



*The
Silent Mind*

The Silent Mind

The Ramana Way

A. R. Natarajan

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INTRODUCTION

It seems that in life most people are content to be only spectators. Many prefer to enjoy, vicariously, the deeds of the players. Some do not even do that but remain on the sidelines. For them the rough and smooth of life are too much - a quiet backwater is what they want. However, when it comes to mind-control, to the silent mind, all have to be players whether they like it or not. There is never a dull moment, for, thoughts keep pestering and harassing. We wake up with thoughts and have no rest from them till sleep overtakes. Some indulge in escapes, in entertainments, some succeed for a time in suppressing unwanted thoughts. But then the chaos of the mind and the consequent restlessness have to be tackled. Unless the mind is understood one can never be sure when the volcano of thoughts would erupt. Does not wisdom demand that one should learn about the mind, learn to manage it, learn to harness its potential fully? None can dodge this responsibility, save at great peril. For it is the only energy source we have and life is made or marred by understanding the mind, by freeing oneself from its waywardness and weaknesses.

The long queue before psychiatrists and spiritual counsellors bears witness to the need felt by many to know the way for a quiet mind. One can certainly approach this matter with confidence for we have it on the authority of Ramana that peace of mind is natural and that restlessness of thoughts is only a super-imposition. The focus of attention in this book is the straight path incessantly taught by Ramana. The way is 'easy, very easy'. The proliferation of thoughts, 'the running with the running mind', is nipped in the bud by shifting attention from thoughts to the thinker. The intelligent and assiduous practice of this path opens up the joy of the silent mind.

When our schedules keep us frightfully busy, when there is no time even to breathe, we are oblivious to the harassment of thoughts. But then one cannot be just a 'workaholic' for fear of free time, for fear of inability to handle leisure. Nor can one always find enough work or work of one's choice to keep one's interest sustained and

going. Mind management, in fact, is not only a matter of the best use of the meditative hour but also the prevention of dissipation of energy when one has time on one's hands. Here it is necessary to mention that thought-free states are quite welcome. By habit we have come to develop the false notion that thinking is inescapable all the time. But this is a fallacy. We have no thoughts when soundly asleep and are none the worse for it. We would like to have the repose of sleep without losing the joy of the alert mind. This is precisely what is being helped by Ramana's teachings about the mind which enables repose in action, repose in idle time, coupled with the alertness of a totally awake mind.

No elaborate system of do's and don'ts is suggested for there is always the danger of doing the don'ts and having after regrets. Instead we have a positive approach in which one experiences the sharpness and exhilaration of a quiet mind. Practice steadies and lengthens such spells till one is free to have thoughts or be without them. Thoughts with purely psychological overtones will lose their enervating effect. Functional thoughts then become total and undistracted. The mind becomes tentative, supple and dynamic. What it is like, how to come by it, the practical guidance given by Ramana, are all spelt out in this book. But here it stops. For experience is always for the individual and it is open to all to have its abundance.

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(The Ramana Way)

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THE POWER OF SILENCE

Dakshinamurthi, Lord Siva, as a youthful Guru, has been the symbol from time immemorial of the potency of a silent mind. His exposition of the truth, the 'Brahma Tatva', to elderly disciples was in silence. These disciples had mastered the scriptures but not their essence. Their doubts were set at naught in the vast and all pervading silence of Dakshinamurthi. Again we have reiteration of this power of a silent mind in 'Kaivalya Navaneetam' which narrates the story of Tatvaraya. An ardent disciple of his composed a 'bharani' on him. When this was read out in an assembly of scholars, all of them objected protesting that a 'bharani' could only be on a hero capable of killing a thousand elephants. Thereupon, in order to bring home their folly to the learned disputants the disciple took them to Tatvaraya. In his presence the silence was simply overwhelming. The whole day passed, the night came and some more days and nights and yet all were lost in that silence. Not a single thought occurred to any one of them till Tatvaraya himself broke the silence. With one voice, all assembled declared 'there is nothing equal to the silent power of a Sad-Guru for such is his silence that the 'rutting elephants', the minds of each of us, have been quietened.' The glory of Dakshinamurthi, the story of Tatvaraya, seemed utopian ideals to be hungered for.

Ramana has metamorphosised everything by his incessant teaching of a straight path to a silent mind. His life itself is constant testimony to the validity of the power of the silent mind embodied in Dakshinamurthi and Tatvaraya.

Paul Brunton carefully jots down a series of questions which he wants to put to Maharshi Ramana. Full of doubts and queries he enters the hall where the Maharshi is seated on a couch, gazing fixedly with open eyes through space. 'The Maharshi's body is supernaturally quiet and pin drop silence prevails throughout the long hall'. The minutes mount to half-an-hour and then it becomes a whole hour. There is not a ripple and absolute peace prevails. Another hour goes by. One by one, the questions

drop away. Brunton does not care whether they are asked or not. 'He is only aware of the steady river of peace flowing near and penetrating the inner reaches of his being'.

In Maharshi's presence, this language of silence was a common occurrence, though it was most potent in the twilight hours of the evening. We have the case of a 'Sivarathri' at Sri Ramanasramam. A sadhu came there about eight at night and requested the Maharshi to expound the meaning of the 'Hymn to Dakshinamurthi'. The sadhu and the others sat and sat. Ramana was poised in stillness, with no consciousness of the body. 'Eight hours passed in peace, in silence of Being' and the persons present could understand the meaning of silent communication.

Ramana would seldom answer questions straightaway. A penetrating silence would precede a cryptic reply going to the very root of the matter. This was so from the time he broke his virtual verbal silence to clear the doubts of Ganapati Muni on the true meaning of austerity, of tapas, in 1907. Often there would not be any need to reply for the doubt would be dissolved by the mere silent presence. When needed, just a few words would suffice. The benediction of the silence was felt by all in Ramana's presence.

LOST AND FOUND

Ramana would repeatedly point out that the mind's natural state is one of silence. It is only because of this that such strenuous effort is being made by everyone to control the mind when it is wayward or turbulent. Such efforts for a quiet mind can be compared to medication to get rid of a head-ache. Because health is natural and ill-health is not, even a mild ailment such as a head-ache is something we want to get rid of straightaway. Similarly, since silence is natural, looking for ways and means of attaining it is inescapable.

The loss of our natural state of a restful mind and our happiness in discovering it again is illustrated by Ramana through stories which highlight the point. The first is the case of a woman wearing a necklace but imagining that she has lost it. Initially she searches in obvious places where she could have kept it. Then she searches every nook and corner of the house. Thereafter she proceeds to various friends and relatives and anxiously enquires whether she has left the necklace in their house when she had visited them. Finally a friend points out to her that she is wearing the very necklace which she had been frantically looking for. She had 'created her own anxiety about the loss and happiness at finding it'. One is unaware of the truth of one's inherent peaceful nature. Hence, means must be found to achieve the silent mind.

Another illustration referred to by Ramana is the case of ten foolish men who were to cross a river in spate. All of them had crossed to the other shore safely. However, to check up, they started counting. Each one counted the others leaving himself out and said 'I count only nine; sure enough we have lost one, who can that be?' So, they all agreed that one was lost but could not find out who it was and concluded that the 'missing' man was drowned. One of them burst into tears and the rest followed suit. Seeing the ten men weeping on the river bank, a sympathetic passerby enquired for the cause. On hearing the story he counted and found that all the ten were before him, and could guess what had happened. In order to bring home

the fact to each one that no one was lost, he said 'Each of you count for yourself, but one after the other serially - one, two — while I will give you a blow that all of you may be sure that you are included in the count and included only once. The tenth 'missing' man will be found'. Even at the very thought of finding their lost comrade, the ten men were very happy and excited. The passerby gave a blow to each of the ten in turn. 'Ten' said the last man as he got the last blow in his turn. Then, they looked at each other and shouted 'We are now ten'. They thanked the passerby heartily. Having stated this story, Ramana would point out that the tenth man was always there and was never lost. When the tenth man was properly counted, he was not a new man. Their grief was due to their ignorance and mistake in counting. Their joy was none the less real because they had found the 'lost', tenth man. Peace of mind has to be striven for because we are ignorant of the truth in our present state, that peace is our very substratum.

There is yet another illustration given by Ramana to underscore the same point. A man goes to sleep, in the old hall at Sri Ramanasramam. He dreams he has gone on a world tour, travelling in different countries and crossing continents. After many years of strenuous travels, he returns to India, reaches Tiruvannamalai, enters Sri Ramanasramam and walks into the hall. Just at that moment, he wakes up and finds he has not moved an inch, but has been sleeping where he lay down. He has not returned after great effort but had always been in the hall. Similarly, having lost the awareness of the mind's inherent peace one has to find it again by appropriate effort.

THE INNER ROCKET

His Holiness Sri Jagadguru Chandrasekhara Bharathi Swami of Sringeri Sharada Peetha gives an illustration of the chain formation of thought. On one occasion, an old devotee, Krishnaswami, entered the room when His Holiness was seated by Himself lost in deep silence. After a slight gesture indicating to him to sit down, His Holiness relapsed into silence and continued in that state for about twenty minutes radiating peace and exultation. Then, a smile flickered on his face. The devotee wished to know why and His Holiness himself volunteered the answer. His Holiness said ‘I was in perfect peace, when a thought disturbed it. I realised that you were sitting near me and expected me to speak. I recollected immediately that to ‘speak’ is a verb which requires an object. I further thought I must find an object as otherwise there would be no speech. Then I recollected that all objects in the universe come under two categories ‘the true’ and ‘the false’. The truth is the Brahman and is incapable of being explained in words. Hence, I decided that there was no point in talking and relapsed into silence.’

We also have the illustration given by Ramana from His Skandasramam days. Ramana used to go and sit on a rock with Ramaswamy Iyengar and other devotees. One day they noticed a moth like insect shooting up in the air from a tiny crevice in the rock. Then, within a twinkling of an eye, it had multiplied itself into millions of moths and the sky was hidden from view. On examination they found that the entire mass of moths had come out from just a pinhole in such a short time. So too, immediately on waking, thoughts literally burst forth as if a thought rocket has been fired from within. Their multitude and variety is baffling and they form a screen preventing the full use of the mind’s total energy. Management of thoughts is therefore a must, a necessary pre-requisite for freeing the mind from the crowd of thoughts.

Though generally one thinks of the need for a quiet mind in the context of spiritual practice, one has to really look at it in the larger perspective of all activity, in the larger

canvas of living itself. Unless one is able to find peace of mind in work situations, in handling of relationships with others, it would not be of much significance. Even so, one has to grapple with the mind to quieten it through meditation, through spiritual practice. Though the time set apart for such purpose may be little, it serves as a pace-setter. It sets the mood for the day. The mental stillness achieved during meditation has its own sustaining power, and is felt throughout even while one is at work.

The dissipation of the mind through its wandering is to be tackled through the proper use of the meditative hour. When one is desirous of fixing attention on a particular thought to the exclusion of others, be it on God or on a sacred mantra, one seems to get nowhere, notwithstanding this right resolve. The very resolve seems to be an open invitation for horde of thoughts to crowd in and push aside the desired thought like the proverbial ‘Camel and the Arab’. Why is it so? One has to ponder and consider the issue deeply to find the way out.

It appears that this situation springs from the divisive nature of the mind, from the competing and contrary pulls and counter-pulls of the desires embedded in the mind. We are unable to give our whole mind to the job on hand, to meditation. As Ramana says, ‘All effort is performed with only a portion of the mind and with frequent breaks. Only remaining still inwardly is done with the entire mind and without break’. As one goes into this, it would appear that there are really two thought layers, the one at the surface level seeking to stick to the particular thought and the other, the under-current, which is the product of the residual memories, ‘vasanas’, impressions of pleasure and pain. They pull the mind in diverse directions away from the single thought stream. As soon as the effort creates temporary thought-vacuum, the under-current of thought gushes forth as from a hidden spring to roam about in thought groups considered pleasant by the mind. The interval of straying would be long or short depending upon when attention reverts back to the fact that one has moved away from the wanted thought.

A mind which is constantly distracted in this manner by 'other' thoughts, by thoughts which are extraneous to what is sought to be held, is labelled as a 'weak mind' by Ramana. The characteristic of such a weak mind is its being scattered in a thousand thoughts. Since weakness of the mind is the cause of the disquiet of the mind, its opposite, strength of mind, is obviously the solution. By strength of mind is meant the capacity of the mind to be integral, to be totally involved in what needs attention at the moment. Such strength of the mind is the product of properly directed effort. One must therefore ask what is the effort which brings about the strengthening of the mind?

TRADITIONAL WISDOM

The scriptures contain many worthwhile means for harnessing the mind. One can usefully apply each of these methods or all of them together in a judicious combination for effective mind control.

Since one is at work all the waking hours, one's work attitude assumes great importance. The normal way, of course, is to be keyed to results, to have definite goals and to pursue the same relentlessly, driven by the motive power of desire. Frustrations and disturbances of mind necessarily follow. For, results are outside one's control. Even when the results come one's way, they only egg one on to more effort with no guarantee of a second or third time, or of continuous successes. Such action is inherently destructive of peace of mind, and would be sowing, unconsciously, seeds for a chaotic mind. The pleasure achieved, the pain avoided, these leave indelible marks on one's psyche. When conditions are ripe they would leap out like tigers attacking, coming out of their natural camouflage. Then, all the carefully planned mind control mechanisms would be thrown into disarray.

So, wisdom suggests that motivated action in expectation of anticipated results is not the way. What then should be the compulsion for action? What mental attitude should one adopt? It is to give up the desire-result orientation by treating the jobs on hand as God's, as those of the Supreme, whose strength it is that gives the power to act, and whose law alone regulates the results. Ramana would say, 'When we know that the train is bearing all the burden, why should we who travel in it suffer by keeping our luggage on our heads?'

Often one might lapse back to the old desire-result orientation. A parable would illustrate this. Thousands of ants were living on a hill of salt. On learning that there was a mountain of sugar nearby they switched over in happy anticipation only to find that it was not different. Why? Because their mouths were full of salt particles which they were reluctant to leave aside. Even though old habits die

hard, a gradual change is bound to come about. The mind's distractions are subdued and reduced. New accretions, in the form of memory residues, will be less. The mind becomes purer, supple, alert and tentative. The harvesting of the rich pastures of a happy life becomes possible.

Another time-honoured method is to control the breath. One can see for oneself that one's breathing and thoughts are inter-linked and inter-laced. Control of the mind leads to the regulation of the breath and the control of breath in turn to the quietening of the mind. Hence the hatha-yogic practices of inhaling, retaining and exhaling breath according to some set pattern of controlled breathing. The mind does get steady by such practices, but it would require the guidance of one experienced and seasoned in such yogic ways. A simpler and a more direct way of regulating breath taught by Ramana would be to watch the movement of breath with the mind. Such watching, if constant, has an automatic effect of regulating the breath directly and thought as well, indirectly. The mind is held in leash as it were. Like 'a deer caught in a hunter's net' or 'an animal tethered to the rope' the breath becomes controlled along with the mind.

Unfortunately such control is only temporary. The lulled mind would be just waiting to regain its sway. Thoughts would recommence with redoubled vigour when such control is withdrawn. The story of a yogi which Ramana would relate would be apt. A certain yogi, who had mastered Pranayama and the control of breath at will for long periods, deluded himself into the belief that this was the goal. He would practice long periods of trance by controlling breath. Once, before going into one such spell he called for a glass of water from his disciple. Before the water could be brought, he had lapsed into a trance which lasted for centuries. When he opened his eyes, the first thing he asked was for water. Even the yogi's last minute, superficial thought had not changed. His state was as before, let alone his having achieved any vital breakthrough in mastering the mind.

The purpose of the story is not to decry or belittle the

importance of breath control as a useful tool for tackling the mind. For, it certainly operates in the same way as a 'brake for a car' or 'reigns for a horse', for controlling the mind. Particularly in the earlier stages, when the mind is scattered and unsteady, breath regulation is an important aid for gathering it together. Without one-pointedness, no worthwhile meditation and control of mind is at all possible. One could therefore, in the early stages of practice, or even later at the beginning of the meditation session, use breath regulation. As the mind becomes strong, then the time would come for removing the fencing of constant watching of breath and the dependence on it as a means of tranquility of the mind. Breath regulation, therefore, is vital at the initial stage, is temporarily needed for some and can be used with advantage whenever the mind is turbulent or lapsing back 'into the chaos of the unconscious'.

The conscious pursuit of a single thought is yet another important means for achieving a quiet mind. A single thought, be it a sacred mantra, the worship of one's favourite deity, repeated contemplation of oneness with the Supreme, serves to control the mind. As Ramana would say, it is like giving an iron chain to an elephant to prevent the constant swinging of its trunk. The mind's attention is directed to the particular thought, the repeated contemplation of which adds strength to that thought. Here the control being the product of properly directed effort one would not be a victim of the thought obsessions and can move freely to other required thoughts. The single thought recommended by Ramana is the remembrance of one's natural state, a state in which one is immersed in bliss, a state in which one is free from thoughts. As a prelude, the single thought emphasised in the scriptures, namely the affirmation of one's identity with the fullness of consciousness, would be of immense help. The concept 'I am That' breaks the barrier of thoughts, based on divisive and relative outlook. The single thought of the non-dual state would, in time, end this thought as well and only the integral feeling of unity would remain. Freedom from the 'loom-shuttle' type of ceaseless thought ensues. Why? By such meditation the

mind acquires the quality of the thing meditated on. Non-attachment, peace and tranquility become its dominant features. The march of events is taken in the stride and peace of mind reigns supreme.

THE FRIEND AND THE FOE

All are seeking the silent mind. It makes no difference if one is 'worldly' or 'religious' for this purpose. Seekers plagued by visitation from the innumerable unwanted thoughts which disturb their meditation keep asking questions about it. Those addicted to work also look for ways to handle the grip of a single thought obsession. To escape from its harassment, they take to sleeping tablets and tranquilisers. Otherwise, their minds are tension ridden with sales charts, growth rates, and so on. If there is no work, such persons are at a loose end unable to handle the leisure. There is a case of a person on leave from his office, sick with terminal cancer, ringing up his personal assistant to send files to his home for he felt completely lost without them. The seeking of jobs by those who are already one foot in the grave is also because of the fear of not being able to flush out the thought legions unless they involve themselves in some work or the other, unless their mind can be engaged.

It is the mind which makes the person. It can either be a friend or a foe. We can understand its being a friend, when it is supple, moving in desired directions and working without distraction. When its energy is fully available to us in action, we get things done the way we want them done. But often it is like a rebellious or a pampered child. It is flitting from thought to thought in utter dissipation, pre-occupied with day dreams, utopias or obsessed with negative thoughts and so on. At such times we become operationally useless. The friend the mind can be quite treacherous, tripping one along the way. Just when one is feeling confident about being able to manage the mind it takes one for a ride. A story illustrates. An old lady who was outwardly extremely nice and polite came to be regarded as a loving soul. Inwardly, however, she was boiling with hatred against those whom she thought had piled insults on her. One day she was bitten by a mad dog and developed hydrophobia. In the hospital while she was still sane, the doctor told her 'I am giving you paper, pen and ink. Write your will'. She began to write and write. The doctor saw that she was going on and on and asked her

‘What are you doing?’ She replied, ‘I am making a list of those whom I am going to bite’. All the pent up rage in her subconscious showed up. This type of double personality is found, in varying degrees, in everyone, because the mind is often the boss. The search for a solution is therefore going on, but seemingly endlessly. If in spite of a spate of sound advice on the subject, one is often back in the nursery class when it comes to mind control, it is time one had a good look at fundamentals.

Ramana says that the fault is in our approach, in our foolish expectation that the mind would commit suicide. He would say that the desire to control the mind, the thought of mastering it, is still part and parcel of the mind itself. Such a thought, however keenly felt or worked for, cannot deliver the goods, because it is still within the frame-work of the mind. ‘The mind is simply fattened by more thoughts in that direction’. As Ramana picturesquely puts it, ‘It is the mind which is the thief pretending to be a policeman’.

This point is dramatically brought home in a real life story which happened in Madurai during Ramana’s school days. Once a notorious thief warned the owner of a house in West Veli Street, Madurai, that he would burgle his house on a particular night. Being thus fore-warned, the owner took all precautions by seeking full police protection. Policemen literally besieged the house to make certain that the thief would not escape. The dare-devil thief came notwithstanding the police cordon but as he was about to leave with the stolen goods, an alarm was raised. In order to escape, the thief joined the chase by the general public shouting most loudly ‘thief, thief, catch him, catch him’, and thus, he managed to disappear. In the incident the thief by play-acting as a policeman managed to elude capture. Ramana would say that similarly the mind would not come under control but would escape through a variety of disguises unless one makes determined enquiries about its nature.

THE MIND - A FREEZE FRAME

What is this thing called 'Mind'? What is it that is being sought to be controlled? Who is it that desires to control it? It would have been noticed that in the various solutions which are generally offered, the assumption is that the mind is an independent, separate entity which the individual has to learn to handle in order that it may be quiet. We do not really know much about the individual, though of course we would rather not confess it. We know even less about the mind. Why? We do not know about the individual specially because attention is always on the objects and the subject is taken for granted. Similarly, we have never gone into the question of the nature of the mind. Ramana says that the straight path to mind control lies only in finding out what the mind is. This in turn would also lead to an awareness of the real import of 'I'. The reason for terming the Ramana path as the direct one is that in it the focus is exclusively on the individual, on the mind. There is no beating about the bush, and the examination is frontal. Ramana repeatedly suggests that this enquiry, this search is a joyous one and is at the same time revelatory. It does not need much convincing to say that it is only things which we understand that we can master and handle. The approach to the enquiry should be to regard it as an adventure, as an 'inner-odyssey', for the task demands courage and steadfastness. As one experiments, the discovery and experience of a naturally silent mind come about. The mind's turmoil is then seen to be only a superimposition brought about by habitual attitudes of the mind, by its pleasure-hunt.

To bring home the advantage of such a close look, Ramana would relate the bridegroom story. The story runs thus: An imposter taking advantage of the prevailing confusion when a bridegroom's party arrived, mingled with the group as one of them. The bride's party thought that he was an important member of the bridegroom's party. In like manner, since he was a stranger to them, the bridegroom's people thought that he was a close relative of the bride because he was seen along with other members of the bride's party. When his obnoxious conduct repelled

both sides, they started enquiring as to who this person was and the trickster took to his heels. In this story, mind is compared to the trickster because it has a thousand and one ways of beguiling and distracting one's attention from an enquiry about itself. However, once a proper enquiry is made, the truth would be revealed. If an enquiry is set afoot it would be seen that the mind is only a vast galaxy of thoughts. Why? 'If we set aside all thoughts and look, there would remain nothing separately as a mind'. Therefore, Ramana says that 'thought itself is the nature of the mind'. Again, though the thoughts are innumerable, varied and disparate, they are all integrated by a central thought or a core thought, the 'I' thought. All thoughts are the individual's thoughts, a person's thoughts. They exist in relation to him. They have no locus-standi of their own. We might compare the universe of thoughts to the solar system. The 'I' thought is the Sun around which all other thoughts revolve. The moment the individual's attention is withdrawn from a thought, it becomes lifeless being parasitic and dependent. For all practical purposes, one can therefore say that the root 'I' thought, the feeling of individuality, is the mind since the other thoughts do not matter, whatever be their number. It follows from this that finding out the mind's nature really means finding out the truth about the individual, about the sense of individuality.

This is a stage where one has to break and reflect. How and when does this feeling of a separate personality begin? Certainly it is dominant and cannot be missed when one is awake and active. But, after all, we go to sleep each day and dream while sleeping. What happens to the individual in the other two states of dream and sleep which he experiences each day? Quite obviously we have to look at all three states of experience, waking, dream and sleep, to have a real comprehension of the mind. Looking at it from this angle, one finds that the dream personality, dream thoughts, dream solutions can be quite at variance with what may be termed as one's waking personality. Only the dream doctor, administering a dream medicine, can cure a dream sickness. A king may dream of being a lowly beggar moving from door to door piteously for alms. Not all the riches and power of his waking state can help even

a wee bit. The personality is different. The dreamer is not the one who is awake. As for sleep, the person and his thoughts are absent. They are nascent till one wakes up to the world of 'I' and the thoughts. Since the 'I', the mind, has been non-existent in sleep, it would be only reasonable to question 'What happens to it?' Where did it subside in sleep? Or alternatively, where did it rise from on waking? These queries are raised because of the presence of the mind in the waking state and its absence in sleep. After these issues are taken up, the purpose of the analysis of the three states of daily existence, the waking, sleep and the dream, would have been served. It would have been brought out in clear light that there is more to the mind than we have taken it to be.

The important aspect which is found is that the mind has a source within into which it merges and comes out each day. Ramana gives the analogy of a hen and its chicks. Just as a hen gathers its chicks under its wings and goes to roost after sunset, the root 'I'-thought brings together its associates, the innumerable latent thoughts, and returns to the source. However, this process takes place involuntarily because the mind is overtaken by sleep when it returns to its source. Consequently, since the process has happened without one's control, sleep does not reveal any story about the mind. If such a revelation is to come about, it can only be through an alert enquiry which pushes the mind consciously back to the source and merges it there. Then, the stillness of the mind would go hand in hand with its vibrancy. Repose and vitality would co-exist. This happens because the source of the mind is the fullness of consciousness termed as the 'Heart' by Ramana. When the mind is intuned by effort and made to sink in the Heart, it remains pure, it remains as consciousness, as intelligence.

That is the next stage where we have to stop and reflect about the knowledge gained. What is it that we have now learnt about the mind? The mind has a conscious source. Therefore it has a content of consciousness. The mind stays at the source either involuntarily during sleep or as a result of well directed practice when it reaches its source,

which is the fullness of consciousness. The next thing which is known is that the outward thrust of thoughts pushes out the mind and scatters it. It is like breaking a fine instrument into smithereens for such is the consequence of the fragmentation of the mind by thoughts. Yet another point which emerges is that there is good reason not to be too much concerned about the vastness of thoughts, so long as one is aware that the weak mind split up by thoughts is only a passing phase. It can be overcome by holding on to the subject of the 'I'-thought. Such attention would make the mind naturally silent by merging it in the source.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE MIND

The dual characteristics of the mind - the essential consciousness aspect and the accretions, the world of thoughts, would have been noticed. The consciousness in the 'I' is the scent to which one must hold on for the journey back to the source. This is the clue which should not be lost sight of. Ramana cites the analogy of a dog tracing its master by his scent. 'The master's scent is the infallible clue for the animal, nothing else such as the dress he wears, his build or stature, etc. To this scent the dog holds on undistractedly while searching and it finally succeeds'. If one holds on to the consciousness aspect of oneself then the quest must lead one to the pure mind.

How does one hold to the consciousness in the 'I'? The movement of the mind is twofold - the inner movement the return to the source which is either involuntary, when sleep overpowers, or is voluntarily achieved by practices which turn the mind inward. What prevents this inwardness of the mental movement is the second aspect of the mind, namely, the outward thrust of the mind caused by latent thoughts in the mind. The very vastness of these thoughts is frightening. They represent the whole weight of the past. Since every action leaves behind a memory mark, it is just waiting in the wings to reappear when the circumstances are appropriate for the repetition of the wanted experience.

So, the first step without which one cannot proceed at all is to arm oneself with a technique which sterilises the past and renders it impotent. For achieving this, Ramana suggests an approach which leaves all desires, all thoughts severely alone. He would say 'Do not run with the running mind.' For, any effort in which the attention is paid on the thoughts themselves, good, bad and indifferent, is no better than shadow chasing. It is said that when a child tries to catch a shadow by running after it and is distressed at not being able to do so, the mother prevents it from running. Similarly one should closely look into the essence in any thought formation and not deal with the

shadow, the rest of the thoughts. In this light, it is only the thinker, it is only the individual, who matters. Shifting the mind's attention to its core, to the first person, is what is to be attempted. The second and the third person thoughts would no longer have the power to damage, since the attention of the 'I' is not cast on them. An analogy would serve to highlight this point. To say 'do not have desires' is 'like asking one to take medicine without thinking of the monkey'. Sure enough the dominant thought would then be the monkey. Instead Ramana's method gives a positive turn by saying, 'drink the medicine thinking of the elephant'. In other words it is like advising one who has to 'abandon the east' to 'go west'.

Care is needed not to bestow attention on any particular thought. The danger in paying attention to any thought 'even if it be to deny it, to recall a memory even if it be only to reject it is that one runs the risk of investing it with fresh strength'. When someone complained that he was unable to prevent the rush of thoughts, Ramana said that all that needs to be done is to catch hold of the leading thought, the 'I'-thought, giving thereby no chance to other thoughts to distract you'. This was the basic tune of Ramana from the early days of his spiritual ministration. An early seeker said in dejection, 'What can I do? If I reject one thought, another thought takes its place' - Ramana promptly advised, 'cling to the 'I' - thought - when your interest keeps you to that single idea, the other thoughts automatically vanish'. The past in the form of the thought power flowing from vasanas, the inherent tendencies, is pulverised by attention. Those thoughts just wither and fade away. 'Thought grows with thought as fire with fuel. When attention is withdrawn thoughts die like flame without fuel'. True, to begin with they distract and one has to repeatedly bring the attention back to the thinker. Soon one is off the outward mental movement. The shifting of attention to the subject does the trick.

The advantage of keeping the thinker in focus, instead of thoughts, should be apparent, for we then deal with the root of the tree instead of its branches and leaves. A single life-giving thought is held firmly without bothering about

other latent and surface thoughts. The phrase 'life giving' is used advisedly for one perceives that the other thoughts, however strong, cannot operate till the individual gives them attention, consciously or unconsciously. When one holds on to the 'I' or for inspecting it, one is on the trial of the mind. Attention to the single thought which waters the entire thought structure opens the door to an understanding of the mind.

ATTENTION - SWITCH

What is being attempted is 'looking at the mind by the mind'. Attention of the mind which has so far not been on the individual, the thinker, the doer, but on his thoughts, is shifted back to the person. The individual is taken for granted and has not been given any attention. As a result, the mind's power has not been utilised for self-knowledge, knowledge about oneself. At this point, it is worth remembering that the mind is a dynamic force because of its essential content, namely consciousness, intelligence. The mind identifies itself with whatever object its attention is fixed on. The purpose of the effort and practice now suggested is to transfer the focus of the mind's attention to itself, to its centre. Consequently, the entire energy of the mind becomes available for revealing the nature of the mind - 'by gathering itself from variety to thought-free unity of itself, it enjoys freedom from distraction... the gaze turned on itself leads to the discovery of its nature'.

Since the individual's 'I'-thought rises simultaneously with the countless other thoughts and also because of the habitual attention of the mind being on the other thought, no care has been bestowed on the 'I'-thought. In the Ramana way, the whole situation is met by replacing 'thought attention by self-attention'. If attention is fixed on the subject even as conceptualisation takes place, as the movement of thoughts gathers momentum or soon thereafter, one would be tackling the problem at its very inception. Vigilance is needed not to be carried away by the swift thought current. Repeatedly attention is brought back to the individual. How? For self-attention Ramana gives two invincible tools, the first of which is in the form of the question 'Who am I?' One begins by questioning for whom these thoughts occur. Since the thoughts are for the person, attention reverts to him. Thought formation is muzzled, nipped in the bud by this device for self-attention in the garb of a question. This switching back of attention to the 'I' serves the important purpose of cutting it off from the company of other thoughts. In other words, the identification of the mind with rest of the

thoughts is scissored. The 'I'-thought is isolated, actively observed and attacked by the intense enquiry 'Who am I?'

The isolation of the central thought thus achieved is, however, not an end in itself. It is a step, no doubt an important one, in the intelligent journey back to the source. Here we have to press into service the complementary weapon, provided by Ramana, again in the form of the question, 'whence am I?', 'wherefrom does this 'I'-thought arise?' The whole idea being one of merging the mind in its source. This query creates an awareness in the mind of its source. The disease is the identification of the pure mind with the impurities of the past as a result of the idea of separate existence. For eradicating this false notion the potent medicine is awakening of source consciousness through this method. The mind is constantly reminded of its true strength, its home and unity with the totality of life. 'This practice of self-attention is a gentle technique which merely invokes awareness of the source from which the mind springs'. Success depends on the extent to which one is saturated with the keen edge of enquiry. For there is no fixed time for its practice. Even while engaged in work, there can be, without any prejudice to the work itself, the under-current of attention on the 'I' and its real nature as a powerful and silent vehicle of consciousness.

Recapitulating, the practice of self-enquiry separates the 'I' from its association with other thoughts and the mind turns within. This happens more readily with growing awareness of its inner strength. Fed simultaneously with the invigorating tonic of source-awareness, the mind itself becomes the bridge back to its abode. When the mind is fed with the joy of silence the old habit of seeking links with the other thoughts gradually wanes, till at last the mind stays submerged in the vast all-pervading silence of its source.

EXPERIENCING THE PURE MIND

While journeying from the state of a troubled and weak mind to an all pervading silence we have to clear many a mental cob-web. Troubled sometimes by a plethora of thoughts, even after earnest effort, some would ask Ramana in despair whether at all it is possible to break the thought-barrier. Ramana would encourage saying ‘Yes. Many have done so because they believed they could. Why not you?’ Again there is the danger of listlessness at the seeming lack of progress - yet another facet of the mind’s weakness. When someone talked of the need for years of practice, Ramana chided remarking ‘There is no question of time. Prevent this thought, this very moment’. When doubt and despair dominate, the strengthening remembrance of the inherent peace and quietness of the mind is the best antidote.

There are periods during practice when the mind is quiet and undisturbed by thought. This quietness is of course very pleasant and enjoyable, but it is also the time for greater vigilance. For, one could well be misled by this stilling of thought and assume that the mind has come under control. Actually it is more in the nature of a lull before a storm. The latent tendencies which give rise to thoughts have not yet been eradicated at this stage. They are only asleep and would be back to frenzy the mind. The temporary thought subsidence, even assuming that it lasts for a thousand years, would really be of no avail because one has not yet reached the mind’s source. This apart, essentially the mere absence of thoughts is only negative and cannot be equated to a permanent freedom from the back and forth movement of the mind. Ramana would therefore advise that one should ‘revive consciousness and reactivate the mind’. This is to be done by enquiring within as to who is experiencing this stillness? Such questioning has the double advantage of not only preventing the intrusion of thoughts but also helps in keeping the thinker wide aware for continuing the self-enquiry.

In fact it is so important to get past this ‘false quietude’ that

whenever Ramana noticed an earnest seeker falling off to sleep while meditating, he would advise a companion to 'take him out to the temple or for a walk along the lake.' Here it is important to remember that the waking state is the only available time for effective pursuit of self-enquiry and should not be frittered away particularly under the false belief that one is meditating and progressing.

Ramana would also point out the dangers of practices which lead to the stupefaction of the mind. Certain techniques of meditation like seeing the light between the eye-brows, fixing the attention between eye-brows and so on, dazzle the mind and silence it. Ramana specially advised an early and long standing seeker, Echammal, to give up such a practice as it is important to be wide awake throughout one's meditation. Anything which dullens the mind that needs to be sharp and alert is a set-back to be warded off with intelligence.

Having cleared the road-blocks one has to look to positive means and practical ways of experiencing the pure mind. Each day there are times when the mind is quiet and in a state of equilibrium. When this mental mood would come, it is difficult to predict. However, it is clear that when one sets apart time for meditation even though the meditation session itself might be a battle royal, sometime later, totally unexpectedly, a distinct calmness prevails. This period should be made the best use of and not allowed to pass by. It can even be said that the work on hand can be put aside to profit from the peace and quietness which prevails. As for the work left unfinished it would be better done later when the mind's silence would continue as an under-current and make the mind fully efficient.

According to Ramana each day offers us an opportunity for being in touch with the pure mind, the mind which is thought-free. However, we let the opportunity go by. Why? It is because of our lack of acquaintance with the times when the mind is pure. When one gets to know such periods and learns to hold on to them, experience of the mind which is silent yet vibrant comes about. The first of these periods is what one may term the thought-gap time.

The mind is sometimes compared to a leech which would not leave an object before it catches hold of another, or a caterpillar which leaves its hold after it grips another leaf. The idea in these analogies is that thought movement is continuous and without break. Ramana, however, does not subscribe to this. According to him thought movement is like that of an alternating current, where there is break but the break being so brief it goes unnoticed by the very speed of the movement. There is need to be aware of this interval between thoughts.

Ramana also draws repeated and pointed attention to the twilight time which is immediately after sleep and before one is wide awake. The sense of individuality is yet to appear and consequently the other thoughts are not there. It is not sleep because there is consciousness. It is also not waking because the 'I'-thought has not yet surfaced. At this time the mind is pure and is not different from the consciousness which it reflects.

The mind is to become aware of this transitional period so that it may not go unnoticed. Total attention is necessary since this state usually 'lasts for a minute'. Some practitioners of the Ramana way have given some practical tips for this purpose. One can experiment and find out with the aid of these tips. Generally the last thought before one goes to sleep is the first thought on waking up. Therefore, one should have a strong desire before sleeping to experience immediately on waking the pure mind. Then, as one wakes up and before individuality grips, one can experience it. Also it is necessary to break the habit of 'proceeding headlong into the morning routine'. This time is to be prolonged without lapsing back into sleep or allowing thought intrusions. A touch with consciousness thus kindled and kept up has its benefits throughout the waking time. It becomes easier to switch on the inward movement which leads one back from this intermittent experience of the silent mind to a steady abidance in it.

SILENCE AMIDST NOISE

It is one of our pet ideas that if we could somehow run away from the world to the solitary Himalayan heights, to some mountain caves or hermitages, we will be able to solve the problem of the quiet mind. The panacea is 'solitude' and it is believed that it can be found only away from our work schedules, from our daily chores, away from the people we are used to. How can we do anything about the mind unless we are able to somehow escape from intrusions by others who keep spoiling the meditation time by visiting and chatting? Thus thinking, we seek nature's quiet spots. The desire to be alone, to keep off company, is for the purpose of tackling the mind free from outside disturbance.

There are some others like Paul Brunton who look upon change from one's ordinary life as, 'a strategic retreat from the world'. Having launched upon a feverish pursuit of work, used to looking with dismay at an empty page in the engagement diary or even a gap of few minutes, these retreats to scenic spots are regarded as a balancing factor. Time would then be available to learn about the subtlety and vagaries of the mind, its whims and fancies, since the normal run does not provide any leisure for such meditation or reflection. This is their attitude and hope that 'far from the madding crowds' an understanding of the mind would come. Naive it may be but a common belief. One can well understand the love of 'lonely' spots in the conviction that then it is possible to be 'alone'. True, nature's fascination cannot be under-rated. It has its own magic, its own charm which goes to the very pore of one's bones. By all means if one's circumstances permit it, if karma is kind in this regard, one can resort to such places, where the mind is easily harmonious and restful. But then, it does not need argument to show that such changes in environment or circumstances may not be possible for all or at times of one's choice. Often, carefully laid plans break. Some one or the other, some totally unexpected event or the other would put a spanner in the works. Instead of the joy of the much looked forward to, disappointment would stare one in the face.

Do we need to regret this? Can we afford to place the all important need for a silent mind in the hands of some outer circumstance such as a suitable environment away from work. In overrating the importance of solitude perhaps we have not understood what solitude really means. Looking at it fundamentally, the underlying assumption behind the linking of the mind's quietness with a place with soothing surroundings only may be an error. 'Solitude' says Ramana, 'is in the mind of man'. It means making the mind still. This can be done in a crowd also. 'Solitude cannot efface one's thought. Practice does it. The same practice can be made here too'. Solitude *per se* cannot bring about a cessation of thoughts. What is required is positive effort to bring it about.

This position is consistent with Ramana's teachings that circumstances are pre-ordained and not of our making while at the same time the freedom to get back to the natural silence of the pure mind is unfettered. The opportunity of discovering the silent mind is open to all. It does not really matter if outer circumstance, like pursuit of one's sadhana in a conducive environment, is available or not. If the sun of a favourable fortune shines, by all means let one make hay. If, however, the situation is dark let it not deter. One can see the stark reality of what Ramana says. The obligation to practice the quest, to search within for the source of the mind cannot be excused away, even if the circumstances are not to one's liking. For, practice alone can rid the mind of its trappings, of its addiction to thought.

Hunting the 'I' with the twin invincible weapons provided by Ramana, one has to dive within. Entering as a pearl diver would with breath and mind control, persisting beyond the lulls of the mind, one arrives at the source of the mind only to be lost in the vastness of the mind's space. When the mind is not crowded with thoughts it becomes free and spacious. It is like removing furniture from the room which is cluttered with it. Then, the very act of removing furniture makes it spacious. Space was not created. It was there before. The furniture had cramped it. When the mind is freed from the noise within, a deep and vibrant peace would prevail.

GRACE TOO IS NEEDED

Sometimes notwithstanding the firmness of resolve, diligence of effort, one seems to be back at the starting point. Thoughts swarm up in hordes and one feels like throwing up one's hands in despair. The difficulty is heightened by the fact that the mind seems to go off hand just when one has become confident of having achieved a fair degree of control over it. The technique and the experience acquired by long practice seem of no avail. Since it is a common problem, one has to find a way out of this impasse. Ramana recognises the situation practically in his 'Hymns to Arunachala'. When the mind is weak and unable to pursue self-enquiry the inner journey is not possible and one has to return to the world of thoughts. According to Ramana, at this point grace is needed most.

It is difficult to talk about grace because each person has his own concept of it. Grace is something given by God or the Sadguru whose mind has become silent. In this context its aid in a situation where one is helpless, where one's efforts have come to a stand still, is invaluable. With the help of this grace one is back effectively on the inner journey overcoming the mind's holocaust.

Though, apparently, grace seems to be a gift, Ramana points out that such a notion arises from the error of thinking that grace is present sometimes and absent on other occasions. But grace is always there. According to Ramana it is effort which makes one aware of the grace and enables one to fully take its help in the pursuit of the self-enquiry for the silent mind. Grace and effort would thus be seen to act and react on each other. 'There is no real Vichara without grace, nor is grace active for one who is without Vichara'. Both are necessary. Unaided by grace, the labour and the wounds may be in vain. Equally, without toil, without intelligent and persistent effort, the aid of grace cannot be perceived. If this is remembered, then one need not give up half-way fearing the invincibility of the enemy - the endless thoughts.

THE JOURNEY'S END

Having ‘carelessly’ missed the natural silence, one must find one’s way back through self-enquiry backed by consciousness of the ever operative grace of Ramana. Silence would then be restored. A repose which no activity can disturb would prevail. The pure mind is quiet because the latent tendencies have dried up for want of attention. The mind has no longer any inclination to move out at all in search of happiness through objects.

The desire to know what happens when one reaches the source and stays there is very common and understandable. This is so because it is something which we long for and are prepared to work unweariedly to achieve. Ramana’s reply about it would depend upon the attitude of the questioner. If the desire to know was prompted by idle curiosity, Ramana would simply say ‘Why ask now; find out for yourself what happens’. In the alternative, he would reply ‘it is not for one to say what an individual experience would be. It would reveal itself’ and add ‘it is experience not in the category of knowledge’. At the same time, Ramana would patiently explain as to what the thought-free mind would be like when he found the enquirer to be very earnest.

According to Ramana in that state it would be as ‘difficult to bring out a thought as it is now to keep it out’. A conversation which a devotee held with him would help to clarify.

D : Do you have thoughts?

M : Usually I have no thoughts.

D : But when you are reading?

M : Then, I have thoughts.

D : And when some devotee asks questions?

M : I have thoughts, while replying, not otherwise.

What does this imply? Thoughts are only for the immediate purpose, here, to understand what is read or to elucidate. Once this purpose is served, the thought process ends. This is in contrast to our present state. If we read the newspaper it would set off a series of thoughts

with reference to what was read. Similarly, while answering a doubt, there would be a sense of self-importance or a looking down on the enquirer and so on. The thinking continues and leaves impressions which push thoughts hither and thither, later. But for one who is rid of tendencies, ‘incidents interest only so long as they last’ as they would a child. One ceases to think of the event when it is over.

Why does this happen? Why the difference? This too is answered by Ramana through an illustration which is best stated in his own words. ‘Suppose a cow plays a rogue and strays into the neighbour’s fields to graze. She is not easily weaned from her stealthy habit. How is she to be kept in the stall? If forcibly tethered in the stall she simply bides her time to play the rogue. If she is tempted with fine grass in the stall she takes one mouthful on the first day and again waits for the opportunity to run away. The next day she takes two mouthfuls; so she takes more and more on each succeeding day, until her straying tendency gradually weakens. When entirely free from the bad habit she might be safely left free and she would not stray into the neighbour’s pastures. Even when beaten in the stall, she does not afterwards leave the place. Similarly with the mind.’ In this illustration, the mind is the cow playing the rogue, the thoughts are the neighbour’s pastures. The pure mind free from thought is the stall. The joy and peace of the pure mind is such that one would not stray into the thought world.

The mind then becomes sharp like the end of the grass blade, for, its energy remains integral and is not broken up into thoughts. The jobs on hand get done perfectly and there would be no hang-over of thoughts to disturb. One has then arrived at the journey’s end.

LIVING GURU

In the early years after His Aruna Vijaya, on 1st September 1896, Ramana observed silence of speech. His mind of course was always truly silent, the onlookers could also see Him observing 'mouna'. Notwithstanding this, many would gather round just to gaze at His beauty which made 'the sun look dark'. He was the pure channel of the divine and to sit near Him was sufficient. Many of the persons who came could hardly be classified even as seekers of truth, let alone being on the verge of illumination like the famous four who had come to Śiva, as Dakshinamurthi, in times of yore. It is even difficult to say that the visitors' exclusive purpose was Self-knowledge. Yet they were drawn by the magnetic pull of His physical presence. How else can one explain groups of children preferring to stay and sit silently before Him, forgetting their mischief and play? Thanks to Ganapati Muni, Ramana broke this silence after eleven years. Even so, in the early years He seldom spoke much. His reminiscent mood, the patient explanation of the A to Z of self-enquiry, recorded later by Munagala Venkataramaiah, Devaraja Mudaliar, Suri Nagamma and Cohen, was not yet. However, whoever was fortunate to hear about Him would not miss the opportunity of being near Him. Such pilgrims would not even have doubts regarding the quest or even if they had, they would be solved in Ramana's presence before they were expressed. One would be reduced to tears while leaving and had to be lovingly reminded by Ramana of His feet being everywhere, or to think that 'one is still at Tiruvannamalai'. Later, when communications improved and the Master's glorious state began to be more widely, known, larger numbers preferred the jungle hermitage and the lives of a recluse to the luxury of their own homes. Proximity to the Maharshi was the magnet which drew them. Week-ends and holidays would swell these numbers. Then even those to whom circumstances had denied daily contact did not wish to lose such opportunities as they could grab to bask in the sunshine of His presence. The Kumbabhishekam of the Mother's temple and Bhagavan's last illness made Sri Ramanasramam the focal point of all devotees. The Master was totally indifferent to the pain

racking His body but the devotees had to bear the pain of the suffering of Ramana's body. Not for all the world would they miss His bewitching smile, the divine radiance of His face.

Ramana was fully aware of their eager love and would frown on any attempt to deny them 'darsan', however much His body may be racked with pain. At the same time, He was keen on preparing them for the inevitable end of the body. Ramana told Ananthanarayana Rao, 'the prime duty of the guru is to establish in his disciple the certainty of his existence and having done so, he is free to leave the body'. Hence, the repeated assurance of His 'continued presence'. For, where could there be death for 'the deathless one?' Yet the Mahasamadhi, the 14th April, 1950 is an event of utmost significance. For the thousands who had known the joy of the indescribable beatitude of His physical company it was like the end of the world. They just could not reconcile themselves to that absence. Sri Ramanasramam bore a deserted look. It seemed as if the fifteen long months of spiritual ministration by Ramana were lost on them, the ministration to imprint on their minds the idea that they should regard His body in the same way as He did. For them, it was an unbearable heart-pang, difficult indeed to get over.

The Sadguru Ramana is a living guru, because His effulgence was never limited to the body. The human garb had been worn and the human drama had been enacted not for the spiritual regeneration of a generation or two who alone could have physical proximity, but for 'a millennium or two'. Even when Ramana was in the body, there were many whom He had drawn to Himself though they never came to Arunachala, where He was rooted for fifty four years. The case of Mrs. Victoria Doe referred to by K.K. Nambiar in his 'Guiding Presence' is illustrative. This old English lady whom he visited in London had never come to India, never seen Bhagavan in flesh and blood, but 'lived in Him day in and day out'. Often, books and photographs would be the medium, the link and communication with Ramana.

For Ramana's life giving force the physical end made no difference. How could it? It may be remembered that though in His body, He had transcended the identification with it as early as July 1896 after His 'death' experience'. His state of steady wisdom, His awareness that He was the deathless spirit was always there since then. It is this awareness which He sought to communicate throughout the period of His spiritual ministration when He was in the body.

In this context, Ramana's method of teaching assumes the utmost significance. While assuring one of His 'tiger-like grip', He would constantly draw one's attention to the need for effort by the devotee himself. When one devotee quoting a Tamil song and citing an example of the 'kitten' wished for similar help, Ramana replied, 'That is impossible, it is necessary both for you to strive and for the guru to help'. Again, when asked about the Guru's grace, He would say, 'It is essential for realisation, but it is given only to those who have striven hard and ceaselessly on the path towards freedom'. By discouraging excessive dependence on the guru and by emphasising tireless practice on the part of the disciple or the devotee He made possible the maturing of the individual. Consequently, a right relationship, in which the guru's guidance and the individual effort blend, was opened up. In such a relationship what matters is the consciousness of the presence of Ramana as the inner guru available without time-space limitations. The importance which Ramana attaches to practice and experience also springs from this approach. It is not the study of 'even hundreds of scriptures', but experience that matters. In the Ramana way, the means and the goal are not different. The repeated dips into the Self by treading it is termed practice and this itself is Wisdom when the experience becomes steady. A reporter made a banner headline of the physical passing away, titling his report 'I Saw A God Die'. Little could he realise the mystery of the working of Ramana as the intelligence shining in the hearts of all life. Working within, creating circumstance and environment which push one within, Ramana reveals His immortal presence to all who tune themselves to it.

THE VOICE OF TRUTH

When immortals like Ramana walk on earth one wonders why humanity has been given this rare opportunity. Why has Ramana been saved from a barren worldly life? Ganapati Muni would have it that it is for ending once and for all dry polemics and for trumpeting the Truth. Ramana Himself has revealed the secret. Arunachala gave Ramana birth and tended Him, made Him into a 'wonderful work of art; graciously bestowed on him, His own auspiciousness, His own state of bliss,' Why? It was in order that 'His state of consciousness may shine forth and His power might flourish' What is this state, and what is the power of Arunachala which Ramana embodied? Having been specially clothed with this authority Ramana exposed and made public the hidden ways of Arunachala. His purpose in doing so was to make the whole world rejoice by experiencing directly the joy transcending the mind, a joy which fills every pore when the mind is silent, truly silent. Every thing which Ramana taught was therefore an open book. No secret rites, no lock up of knowledge in a close circle. Hence too His accessibility at all times to one and all, not for a year or two but for each single day of fifty four years of spiritual ministration while in the body. Ramana was a munificent giver of knowledge and He keeps ever fresh the spirits of those to whom He alone matters.

The story of Arunachala's grace was broadcast so widely by Ramana and for all times that the Muni sings, 'good luck accumulated to the Red Mountain, Arunachala... which has grown incomparable because the Lord Sri Ramana Maharshi has chosen this hill for His abode'.

Arunachala's attraction has always been strong and irresistible for those seeking freedom through the 'Jnana' way, the way of knowledge, but then, after Sankara who blazed forth in the 8th century, the path of wisdom had taken the back-seat. The flood-tide of Bhakti had taken over and it was repeatedly stressed that the easiest way to salvation was through devotion. 'Jnana Marga', was labelled as difficult, sharp as a razor's edge, intellectual

and impractical. Historically, Ramana's role was to restore to the path of knowledge, which Arunachala symbolises, the pride of place, to make it easy and direct and to make for its integration into one's daily life.

The Brahmic state was mostly a matter of hearsay, but Ramana by being a living example of it, has restored the faith of humanity in the scriptural affirmation of one's identity with the Self.

Ramana had become Self-aware in His teens. His wisdom thereafter was natural, firm and rocklike, the body had served its purpose and could have been cast away. The divine had other plans. Arunachala drew Ramana to itself physically as well so that the glory of Sivahood, the Brahmic state, could be seen in all splendour. The dramatic demonstration of its purpose was when life was restored to Ramana in the early years of His stay on Arunachala. When He was returning to Virupaksha cave the circulation of blood and beating of the heart stopped, the body became dark in death's grip. Later after about ten minutes, circulation of blood and beating of heart recommenced. Years of spiritual ministration lay ahead, Arunachala's message had to reach far and wide. What could death do in the face of this divine plan for which Ramana had left behind His celestial home and put on the human garb? How did Ramana fulfill this purpose? What are the propositions which He laid bare? The first is that it is the direct experiencing of Self which matters. Second, that truth is common property, it is one's own, it is not given and cannot be taken away. Thirdly, that one must understand the nature of the mind if the fountainhead of bliss is to be tapped. Fourthly, that the straight-path to it is through vigilant self-enquiry.

Ramana's way as a teacher, as a Sad-guru, was gentle and compassionate. He would not try to wean any one from the path to which he was naturally inclined. He would not insist on the practising of the royal-path of self-enquiry. He would, however, gently point out that in the end self-enquiry is inescapable for Self-knowledge.

Pausing here one has to highlight the essential features of self-enquiry to see in clear focus its utility. Attention is the key word. Mental seepages are given up for one's attention is constantly rivetted on the 'I', subject, the individual. Thoughts occur in waves or clusters, the 'I'-thought being the centre of each cluster. The 'I'-thought is never alone. It is company ridden. Other thoughts keep coming and going in a ceaseless movement, based on the directional pull of the past, based on one's idea of where pleasure and pain are located. The other thoughts may be termed as hangers-on, as parasites, because they cannot survive unless nurtured and put together by the 'I'-thought. The 'I'-thought has a locus-standi of its own, as it is not dependent on other thoughts for its existence. If only one could isolate this 'I'-thought from associated thoughts, half of the battle would have been won. Self-enquiry serves precisely this purpose. Because attention is paid to the centre, the 'I'-thought, as other thoughts start moving in to get a foothold, this attention stifles conceptualisation. It is only when concentration wavers that the other thoughts make a surreptitious back-door entry. But their reign would be short lived as attention is refocussed on the 'I'-thought by the enquiry. 'Who am I?' The grip of other thoughts weakens, and their strangle-hold is loosened by the repeated searchlight being thrown on their root. Once the inward journey commences the channeled energies are to be harnessed by pushing in deeper by searching for the source of the root thought. Effort can go only upto the point when the barriers of mental waves and 'false quietude' are broken. It is a joyous 'spiritual treasure hunt'. Then the spiritual Heart's magnetic pull would take over and the one who began the journey would not be there to report about it.

Before one is steadily in that bliss, one inescapably falters, is back in the old rut. But having tasted the ambrosial joy of the Self the taste for more of it would not let go. One returns, enquiring, searching, strengthened each time in the conviction that happiness is ours inherently. One becomes increasingly aware of the folly of looking for it through sensory doors. Then suddenly knowledge dawns. The sovereignty of the mind over us and its independent

postures, its strutting about, wither away. Where are the words to describe the joy of that state, the beauty of being Ramana's immersed in His blazing light of knowledge?

THE HOUND OF HEAVEN

Ramana would seldom admit His true stature. In fact it would seem as if He was keen on hiding it. However, it unfolds itself in the accounts recorded by some devotees over the years. As one reads them one feels the thrill of His shining presence within; one is filled with joy at the wonderous play of this 'hound of heaven'.

Sundaresa Iyer is terribly hungry and sulking at an insult. Ramana coaxes him to eat saying, 'Come, I have prepared special sambar for breakfast and I would like you to taste it', spreads a leaf, heaps idlis and pours sambar. He then sits by his side cutting jokes, telling stories and making him forget his worries. Devaraja Mudaliar goes in the morning for 'pradakshina' of Arunachala and comes back well past breakfast time, only to be served dosais and kootu which have been reserved for him at Ramana's behest. Humphreys is tired and hungry after a long and tiring drive by motor cycle, but would not like to mention it. Ramana however knows and arranges for his lunch and keeps chatting with him while he eats. More than a mother's care! Who has not tasted Ramana's solicitude? From the basic needs, food, clothing and shelter, He takes over.

Ramana thinks of Subbaramayya's family while tasting a special dish, 'Aviyal', prepared in the Ashram. Ramana has ears only for the whistle of the train when a particular devotee has informed in advance that he would be coming by a train scheduled to reach at that time. Ramana is quick to notice the entry of Bose, a heart patient, into the hall and gently suggests to another devotee to shift a little and give him his seat so that Bose could lean against the pillar. Nothing seems to escape His loving attention.

Manavasi Ramaswamy Iyer, a chronic gastric ulcer patient, could only stomach gruel and nothing more till Ramana ended it with a feast which he could digest. Mudaliar is having severe diarrhoea and is cured by an extra breakfast and a heavier lunch in the Ashram in Ramana's presence. Subbaramayya is bedridden at Sri Ramana-

sramam. Bhagavan visits him, suggests some simple home-remedies which make him all-right. Ramana Himself vomits that night, the illness is taken on as it were, but the devotee is protected. Innumerable petitions for some remedy or the other for the devotee or his family were answered by letters or telegrams sent with Bhagavan's blessings. How many miracles for each person! The recipient alone knows. It was not Ramana's way to admit for it might distract one from life's true purpose, the search, the quest and discovery of the Self. But it is clear, Ramana is there, almost at the beck and call of the devotees, shouldering their daily woes and cares. "Human love needs human meriting" - not His. For compassion was not His attribute but His nature. The fullness of His universal love was evident in each incident.

Should one ask for a specific assurance of protection and help in the path, that too would be given. We have a poignant instance of it. Ramana's last breath is about to come. A devotee tearfully asks for a boon of protection from fear, and gets the reply, 'Yes, I have given it'. The case of Chadwick too is apposite. After having travelled thousands of miles and settled down at Sri Ramanasramam, he wanted to be secure in the thought that his Sadguru had accepted him. Ramana remarked, 'Has he any doubt about it? Ask him, does he want me to give him a written document? Go to Narayana Iyer, Sub-Registrar and tell him to make one out for him'.

What about the abundance of the spiritual ministration? Where was the barrier of time or space for it? Paul Brunton, tired and sick from his wanderings in India in search of godmen, is determined to sail back to England, but is summoned back to the 'jungle hermitage' by the irresistible eyes of the Maharshi. What a blissful home-coming it was for Eleanor Paulene Noye to return from Calcutta, where she had gone enroute to USA, to Ramana's presence impelled by His love.

The spiritual guidance would be tuned to the need and to the maturity of the seeker but the process of unveiling would be firm and gentle. The light would be thrown step

by step, even-paced, no racing, not even accelerating. If visions were sought, as they were by some devotees like Sundaresa Iyer and Raghavachari, they were given. At the same time the need to enquire, the need to find the truth about the seer of the vision, would be emphasised all the time as a basic tune. Any attempt to condemn oneself, to confess to weakness or to speak of difficulties on the path, would be countered by Ramana's invigorating reminder about one's true nature, its divinity and the fact that it is only 'our habits and desires which are weakening'.

Once Lalitha, daughter of Subbaramayya, implored Ramana to attend her wedding, only to be assured by Him that 'He would be present with her not only for the function but always'. What can one say, when one experiences so many quiet miracles which Ramana performs, except that His 'strong feet follow and follow with out-stretched hands'.

WHAT IS DEATH IF SCRUTINISED?

What a terrifying thing to do! Why should we think of the dreaded death at all, let alone scrutinise it? Surely we know a few things about death; that the young and old, the healthy and infirm, the rich and poor, the wise and the ignorant, no one can escape it. We also know that no one can predict the when of it. Birth being the product of karma, of fate, who knows when it would come to an end? So one feels that it would be best to leave inevitable death severely alone. Would it not be an ostrich-like attitude to ignore the reality and to push it away till it confronts you with or without warning? Is it not the unconscious and unsaid fear that death marks the end of all that we hold dear that is at the back of the steady refusal to have a close look at the only event in our lives which is certain and unavoidable?

But can one afford this attitude which would deny insight into life itself? Ramana specifically suggests that one should examine the meaning of death and find out the truth of it. When His mother Azhagammal lay dying in 1914, from typhoid, Ramana gave potent guidance in the form of a prayer for her recovery. "Where would be the need for cremation if one were to probe into death?" He asks in the prayer. Why? For therein lies the key to immortality, the key to freedom from the fetters of time. Strange as it may seem, it is only those courageous ones who have dared to invite death, dared to fearlessly examine it, who have become the trail-blazers of joyous living.

Hence, one finds Ramana almost coaxing one out of this deep and hidden fear. "You are as good as dead even in sleep, what fear is there of death?" He would query. Or "why do you love sleep, but not death?" For, sleep is closest to death in one sense. The body is non-existent for the sleeper who has no thoughts and hence no identification with the body. But, somehow death seems different. One is certain that on waking, the awareness of the dear body would be there, whereas death would mark the sharp ending of the known. The stark reality of this fear operates

against the in-depth involvement to find out about death. Yet, one should persuade oneself to do so. The experience of Ramana Himself would help in the ridding of this deep-rooted fear.

Those familiar with Ramana's life know of the dramatic events of 1896 and 1911. The total and gripping fear of death in July 1896 left Him with no choice except to come face to face with this primal fear of death. What was the result? His own immortality. He became aware and aware constantly of the ceaseless shining of the 'I' to which the burning of the body to ashes, on death, makes no difference. Death could only be for the perishable body and not for the imperishable 'I'.

In 1911, while returning to Virupaksha cave, Ramana had the second confrontation with death. Only, this time it was not fear of death, but actually physical death. In His words: "The circulation of blood and the beating of the heart stopped and my body became dark in colour, same as what happens to a dead body... but the flow of my thoughts and the consciousness of the Self was not lost". Aware of the dying body, Ramana remained firm in His abidance in the Self, fully conscious of this deathlessness.

If one is prepared to look, what does one find? It becomes evident that when one talks of birth or death, one has in mind only the body. The fact that the body comes into existence and passes away automatically, according to the karma which gave rise to it, is forgotten. Once the karma is exhausted, the body comes to an end. Hence the phenomenon of the death of infants and the lingering on of the old. These are but 'body's deaths and births', Ramana would say and point out, 'true birth is in the Self'. Death is seen as clinging to the wrong notion of identification with the body and forgetfulness of one's real nature. On close examination of death, this ignorance explodes for, the first thing to end would be this identification. Once this happens, one is naturally 'That' eternity. What happens to life thereafter? A new unhurried and recollected life begins. Unhurried because of the consciousness that events are shaped by the Higher

Power and not by the strength of the ego. One learns to have repose born of the harmony with the divine law. Why recollectedly? Because one is constantly aware of the natural state of bliss, where there is no coming or going.

One has to practise incessantly the way shown by Ramana to become heirs to such a life. What exactly does this practice imply? Since we are 'close to death' in sleep, watching of the subsidence of 'I' before sleep would be the first step. This has to be consciously extended, by making the 'I' subside into its source by watching it as it rises. Such attention before it branches into other thoughts immediately pushes it within and it drops 'crestfallen' into the source. The individual life current merges in the universal and one becomes consciously immortal.

THE FUTURE IS IN THE PRESENT

Unmindful of the present, we live in the past or in the future. The past is our constant companion, for, the experiencing of pleasure and pain in action leaves marks on the mind. We are the victims of time. Nothing is a thing of the past for us, for, the residual memory drags us in different directions. The past projects the future as well. Either we want it continued or changed. The interest in the future is common and widespread because one likes to crystal gaze into the unknown to be reassured that good fortune lies ahead. In the coming events we expect the fulfilment of our dreams. Actually this interest in the future does not stop with our own lifetime. One wishes to know what would happen after death, about transmigration, and so on. This thought continuum, this swinging between the past and the future is destructive of all that is sweet and worthwhile in life. It is the present which holds the key to happiness. Ramana's dictum 'take care of the present and the future would take care of itself' has the sole purpose of focussing one's attention on the present, on the 'now'.

If would be worth recalling here a typical conversation of Ramana. A group of lady doctors from Bangalore were visiting Him. Their conversation runs thus:

Lady : Is there re-birth?

Bha : Do you know what birth is?

Lady : Oh! I know I exist now, but I want to know if I will exist in the future.

Bha : There is neither past nor future. There is only the present. Yesterday was present to you when you experienced it and tomorrow will also be present when you will experience it. Therefore, experience takes place only in the present.

Again, many would come to Sri Ramana feeling diffident about their backgrounds, doubting their fitness for self-enquiry and the spiritual path because of their past 'misdeeds'. Ramana would never let them wallow in the past. For instance in a pessimistic mood, Paul Brunton

talked of his own weakness and kept persisting that it was true. Ramana's firm reply is telling. 'It is not true. The great error of man is to think that he is weak and evil by nature. What are weak and evil are only his habits, his desires and thoughts but not himself'. If the fault lies in the habits of the past, what is needed would be break old habits remembering consciously one's true nature.

Even though Ramana states so simply one often doubts whether it is possible to scissor and cut away totally the links with the past and the future and to live wholly in the present, to live each moment of our life giving it the fullest attention. It might appear that it is easier said than done. After all it is so totally alien to the way of life we are used to. However, if one doesn't handicap oneself through negative and debilitating thoughts, there is hope.

The whole purport of Ramana's teachings is to show a way to such a life where the stranglehold of time ceases. If the path indicated and reiterated by Him repeatedly is pursued with vigilance, action will be complete, leaving neither memory of it nor a lingering desire for its repetition in the future. How then is one to cut his roots in the past and his faith in the future? Ramana explains that for this one should learn about the mind itself. The mind is a series of thoughts, representing the pleasure-pain residuum of the past which is stored up in the Heart in seed form by the core or root thought 'I', the feeling of individuality. How? Just as a hen gathers her brood of chicks under her wings in the evening and goes to roost till the next morning, the individual thought gathers the other thoughts and merges in the Heart during sleep. On waking, the 'I'-thought along with the host of other thoughts rises up. At this stage if the individual does not pay attention to other thoughts then they are unable to sprout for want of support. A shift in the individual's attention is what is needed, the shift being from the objects, the other thoughts, to the subject, the 'I', and its source. If the attention so shifted is sustained, then the 'I'-thought is consciously pushed back to the Heart. The other thoughts too follow suit. The other thoughts do not matter. Let their number be a legion. Being dependent on the 'I'-thought they move in unison with it. When this

happens, the past and the future, in the form of thought structures, become well and truly dead. Unable to come to life, for want of attention of the 'I'-thought which sustains them, the other thoughts fade away.

Having thus learnt to live in the present by cutting our connections with the past and the future we have to be wide awake and alert, and watchful. Persistent practice roots the mind at its source. Then there is only the bliss of the present experienced in all its fullness.

FORGETFULNESS AND REMEMBRANCE

All our problems could be said to arise from twin faults, forgetfulness of our real nature and failure to remember it. What is it that we have forgotten or failed to remember? The scriptures assert emphatically and clearly our oneness with the Self. What does it imply? It means that in essence we are ever free and blissful. 'There is nothing we do not possess as yet'. Nothing can be added to make our cup of happiness fuller for we are brimming with it. Not only have we forgotten this, but we are always relating some tale of woe or the other. We feel bound by circumstances and quite often we turn to God for satisfying something or the other in our long and unending list of prayers. 'Though greed is endless and life is not', we want to somehow fill the half filled jar of gold rather than to enjoy the gold we already possess.

Ramana would never permit such meaningless mourning. He would counsel that instead of 'wailing inconsolably' labelling oneself as a 'sinner', a 'weakling' and so on, one should zealously carry on meditation on the Self'. Such meditation necessarily implies awareness of one's inherent happiness independent of the external situation.

One has to blame oneself for the self-imposed misery. There is always a sense of hurry, an anxiety to push on to the next job even before due attention has been given to the work on hand. Caught in life's hustle-bustle, we are trying to chew too much, to take on jobs which others could do better. The other side of the fence is always greener. The workload constantly diminishes for those who are blessed. They do not volunteer or seek work. What needs to be done is given the mind's might. Since such work cannot be renounced one need not opt for additional burdens. The hectic pace of life which is our undoing needs to be slowed down to an even keel which leaves time for reflection and meditation.

When Ramana focusses attention on the unhurried and recollected way of life, He also suggests how to bring this about. Attention should be on 'the under-current which

vivifies the mind', that which enables the work to be done. Since haste is the cause of forgetfulness, our aim should be to give the time due to each job. The object is not merely the proper performance of work, which is the automatic consequence of such attention, but to remember our essential nature and inner strength. This reflective attitude enables one to be aware of the true relationship of the mind to its source and strength, the Self, the Heart. What is gained is the conscious merging with the totality of existence. Then one's hands may be busy at work, but the head would be cool in the exhilarating heights of the joy of Being.

One might ask 'are there any warning signals in our lives to indicate that we are moving away and getting entangled in the karmic vortex?' 'Yes', says, Ramana. One can easily see it for himself. Whenever one is fearful or anxious, then, it is time to have a look at what is happening. It is the danger sign indicating clearly that we are taking on far too many jobs. Then it is time to assess, time to have mercy on oneself, so that the unhurried and contemplative way of life is not lost. The seeming sacrifices to achieve this are literally worth their weight in gold.

The know-how of such a life requires the proper use of the hour of meditation. God knows how little we care for the time we set apart for meditation. Somehow we would try to cram it into our busy schedules often to be got over quickly, in order to get on with the jobs we relish. Ramana advised Humphreys that even if one is able to set apart only a few minutes a day, it would be enough. These few minutes, if properly utilised, have a transforming influence. One gradually acquires, unconsciously, power to deal 'with men, events and things' effectively and with detachment. The circumstances, which are clearly not of our making and are outside control, can no longer hinder awareness of our links with the Infinite. Work or its absence does not disturb the inner current of bliss flowing steadily and immersing us in its abundance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

To fall in love with Truth, with the Heart, with one's own natural state, would be wonderful. That is what the scriptures have been affirming, repeating and saying over and over again. The natural state is one of 'ananda', of bliss, a bliss which is not of time and therefore without break. The examples of the lives of the great saints and their teachings are only to remind us of the validity of this truth. After all, seeing is believing, so one's scepticism, or lack of faith, is corroded when one witnesses or recalls the stories of their lives. They possessed none of the means of happiness, namely, wealth, power, position, and so on. Even so they were always brimming over with happiness. Ramana's worldly possessions were only His cod-piece and 'kamandalu'. Yet He was and is a constant and unfailing powerhouse of peace, of abundance and fullness of life. His famous 'Atma-Vidya' song wisely termed as 'the song of bliss' is an invitation, a gentle reiteration of the sweetness and joy that we too may partake of. Yet one does not seem to care enough for what the scriptures, the sages, and mystics say. We certainly are not filled with passion for the practices which lead to it. The path tread by them seems wholly different. Often one feels that it might just be a dead-end leading nowhere. True, we begin with faith, but it is weak and uncertain, unbacked by experience, and more often than not dryness sets in. The first flush of love peters out and it is not sustained. One comes to regard spiritual practice as best got over with as quickly as possible, mechanically, as a discipline rather than as a process to be lived with loving care. What the great ones say is outside the field of our experience and we carry on basically with our old ways giving life to habit and searching at false doors.

If one is earnest what is to be done? After all when the goal is there, and bliss that is naturally ours beckons, why should one not reap it? Looking at the facts one finds that the real fault lies in our not working hard enough. Great expectations; but how can they be fulfilled when the input is totally inadequate? This does not need much proving. One has to just see for oneself the distribution of time

during waking hours and the relish with which we do our 'other work'. We hardly have the patience to let the truth seep in. Chadwick relates the following conversation in the old Hall at Sri Ramanasramam which is typical of the general attitude. An American party touring India in search of 'Mahatmas' arrived at Sri Ramanasramam. One of its members, Mrs. Taylor, sitting in the Hall with Bhagavan, suddenly said, 'Bhagavan, I want Self-Realisation'. 'Wait', replied Bhagavan, 'It will come in due time'. 'No', she answered, 'that is no good. I want it here and now'. We also have the case of the devotee who told Bhagavan 'I do not want anything - only give me Self-Realisation'. Only in spiritual life somehow one deludes oneself into thinking that everything should appear at jet-speed. As in everything else in life, there is need for time. The blooming of the Heart is bound to occur at the ripe time.

Ramana would constantly remind that Self-knowledge, and the bliss which flows from it, is not a gift given on a platter by the Sadguru. One has to strive for it with diligence and vigilance. For, grace is already there in full measure, what is lacking is the effort. This weakness of mind, this lack tenacity of purpose, is the product of the tendency in each one of us to pass on the buck. It is so tempting to do so, particularly when we are conscious of the Sadguru's strength. But it is precisely this that Ramana would never encourage. For, only if Kitty remembers Bhagavan, Bhagavan would remember her'. This is not said in the spirit of the bargain. Indeed, how can there be any question of it? For Ramana's mind was dead, anchored in the source. It is only to underscore the truth, that unwearied and ceaseless effort is a must, that Ramana made this statement. If you have done enough and come to a point of helplessness you have the right to press your demands on the Sadguru and invoke His blessings, so that the truth may be revealed, so that our loveless heart may be inundated with the fullness of love. Then it would not be refused. Rather, then we become aware that all along that help has been there, warding off the weaknesses and distractions of the mind. Just as the mother feeds a child is sleep unknown to it, so does the Sadguru Ramana,

kinder than any mother, nourish those who with unflagging interest have pursued self-enquiry and the search for truth. Then, 'What they say' is what we know; that there are no 'others' and that love embraces all life. What was heard and contemplated upon becomes one's own experience.

WITH NO REGRETS

Why is one drawn to the spiritual path? More particularly what brings one to the direct path, the Ramana way? One might explain it by attributing it to past good deeds fructifying now, fasts and prayers yielding fruit or the blessings of generations of ancestors. But none can really account for it. For, all have their share of bad fortune, sorrow through loss of dear ones, financial problems, ill-health and so on. Even though the ‘slings and arrows’ of karma are common, it is only some of those afflicted who either consciously or unconsciously seek to find out the meaning of it all. Only some are concerned enough to find a way out of the sorrow, out of karma’s see-saw, and pursue solutions which would put them beyond the sway of fickle ‘dame-luck’. Unfortunately, even among them, all do not stick on. Their determination is not steadfast nor is their resolve sufficiently firm to keep them going till the truth is revealed. False notions, like the idea that the spiritual path is difficult, and the hold of the belief that happiness lies in the sensate way are the nagging negative factors. On the top of it, the lack of experience of the joy of inner life makes them wayward and unfaithful to the goal. A lingering doubt that they would regret having given up the ‘good things of life’ for ideals and goals set out by the scriptures takes the steam out of their efforts. Only a little, alas all too little, time is given and after some dissipated efforts they are back in the old grooves.

In this context the teaching of Ramana is like a copious spring of fresh water cooling the path. What is so special about this path that we can confidently assert this? It is because the Ramana way is free of all dialectics, of philosophies and concepts. For, mere ideas unbacked by experience lead only to intellectual wrangles or attempts to dazzle with erudition and knowledge. However firmly one may be convinced of these concepts, at crucial times, in the absence of experience, the beliefs crumble and fall. Therefore, Ramana always used to emphasise the need for ‘practice’ and ‘experience’. Once one is convinced by faith in the scriptures or the words of the Sadguru and commences on the inner journey, experience alone is

required. Ramana would also gently push aside various mental road-blocks of a host of negative thoughts. One of the most common of such thoughts is the idea that the results will take a long time and that the search may be vain in one's lifetime. Everything would seem to be post-dated. Seekers would also think of their past, their omissions and commissions, and feel that because of this they may be denied the fruits of the search. These are some of the handicaps which the mind is quick to create to delay one away from any enquiry about itself.

Let us look at the answers Ramana would give. One of His classmates and ardent devotees, Ranga Iyer, would take the liberty of putting question after question to Ramana like Devaraja Mudaliar and Subbaramaiah. Once he asked Him, "How many more lives would it take for me to be liberated?" Ramana replied, "There is no such thing as time and space; in an hour you can dream of myriad experiences, in a cinema - in a tiny film, you see mighty oceans, mountains and temples in quick succession. It is the mind which blows up everything". By pointing out that the time factor is not relevant in a search which is in essence timeless, Ramana removes the fear that we may never reap the fruits in this life and that we may end up by regretting having given up the 'known devil'. In the inner world, time is not, as we are cutting at its very root. One is already off the mental movement when self-enquiry turns the mind within.

Again, when seekers would talk of their past sins Ramana would cut them short by pointing out the futility of recollecting them and thus giving a new lease of life to them, instead of concerning themselves with the present which alone matters.

Ramana would also emphasise the positive side by drawing attention to our real nature, its purity which is not affected by weaknesses brought out by habit. Ramana is thus constantly guiding and helping in removing ideas which sap the effort, removing all that is weakening, all that dampens the enthusiasm. Thanks to this one is ready to dive within the sure-fire tool of self-enquiry.

Once the journey home-ward to the Heart begins, in search of the source of the mind, one is safe, For, a taste of the bliss is experienced along the way. When asked about the difference between one who is ignorant of the truth and the one who is searching and has not yet found it, Ramana would say that there is certain hope for the latter for he will not give up. He is smitten by the stimulus of the joy springing from the Heart which would goad him on to further efforts till that state is steady. Then one leaves behind all regret.

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

Once a person is drawn into the magnetic field of a Sadguru, though often spiritual effort may lag, though often doubts may keep dogging, one will never lose, altogether, the sight of the goal, of Self-knowledge. The Sadguru's Grace would see to that. Even though this is certain in the spiritual path, one often feels that there is no progress at all, that perhaps the goals and ideals of the scriptures are merely utopian. We find that even those who stayed near the physical presence of Sri Bhagavan have not been an exception to this kind of feeling. This was so notwithstanding their total involvement in the spiritual path. Sundaresa Iyer, who could not rest without seeing Ramana every day, suddenly decided to stay away for a hundred endless days because he was disgusted with his apparent lack of change. After Chadwick had stayed for a while at Sri Ramanasramam, Ramana could sense his need for a change and gently suggested that he could 'go to Varkala' adding that 'it would be cooler there'. Three years after coming permanently near Ramana, Cohen had a strong urge to go on a pilgrimage. What place is there holier than Ramana's proximity, for which he himself had left hearth and home? Yet, the mind has its ways and the 'yatra' bug bit him strongly. He felt the need for a change of place, the need to be away somewhere even though he was then basking in the sunlight of Ramana's presence.

Such impatience with spells of dryness, boredom and listlessness has to be tackled and overcome by the seeker all along the way. For, the transformation is the product of the totality in which several factors are involved, the past background, the intensity of the effort, and the passion with which the Grace of the Sadguru is invoked and felt. The inner journey has no milestones against which one can measure the progress and feel happy or unhappy about it. Often Ramana would gently reprimand those complaining about the lack of progress with the query, 'How do you know that there is no progress?' As doubts linger and haunt, one has to assure oneself of the fact that no other circumstances, no environmental situation can bind. In God's scheme of things, there is total

freedom to pursue the search and to find out the truth. The problem of establishing relationship with the impersonal has also to be tackled. The basis of all our love is centered on the personal relationship which is fostered by look, by touch, by speech. Impersonal love is outside our experience. To love in silent communion with the eternal, demands willingness to lose oneself. But one is not prepared for it. Why? The reason is at the back of one's mind, the unsaid fear of losing everything which we have treasured so far. The fear of what would happen if the ego is lost cuts at the root of learning about the beauty of life merged in the Infinite. Deep feeling, the single-minded resolve to be free of all limitations, is sacrificed at the altar of this fear. That the fear is very real is evident from the question which seekers have put to Ramana. Chadwick records that after meditating in the presence of Bhagavan for some months, he reached a stage when he was overcome with fear. Bhagavan explained to him that this fear was felt by the ego which was gradually losing its grip. It was in fact dying and, naturally, resented it. Ramana asked Chadwick to enquire 'whom is this fear related to?' Ramana added that the fear was a product of the habit of identifying the body with the Self and assured that repeated experience of separation from this idea, by practice, would end this fear.

Only when this fear is tackled one begins to care truly for Self-knowledge. Passion for it is magnificent, for in it lies the key to all happiness. After all, great things are achieved by passionate involvements, even if it be for wealth, power and so on. The passion for these things takes one away from the vital source of life by externalising and scattering the mind away from the inner search. If only we can channel this madness for 'wordly values', if only we could hold on for dear life to the holy feet of the Sadguru Ramana and the way taught by Him, the floodgates of freedom and bliss would be opened. We will no longer be victims of the subtle escapes of the mind and its vagaries. Bliss is not then a far-off experience. It is felt as it comes on, unheralded, in moments when the mind is quiet, at times when the presence of Ramana Sadguru is felt deeply within. This experience is the

beginning of wisdom, for, it leads one on within. The taste of inner joy, the beatitude of self-merging dips, would draw one back for more of it. Gradually, unnoticed, but surely, the mind slips back to the source, till what remains is only bliss, vast and indescribable.

BORN TO DIE

A devotee once prayed to Ramana that he should be granted all the 'good' things of life and also simultaneously be liberated from Karma's cycle. 'Why not' he thought. After all there is no limit to the Master's power and His compassion. Quick came Ramana's reply. 'The world is a dream. Do you not want to wake up from it?' Ramana was not making a philosophic statement but only declaring the bare truth. What is it? Granting that life is a bed of roses, how would one react to it? Would it be a boon or a bane? The chances are that one would be taken in by such a life, forget the sense of purpose in life, and just carry on with the brimful of successive enjoyments. Are the people who have such lives really fortune's favourites? Is their lot to be envied? When one ponders one can see that it is not so. Their life would be truly wasted, wouldn't it? The human opportunity would have been frittered away. It may be because of this that the puranas say that celestials, for whom it is one long innings of pleasure, have to be born as humans to find out life's purpose. This is not to extol sorrow as such but to say that a deep disappointment, which goes straight to the heart, makes one question accepted values and habitual ideas. Of course there are some who are so insensitive, so callous, that no event leaves a mark. Incapable of deep feelings, they lead surface lives like the 'lucky' ones who are left unscarred by fate. But for those who feel, who are truly human, sorrow produces a sense of dispassion resulting in the inturning of the mind to find out what life is all about. One then seeks to find out whether one is just fate's plaything, a creature of circumstances. One then begins to enquire whether there is a way out of all this sorrow; not only the sorrow of the moment caused by an event but sorrow itself. Without withdrawal into oneself, without becoming cynical, if one stays with sorrow and lets it sink deep within, then the topsyturvy values lose their old potency. This is the dawn of the Grace of the Sadguru for, doubt, searching, yearning, is a prelude to a new awakening. Then there is scope for the opening up of a fresh way of life. One would then begin to use the discriminative faculty, which is the hallmark of human life,

for diving within to find out the true import of the 'I', The scriptures are never tired of repeating that joy is inherent and that bliss is the nature of one's own Being. The plunge within enables the discovery of it by putting to shade all happiness enjoyed thus far.

Ramana's reference to the passage in Taitriya Upanishad is telling in this connection. If a man has vast learning, abundant wealth, a chaste wife, loving children, obedient servants, sound health, and long life, the cup of human happiness would be full. Taitriya Upanishad goes on to enumerate ten higher grades of happiness, each of which is said to be a hundred fold greater than the preceding one. The Upanishad further asserts that the happiness of all these eleven grades are mere foam when compared to the ocean of bliss of abidance in the Self. Ramana sometimes would refer to this and also talk of the story of the ascetic, Dattatreya, to drive home the point that true happiness can be found within and not from outer circumstances which we have come to regard as the only means to happiness. The story runs thus. Once a king and his retinue were passing through a forest with pomp and pageantry. The king came across a person who did not even have a piece of food but whose face radiated divine light and happiness. He was naturally curious to know the cause of this person's happiness, in circumstances when one would ordinarily be in abject sorrow. He sent messengers who were ignored. Later the king went himself and learnt that this naked ascetic's happiness lay in his having found its secret as the incessant sparkle of the Heart.

If human happiness at its highest is a mere pittance in comparison to the bliss that is one's own, does not intelligence demand the using of one's mind to discover it? Mere drifting along without serious search would be to negate life's purpose. Therefore, Ramana asks in His 'Marital Garland' 'What is the use of this life without the spirit of enquiry?'. Otherwise, one would be just born to die. One's life would be a mere chronological interval between two dates, the date of birth and the date of death. What a pity if one were to die no wiser than when born, to die ignorant of life's beauty and depth.

MIND THE BUSINESS FOR WHICH YOU HAVE COME

All events in life are shaped according to the divine plan. What is bound to happen will happen. What is not to happen cannot be brought about by any human effort. On this point, Ramana was quite categoric. When Devaraja Mudaliar questioned Him as to whether only important things in one's life such as major occupation or profession alone are pre-determined or even trifling acts, Ramana replied, 'Everything is pre-determined'. One of the purposes of birth is to go through certain experiences which have been marked out in the karmic unfoldment of this life. 'The whole programme is chalked out'. This would apparently be a dampener to all effort for one would be puzzled as to what the responsibility of man is. Is he an automaton of karmic forces? Where do his free will and effort come in? Ramana points out that there is another, deeper purpose to life, that is to search and find out the truth for oneself. He would say that 'the only useful purpose of life is to turn within and realise. There is nothing else to do'.

Ramana would therefore constantly din into everyone the fact that the ultimate truth is 'Sakshat', immediately available here and now. When Natanananda asked Ramana 'Is it possible for everyone to know directly, without doubt, what exactly is one's true nature?' prompt came the reply, 'Undoubtedly it is possible'. The ultimate truth is so simple, Ramana would say. It is nothing more than abiding in one's state. This is the essential message of all religions and creeds. Leaving aside the automatic course of our lives, regulated by the Creator according to His law, one's duty is to channel effort to be Self-aware. Steadfastness of purpose is in treading the inner path through vigilant self-enquiry. On such enquiry as to the source of the individual the enquirer merges in the conscious source. The inner odyssey is seldom smooth sailing. Full many a delusion would wean one away. For instance, people would go to Sri Ramanasramam to breathe its rarified atmosphere. While there, instead of surrendering to His flowing grace, they

would get involved in the happenings of the Ashram management. Ramana used to jocularly remark of some visitors, 'on their first visit to Sri Ramanasramam they seem to be all right. On their second visit, they discover that the Ashramam is not properly run; on the third visit, they start giving advice; on the fifth, they discover that the management is not responsive; on the sixth, they suggest that the present staff should walk out leaving the Ashram to them'. They would thus get bogged down in things which are irrelevant for the search. When such people complained, Ramana would say, 'mind the business for which you have come'. This would apply of course not only to their visit to Sri Ramanasramam, but also the purpose of human life itself. One has to constantly keep before the mind's eye the liberating purpose - the only worthwhile one of freeing oneself from the karmic chain by discovering the hidden truth.

Ramana would even seemingly chide if one failed to pursue one's own sadhana but wasted time thinking and talking of 'others'. A devotee once told Ramana, 'I have been here for many years. People get into samadhi. I close my eyes for a minute and my mind travels round the world'. Ramana replied, 'Why do you think about others? Let them meditate, sleep or snore; look to yourself, whenever your mind goes astray, bring it back to the quest'. Once Bhagavan told a devotee, 'You wake up, look at the mirror, it shows the growth to be got rid of. Instead of wasting time, start shaving'. Similarly, heaven knows when the allotted time would end. Hence, not to seek the truth by vigilant self-enquiry is truly suicidal.

Many would like to blame their circumstances for their indolence and failure to pursue self inquiry. Ramana would ask 'why depend on that which is not in your hands? Go ahead with the business which is in your hands, under your control, leaving aside what you cannot do anything about'. Proper utilisation of God given freedom of turning the mind within is what is needed all the time. As for adverse circumstances in life, of which everyone has a bellyful, while sympathising Ramana would at the same time say 'you are always free not to be affected by the

pleasure and pain consequent on action'. The teeth have to be taken out of the event by an attitudinal change which neutralises it.

Sometimes Ramana would advise leaving things to the sure hands of the Sadguru and to stick single-mindedly to the effort which would make one Self-aware. Ramana would say 'Why don't you do what the first class railway passenger does - he tells the guard his destination, locks the door and goes to sleep. The rest is done by the guard. If you can trust your guru, as much as you trust the railway guard, it will be enough to make you reach the destination'. Again, when someone pestered Him for the darsan of Sri Krishna, He said 'Why don't you leave the Sakshatkara of Krishna to Krishna?' We also have the pointed advice given by Him to Ganapati Muni, 'Remain all the time steadfast in the Heart. God will determine the future for you and accomplish the work. What is to be done will be done at the proper time. Don't worry. Abide in the Heart'.

Life becomes meaningful if we joyously tread the inward path remembering that ours is to do the vichara and it is for the Inner Force to do the rest. Then bliss is not the end product to be found on reaching the goal, but is felt all along the homeward, Heartward, journey.

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