

in various parts of the country, gives talks and informally discusses knotty points needing clarification.

The present 'Be The Self' is a collection of samples from such 'talks' of his. In his quiet, unobtrusive way he avoids showing off his academic erudition and shuns dry theories, but explains clearly the Master's practical guidance to pilgrims on the spiritual path. With his feet on solid ground and his heart at the Feet of the Master, he helps devotees to understand correctly the Teachings of the Sage.

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Sri Ramanasramam,
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Om Namo Bhagavathe
Sri Ramanaya'

THE PRACTICE OF SELF-ENQUIRY— THE RAMANA WAY

By V. GANESAN

(Managing Editor: "The Mountain Path")

அதுநீ என்று அம்மறைகள் ஆர்த்திடவும் தன்னை
எது என்று தான்தேர்ந்து இராகு—அதுநான்
இதுஅன்று என்று எண்ணல்உரன் இன்கையினால் என்றும்
அதுவே தானாய் அமர்வதால்.

— "உள்ளது நாற்பது", 32

"Although the scriptures proclaim 'You are That', it is a sign of weakness to meditate: 'I am not this but That', instead of enquiring what one is and remaining so; for one is always That".

— Reality in Forty Verses, v.32"

I have divided my speech into three parts for the sake of convenience. (1) Overall Perspective; (2) The 'How' of Self-Enquiry and (3) The Uniqueness of the Ramana Way.

(1) — OVERALL PERSPECTIVE

"God made man in His own image" is an ancient saying. Man is thus primarily made of the divine essence only. But he

is now steeped in ignorance shutting himself off from the knowledge of this divine essence in him. The divine vocation in man is ineradicable; it may be covered up for a time being, but it must well forth again. Man's movements are generally directed only outwards since all the senses in his body are turned outwards and tuned to absorb things only from outside. When his activities are one-pointedly directed within, turned within, he notices an entirely different nature of himself. Weaned away from externalities, directing his attention inward he recognises the divine nature in him revealing itself in all splendour. Anyone, thus turning within is bound to realise this eternal truth within him; no one is excluded from this divine consciousness. Man turning his attention outward by the very act excludes himself from consciously experiencing it, though every man even in his ignorance is not devoid of experiencing this divine consciousness in himself. Whether he knows it or not every man is filled with this Pure Consciousness, Pure Awareness. That which clouds such awareness from his conscious experience is his habits to cling to externalities which are expressed in his discontent, frailties, darkness and fear. Let him look within deeper and longer and without fail he will notice this so-called 'hidden and mysterious' Self inhabiting his centre, the source of his being. Turning within from the externalities and paying full attention to this source brings about a tremendous change in a man's life, since for the first time he recognises that he possesses this divine essence within him. He understands the scriptural declaration: "You are That" to mean "You are yourself That divine essence". Pure Awareness, the 'I AM' ness in every man, is this essence of God.

This Reality that exists in everyman is Consciousness or Awareness. No man can say he does not know it. By the very act of his denying knowledge of it he declares its presence! The marks of the Reality are that it always exists and it is able to exist by and in itself. The Awareness in man exists always, by and in itself. Each man has therefore within his grasp this opening to this eternal light within. Once he has a glimpse of experience of this, his true being within, which

glows totally independently not needing his effort or support for its existence — all his external activities need his effort for their fructification — he will realise that he has passed into a wonderful state, not depending on his five senses. This is an experience which he has never had before. An experience which was got without the aid of the five senses and that too within himself and by himself is unique indeed. That day of having this vision in oneself is the most stayed day, for, on that day he is one with eternity. Whoever engages in such inward exploration is no dreamer, 'he merely antedates today what the multitude of men will have perforce to do tomorrow.' Man therefore is a spiritual being having this capacity to possess the Wisdom. He breathes this Truth every moment! He thus contains a divine infinitude within him. This infinite awareness is experienced as a perennial feeling of unalloyed happiness — the 'ananda' aspect of the Eternal Truth of *Satchidananda*.

But, while stating the truth of our inner being thus, the head side of the coin, should we not also observe the obverse of the coin? The external world with its attractions and distractions devour man's attention absorbingly and wholly. The complicated fastness of the world outside to which the human system is so very strongly drawn, attached, is for ever drawing man more and more to involve himself with matter, objects, activities external to oneself. Time too rushes onward like a roaring stream carrying the human race along with it and drowning them in its flux. In such a struggle — all the time forced to run outward and forward endlessly, both physically and mentally — if a man is asked to take a leap backwards, to dive within, it will be nothing short of a feat of gymnastics! And to tell such a totally tottered man about the divine awareness and the need for him to turn inwards would be treated by him as a 'hallucination of human fancy and infantile idealism'. If he has to interest himself to take a right-about-turn in his life, that is, to turn his conscious attention from his activities outward to introspection inward he needs a good cause to do it.

What is that imminent cause?

Without further compelling him to involve himself yet again externally, in the name of spiritual disciplines, ethical codes, ritualistic regulations, he should be smoothly but firmly made to turn within and expose him to the Truth that is his Being. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi has opened up a Royal Path to attain this 'diving within' in the easiest, most direct and simple way. To understand it clearly we will have to take up a microscopical viewpoint, as till now we have been making only a general observation. That is, from the viewpoint of 'human race' let us deduce our attention to the 'individual'.

(2) – THE 'HOW' OF SELF-ENQUIRY

How does an individual, for that matter, every individual, refer to himself? Every one refers to himself as 'I' only. The entire vast population, millions and millions of them, all the time say, referring to themselves only as 'I', 'I'. Are there so many millions of 'I's? Conversely, there is only one 'I' to which countless number of bodies are referred to! Is it not strange that the entire multiplicity is reduced to one single syllable! Yes, the 'I' is a symbol which stands for something immeasurably wider than itself.

Though every one says 'I', 'I' only, yet strangely not many make effort to know what exactly this 'I' is or what it means. By 'I' usually primarily we mean only the body, but on deeper analysis we mean by it the faculties of thinking, feeling and willing. We can easily arrive at the conclusion that the body is not the 'I' since it is insentient. By insentience we mean that the body is always the known one and never the knowing principle. Said the great Hindu sage, Allama Prabhu: "Know yourself without losing your awareness. If the body be yourself, why do you say: 'my body'? Everybody speaks of his possessions as 'my clothes, my gold' only. Tell me if anyone ever identifies himself saying 'I am the clothes or I am the gold'? You are mistaking a superimposition for a fact when you take your body to be your Self".

Then, what is this 'I'?

In the body, which is insentient, there arises a sense of alertness, a sensation of 'I'. It is termed as 'mind'. Bhagavan Ramana says that if one investigates the mind, it is seen to be a bundle of thoughts. Mind is, therefore, a function wherein the 'I' functions as the basis of all thoughts. All thoughts are related to you. Every thought is either about you or connected with you as individuals, objects, things, events or opinions. All these are rooted in your 'I'; thus the 'I' in you is only an 'I'-thought, the ground for the entire gamut of countless thoughts. Let us look at it still closer. Every day the first thought on waking from our sleep is this 'I'-thought. In sleep you do not know anything, including the 'I' with which you refer to yourself. This 'I' or 'I'-thought is completely subsided in deep sleep, along with its chain of other thoughts. If we observe further carefully it will be seen that the last thought before sleep to 'set' is this 'I'-thought, which is also strangely the first to 'rise' when you wake up the next morning! Where does this 'I' set and wherefrom does this 'I' arise? It is an immediate necessity to search for and find out the source of this 'I' which 'dies' every night in our sleep and again takes birth the next morning. In addition to our perseverance to find out its source we have the assured help of Sri Bhagavan who leads us further on by saying that there is an Eternal 'I' behind the known 'I', into which this 'I' or 'I'-thought merges and again comes out daily, since it is the Source. It is important to record here that Scriptures declare that the first Name of God is 'I'. It should definitely refer to the Eternal 'I', the source of Being and not to the 'I' of our everyday knowledge. Moses got a verbal answer from God when he questioned God what His Name was: "My name is I AM, I AM". So, both from sages' statements and scriptural declarations and also from our own common experience we can easily arrive at the conclusion that there is an Eternal 'I' behind the 'I' by which we refer to ourselves everyday. It also propels us further to awake to the knowledge of this naked truth of Awareness which is hidden unattended to within. For, it is very essential that we have to observe closely the 'I'-thought since it is the link between the body and the Eternal 'I' spoken of as hidden within us by the scriptures. We must track the 'I'-thought to its source, by paying full attention to it and

whence it arises. How to do it? It is like this. When other thoughts arise we should focus our attention to the 'I'-thought. All the time one's attention should be unwaveringly directed to the feeling of 'I' or the 'I'-thought. When we are filled with thoughts, how to bring back the attention from other thoughts to the 'I'-thought? When we have other thoughts if we pose the question 'for whom is this thought?' the answer would come: 'to me'. Then ask 'Who am I?' This questioning 'Who am I?' again draws back our attention to the 'I' or the 'I'-thought and this attention leads to its Source. Thus, focussing one's attention on oneself is the sole effort one has to put forth to find out one's true identity.

When one is probing into oneself, enquiring into the 'I', through persistent questioning 'Who am I?', one gets in direct touch with the inner Reality, the Eternal 'I'. The measure of seriousness and one-pointedness with which one delves within to be 'I AM', is also the measure of how rewarding it will be. To be oneself is not only the straight path but also the easiest since you do not at all need any outer aid. As enjoined by Sri Bhagavan, we can, therefore, conclude that any act that directs or drives the outgoing mind inward to its source, the Eternal 'I', is spiritual and that anything that drags the mind outward, doping it in any activity, is unspiritual.

Bhagavan Ramana has opened a path to wake us all up to this Truth of inner felicity which is going to reverberate the entire world. This path will stand the test of time, logical analysis and clinical-type practical application. Seekers after Truth will hold on to it and thus keep the torch of the Truth silently but solidly burning for centuries to come. Any one can follow this silent, inward path of Ramana wherever they may be and in whatever walk of life they may be placed, not dependent upon nor affected by the challenges of perplexed environments. Thus, this path of introspective Self-Enquiry is an ever open path and hence anyone can tread it. It is simple, direct and rationally supported by intuition and utterly free from any outward influence, be it a religion or a dogma. This path, therefore, is meant for practical business, office and factory

workers, or professional men, no less than for those monastic-minded ones who are ready to renounce the world.

What makes Bhagavan's method unique is that it is based on intuition checked by reason; also, this pure reasoning is employed in the enquiry into the Self only by illuminated intuition. So, to summarise, we shall quote Sri Bhagavan's own words: "The state of non-emergence of 'I' is the state of Pure Being, Pure Awareness. ('Heart' is the word used by Bhagavan for this Pure Reality within us). This could be achieved only through enquiring 'Who am I?' Just as a man would dive in order to get something that had fallen in water, so one would dive into oneself with a keen one-pointedness and find the place whence the 'I' originates. The only enquiry leading to Self-knowledge is seeking the source of the feeling 'I'. If one enquires 'Who am I?' within, the individual 'I', the limited 'I', falls down abashed as soon as one reaches the Heart. Immediately the Reality manifests itself spontaneously as 'I', 'I'. Although It reveals Itself as 'I', it is not the limited 'I' known to us, but the Perfect Being, the Eternal 'I', the Divine Essence in us. The Self, the Truth that you seek to know is thus verily yourself". Also, when once Sri Muruganar put a question to Sri Bhagavan as to what he should do to attain the ultimate Truth, Sri Bhagavan answered: "Be as you ARE!"

(3) — THE UNIQUENESS OF THE RAMANA WAY

The term Self-enquiry or *Atma Vichara* is found in many of the ancient scriptures of India. In his great work "*Viveka-chudamani*" Sri Adi Sankara says that Liberation cannot be attained by any amount of action but only by Self-enquiry.

In "*Jnana Vasishta*" Sage Vasistha proclaims: "Shining in every body as 'I'-'I' is nothing but the Self on which one has to meditate... With the stick of enquiry strike the fierce-looking mind and snakelike senses and make them abide in the Heart".

"*Kaivalya Navaneeta*" declares: "Enquiry alone can lead to the knowledge revealed in the Vedas. Knowledge of Self cannot be gained by study".

"Srimad Bhagavad Gita" portends: "Fix the mind firmly in the Self".

So, when it is asked 'When Self-enquiry is already mentioned in scriptures, what new revelation has been made by Bhagavan?' the answer is easy and ready for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Though Self-enquiry is mentioned in the scriptures, the actual method of practising it is not clearly given. The scriptures give clues, it is true, such as: "You are not the body, *prana*, mind, etc.; You are Brahman", but these clues do not emphasise how to put it into practice. Such meditation brings in again another activity of the mind – any act by the mind fetters oneself. We start with meditation but soon find ourselves again back at the place where we started! Perhaps, noticing this constant riddle continuing in spite of existing scriptural statements, the Supreme Reality which gave those Scriptures, out of profound compassion for the human race, has come again in the comely form of Bhagavan Ramana, in order to give easier clues to find the Truth that can be easily understood, practised and realised by even a common man.

The uniqueness of Bhagavan's teaching is that it is not within the framework of the mind. In fact, Bhagavan is the great Master who has exclusively dealt with the realm, scope and ultimate futility of trying to rid of the shackles of the mind through mental methods. When questioned it will merge in its source and new dimension of functioning will come about.

In the first benedictory verse of "*Ulladu Narpadu*", Sri Bhagavan points out the futility of meditation (in the sense in which the term is generally understood) by asking: "Since the Reality exists in the Heart beyond thought, who can and how to meditate upon that Reality, which is called the Heart?" That is to say, if meditation is understood in its usual sense, namely a process of thinking, no amount of meditation can enable one to know or realise the Reality which is beyond thought. For, how can any amount of thought enable one to realise that which is beyond the range of thought? How then is

the Reality to be realised? The answer is given by Bhagavan Himself in the remaining portion of the same verse: "To abide in the Heart as it IS, is truly meditating upon it". In other words, since the Reality is beyond thought, to abide without thought as that Reality is the only way to meditate upon it and to realise it as it IS. But how to abide thus without thought?

What is it that now prevents us from abiding without thought as the Reality? The Reality or Self ever shines in the Heart, beyond thought, as the pure adjunctless 'I AM'. But instead of abiding as that 'I AM', there rises an ego, a separate individual who feels 'I am this body', 'I am so and so'. This ego is the first root thought, the 'I'-thought; without it no other thought can exist, as we already saw. Therefore, it is this individual 'I' which assumes the thought-forms as 'body', 'world', etc. that obstructs our natural abidance as 'I AM'. Hence, if we want to abide without thought as the Self and thereby realise the Reality as it is, we need only remove this obstruction, the first thought or ego. That is why so many of the verses of '*Ulladu Narpadu*' analyse and describe the nature of the ego and its by-products – the body and world – for, only when we understand their nature will we know how to remove them.

What is the nature of this ego, and how are we to prevent its rising? The answer to this question is the uniqueness of Bhagavan's teachings. In verse 24 of "*Ulladu Narpadu*", He tells us that the insentient body cannot of its own accord say 'I', that the real Eternal 'I' does not rise or set, but that between these two rises a false 'I' which is limited to the body; this is the ego, otherwise known as the *chit-jada-granthi* – the knot between the sentient Self and the insentient body – bondage, the individual soul, mind and so on. In the next verse, Sri Bhagavan tells us: "This formless and ghostly ego comes into existence by grasping a form (a body); grasping a form it endures; feeding upon forms which it grasps, it waxes more; leaving one form, it grasps another form..." How then are we to remove this sole obstruction which prevents us from peacefully and happily abiding as the Self? The answer is given by Bhagavan in the same verse (v.25), "When sought for, it takes

to flight"! This is another unique clue revealed by Bhagavan. He illustrated it with a story. A man posed himself as a friend of both the bride's and the bridegroom's party. So long as everyone believed him, he got on very happily, bossing over both the parties and feasting sumptuously. But, as soon as an enquiry was started about him, as soon as people tried to find out who he was, he took to flight and disappeared. Such is the case with the ego which, likewise, poses both as Self and as the body: it is endowed with consciousness and shines as 'I', which are the properties of Self, and, at the same time, it is limited to a form and it rises and sets, which are the properties of the body. So long as we do not enquire who it is, this ego will boss over us and will feast on the knowledge of objects gained through the five senses. But, as soon as we start Self-enquiry, as soon as we try to know who this ego is, it will take to flight and disappear.

Why, some may wonder, does the ego thus disappear when it is scrutinised or attended to? As Sri Bhagavan explains, the ego comes into existence only by grasping a form, also it endures by grasping forms, and it feeds itself and waxes strongly by grasping forms. Without a form to grasp, the ego cannot stand. All thoughts, all objects, all knowledges of second and third persons are only forms. Therefore, so long as the ego attends to objects, to second and third persons, it waxes and grows strong. But, the ego itself has no form; so, if it tries to attend to itself, the first person or subject, it will lose its strength, subside and disappear. Since, there, the ego falls back into its source, in the Heart. So long as it attends to second and third persons, it appears to exist, but when it tries to attend to itself, to enquire 'Who am I?' it is found to be non-existent. This truth is clearly stated by Bhagavan in verse 17 of 'Upadesa Saram': "If one enquires without inadvertance into the form of the mind (or ego), it will be found that there is no such thing as mind at all! This is the direct path for anyone and everyone!" When the ego thus disappears, being found to be non-existent, what remains? Only Self, the Reality! This, therefore, is the direct path which enables us to "abide in the Heart as it IS" as Sri Bhagavan says in the first benedictory verse of "Ulladu Narpadu".

Another unique contribution of Sri Bhagavan is His clear exposition that there are no two 'I's, one the ego and one the Self — "duality during practice 'sadhana' and non-duality on attainment 'sadhya' — and that Self is the only real 'I'. Only on this ocean of 'I AM', arise all emotions, feelings and thoughts, the adjuncts of the individual, the ego making us feel that the ego is the real 'I'. Therefore, if we closely attend to this 'I', we will find that it is not the ego but only the real Self. That is why, while teaching the practice of Self-enquiry, Sri Bhagavan does not distinguish two 'I's, the ego and the Self. He merely says: "Enquire 'Who am I?'"; in other words, attend to what you feel as 'I'. If what we feel as 'I' is the Self, by our attending to it, we will know it as it IS. If what we feel as 'I' is the ego, by our attending to it, it will disappear, and Self alone will then be known. Thus, whether the 'I' which we try to attend to is the ego or the Self, the result will be the same: only the Self, the Eternal 'I', the substance and ground of the false 'I', will remain shining.

Another uniqueness in the teaching of Bhagavan is that He revealed the importance of paying attention. We can thus boldly say that the correct technique of Self-enquiry as taught by Bhagavan is paying full attention to the mere feeling 'I'. As soon as we try to attend to the feeling 'I', all sorts of thoughts arise and distract our attention. However, it is interesting to observe that thoughts do not rise of their own accord, they rise only because we think them. Moreover, thoughts do not have any power of their own, they gain power only by our attending to them. If we do not attend to the thoughts that rise, they will subside of their own accord. Bhagavan says: "If you deny the ego and scorch it by ignoring it, you would become free. If you accept the ego, it will impose limitations on you and throw you into a vain struggle to transcend them". We have, thus, to set aside thought-attention and regain Self-attention. This method of attention is clearly taught by Sri Bhagavan in the small book: *WHO AM I?* where He says: "If other thoughts rise, one should, without attempting to complete them, enquire 'To whom did they rise?'. What does it matter however many thoughts rise? At the very moment, that each thought rises, if one vigilantly enquires 'Who am I?', the mind (our power of

Sri Bhagavan has categorically stressed in "Atma Vidya" that Self-enquiry is the easiest of all paths. Let us see why Bhagavan has said 'easiest'. What do the terms 'easy' and 'difficult' mean? In the words of Sri Sadhu Om: "What we do not like, what we cannot do and what we do not know, we call

attention) will turn back (from the thought) to its source, Self; (then, since no one is there to attend to it) the thought which had risen will also subside. By repeatedly practising thus, the power of the mind to abide in its source increases". This is a great clue for practising *sadhaks*: so long as our attention clings to this feeling 'I', we cannot know or attend to anything else. The sole purpose of the quest is to divert our attention back towards this 'I'. Therefore, Self can be known only by means of Self-enquiry and Self-enquiry is not an activity of the mind but the state of stillness of mind. As Sri Bhagavan says in verse 26 of "Upadesa Saram" "Being the Self is itself knowing the Self, because Self is not two. This is Self-abidance".

In verse 27 of "Ulladu Narpadu", Bhagavan declares that unless we attend to Self we cannot attain the state of egolessness in which 'I' does not rise, and unless we attain that egolessness we cannot abide in our true state of oneness with the Reality. Why should this be so? Why should not other *sadhana*s also enable us to realise the Self? The reason is lucidly explained by Bhagavan in "Maharshi's Gospel" (Book-I, Ch.1): "Self-enquiry alone is the direct means to realise the Self, because every other kind of *sadhana* presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the *sadhana*, and without the mind it cannot be practised. Therefore, the attempt to destroy the ego or mind by *sadhana*s other than Self-enquiry, is just like a thief posting as a policeman and pretending to try to catch the thief. Self-enquiry alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor mind really exists, and thus it alone can enable one to realise the Self". Bhagavan has also employed another analogy. He used to explain that trying to kill the mind by other *sadhana*s is like trying to bury one's shadow. If the mind were real, it could perhaps kill itself. But, the truth is that the mind is non-existent and hence it can no more kill itself than a man can bury his own shadow!

'difficult', whereas what we already like, what we have already done and what we already know, we call 'easy'. That is, if something is within our power of loving, our power of doing and our power of knowing, we feel it to be easy; but, if it is not within our power of loving, doing or knowing, we feel it to be 'difficult'. With this simple definition let us see whether Self-enquiry is easy or difficult. Is there anyone who can say that he does not love himself? No, among all the things we hold dear, it is ourself that we love most. Is there anyone who can say that he does not know himself? No, because before we know any other thing, we must first know ourself: when we say: "I know so-and-so" does it not prove that we know the feeling 'I'? And is there anyone who can say that he is not able to remove all his adjuncts such as the body and mind, and to abide as himself? No, because every day in deep sleep, we effortlessly and naturally remove these adjuncts and remain in our true nature. Thus, it is clear that we all love our Self, we all know our Self, and we are all able to abide as our Self. In other words, the *ichha-sakti* (power of loving, *kritya-sakti* (power of doing) and *jnana-sakti* (power of knowing) necessary for Self-enquiry are already inherent in us! Therefore, Self-enquiry is the easiest. All Sri Bhagavan asks us to do is: "Love yourself, know yourself and be yourself". How can this be called difficult? When Bhagavan assures that Self-enquiry is the easiest, He has also subtly left us a clue there. His reassurance is that we are not alone in this endeavour, but that His Grace is always there to help us. When His Grace has brought us all to His Lotus feet, will He not help us to attain the most noble and worthy achievement, that of success in Self-enquiry?