to be in his presence. Vacations, week-ends, holidays were earmarked just for this. No doubt they had the enormous advantage of being in Ramana's physical presence. They could always be with him without any restriction be it the

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Mango Grove years, Virupaksha Cave years, Skandasramam years, or the twenty eight long years at Sri Ramanasramam. All that one could wish was just to be in the atmosphere saturated with indescribable peace. Feasting their eyes, enjoying his jokes, his dramatic stories, filled with wonder at his words of wisdom they were soaked in joy. How could they leave him even when compelled by duties? Somehow they had to tear themselves away. The physical attraction of the overpowering inner radiance which filled Bhagavan's body with luster was also very much there. When Ramana was on the hill this attraction was so strong that often ardent devotees like Vasudeva Sastri and Ramanatha Brahmachari would find it well nigh impossible to resist the temptation to hug him to their hearts content. Even in the late thirties the position was very much the same. N.N. Rajan records in his 'More Talks with Ramana Maharshi', "After his bath he would come out and stand for about two or three minutes on the steps facing west. It was a grand sight to see him at that time. His effulgence would be so distinctly visible. We can never forget this magnificent darsan". Then there were also the evening hours after Vedic chanting when everyone would be gathered into the vastness of Ramana's silence.

Should the physical absence of Ramana make such a difference? Does it mean that the post-nirvana disciples and devotees cannot have the same kind of intimacy and companionship which the 'old' devotees had? But then, is Ramana absent even physically? Do not his photographs, hundreds of them, breathe life? Each one has its own power and fascination to attract, to make one feel that nothing happened even physically on the 14th of April 1950. What eyes with their unmatched power and peace? What eyes which speak, which converse? What magic in those eyes which keep beckoning.

Even so something is lacking. There is no excitement, no joyous eagerness to be tuned to Ramana. We do not miss him

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enough. The answer lies in the fact that one cannot enter or stay in the Ramana land of inner silence unless one is able to be aware of the unreality of the mind as a separate entity. When thought power is negated through self-enquiry and surrender where is the mind? It folds up and merges into its source. Then one recognises the glory and magnificence of Ramana's presence as the inner guru. One feels his joyous dance as 'I' as 'I' in the heart. He draws us to himself by his magnetic pull, by bestowing his own state of fullness. There would be no need to find a way for union for then there is no separation. Freed from mental shackles we would have found the meaning of life in its fullness and joyous exuberance.

24. THE DIFFICULT PATH

Many visitors came on one occasion and they all saluted Bhagavan with the single prayer, 'Make me a bhakta', 'Give moksha'. After they left, Bhagavan said, thinking aloud, "All of them want bhakti and moksha. If I say to them 'give yourself to me', they will not. How can they get what they want?"

— Talks, pp.543 and 555.

There was a rush of visitors because it was Christmas vacation. They came from far and near. A group of them sat near Bhagavan and two of them began to ask questions. The tenor of their questions was almost irreverent - 'Have you realised the Self?', 'Have you experienced nirvikalpa samadhi?' and so on. After a series of such questions, there was a change. They sought Bhagavan's help 'to realise the truth'. They were told that his help was always there and would be realised by them if they surrendered. One of them asked Ramana, "Will, sadguru place his hands on my head to assure me of his help? I will have the consolation that his promise will be fulfilled". Ramana humorously replied, "A bond will be the next requisition and a suit will be filed if you imagine no help is forthcoming".

The attitude of the visitors is somewhat typical. They wanted quick results, by shortcut methods. Their frame of mind was hardly humble as was evident from their questions. They had not recognised the omnipotence or capacity of Ramana to take charge of their affairs. They merely wanted to cash in on their short visit and get an assurance of lasting protection.

Surrendering and questioning the course of events are contradictory. One cannot say that he has surrendered and yet doubt the wisdom of the way things are happening, hold an opinion that some other result which he had wished for would

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have been better. The very labelling of an event as 'good' or 'bad' would again be contradiction. For, to surrender is to give up totally the sense of doership, the thought that one is responsible either for the action or its results. For, in truth, everything happens in accordance with God's scheme of things; a fact which one will recognise automatically if one has surrendered. To wish for a particular course of action, for the fulfilment of a particular request, 'is not surrender but command'. As Ramana would say, "You cannot have him obey you and think you have surrendered". If doubt exists about the grace of the guru, one might say that he has surrendered but it would only be deluding oneself.

Looking at the quote we are reflecting on, Ramana is clearly pointing out a stark reality. Few are really ready to surrender. Ramana is indeed asking out of compassion in order to take over our burden on to his shoulders, "Give yourself to me". But that asking of his, that beckoning of his lustrous eyes is lost on us. One is not really ready to give up his ego-world, his bank balances, his pet ideas, his special welfare schemes. To give up the sense of doership, the feeling that one is the creator of his own destiny, is difficult. And unless this is given up, how can there be surrender to the guru? Your will and divine will cannot go hand in hand. Yet it is our desire to have the best of both the worlds that makes us harbour the false notion of having surrendered while retaining the doership idea.

It is this kind of false notion which makes one reject self-enquiry as difficult and choose surrender as the easier of the two alternatives given by Ramana for discovering natural happiness. It seems that in many ways self-enquiry is easier, for you are dealing with the most intimate, with the self-evident 'I'. This 'I' is the very core of our lives. Yet rejecting the enquiry relating to the subject, about oneself, we remain in the smug belief that we have placed our affairs in the hands of the sadguru

The Difficult Path

Ramana. That is why Ramana keeps cautioning about the limitation of 'conditional surrender' and about the inherent contradictions between devotees' claims and their way of life, attitude to events.

The fact is that if one has surrendered to the higher power, "that power sees your affairs through, that power will take over your affairs along with the fruits of action". A most moving account of how Ramana would take over the burden is narrated by Krishna Bikshu in his reminiscences. Once all of a sudden a visitor started weeping profusely. "I am a sinner. For a long time I have been coming to your feet but there has been no change in me. Can I become pure at last? How long am I to wait? When I am near you, I am good for a time. But when I leave this place I become a beast again. You cannot imagine how bad I can be - hardly a human being. Am I to remain a sinner for ever?" Bhagavan told him, 'If I am your guru, what are my fees? Surely you should pay the fee for my services', "But, you won't take anything" cried the visitor. "All right, Now I am asking. What will you give me". "Take anything, all is yours". "Then give me all the good you have done in the world". "What good have I done? I have not a single virtue to my credit". "You have promised to give. Now give". And he agreed. "But this is not enough" said Bhagavan. "I have nothing more to give". "No, you have to give me your sins". The man looked wildly at Bhagavan. "You do not know Swami what you are asking for. If you know you would not ask me. You do not know my sins. Please do not ask for my sins" and he wept bitterly. "I shall look after myself. Don't worry about me" said Bhagavan, "All I want is your sins".

For a long time the bargain could not go through. The man refused to part with his sins but Bhagavan was adamant. In the end, the visitor's scruples broke down and he said, "All the sins I have done are no longer mine but Ramana's". Bhagavan told him, "From now on there is no good or bad in you. You are

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pure". A great peace fell over the visitor and those present. He never came back for there was no need for his coming.

When the guru takes over, what would happen is the transformation of outlook. One would recognise that the entire scheme of things is chalked out by that power. The burden has been taken over. Having surrendered one has to remember the invariable rule of silent acceptance or one should say joyous acceptance of the Lord's ways.

Once Devaraja Mudaliar complained quoting some verses of Sivaprakasam Pillai to the effect that though he had surrendered, Ramana had not extended his protection. Had he done so his mental impurities would have taken flight and he would have been stabilised in the natural state. Ramana's quick answer, "Whether I do protect or not, if you have surrendered keep silent" was to drive home the point that the one who has surrendered has nothing more to do. All further actions in his life are being shaped by the sadguru in his best interest. The sadguru knows "What to do, when to do and how to do it".

Generally, bhakti and surrender are equated when many seekers claim that 'they find surrender easier'. They ignore the fact that surrender is the ultimate in devotion, when the 'I', the ego, is not there. In this sense it is not different from the path of jnana, in which also, the effacing of false 'I' by self-enquiry is sought. Surrender is far more demanding than only chanting, singing of bhajans and dancing to drums and cymbals. It is not mere moments of emotional tears for God, or temporary yearning for him. Its sweep is majestic. For the 'I' and 'mine' would have been swallowed up by the current of love and faith. In their loss the true meaning of life would have been discovered. For everything is the leela, play of the Supreme One, of the incomparable guru. He has lovingly given the devotee a part to play in this varied, multifaceted, elevating and beautiful cosmic sport. And what a joy it is to play the assigned part, conscious, always conscious of his ever present grace.

25. THE VERY ASKING IS THE DENYING

Do not dwell in the desert hot
Of the non-self, eating arid sand.
Come into the Heart, the mansion
Cool, shady, vast, serene
And feast on the bliss of Self.

By Guru's grace and this alone
And by no other means can one
Gain coveted peace and bliss.
Therefore with single minded zeal
Persist, ever seek such grace.

— Verses 297 and 290 of
Garland of 'Guru's Sayings'.

Ramana reminiscences abound in his innumerable rescue acts, his unfailing response to prayers in distress and his limitless boon giving. Ramana's miracles which keep happening everyday bring in fresh accounts of his continued role as an unparalleled benefactor in the post - Nirvana period as well. Given as we are to our endless demands on Ramana for more of what we already have, these true reports whip up our desires even further. Like spoilt children seeking the satisfaction of every passing whim and fancy, we keep heaping our requests and prayers on Ramana. We are trapped by the demon desire for things springing from an illusive, ego-based life.

The very motherly concern of Ramana seems to be pushing us in this direction instead of away from it. The Maharani of Baroda comes for a few days stay for consolation and to pray for her husband's health. For he was ailing in England. Ramana asks Devaraja Mudaliar to translate to her the benediction from Muruganar's 'Ramana Sarana Pallandu' which reads thus: "All

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devotees coming to Ramana get their desires fulfilled for he firmly plants his feet in their hearts, setting at rest their troubles and bestowing peace". As if this was not enough Ramana encouraged Mudaliar to translate his favourite verse 'Arunai Ramanesan' the gist of which is that "Ramana bears upon his head, because it is his fate, the burden of those who throw themselves at his feet". Ramana would cry with Echamma, relieving her of the pain of bereavement, read out passages from the Psalms to console Eleanor Noye's anguish at parting, or just cancel fate's decree as he did for Jagadeeswara Sastri, by accepting his pleadings for saving him from sure death.

True, prayer and response strengthens one's faith in the power and protection of Ramana. However, unless we cry a halt to the pull of our tendencies, we would be pushed headlong into the external whirl of the mind with its ceaseless pressures. As Muruganar says in the quote we would remain content "to eat arid sand" ignoring what we could have got by the guru's grace "the cool, shady, vast, serene, feasting on the bliss of Self". All this brings us to certain fundamental questions about the need to reflect and be firm about basics. Why at all have we opted for a spiritual life? Why at all are we attempting to find peace and balance in life? Why are we not just content with what seems to be making the teeming millions happy? What makes us care for freedom from karma, freedom from pestering thoughts, freedom from all that is keeping us chained to our ego-centric life? If all this is to have a meaning we must stand rock-like, should we not, against the beguiling power of Ramana to satisfy our desires?

We are not thinking about prayer which is integral to surrender, prayer for support in sadhana, prayer invoking his grace for inwardness. What one has to be on guard against is the prayer which, by its very endless nature, pushes one away from the Sadguru into the wilderness of desires.

The Very Asking is the Denying

Also one should pause and ponder as to what would happen if we do not pray at all for this or that but let Ramana order our life, if we transfer the burden of our cares to him. Would we be abandoned? Left high and dry? Would we not be shielded against fate's onslaughts? Surely 'No'.

Such unburdening, such off-loading would be a great relief. It may not happen just in a jiffy. Gradually as one comes to recognise more and more Ramana's omnipotence and his love, an unsaid joy will fill one's being. This true dependence on Ramana makes us his in the real sense of the term as he gives himself wholly and unreservedly in a response of love. Everything becomes sunny. There is no need to look for the silver lining in the dark clouds of life. For there would be no dark clouds in the horizon, there would not be a single care.

Then, only then, we cease to deny him. For the very asking is the denial of his unconditional love, his willingness to give unasked the very best. It is based on the fallacy that he needs requests and reminders to extend his help. It is based on one's ignorance of umpteen crises and dangers where he has protected even without one's knowledge. This reminds one of an incident which happened in Ramana's hall in 1939. One day among the visitors there was a small boy of about five years. He looked lovingly at Ramana who placed his left hand on his head and asked "What do you want?" The boy replied firmly "I do not want anything". "Oho!" said Ramana, "you belong to us". Speaking to others present he said, "If he remains in this don't want state everything will come to him". If we do not intervene with the working of the divine plans, the mystery of Ramana's grace would be unravelled to us. It is that he reserves the best for those who do not ask. To them he gives himself, to them he grants the boon of awareness of his "wondrous dance in the heart".

26. FREE FROM BOON SEEKING

Joshi: I find surrender easier. I want to adopt that path.

Ramana: Surrender appears easy because people imagine that once they say 'surrender' with their lips and put their burden on the Lord, they are free to do what they like. But the fact is you can have no likes and dislikes after you surrender and that you should be completely non-existent, the Lord will be taking its place.

– Day by Day with Bhagavan, p.72.

How I wish I could say this truthfully ! Ramana, my foolish mind keeps seeking, keeps asking, keeps begging you for boons. Am I not forgetting that I am the patient and you are the doctor for curing the dreaded disease of worldliness? Am I not denying your mercy, denying your grace by praying for its particular channelising? Am I not presuming to know better than you what is good for me? Am I not questioning your care, your wisdom through my specific prayers? When will that day dawn when I can say 'Now I have surrendered', say, 'Do what you will'?

After all what can I ask you my master with my limited intelligence, with my mental blinkers, with my prejudices and attachments? Am I not as foolish as a beggar who asks a king for 'stale gruel'? Assuming you grant all my prayers where would I be? In the endless chain with one more life gone, one more life wasted. For the very satisfaction would keep fuelling my desires, would push my mind away from you into the whirl of the externalised mind, would distance me from the all important inwardness. I know, my Ramana, that I have gone through it over and over again, in the cycle of time, in the Karmic bondage. But it is now different. You have entered. You have come as

Free From Boon Seeking

Sadguru to light my mind, to blossom my heart. Can I excuse myself if I let go this chance, if I cheat myself of its fullest benefit?

It is so tempting to ask, so easy to pray for worldly gifts which I hold dear, for you have the power to grant. You have the compassion to give. I know you can. But don't. Protect me with your strong mercy. Did you not enjoy being abused by Sundarar and being called a 'mad man' when you tried to stop his marriage as it was about to be solemnised? 'Mad' he called you. Mad indeed you are when it comes to protecting your devotees. Reflecting on my past how often and how ready was I to fall and jump to my damnation. My heart is touched and moved by your knowing and all intelligent compassion. What do all my prayers add up to? These trivialities, these ego based requests, how can they add to my fullness? Will I never make a bonfire of them. How can my mind be silent, be aware of your silent presence if my mind keeps running riot in the grip of desires to which this boon seeking is integral?

But Ramana, sometimes you are so mischievous. You let me stew in my juice. You let me play with the toys of life, to be misled by my attachments, to be lost in the distant horizons. You even seem to encourage this straying, this wandering by my body-mind pulls. So long as one does not ask who is the asker, who is the boon seeker, will there be any end to the seeking of more? Are you not the puppeteer and we the puppets? Why do you leave the puppets to wander in their imagined freedom? Yet if only I leave it to you, if only I recognise the powerlessness of my ego then you would not let me move away from your constant gaze. Chadwick certainly knew what he was writing about when he wrote. "Why don't you let me go?". You won't. Because you care. Because you love in some mysterious way those who even have an iota of devotion to you. You have set the standards so

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low. You keep forgiving my trespasses. You put up with my foibles, fancies, but firmly you draw the line. There you are in every situation, every nook and corner extending your true hand of friendship, pushing me inward, pulling my mind within to yourself as a mighty magnet, the self. I have learnt that it was my very wanting, very boon-mindedness which has stood between us. With my own mind I have obstructed the free flow of your grace. I must cry a halt to this with the strength flowing from you. But for your attentive protection what would have happened to my sadhana? Surely I would have lost heart, forgotten my true nature. Surely I would have been easily distracted and tempted away from your wondrous direct path.

Master, I hesitate to proclaim it. To reveal your secret working. Yet having received such abundance of grace should not my heart speak? After all, what can I give you, the intelligence sporting in all life? Did you not infuse Muruganar's pen with your power so that he may proclaim your glory? Did you not make him a captive of your gracious glance just for this?

Oh, great dancer of the open space, of the vast akasa, Nataraja, dance, dance, on my ego till it is torn to shreds. In ancient times you destroyed the demon Andhaka. Is this not symbolic to denote the truth that your dance of joy destroys ignorance, the ignorance of one's true nature? They call you a destroyer because at the time of the maha pralaya, at the time of the great deluge, yours is the mighty dance. Those who call you a destroyer know not what they say. For in your destruction is the creation. In your trampling of the ego is the birth of a new life. You, the so called destroyer, are the giver of the bloom of life. When your dance of joy enthralls where is the mind? Its realm is over. Its jurisdiction has ended.

Free From Boon Seeking

Oh Ramana, make me aware of your dance in my heart as 'I' 'I'. I am back in my old groove. Yet another prayer. May be the loftiest. May be for the very purpose of life. Yet a prayer. Don't you know how to give me your repose, your own state of steady bliss? Freed by your unsolicited grace from the load of the past, from the burden of thoughts, one sports in bliss.

THE HIDDEN POWER

The beauty and power of a fully conscious mind is now hidden and untapped. If only one discovers it, one would be suffused with boundless energy and pulsating joy. How does one quest, search, go about for discovering this secret power, this hidden treasure? One is handicapped by the overloading and pollution of the mind with thoughts. How does one overcome the numerical weight of thoughts. Ramana Maharshi gives a technique, self-enquiry, which enables one to bypass the world of thoughts by paying attention to the subject, to the individual to whom the whole thought world relates. As a result the mind becomes single focused instead of being multifocussed as at present. The single focus makes the mind integral, unitary and its energy is gathered together. The mind would always be charged with energy.

This book provides deeper insights into the different aspects of Ramana Maharshi's teachings, which unfold this hidden treasure.

ISBN: 81-85378-45-2

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