

Golden Guidelines to "Who am I"

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Swami Shantananda Puri

**GOLDEN GUIDELINES
TO
“WHO AM I”**

by

Swami Shantananda Puri

Parvathamma C.P. Subbaraju Setty Charitable Trust

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Samarpana

*This Book is dedicated with veneration to
the Lotus Feet of*

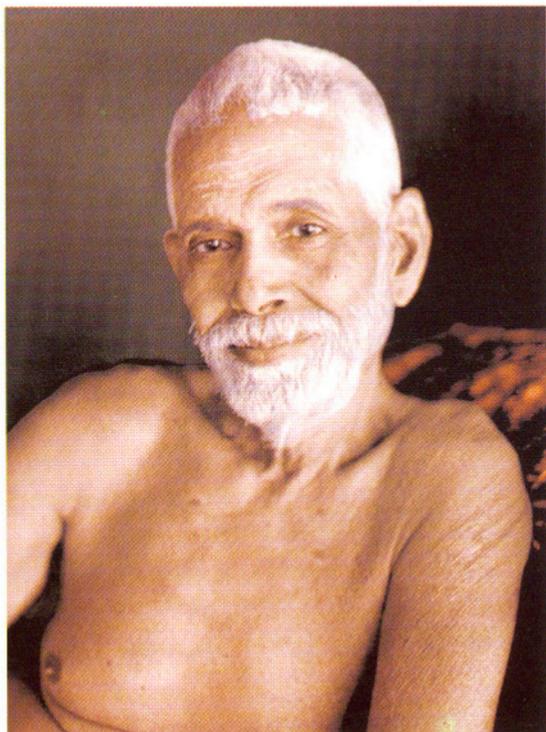
Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

whose spontaneous grace and compassion

have inebriated and inspired me

to venture into writing this book.

- Swami Shantananda Puri



BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI
(1879-1950)

PREFACE

The Absolute Reality is one and it is Pure Consciousness. However, the paths for the realization may be infinite. After all, all roads lead to 'Ram' (Reality) who is all-pervasive, just as all the rivers finally end in the vast expanse of the ocean. *Sivamahima stotra* by Pushpadanta proclaims¹:- "Oh Supreme Lord, you are the one destination of all the people who strive to reach you through various paths, straight and tortuous, according to their diverse tastes in the same manner as the ocean is the destination of all the rivers." The various paths are necessary in order to cater to the different tastes, temperaments and proclivities of different seekers. One may like to meditate on a God with form and attributes like *Siva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, etc.*,

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1. रुचीनां वैचित्र्यात् ऋजु कुटिल नानापथजुषां
नृणामेको गम्यः त्वमसि पयसामर्णव इव ॥

(*Siva Mahimna Stotra - 7*)

another on a formless God but all benign and compassionate and with all desirable attributes and another on the undifferentiated Absolute Self or Atman. A person chooses the path suitable to his nature and temperament and the choice depends also on the path already trodden in his past births. For him, the path chosen depending on his prior conditioning and temperament and as suited to his spiritual constitution is the short cut. At a time when the religions with their elaborate rituals have lost their appeal and credentials for many people, when many have become allergic to the word God itself and have become disillusioned and disappointed with the various pseudo God-men and so called saints dishing out various types of meditation for a substantial consideration, the brilliant star called Ramana Maharshi arose on the spiritual horizon and has blessed this world with a unique Self-contained method of enquiry, "Who am I?"

In all these paths, ultimately it is the Self seeking the Self and what can be simpler than searching for one's own Self and what can be more certain than that the Grace of the Self will surely

take one forward to success in one's quest for the Self. What is needed is an unshakable faith and undivided wholehearted devotion to the Goal, infinite patience, a volcanic unquenchable longing for the Reality and an indefatigable persistence and diligence. Bhagavan Ramana has talked about this unique and direct path of enquiry into "Who am I?" in such elaborate and lucid details as recorded in the various works like "Talks with Ramana Maharshi", "Who am I?", etc., that any more commentary or guidelines will look superfluous. An attempt has been made only to collect the relevant instructions of Bhagavan given at various times and put them together in a concise form so that they can be of some help especially to those who start on this path. Except for some background material which has been added in my own words, mostly effort has been made to retain more or less the expressions and words of Bhagavan's own as recorded in the various books published by Sri Ramanasramam. The author of this booklet firmly believes that he has got himself purified and blessed by Bhagavan by venturing on this work on Self

enquiry which many a savant or wiser scholar would have thought twice before embarking upon.

Whatever be the path one chooses, the Divine Grace plays an important part. Whenever a seeker becomes desperate, frustrated or feels dejected in the absence of any visible signs of progress in his spirituality, prayers to the Supreme Being or to the personal Gods like Arunachaleswara, Bhagavan Ramana are sure to invoke the Grace of God and help the seeker in his spiritual pursuit.

Incidentally, I must express my gratitude to Sri D. Vasudevan of Sri Ramanasramam, who has been of immense help in my writing this booklet and getting the manuscript done in record time. My undying gratitude is also due to Sri V.S. Ramanan, President of the Ramanasramam who had time and again been kind enough to offer me, an unknown wandering monk, shelter and food (a royal one at that!) in the Asramam unstintingly for substantial periods thus enabling me to approach and meditate on Bhagavan and his teachings closer and closer

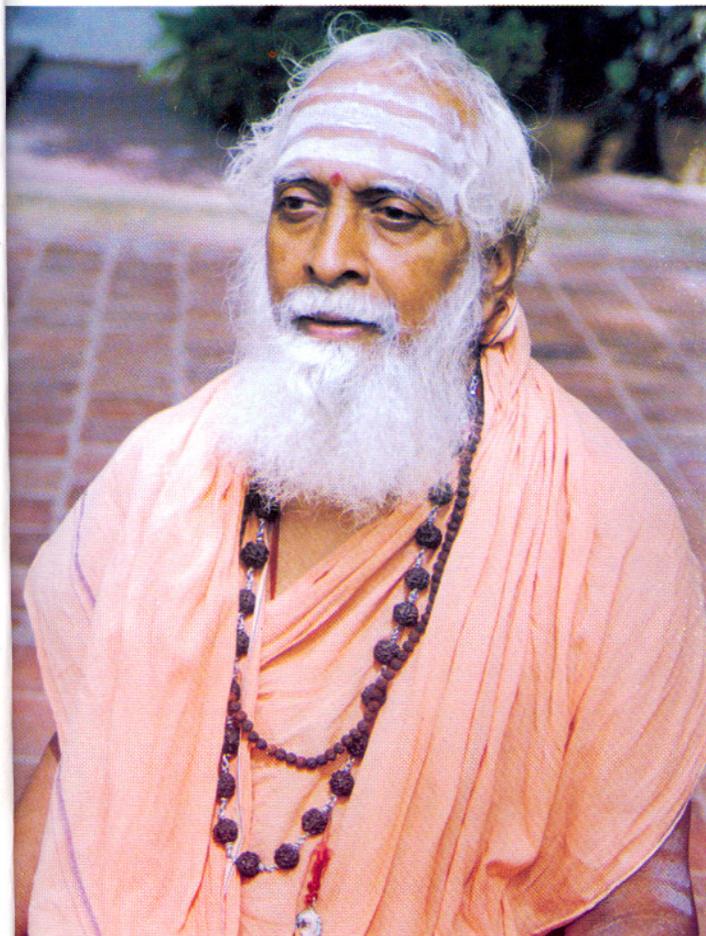
and also be benefited by the holy company of various devotees of Bhagavan.

This book would not be possible without the support of my friend Sri D.N. Anand who has been a great source of strength in printing meticulously. May the Divine Mother bless him and his family with all the best in life.

A very thought provoking and original cover design has been provided by young Achal Arvind. May Divine Mother bless him with all the best in life.

Last but not the least, I have to record my debt of gratitude to Sri P.S. Venkatesha Babu and the staff members of M/s. Omkar Offset Printers who have worked with great dedication and love, in bringing out this booklet.

Swami Shantananda
Vasishta Guha, Rishikesh



H.H. Srimad Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj

INTRODUCTION

The traditional philosophy of the Vedas (Upanishads) has, indeed, placed inter alia emphasis on doing Self-enquiry (Vichara), but the full credit for developing the method of enquiry into “Who am I?” (Vichara), as a full fledged direct path and elaborating on it goes solely to Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai. The word ‘Vichara’ actually means in Sanskrit a reverse movement (Viruddhah charah). When I see a beautiful flower, instead of being lost in the beauty of the flower, if I were to ponder as to who it is that sees the flower and pursue the ‘I’ who sees the flower to its source, it is the reverse movement or vichara.

Even in the days of the Upanishads there were seekers who were not satisfied with the trodden path of worldly life followed by most of the people but were interested in doing Self-enquiry (Vichara).

The Svetasvatara Upanishad starts with a few spiritual seekers (Brahma Vadins) raising the questions such as :-

“What sort of cause (material, efficient or instrumental, etc.) is the Supreme Being (Brahman)? Whence have we been born? What sustains it and on what support are we basically established? (ie. Who are we?)”¹

The Annapoorna Upanishad also says² :-

“Who am I? How has the world come up and what it is constituted of? How do birth and death take place? By contemplating on these issues you reap the greatest of fruits.”

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1. किं कारणं ब्रह्म कुतः स्म जाताः
जीवाम केन क्व च संप्रतिष्ठाः। (Svetasvatara I-1)
 2. कोऽहं कथमिदं किं वा मरणं जन्मनी।
विचारयान्तरे वेत्थं महत्तत्फलमेष्यसि (Annapurna I-40)

The great Sankara Bhagavatpada also in his famous Charpata Panjarika ‘Stotra’, advises³ – “Who are you? Who am I? Wherefrom have I come? Who is my mother? Who is my father? Thus go on contemplating after abandoning all thoughts of the universe which is essenceless and which is just a dream.”

In Yoga Vasishtha, again Rama says^{4A}

“What is the use of all this kingdom and enjoyments? Who am I? How has this world come about?”

Elsewhere in YOGA VASISHTHA, Kumbha Muni advises^{4B} king Sikhidwaja thus:- “Self-enquiry

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3. कस्त्वं कोऽहं कुत आयातः का मे जननी को मे तातः।
इति परिभावय सर्वमसारं विश्वं त्यक्त्वा स्वप्नविचारम्॥
(Sloka 12 Charpata Panjarika - known as Bhajagovindam song)
 - 4A. किं वा राज्येन किं भोगैः कोऽहं किमिदमागतम्।
(Yoga Vasishtha - Vairagya Prakarana I-12-15)
 - 4B. राजन्स्वप्न विचारोऽयं कोऽहं स्यादिति रूपकः।
चित्तं दुर्द्धमं बीजस्य दहने दहनः स्मृतः॥
(Nirvana Prakarana I-94-29)

in the form of 'Who am I?' is the fire which can burn away the ego, the seed of the evil tree of the mind" – (*NIRVANA PRAKARANA I – 94-29*)

Thus the path for attaining Self Realization enquiring, "Who am I? What is this world about?" has been touched or advocated inter alia since time immemorial in the Vedas (Upanishads) as also by subsequent Masters like Adi Sankara. But this path of enquiring into the Self alone had not been developed by any of them into such a full-scale scientific method as done by Bhagavan Ramana. All those earlier systems of philosophy were based on speculative concepts and inferences supposed to have been based on the insight of the sages. As they all claimed the authority of the Vedas for their philosophies, they were considered sacrosanct. As the paths were numerous and as each Acharya claimed his own path as the only path for salvation, there was general confusion prevailing so that the common man was left baffled. Many of the affirmations in Sastras which had been based on past experience and faith were not adequate to satisfy the needs of the modern man with an analytical and

rational mind with a scientific bent. It was at this juncture that Bhagavan Ramana came into the scene in the 20th century, the corner stone of whose teachings was the 'self enquiry' as to 'Who am I?'. The Maharshi did not have any formal grounding in Sastras or a theological education when he propounded the path of 'Who am I?', but what all he said was generally in consonance with the scriptures. The enquiry was his own and the way he discovered it was also his own. Sri Gurdial Mallik (of Santi Niketan), an associate of Rabindranath Tagore, writes just after once perusing a small booklet entitled "Who am I?" of Bhagavan Ramana – "After I had put it aside, a feeling of peace and bliss enfolded me like the arms of a mother".

WHY SELF-REALISATION?

Before we go ahead with an elucidation of the path of Bhagavan Ramana, it is necessary to deal with a doubt which may arise to a common man as to why at all one should bother about this Self Realization (or God realisation) and in what way it is supposed to benefit one.

If someone were to be asked the question ‘What is it that you seek in this life? What do you want?’, the immediate answers may vary widely something like, ‘I want a lot of money and to become a millionaire’, ‘I want to own a Bungalow’, ‘I want a car’, ‘I want to marry’, ‘I want a son’, etc., etc. If we go behind all these diverse answers and analyze, we will find that everybody is seeking happiness – somebody through money, somebody through a car, etc. No doubt the means adopted by each to achieve this end may differ, but all the seekings are with the expectation of an ultimate happiness – an unending happiness forever. The sad truth, however, is that such an absolute happiness that we seek through money, possessions, relatives, etc., continues to elude our grasp while unexpected miseries and unlooked-for maladies dog our foot-steps. Many a happening in this world, repeated births, deaths, old age and family problems – all cause sorrows and sufferings. At the end of our life when death faces us all, it is perhaps the greatest of sorrows.

“Birth causes sorrow. Old age causes sorrow. A wife and family cause sorrow. These sorrows recur

again and again. At the end of our life is the greatest sorrow, viz. death. Hence, wake up.”⁵

Peace which characterizes true happiness is the conscious or unconscious aim and the object of all human endeavours. All the scriptures and all the saints including Bhagavan Ramana, who have been able to achieve the highest state of bliss and liberation from all miseries in this very life have unanimously averred that Self-realisation, i.e. knowing our real nature as to who we are is the only way.

“There is no other path for salvation” –

*Purusha Sookta.*⁶

In life, we do find occasional happiness trickling down in thin weak streams or drops in seeing T.V. serials or skits, in getting a lottery, in

5. “जन्म दुःखं जरा दुःखं जाया दुःखं पुनः पुनः।
अन्तकाले महा दुःखं तस्माज्जागृहि जागृहि” ॥

(Stray verses)

6. “नान्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽयनाय”

(Purusha Sooktam)

tasting some delicious dishes, in seeing cricket matches, in attending music concerts or dance performances, playing computer games, etc. One thing is that such happiness is all momentary and does not last. Secondly, often enough, such happiness when carried to extremes, results in sorrows. Where then is this Super Bazaar (market) for unalloyed and continuous happiness and who manages or conducts it? Nobody who has searched for it in the wide expanse of this external world has ever succeeded in locating this Super Bazaar for perennial happiness. Obviously, the only likely place left is “inside” us. The fact that no object or possession in the world is capable of giving us transcendental happiness is also proved by the observation that in deep sleep, where a man is devoid of all possessions including his own body sense, he is quite happy. The conclusion is that happiness is inherent in man and is not caused by external causes. One must seek and realize his Self in order to find out the Super Bazaar of “all happiness” and “no sorrow”. The occasional trickles of happiness or joy we find in our normal day-to-day life from the possession of various objects is all due

to the super-imposition of our innate happiness on the objects we like due to our conditioning of likes and dislikes – the objects we like causing limited happiness and the objects which we dislike causing unhappiness or sorrow.

Sometimes I used to imagine that a Zero watt bulb in my room is full of misery and sorrow and bemoaning its lot that due to its *prarabdha* (effect of past misdeeds) it has been born as a Zero watt bulb with a low-powered illumination, while other bulbs of 200 watts and 1,000 watts were shining brilliantly and disgustingly proud of their performance. It used to entreat me, “Swamiji, please let me be born at least as a 200 or 1,000 watt bulb in my next birth by your blessings and your holy company (satsang).” After all, only one electric energy with infinite wattage is passing through all the bulbs and is present in both the Zero watt bulb as also the 1,000 watt bulb, the difference in efficiency being ascribable to the varied resistances (conditioning or Sanskar) in the bulbs. If only the electricity in the Zero watt were to realize its Self as to who it was and were to become aware that it

alone illuminated all the bulbs of low and high wattage and was the one Self of all the bulbs, where is the need for the misery and sorrow of the Zero watt bulb? Similarly, it is only due to our ignorance of who we are, not realizing that we are the one unlimited infinite Self running through and inhabiting all the beings that we fail to experience the Bliss which is our real nature and heritage but we are on the contrary exposed to sorrow and misery.

BASIS OF SELF-ENQUIRY (PRE-REQUISITES)

Even the path of enquiry (Vichara) prescribed in the Vedanta philosophy requires a few pre-requisites or qualifications known as, 'Sadhana Catushtayam' (Fourfold practices) – viz. 1. Viveka (discrimination). 2. Vairagya (dispassion). 3. A package of six disciplines called Śamadhi Shatka, viz., Control of mind (Śama), Control of all senses (Dama), withdrawal of senses from all external objects (Uparati), forbearance (Titiksha), faith (Śraddha) and settling down of the mind (Samādhāna) and 4. Mumukshutwa – yearning for liberation.

The method of Self-enquiry, 'Who am I?' prescribed by Bhagavan Ramana is a self sufficient method needing no prior qualifications as above. It is a splendid spiritual discipline leading to Self-realisation (known also as God-realisation) and an infallible panacea for all ills. It is a simple spiritual practice of seeking, 'Who am I?'. It is the simplest, the easiest, most direct and the most suitable path for the modern generation whatever be the faith, nationality, sex, caste or educational background.

Whenever any problems (be they personal, domestic, professional, political or social) were brought up before Bhagavan, he used to say, 'Find out who has the problem or who is suffering.' If the answer was "I, Mr X or Mrs Y sitting before you", he used to ask them to find out who that 'I' was. As most of us take for granted that 'I' refers to the body sitting before Bhagavan, people were at first baffled as to what further enquiry into the 'I' was necessary or possible.

Yes, we are all generally having a confusion. When we say, "I am sick, I am old, I am wounded,

etc.”, we invariably identify ourselves with our bodies. A little deliberation will show that ‘I’ cannot be the body. The body belongs to me and is distinctly separate from me. When I say, ‘I am wounded’, the wound is on the body while I take the body as myself. Many may have heard of the anecdote where Bhagavan Ramana once touched the hand of a child in deference to its wishes, but the child told him, ‘You have only touched my body, not me!’ Thus it is the mind which has superimposed the characteristics of the body – birth, growth, disease, death, etc., on the Self.

By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind which arises in the physical body, the mind is transformed into that which is in fact the real Self. It is the mind which is also known as ego, jiva or individual soul. If one persists in the enquiry as to whence the ‘I’ thought arises in the body in the first instance, it will be found that it is from Hridayam or the spiritual heart which is subtle and lies on the right side of the chest. Bhagavan Ramana describes in the following lines in a beautiful stanza :-

“In the deep recess of the heart the only reality which is Brahman alone, shines before us in the form of the Self, vibrating as Self awareness, ie ‘I-I’. You should enter into the Heart either pursuing the ‘I’ thought or dive into it”.⁷

Entering into the Heart only means remaining without thoughts or External distractions. Normally the mind sees itself diversified as the universe. If the diversity is not manifest, it remains in its own essence, that is the Heart. The Heart is the only reality while mind is only a transient place. To remain as one’s Self and being merged in it is figuratively described as, “diving into the heart”.

The heart is stated to be “the centre of consciousness”. Consciousness is one in its nature and essence. It is universal, all-pervading: It is called

7. हृदय कुहर मध्ये केवलं ब्रह्म मात्रं
ह्यहमहमिति साक्षादात्मरूपेण भाति॥
हृदि विश मनसा त्वं चिन्वता मज्जता वा
पवन चलन रोधादात्मनिष्ठो भव त्वम्॥

(Stray verse of Ramana)

'Brahman' or 'Self'. According to Schrodinger, a well-known scientist (Quantum Physics), consciousness is always in singular and has no plural. The universal consciousness assumes individual shapes, in accordance with the past karma or pre-disposition of the mind. One must retrace the steps to realize the Truth as the universal consciousness. Liberation is a return to the centre. Hence Maharshi describes it as 'plunging' or 'diving' into the heart.

If plunging into the heart is to remain as the Self, the next question arises as to how to practise to remain as the Self.

HOW TO PRACTISE TO REMAIN AS THE SELF?

Everybody knows and feels that he exists. There cannot be any time when a person feels, "I do not exist". Hence the main inherent attribute of the Self is 'Awareness of existence' or 'Awareness and Existence (Chit and Sat)' – ie. 'I AM'. As there is

no doubt in anyone's mind about one's being or existence, it should be possible for one to practise daily for some time to remain merged in the feeling of "amness" or "existence" to the exclusion of all thoughts, just like a new born baby. A baby which is just born has no vocabulary of any language and so cannot think of any object. One has to think in one language or other. So a child just born cannot have any thoughts. It can only feel. When once its basic need of hunger and thirst are satisfied, the only feeling the child will possibly have is the feeling or knowledge of being or amness.

The knowledge that someone or something else 'is' or exists (say, my neighbour or a pot) is an indirect knowledge derived through my senses like my eye and established by the conditioning of my mind which has learnt about what is a pot and how it looks like, etc. On the contrary, the fact that 'I AM' is a direct knowledge which has come to me instinctively directly from the very EXISTENCE and not through my senses.

Hence if a person manages initially to sit for a few hours daily directing his attention (through imagination) to the spiritual heart and get merged in the feeling of “amness” or “BEING” or “I AM” like the newborn child, he is sure to get Self-Realisation. One condition is that he should not think or repeat “I AM” like a Mantra. Secondly, he should not add any more qualifications to “I AM” – like, ‘I am a man’, ‘I am 40 years old’, ‘I am an Engineer’, etc. A new born child cannot add or think of such epithets. One of the recent philosophers of repute, late Sri Nisarga Datta Maharaj of ‘I AM THAT’ fame has claimed that by adopting the process of ‘I am’ as directed by his Guru, he had attained Self-realisation (enlightenment) in three years’ time. This method of remaining in one’s being or Self is nothing but another version of the other method of enquiry as to, “Who am I?” advocated by Bhagavan Ramana. Ramana Maharshi has said that, “Even if one thinks constantly I-I, one will be led to that place”, i.e. the source of ‘I’ or mind. This method has also been advocated by Ashtavakra as an instant ‘Moksha capsule’.

“Bereft of the body-sense, if you can remain resting in your Self alone, you will, here and now, become blissful, peaceful and free from bondage.”⁸

According to Ramana Maharshi, “There is nothing so simple as being the Self. It requires no effort, no aid. One has to leave off wrong identity and be in one’s eternal, natural and inherent state.” (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.101, p.98 – 1996 Edition*).

THEORY BEHIND ‘WHO AM I?’ ENQUIRY (i.e. Searching for ‘I’):

The first and foremost of all thoughts that arise in the mind is the primal ‘I’ thought. It is only after the rise or origin of the ‘I’ thought that innumerable other thoughts relating to the world or body arise (Sloka 26, Sat Darsanam). Since any other thought can arise only after the rise of the ‘I’ thought and

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8. यदि देहं पृथक्कृत्य चिति विश्राम्य तिष्ठसि।
अधुनैव सुखी शान्तो बन्धमुक्तो भविष्यसि॥

since the mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, it is only through the persistent enquiry, "Who am I?" that we can go to the source of the 'I' thought, i.e., ego. As already explained in the previous paras, if we analyse, we can clearly see that the body and its functions are not 'I'. Going deeper, the mind and its functions cannot also be 'I'. (Such an analysis is only meant for the understanding of readers who are new to this path. It does not form part of the practice of Self-Enquiry). During deep sleep, even when the mind ceased to exist, the awareness had continued as we were able to recollect the next morning on waking up that we slept. Further, the conception and operation of thoughts is cognized by the individual. This individuality who cognizes the existence and operation of thoughts is the 'I'. Proceeding with this enquiry, 'Who is this 'I'? 'wherefrom does it come?', we find that the 'I' is always there – whether in deep sleep, in dream or in the waking state. There is always the feeling of 'I'. All that we need do is, therefore, to pursue and find out the source or origin of 'I' and stay there to the exclusion of all other thoughts. It is the false 'I' or ego which is the

obstruction that hides the real 'I' i.e. the Self. Even the feeling that we have not realized is a main obstruction to realisation. Everybody is already realized and there is nothing more to be realized. What we seek is something that already exists as eternal, but is veiled due to obstructions. What exists is not recognized due to ignorance. This ignorance is the obstruction and is identical with the ego or the 'I' thought. The body consciousness, i.e., the identification of one's self with the body-mind-complex is the wrong 'I'. If we seek its source, it will vanish without a trace.

When the mind increasingly investigates into its own nature, it transpires that there is no such thing as mind. The 'I' thought implicit in the Self-enquiry having destroyed all other thoughts, itself gets destroyed, i.e. consumed like camphor which burns out without leaving a trace or just like the stick used for stirring the burning funeral pyre gets consumed itself. When the 'I' vanishes, there appears an 'I-I' by itself. This is the Infinite. Thus when a person goes on enquiring into it, the false

'I', i.e. the individual 'I' disappears as soon as one reaches the Heart - the source of this 'I' and immediately the Absolute Self which is the only reality manifests itself as 'I-I'. It will be an unbroken awareness. So what all that is required is to penetrate into oneself with a keen one-pointed mind and find the place where one transcends all thoughts (which subside). Thus tracing the source of 'I', we realize the perfect 'I-I'. It is the name of the Self. This 'I' is perfect and it is eternal. It has no origin and no end. The other 'I' is born and also dies (for example in sleep). It is impermanent.

The Self which is of the nature of intelligence (Chit) has no sense of 'I'. Nor does the body which is insentient possess a sense of 'I'. The mysterious appearance of a delusive ego between the intelligent Being (Self) and the insentient body is the root cause of all miseries, troubles and sorrows in this life. When this is destroyed by the enquiry, 'Who am I?', that which really exists (Self) will be revealed as it is. This is Realisation, also termed as Liberation (Moksha). This stage when the 'I-I' consciousness or Self shines forth is also called Samadhi.

PRACTICE OF SELF ENQUIRY (METHOD) **- The method of searching ('CHINVATA')**

The Sadhana or practice of Self-enquiry enunciated by Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi is the simplest as it involves no rituals or outer form and thus it is an ideal method suited for the needs of present day modern conditions of life. This is the direct method where we pursue the very ego which raises all sorts of doubts in our mind, to its very source. From the very beginning, we start with the ultimate question of 'Who am I?' and hold on to it with persistence without any other thought till at last the question along with the questioner gets dissolved. Ultimately the question, 'Who am I?' does not get a solution or an answer. It gets dissolved into the only Reality which always is and which takes over. In this method, the mind is not used in the sense that it is not taken for granted as a real entity but its very existence is questioned, the easiest way to dispel the delusion of its existence which in turn has been responsible for all the miseries.

HOW TO BEGIN THIS TECHNIQUE OF BHAGAVAN:

A devotee asked Bhagavan how to begin this Enquiry, as it had nothing preliminary or positive as in other methods, with which one could begin and go step by step. This was answered by Bhagavan more or less in the following manner:-

There is no beginning and no end. We are ourselves the beginning and the end. If the Self is somewhere else other than in us, then only the question of how to start, how to travel and how to reach will arise. A man is always the Self and nothing else. It is not meant that we should go on asking, 'Who am I?' like a Japa. In asking ourselves, 'Who am I?', we are told to investigate within ourselves the source of the 'I' thought by holding on to that to the exclusion of all other thoughts. As the Self is not outside but inside us, we are asked to dive within. What can be easier than remaining as ourselves? How can we say that we have nothing positive to start with? We have the 'I' to start with. We identify

the 'I' with the body and hence all our trouble. All that we have to do is to give up identifying the Self with the body with forms and limits, and then we shall know ourselves as the Self that we always are. This is the only way. If it is anything objective, the way can be shown objectively. This is within us and so it is subjective. Is it necessary to show the way in the interior of our own house?

METHOD:

The method is only to go on asking yourself the question, 'Who am I?'. 'Who am I?' is not a Mantra to be repeated again and again. You have to remain in the quest of 'I'. Remain in the thought or quest as to 'Who am I?' or simply think even 'I', 'I', 'I' and hold on to that one thought to the exclusion of all others. That is the way to investigate the source of 'I'. The Enquiry is not a mere mental questioning. The purpose is to focus the entire mind at its source. It is not a case of one 'I' searching for another 'I'. There are no two selves. The practice, in Ramana's own words consists of, "constant search

for 'I', the source of the ego. Find out "Who am I?". The pure 'I' (Self) is the reality. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.17, p.12*). When that is forgotten, all miseries crop up. In this connection, let me recount an anecdote:

An outgoing student from Shanti Niketan once went to Sri Gurdial Mallik, an eminent spiritually oriented scholar assisting Sri Rabindranath Tagore and requested him for an autograph. Mr Mallik wrote in the notebook – "Know thy Self". The next day the student approached Sri Tagore for his autograph. Tagore first turned the previous leaf and saw what Mr Mallik had written. He then wrote on the next leaf, "Forget thyself".

When we have lost a diamond ring and search for it, all the attention is focussed on the quest and we do not go on asking mentally or repeating, "O Ring, where are you?" Only the quest 'Who am I?' is necessary. Asked who wakes up from sleep, you say, 'I'. Now you are told to hold fast to this 'I'. If it is done, the eternal being will reveal itself. Investigation of 'I' is the point and not meditation on the heart

center. There is nothing like within or without. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 131, p.116, 1996 Edition*). Here NO MEDITATION is involved.

The technique looks simple enough. It is only to go on enquiring 'Who am I?' It is not mere asking: you must go into the meaning of it and dwell on it so long as you are not disturbed by outside thoughts. The aim is to reach the root of the 'I' sense by shutting out all other thoughts. The main point is to focus the attention on the inner feeling of 'I' and to hold on to that feeling as long as possible. It is thus a practice in self-attention, ie. awareness of the I-thought. It is not an exercise in concentration nor does it aim in suppression of thoughts; it merely invokes awareness of the source from which the mind springs. When the question, 'Who am I?' takes hold of you, it will not be possible to think of other thoughts. Whenever the mind gets distracted, one is to ask the question promptly, "To whom do these distracting thoughts arise?" That takes one back to the 'I' point. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 27, p.27*).

While enquiring 'Who am I?', if other thoughts or doubts arise, one should not pursue them, but every time such thoughts arise, one should enquire, 'To whom do these thoughts arise?' The answer would be – 'To me'. Thereupon again one should resume the enquiry, "Who is this 'I'?" "If problems puzzle, desires agitate and thoughts confuse us, do not concentrate on those problems, desires or thoughts or scrutinize them. Be vigilant with the basic query, 'Who, indeed, is the one that doubts, desires or thinks?' This persistent demand or search for a revelation of identity of the 'I' who doubts, desires and thinks will have to lead us to the source. It does not matter how many thoughts arise. Our mind can take us only thus far. Then the 'Beyond' will take care of itself. The Supreme Self will take over and will shine forth by itself in due course. This may be called as Divine Grace, which is required for realisation. Grace is the Self. It is not manifest because of the ignorance prevailing. With *Śraddha* (faith and sincerity in effort), it will become manifest. In Ramana's words, the quest "Who am I?" is the axe with which to cut off the ego. Reality

is simply the loss of the ego. Because there is no entity in fact called ego, it will automatically vanish and Reality will shine forth by Itself. This is the direct method. Meditation needs effort; Jnanam (pure awareness) is effortless. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 146, p.131*).

Śraddha, Grace, Light, Spirit are all synonymous with the Self. This is the path shown by Bhagavan Ramana. It is a self-complete discipline of Sadhana which only calls for persistence and assiduous practice. According to Ramana, Abhyasa (practice) "consists in withdrawal within the Self everytime you are disturbed by thought. It is NOT CONCENTRATION or destruction of the mind, *but withdrawal into the Self.*" (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.485, p.464*).

While doing the Self Inquiry, 'Who am I?', we should not try to furnish ourselves with ready made answers like, "I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am the pure Atman". Such analysis of the five sheaths (Body, mind, intellect, vital breath, etc.,) and

eliminating them as the non-self is purely a mental process. It has been prescribed in the scriptures like Taittareeya Upanishad only in order to guide the seeker to the Truth which cannot be directly indicated. Even meditating on 'I am Siva' or 'I am He' cannot eliminate the 'I' (EGO). This 'I'-thought being the root thought for all other thoughts, if it is pulled out, all other thoughts are at the same time up-rooted. Meditation on "I am not this; I am That" may be an aid to enquiry. The only enquiry leading to self realisation directly is seeking the source of 'I'. One should investigate what one really is and should remain as that.

DIFFICULTY IN SELF-ENQUIRY:

In answer to a devotee's query as to how to realise the Self, this enquiry into the Self being difficult in his opinion, Bhagavan Ramana says – "There is no reaching the Self. You are already the Self. **You are already 'That'. The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss. Attempts are directed only to remove this**

ignorance. This ignorance consists in wrong knowledge. The wrong knowledge consists in the false identification of the Self with the body, mind, etc. This false identity must go and there should remain only the Self. "This very doubt, 'Can I realise', or the feeling, 'I have not realised' are the obstacles. Be free from these also." (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.251, p.207-208*).

As this method is a constant search, it is not to be limited to a few hours per day as seekers do in the case of Japa, meditation, Puja, etc. The search for 'I' should go on constantly and uninterrupted, even when one is engaged in worldly activities like professional or domestic duties. Suppose a person who was travelling by a bus from Chennai to Bombay woke up from a short nap and found to his consternation that he was unable to recall as to who he was, to which place he belonged, etc., such a memory-loss is called "amnesia" in medical terms. He found no clue to his identity from the few clothings and other possessions in the bag he carried as also in his pockets. There was no visiting card or

any papers or diary, etc. He was racking his brain for hours but to no avail. He was nearing Bombay and had very little money in his pocket. How panicky he would have become! Will he confine his searching in mind to one hour or two or will he continue it for hours till he recollects his identity? In the same way, the search for 'I' has to be a continuous affair as if it is a life and death affair (which it is). In this connection, I remember an anecdote about Schoppenhoeur, a famous philosopher: From his school days, he was always engaged, whether in the classroom or in his house, in serious contemplation about answer to a few questions, viz. "Who am I, Where have I come from? What am I doing here?", etc. He was thoroughly obsessed about getting answers to these questions. Once he was sitting in his house fully dressed, lost in his usual contemplation. At midnight, involuntarily he got out of his house and began walking in the street and through somebody's private garden full of fruit bearing trees. When the watchman with a lantern in his hand espied this stranger walking with his hat on, at that time of the night, he mistook

Schoppenhoeur to be a poacher and ran towards him from behind, shouting, "Hey, who are you? Where are you coming from? What are you doing here?", Schoppenhoeur turned round, ran towards the watchman and holding his hands exclaimed, "Oh Lord, these are the very questions I have been asking myself for years and have not been able to get any answers. You are also asking me the same questions, my dear man". Such an obsession and persistence are necessary for the path. It is a 24 hours job daily.

Just as a person who has forgotten his name and all other particulars is fully obsessed with recollecting his identity and will not bother about eating even normal food not to speak of delicious dishes and also about any other worldly temptations, when Self-enquiry continues, automatically it results in *Vairagya*, ie. a contempt for wealth, fame, ease, pleasure, etc. In other paths like VEDANTA, *Vairagya* becomes a pre-requisite for the practice and it is very difficult to cultivate it. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.27, p.26*). Here, it is a by-product of 'Self Enquiry'.

HOW MANY HOURS PER DAY TO PRACTICE?:

Bhagavan Ramana saw no conflict between working at home, office or outside and self-enquiry with a little practice could be started and continued in all circumstances.

SLEEP, NO OBSTRUCTION TO ENQUIRY:

Even if we fall asleep during the practice of Self enquiry, we need not worry. If we persist with the enquiry throughout the waking hours it will be sufficient. If we keep on making the enquiry till we sleep, it will go on during sleep also. We should take up the enquiry again as soon as we wake up.

HOW LONG TO CONTINUE THE PRACTICE:

As long as there are impressions of objects in the mind, so long the enquiry, 'Who am I?' is required. As thoughts arise, they should be destroyed then and there in the very place of their origin,

through enquiry. (*Para 15, p.11, "Who am I?"*). One should resort to contemplation of the Self intermittently until the Self reveals itself. The consummation of the quest lies in the disappearance of the provisional 'I' at its source. The enquiry is concluded when this is accomplished, for there is nothing more to enquire about and none needing to enquire. Bhagavan Ramana has stated that even to entertain a desire to know how long it would take to realise the self is an obstacle in our progress.

DOWNFALL OR BREAK IN PRACTICE:

Even if there is a downfall or a break during the endeavour to do Self-Enquiry, it does not matter. Steady determination is what is required according to Bhagavan. It will set us on our feet again after every downfall or breakdown. Everything comes right in the end.

PITFALL TO AVOID:

Sometimes while engaged in this Enquiry, some people may arrive at a stage of stillness of mind, an

emptiness, a blankness where there is no thought of any kind and no body-sense. Such a stage is not to be mistaken as the ultimate one. This does not mean salvation; such a condition is termed *manolaya* or temporary stillness of thought. *Manolaya* means concentration, temporarily arresting the movement of thoughts; as soon as this concentration ceases, thoughts – old and new – rush in as usual and even if this temporary lulling of mind should last a thousand years, it will never lead to total destruction of the 'I' thought resulting in salvation or liberation. ***The practitioner must therefore be ever on the alert and enquire within as to who has this experience.*** Due to the absence of a proper guide at this stage of spiritual practice one may have been deluded and fallen a prey to a false sense of salvation and only a few have, whether by the merit of good acts in their previous births or by extreme grace, been enabled to reach the goal safely. One must not allow oneself to be overtaken by such spells of stillness of thought, deep sleep or self-hypnotism. The moment one experiences this, one must revive consciousness and enquire within as to who it is that experiences this

stillness. This is no doubt a sign of progress, yet it is also the point where the divergence between the road to salvation and yoga Nidra (*Manolaya*) takes place. The easy way, the direct way, the shortest cut to salvation is the Enquiry method.

MONITORING PROGRESS:

As regards monitoring the progress made on this path from time to time, Bhagavan has said that progress is for the mind and not for the Self. The Self is ever perfect. Further, 'Progress can be spoken of in things to be obtained afresh, whereas, here it is the removal of ignorance and not the acquisition of knowledge. What kind of progress can be expected in the quest for the Self? Mere performance of the sadhana is the progress. One must entrust himself to the Self or God and wait for its Grace. However, one can gauge one's progress from the degree of freedom from unwanted thoughts intruding in the mind and the degree of concentration attained in holding on to a single thought. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.427, p.394*).

ROLE OF DIVINE GRACE:

Bhagavan's views on Divine Grace are as follows:-

We cannot attain realisation of the Self by our own mind, unaided by God's Grace. Even the Grace does not come arbitrarily, but only because one has deserved it by one's own efforts either in this life or in previous ones. Grace is within us. Grace is the very Self. If we get interested in this spiritual path, that very awakening is a sign of Grace. There is no moment when the Grace is not operating on us. **Grace is both the beginning and the end. Introversion of mind is due to Grace; perseverance is Grace; and realisation is Grace.** The entire process is the working of Grace. It is Grace that works when one experiences pleasure as also when one suffers from pain. In either case, the experience is there because the individual identifies himself with the ego. But Grace is all along there as it is the Self. It is veiled by ignorance. All that is necessary is to know its existence. Grace is found by Practice alone with Sraddha (faith) although it is here and now.

Personally, whenever the author of this text had found that he was unable to feel the Grace which is supposed to flow perennially, he used to resort to pray to the Lord who is both within and without. It never failed to have a remarkable effect. Intense prayer alone can lead one to ultimate success by drawing unto one all the Grace of the Self. Bhagavan Ramana's famous prayers like Arunachala Pancharatnam, Aksharamanamalai are also excellent for use as our prayers. Sankara's works like Dakshinamurthy Stotra, Vaishnava texts like Mukundamala are all inspiring prayers. Supplications of one's heartfelt feelings in one's own words are perhaps more effective than borrowed prayers.

GOD – NECESSITY FOR:

Bhagavan used to say, "Know yourself before you seek to know the nature of God and the world." God is of course necessary for most people. They can go on with one, till they find out that they and God are not different. Knowing the Self, God is known. In fact God is none other than the Self. **The devotee, God and the hymns are all the Self.** The

various Gods – Ishwara and Vishnu, and their abodes – Kailas, Vaikuntha, etc. are all as real as we are in this body. If the mind is turned inwards, God manifests as inner consciousness.

Bhagavan has also said, “If one cannot believe in God, it does not matter so long as he believes in his own existence. Let him find out the source from which he came”.

NECESSITY FOR GURU (TEACHER)

The Master (Guru) is the same as God and not different from Him. A person not content with the world turns to God for satisfaction of his desires, by praying to Him. His mind is purified and begins to long for God. Then God’s Grace begins to manifest. God takes the form of a Guru and appears to the devotee in a human form. He teaches the devotee the Truth, ‘God is within yourself. Dive within and realise’. He purifies the mind by his teachings and contact; the devotee is able to turn inward. By meditation he becomes purified yet further and enters into silence. That stillness is the

Self. Hence there is no difference between God, Guru and Self. The Guru who is the Self incarnate, works from within, while giving the devotee a push from outside and guides him in the right path until he realizes the Self within. Bhagavan Ramana, replying to a question has said – “The realization is the result of the Master’s grace more than teachings, lectures, meditations, etc. They are only secondary aids, whereas the former is the primary and the essential cause. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 13, p.4*). According to Ramana, the Guru need not necessarily always take human form. Dattatreya had twenty four Gurus – the elements, the serpent, the trees, etc. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 23, p.21*).

OTHER METHODS FOR SELF- REALISATION:

Apart from the path of Self-Enquiry where by pursuing to its source, the Ego becomes non-existent, the only other path suggested by Bhagavan Ramana specifically was to kill the ego by completely

surrendering to the Lord. This path is for those who are not fit for the former path of Self-Enquiry. Here one realizes one's helplessness and says, all the time, 'Not I, but Thou, Oh, my Lord', giving up all sense of 'I' and 'mine' and leaving it to the Lord to do what He likes. Surrender can never be regarded as complete as long as the devotee wants this or that from the Lord. **True surrender is love of God for the sake of love and for nothing else, not even for the sake of salvation.** In other words, complete effacement of ego is necessary to conquer destiny, whether you achieve this effacement through Self-enquiry or through devotion and surrender (Bhakti marga). Self-surrender leads to realisation just as enquiry does, as when once the ego (I-thought) is effaced, all the predispositions (Sanskaras) are washed off and one becomes free. The ego submits only when it recognizes the Higher power. Such recognition is surrender.

So long as the sense of being the doer remains, desires also remain. But if one surrenders once for all, the desires go away. Once the ego becomes extinct, the Self shines forth in its purity. "Be still

and know that I am God." Here stillness or silence is total surrender without a vestige of individuality. Bhagavan has said, "Surrender unreservedly. One of the two things must be done. **Either surrender because you admit your inability and also require a higher power to help you, or investigate into the cause of misery, go into the source and merge into the Self. Either way, you will be free from misery**".

Even if complete surrender is not possible, according to Bhagavan Ramana, "Partial surrender is certainly possible for all. In course of time that will lead to complete surrender. Well, if surrender is impossible, what can be done?" In partial surrender, you should throw the responsibilities on God and do not bear the burden yourself.

As regards the various other methods of Sadhana like meditation, Japa, Puja, Hatha yoga, Raja Yoga, etc., Bhagavan has stated that the method adopted "depends upon the temperament (Sanskaras) of the individual. Every person is born with the Samskaras (characteristics or tendencies) from his past lives. One method will prove easy to one and

a different method to another. There can be no general rule.” Ramana has said that a Japa once uttered has its own good effect whether the individual is aware or not. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 103, p.99*). “Chanting leads to dhyana (meditation) and it is the means for realizing the Self.” (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 322, p.286*). The purpose of all the methods is the goal they aim at. The essential point is the ‘*atma-vichara*’ – enquiry into the Self. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 596, p.550*). There are many methods. “You may practise Self-Enquiry asking yourself ‘Who am I?’ or if that does not appeal to you, you may meditate on ‘I am Brahman’, or some other theme; or you may concentrate on an incantation or invocation. The object in every case is to make the mind one-pointed, to concentrate it on one thought and thereby exclude the many other thoughts. If we do this, the one thought also eventually goes and the mind is extinguished at its source.”

Talking of the innumerable ways of different seekers of God, Bhagavan said, “Each should be

allowed to go his own way, the way for which alone he may be built. The Guru will go with the disciple along his own (disciple’s) path and then gradually turn him into the supreme path when the time is ripe.”

AIDS TO SELF REALISATION:

Primarily, Master’s (Guru’s) Grace and secondarily the Teachings of the Scriptures and of realized souls are the aids for realization. (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No.13, pages 4 & 5*). *Ishta Devata* (a personal God with form) and Guru are very powerful aids on the path. “But for these aids to be effective requires your effort also. Our effort is a sine-qua-non. You yourself have to see your true nature. Not much of aid is required for doing it!” (*TALKS with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk No. 28, p.30*).

CONCLUSION:

For centuries past, there has been nobody other than Bhagavan Ramana who belonged to a very

special category of Realised souls called "Atyasramis" and as such remained and behaved as the Absolute Self in all his apparent dealings - pure, changeless, eternal, an embodiment of pure knowledge and Bliss and disseminated the simplest and direct path to Self-realisation. His path is not an intellectual and purely rationalistic path of logic and reasoning. **It is the mystic path of dynamic silence revealing the transcendental Truth**, a truth which is beyond the capacity of common perception and human intellect. His technique of 'Who am I?' leads one progressively beyond the senses into the depths of the self beyond the mind and thus into the bliss of the Plenum of Pure being. "Who am I?" fulfils itself in the supreme Self-realisation leading to the absolute bliss of perfect peace.

Incidentally, there is a story of a Sufi saint, which is narrated below:-

There were three disciples of the Sufi Saint. They were always afraid of the Master. The first disciple asked the Saint:-

"Master, how can one get rid of the thoughts of the past which pester me?"

The Master told him with a disdain in his voice:-

"Ask a question closer to home".

The disciple who could not understand this reply sat down quietly.

The second disciple asked:-

"Master, what will I get by sincerely and diligently practising your teachings?"

Again the Master replied in a thundering voice:-

"I say, ask a question closer to home".

The second disciple became silent.

The third disciple very diffidently ventured a question:-

"Master, what do you mean by, 'ask a question closer to home.'?"

The Master exclaimed with a benign smile -

"I thought that you people would never ask this question. By the question, "Closer to home",

I meant the question which is relevant, which can affect one immediately and which can transform one's life."

What can be "closer to home" than the question of "Who am I"?

Adopted from 'The Wisdom of Yoga Vasishta' by Raghunandan (Published by Motilal Banarsidass).

May the Grace of Bhagavan Ramana, the Supreme Self sporting in Arunachala lead us all to the only goal of human life.

"TAMASO MA JYOTIR GAMAYA"

'LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT'

OM

Who am I?

(In one sloka by Bhagavan Ramana)

देहं मृण्मयवज्जडात्मकमहं बुद्धिर्न तस्यास्त्यतो
नाहं तत्तदभावमुत्तिसमये सिद्धात्मसद्भावतः ।
कोऽहंभावयुतः कुतो वरधिया दृष्ट्वात्मनिष्ठात्मनां
सोऽहंस्फूर्तितयाऽरुणाचलशिवः पूर्णो विभाति स्वयम् ॥

The body is like an earthen pot, inert and so it cannot be the 'I'.

Further as daily in the deep sleep without any body-sense we touch our real nature. The body is not therefore 'I'.

Then Who is this 'I'? Where is this 'I'? In the heart - cave of those that question thus and are established in the Atman, there shines forth as 'I', Himself the Lord Siva of Arunachala, leading one to the realisation of 'I am THAT'.

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