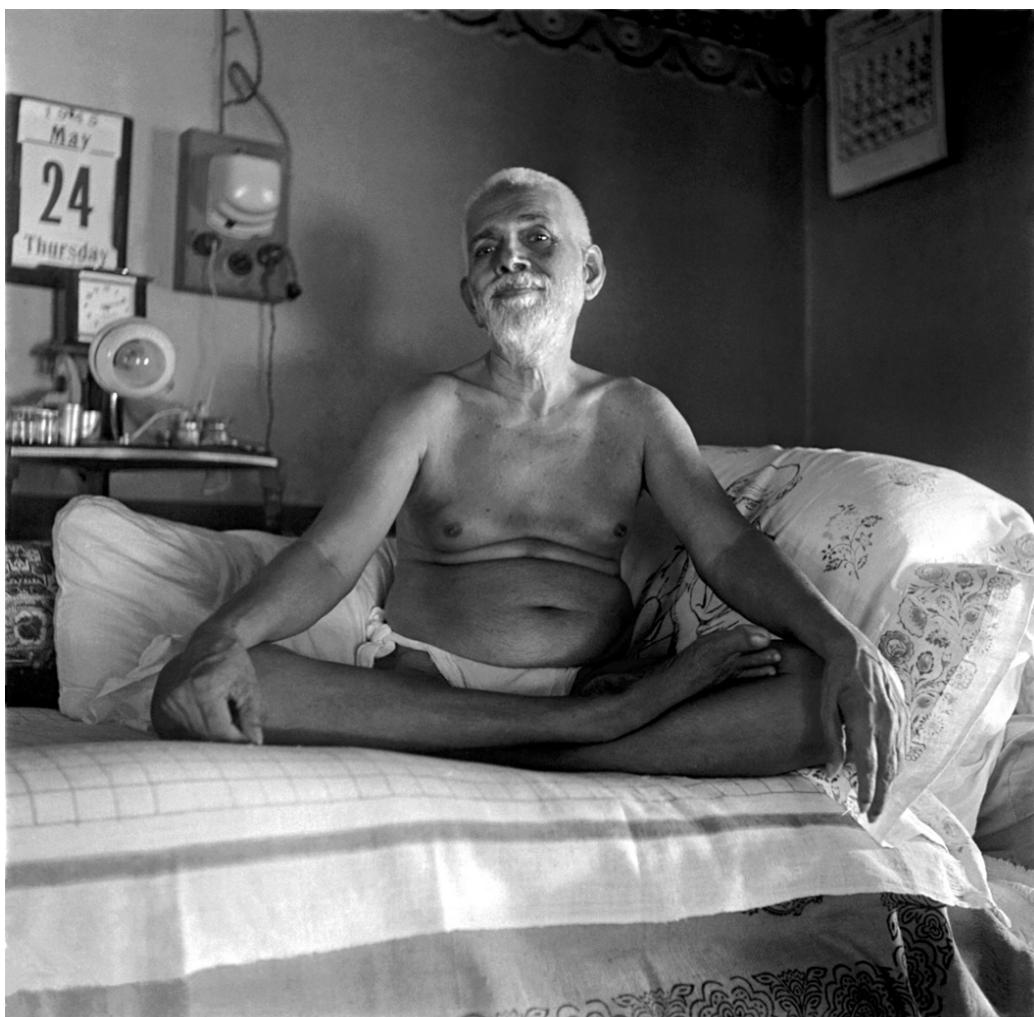


FROM THE TEACHINGS OF SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI



PRACTICAL SADHANA

SWAMI SADASIVANANDA GIRI

**OM
SAMARPAN**

**May all of the effort and any merit that
may accrue from this work be dedicated
to those who seek to find and love the
Lord Who dwells within the Heart – that
very Bhagavan Ramana whose
compassion for all is the embodiment of
Pure Unselfish Love**

A Few Words About This Book and its Author

By Swami Shantananda Puri

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE SRI RAMANAYA

Just like the *Bhagavad Gita*, which has lent itself to several interpretations by great *savants* and Saints, Bhagavan Ramana's teachings also can give newer and newer meanings to each person who reads them. Every time a person reads these teachings, one gives emphasis to certain aspects based on the conditioning, level of *sadhana* etc. of the seeker. According to the qualifications of the seeker, the interpretation which appeals to him may help him, so long as he endeavors to keep the goal alive before him.

The author of this book has placed all his emphasis, very rightly too, on practise (*abhyasa*). He has warned the reader of the error of complacence which says that everything will be done by the grace of the Lord.

In some University Examinations, when somebody gets one or two marks less than the minimum pass mark, a grace mark is given for the small gap of two marks and he is made to pass. If the candidate has given an empty answer paper or gets only ten marks out of a hundred (40% being the pass mark), nobody will give him the balance as grace marks. As the author has pointed out, Bhagavan has said that a seeker has to do *sadhana* to the maximum of his ability and the rest will be done by the Lord. ¹ The author has profusely quoted chapter and verse from the writings about Bhagavan's talks as also from other renowned Saints in order that the reader may not consider the author's views as his *obeiter dictum*. The authenticity of a book is very much dependant on the authenticity of the author. Let me, therefore, tell you a few words about the author too.

The author, Swami Sadasivananda was born to American parents in Florida in 1950. In 1971, while yet a young man of twenty-one years, he was pursuing a career in *Comparative Religion* at a University in Colorado when he suddenly realized that what all he had learned of religion in his academic career was meant for practice and to attain God in this very birth. He had instinctively felt that in previous births he had come to this same conclusion, but he had failed to do what was needful to attain the Goal of those lives. This time, however, he acutely felt the urgent need of full surrender to the call of God. He, like all of us, was stubborn. Fortunately God was more stubborn! Therefore he left all that he had for years striven to achieve and came to India.

His first visit was to Sri Ramanashramam in late 1971. From that first *darshan* of Bhagavan and Arunachala he became aware that his life was irrevocably changed, and he was "somehow" to return to America and become a monk. As he had learnt that the best of the living Saints at that time was Ma Anandamayee, he endeavored to seek Her grace and guidance. After surmounting a mountain of obstacles, both physical and mental, his heart and soul finally found shelter at the feet of this manifestation of the Divine Mother. He entered an Ashram in the U.S.A. under the guidance of Ma Anandamayee and one of Her chief disciples. He, having received the golden touch of this Joy-Permeated Mother, lived as a Brahmachari and Pujari in Sri Anandamayee Ma's Ashram. At the bidding of his *Guru*, in 1974 he received full initiation as a monk from a Swamiji in the disciple-lineage of Puri Sankaracharya.

¹ See footnote #6 on page 11.

For the next thirty years he remained in the Ashram doing a lot of collective and individual *sadhana*, strictly as per the instructions from Ma, and the guidance of Her close disciple.

Although he had visited India several times over the intervening years, in 2003 he again returned to India to live there permanently. Since then he has been living in an austere manner in a separate dwelling not very far from Sri Ramanashramam at Tiruvannamalai (*Arunachala Kshetra*). He has made a thorough study of the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana and also of Sri Ramakrishna. For years he has been given to long hours of meditation as I have personally witnessed while in his company during various travels throughout India from time to time.

In this book, the author has tried to give the quintessence of the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana in the light of his own spiritual experience gained in the last thirty-four years of his life of practice as a true *sannyasin* (monk). He has brought out the universality of Bhagavan's teachings which cover all the essential aspects needed by a seeker – the need for a *Guru*, *vichara* (enquiry), *abhyasa* (practice), *japa* and meditation, prayers and Grace etc. The author has also quoted substantially from the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. He has specially limelighted the view of Bhagavan that the breath control through *pranayama* is subject to pitfalls while the same can be achieved safely and with equal effectiveness by watching the breath.

The holistic approach adopted by the Swamiji towards the teachings of Bhagavan is really commendable. I am sure that this book, where a lot of clarifications have been given by the author in Bhagavan's own words (as collected from various talks), will be of immense help to a number of seekers including those who have not specifically adopted Bhagavan's teachings in their life of *sadhana*.

Shantananda 7/6/08

[Swami Shantananda Puri of Vasishta Guha (Himalayas)]



Swami Sadasivananda Giri (left) with Swami Shantananda Puri

Introduction

The One Thing Needful



“The Self manifests externally as Guru when occasion arises; otherwise He is always within, doing the needful.”

Sri Ramana Maharshi in *Talks*

“When the goal is ever before one as a living reality, all that is needful will come of its own accord.”

Sri Anandamayi Ma in *Sad Vani*

From the most ancient times of spiritual endeavor and attainment in all of the major religions of this world, the truths that inspired mankind were conveyed from Master to disciple in the tradition of oral transmission. One became fit for discipleship with the developed skill of appropriate attention to the teachings, invoked by a keenly alert questioning and a willing receptivity to the course of effort charted by the Master.

The Sage Vasistha (the *guru* of the Lord Rama) proclaimed that this form of teaching through *satsanga* (keeping close company and a living relationship with the Holy) ² would not only produce perfection in practice, but would convey the highest Liberation. Therefore he revealed that of the four gatekeepers to the Palace of Liberation, *satsanga* is included.

To find true *satsanga* that can transform is an act of grace; to be receptive to it, and thus to spiritually progress, is an act of effort. In keeping with the traditions of old, the contents of this book are presented in the form of *satsanga* containing questions and answers concerning practical instruction regarding the teachings prescribed by Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. The inspiring truths conveyed concerning spiritual pursuit are of great practical value to all who seek to find the ‘pearl of great price’, which has come to be known in theory as religion, but in practice as the path leading to a life of the Spirit.

Though the ancient form of instruction is maintained, the answers reflect what has evolved in our modern times as a uniquely universal spiritual teaching that can be taken up by anyone the world over without adopting the limiting constraints of any one religious tradition. It has been said that these teachings were indeed God-given, for they began with the words of grace flowing from Sri Ramakrishna and continued with the blessing of perfection that was embodied as Sri Ramana Maharshi.

² A complete definition of *satsanga* is: The company of Sages, Saints and seekers after Truth, either the actual physical company or, in an applied sense, by reading Holy Scriptures or the lives of the Saints. Also, a religious gathering or meeting. In the widest sense the practice of the presence of God.

As did his predecessor, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi stressed practice that produces purification (removal of that fog of ignorance, the obstacles and habits of the mercurial mind which diminish our pure vision) as well as the grace of the knowledge of the Self as the eternal companions of those who would be led:

**From the unreal to the Real,
From darkness to Light
From death to Immortality!**

The Practice That Makes Perfect

Why has *satsanga* been deemed to be essential for the spiritual progress that leads to Realization? What is the task of the *guru* (qualified teacher), if not to show us the way and patiently lead us towards it?

During the blessed years of Sri Bhagavan's physical sojourn amongst us, those who took shelter at his feet were daily inspired to continue in the 'practice that makes perfect'. This was a true example how history repeats itself since the ancient times of *Sanatana Dharma*, the religion where men have eternally sought God, their effort only to be outdone by God's longing to become manifest within man.

When Lord Rama sojourned on earth, he once asked his *guru* Sri Vasistha why it was that when they were together his knowledge and experience of the Self was undiminished, but when they were apart forgetfulness obstructed the vision of his divinity? Sri Vasisthadeva simply, but with great profundity, declared that the reason for forgetfulness was:

“Lack of *abhyasa* (repeated spiritual practice).”

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi echoed the same Truth when answering a devotee's comment that:

“Bhagavan's Grace is needed in order that meditation (and thus remembrance) should become effortless.”

Bhagavan replied: “Practice is necessary, there is Grace.”³

The Winds of Change

Though God and His Truths never change, we seem to have wandered astray, being led by the whimsical desires of infantile habits. Assuredly, this child by adoption (our ego) is habitually perverse and dangerously errant, and deserves disownment. In fact, our very liberation demands it! A great scholar of Vedanta, and devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Yatiswarananda, has stated this condition with crystal clarity:

“We all know that the ego is perverse and how it is constantly changing its center of gravity. It is now identified with outside things, next moment with the body, then with the senses or the mind. It is mad and runs the risk of tumbling down any moment. How at times

³ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 76.

it becomes too much one-pointed, centered on itself! We forget that our individual consciousness is part of an infinite consciousness; we forget that the welfare of our fellow beings is inseparable from our own; we become egocentric, selfish and mean - a danger to ourselves, to our family and society.”⁴

The complete eradication of this habit, and the state of perfection that we must strive for is exemplified completely with every detail of the life of Sri Ramana Maharshi. He has made the mold, now we must cast the image in his likeness.

In our own era the winds of change blow with gale force intensity, they toss the externalized mind about like a boat on a stormy sea. With even greater force our heedless impatience impels us to seek the easy road to Realization, a way that avoids and even denies the need for a path that skillfully trains one to overcome the mind by turning within.

Calming the Storm

Bhagavan emphasized this clearly when He stated:

“How to transcend the mind?” The Master answers: “Mind is by nature restless. Begin liberating it from restlessness: give it peace; make it free from distractions; train it to look inward; make this a habit. This is done by ignoring the external world and removing all obstacles to peace of mind.”⁵

These words of Bhagavan are in perfect keeping with the tradition of the eternal religion of India. He declares the goal, and then proceeds to show the way to get there. He reveals to us that we habitually live in the shadowy awareness of a distracted externalized mind, and that training is needed to remove these ingrained obstacles.

We must begin our *sadhana* (spiritual practice) with an unshakable understanding that for the vast majority of us this condition, though only a superimposition on our real nature, is exactly where we stand. We must recognize as Sri Ramana’s predecessor, Sri Krishna, exemplified to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*; there are enemies (obstacles), and the training of a skillful warrior is needed for victory (liberation from restlessness).

So the first question for us is “Where do we stand?” Perhaps the magnitude of the grace and compassion of Bhagavan Sri Ramana is demonstrated by the fact that although his incarnation focused on revealing to us the answer to the enquiry “Who am I?”, it was said that he seemed to like nothing better than helping to deal with the obstacles and clearing the doubts of those who came before Him. Perhaps the hidden efficacy of this fact is borne out by one of the truly essential statements of Bhagavan recorded by his close disciple Sri Muruganar:

“If we perform *sadhana* to the limit of our abilities, the Lord will accomplish for us that which is beyond our capabilities. If we fail to do even that which is within our capabilities, there is not the slightest fault in the grace of the Lord.”⁶

⁴ *Meditation and Spiritual Life*, Swami Yatiswarananda, Ramakrishna Math Bangalore 2001, p. 241.

⁵ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 26 p. 129.

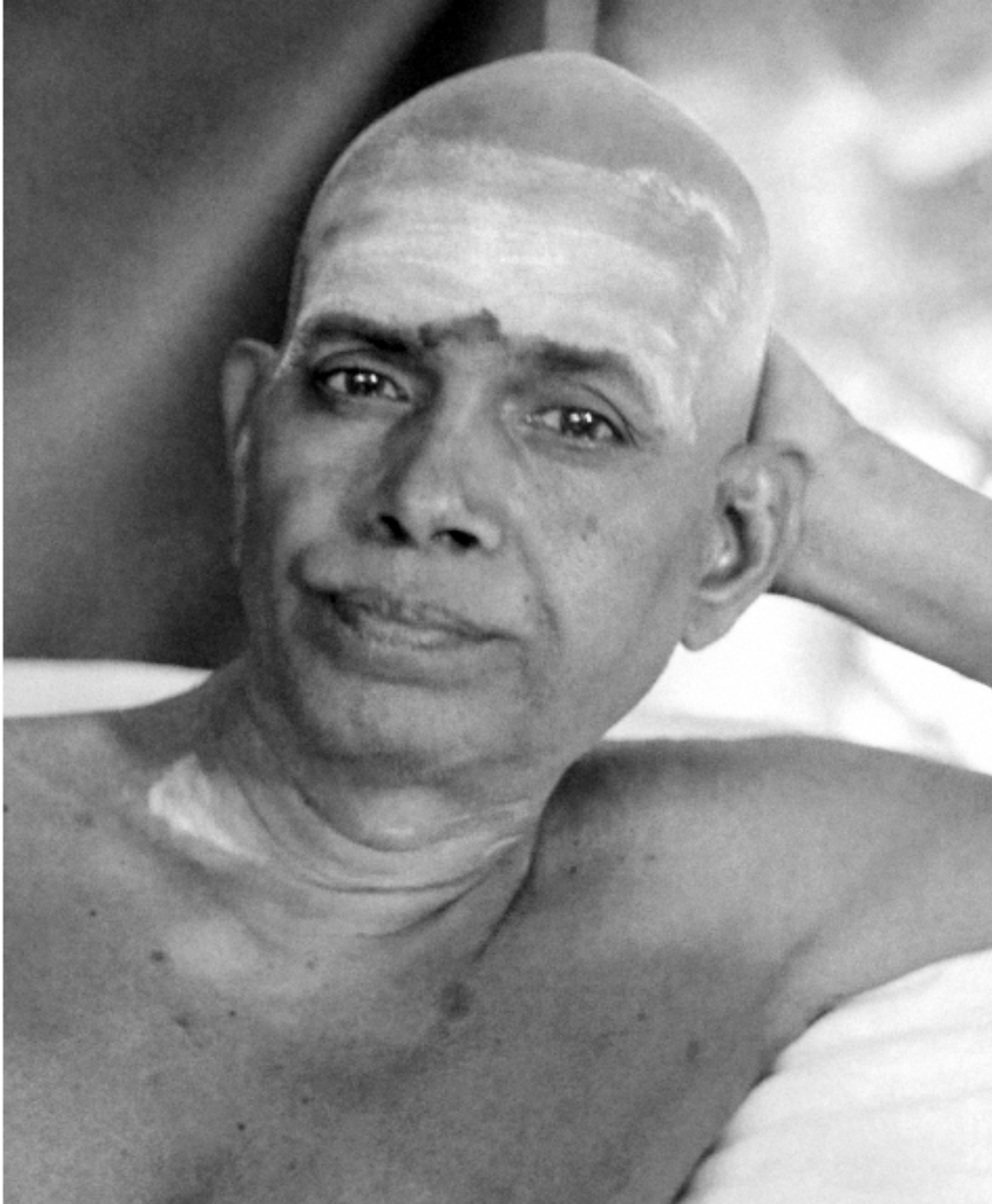
⁶ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, p. 186. (Reference is to *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, vol. 8, verse 192).

The Virtue of Patience

Though Bhagavan began walking amongst men now over a century past, he was very much in our modern times. Thus one of his close disciples wrote, for us to consider while we analyze where we stand, words that give a clear description of what we all face:

“This is the age of shortcuts. Time has shrunk and space more so, and the dual inconvenience has affected men’s moods and temper. Even the supreme Knowledge has nowadays to be given in massive doses and has to produce quick results too, or they will have none of it...The result is that we return from the *guru* and his *Ashram* with our doubts still in our heads uncleared, and our minds, about truth and untruth, still befogged.”⁷

⁷ *Advaitic Sadhana The Yoga of Direct Liberation*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2007, p. 1-2.



Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi

All of those who beheld the glance of Sri Ramana Maharshi
Universally agreed that His eyes were floodgates of an
“Ocean of Compassion Without Reason”, for
“Who could deserve such Grace?” Even today, many testify to the enduring transformative
power of his Presence. For he said in the final days of his physical sojourn amongst us:
“They say that I am dying but I am not going away.
Where could I go? I am here.”

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One Preparation for Spiritual Ascent

Question: Why is it that the wise say that hearing alone can create a distorted understanding of any profound Truth? Why are we told to first hear, then reflect and assimilate so that knowledge can become experienced?

What we hear must be heard then digested within, and then it becomes distilled wisdom. Like the cow eating grass, first in a hurry and then meditatively sitting in the shade and only then does she convert it into milk.

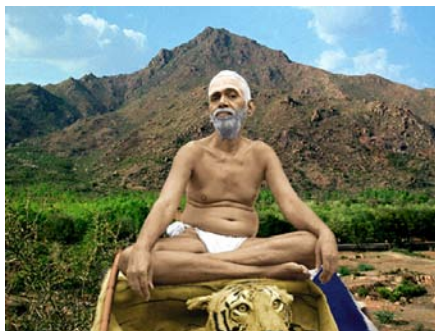
So how man extracts wisdom out of all talk and reading is to profoundly think about it and then dive deeply within in meditation. In that way he really digests what he has heard or read and then it flows into him as an experience and becomes a storehouse of knowledge.

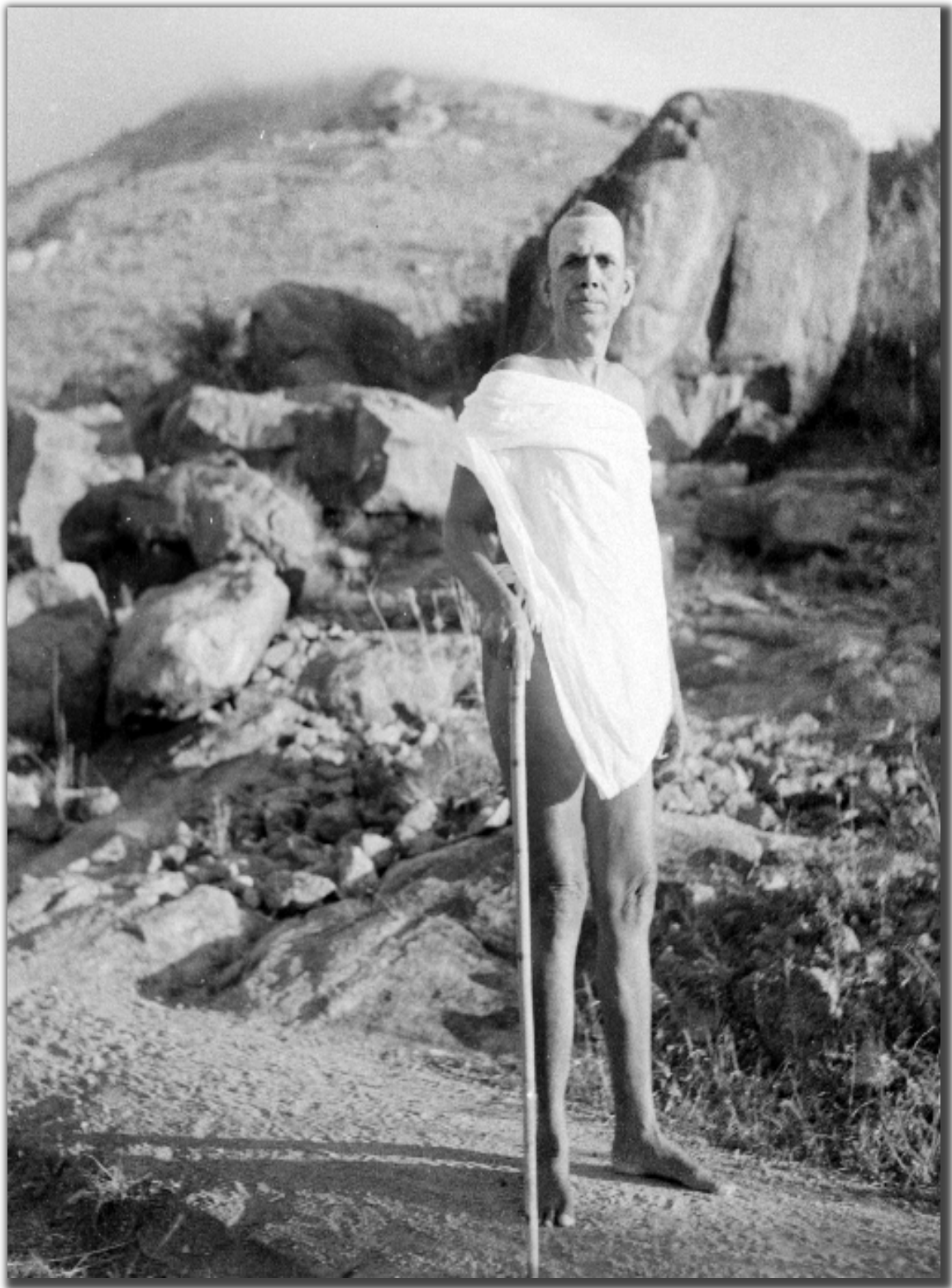
Question: Is it the real experience as *anubhava* (direct spiritual experience; intuitive consciousness) that is difficult to achieve?

Yes, for the experience one gets by reading is only theoretical. *Anubhava* is living every movement of your life with what may come and to face it and act accordingly with what you have actually heard and read or seen in the lives of great *Gurus* and Saints. All these things put you to the test, moment by moment, in your own life. Nothing in life goes by a pattern, nothing is a copy, each one of us is given experience in his own individual way, and to the limit of his own endurance. There is no similarity, absolutely no similarity.

What may happen to somebody, a lesson through some incident that may seem insignificant to others, will be to him a lesson by which a tremendous insight is comprehended. The insight may have an impact that causes real spiritual growth. To him a real experience ensued, to the onlooker nothing at all occurred. There is no way to know when and where such insight will occur; one should only at all times maintain and preserve a keen lively awareness and receptivity to become a worthy vessel for the touch of the divine. For it is the divine alone who knows where to kindle and light up the explosion that brings about real change and transformation.

The impact of the divine in our lives is irrefutable; the consequence of it, the degree of absorption and transformation depends on the intensity of our *sadhana* and meditation. God never denies us, we deny Him!





“Practice is Necessary, there is Grace.”

Two

Meditation and the Mind

Question: You mention meditation; is meditation very important to control the mind or purify the heart?

The answer must be addressed step-by-step. So long as you are struggling to control the mind, it is not *deep* transformative meditation. It is, however, an essential mental exercise, for it is a purifying process and thus an important first step towards one-pointedness of mind. Initially, the grossest *tamasic* impurities must be held in check and eventually sublimated. This is not simply a curbing of negative traits; rather it is their elimination by will power and self-effort, which is achieved by observing the negative consequences of our habits and changing them. The great master Paramahansa Yogananda once said: "If sufficient will power is lacking, develop 'won't' power." One simply says: "The reaction to that action was harmful to me spiritually, so I won't do that again." At first we must exercise willing introspection and right perception, and then foremost is the honesty to acknowledge the consequences of our behavior without any sort of denial or cover-up. Although in reality our divine nature is immutable, eternally unchanging and free of all taint, our consciousness depends solely upon our perception and the ensuing thought fabrications that manifest and literally create our awareness. The Buddha thus declared:

"Mind precedes all mental states, mind is their chief; they are all mind wrought." ⁸

This perception can be, and is, daily affected by our skillful or unskillful actions. Actions enlighten or darken our perception; their consequences determine the degree of influence that grace has in our lives.

Again, this is why Bhagavan Sri Ramana declared:

"Practice is necessary, there is Grace." ⁹

⁸ *Dhamapada*, translated by Ven. Acharaya Buddharakkita, Buddha Vachana Trust, p. 7, verse 1.

Quality of Mind

When our mind is too gross, *tamas* or dullness and *rajas* which is activity, govern it. When one is in this condition, the *sattva* or quietude is not predominant. In the absence of *sattva*, the qualities of *tamas* and *rajas* become the reigning powers. Being thus overwhelmed, such a one becomes very dull. So the real work is how to bring such a person into spirituality. In the beginning he should be given a purifying activity, for he cannot be made to sit still.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi would often use the Tamil word *kadavul* in reference to God. It literally means the divine and eternal Self that abides within in stillness and silence. This supreme quietude, which is the manifestation of Wisdom, is unquestionably our own very Self and our greatest friend. However, because of the governance through an externalized mind deluded by the distracting and veiling powers of *rajas* and *tamas*, we are seeing, feeling and 'living' life in the death grip of the devouring ego, our worst enemy.¹⁰

So in *Sanatana Dharma*, which has come to be known as Hinduism of India, what is done in the beginning is to give such a person some action which has by its very nature a purifying effect.

Even though a person may have a sincere longing for spiritual attainment, he is not always able to perceive the dullness of his mind. The scriptures say that the ego has mainly two powers in its arsenal: *vikshepa* or distraction, and *avarana*, which is a veiling of the truth.

If a person remains unskillful throughout his life, and maintains an indifferent regard towards spiritual growth then a third power is available to the ego. This third power is *mala* or gross impurities. Of course this third power must be removed, but in truth the very first step is to become aware of its existence.

⁹ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam, 2006, p. 76.

¹⁰ See *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 6, verse 6.

Purification through Action

Placing a person in an environment where *sattva* (a pure condition) is active and assigning work such as in a Temple or an *Ashram* affects one through mere association with the qualities inherent in doing work for God, even if it is only something like cleaning the place of worship or the pots and pans or picking flowers. The first phase of transformation away from the dullness of the *tamasic* mind can begin with these actions. When working for the benefit of a place that promotes higher life, one becomes acutely aware of one's own disinterest, negligence, laziness, and disregard for the work, and through grace a sense of shame emerges.

By placing someone in a Godly environment and having them do work solely for God, the higher power takes away the ego's power of *avarana*. The veil is removed and now the dull, distasteful and shameful qualities of *tamas* are seen face to face. Also through this divine association, this powerful form of *satsanga*, the mind and heart are invested with a determined desire to rise out of heedlessness.

An awareness and recognition of the intoxicating addiction to heedlessness is also brought to light together with a resolve to strive for true spiritual growth. Thus the all-knowing God begins by infusing into us the will to change and seek a pure life.

“The quality of soul that makes it possible for man to rise to spirit life is purity...that which one wills to do, he has the power to do. Knowledge of that power is faith; and when faith moves, the soul begins its flight.” ¹¹

The Path of Ascent

We have begun; we have made a start. In the truest sense we have now set our hands to the plough. In the entire *Srimad Bhagavatam* Sri Krishna reveals the quintessence of His teaching in one statement:

“Shake free of sloth, and merge your mind within Me.” ¹²

¹¹ *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, by Levi, DeVorss & Company 2001, p. 87.

Though we might believe that only a simple start has been made, the shaking free of slothful heedlessness is declared by God to be half the battle.

We have recognized that there is a fog that clouds our vision, and obstacles (restlessness and slothfulness), that literally obscure the manifestation of the light of the Self in our consciousness.

Regardless of whatever label we choose to call this effort, whether it be deemed purification, removal of defilement, awakening, being in oneness or even becoming still, it should be known that Bhagavan said it is “effort that instills purity” and stressed that without it the goal of *vichara* (enquiry) will not be reached.

In direct reference to this Sri Muruganar heard the following profound statement from Bhagavan and recorded it that our doubts might be cleared:

“Know that the wondrous *jnana vichara* is only for those who have attained purity of mind by softening and melting within. Without this softening and melting away of the mind, brought about by thinking of the feet of the Lord, the attachment to the “I” that adheres to the body will not cease to be.”¹³

Focusing on the Goal

Having arisen out of a body full of *tamasic* habits, we must now set to work to focus the mind by gaining a depth of concentration needed for merging with and realizing our divine nature. This is essential, for concentration on one object effectively reduces the onslaught of thoughts habitual to our mercurial minds. Bhagavan has said that the degree of effort required to secure and maintain the needed depth in meditation results from “long and protracted” sadhana. This one-pointedness of mind cannot be imagined or conjured up. Bhagavan repeatedly stressed avoidance of what can be rightly referred to as an effortless cover-up.

¹² *Srimad Bhagavata*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2007, Book Eleven, Uddhava Gita.

¹³ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 186. (Reference to *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, vol. 7, verse 340).

“Protracted practice ripens into an intuitive approximation of the Self, otherwise the Self remains but an imaginary conception even for sadhakas.” ¹⁴

Bhagavan’s declaration of the essential “softening and melting within” is brought about primarily during the practice of meditation. The attainment of concentration that results in the purity Bhagavan describes is most easily achieved by adopting a meditative practice that naturally suits one’s temperament and nature.

Bhagavan often seemed to stress for most of us that Knowledge of the Self is attained by an integrated practice of *jnana* (path of Knowledge) and *bhakti* (path of Devotion). In this regard the master reveals:

Bhagavan: “Any kind of meditation is good. But if the sense of separateness is lost and the object of meditation or the subject who meditates is alone left behind without anything else to know, it is *jnana*. *Jnana* is said to be *ekabhakti*. The *jnani* is the finality because he has become the Self and there is nothing more to do. He is also so fearless ‘*Dwitiyat vai bhayam bhavati*’- only the existence of a second gives rise to fear. This is *mukti*. It is also *bhakti*.”

Devotee: “Will *bhakti* lead to *mukti*?”

Bhagavan: “*Bhakti* is not different from *mukti*. *Bhakti* is being as the Self (*swarupa*). One is always that. *He realizes it by the means he adopts*. What is *bhakti*? To think of God. That means: only one thought prevails to the exclusion of all other thoughts. That thought is of God, which is the Self, or it is the self surrendered unto God. When He has taken you up nothing will assail you. The absence of thoughts is *bhakti*. It is also *mukti*.

The *jnana* method is said to be *vichara* (enquiry). That is nothing but ‘supreme devotion’ (*parabhakti*). The difference is in words only.” ¹⁵

It is essential to understand that Bhagavan is declaring both the goal and alluding to the path that leads toward its attainment. Thus he is describing the

¹⁴ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 156.

¹⁵ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 650, p. 635.

path to be, “the means one adopts which excludes all thoughts other than the thought of God.” Bhagavan has also emphasized that it is the effort of “the ‘I’ thought (ego), which is carrying out a progressive and protracted *sadhana* that culminates with the awakening (remembrance) of the immaculate nature of a Pure Mind.”¹⁶ In fact, when Bhagavan was once asked to define *yoga*, He replied:

“Effort itself is *yoga*.”¹⁷

“*Dhyana* (meditation) means fight. As soon as you begin meditation other thoughts will crowd together, gather force and try to sink the single thought to which you try to hold. The good thought must gradually gain strength by repeated practice. After it has grown strong the other thoughts will be put to flight. This is the battle royal always taking place in meditation. One wants to rid oneself of misery. It requires peace of mind, which means absence of perturbation owing to all kinds of thoughts. Peace of mind is brought about by *dhyana* alone.”¹⁸

In regards to *sadhana* that is based on “remembrance”, Bhagavan declared:

“Grace is the Self. I have already said, ‘If you remember Bhagavan, you are prompted to do so by the Self.’ Is not Grace already there? Is there a moment when Grace is not operating in you? Your *remembrance* is the forerunner of Grace. That is the response, that is the stimulus, that is the Self and that is Grace.”¹⁹

How can this statement be true when standing alongside the propounded emphasis by some that we need only ‘be as we are’, for the Self is the only Reality, and ever shining within? Simply speaking, this position is putting the cart before the horse. Bhagavan’s own words bring to light the Truth that long practice from past *sadhana* and then further effort alone makes permanent the effortless state.

¹⁶ See footnote #58, p. 62.

¹⁷ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam, 2006, p. 74.

¹⁸ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 371.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Talk 251.

The difficulty in dealing solely with dry theory is put to rest by the experience of That, the *samadhi* (meditative absorption) referred to in the *Kaivalya Upanishad* called *vijnana vedanta*, which the theory only implies. When the question was put before Bhagavan of the need for practice and then further practice being required to attain the final state of the highest and permanent *samadhi*, He declared:

“People have all sorts of notions about *nirvikalpa*... All this is due to their viewing it intellectually. *Nirvikalpa* is Chit - effortless, formless Consciousness... To some whose minds have become ripe from a long practice in the past, *nirvikalpa* comes suddenly as a flood, but to others it comes in the course of their *sadhana*, which slowly wears down the obstructing thoughts and reveals the screen of Pure Awareness ‘I’-‘I’. Further practice renders the screen permanently exposed. This is Self-realization, *Mukti*, or *Sahaja Samadhi*, the natural, effortless State.”²⁰

Bhagavan frequently used the “motion picture screen” simile to describe the essential nature and relationship between the world perceived by the senses, the mind and the Self.

Bhagavan: “To illustrate it: The pictures move on the screen in a cinema show; but does the screen itself move? No. The Presence is the screen: you, I and others are the pictures. The individuals may move but not the Self.”²¹

Although the theoretical meanings of the “screen” simile, and the above illustration, are vast as well as somewhat difficult to grasp, Bhagavan is clearly directing us to “wear down the obstructing thoughts to reveal the screen of Pure Awareness ‘I’-‘I’.” One of the most direct and endearing practices prescribed by the Maharshi that accomplishes this aspect of *sadhana* involves *Giri Pradakshina* (circumambulation) of the sacred hill *Arunachala*.

“The Maharshi explained it in detail, saying that the universe is like a painting on a screen - the screen being the Red Hill, *Arunachala*. That which rises and sinks is made up of what it rises from. The finality of the universe is the God *Arunachala*. Meditating on Him or on the seer, the Self, there is a mental vibration ‘I’ to which all are reduced. Tracing the

²⁰ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 88-89.

²¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 470, p. 459.

source of 'I', the primal 'I-I' alone remains over, and it is inexpressible. The seat of Realisation is within and the seeker cannot find it as an object outside him. That seat is bliss and is the core of all beings. Hence it is called the Heart. The only useful purpose of the present birth is to turn within and realise it. There is nothing else to do." ²²

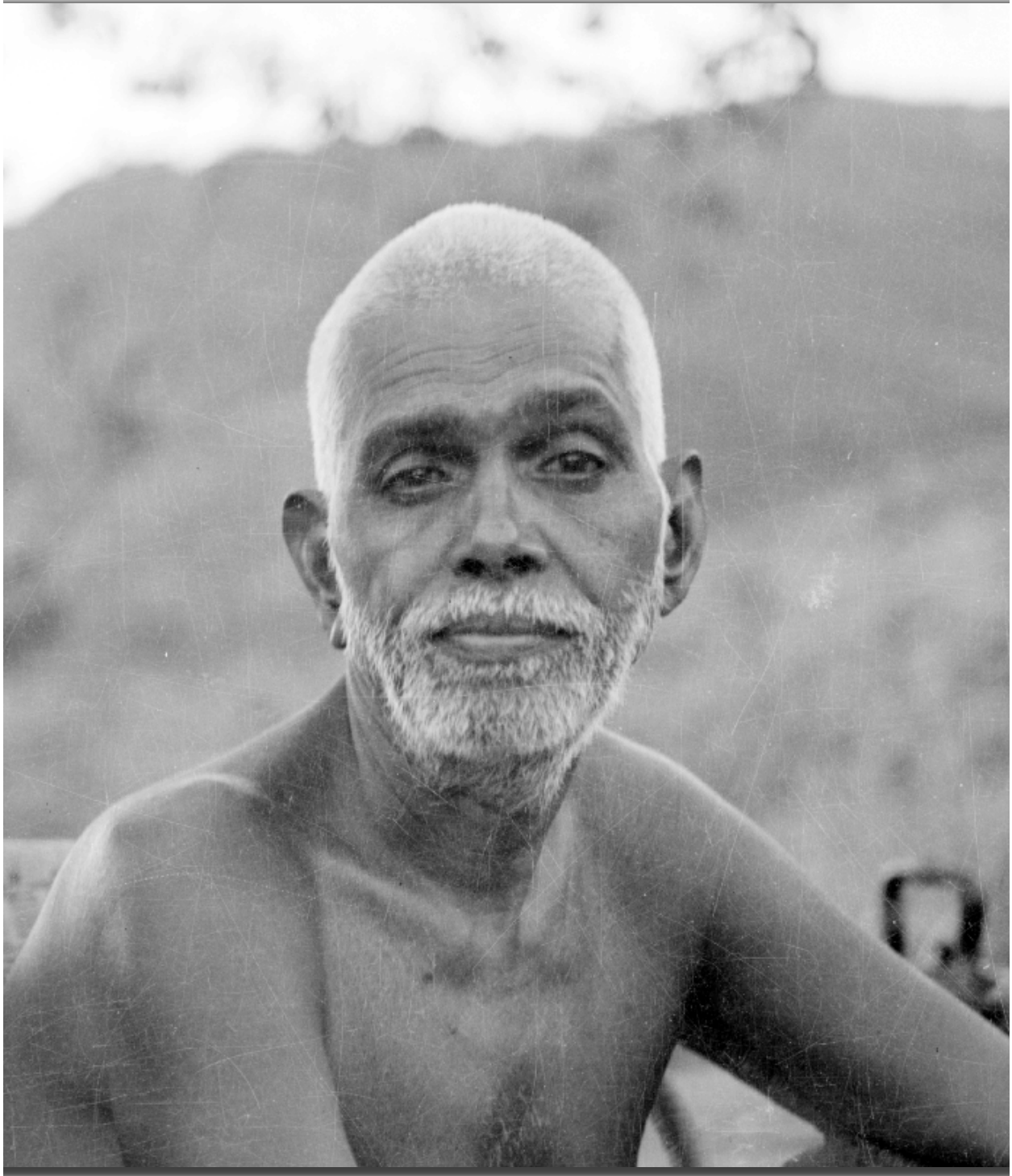
Regarding the efficacy of *Giri Pradakshina* as a most effective practice of "turning within and making the mind bear on God", Bhagavan told the following story:

"The greatness of this *Giri Pradakshina* has been described at length in *Arunachala Puranam*. Lord Nandikesa asked Sadasiva a similar question and Sadasiva narrated as follows: 'To go round this hill is good. The word '*Pradakshina*' has a typical meaning. The letter 'Pra' stands for removal of all kinds of sins; 'da' stands for fulfilling the desires; 'kshi' stands for freedom from future births; 'na' stands for giving deliverance through jnana. If by way of *Pradakshina* you walk one step it gives happiness in this world, two steps, it gives happiness in heaven, three steps, it gives bliss of *Satyalo*ka which can be attained. One should go round either in *mouna* (silence) or *dhyana* (meditation) or *japa* (repetition of Lord's name) or *sankeertana* (*bhajan* or singing the Lord's name and glories) and thereby think of God all the time. One should walk slowly like a woman who is in the ninth month of pregnancy." ²³

Let us, therefore, walk slowly but surely towards God. Let us heed one of Bhagavan's final instructions, "to put His teaching into practice" and never become foolish enough to allow our prideful and ignorant ego to tell us we have arrived at the goal without putting forth an ounce of effort along the path. It does not work in practical worldly endeavor and likewise it will not work in the 'life of the Spirit'.

²² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 219, p.189.

²³ *Letters from Sri Ramanashramam, Suri Nagamma*, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Letter #251 June 1949, p. 600.



“The Obstacles are the Habits of the Mind”

Three

The Method and What Hinders It

Question: I know Bhagavan has said:

“The obstacles that hinder realization are habits of the mind (*vasanas*), and the aids to realization are the teachings of the scriptures and of realized souls.” ²⁴

What is difficult to grasp, and therefore needs clarification are the methods of the teachings, especially in regard to Bhagavan’s method of reflection?

“Reflection (enquiry) is said to be one of the most effective and advanced techniques of spiritual attainment, for it leads to Self-realization. Reflection in *Sanskrit* is *vichara*, also sometimes called *manana*. Its foundation is based upon the quality of intellect. When the intellect is pure and subtle one begins to reflect upon “Who am I?”, what is the nature of this world, and what is my goal in this life and how am I going to attain it. These are all questions pertaining to an inward movement of the mind. But when the intellect is externalized it becomes tainted through attachment to the things of the world. This attachment will in time render the intellect impure. The nature of reflection common to this impure intellect asks not questions vital to man’s inner search, but rather ones essential to the survival of the ego. This externalized mind is day and night occupied with acquiring wealth, sensual pleasures, name and fame. Then after acquisition of these, equal time is spent warding off troubles that might jeopardize their maintenance. We are consumed with brooding over these objects of the senses. Our attachment produces desire, from which sprouts anger when the desire is thwarted. From anger proceeds delusion and forgetfulness.” ²⁵

²⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 13, p. 5.

Results of Actions

Thus we do not feel any of the consequences of indifference, inattention and procrastination concerning what in the beginning was merely a habit of bad choice, but now has matured into *pramada* (defined in the *Vedantic* scriptures as death).²⁶ Such reflection is never directed to our own Self, but is only associated with the temporary body it is dwelling within.

Our mental processes do not focus themselves on the central problem, which surround the essential purpose of life, the revelation of the Truth of our nature. Our attempts to settle matters in the external world of *maya* literally blind us to the subtle and real problem of “Who am I?”. This blindness alone constitutes our impurity. The fruitless but nevertheless endless and all-consuming effort put into an attempt to secure happiness from the outside world compounds our problem. The neon lights advertising worldly happiness initially cause us to postpone our inner search on the path to Life. If we remain distracted by the glamour of the world long enough, we will completely forget the goal of Higher Life. Thus sadly, the result will be that we have succumbed to the goal of the lower egotistic self - forgetfulness of God.

The vast majority of people have this externalized intellect in various degrees. Simply, they are not interested in the essential problem of “Who am I?”, and are unconcerned with its resolution. Inattention to spiritual practice at first only obscures the Light of God. By graded degrees inattention spawns indifference, which results in blindness.

The Art of Reflection

The practicing aspirant, on the other hand, learns the art and application of reflection on “Who am I?”. He allows the mental energy of a purified intellect to focus and concentrate with depth and regularity. The ego thrives in an individual in the absence of reflection. Thus, the whole world-process exists due to the absence of reflection. If we reflect skillfully and long enough the obstructing thoughts of the world will be worn down, our problems will dissolve and our purified intellect will merge into the experience of our unity with God (*samadhi*). Bhagavan assures us of this by saying:

²⁵ This section includes quotes and paraphrases from talks by Swami Jyotirmayananda, Yoga Research Foundation, Miami Florida, USA. www.yrf.org

²⁶ See *Bhagavad Gita* Chapter 2, verses 62-63.

"We are ever in *sushupti* (absolute Being, in the dreamless deep sleep state). Becoming aware of it in *jagrat* (the waking state) is *samadhi*. The *ajnani* (one ignorant of his true Being) cannot remain long in *sushupti* because his ego pushes him out of it. The *jnani* (Knower of the Self), although he has scorched the ego, it continues to rise again and again due to *prarabdha* (past life habitual tendencies). So, for both the *jnani* and the *ajnani* the ego springs up, but with this difference: whereas the *jnani* enjoys the transcendental experience, keeping its *lakshya* (aim, attention resulting in transformation) always fixed on its source, that of the *ajnani* is completely ignorant of it. The former is not harmful, being a mere skeleton of its normal self, like a burnt up rope. By constantly fixing its attention on the Source, the Heart, the ego gets dissolved into it like a salt doll which has fallen into the ocean." ²⁷

The Higher and Lower Self

It is essential to understand the difference here in Bhagavan's affirming that the "absolute Being that we really are" (with a capital "B" denoting our higher divine Self), without the process of transformation enjoined, could very well be a long time (lifetimes) away from our present state of 'being as we are' (with a small "b" denoting our lower egotistic self). This is because though the ego seems to be ever concerned with our well being, it comes between our practical personality in this world and the spiritual personality of our higher Self.

It comes in-between and lies; and our belief in the lie deludes us with the idea that we are only the body, without spiritual basis. Perhaps even a lie that declares that we can be pure Being without the spiritual basis created by the process of transformation, which Bhagavan declared as essential. Led by the ego's lies, the individual experiences fleeting joys mixed with lasting frustrations and sorrows, which drag him from one embodiment to another.

When we practice reflection we begin to understand the illusory nature of the ego. The purpose of *atma vichara* is to remove this illusion. In essence we melt the ego itself, or transcend the ego through submission to God.

²⁷ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 56.

Gradually through either path, God becomes the dominating factor in our lives. The verification of this achievement, without the taint of human imagination, is actual experience of the grace and bliss of stillness and peace, which Bhagavan promised is our higher Nature by inheritance.

Engaging the Enemy with Meditation

Before this revelation, there must come a confrontation and a conquering, then finally sublimation through the rising of our self by our own self-effort (*svakriya*).

“One should uplift oneself by one’s own Self and not lower oneself. Truly, it is the Self which is one’s friend, and it is the self which is one’s enemy.” ²⁸

Bhagavan gives us a choice of two means of practice. He frequently said:

“There are two ways: ‘Ask yourself- Who am I?’ or ‘Submit and I will strike down the ego’.” ²⁹

For those who have set their hands to the plough of:

“Effort, which is itself *yoga*,” ³⁰

it seems safe to assume that both of the means employ similar methods. Bhagavan’s statements concerning the success of either path exemplify this.

A devotee who received direct instruction for a long period of time from Bhagavan asks:

“Although I have listened to the explanation of the characteristics of enquiry in such great detail, my mind has not gained even a little peace. What is the reason for this?”

Bhagavan replied: “The reason is the absence of strength or one-pointedness of mind.”

²⁸ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 6, verse 5.

²⁹ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000, p. 64.

³⁰ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 74.

Devotee: "What is the reason for the absence of mental strength?"

Bhagavan: "The means that make one qualified for enquiry are meditation, *yoga*, etc. One should gain proficiency in these through graded practice, and thus secure a stream of mental modes that is natural and helpful. When the mind that has in this manner become ripe, listens to the present enquiry, it will at once realize its true nature, which is the Self, and remain in perfect peace, without deviating from that state. To a mind that has not become ripe, immediate realization and peace are hard to gain through listening to enquiry. Yet, if one practices the means for mind-control for some time, peace of mind can be obtained eventually." ³¹

Once a devotee of Bhagavan asked:

D.: "What is the meaning of the strength of the mind?"

Maharshi: "Its ability to concentrate on one thought without being distracted."

D.: "How is that achieved?"

M.: "By practice. A devotee concentrates on God; a seeker, follower of the *jnana-marga*, seeks the Self. The practice is equally difficult for both." ³²

D.: "What are the steps in practical *sadhana*?"

M.: "They depend on the qualifications and the nature of the seeker. If you are doing idol worship, you should go on with it; it will lead you to concentration. Get one-pointed, and all will come out right. People think that Liberation is far away and should be sought out. They are wrong. It is only knowing (by direct experience) the Self within oneself. Concentrate and you will get it. The mind is the cycle of births and deaths. Go on practicing and concentration will be as easy as breathing. That will be the crown of your achievements." ³³

³¹ *Self-Enquiry (Vichara Sangraham) of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, translated by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Sri Ramanashramam 2005, p. 16-17.

³² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 91. p. 90.

³³ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 134-135.

Constancy and Ardency

Here Bhagavan is stressing the graded practice of concentration that ultimately produces a one-pointed intellect. Every learned devotee of Bhagavan knows that this takes time because of the very fact that it is not theory. For God is not a theory, and thus it takes effort to think of Him with concentration at least equal to the effort we put forth in forgetting Him.

Though we forget God with apparent ease, the devotion required to attract the grace of remembrance of Him develops slowly, and deepens only with our ardent perseverance in concentration, meditation and prayer. Bhagavan affirmed this by saying:

"If *bhakti* is sufficiently developed, *vairagya* (dispassion for objects of the senses) and concentration follow as a matter of course. If devotion to an Ideal (commonly an *Ishta Devata*) is also lacking, the seeker may resort to *japa* (repetition of the Name of God) or *pranayama* (awareness and control of breath) to arrest the restlessness of the mind. All these practices specifically aim at stopping the *vritti*, the ceaseless modification, the wanderings of the mind, so that the latter may be nailed to itself and may eventually cognize its own native state. Mental diffusiveness resembles a mixture of gold dust with sand, earth, ashes and dirt of all sorts. Concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*) are the sieve, which sifts the gold dust from the others. They churn the *nadis* (nerves) along which consciousness flows to the whole body and tracks them down to their source, the Heart. Relaxation of the nervous system then takes place, denoting the ebbing of the consciousness from the *nadis* back to the Heart. The ebbs and flows of the consciousness, which constant practice renders increasingly perceptible to the meditator, gradually loosen the consciousness from the body and end by separating them in *samadhi*, so that the *sadhaka* (spiritual practitioner) is enabled to perceive the consciousness alone and pure. This is the Self, God the Absolute." ³⁴

Our constancy in *sadhana* involves both a persistent development of focus and a deepening of devotion. The Lord is attracted not by the thoughts

³⁴ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, notes on Talk 27, p. 133.

of the mind, but rather by the movement of our heart. We are reminded that we also have a skillful part to play in this act of grace when Bhagavan said:

"Grace is always there, it is only you who have to make yourself receptive to it." ³⁵

Effort and Grace

Bhagavan's close disciple, Arthur Osborne, clarified the meaning and tradition of this statement saying:

"To do this constitutes the effort of which the teachers and scriptures speak. The mind has created the obstruction; the mind has to remove it. But merely to recognize this, to recognize, that is to say, that the ego is (according to the *Advaitin* or non-dualist) an illusory self or (according to the dualist) a creation of the Spirit, to which it should be totally submissive and passive, is far from constituting the full effort required. Indeed, it increases the obligation for total effort and therefore, so to speak, the guilt in not making effort." ³⁶

Though grace is always there, it is natural and simply human to pray to Bhagavan for a physical support of grace. We know that in Bhagavan's physical presence a glance was enough. Though many have come to love him, there are those who feel "born out of time", lacking that heartfelt devotion produced by the power of his presence even though he assured us that:

"They say that I am dying but I am not going away. Where could I go? I am here." ³⁷

Through our *abhyasa*, *vichara* (enquiry into one's true Nature) and devotion we will experience him and thus know that he is eternally with us. He is for all a *jagat guru* (world teacher) who even today for many, through their love of him, is still a physical support of grace. He declared that if we "put his teaching into practice" our qualifying ripeness would be even his very

³⁵ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000, p. 74.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 73.

³⁷ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 222.

embrace! For those of us whose love for him is still ripening we live with the assurance he gave:

"*Mount Kailas* is the abode of *Siva* but *Arunachala* is *Siva* Himself."
 "He saw the sacred hill as the form assumed by pure Spirit for the support and guidance of men. Now that the physical body of Bhagavan - the most precious of all supports of Grace has been withdrawn from us, the Hill emits power and Grace for his devotees even more than before." ³⁸

Following in His Footsteps

Perhaps even more assuring will be that through "the crown of our achievement" Bhagavan will declare to us when we come away from his *Ashram* and *Arunachala* the very same words he spoke to Arthur Osborne when he once left for Madras:

"He is taking the *Swami* with him." ³⁹

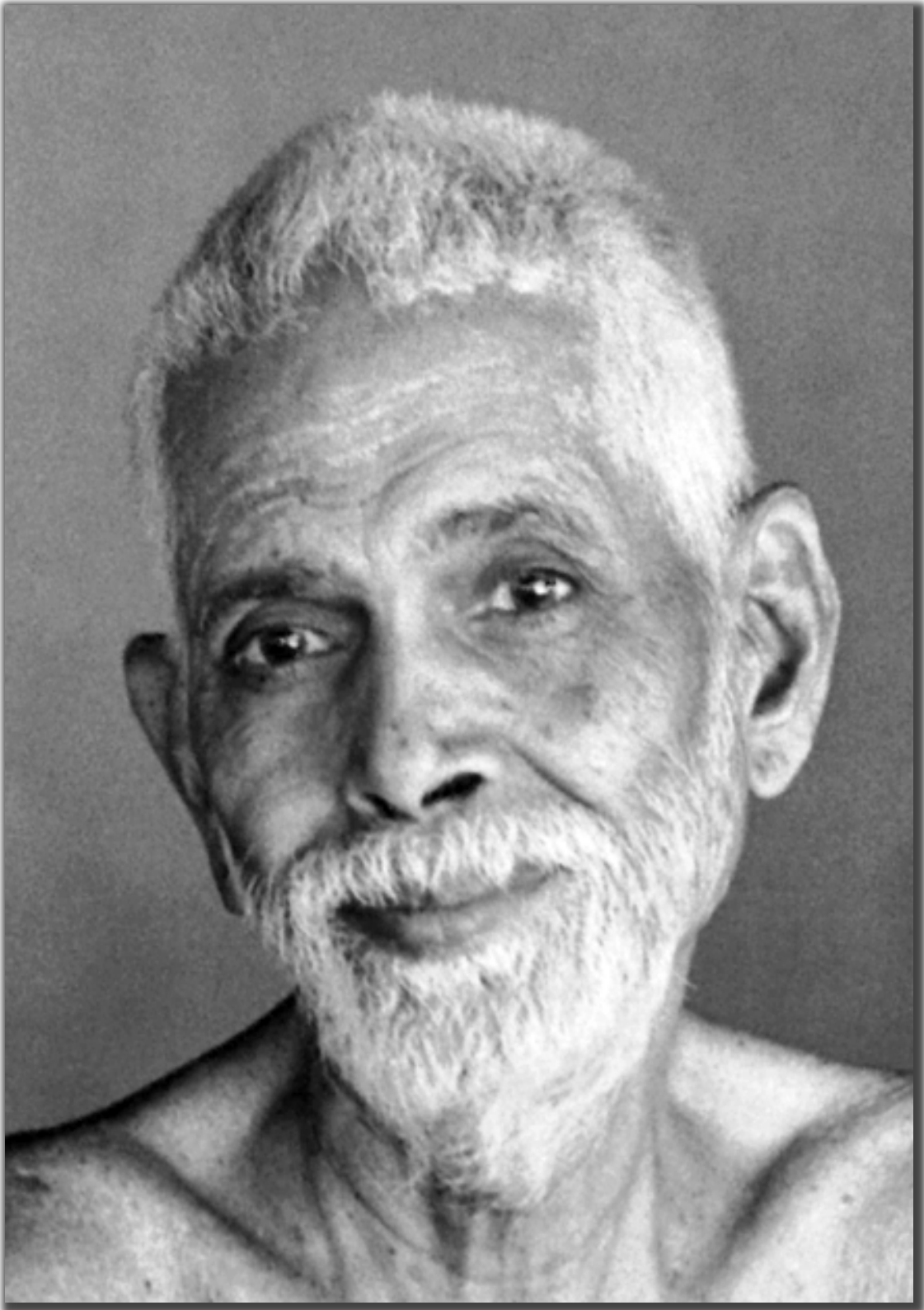
For through our seeking with patient perseverance in transformative *abhyasa* and *vichara* and our heeding Bhagavan's call to "think of the feet of the Lord", we will discover the abode of those divine feet. Even though physically for us there is:

"No more the beloved face, no more the sound of his voice; (but) henceforth the *lingam* of polished black stone, the symbol of *Siva*, over the *samadhi* (as our) outer sign; inwardly (there will be) his footprints in the heart." ⁴⁰

³⁸ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000, p. 78-79.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 225.



GURU RAMANA SIVA
(Sri Muruganar often referred to Bhagavan by this name)

Four

The Need for a Guru

Question: I now understand the need for *abhyasa* and *vichara*. But a larger question has now arisen which is the need for a *guru* to guide my efforts towards attainment. Is a *guru* necessary, what does a *guru* really do, and where can I find one whom I can whole-heartedly believe and trust?

The heart and soul of *Sanatana Dharma*, or the eternal religion, found its origination and essence in the oral transmission of its Truths. Since the abiding nature of this *dharma* is Eternal, the foundation for those who today seek to cultivate these Truths must rely primarily on the oral tradition transmitted through the *guru-disciple* relationship, or through *satsanga*, which will lead one toward that relationship.

These traditions that were a Truth of old, remain Truth today. The primary difficulty universally faced by all who seek to cultivate the inner Life of the Spirit is the question of authenticity.

The primary choice to make in the beginning of spiritual pursuit is whether to seek the outward guidance of a *guru*, or find the path to the Eternal through the prompting of the inner intuitive voice of the Self.

Regardless of the chosen path, the uncertainty facing all who seek a practice of meditation that can produce purification is the question of the authenticity of the teachers and their teachings, or the reliability of one's own inner voice. The question of whether or not to trust this voice of the conscience depends solely on the quality of *sattva* (purity of vision and habits) of the intellect.

The essential quality of intellect, in regard to the need for a *guru*, rests primarily upon a clear vision and understanding of exactly what a *guru* does. Therefore Bhagavan, who left no stone unturned in the ongoing guidance of all who came before Him, gave precise clarification on this essential aspect of

spiritual life to one of His close disciples, Arthur Osborne, who summarized Bhagavan's teaching in his collected essays:

"The *guru* is the Spirit of Guidance. Ultimately this is to be found within oneself. Whatever awakens it is acting as *guru*. "The purpose of the outer *guru*," the Maharshi said, "is to turn you inwards to the inner *guru*." And yet in this regard there is no easy formula, no guarantee against error, for just as the aspirant may be misled by false outer *gurus* reflecting undesirable qualities in himself, so he may dignify various inner urges with the same name "*guru*". Constant vigilance and intelligent purity are necessary." ⁴¹

The authenticity of spiritual teachers is now a decades old problem, as was noted by one of the close disciples living with Sri Ramana Maharshi:

"The rise of a new political ideology in the West after the first World War made men intolerant of all authority. The forces it released and the spirit of rebellion it disseminated everywhere had such extremely wide repercussions that its influence stamped itself on most of the new world literature. It invaded even the spiritual sphere and colored the views of the preachers, who became the Messiahs of the new age. The truly-seeking minds were thus caught between the spirit of the new age and that of the venerable traditions and scriptures, which had, throughout the centuries produced spiritual giants who led millions "from the unreal to the Real and from death to Immortality." It is small wonder then that bewildered, earnest, truth-hungry men should anxiously visit Ramana Maharshi and seek his advice on the need or otherwise of a *guru*." ⁴²

Trusted Guidance

Historically, the guidance of a Master and the discipline of the disciple were to all religions essentially fundamental. Sri Ramana Maharshi could not have more clearly emphasized this truth when he was once asked: "Is it

⁴¹ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000. p. 62.

⁴² *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 68.

necessary to have a physical guru?" The Master replied: "Is it necessary for a new born child to have a mother?"

Nevertheless, in our modern age our moods and suspicions concerning the authenticity of a *guru's* teachings automatically come into question. In order to correctly resolve this question, the seeker must possess the valuable quality of discrimination, strengthened by vigilant prayer for guidance. The spiritual marketplace has for decades been overstocked with self-made masters who seek worldly benefits for themselves rather than spiritual benefits for their followers. Therefore, sincere seekers the world over 'casting their cares upon the Lord' have given the reins of power and practice to an inner guide. Though many take direction from their now so-called *inner guru* with faith, hope and reliance, they are simply unaware of a great danger - a powerful and destructive enemy within. Lord Krishna warns Arjuna of this great foe to the realization of the Self in the beginning chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*: Arjuna said:

"By what is a man impelled to commit evil, *Varshneya* [an epithet of Lord Krishna], seemingly against his own will, as if urged thereunto by force?" The Holy Lord said, "It is desire, it is anger, that's born of the *rajo-guna*: of great craving, and of great sin; know that to be the enemy...The senses, mind and intellect are said to here be its abode...thus restraining the self (here the use of '*atman*' denotes the mind) by the Self, then destroy that enemy so hard to conquer: desire." ⁴³

Sri Krishna is revealing not only the identity and nature of the enemy within; He is showing us the location of its fortress. Without the guidance of an experienced Master, one's own intellect might intuit inimical desire to be simply another thought. The enemy is the ages-old ego; the desire emanating from it is its very life-blood. Its abode is three-fold, and its powers cannot be imagined away. Not only is the ego living within the senses and the mind, but also within the higher faculty of our intellect.

The Abode of Truth

Technically we are speaking of the *vijnanamaya kosha*, which is also the abode of our intuitional intellect. The scriptures speak of this *kosha* as being

⁴³ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 3, sections of verses 36-43.

the dwelling place of the Goddess *Saraswati*, the Deity of our consciousness. This fact is for us the wonder of wonders and at once our very dilemma.

For though the Goddess is our very own Divine Mother and greatest friend, caring only for Her children's upliftment and highest Realization, we have permitted our greatest enemy to co-exist in Her dwelling place - and these two are not friends.

Though our Divine Mother directs us upon a seemingly rugged path of discipline, vigilance and patient endurance, Her promised reward is eternal happiness and pure unselfish love. The ego, on the other hand, impels us toward the instant (though fleeting and illusory) satisfaction of craving. The choice between these two is not up to fate, but rather ours to decide.

Sri Krishna further declares in the *Gita* that the odds of victory for right discernment and effort by Arjuna (symbolizing each one of us), even with such a one as Sri Krishna Himself as mentor and guide, were against Arjuna by a ratio of eleven to seven. The foot soldiers of the ego simply outnumber our virtuous tendencies.

As we are against bad odds and are creatures of bad habit, our ego can impel us, even against our own will, to make bad choices. In all honesty, such bad choices cause us critical damage, resulting in lives of sorrow and misery. All our suffering comes from vainly seeking to appease the ego, an enemy whose appetite is insatiable.

The Voice of Truth

For Lord Krishna has said:

“O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), wisdom is clouded by desire. This constant enemy of the wise is as insatiable as fire.” ⁴⁴

Admittedly, there is an entire school of religious thought that refutes this position as being of the less mature path of *bhakti*. They have voluminous *advaitic* (non-dual theism) scriptures of the *jnana marga* (way) that can be

⁴⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 3, verse 39.

interpreted to support their claims. Regardless of this, there is universal agreement amongst all sects that due to *adharma* (unrighteousness of civilization) and the spiritual blindness ensuing from it, an embodiment of the divine state of perfection appears amongst humankind from time to time to establish *dharma* in the world.

In our times Sri Ramana Maharshi came forth as an embodiment of that Perfection. His teaching is recognized and accepted as the *mahayoga* (great path to union with God) through primarily the *jnana marga*. Although, he did say that to be a true *jnani* one would simultaneously become a true *bhakta*, and vice versa.

To know the truth regarding the need for a *guru* to lead one through the perils of engagement with an enemy that roams freely in a world ablaze with its desire of unappeasable fire, let us listen to the voice of the Maharshi, and the comments of one who lived by his side. Bhagavan said:

“The *guru* is the formless Self within each one of us. He may appear as a body to guide us, but that is only his disguise...the function of the outer *guru* is to awaken the inner *guru* in the heart.” ⁴⁵ The *guru* realizes the ultimate truth that: “There is no being of the unreal and no not-being of the Real.” ⁴⁶... “And yet, paradoxically, it is also an impediment to assert that no effort need be made, on the pretext that, as ‘there is no being of the unreal and no not-being of the Real’ one is that now and has therefore no need to strive to become That. It sounds plausible, but it is an impediment because it is the pseudo-self, the illusory unreal, that is saying it. The Master can say that there is nothing to achieve because one is That already; the disciple can’t...Bhagavan expected the devotee to make effort, even while appreciating the paradox that there is no effort to make. In the same way he would say that for the Realized Man there is

⁴⁵ *Be Still, It is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000, p. 80.

⁴⁶ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2, verse 16.

no *guru-disciple* relationship but added that for the disciple the relationship is a reality and is of importance.”⁴⁷

The Enemy Within

We cannot manoeuvre and progress towards victory over an enemy that outnumbers us, in such an inimical battlefield called the human mind, without soliciting real help. Without an experienced guide as the General of our forces, we may even court a fatal consequence. By legitimizing and even deifying our ego’s habitual heedless indifference to God, and by labeling its urges as the ‘*inner guru*’ or ‘voice of our spirit’, we inevitably fall into the death grip of *pramada*.

In the *Udyoga Parva* of the *Mahabharata* epic, the blind King Dhritarashtra, who symbolizes the blindness of the ego, cynically asks the Sage Sanat Sujata: “What is death?” The Sage replies, “*Pramada* is death!” It should be understood that the definitions of *Sanskrit* words are subject to philosophical intention, and thus are prey to individual bias. Therefore disagreement and even argument concerning proper meaning and usage are commonplace. Nevertheless, the most learned scholars agree that the ancient definition of the word *pramada* comes from its usage in this scripture. “*Mada*” means intoxication, when prefixed by “*pra*” it becomes intense intoxication to the degree of madness.

The ancient Saintly King Bartruhari, who became an enlightened Sage, used the word *pramada* in the correct spiritual sense indicated by the Sage Sunat Sujata. He proclaimed:

“Peetva mohamayeem pramada madiram unmatta bhootam jagat”

“This world (its inhabitants therein) has become mad after having drunk the wine of negligence (*pramada*: laxity towards the spiritual

⁴⁷ *Be Still, It is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000, p. 76.

goal), which being of the form of *moha* (delusion), has overwhelming power to delude you.”

The Sage Sanat Sujata is indicating that the presence of *pramada* brings about a spiritual death. Thus the spiritual madness that at first manifests as indifference, inattention and negligence becomes deadly because it is directed towards God. This is not to be defined as forgetfulness of the Self, unless one admits to a willful and belligerent forgetfulness.

The secondary meaning of *pramada* is procrastination and laziness, it means not taking any immediate action to rectify this most soul-stripping heedlessness. One may say: “God’s grace is always there, so somehow I will get back on my spiritual feet.” But the fatality of staying “dead level” without motivation to rise up comes upon us as *pramada* gives birth to its only-begotten son. This offspring of *pramada* is known in *Sanskrit* as *duragraha*. *Duragraha* means the adamant determination to do that which you know you should never do.

The compound spiritual fracture of being indifferent to God and habitually partaking in negative action with utter disregard for the negative consequences creates a *karmic* bloodletting fatal even to the strongest constitution.

Seek and You Shall Find

We can believe the Saints when they say: “Our fate is simply a bundle of habits; if you want to change your fate - change your habits.” ⁴⁸

We now understand that a *guru* is necessary. But for so many sincere people longing for spiritual attainment, the dilemma of “Where is my *guru*, amongst so many who are not?” still remains looming before them. Sri Ramana Maharshi spoke precisely to them by declaring that one should first understand:

⁴⁸ Quoted from the talks of Swami Sivananda, of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, India.

“What is a *guru*? *Guru* is God or the Self. First man prays to God to fulfill his desires. A time comes when he will no more pray for the fulfillment of material desires but for God Himself. God then appears to him in some form or another, human or non-human, to guide him to Himself in answer to his prayer and according to his needs.” ⁴⁹

A devotee inquired of Bhagavan: “Is there any way to meet the appointed *guru* for each?”

Maharshi: “Intense meditation brings it about.” ⁵⁰

Therefore the search for a *guru* is only the search for God. We need not search in vain for the place to knock, for it is within. Sri Krishna said: “My glory is within”, Jesus also assures us of the direction to find the *guru* as the “pearl of great price” saying: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven and all else shall be added unto you.”

This kingdom within is our very Heart, and Bhagavan offers two ways of approach, and then clearly instructs us how to unite with it:

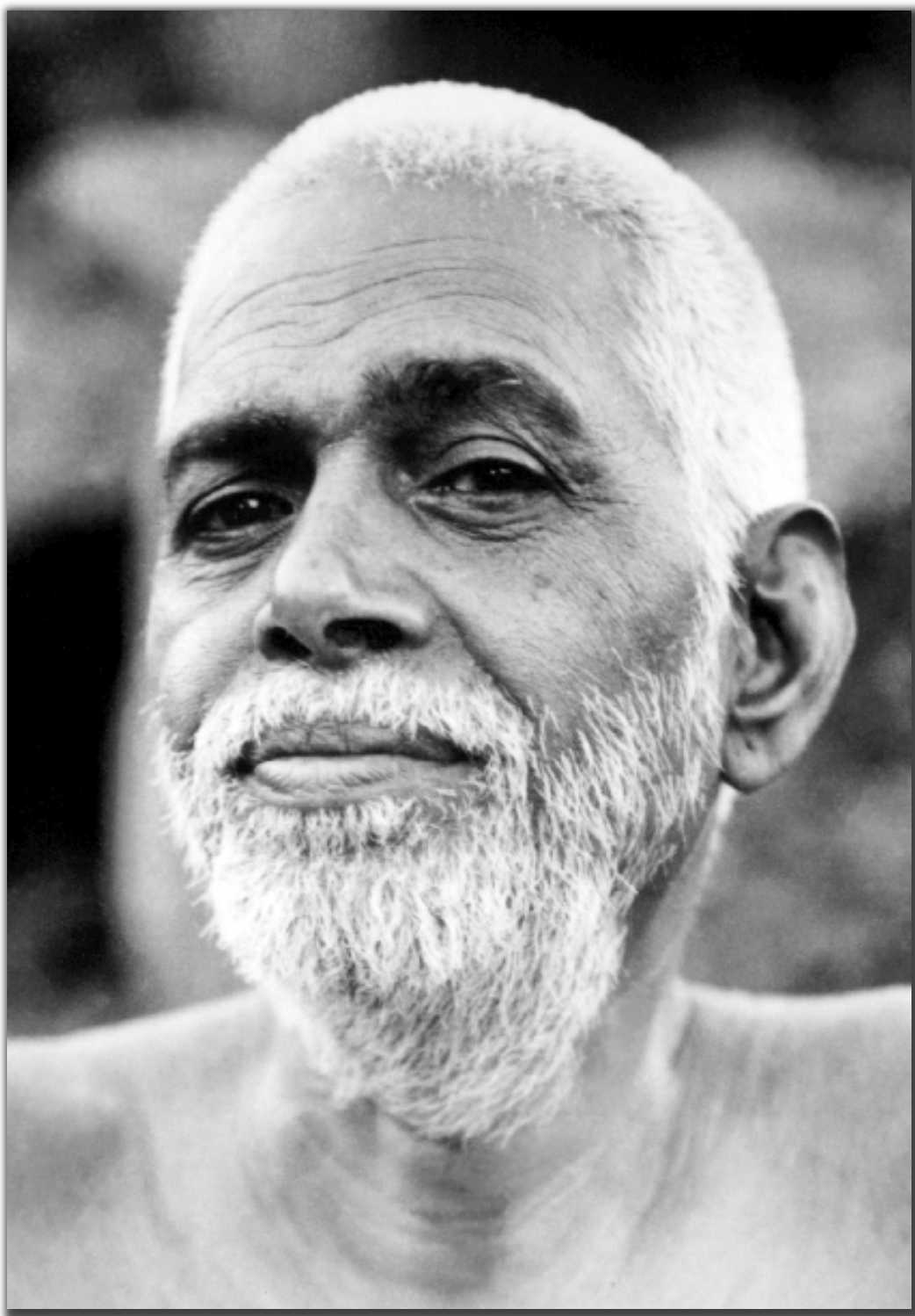
“There are two ways: ‘Ask yourself - Who am I?’ or ‘Submit and I will strike down the ego’.” ⁵¹ “Seeking my true nature in your Heart, discovering it and rejoicing in it by bathing in the bliss of my *jnana swarupa* – this is union.” “Only *bhakti sadhana* performed continuously with love will facilitate easily, in a gradual way, this union.” “Enter with love the temple that is in your own Heart and experience the bliss of being absorbed in my *swarupa*, becoming one with it.” “I myself will command and control a mind that has died by the sacrifice of the ego.” ⁵²

⁴⁹ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 70.

⁵⁰ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 135. p. 125.

⁵¹ *Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam, p. 64.

⁵² *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 29, verses 27-30.



“The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You” ⁵³

⁵³ Bhagavan is quoting from the *Bible* in: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 311.

Five Which Way Within

Question: Without doubt, God and His scriptures, and those who take up a serious spiritual practice agree that the ultimate goal is within. But when the mind of man goes within, there is found an unimaginable variety of species, living in worlds within worlds of thought. What is the method of first locating, then concentrating on and then attaining the One thing needful?

Unquestionably, the human mind is a well-seasoned traveler, with a photographic memory, through untold lifetimes of worlds of experience.

The Buddha once directed his followers to consider the vast number of different species existing in our creation. His followers were perplexed at failing to bring to mind the vastness of the types, shapes and colors of seemingly millions of life forms. He then declared:

“The human mind is more variegated than this variety of known life.”

Yet we are told to turn within and seek the source that gave birth to these vast worlds. It is no wonder that many, due to memories of past painful struggles and failures, simply declare: “I am not going there and destroy the little peace I have.” Their steadfast stance of holding on to even a fleeting refuge from an apparently uncontrollable world on fire seems to be supported even by the statements of Arjuna and Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Arjuna said:

“O Madhusudana, I do not see how it is possible to maintain the steady state of *Yogic* equanimity which you have taught. The mind is ever so restless! Verily, O Krishna, the mind is fickle, impetuous, powerful and turbulent. To me, it seems as difficult to control the mind as it is to control the wind”. Lord Krishna said: “Indeed, the mind is restless and difficult to control, but it can be brought under control by the practice of *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, O son of Kunti. It is my opinion that *Yoga* is difficult for anyone who is lacking self-control,

but it can be attained by one who has mastered the lower self, if he adopts the proper means.”⁵⁴

Our Infallible Weapon

Common sense shows us that to combat and conquer a foe that is so powerful and turbulent we must develop our own powers and stability. Meditation is the means to this end. The methods to adopt depend on “where we stand”. But first we must firmly rise to our feet before turning inwards. Practically, we must first decide to invest the time for repeated effort, and then develop strength and perseverance to develop the right discernment and ensuing virtues that will strengthen us. Spiritual life improves much like worldly life; gradually step-by-step.

When we were babies crawling on the floor but wanting to be in the arms of our mother, we leaped forward only to come down with a crash. Innately we learned to concentrate on standing with balance and then moving towards our goal. Through our repeated efforts, and failures, at gaining concentration, we achieved success.

Likewise, in the beginning of spiritual movement the first task before us is to develop the skill of concentration within meditation. In fact, in the *Pali Canons* containing the words of the Buddha (whom the spiritual world reveres as the Master of meditation), the word in *Pali* used for meditation (*jhana*) means exactly “development”.⁵⁵

The Buddha (also being the Master of metaphor) likened this development to building a bridge over a swiftly running river. The foundations of this bridge on either shore were virtue and discernment. The most important foundation in the middle of the most dangerously turbulent currents is concentration. If our concentration rests on a weak foundation, then it is only a matter of time before our virtue and discernment are washed

⁵⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 6, verses 33-36. (Translation By Swami Jyotirmayananda, Yoga Research Foundation, www.yrf.org)

⁵⁵ *Gunaratna*, www.accesstoinight.org, "It burns up opposing states, thus it is *jhana*" (Vin. A. i, 116). The purport being that *jhana* "burns up" or destroys the mental defilements, thus the development (*bhavana*) of serenity and insight is promoted.

away. Therefore to properly address your question, the first step is not a matter of location but rather of “How to develop concentration?”

Concentration and Vigilance

We have heard from Lord Krishna and his beloved disciple the description of the nature of the mind. We know from science that the vital nature of all life is in the blood. The life-blood of the mind is movement! To concentrate means to steady and ultimately control this movement that produces distraction (restlessness). Therefore, to establish concentration in meditation means control of the mind. Yes, now must come the Ultimate Question; “How to control the mind?”

During the years that Sri Ramana Maharshi was living on the sacred hill of *Arunachala* in the *Virupaksha* cave, a devotee whose most urgent concern was this very question was visiting him daily.

The devotee asked Bhagavan: “Of the means for mind-control, which is the most important?”

The Master replied not just to the devotee, rather his answer was framed to all universally:

“Breath control is the means for mind control.”⁵⁶

The devotee, being a *bhakta* (follower and friend) of Lord Rama, was well aware of the fact that this answer was a well-established practice in the ancient religions of the world. He no doubt was aware that what was being referred to was not the complicated, misused, and the sometimes destructive practice of *yogic pranayama*, but rather a practice also known as “watching the breath”. Nevertheless, after Bhagavan briefly discussed the textual definitions of breath retention and regulation, the devotee restated his question:

“How is breath-control the means for mind-control?”

⁵⁶ *Self-Enquiry (Vichara Sangraham) of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, trans. By Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, Sri Ramanashramam 2005, p. 17.

Bhagavan replied: “There is no doubt that breath-control is the means for mind-control, because the mind, like breath, is a part of air, because the nature of mobility is common to both, because the place of origin is common to both, and because when one of them is controlled the other gets controlled.” ⁵⁷

Bhagavan’s teaching regarding breath-control is clearly given in Chapter Six of the *Sri Ramana Gita*:

“One should control the fickle mind by controlling the breath and then it, like a tethered animal, ceases to stray.”

“With the control of breath, control of thoughts also is achieved. When thoughts are controlled one stands established at their source.”

“Control of breath means merely watching with the mind the flow of breath. Through such constant watching *kumbhaka* does come about.” ⁵⁸

Deception of the Mind

Forty-four years later Bhagavan was again requested to expand on this essential means for controlling the mind. But prior to that revelation, the need arises to address those who flatly, and paradoxically with an angry boldness, declare that the mind and this so-called ego are all an illusion.

They retort that what is being asked to be controlled simply does not exist, and absolutely no effort need be exercised to attain this Divine state referred to as the “One thing needful”. They refer to the Master saying that this ‘One thing’ is absolute Knowledge of the Self, and it is always there. Furthermore, they emphatically propound that Bhagavan’s *essential* teaching proclaims, “We are That”, and the *guru’s* work is *solely* to reveal this Truth.

Undoubtedly, Bhagavan’s teaching emphasized that the Self (God) is within us. His essential teaching, however, as a *jagat guru*, was the revelation of *atma vichara* as the path of enquiry, which effectively removes the ignorance of identification with the false “I”, and inevitably leads one to the direct experience (*aparoksha anubhava*) of Self-realization. Bhagavan definitively clarifies this Truth, and that of the *guru’s* role, when He declared:

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 18.

⁵⁸ *Sri Ramana Gita*, Sri Ramanashramam 2004, p. 25, verses 3-5.

“If ignorance is wiped out the confusion will end and true knowledge unfolded. By remaining in contact with realized sages one *gradually* loses his ignorance till it disappears totally. The eternal Self is thus revealed. Without understanding it aright people think that the Guru teaches something like “TATVAMASI” and immediately the disciple realizes “I am Brahman”. In their ignorance they conceive Brahman to be something much bigger and far more powerful than anything else. With a limited ‘I’ man is so stuck up and wild. What will he be if the same ‘I’ increased enormously? He will certainly be proportionately more ignorant and more foolish. This false ‘I’ must perish. Its annihilation is the fruit of service to the Guru. Realization is eternal and is not granted by the Guru. The Guru helps only the removal of ignorance; that is all.” ⁵⁹

Bhagavan, in answer to questions, has said that *Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras* were the quintessence of *asthanga yoga* (the eight-limbed yoga followed by millions and respected by all). Let us apply this Sage’s wisdom to decide whether we possess the obstacles to knowledge he describes and therefore must use all of our powers to remove them, or whether for us it is simply all an illusion.

Patanjali declares: “Sickness, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, sloth, craving for sense-pleasure, false perception, despair caused by failure to concentrate and unsteadiness in concentration; these distractions are the obstacles to knowledge. These distractions are accompanied by grief, despondency, trembling of the body and irregular breathing.” ⁶⁰

To those who assert that they do not believe these human traits are anything other than illusion, all that can be possibly said is: “Try wishing them away, and good luck!”

⁵⁹ *Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 350 p. 172.

⁶⁰ *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Swami Prabhavananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math 2005, Sutras 30-31, p. 38.

Strength of Breath

In the year 1945, Bhagavan was again requested to expand on how breath-control or watching the breath was an essential means for controlling the mind. The conversation between Master and disciple was:

“In continuation of an old question of his with reference to a certain passage in *Maha Yoga*, the disciple asked Bhagavan whether it was necessary and a condition precedent for a man to watch his breathing before beginning the mental quest ‘Who am I?’ ”

Bhagavan: “All depends on a man’s *pakva* (his maturity and fitness). Those who do not have the mental strength [*another translation of ‘mental strength’ is preparedness gained through repeated practice*] ⁶¹ to concentrate or control their mind and direct it on the quest are advised to watch the breathing, since such watching will naturally and as a matter of course lead to cessation of thought and bring the mind under control. Breath and mind arise from the same place and when one of them is controlled, the other is also controlled. As a matter of fact, in the quest method, which is more correctly ‘Whence am I?’ and not merely ‘Who am I?’- we are not simply trying to eliminate saying ‘we are not the body, not the senses and so on,’ to reach what remains as the ultimate reality, but we are trying to find whence the ‘I’ thought for the ego within us arises. The method contains within it, though implicitly and not expressly, the watching of the breath. When we watch wherefrom the ‘I’ thought, the root of all thoughts, springs, we are necessarily watching the source of the breath also, as the ‘I’ thought and the breath arise from the same source.”

The disciple again asked whether, for controlling the breath, the regular *pranayama* (of regulated inhalation, retention and exhalation i.e. 1:4:2) is not better?

Bhagavan replied: “All those proportions, sometimes regulated not by counting but by uttering *mantras*, etc., are aids for controlling the mind. That is all. Watching the breath is also one form of *pranayama*.

⁶¹ The word *pakva* comes from the root “*pak*” which means fully cooked. Bhagavan used the derivative “*pakwigal*” which, by implication, means one who has become mature through the “cooking” process of *sadhana* (spiritual practice).

Retaining breath, etc., is more violent and may be harmful in some cases, e.g. where there is no proper *guru* to guide the *sadhak* (the one performing the spiritual practice) at every step and stage. But merely watching the breath is easy and involves no risk.”⁶²

Watch and Pray

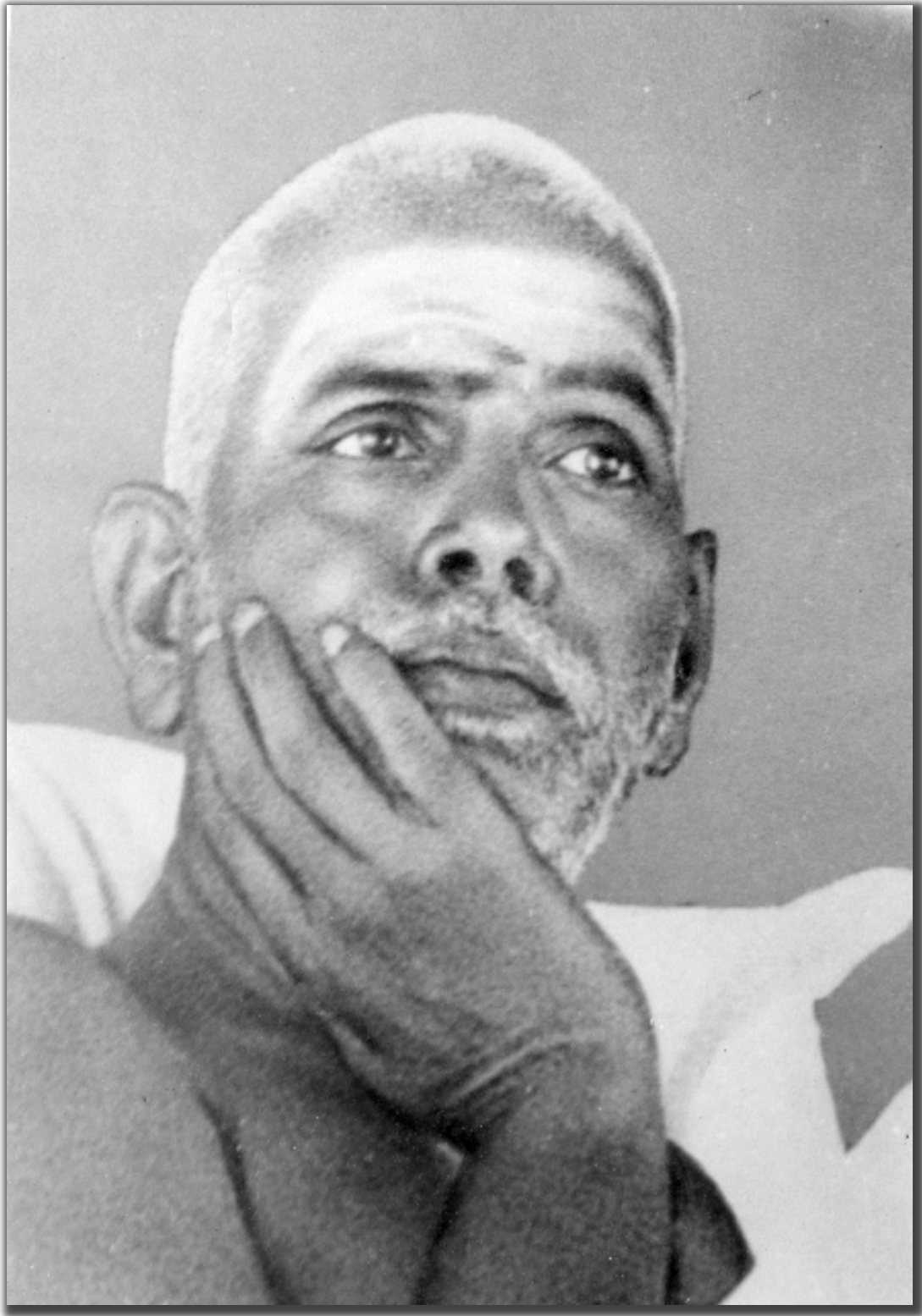
This method is indeed easy, and can be joined to any form of *sadhana* (spiritual practice) that one is engaged in. The breath is not controlled but merely watched with acute attention. Its movement should at all times remain natural and comfortable. It is helpful at first to center one’s attention without stress on any area where the movement of the breath is physically palpable or noticeable.

The attention of the mind with alert awareness on the movement of the breath satisfies the mind’s life-sustaining urge to circulate through movement.

Thus we watch and pray with calm but steady concentration. The place of our origin, that forgotten abode of the Self, is Self-revealing. Becoming truly still, and calling on God with patient perseverance, we will enter and experience:

“The Way, the Truth and the Life.”

⁶² *Day by Day With Bhagavan*, A. Devaraja Mudaliar, Sri Ramanashramam 2002, p. 55-56.



“Control the mind and direct it on the Quest.”

Six

The Ultimate Secret

Question: The Ancient Ones (Sages and *Rishis*) say that *japa* (continuous repetition of *OM* or the Name of God) leads to concentration, and concentration leads to meditation, and meditation to *samadhi*, and when *samadhi* is steady one is established in *yoga*. But if the Wisdom of the Self arises only from the heart, how can I come to understand that states of mind, even exalted states like *yogic samadhi*, will lead me to the discovery of the ultimate secret which is an awakened realization of the Self? And finally, how will I know outside of meditation, in my normal daily life, that such a permanent transformation of consciousness has occurred?

When we normally speak of going into a state of *samadhi*, we are rightly referring to its lower stages that are not close to *complete* absorption in the Self. It is a great step forward, but in relation to the final goal it is just another achievement of progressive steps, though at higher levels.

An advanced and skillful Buddhist will propound an understanding of this that refers to eight separate stages of *jnana* or *samadhi*, four material and four non-material. These are simply seen as high states of mind that can ultimately lead one to the thoughtless (mindless) state, therefore not the Self that dwells exclusively in the heart. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of these mind states is that their movement develops concentration, which takes you within, directly to the door of the heart. The metaphysics of Hindu *dharma* agrees, differing mainly with reference to the description of separate stages.

The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, which Bhagavan has referred to, propound the Hindu view of the essential need for progressive stages of mental strength and development of acute awareness that in time lead one towards and finally into *Samadhi*.

According to the various interpretations of Patanjali's *Sutras*, there range from between six to twelve separate progressive stages, all referred to as *samadhi* (absorption in meditation).

Focusing on That which can be Seen

Bhagavan's teaching is in harmony with Patanjali in that the effort to "know the Self" is an actual experience that involves a progressive and protracted *sadhana* that culminates with the awakening (remembrance) of the immaculate nature of a Pure Mind. In this regard a devotee asked Bhagavan:

"What is that Self in actual experience?"

Sri Bhagavan tells us: "It is the Light which ever shines in the Cave of the Heart as the flame of the Consciousness 'I' 'I' – the eternal and blissful *Sat-chit-ananda*. This is the answer to the *vichara* and its fulfillment. The 'I', which has carried out a *determined* and protracted search into its own nature, has at long last found itself to be not other than the Pure Mind, the immaculate Being, which is eternally wrapped in blissful stillness. This is *Turiya*, the Fourth, or *Samadhi* (the highest stage)." ⁶³

This statement reveals an essential aspect of Bhagavan's teaching that is often misconstrued. Some adherents to the Ramana Way flatly proclaim that *vichara* (reflective enquiry) is effortless. They adhere to a mistaken interpretation of Bhagavan's method of enquiry that denies the need for an active and acute awareness within the mind. They firmly proclaim that *vichara*, even in its preliminary stage, is not an intellectual process. Bhagavan's use of the word *determined* in the above quote clearly contradicts this belief. Determination in this instance is the unwavering resolve of the 'I' thought, which originated from and is residing within the intellectual mind, to seek the source of its own nature.

Therefore all effort motivated by this resolve takes place as an intellectual process, until *in the end of enquiry* the final goal is achieved and the "I" transcends the mind.

Patanjali also clarifies this error, for he declares that achievement of the lower stages of *samadhi* are essential. For in them there is a witness who experiences first the lower plane where there *distinctly* exists the knower, the object as the known and the knowledge. Ultimately the highest stage is reached when the many dissolves into the One, which connects them. Bhagavan concurred with this when in conversation with Mr. Cohen it was said:

⁶³ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 73.

Mr. Cohen: "There seems to be nothing but awareness, for to know anything there must be knowledge – we cannot get over that."

Bhagavan: "Certainly. Subjective knowledge – knowledge knowing itself is *jnana*. It is then the subject as the knower, the object as the known and the knowledge which connects them."

Mr. Cohen: "This last is not clear to me in this case."

Bhagavan: "Why so? Knowledge is the light which links the seer to the seen. Suppose you go in search of a book in a library in pitch darkness. Can you find it without light, although you, the subject, and the book, the object, are both present? Light has to be present to unite you. This link between the subject and the object in every experience is *chit*, consciousness. It is both the substratum as well as the witness of the experience, the seer of Patanjali." ⁶⁴

First Things First

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* present a progressive advancement of effective methods for controlling the thought waves (*vrutti*) of the mind, which will result in the focusing and strengthening of awareness.

Questions were often placed before Bhagavan regarding the need for the establishment of progressive effort that leads to a *fully aware* and controlled mind:

"Mr. Cohen relates how the reading of *Patanjali Sutras* in 1926 had greatly impressed him. The first few *sutras* had convinced him of the truth of the teaching, but unfortunately there was no one to give him proper guidance until he met Sri Bhagavan early in 1936."

Bhagavan: "Patanjali's first *sutras* are indeed the climax of all systems of *yoga*. All *yogas* aim at the cessation of the *vrutti* (modification of the mind). This can be brought about in the variety of ways mentioned in the scriptures through mind control, which frees consciousness from

⁶⁴ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 75.

all thoughts and keeps it pure. Effort is necessary. In fact effort is itself *yoga*.”

Mr. C: “I suppose efforts have to be made in the waking state, which implies that *moksha* can be gained only in *jagrat*?”

Bhagavan: “Quite so, awareness is necessary for mind control; otherwise who is to make the effort? You cannot make it in sleep or under the influence of drugs. Also *mukti* has to be gained in full awareness, because the Reality itself is pure awareness.” ⁶⁵

The testimony of practically all of the disciples who lived with Bhagavan proclaims that the achievement of “freeing consciousness from all thoughts and keeping it pure,” involves constant spiritual practice and real non-dependence (*vairagya*) on the objects of the world. In rare instances, though some people seem to have achieved the state of thoughtless purity without effort, it may, as Sri Ramana himself said, be due to effort done in the past.

They were right, for they were perfectly guided to this understanding by the Guru Sri Ramana whose life was a living demonstration of supreme control and *vairagya*.

There are two aspects of controlling the mind, *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. *Abhyasa* is adopting any particular spiritual discipline and repeating it continuously. *Vairagya* is developing detachment and dispassion towards objects of the world that degrade your mind.

As one conquers one’s desires one gets a sense of mastery over the objects of the world. Objects of the world have no real bearing upon the mind, but they become important and impinge upon the mind because of the desires towards them. As we advance in our *sadhana* we begin to discover that the innermost Self is an ocean of bliss. The realization of that Self puts an end to all desires.

However, this process is progressive. As one gains insight into the transient nature of the things of the world, one comes to realize that the

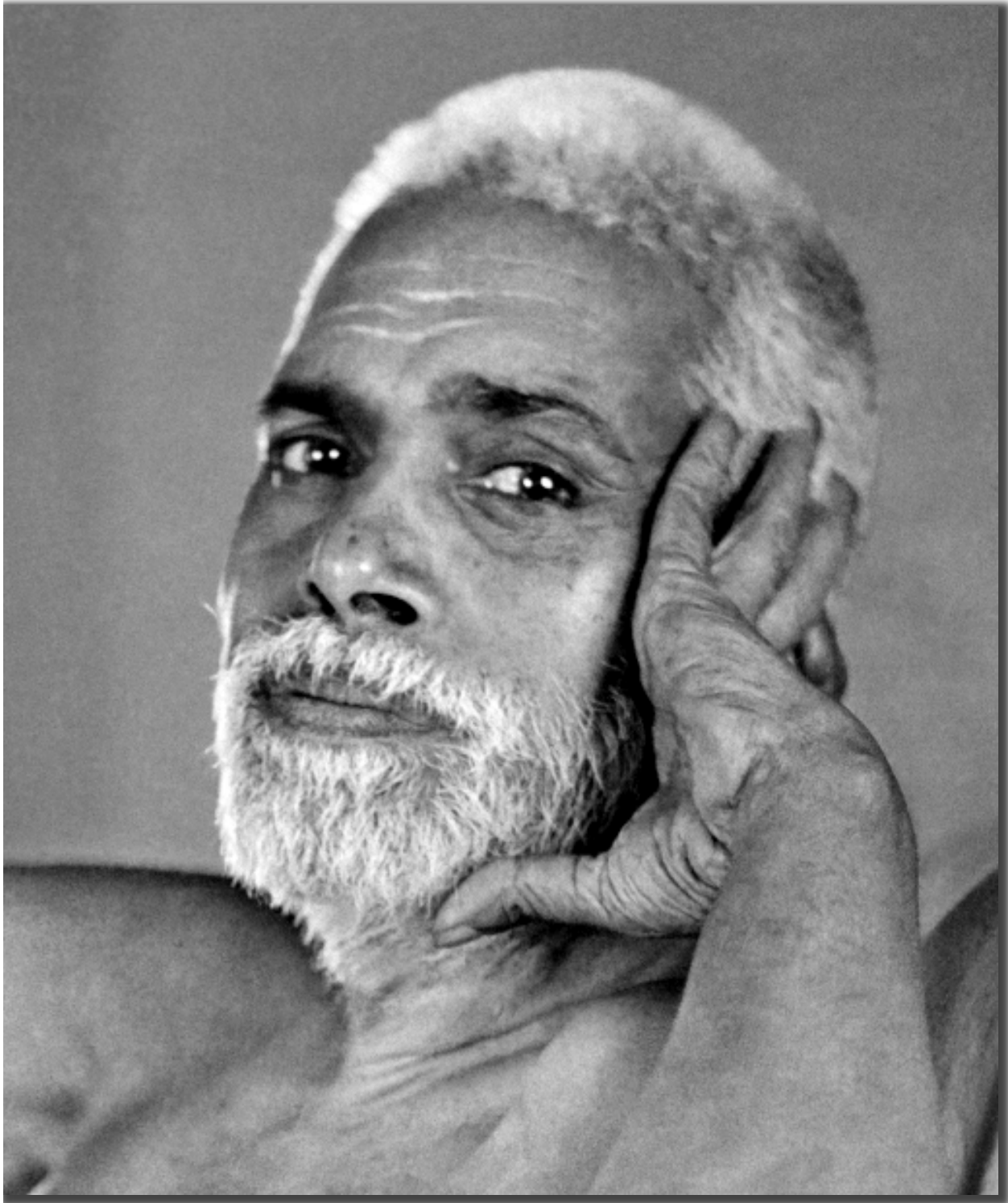
⁶⁵ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 74.

seeking of happiness from the objects of the world has effectively reduced one into a beggar.

The mind's nature is to be constantly feeding on the objects of the senses. Inwardly, the mind never loses its attraction for more happiness than already has been gained and is forever on the prowl in the world for fresh pleasure. Unfortunately for most, the strongest *vasanas* (latent tendencies) direct the mind towards the lower realms of sensual attraction. Thus we end up searching, as it were, in the garbage cans of other people for the things to feed on. The mind has left its own home, and moves about in the streets of worldly pleasure feeding on that which will momentarily satisfy its craving.

The greatest burden of these irresponsible actions comes from the certainty that there is alongside the craving a complete disregard for the suffering that is produced both within oneself and within those who are the objects of desire.

How can we secure our happiness on the basis of a world that is constantly shifting? If you have illusion about the world and become its beggar, the world will always be there to dominate you. To the extent that this illusion breaks, you become the ruler of that which had previously conquered you. If you have no desire for the objects of the senses, your rulership is known as *vairagya*. *Vairagya* is not the development of disgust for the objects of the senses, but rather the discovery of the majesty of the power of rulership over them. Your revelation is that the objects are dependent on you; you are not dependent on the objects.



“Discover the Majesty of a Pure Mind”

Seven Samadhi's Goal: “Turn Your Back on Heaven”

Question: Some say that to break the illusion of dependence on the world and gain the happiness of heaven one only needs to think he is free. Is the achievement of happiness and freedom from the ego's dominance the heaven we seek? If not, can you please clearly explain the method and means to achieve what Bhagavan states as the Goal of realization of the Self!

“The strong Gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred Seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find Me, and turn thy back on heaven!”

Emerson—‘*Brahma*’

We are now embarking into realms in which the normal human being has little or no experience. Thus we must, with faith and assurance, adhere to the guidance and teachings of God, the *gurus* and their scriptures.

We have seen that the Lord in His *Gita* lays before us two separate paths of devotion, one with form (commonly known as *bhakti*) and one without form (known as *jnana*). Sri Krishna directs us to make both paths our beloved. Thus at the final achievement of the highest *yoga* our lower nature (ego) will be completely consumed with:

“Loving God with our whole mind and with our whole heart, and our neighbor as our Self.”⁶⁶

Bhagavan echoes this same Truth in the second subsequent verse added to the *Five Stanzas on Sri Arunachala (Arunachala Pancharatnam)* that were composed by his own hand:

⁶⁶ The use here of the word “whole” by Jesus is exactly the same as the use of “*purna*” in *Sanskrit*. The true meaning in both cases is “perfect”. The Lord restated this truth saying: “Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is Perfect.”

“In the recesses of the lotus-shaped heart of all, from *Vishnu* downwards, there shines as Absolute Consciousness, the *Paramatman* (Supreme Spirit) who is the same as *Arunachala* or *Ramana*. When the mind melts with love of him and reaches the inmost recess of the heart wherein he abides as the Beloved, the subtle eye of Absolute Consciousness opens and He reveals Himself as pure Knowledge.”

For one who is following the path of devotion to God, the passage through different stages of *samadhi* will not only be experienced as deeper levels of consciousness, but also as deeper degrees of sincerity and the longing of devotion. Acceptance of the wonder of this accomplishment is also acceptance of the task of persistence; for the goal is glorious.

The Beauty of Seeking the Beloved

As one develops *abhyasa* and *vairagya*, and as the mind gradually comes under control through *vichara* (reflection), there ensues a peace that is inconceivable. This control of the mind has three stages. They are *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*. Each stage has its own beauty to behold.

Dharana is focusing the mind, gaining a focused attention. *Dhyana* is a continuity of the focused attention. Maintaining this state of continued focus is called meditation. When, in meditation, all the thoughts are gathered into one place and steady focus deepens into absorption it is called *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is stepping beyond the normal limits of consciousness, going beyond the ego's domination. This newfound freedom is a wonder to behold.

In the first stage of concentration you are gathering the mind, for the mind is distracted. It is essential that we let the mind be focused. Then, in the second stage, let the focus continue as steadily and naturally as possible. When you are attempting meditation and you succeed in focusing the mind, subtle impressions are created within the subconscious that will make the process easier in the future. Therefore sustained effort is needed.

In the third stage, when this process becomes natural and requires less effort, your consciousness expands and steps beyond your ego. This heralds an awareness of a profound depth, which has never been seen before. It is an expansion that holds within itself all that is good and beautiful and wondrous. This experience is called *samadhi*.

These three states are fused together. Where *dharana* ends, *dhyana* begins. Where *dhyana* (meditation) ends, *samadhi* begins. It is a natural progression. Due to a lack of perseverance few reach *samadhi*. And though still fewer reach the higher stages of *samadhi*, the persistence in curbing distractions produces a profound effect on the personality. When successful achievement of *samadhi* does come, it becomes miraculous.

A Firm Resolve and a Growing Faith

All who set their hands to the plough of inner spiritual life achieve a growth of faith. Perhaps this faith was in the beginning simply a seed of mere interest in self-improvement.

“True faith is not like a picture frame, a permanently limited area of acceptance. It is like a plant that keeps on throwing forth shoots and growing. All we require, at the beginning, is a seed. And the seed need be nothing more than a feeling of interest in spiritual life. Perhaps we read a passage in a book that moves us. Perhaps we meet someone who seems to have reached some degree of wisdom and tranquility through the practice of meditation and spiritual disciplines. We become interested and intrigued.”⁶⁷

It is natural to assume that the deep levels of *yogic* absorption require a development of mental strength that is beyond our capacity. For many, the enormity of the difficulties in normal life seems to demand all of the energy they possess. They conclude that to delve into the realms of *samadhi* requires superhuman strength, and therefore any attempt would be futile and a waste of precious time. Nevertheless, we innately possess an inner impulse that tells us that if we seek even the slightest inner growth with faith and devotion, some degree of success will come. After all, those whom we admire who possess spiritual stature are human and so are we. Maybe even the simplest practice of meditation would be the solution to our problems. We cannot be certain, but we do have faith and energy and perhaps just enough devotion that will set us on a path to success.

⁶⁷ *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Swami Prabhavananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, p. 27.

Patanjali affirms this assumption as true in his *Yoga Sutras*:

“The concentration of the true spiritual aspirant is attained through faith, energy, recollectedness, absorption and illumination.” ⁶⁸

Earlier Patanjali stated that success in *yoga* comes gradually through a step-by-step progression from the beginning stages towards the final highest attainment. His wisdom directs us to possess faith, energy and devotion as the foundation upon which the illumination of Life is achieved:

“Success in *yoga* comes quickly to those who are intensely energetic.”

“Concentration may also be attained through surrender to *Ishwara* (God within *Prakriti*, manifested).”

“In Him (God) knowledge is infinite; in others it is only a germ.”

“The word which expresses Him is *Om*.”

“This word must be repeated with meditation upon its meaning.”

“Hence comes knowledge of the *Atman* and destruction of the obstacles to that knowledge.” ⁶⁹

What Patanjali describes, is in Truth confirmed by Sri Ramana Maharshi in His declaration of *Arunachala* as the living embodiment of Divinity. Thus with the deepest devotion Bhagavan declared:

“Significance of *Om*, unrivalled, unsurpassed! Who can comprehend Thee, O *Arunachala*?” ⁷⁰

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 26, sutra 20.

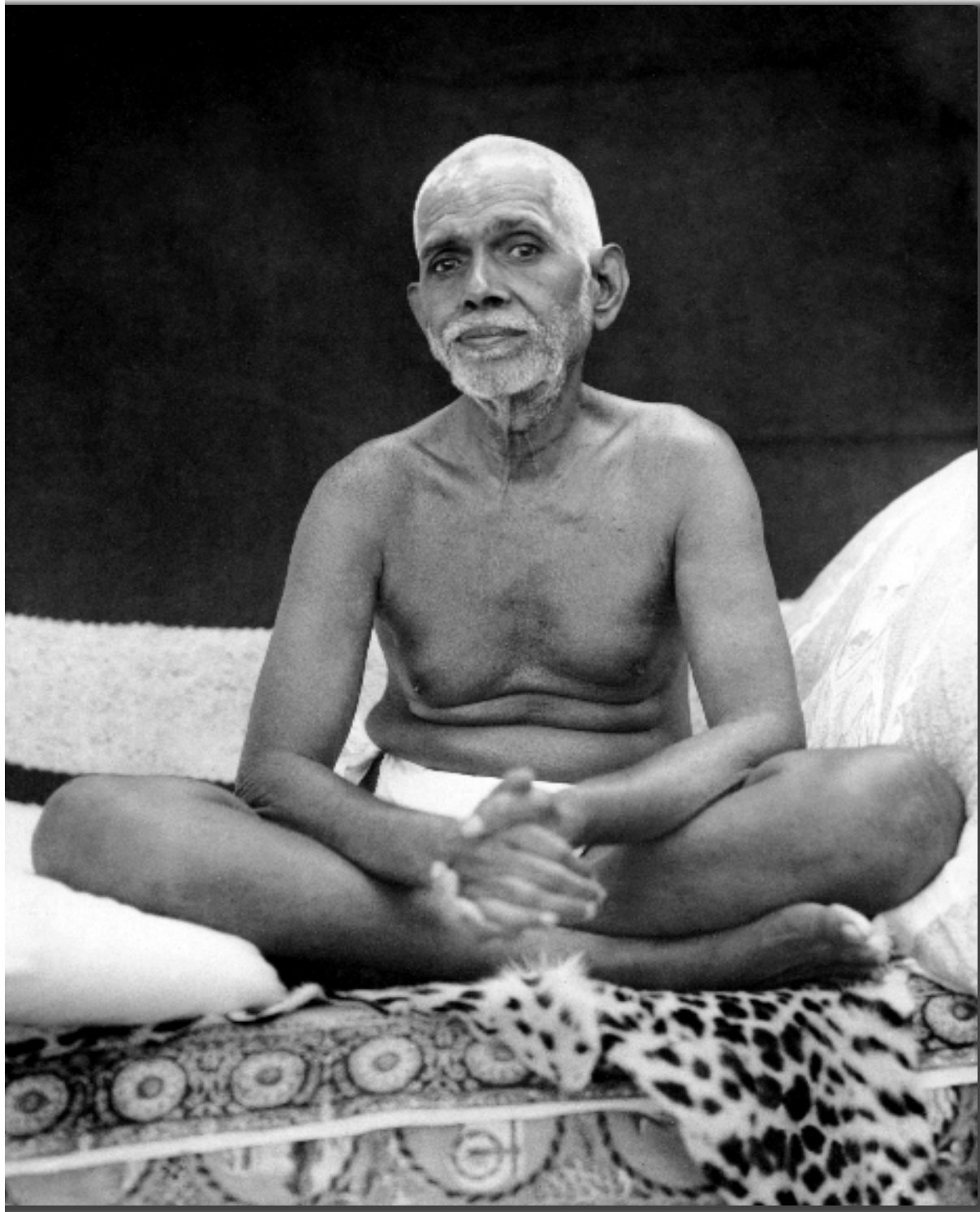
⁶⁹ *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Swami Prabhavananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Section I selected sutras between # 21-29.

⁷⁰ *Marital Garland of Letters (Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai)*, Sri Ramanashramam, verse 13.

“You are beyond the knowledge of all *tattvas*, all philosophies. You are only this, the Truth at once transcendent and immanent, you are my Arunachala.” ⁷¹



⁷¹ *Ibid*, verse 42.



“In Him Knowledge is Infinite”

EIGHT

Blessed Be the Name of the Lord

Question: “Experience shows me that the practice of *mantra japa* is a central aspect of *sadhana*, at one time or another, for the majority of those following *Sanatana Dharma*. Further understanding of Bhagavan affirms that his teaching accentuated the foundations of this eternal religion. However, I have been lead to believe that the teachings of Bhagavan regarding *japa* state that this practice was prescribed only for those of weak (lacking maturity) minds. Is this assumption true?”

A common misunderstanding regarding the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi is the belief that he never advised his disciples to take up a practice that involved *mantra japa* (continuous repetition of one of many sound formulas representing a Name of God). The truth is that such advice was given, though rarely, and even given to some of those in the innermost circle. In the memoirs of one of Bhagavan’s close disciples such an occurrence is recorded:

“Though Bhagavan rarely gave out *mantras*, when he did, he generally recommended ‘Siva, Siva’. Muruganar himself was given this *mantra* by Bhagavan, as were several other devotees including Annamalai Swami, the brother of Rangan (who was one of Bhagavan’s childhood friends), and an unknown harijan.” ⁷²

Muruganar continues, making special note of Bhagavan’s teachings regarding the use of *mantras*:

“Through grace, Padam (Muruganar’s epithet for Bhagavan) ensures that there is never any danger to those who remain in their heart, meditating ‘Sivaya Nama’.”

“The *mantra* ‘Sivaya Nama’ on which you meditate will reveal itself within your heart to be your father and mother.”

⁷² *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 224 - 225.

(In this verse the father implies Siva, who is Sat [being], while the mother denotes Sakti, who is Chit [consciousness].)

“The mind that does *japa*, ‘Siva, Siva,’ will later automatically lose itself in *ajapa* (*samadhi*).” ⁷³

The Joy of Perseverance

“When it is said that this practice of meditation (with or without the use of *japa*) and *samadhi* is persistent, it is of two types, disciplinary and pervasive. Disciplinary means that you have chosen a time in the morning or evening to do the practice. The morning hours are considered best because you are rested from sleep, and the world around you is also at rest. In meditation we are leading ourselves to a state of quietude by conscious movement. In sleep we are being led by the unconscious. Sleep can give a feeling of refreshment, but it cannot give our thought vitality. Philosophically, the stages toward enlightenment are the progressive movement toward the stage where the ego is not dominating you. The final enlightenment is the burning down of the ego entirely.

“The pervasive type of practice is the most important. The revelations of *yoga* that are achieved while practicing privately in the recesses of your heart must be applied in your daily life. The strength, beauty and rapture of focused attention that one experiences in meditation becomes even more wondrous when applied to everything one does.

“A sense of joy will pervade the life of one who applies this *yogic* concentration in the actions of everyday life. Others will not only perceive this joy, it will uplift them. This uplifting of humanity is the prime characteristic of one whose life is one of service to God. Maintaining this mental focus within during outward activities also produces a stream of unimaginable peace. This profound peace is

⁷³ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 224 - 225.

undreamt of for it is the peace wherein the ego is transcended, even though one remains active in daily life.

“How will you know it? Even when you are insulted, you will not feel at a loss, because you are not dominated by the ego personality. You are never shaken when put into difficult circumstances. You have experienced *dhyana* and *samadhi* at a deeper level of your personality. The goal is that by practicing meditative absorption in a disciplinary way you direct that experience to permeate your life.” ⁷⁴

According to Patanjali, the lowest stages of *samadhi* rest upon the support of the control of the senses. One must remember that the definition of *samadhi* comes from the root ‘*dha*’ which is prefixed by ‘*sam*’ and ‘*a*’. The meaning is to gather together and keep in one place, in a very skillful, controlled and thorough way. This deep level of absorption suggests that a transformation is occurring in which there is unfolding within the mind complete unification. This transformation is progressive, as our concentration and ‘experience of unity’ becomes prolonged and more natural. Internally, we are accomplishing the “purification through softening and melting within” which Bhagavan maintains as essential. It is the ego that is melting, and due to its strength, its powers wane slowly. Our perseverance in the *sadhana* of steady meditation will ensure the final attainment.

This final achievement is the burning down of the externalized mind that has become impure (egotistic) through lifetimes of identification with a world founded upon and maintained by multiplicity.

When concentration is directed, focused and absorbed in one place, and remains there for a prolonged period of time, the simplest state of *samadhi* is said to occur. Although this is of the lowest type of *samadhi*, it is a significant achievement. At this stage the disturbances within the physical body, though active, are being overcome even though body-consciousness has not been transcended. It is like the state of molecules of water that are passing between the stages of liquid into gaseous form. The freedom of the gaseous stage is

⁷⁴ This section includes quotes and paraphrases from a talk by Swami Jyotirmayananda, Yoga Research Foundation, Miami Florida, USA, www.yrf.org

being experienced while still within the presence of the liquid state. The key is that the mental focus is directed to the gaseous presence, and only that.

“The distinctive feature of *samadhi* is that it is a movement of higher consciousness centered in one or another mental state beginning with the lower mental realm, where there are active disturbances present, from both within and without, and ending with the *Atma* (essence of Being or soul). This is a permanent state of purity free from all disturbance or thought. In every case the mind is cut off from the physical world and thus consciousness is free from the burden and interference of the physical brain. In the lower stages of *samadhi* the mind, though cut off from the world, is completely concentrated and still under the control of the will.”⁷⁵

The Limitations of Words

Some say that Bhagavan never spoke about any of the lower stages of *samadhi* which Patanjali states as those preliminary to the seedless (without any possibility of disturbance) *nirvikalpa* state. Though this belief is fundamentally untrue, there are grounds that would *seem* to give this statement validity.

Throughout the more than 50 years of Bhagavan’s active guidance of the hearts and souls of the thousands who came before him, he never postured himself as a philosopher. He never philosophized or preached to the masses. His very life demonstrated his attainment. His silent abidance in Truth and Purity was his most eloquent doctrine. When devotees came to Bhagavan with doubts and questions, he revealed the highest Truth regarding the subject placed before him. A close study of the core teachings that were recorded both during and after his physical lifetime would reveal that he directed his questioners towards the method of attainment that suited their temperaments and natures.

The majority of the recorded teachings of Bhagavan regarding *samadhi* that have come into print were invoked by questions from learned pundits and devotees of attainment. It is mainly due to this fact that the majority of discussions regarding *samadhi* centered on the highest states of meditative absorption. Regardless of this fact, Bhagavan never veered away from the

⁷⁵ *The Science of Yoga*, I. K. Taimni, The Theosophical Publishing House 1961.

traditional scriptural teachings of the *Rishis* and Sages of India's eternal religion. Rather, his teaching accentuated them! Quite simply, the misunderstanding mentioned has come into being from the terminology Bhagavan used.

Patanjali refers to *samadhi* with differentiation (disturbances) between the subject, object and knowledge as the lower stages that lead up to the very highest states of *savikalpa*, *nirvikalpa* and finally *sahaja samadhi*. Bhagavan spoke in the same vein, though using a different method of description. When Patanjali refers to meditative absorption with disturbances as the lower *samadhi*, Bhagavan's terminology differed only by not using the word 'lower' but rather stated that the *samadhi* with disturbances was the *savikalpa* state. This is merely a matter of semantic preference, and not a differentiation of definition. A clear example of this is seen as Mr. Cohen is questioning Bhagavan:

Mr. C.: "May I have a clear idea, Bhagavan, of the difference between *Savikalpa* and *Nirvikalpa*?"

Bhagavan: "Holding on to the Supreme State is *samadhi*. When it is with effort due to mental disturbances, it is *Savikalpa*, when the disturbances are absent, it is *Nirvikalpa*. Remaining permanently in the primal state is *Sahaja*. Like *Nirvikalpa*, there is an internal as well as an external *Savikalpa*, depending on whether the disturbing thoughts are from the outside or from inside."⁷⁶

The aspirant after spiritual truth should always adhere to the essential tenet of the practice, which is to never only seek a description of what any attainment is, rather always strive for the experience of what the attainment does.

The significant effects of this process of mental absorption that actually produce the needed transformation occur in the subtle realms of the unconscious mind. The impressions created from concentrated absorption (*samadhi*) work to cleanse the subtle impurities and *vasanas* (latent habitual tendencies from the one's early life, or past lives) of these realms that lay beyond our normal perception

⁷⁶ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 91.

“The achievement of successful eradication of subtle impurities rests on the foundation of the three-fold process of concentration, meditation and absorption (samadhi).”

Thus, Patanjali states:

“When these three - concentration, meditation and absorption-are brought to bear upon one subject, they are called *samyama*.”

Samyama is simply a convenient technical term that describes the three-fold process by which the true nature of an object is known.”

“Through the mastery of *samyama* comes the light of knowledge.”

“It must be applied stage by stage, for the practice of *samyama* leads to the lower *samadhi*.”

“When, in meditation, the true nature of the object shines forth, not disturbed by the mind of the perceiver, that is absorption (*samadhi*).”

“Patanjali warns us not to go too fast. It is no use attempting meditation before we have mastered concentration. It is no use trying to concentrate upon subtle objects until we are able to concentrate upon gross ones. Any attempt to take short cuts to knowledge of this kind is exceedingly dangerous. For experience through these short cuts, so obtained, can bring no lasting spiritual benefits. On the contrary, they are generally followed by a relapse into complete agnosticism and despair.”

“These kinds of *samadhi* are said to be ‘with seed’.”

“That is, seeds of desires and attachment may still remain within the mind, even though perfect concentration has been achieved. These seeds of desire are dangerous, for they will lead one towards attachment and impurity.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Patanjali Yoga Sutras*, Swami Prabhavananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Section III sutras 3-6, (quotes include his commentary in *italics*.)

At all times we must remain vigilantly aware that the nature of seeds is to sprout. The seeds of desire are of the most resilient type, for they can remain viable even in ground (the mind) laid fallow through meditation that successfully developed aversion to the lower life of the senses. They can come to life, even after years of dormancy, from the watering of our subconscious tendencies that remain intact. Though consciously we may feel real dispassion (*vairagya*) for desires that degrade our minds, subconsciously we can be driven to seek satisfaction of harmful desires even against our conscious will. Shakespeare spoke in a famous sonnet of this human tendency to oscillate between worldly attraction and aversion which propels us through lifetimes of “spiritual madness”:

“Enjoy’d no sooner but despised straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait
On purpose laid to make the taker mad...”

The strength of the foundation of *samyama* comes from our *abhyasa* (repeated practice), *vairagya* (non-attachment and dispassion) and *vichara* (reflective enquiry), which were paramount during our ascent towards these lower states of *samadhi*. If our concentration and meditation were not accompanied by *vairagya*, our ignorance would remain and prevent us from achieving the goal of higher *samadhi*.

The Stability of Sobriety

Though our persistent practice may have brought us to the threshold of liberation, the aspirant must never feel he has risen to such heights that it is unlikely he can fall back into bondage. The high state of seedless *samadhi* (*nirvikalpa*) demands a further and even more intense spiritual effort.

“Admittedly, it is impossible to have a concrete idea of these higher planes without their description being in the most general and vague manner. It must be understood that at no time can one attempt to describe the experiences of these stages of *samadhi*. An attempt is merely made to give a very simple ‘road map’ showing only that these realms exist. If one wants to know what these higher planes are like, one must go there and see it for oneself. In reality concerning spiritual progress and purification, what these stages are like is not at all the issue. The achievement involves what these experiences produce. They

effectively create impressions within the unconscious levels of the mind that first diminish and then dissolve the *vasanas* that obstruct our ascent to higher life. Simply speaking, we are changing our fate by changing habits of both our external as well as our internal life. By decreasing and then hopefully dismantling the habits that disperse our minds, we lessen the burden of the *samskaras* (latent tendencies from the past) that produce them. As these burdens of 'karma' are reduced we begin to experience the *ananda* (joy) of freedom from the slavery of the ego.

The greater is skill of effort, the greater the degree of the freedom (peace). It must be thoroughly understood that if the ordinary desires of the mind have not been eliminated by sublimation, but only curbed or suppressed, it is impossible to practice *samadhi*.”⁷⁸

A famous Buddhist monk, Ajahn Chah, of the Thai Forest Tradition once said:

“If you let go a little, you get a little peace. If you let go a lot, you get a lot of peace. If you let go completely, you get complete peace (*samadhi*).”

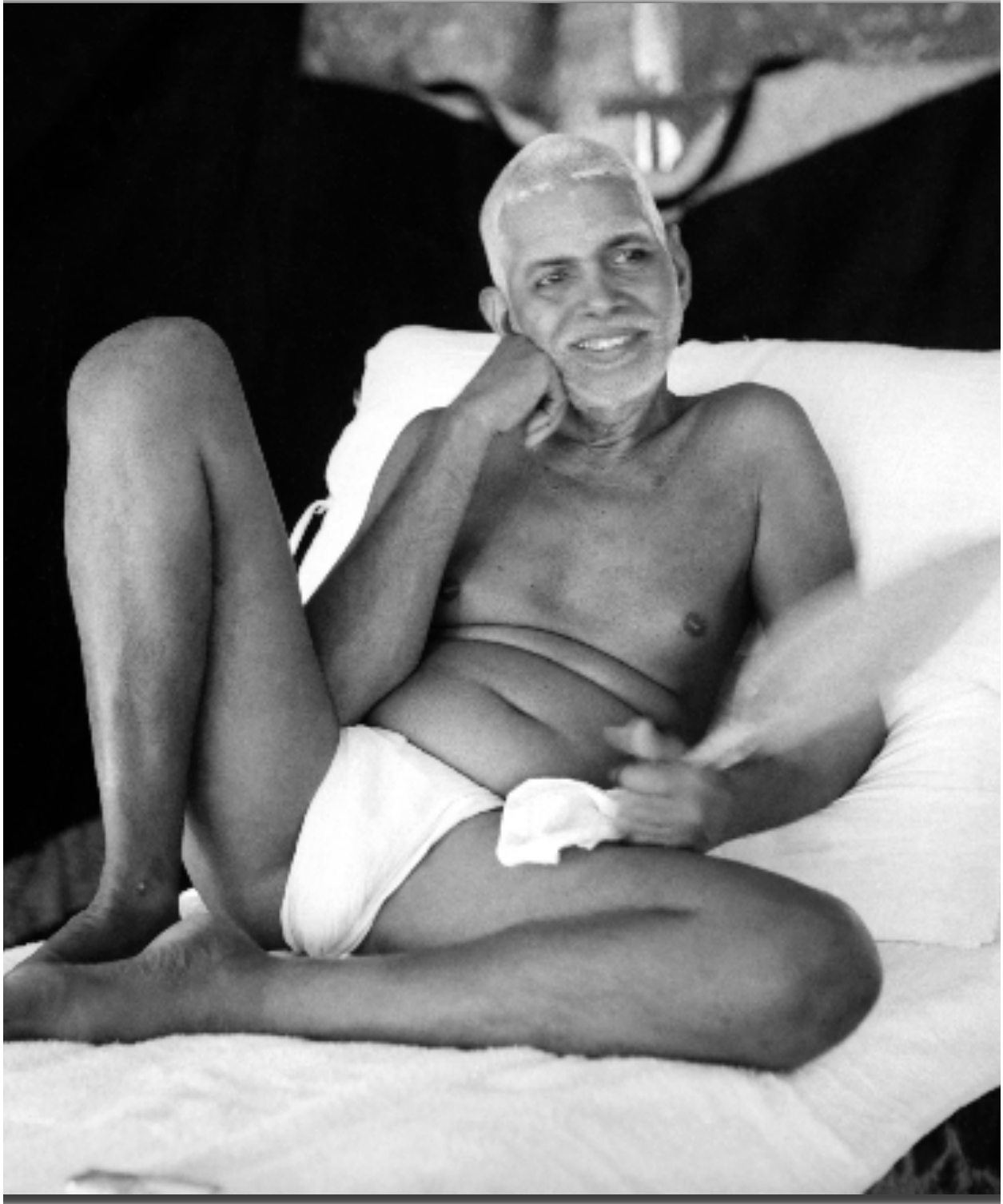
⁷⁸ *The Science of Yoga*, I.K.Taimni, The Theosophical Publishing House 1961.



D.: “Are we to keep anything against a rainy day; or to live a precarious life for spiritual attainments?”

Maharshi: “God looks after everything.” ⁷⁹

⁷⁹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 377, p 358.



**“Love and devotion to Him are a bridge
across the abyss to Salvation.”**

NINE

Prayerfully Seek: “Whence am I”

Question: What exactly is the way to conquer the desires that obscure my vision of the Truth and the Light?

The way to Realization is a step-by-step methodical and gradual progression which begins long before the *samadhi*, and ends far beyond the levels of *samadhi* normally reached by most spiritual aspirants. In the beginning we work to develop the skill called *pratyahara*, which is the reining in of the movement of the senses and turning it inward. This is greatly aided by prayer. In fact, experience shows that without prayer to God for assistance, we are fooling ourselves into thinking that we are successful when an honest account would reveal, as the Lord said to Arjuna, that our turbulent senses truly:

“Forcibly carry away the mind of even a wise man who is striving to control them.” ⁸⁰

So we watch and pray, as Jesus exhorted us to do. As we watch with constant effort our attainment brings us to the next step, a focused mind. By repeated effort this inward focus deepens and remains steady for a prolonged period of time. The wind of uncontrolled thought is still blowing, but we have found a shelter from its brutal treatment. This shelter is known as the steadiness of concentration. Sri Krishna refers to this when He says:

“The wise one is of steady mind, an enlightened person is one whose mind is established, unmoving and always steady. His mind never wavers from either sorrow or joy; he is free from attachment, fear and anger.” ⁸¹

In Chapter 2 of the *Gita*, the verses from 54th onwards are called the qualities of *sthita prajna*, steady unwavering Enlightenment. This is also exactly what Bhagavan meant when he would refer to God in Tamil as “*kadavul*”, meaning the transcendental Divine Self abiding within in Stillness

⁸⁰ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2, verse 60.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, verse 56.

and Silence. Words of spiritual content in the *Tamil* Language, much like *Sanskrit*, convey definitions that describe deep meanings as well as secrets to attainment. In this instance, '*kada*' means to transcend, the root '*ul*' means within; the implication is *that which is transcendental is also immanent*.

Going Forward

For us, working towards purity of mind, we are talking of the experience of being at the very door of the heart. But where is the key? In fact, where is the keyhole? The key turns out to be the next stage, which needs further skillful development. Yes, we must slog on! The key has been gifted to us. Remember that with each and every meditation we are praying for the Lord's embrace, for the Divine to "take my hand, and lead me on". The attainment of purity comes from the mutual interaction of our effort and God's grace. Without the hand of the Lord upon us, our effort will yield little. Bhagavan echoed this profound Truth in His "*Marital Garland of Letters*" by declaring:

"Unless Thou extendest Thy hand of grace in mercy and embrace me, I am lost, O Arunachala." ⁸²

"Unless Thou dost embrace me, I shall melt away in tears of anguish, O Arunachala!" ⁸³

"Sri Bhagavan spoke and wrote most about the *vichara* or Self-enquiry, and therefore the opinion arose that He prescribed only *jnana-marga*, the Path of Knowledge, which most people find too sheer in this age. But in fact He was universal and provided guidance for every temperament, by the path of Devotion no less than of Knowledge. Love and devotion to Him are a bridge across the abyss to salvation. He had many devotees for whom he prescribed no other path." ⁸⁴

Though it is true that the path of *bhakti* (devotion) does not suit the temperament of all spiritual aspirants, it is undeniable that thinking of God, thinking of the "feet of the Lord", does attract His grace. Whether devotion is

⁸² *Marital Garland of Letters (Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai)*. Sri Ramanashramam, verse 51.

⁸³ *Ibid*, verse 34.

⁸⁴ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2002, p. 174.

achieved through *bhakti* or *jnana*, when the grace of God dawns upon us, our devotion deepens into love of Him. The love of God is the key that opens for us all knowledge, peace and purity.

This key is the keen and lively awareness and our patient endurance, while waiting on the Lord, which we have developed by persistently weathering out the storms of thought that mercilessly attempted to turn our attention outwards.

Beyond Samadhi

So we can see that to be in the lower states of *samadhi* is really not a big deal when compared to the goal. Paradoxically however, to be fully aware and alert within those states is a very big deal. For this alertness is in reality true *manana*, watching with reflection.

By watching this condition with reflection, we begin to awaken to its source with the posing of the question “Who am I?”. Or as Bhagavan said, it is more correctly a query of “Whence am I?”. (*See quote from footnote #41*)

Bhagavan often directed many before him to reflect on “Whence am I?”. Two clear examples of this are as follows:

“A young man, Mr. Knowles, came for *darshan*. He had read Paul Brunton’s two books. He asked: “The Buddhists say that ‘I’ is unreal, whereas Paul Brunton in the *Secret Path* tells us to get over the ‘I-thought’ and reach the state of ‘I’. Which is true?”

Maharshi: “There are supposed to be two ‘I’s; the one is lower and unreal, of which all are aware; and the other, the higher and the real, which is to be realized... the idea of diversity has arisen along with the body-consciousness; this body-consciousness arose at some particular moment; it has origin and end. What originates must be something. What is that something? It is the ‘I’-consciousness. Who am I? Whence am I? On finding the source, you realize the state of Absolute Consciousness.” ⁸⁵

⁸⁵ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 53.

On another occasion, Bhagavan was more succinct and thus, as was his way, more direct:

Devotee: "I want to get rid of pain. To be rid of it is said to be liberation."

Maharshi: "That is what all religions teach."

D.: "But what is the method?"

M.: "To retrace your way back."

D.: "Whence have I come?"

M.: "That is just what you should know." ⁸⁶

Thus our reflection is transformed into a state of awareness. Now our job is to make this state steady and continuous. Steadily following the thread inward toward whence we came. This entire process is what the Saints, and Bhagavan, rightly call purification of the mind by softening and melting away of the obstacles that have for lifetimes barred our way to the door of the heart. It is also important to understand, as has been understood by experience and seen in the *upadesha* (spiritual instruction) of these very same Saints and Sages, that this process can be accelerated and the sublimation of the mind of man can be quickened by the use of *japa* (constant repetition) usually of the Name of the Lord or *OM* (the single-syllable *Pranava mantra*).

A Firm and Glorious Support

The keyhole to life Divine is what we rely on as a support to maintain physical life - our own breath. For when the storms of thought worlds crash in upon us, we keep within the shelter of the breath, constantly pulling the outward tendency of movement back, ever back to the movement of the breath. The Buddha, Sri Krishna, Sri Ramana Maharshi and the scriptures of all major religions declare that by pulling the externalized mind always back to the breath we will be taken inward towards its source, all the way to Nirvana.

⁸⁶*Ibid*, Talk 479, p. 473

So now one can see that the early stages called *samadhi*, though exalted in their own right, have become a platform on which so much more attentive practice needs to be accomplished. Yes, the enormity of all this seems to take one's breath away. But that is why we have been praying, and our prayers have been answered, for our breath is always very much with us - all the way home.

The Buddha said that the key to all of this is *para mukha*, which literally means 'before the face'. Simply speaking, right under our noses, the dwelling place of our physical breath.

It is the simplicity of this that mystifies us. God has made the way straight. Though we have created lifetimes of detours through our *pramada* (indifference, inattention, and willful procrastination), our way may at times seem hopeless, but it is never helpless. Prayer will straighten our way back to God. For the Lord is "Glorious in His Saints", and if we seek their aid through prayer, they will help us find in this life the key to heaven.

Question: Is it correct to say that we are not trying to annihilate the mind, but rather be non-cooperative with its outward moving tendency?

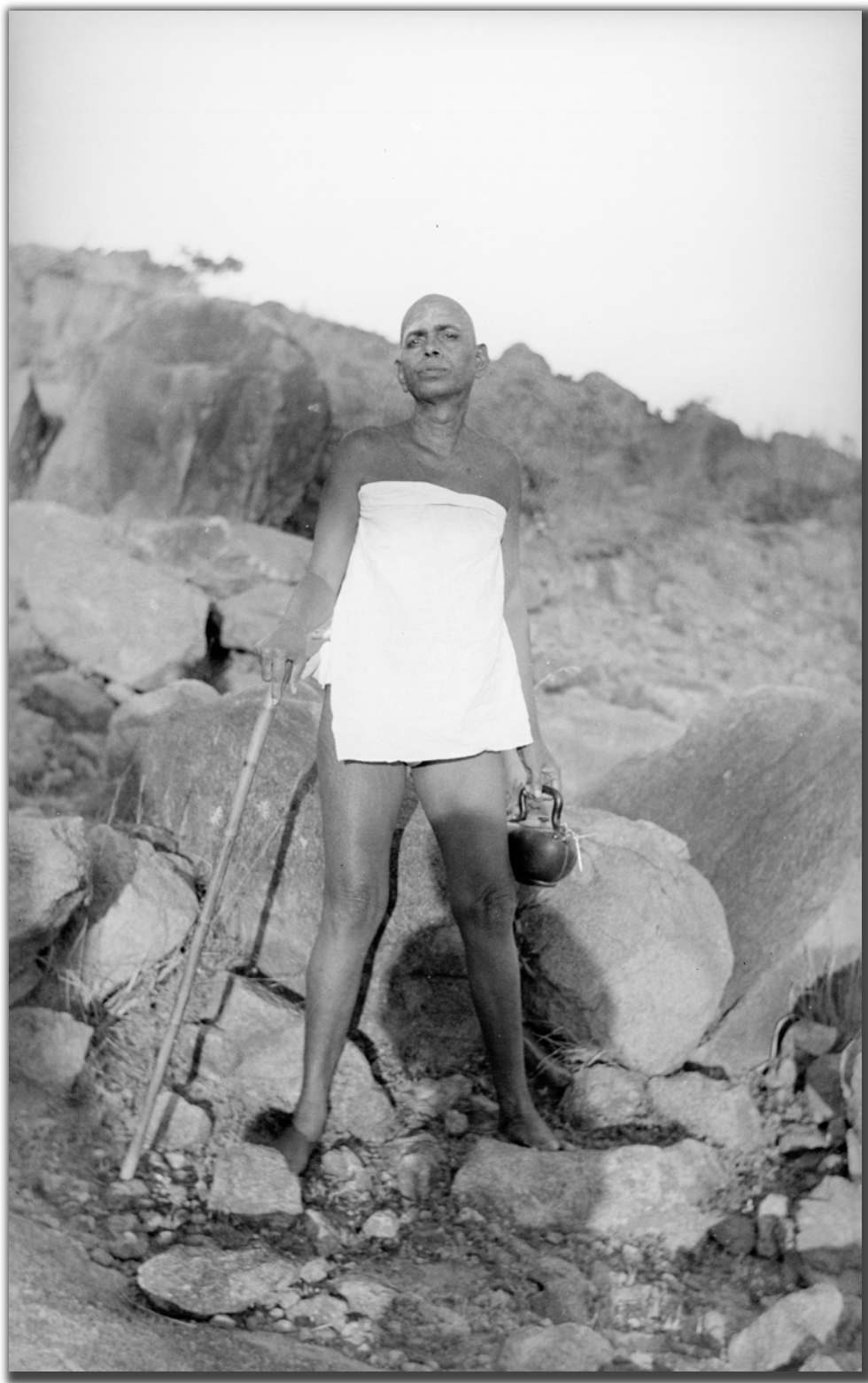
Yes, this is exactly correct. We firmly, though very respectfully, do not tag along with the mind's endless adventures into the innumerable worlds of thought. If the mind demands an excuse for our *satyagraha* (peaceful non-cooperation with untruth), we simply respond: "No, Sir or No, Madam". If the mind gets belligerent, we should then respond with: "No thank you; not now!" We will conquer the mind by ignoring thoughts that embellish the past, and those of imagination regarding the future. Victory over the mind is achieved as we strive to remain focused within the present moment.

At all times we must remember that we are engaged in the art of *vichara* (reflection on the source of the 'I' thought which is the goal). The Maharshi has repeatedly said that the 'I' thought and the breath arise from the same source. Our *yoga* is to *practice* what He taught. This is done by focusing our attention on the movement of the breath that is occurring only in the present moment. This is never accomplished by attempting to apply a stranglehold on the mind, for this form of engagement only strengthens the mind's excited desire to travel outwards.

A true story that demonstrates this truth concerns the liberator of modern India. A devotee of Mahatma Gandhi once inquired of the Mahatma how *manonasa* (destruction of the mind) is achieved. Though Gandhiji knew well the correct path to this achievement, he instructed the disciple to seek the answer from a great Saint living in the foothills of the Himalayas. The implication was that usually when a disciple is living day in and day out with his Master, he becomes complacent and therefore might not take an utterance of profound Truth to heart.

The disciple traveled the long and hard road northwards with a heart full of anticipation for a revelation that would change his life. Upon reaching his destination, he fell at the feet of the Saint and introduced himself as a devotee of the great Mahatma Gandhi.

The Saint, following the mystic tradition of the Himalayan Masters flatly said: "Tell me! What do you want?" The now weak-kneed devotee arose and said: "How is the mind to be destroyed?" The Saint, much aghast, proclaimed: "O my God, you come from Gandhiji with 'destruction' upon your lips! Your Master's very life proclaims the answer. *Satyagraha*, non-cooperation with the mind, is the way! Remaining still, and therefore not cooperating with the mind's egotistic intentions to move into the external world achieves your victory over distractions. Your efforts to conquer the mind should be two-fold. When the mind says, 'Come out with me and play', you first ignore the invitation, and then turn your awareness inwards upon the breath and thus stay at home with God. Your inevitable victory proceeds gradually, one success at a time."



“He Who Conquered and Never Compromised”

TEN

Conquering the Ego's Fort

Question: This practice appears to be right at the heart of the issue. Therefore, can you be more specific, especially regarding "How to and how long" one should continue in this spiritual *satyagraha*?

Yes, of course, and the heart of the issue demands clarification from He who is in full possession of the Heart!

"He who conquered and never compromised." ⁸⁷

Therefore, Bhagavan explains to all:

Devotee: "I do not yet understand how it is to be done."

Maharshi: "You are practising breath-control. Mechanical breath-control will not lead one to the goal. It is only an aid. While doing it mechanically take care to be alert in mind and remember the 'I' thought and seek its source. Then you will find that where breath sinks, the 'I-thought' arises. They sink and rise together. The 'I-thought' also will sink along with breath. Simultaneously, another luminous and infinite 'I-I' will become manifest, which will be continuous and unbroken. That is the goal. It goes by different names - God, Self, *Kundalini Sakti*, Consciousness, *Yoga*, *Bhakti*, *Jnana*, etc." ⁸⁸

Devotee: "How long is the practice to continue?"

Maharshi: "Till success is achieved and until *yoga*-liberation becomes permanent. Success begets success. If one distraction is conquered the next is conquered and so on, until all are finally

⁸⁷ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2002, p. 143, paragraph 3.

⁸⁸ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 195, p. 166.

conquered. The process is like reducing an enemy's fort by slaying its manpower - one by one, as each issues out." ⁸⁹

Being Still

It is our level of concentration that conditions, or rather reconditions, the mind so that it may stay focused within and eventually slow down. When our concentration is skillful and the mind becomes still it enters the *samadhi* state. When we sustain this state by remaining very alert and in full possession of a reflective observance we know that the entire mind-stuff has been sublimated into the *bhava* (experience) of the breath, and the sound of the *Nama* (God's Name) alone. We have full awareness of the truth that, "In the beginning God breathed upon the waters" ⁹⁰ (waters mean the mind), and for us what needs to be known is, "Be still and Know that I am God". ⁹¹And then, of course, we must do it over and over and over again. Bhagavan spoke clearly on this point when once asked by a devotee:

"What is *Moksha* (liberation)?"

Bhagavan: "*Moksha* is to know that you were not born. 'Be still and know that I am God.' To be still is not to think. Know, and not think, is the word." ⁹²

When the mind distracts us away from inward stillness, it does so by luring us through imagination into the future or making us emotional and reactive to things from the past. Its effort is concerned solely with pulling us out of the present moment.

Constant abidance in the present moment is the death knell for the ego. Therefore our sole concern as meditators is to develop and deepen the skill of abidance in the present moment, permitting the movement of the breath to be the doorway to the source of our existence, to life Divine. If one's practice is to use the *Nama Japa* as a further aid towards the goal, then this *japa* is

⁸⁹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 28, p. 29.

⁹⁰ *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 1, 2.

⁹¹ *The Holy Bible*, Psalms 46, 10.

⁹² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 130, p. 119

synchronized with the breath naturally and without strain. The repetition of the *japa* is always set to the rhythmic movement of the breath. One should never try to squeeze or expand the breath into the metric length of the *japa*.

God's Grace, His Gift

Specifically, we have literally invoked the Presence of God through the remembrance of His Name. This is not at all an empty state of mind; we are not stone-like in a state of *laya*. We have become utterly still within and in our stillness we become aware of the movement of God from within our heart. We perceive that this movement is with form and has a beautiful personality. In reality, God is perfectly human in the sense of possessing a Pure Mind. We are made in this likeness of God, though habitually forgetful of it. His Grace is that this Purity is offered to us as an inheritance. If only we would not attempt to disown Him by our actions.

It is so touching how very human God really is. It is touching in the sense that our hearts are consumed with attraction towards His *ananda* (pure happiness, joyful unselfish love). His presence is the door; the key is our reflection upon this physical (very palpable) perception of that Divine presence. Our focus remains steady while intent on the breath.

Our revelation is that we can and should perceive, not 'Who' we are *at first*, but 'Who He is'. This act of reflection within, which is also an act of surrender, reveals that He is our very own. Thus our Awakening is the realization that from "Whence we came" is from God, and in the end, our *sadhana* will be the most natural union by going back the Way we came.

Question: Is it the same experience for all?

No, because God manifests in the precise way that is attractive to each individual. There is really no similarity or duplication of the experience of God's Presence. Even amongst people who are developed *bhaktas* (practicing mainly devotional aspects of *yoga*), certain aspects of God will be attractive to one and another will not become lured within. God knows exactly what will catch us. He puts out the very best bait. He is the fisher of men. He knows that certain of the fish He is out to catch like a particular sound, and a certain form. He becomes that which we find most adorable.

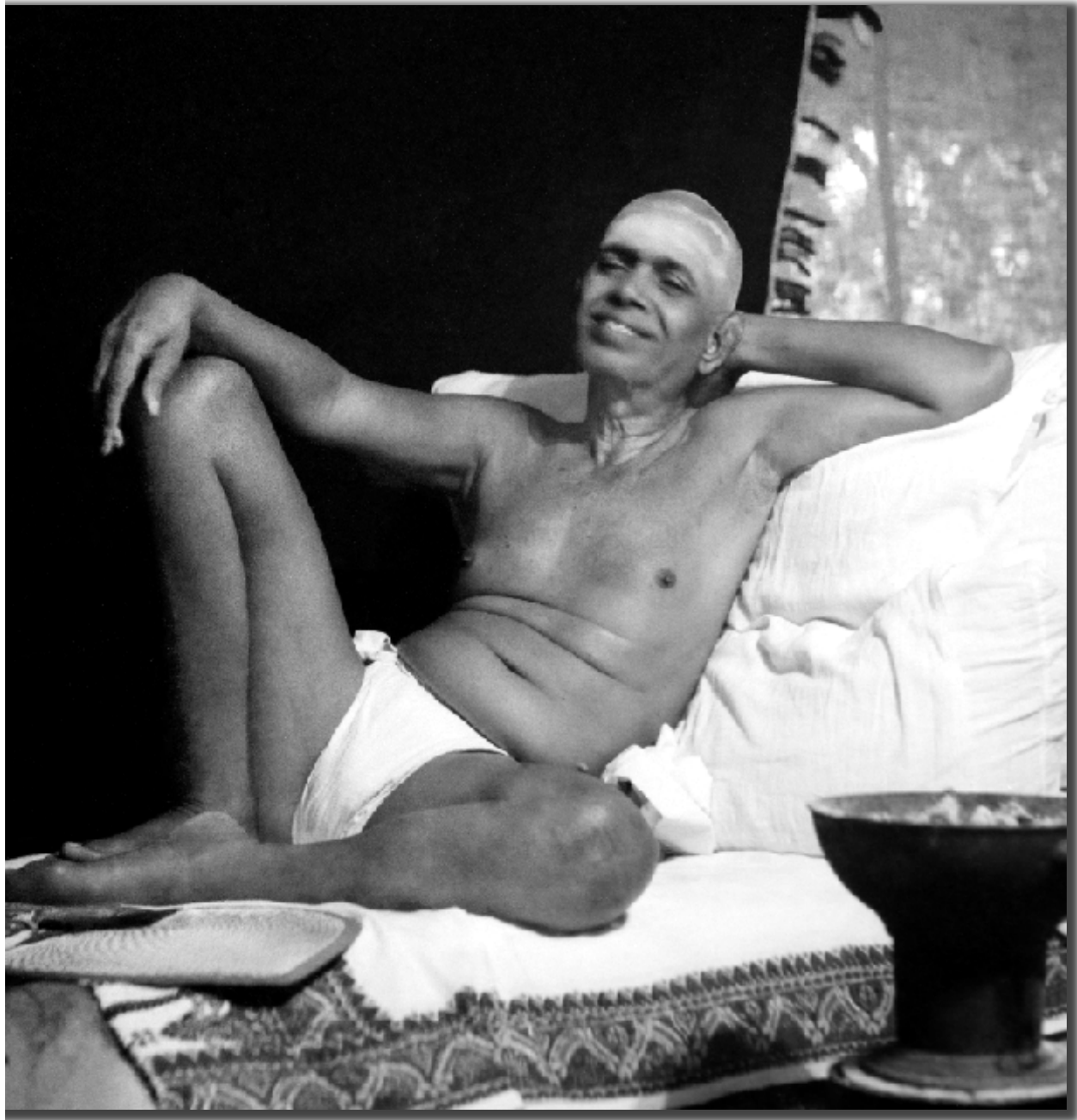
The Beauty of Maya

Another aspect of this secret of God and *maya* (cosmic illusion) is that we are caught up by the form of God that is most physically adorable and joyful. Again, this is the most natural thing because we are human, with a human heart. The truth is that the human heart, in its *pure* state, is the bait that God finds irresistible. He loves us purely and without motive, and far more than we love Him! Our *sadhana* and prayers, our remembrance of Him, are a confession of this. With sincerity and longing we ultimately pray that in spite of this He will awaken us and save us. The true *jnani* also comes to this realization. After all, Sri Ramakrishna said that since we came into this world to eat mangoes, we should definitely eat them and be happy at it. The implication here is that mangoes represent the sweetest and purest offering of creation. We came forth into such a creation to enjoy its fruits and be thankful to its creator. All of the trouble and pain that we experience in material life come from freely partaking of the fruits of life without gratefully acknowledging the Master of the orchard.

We relentlessly labor at it to the best of our ability, knowing from the testimony of the Saints and Sages that the goal is beyond our reach. We persevere with vigilance supported by the assurance often stated by Bhagavan:

“If we perform our sadhana to the best of our ability, the Lord will accomplish for us that which is beyond our capability.” ⁹³

⁹³ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, p. 186. (Reference is to *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*, vol. 8, verse 192).



“Fountain of Living Waters”

“The Bible and the *Gita* are the same...In the *Bhagavad Gita* it is said that it is the nature of the mind to wander. One must bring one’s thoughts to bear on God. By long practice the mind is controlled and made steady.” ⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 164 p. 144 & 91 p. 89.

ELEVEN

Water for Survival

Question: What exactly is beyond our capability? What does *bhakti* achieve that *jnana* does not accomplish?

Vinoba, a saintly devotee of Mahatma Gandhi, reveals in his book *Talks on the Gita* a most important point regarding this question that frequently arises during spiritual pursuit. He definitively proclaims that *bhakti* will lead one to the revelation of *jnana*. In the same breath he says that: “the branch of *jnana* is nourished by the waters of *bhakti*.”

One should then ask, “How can this be?” The answer is known by the understanding that when all of our *abhyasa* and *vichara* are distilled down to the fundamental motive, we are primarily in pursuit of a Pure Mind.

We are in pursuit of pure happiness, the foundation of which resides exclusively within the heart. This is diametrically opposed to the pursuit of pure pleasure which is the dominating factor motivating the ego. All the trouble in the world comes from the pursuit of happiness being misdirected towards the pursuit of pleasure.

It is human nature that even in the pursuit of something as pure and enduring as spiritual awakening we tend to use a scientific approach. We analyze the endeavor and equip ourselves with tools that suit the task. This approach is indeed fraught with great risk when the work at hand is nothing short of the ‘experiment of life’ and we somehow feel up to the task without divine guidance.

Which Way First

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Lord places before us the most appropriate tools for us to utilize in solving the riddle of life. They show us how to awaken and purify the mind and thus remove the veil of ignorance and delusion. Sri Krishna places before us two separate toolkits to choose from according to our temperament and nature. Unfortunately, we misread the instructions

from the very onset. We contemplate the path of *jnana* and conjure up a belief that being only conceptual it is achievable with relative ease. The path of *bhakti* is immediately shied away from for it is seen as nothing short of a lifetime of work, constantly trying to deepen the sincerity of one's devotion.

God, in His infinite wisdom, incarnates as an *Avatara* again and again to show us that the choice is not *which* tools to use but rather which tools to use *first*. Each path is designed to effect unique results that taken all together are essential for ultimate success. One path leads to the next, and they mutually nourish each other along the way.

To the dismay of some, the Lord refers to these two paths not as one of knowledge and the other of devotion but rather as two separate forms of devotion; *nirguna* (formless) *bhakti* and *saguna* (with form) *bhakti*. Chapter Twelve of the *Bhagavad Gita* is devoted solely to the meaning and method of employment of these *yogas*. The Lord reveals to us that the life-long effort of *saguna bhakti* is easier than the path of *nirguna*.

Devoted Knowledge

It is concerning this truth uttered by the Lord Krishna that Vinoba comments with beautiful clarity:

“Apart from the point of easiness, there is one more point. *Nirguna* worship is fraught with some risk. *Nirguna* is full of knowledge and wisdom (*jnana*) only. In *saguna* there is love and tenderness and warmth of feelings. A devotee is more secure therein. There was a time when I relied much on knowledge, but experience has taught me that knowledge alone is not enough. It does burn down gross impurities in the mind, but it is powerless to wash away the subtler impurities.

“Self-reliance, enquiry, *abhyasa*, and *vairagya* - all these means taken together are of little avail here. The subtle impurities can be washed away only by the waters of *bhakti*. Only *bhakti* has the efficacy to do it. You may call it dependence; but it is dependence on nobody else but the Lord. The mind cannot be completely cleansed without His help.

“Some may say: ‘You are giving a narrow meaning to the word “knowledge” (*jnana*). To hold that knowledge cannot cleanse the mind completely is to undervalue it.’ This objection is certainly valid. But my point is that it is hard to attain pure knowledge while living in a mortal body. The knowledge that we can have while we are encased in this body

is bound to be somewhat imperfect and incomplete; its power is bound to be limited. Pure knowledge will undoubtedly burn to ashes all the impurities of the mind; and along with it, it will burn down the mind too. But when associated with the weak flesh, its power proves to be inadequate. It cannot therefore wash away subtle impurities. One has to take recourse to *bhakti* for this purpose. A man is therefore more secure in *bhakti*. This is my personal assessment. *Saguna bhakti* is easier, as there is reliance on the Lord whereas in *nirguna bhakti* there is self-reliance. But, after all, what does 'self' in 'self-reliance' mean? It means reliance on the Lord Who dwells within us. You cannot find anyone purified solely through reason. Through Self-reliance, that is, through knowledge of the Self within, we shall have pure Knowledge. Thus, even in *nirguna bhakti*, reliance is on the Self

"*Saguna* needs help from *nirguna*. One must eventually learn to free oneself from attachment to and preoccupation from individuals and outer forms. *Saguna* is indeed the source of inspiration, but the ultimate culmination must be in *nirguna*, in commitment to principles. Self-knowledge must ultimately emerge from the womb of devotion. The plant of *bhakti* must blossom into the flower of Self-knowledge." ⁹⁵

Strength and Beauty of Experience

Question: How is one to know when the plant of *bhakti* has matured into the flowering stage of Self-knowledge?

It must be understood that we are trying to put an experience of the heart into words from the mind. Our efforts are in vain due to the limitations of the words, which present an insurmountable obstacle to right understanding. Rather than attempting to describe what the experience is, we will succeed in depicting what this experience does.

The dawning of knowledge of the Self is the most attractive thing in creation. It pulls you inward, creating one irresistible desire. You want that and only that! Inherently you know that if effort is slackened and you turn away from the pursuit of it through the slightest indifference, you will lose it.

⁹⁵ *Talks on the Gita*, Vinoba, Paramdham & Sarva Seva Prakashan 2005, p. 171-173.

This loss will happen quickly because we are in the subtle realms of the heart. This region of the heart, though most near and dear to our true Self, is paradoxically an area that we know the least about. If we have not developed through a skillful and nimble power of concentration the subtle strength and agility of awareness, the slightest distraction will cause us to lose the perception of that which we strove with such vigilance to acquire.

A Friend You Can Trust

The foundation of concentration that we laid in the early stages of our meditation will serve as our strength and support during our final ascent. This bedrock of firm and focused concentration is essential because the subtle regions of the heart are not limited within time and space. Within meditation the perception of this limitlessness is so profound and relieving that we want to simply float away and bask within it. Our skillful habits developed within meditation will catch this desire ‘in the act’ and pull us back to the safe shelter through awareness of the breath. Bhagavan Sri Ramana assures us that, in addition to *satsanga*, our awareness on the breath is the most reliable thread leading us to true awakening:

“A visitor asked how to realize oneself in accordance with Maharshi’s instructions, contained in his text of *Truth Revealed*, verse 9, supplement. The difficulty was in controlling the mind.”

Maharshi: “It is to be done by controlling the breath. If you practise it by yourself without other help, then the mind is controlled. Otherwise the mind comes under control spontaneously in the presence of a superior power. Such is the greatness of association with the wise (*satsanga*).”⁹⁶

Bhagavan has assured us that: “I am not going away. Where can I go? I am here.”⁹⁷ With this assurance, we can follow his teachings and his now invisible presence as our *satsanga*. Thus we can avoid the danger of falling prey to self-made Messiahs that are everything but the “superior power” that Bhagavan refers to. Therefore we can embrace His teachings by befriending

⁹⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 10. p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 222.

and controlling (watching with awareness) the breath, for that is what pulls us inward away from the vagaries of the mind, and moves us toward the sublime abode of God.

The ancient Biblical text of the Hebrews declares that: “In the beginning, God breathed upon the waters.” Symbolically this means that God took on our humanity by breathing Immortality into our Higher Mind. The catch is the role of *maya* in this divine action; She put the immortal Mind into a very mortal body.

Regardless of the great possibility that all of this is also Her *moha*, we have no choice but to deal with it. Meditation is the means to this end.

Another aspect of the humanity of God is His methodical nature. He pulls us back to Himself along the same path from which we came out from Him. He is steady in His patience and relentless in His effort. His love for us is without limit or motive; it is pure unselfish love. The simple truth is that we are always within the power of His Presence. The discovery of this is found in becoming receptive to His transformative power.

The Grace of God is literally confined by our choice to receive it. Its effect is limited by the intensity of our efforts to absorb it. Sri Ramana Maharshi verified this truth with certainty to all who came to him. The most profound example of this is seen when in the presence of Bhagavan:

“The conversation turned upon the question as to whether *Iswara Prasad* (Divine Grace) is necessary for the attaining of *samrajya* (universal dominion) or whether a *jiva's* (individual's) honest and strenuous efforts to attain it cannot of themselves lead him to That from whence is no return to life and death.

“The Maharshi with an ineffable smile which lit up His Holy Face and which was all-pervasive, shining upon the coterie around him, replied in tones of certainty and with the ring of truth: “Divine Grace is essential for Realization. It leads one to God-realization. But such Grace is vouchsafed only to him who is a true devotee or a *yogin*, who has striven hard and ceaselessly on the path towards freedom.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 29.

Accepting God's Grace?

Our choice is whether we will remain creatures of free will or accept our inheritance as beings of Divinely inspired freeing-will, in possession of an Awakening that transforms us and purifies those in the world around us. This freeing-will is the Will of God. For from the very beginning it was only God, in the disguise of our *sadhana* who came out of His heart- dwelling within us and into our minds, into the world of forgetfulness that we chose to live in. We may also choose to call it the Divine Mother's sport of *maya*, but certainly this creation has appeared by Supreme intent. God fully intends to lure us inward, back to the realization that He is our very own.

Bhagavan freely divulged the relentless intention of His grace and compassion to all who came to Him with sincere hearts. Thus, he declared to those before Him as if proclaiming to all:

“Even if you let go of Bhagavan, Bhagavan will never let go of you.”⁹⁹

Even so, when a devotee grew despondent at seeing no progress in himself saying:

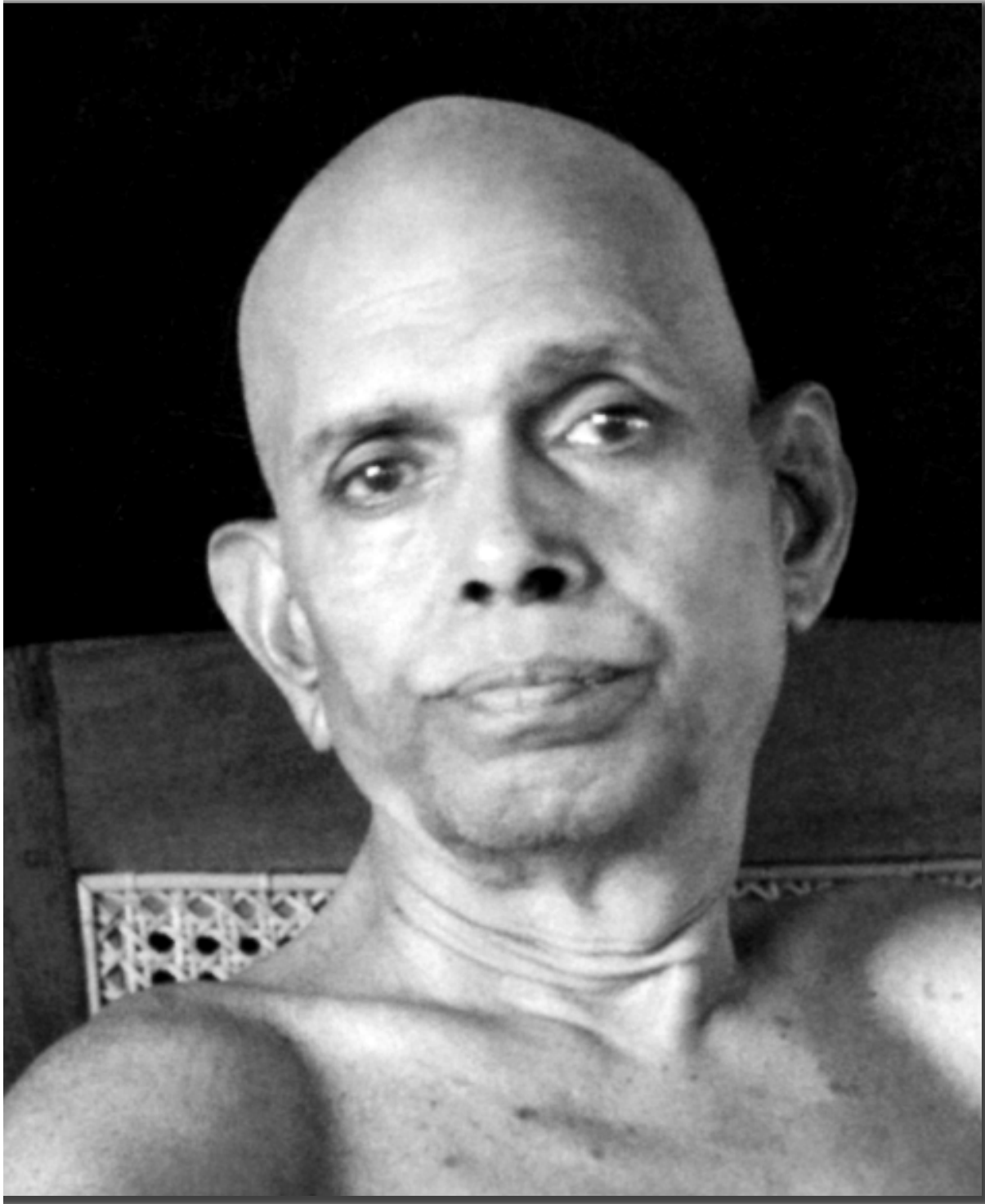
“I am afraid if I continue like this I shall go to hell.”

Bhagavan, the Ocean of Compassion without Reason, tenderly replied:

“If you do Bhagavan will go after you and bring you back.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 172

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 172



“The Look that Pierced”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings, Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanashramam 2000. Chapter 1, p. 27.

TWELVE

Know the Secret of Your Own Heart

Question: From the most ancient times the teaching methods of *gurus* were to describe the goal, clarify the methods and practices for attainment and finally to fully disclose the hindrances to that attainment. Since we are learning the means toward the highest Realization, one must assume that the obstacles to attainment are real and formidable. What are the obstacles to our achievement of the ultimate goal of life?

Let us address this question first with a profound answer according to the religions of the world, and then with the ultimate answer.

The Saints and Sages unanimously agree that regardless of any chosen path, it is practice that makes us perfect. For it is through practice that we attract the ever-present Grace of God.

The greatest obstacle to practice is not only formidable but completely beyond the realm of our control. This hindrance and greatest foe to Enlightenment is all-consuming and devouring Time. The servants of this enemy of the evolution of man are called the *devadutas* (divine messengers).

There are five separate *devadutas*, of which three are for us of major concern. When these visit us we become fully aware of the transitory and limited nature of our physical existence. These three, that for practically every living being are the ultimate obstacles to the achievement of immortality, are Ageing, Illness and Death.

The Wonder of Wonders

When time is on our side we fritter it away seeking what comes naturally to us, which are the enjoyments and the love of material life. When the day of the eventual, inevitable, and unpredictable arrival of the *devadutas* dawns, we become consumed with resentment and dread. Our resentment seems legitimate for we find ourselves unable to further enjoy the possessions that we strove a lifetime for. We dread that many of those who have loved us for the wrong reasons might lose their attraction to us. In this condition, the very last thing that we turn to is the arduous and grueling practice of meditation. And even if, by God's grace or sheer desperation, we somehow seek solace with interior spiritual practice, we find that the mental faculties and physical endurance needed for the task have long ago departed from us. This is, simply speaking, the human condition. None are exempt! It is a wonder to behold.

In the *Mahabharata* epic this human condition is portrayed with the encounter of the Pandava brothers meeting *Dharma* (the eternal rhythm manifesting by grace within time), disguised in the form of a *yaksha* (demi-god), by the shore of the cooling waters of a lake. Each of the five brothers, suffering greatly from thirst, were in turn approached and warned by *Dharma* not to quench their thirst before answering certain questions. Each as they approached the lake, disregarded the warning and drank and immediately fell dead.

Finally the eldest, Yudhisthira came and seeing the corpses began to lament. *Dharma* spoke bidding him to first answer his questions and then he would cure the thirst and grief of Yudhisthira.

The most significant of the questions asked and correctly answered was:

“Of all the world's wonders, which is the greatest wonder?”

“That every man, though he sees others dying all around him, believes that he himself will remain forever. What can be a greater wonder than this?”

The profundity of this might be argued but ultimately this truth can never be denied. The problem facing practically all is that when this truth is finally seen, it is too late to do anything about it.

Give Peace of Mind a Chance

All of the Saints and Sages, who have propounded practice as essential and Time as its hindrance, ultimately agree that the perfection from the practice is a Pure Mind. And further that the mind is everything and precedes all states and conditions. A genuine understanding of this reveals the secret behind the problem of birth, ageing, illness and death. Religion, if practiced correctly, does not guide man towards a spiritual preparation for death, but rather towards a transformation into eternal life before death.

It is not the ravages of Time's "rough handling" that are at the heart of the problem of the cycle of life and death; it is our mental reaction to it. Time has been ordained to have dominion over our physical condition. Its dominance over our mental condition is a matter of our own choice. The peace and purity of mind that can be achieved through *abhyasa* and *vichara* is founded on solid experience within the depth of meditation.

The state of *samadhi* in deep meditation gives us experience in a timeless world. The constancy of this experience solidifies our ability to remain merely a witness to the movement of ageing and illness. In reality, we are now experiencing a very vivid timeless state, and our spiritual heart, wherein our divine Self resides, is supremely attracted to it. We know by experience and the promptings of God's grace that if we cultivate this, if we befriend this, it will draw us into Itself. By further practice we will make this our best friend, one who never betrays.

Therefore we will carry this keen and lively awareness and experience of stillness and peace right to the door of death. At that moment we are steady in wisdom (*sthita prajna*).

We will not be ravaged and overcome by death. We will calmly understand that the body is no longer habitable, and we will consciously step out of it as if we were stepping out of one room into another. The body will go the way it came, unto dust. We will go the way we came, unto God.

Salvation from Fear

This is known as the deliverance of the Enlightened Ones. Our deliverance is the deliverance from the fear of death. Death loses its sting. The sting of death is the belief, and for most the mistaken experience, that the loss of the body will cause the loss of conscious existence. The lives of the Saints, and those who through effort and grace have entered the stream of timeless existence, prove this utterly false. Many of these Enlightened Ones have further proved their divinity to those around them who remain embodied. Their transforming process of divination was perfectly complete, transmuting every cell in their bodies. Thus their physical body, which at birth was destined to return unto dust, was rendered incorrupt after death. Their minds became transformed and sublimated by their cultivation of the timeless Spirit within the Heart. Their physical vehicle, which was used skillfully during this transformation, also became thoroughly steeped in incorruptible immortality. They reached that which we must strive for and achieve, what in Christianity is called the purity of the “fullness and perfection of the stature of the Consciousness of Christ”. Which in the East is sought for and known to be the ultimate goal of Self-realization, wherein the self of man is reunited and absorbed within the purity and perfection of God.

“When all the essences of carnal things have been transmuted into soul, and all essences of soul have been returned to Holy Breath, and man is made a perfect God, the drama of creation will conclude. And this is All.” ¹⁰²

To know of that which is deemed “All”, one must surely surrender to It with devotion as well as with knowledge. These two are in essence one, for the secret of Enlightenment is the Love of God! Though many of Bhagavan’s disciples flowered in the fullness of *jnana*, what strikes us most in them is their total love and *bhakti* to Bhagavan.

Thus the Maharshi, the embodiment of Love, enticed us with His words, with His glance, with His life that shone upon us as a brilliant sun to know:

“The eternal, unbroken, natural state of abiding in the Self is *jnana*. To abide in the Self you must love the Self. Since God is verily the Self,

¹⁰² *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*, by Levi, Devorss & Company 2001, p. 88.

love of the Self is love of God; and that is *bhakti*. *Jnana* and *bhakti* are thus one and the same.... their purpose is to lead you to *dhyana*, to meditation, which ends in Self-realization.” ¹⁰³

And all the Sages of all the worlds will say:

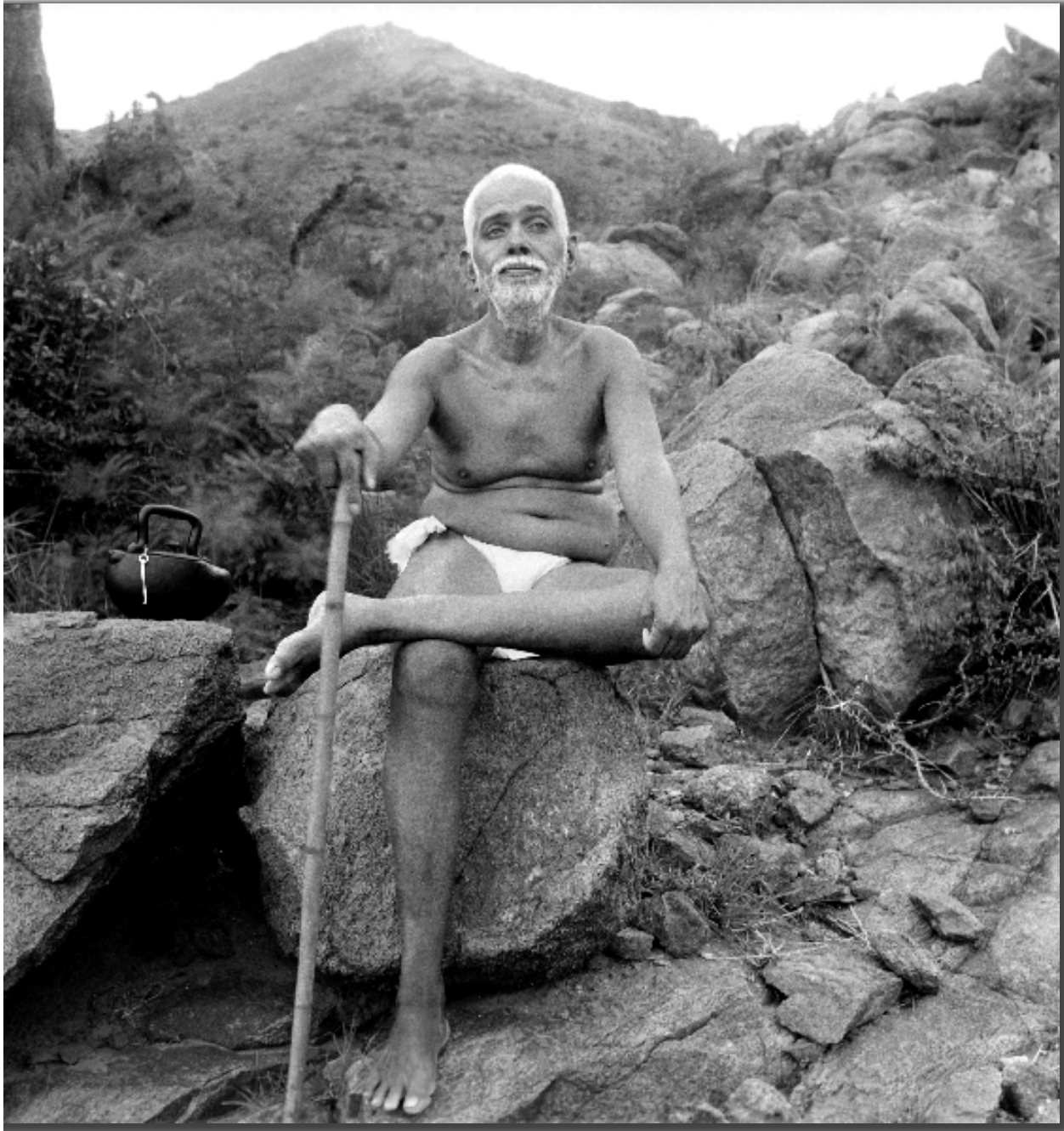
“Amen. Om.”



For further teachings from Sri Ramana Maharshi
and the Masters from the East and West visit:

www.spiritual-teaching.com

¹⁰³ *Maharshi's Gospel I, The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*. Sri Ramanashramam 2007, p. 17-18.



If oneself (the ego) rises, all will rise; if oneself subsides, all will subside.

To the extent to which we behave humbly, to that extent
(and to that extent only) will good result. If one can remain controlling the mind
(keeping the mind subsided), one can live anywhere.

Sri Ramana Maharshi in Who am I?



Abandoning the outer world,
With mind and breath controlled,
To meditate on Thee within, the yogi sees Thy light,
O Arunachala, and finds his delight in Thee.

Five Stanzas on Sri Arunachala – Stanza 4

Appendix I “Surrender”

IT'S TRUE MEANING AND METHOD OF PRACTICE

If there is one term describing an essential aspect needed for success that can be found in all schools of spiritual practice, regardless of the methods prescribed and their scriptural foundation; one single aspect of approach or revelation of the Divine, the Self, the Eternal, the Perennial Ground of which all humans claim inheritance- it is “surrender”.

If there is one thing that can be universally said concerning this fundamental cornerstone upon which is built a life of what is deemed Spiritual and Real, it is undeniably that from it's very definition onwards – practically everyone has it wrong. Of course, this statement is bold and presumptuous, even arrogant. But before such judgment is passed, let us analyze the proper *Sanskrit* dictionary etymology and meaning of the word ‘*saranagati*’, which is commonly translated into English as ‘surrender’.

The meaning of *saranagati* is derived from two root words. First is the word ‘*saranam*’, and finally from the word ‘*agati*’. ‘*Saranam*’ is defined with a list of synonyms including refuge, shelter, protection, succor, and interestingly, a place of rest. ‘*Agati*’ means to come to, to go to, even to go to quickly as an arrow released from a bow.

In the 18th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu Bible, Lord Krishna uses this word twice in His final summation to Arjuna. The Lord is revealing in verses 62 and 66 the highest and most profound secret regarding how to “surrender” and what is its result.

Verse 62

tam eva saranam gaccha
sarvabhavena bharata
tatprasadat param santim
sthanam prapsyasi sasvatam

Fly unto Him alone for refuge

With your whole being, Arjuna.

From His grace, you shall attain

Supreme peace and the eternal abode.

Verse 66

sarvadharmā parityajya

mam ekam saranam vraja

aham tva sarvapapebhyo

moksaiṣyami ma sucaḥ

Abandoning all duties,

Take refuge in Me alone.

I shall liberate you

From all evils; do not grieve.

It is essential to note the words the Lord uses to imperatively modify ‘saranam’ in both verses. In verse 62 the use of the word “gaccha” signifies the exclamatory imperative act “to go!” In verse 66 the word “vraja”, coming from the root ‘vraj’, implies a command “take, vow!” Grammatically both usages are to be defined with extreme emphasis, for they are both 2nd singular imperative acts. The implication that *Sanskrit* scholars derive from this is that the Lord is revealing the act of surrender as a process of determined and totally concentrated effort (*prapatti*, an often used synonym for “saranagati” meaning total surrender to God through devotion and adoration combined with a life of purity and virtue).

Sri Ramana Maharshi clarifies the application of this secret revelation in the Gita when answering questions of devotees from both the *Jnana* and *Bhakti Marga* (way):

*“The ‘I’ casts off the illusion of ‘I’ and yet remains as ‘I’. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it. Take the case of bhakti - I approach Iswara and pray to be absorbed in Him. I then surrender myself in faith and by concentration. What remains afterwards? In place of the original ‘I’, perfect self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the ‘I’ is lost. This is the highest form of devotion (parabhakti), **prapatti**, **surrender** or the height of vairagya... You give up this and that of ‘my’ possessions. If you give up ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ instead, all are given up at a stroke. The very seed of possession is lost. Thus the evil is*

*nipped in the bud or crushed in the germ itself. Dispassion (vairagya) must be very strong to do this. Eagerness to do it must be equal to that of a man kept under water trying to rise up to the surface for his life.”*¹⁰⁴

The *Jnani* “casts off”, the *Bhakta* “approaches, prays and becomes absorbed”. Both are an active effort requiring “strong dispassion and concentrated eagerness” to avoid being drowned in the waters of *samsara* (an ocean of sorrows).

Can we now pass judgment that to believe “surrender” a whimsical act of “letting go”, “giving up the effort”, or casually and shyly “going with the flow” is an erroneous and mistaken understanding?

Mistaken! For Bhagavan and the Bhagavad Gita are declaring that “surrender” means flying like an arrow to a shelter, a refuge and a place of rest in God!

And if we try and try again to attain this most Blessed state, but find no help, our prayers will at least give us “ears to hear” the proclamation from the *Jagat Guru*, the Spirit of Guidance:

Devotee: “We surrender; but still there is no help.”

Maharshi: “Yes. If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently. Distress often leads men to faith in God.”

Devotee: “But we are worldly. There is the wife, there are the children, friends and relatives. We cannot ignore their existence and resign ourselves to Divine Will, without retaining some little of the personality in us.”

Maharshi: “That means you have not surrendered as professed by you. You must only trust God.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 28.

¹⁰⁵ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 43.

“SARANAGATI - SURRENDER”

PART II

“IN ORDER TO ANNIHILATE WHAT IS UNDESIRABLE AND HARMFUL (ANISHTA), THE MIND HAS TO BE STEEPED IN THE ADORATION OF THE BELOVED (ISHTA).”

Sri Anandamayi Ma

The first presentation on “*Saranagati*” concluded with an understanding of the nature of surrender as being a concentrated and definitive movement of the mind and heart towards God. Sri Krishna extolled us to “Fly unto Him, and take refuge in Him alone”. Sri Ramana Maharshi’s guidance gave us the conviction to “abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you, for distress often leads men to faith in God. Therefore you must only trust God.”¹⁰⁶

Without doubt, these words are full of Truth and inspiration. But, as is often said in the scriptures of both East and West: “Inspiration is one thing, the effect it has on our life and *sadhana* is quite another.” Soothing words do soften the sorrow of the human heart, but too often their effect fails to translate into lasting progressive movement towards God. Even if we are truly motivated to “Take wings and fly to the shelter of the bosom of our heavenly Father”, we remain human by inheritance, and thus a sybarite by nature. One may be really very zealous in his austerities and vows in the beginning, but if one is not on a very proper guard, slowly the vigor will be relaxed, comforts will creep in the mind and man will be caught very miserably. For this very reason, an understanding of the nature of “surrender” pales in significance when compared with an exact knowledge of “What “*saranagati*” practically is, and more importantly, how it is done.”

For clarification of this most essential question let us now rely further on Bhagavan and the Bhagavad Gita as our Guru, as our “Spirit of guidance.” Taking their hands of Guidance and Blessing, may we proceed onwards to the “further shore”.

“BLESSINGS ON YOUR JOURNEY TO THE FURTHER SHORE BEYOND DARKNESS!”

¹⁰⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 43.

(Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6)

A visitor once asked of Bhagavan: “What is self-surrender?”

Bhagavan replied: “It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognizes the higher authority of the Atman. This is the beginning of surrender...¹⁰⁷ “Complete surrender to God means giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karmas*, i.e., the actions of the mind, speech and body, are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be on Him.” Bhagavan continued with a quote from the Gita: “Lord Krishna told Arjuna in the Gita,

*ananyas cintayanto mam
ye janah paryupasate
tesam nityabhiyutanam
yogaksemam vahamy aham*

Those men who worship, directing their thoughts to Me,
Whose minds do not go elsewhere;
For them, who are constantly steadfast,
I secure what they lack and preserve what they already possess.
(Bhagavad Gita IX, verse 22)

Bhagavan continues and explains: “Arjuna had to do the fighting. So Sri Krishna said, ‘Place all the burden on Me, do your duty; you are merely an instrument. I will see to everything. Nothing will bother you.’ But then, before one surrenders to God, one should know who it is that surrenders. Unless all thoughts are given up there can’t be surrender. When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one’s Self. If surrender is in terms of *bhakti*, the burden should be thrown on God, and if it is in terms of *karma*, *karma* should be performed until one knows one’s own Self. The result is the same in either case. Surrender means to enquire and know about one’s own Self and then remain in the Self. What is there apart from the Self?”¹⁰⁸

Here, very definitely, Bhagavan is guiding us towards a practice of what will culminate within an effective meditative process of *Atma Vichara*. Many of the

¹⁰⁷ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 56.

¹⁰⁸ *Letters from Sri Ramanashramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 225-227.

most learned Sanskrit scholars define “*vichara*” as a process primarily of “reflection” and secondarily as “enquiry”. We can see the efficacy of this within the guiding words of Bhagavan above in relation to “surrender”.

In order to, “Place all the burden on God, and do our duty merely as an instrument, for God will see to everything”, we surely must ‘somehow’ invoke and perceive THAT VERY PRESENCE. Otherwise, how in heaven or on earth are we to “throw our burden on the Lord” if we do not know the place where to drop off the delivery!

The followers of all religions uniformly face the same dilemma; how is God to be found? All who seek to solve this ‘mystery of life’ find guidance in the saints. It is not essential to become a saint in order to find God, nor is it necessary. What is essential is that someone did it, and through their compassion they shed ‘light on the path’ that we may follow as we proceed onwards toward attainment.

In India, one who sought and found, one who struggled and came through victorious, one which beheld the Face of God, was Swami Ramdas of Anandashram in Kerala.

“Swami Ramdas gave great emphasis to constant chanting of God’s Name, His ceaseless remembrance and absolute surrender to His will. He even adds that these three are synonymous with God-realization. This means he who chants God’s Name constantly, has ceaseless remembrance of God and his surrender to God is absolute. He is as good as having realized God.

“Surrender” is a word that appears in Beloved Papa’s (Swami Ramdas) utterances very often, because it is a magic word for him. He is very fond of it and extols it whenever he gets the opportunity. He assures, the moment we surrender to His will, we are flooded with peace.

“But, for the common man, , the term “surrender”, means a sense of defeat and disappointment. When two persons or countries are engaged in a fight, one who feels too weak to defeat the opponent decides to admit defeat and face the serious consequences of humility and ignominy. He raises his hands in surrender. The fight ends with one in deep dejection because of the defeat and the other boisterous in his victory. To a devotee, however, “surrender” has an entirely different meaning. There is no fight. There is no defeat. There is no humiliation. There is only victory and the consequent joy. If at all we call it a fight, it is a fight with the ego, the individuality, for its

survival. The ego, which is apparently fighting for its survival, does not really exist. It is only a product of the illusory veil put on by the *Atman*, on Himself, just for play – *Lila* - as the devotees say. “Surrender” here is the process of tearing off the illusory veil, which caused a sense of separation between the devotee and God. The result is the realization of the devotee’s oneness with Him. So “surrender” here denotes the vanishing of the non-existent ego and therefore a victory of the devotee.”¹⁰⁹

Death of the ego is swallowed up, through liberating surrender, in the victory of the devotee’s love of God. For the illusory veil being rent a sundered, the tune of the sweet “Song of the Spirit” touches the human heart.



“The touch of Love Divine
Transmutes thee into purest light
A very mould of Truth
In which the Spirit Immortal
Sings to ageless tune;
The sweet strain fills limitless space
Love be thy God –only Love—
The liberating Mother Supreme.”

- Swami Ramdas

To conclude this segment on “surrender”, and to continue onwards with future segments, various methods of how to “invoke and perceive” the object of our reflection and enquiry for which we attempt to achieve true “*saranagati*” will be presented by the most renown and authoritative *Jagat Gurus* (world teachers). Though various methods of *sadhana* will be presented, they all will lead, if correctly practiced with patient endurance, to the same goal. As Swami Vivekananda exclaimed to his Master, Sri Ramakrishna (who was delighted at the hearing): “God is infinite, and infinite are the ways to find Him!” All great Gurus and Masters universally agree that to control the mind and reflect upon its true Nature, a quietening of thoughts is an essential prerequisite. Only the rare few that are firmly constituted in the Self (usually from performing this aspect of *sadhana* in past lives) dare to skip this stage of spiritual effort. Never-the-less, even those rare few are seen to undergo this quietening of the mind, mainly through the

¹⁰⁹ *Points to Ponder; Talks and messages of Swami Satchidananda*, Anandashram Publications 2000, p. 78-79.

supplanting of the diffusive thought processes with the single sound (*aksara*) of God's Name. This fact is evidently brought forth in the diary of Sri Muruganar, who is revered and known to be one of Sri Ramana's closest and most advanced disciples.

“Though Bhagavan rarely gave out *mantras*, when he did, he generally recommended “Siva, Siva’. Muruganar himself was given this *mantra* by Bhagavan, as were several other devotees including Annamalai Swami, the brother of Rangan (who was one of Bhagavan's childhood friends), and an unknown harijan.”¹¹⁰

Perhaps Bhagavan himself declared the reason for this by saying:

“*Japa* reaching to the source of sound is the best course for those who are not firm in consciousness which is the source of the ‘I’.”¹¹¹

Perhaps we can take the liberty to conjecture that if one can say Bhagavan had ‘motives’, a profound one would have been to guide his disciples through stages of the bliss of the self, which would act as catalysts to finally return, through *sadhana*, to their true home in the Self, God – the further shore.

“The purport of prescribing meditation on the *Pranava* is this. The *Pranava* is *Omkara*...the *advaita-mantra* which is the essence of all *mantras*.... In order to get at this true significance, one should meditate on the *Pranava*. ...The fruition of this process is *samadhi* which yields release [*moksha*], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss.”¹¹²

It has been said by both the direct disciples of Sri Ramana Maharshi and the devout that later followed: “If there is a “twin Spirit” of Bhagavan, an exact embodiment shrouded within a ‘different’ physical form; that is seen in Sri Anandamayi Ma.”

If Bhagavan defines “self-surrender” to be the same as “mind-control” in a practice that reveals the knowledge of the Self, surely Mother Anandamayi guided Her devotees with a means to achieve the same glorious end. Bhagavan declared to us: “When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one's Self.” Sri Anandamayi Ma spoke directly about the means to annihilate the thoughts of the mind, which results in the direct knowledge

¹¹⁰ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 224 - 225.

¹¹¹ Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, sixth edition, p. 145

¹¹² The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi, sixth edition, p. 25,26

of “Who we are” and from “Whence we came”:

“In order to annihilate what is undesirable and harmful (*anishta*), the mind has to be steeped in the adoration of the Beloved (*Ishta*). The notion that He is far away must be altogether given up. Thou art within and without, in every vein and artery, in every leaf and blade of grass, in the world and beyond it. The awakening of the sense of want is to be welcomed; it opens the way. He is there at every step to make the unfit expert. ‘As the sense of want and emptiness appearest Thou and no other—Thou art close by; Lord, I take refuge (*saranagati*) in Thee, I take refuge in Thee!’

“The Name and the Named are identical; for He Himself appears as the Name. The sound (*Aksara*, the *pranava Om*) is indeed God’s own guise. When the Name one repeats becomes alive, it is as when a seed is sown the tree grows out of it. If the Name that appeals most to any particular person is constantly repeated, one arrives at the realization that all names are His names, all forms His forms. Furthermore, that He is without name and form will also by and by come to light.

“*Karma* accumulated for ages and ages, sins and desires are wiped out by God’s sacred Name. Just as lighting a lamp illumines a cave that has been in darkness for centuries, even so the obscurity of numberless births is annihilated by the power of a divine Name.

“The moment that has passed does not return. Time must be used well. Only when spent in the effort to know ‘Who am I?’ has it been used well.”¹¹³

Sri Ramana recommended, as did Sri Anandamayi Ma, study of the Ribhu Gita, a traditional text of Advaita. It simply says:

“The syllable ‘Om’ is the Self.” (*Ribhu Gita 10:22*)



¹¹³ Excerpts from Sri Anandamayi Ma, *Ananda Varta* publications.

SURRENDER

PART 3

"WITHDRAW WITHIN INTO THE SHELTER OF ONENESS WITH ME."

Bhagavad Gita 18:66

This third part of the series on '*Saranagati*' will attempt to reveal "How to cultivate surrender". In addition to bringing forth the practical aspects of spiritual practice (*sadhana*) taught by Sri Ramana Maharshi, we will seek guidance from the profound depths of cherished wisdom brought forth by Paramahansa Yogananda.

Many have mistakenly conjectured that the Maharshi was unlike all other Spiritual Masters, in that he did not have a teaching. The only adequate response to this contrived falsehood should come from the Maharshi himself. In a documented lecture given by Sri Ganeshan, the grandson of Chinna Swami (Bhagavan's brother) and a living direct disciple of Bhagavan, the following actual account was related.

In the early evening of April 14, 1950 (the very day of Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi – the day of physical absorption in Arunachala), all of the disciples and devotees were assembled around the room where Bhagavan lay virtually motionless in the final throws of his body's endurance with terminal cancer. Though all were in a state of protracted grief, they still sought for a final word of guidance from Bhagavan. None dared approach, nor were permitted to do so, for the Maharshi's body had begun its final struggle for breath. Amongst the tears and heartbreak of the devoted, the thought arose that if anyone could approach Bhagavan at this final hour prior to the seeming demise of his body, it would be Sri Muruganar. They therefore beseeched Sri Muruganar to request Bhagavan to utter a "final word", by which they could be guided throughout the years to come. He did so, and as the Maharshi's still radiant eyes and beatific smile fell on him, Bhagavan spoke:

"Take my teaching and put it into practice!"

As yogis, those who seek “union” with the Divine, we are given by the Masters of Yoga a means of yogic practice. In the most traditional sense, Sri Ramana Maharshi, like all of the *Jagat Gurus* (world teachers), guides us along the time-honored means of practice towards the highest attainment.

In Part 2 of this series Bhagavan replies to a devotees (and our) question: “What is self-surrender?” His answer was “*purna*” (perfection) in that the definition is couched in terms of the method of attainment.

“It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognizes the higher authority of the Atman. This is the beginning of surrender...¹¹⁴
“Complete surrender to God means giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karmas*, i.e., the actions of the mind, speech and body, are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be on Him.”¹¹⁵

Bhagavan went on to quote, as he often did as a means of guidance, from the Bhagavad Gita. Let us now return to this very “Song of God”, seeking further clarification regarding the means by which we can cultivate “surrender”.

In Paramahansa Yogananda’s wonderful commentary *The Bhagavad Gita - God talks with Arjuna*, we find a deep and mystical revelation that points us towards the direction by which a beginning foundation of “*saranagati / saranam*” can be laid. In further discussion of Gita 18:66 we are shown:

“*Mam ekam saranam vraja*” to literally mean, “Become (*vraja*) sheltered (*saranam*, ‘protected’ - from delusion) in oneness (*ekam*) with Me (*mam*).”

“Always keep your consciousness in My sheltering Presence”; i.e., “Remember Me alone... Indicating the practice of yoga; the Sanskrit may also be rendered “**Withdraw** (*vraja*) into the Shelter of oneness with Me.”

What needs to be understood and absorbed is the essential “how to”, which Sri Krishna, as such a compassionate Lord, never fails to uncover for us. There is another secret “for those who have ears and eyes to hear and see” which tells just “how to”, found in the beginning of verse 66.

¹¹⁴ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 56.

¹¹⁵ *Letters from Sri Ramanashramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 225-227.

Sarvadharman parityajya - which common translation renders for us something that even the most advanced find "too obscure, and thus far beyond normal comprehension." It is mistakenly shown to mean: "Abandon all Dharmas!" Actually, correct comprehension of the verb (the action, "how to" word) *tyaj* is paramount for finding the actual key to the proper 'door to right understanding'. *Tyaj* - means "relinquish all but one!"

So the Lord is actually telling us how to "surrender" to the Sheltering safe harbor of rest in Him:

Sarvadharman parityajya, Mam ekam saranam vraja - means "Forsaking by relinquishment all other *dharma*s (lesser duties), remember Me alone!"

Paramahansa Yogananda reveals for us the true import and thus the method to begin partial surrender, which is deemed to be the highest achievement of human spiritual endeavor; the very heraldry of Shraddha (faith) – which the Maharshi has declared to be the “Cause of self-Realization.”

“A prosaic interpretation of the counsel unequivocally advises the deeply motivated Arjuna, and all true renunciants, to relinquish [attachment to, not necessarily the engagement in] all worldly duties entirely in order to be single-pointedly with God. “O Arjuna, forsake all lesser duties and fulfill the highest duty; find your lost home, your eternal shelter, in Me! Remember, no duties can be performed by you without powers borrowed from Me, for I am the Maker and Sustainer of your life. More important than your engagement with other duties is your engagement with Me; because at any time I can recall you from this earth, canceling all your duties and actions.”¹¹⁶

In Sanskrit, the word “*dharma*”, derived from the root verb *dhri*, means “to hold, to put on”, also literally as an imperative act, “to wear!” Here we see the correlation with the command of Jesus in the Gospels: “Put on the armor of Rightness... wear the robe of Salvation!”

“Dharma, therefore, is the cosmic law that runs the mechanism of the universe; and after accomplishing the primary God-uniting *yoga dharma* (religious duties), man should perform secondarily his duties to the cosmic laws of nature. One should observe rational conduct in all ways!”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks with Arjuna*, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India 2002.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The Masters and scriptures of a “Life in the Spirit” confirm; the beginning of partial surrender essentially engages man in the performance of virtuous *dharma*. We should begin our partial surrender by adhering to the *upadesha* (spiritual teaching) of Devaraj Narada, who declared in His *Bhakti Sutras*: “Seek *satsanga* and abandon (relinquish) *dussanga*.” The central point surrounding an understanding of “surrender” as having the dual role of maintaining an inwardly God-pointed consciousness with an ongoing movement (a seeking) of *satsanga* does not present a contradiction in terms of direction.

Sri Ramana defined the true meaning of “*satsanga*” to Srimat T.R. Kanakammal, one of the few remaining direct disciples of the Maharshi. She has related that Bhagavan declared the Sanskrit word “*sat*” to mean “Being”, and the word “*sanga*” to mean “melt”. Thus to seek *satsanga* is conscious movement within by which we melt into Being! Therefore, by implication, the meaning of *dussanga* is to melt through conscious external movement into non-Being (devoid of Godliness). This is brought about by habitually seeking *adharmic* (non-virtuous) pleasures that destroy intelligent discrimination. The end result of one such as this is clearly described by Sri Krishna in Gita 2:63: “*Buddhinasat pranasyati* – From destruction of discrimination, one is lost.”

The “melting within” referred to by Bhagavan is a protracted process of *sadhana tapa*, a spiritual process of purification. It is not a whimsical imaginative fantasy of drifting within to a so-called instant blissful awareness of “oneness” with the Self. Bhagavan’s use of the word “Being” undeniably refers to *Jnana* (direct Knowledge of the Self), the *Vijnana Vedanta* of the *Kaivalya Upanishad*, direct experience of full awareness of Divinity within. The process of mind control (*tapas*) that induces the melting of impurities is a protracted meditative process of concentration, often empowered by contemplation (thinking of the Lord) or invocation through remembrance (*japa*) of God, which at the final stages culminates with *vichara* (reflection, enquiry). In direct reference to this truth, Bhagavan related how this is achieved:

“Know that the wondrous *jnana vichara* is only for those who have attained purity of mind by softening and melting within. Without this softening and melting away of the mind, brought about by thinking of the feet of the Lord, the attachment to the “I” that adheres to the body will not cease to be.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 186. (Reference to Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, vol. 7, verse 340).*

For many, this guidance from the Maharshi inspires determination to forge ahead with a conviction that the end is glorious, even close. For many more, these words fall upon us as more “tall talk”, being far beyond comprehension, much less as a means of guidance with practical application. There is, however, some consolation afforded to us in the undeniable fact that even if Bhagavan were to convey his teaching to us face-to-face, as he did to many, there would still be “mountains to move” through personal effort before we could lay aside our tools of *sadhana*.¹¹⁹

This fact was observed and documented by a disciple of Bhagavan who remained under his direct guidance for 14 years:

“To beginners as well as advanced *sadhakas* alike, this mind control appears to be a formidable feat, yet the Master encourages them to go ahead and practise – at all events to make a beginning. He constantly dins into us the inspiring notion that we are already Self- realised and that, if we are not aware of it, the obstruction to that awareness should be removed by investigation – *vichara* – which is as logical as it is simple.

“To hear it direct from him, this “Self-knowledge”, rather the way to Self-knowledge, is “the easiest thing there is” (*Atma Vidya*); but, judging from the questions constantly asked of him, and later of his disciples, there appears to be the need for much spade work before its central idea takes a firm hold on the seeker. The Master’s obvious meaning seems to be that, even apart from the psychological efficacy of the *vichara* proper, preoccupying the mind with a single theme to the exclusion of all others, if doggedly practiced, will not fail to produce beneficial results. It will tend to reduce the oscillations of the thinking processes, and thus render the mind amenable to concentration on the supremely important work which is to follow, which by itself is a splendid achievement. Finding the answer to the query “Who am I?” is not the immediate burden of the practice in the beginning. Stability and fixity of the restless, mercurial mind is the first aim, and this can be achieved by constant practice and by frequently pulling oneself back to the subject of the meditation whenever the mind strays away. When the mind has attained an appreciable degree of concentration, which means of depth, it will be time to think of the answer. Some *sadhakas* are fortunate enough to begin with a mind already accustomed to concentration, either “naturally”, or by training, or through intense

¹¹⁹ *Sadhana* is derived from the Sanskrit root “*sadhan*”, which means “instruments or tools”. *Sadha-na* therefore means the methods by which the tools are employed to achieve the desired goal.

fervor, so that they are able to go straight to the application of the *vichara*, and thus make a more or less rapid progress, according to the intensity of their determination, without much strain. For the Master tells us that mental calmness, that is, controlled mind, is essential for a successful meditation.”¹²⁰

Even knowing this, and even being graced with daily having the cherished gaze of the Maharshi rest upon you, still one succumbs to human frailty and a heart that cries out:

Devotee: “Surrender is impossible.”

Maharshi: “Yes. Complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. 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? There is no peace of mind. You are helpless to bring it about. It can be done only by surrender.”

D.: “Partial surrender - well - can it undo destiny?”

M.: “Oh, yes! It can.”

D.: “Is not destiny due to past karma?”

M.: “If one is surrendered to God, God will look to it.”

D.: “This being God’s dispensation, how does God undo it?”

M.: “All are in Him only.”

D.: “How is God to be seen?”

M.: “**Within**. If the mind is turned inward *God* manifests as inner consciousness.”¹²¹

But alas, to be instructed merely to “turn within”, hardly ever satisfies an aspirant who is engaged in an active practice of meditation. For they know from direct experience that what lies “within” can, and usually does,

¹²⁰ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2003, p.66-67.

¹²¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 244.

contain more concentrated forms of a great danger - a powerful and destructive enemy. Lord Krishna warns Arjuna of this great foe to the realization of the Self in the beginning chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Arjuna said: “By what is a man impelled to commit evil, *Varshneya* [an epithet of Lord Krishna], seemingly against his own will, as if urged thereunto by force?” The Holy Lord said, “It is desire, it is anger, that’s born of the *rajo-guna*: of great craving, and of great sin; know that to be the enemy...The senses, mind and intellect are said to here be its abode...thus restraining the self (here the use of ‘*atman*’ denotes the mind) by the Self, then destroy that enemy so hard to conquer: desire.”¹²²

In the closing chapters of the *Gita* the Lord clearly declares the means by which we can “put His teaching into practice.” Paramahansa Yogananda again helps to metaphysically clarify for us this oft-quoted sixty-sixth stanza of Chapter 18, which although is deemed by the most learned scholars as the quintessential heart of the entire *Gita*, is paradoxically the stanza that receives the most varied and diversified interpretation!

Sri Krishna says: “O Arjuna, be a real renunciant! By the practice of yoga meditation withdraw (*vraja*) your mind, intelligence, life force, and heart from the clutches of the ego. From the physical sensations of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and from the objects of sense pleasures! Forsake all duties toward them! Be a yogi by uniting yourself to My blessed presence (*mam ekam saranam*) in your soul. Then I will save you; by nonperformance of the lesser duties to the senses under the influence of delusion, you will automatically find yourself free from all sinful troubles. If you remain in ecstasy with Me, fulfilling all divine duties as directed by Me, forsaking all ego-instigated duties, you will be liberated.”

“The ordinary man’s mind is usually identified with external possessions and sense pleasures connected with the surface of the body. Therefore, physical consciousness is sustained by the mind, intelligence, and life force operating through the lower (rajasic and tamasic) centers of awareness. Thus, the searchlights of intelligence, mind, and life energy continually operate externally, feeding the nervous system and sustaining and revealing the sense pleasures and physical consciousness.”¹²³

¹²² *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 3, sections of verses 36-43.

¹²³ *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks with Arjuna*, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India 2002.

The yogi who persists in withdrawing awareness within through meditation (*aksara japa*, repetition of the sound of the Name of God), or *atma vichara* (reflection upon from ‘Whence we came’) effectively reverses the searchlights of intelligence, mind, and life force inward toward the sheltering presence of the object of meditation – God! This is a protracted process, for through it the mercurial mind is first rendered steady, then ultimately still. For it is in stillness that man approaches the altar of the Spirit!

Sri Ramana Maharshi assented in full agreement with this understanding of the *Gita*’s “teaching put into practice”. With his lustrous gaze, communicating to us the very embodiment of divine stillness, and his voice emerging from pure consciousness, he declared:

“IN THE *BHAGAVAD GITA* IT IS SAID THAT IT IS THE NATURE OF THE MIND TO WANDER. ONE MUST BRING ONE’S THOUGHTS TO BEAR ON GOD. BY LONG PRACTICE THE MIND IS CONTROLLED AND MADE STEADY.” ¹²⁴

¹²⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 91.



“One should not use the name of God mechanically and superficially without the feeling of devotion.

To use the name of God one must call upon Him with yearning and unreservedly surrender oneself to Him. Only after such surrender is the name of God constantly with the man.”

(Maharshi's Gospel I)

