

The Spiritual Journey Continues

# Candles of Celebration 3

The Best Prayer and other articles



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## Walking the Spiritual Path

### The Best Prayer



Whenever we face some difficulties, most of us would pray to the Divine to help solve those problems for us. One drawback of this approach is that whenever the Divine solves our problems for us without any effort on our part to change ourselves, we do not grow. When we are faced with similar problems again, we go through the same emotional turmoil and feel powerless again.

There is a better way.

There are only two things which we should ask from the Divine. The first is strength; more specifically, a strong awareness.

I have a friend who is a Thai forest monk. Can you imagine being in the middle of the forest all by yourself at night? For most of us, the thought alone could be terrifying. But that was the training which my friend needed to go through as a young monk. Before he was sent out into the forest on his own to meditate for the first time, his Master advised him that he can be fearless as long as he can maintain his awareness. His Master asked him to take refuge in his true nature, which is pure awareness or in the Buddhist Heart Sutra, it is called emptiness. Ultimately, taking refuge in our awareness is much more powerful than depending on 'positive thinking' which this modern world tends to emphasize on. That teaching helped him tremendously and he did not back away from his training.

When I first started to meditate, I used to face obstacles in the form of scary images in my mind. Whenever, those scary images appeared, I would just give up and stop meditating. One day, I decided to persist and just observe those images with awareness. I did not add to those images by trying to talk myself out of the fear. I observed my fear rising and falling away. I noticed that the images could not sustain themselves even for a few seconds. They arose and then disappeared. The awareness that I maintained on those images withdrew the power from my emotions to make me react habitually; that is, by giving up and distract myself with other things.

In the Buddhist Heart Sutra, it is said that by abiding in emptiness, the Bodhisattvas (those on the path to becoming a Buddha) are able to be free from suffering. To abide in emptiness, we need to have a strong awareness. We abide in emptiness by being fully present without identifying with our ego.

Most of our suffering is created by our mind based on what we think is right or wrong. If someone is rude to us we may become angry. Getting angry at the point is fine if we can just let go of that emotion and leave it at that. The problem is we keep replaying that memory over and over again in our mind. We keep saying the same things to ourselves over and over again like a broken record to fuel the anger: “Oh! That guy was so rude, I should have scolded him; I should have told him this and that ...” We then prolong the anger unnecessarily because we were not able to abide in our awareness or emptiness.

By asking for a strong awareness, we are asking the Divine to give us the strength to free ourselves from the suffering *that we create for ourselves*. If we are honest with ourselves and just observe our own thoughts, we will have no choice but to admit that most of our sufferings are self-inflicted. Those who are not able to see this will blame the Divine for not helping them or blame their past karma. Our karma has a lot to do with our habitual patterns. When we change our habitual patterns, we change

our karma. In his book, [Intuitive Awareness](#), Ajahn Sumedho shared a personal experience which illustrates this point:



*"I used to have what I call an 'inner tyrant', a bad habit that I picked up of always criticising myself. It's a real tyrant — there is nobody in this world that has been more tyrannical, critical or nasty to me than I have. Even the most critical person, however much they have harmed and made me miserable, has never made me relentlessly miserable as much as I have myself, as a result of this inner tyrant. It's a*

*real wet blanket of a tyrant, no matter what I do it's never good enough. Even if everybody says, "Ajahn Sumedho, you gave such a wonderful dhamma talk", the inner tyrant says "You shouldn't have said this, you didn't say that right." It goes on, in an endless perpetual tirade of criticism and fault-finding. Yet it's just habit, I freed my mind from this habit, it does not have any footing anymore. I know exactly what it is, I no longer believe in it, or even try to get rid of it, I just know not to pursue it and just to let it dissolve into the silence".*

As we strengthen our awareness more and more, we begin to rely more on our awareness rather than our mind to solve our day to day problems. Our mind is limited because it comprises of our habitual thoughts. Research shows that more than 90% of our thoughts that we have today are the same as the ones we had yesterday. Ajahn Sumedho said, "As we begin to wake up, we see beyond the rigid dualism, the puritanical dualism, or the initial programme that we acquire through our family and social background. Trust in your own intuitive awakened sense. Don't trust in your views and opinions about anything: about yourself, about Buddhism or the world, for these views are often times very biased. We get very biased views about each other: we have racial prejudices, class

identities, ethnic biases and feelings of social superiority. These are not to be trusted”.

“That’s a way of breaking a lot of these emotional habits we have that plague us and obsess our minds. You can actually train your mind, not through rejection or denial but through understanding and cultivating this silence. So don’t use this silence as a way of annihilating or getting rid of what is arising in experience, but as a way of resolving and liberating your mind from the obsessive thoughts and negative attitudes that can endlessly plague conscious experience”.

Just recently I wondered how I can share the power of awareness in a simple, easy to apply way. Awareness has been talked about so much that it moved into the realm of the mind and has lost its practical use. Everyone is saying that we must have more awareness but no one understands how to apply it in a sustainable way.

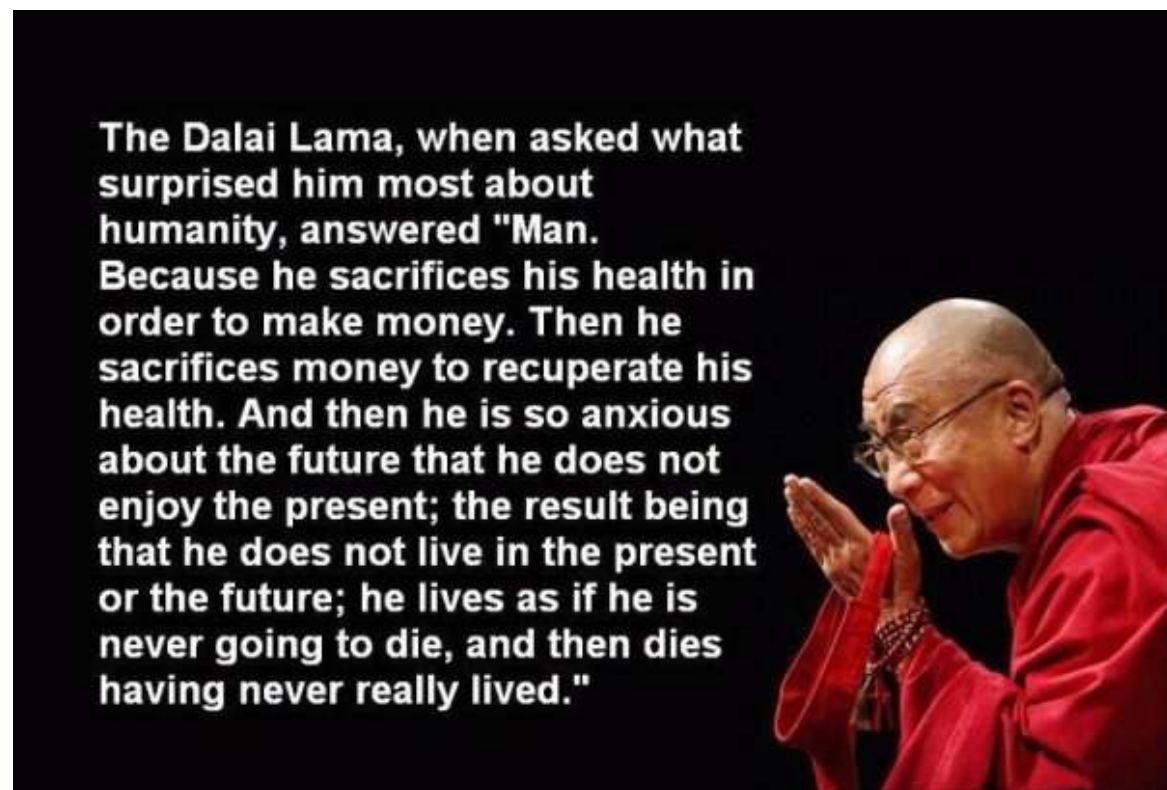
I came to the conclusion that awareness of our emotions is the easiest way to see this. It is simple but yet very powerful. When we watch our emotions with acceptance; without trying to get rid of them; we begin to take control of ourselves. It is a very effective way of understanding or accepting our emotions. Many of my friends could easily understand and apply it.

Allowing ourselves to really feel our emotions *without trying to talk ourselves out of them or to distract ourselves from them* can be a very enlightening process. If you have tried it and found it to be effective, I humbly request that you teach it to others so that they can learn to gain mastery over themselves with this simple process of paying loving attention to their emotions.

Ajahn Sumedho put it this way; “Awareness includes those emotions as mental objects, rather than subjects. If you don’t know this, you tend to identify with your emotions and your emotions become yourself. You become this emotional thing that has become terribly upset because the

world is not respecting you enough. Our refuge is in the deathless reality rather than in the transient and unstable conditions. If you trust in the awareness, then the self and the emotions about oneself, whatever they might be, can be seen in terms of what they are; not judged, not making any problem out of them, but just noticing: It's like this".

When we watch our emotions, we do so silently. There is no need to mentally express our emotions. There is no need to ask ourselves, "What am I feeling?" It is like tasting a new type of food. We just experience the taste without explaining the taste to ourselves. It tastes like this...and that is it. There is no need to say more about it; we already know the taste. Words pale in comparison to the actual experience.



Secondly, we should pray for wisdom. Most of the time, we get into arguments which are not worth the effort. We argue because our ego was hurt and it really did not matter who was right or wrong. Road rage is one example.



We set expectations of others and ourselves that cause us unnecessary hurt. Parents push their children into the professions which they think can earn the most money but do not consider what their children are passionate about. My friend fought with his parents because he preferred fashion designing but his parents insisted that he get a professional degree. He persisted and now he is a successful businessman in the area of fashion designing. Had his parents the wisdom to see that it is better for their son to go after something he is passionate about, they could have avoided a lot of unnecessary arguments which strained their relationship.

Wisdom and intellect are very different things. Wisdom arises out of experience and intuition. 'Intellectually knowing' that we are not our mind is very different from observing the workings of our mind and coming to our own conclusion that we are not our mind. I have a friend who keeps repeating that we need to see that we are not the 'I' but I could see that he is merely parroting something that he read; that intellectual knowledge is not helping him to live a happier life. In fact, it appears to be a hindrance because he 'thinks' that he has understood and as such, is not putting in any effort at all to look within to experience what he is saying.

Ajahn Sumedho summarised this beautifully when he said, "In meditation we are not trying to deny personality, we are not trying to convince ourselves that we are non-people, grasping ideas that "I have no nationality, I have no sex, I have no class, I have no race, the pure Dhamma is my true identity". That's still another identity, isn't it? Now that's not it. It's not about grasping the concepts of no-self. It is in realising, in noting through awakened attention the way things really are".

When we have wisdom, virtue arises naturally. Many of us set virtue as high standards that we need to achieve. We tell ourselves that we need to be more humble, more generous, more patient and so on. This kind of

thinking only creates unnecessary guilt and is counter-productive. Virtue arises naturally when we have the wisdom to see that virtuous conduct leads to inner-peace.

When we are humble, we are less likely to get angry at others. This is because it is less likely for us to become angry at someone who we think is important. When we see ourselves as more important than everyone else, it is easier for us to lash out at others. With humility, we are more forgiving with others and more importantly, we are more forgiving with ourselves. We become more patient and peaceful. We stop expecting ourselves to be more this and more that. We are what we are and we allow ourselves to make mistakes because we have the humility to know that we are not perfect. We become humble because we see it contributing to our inner-peace and not because the scriptures say that we need to be humble. With wisdom, virtue becomes natural and effortless.

So, pray for wisdom and a strong awareness. Actually, they are not two separate matters. Awareness and wisdom come hand in hand. Wisdom arises out of awareness and that wisdom further strengthens the awareness from which it arose. Awareness enables us to look pass our 'personality view' and that is wisdom. Ajahn Sumedho said, "Personality view is a tyrant. It's the victim and the victimizer. As the victim it says, "Poor me. I'm so impure", whilst as the accuser it says, "You're not good enough, you're impure". It's both. You can't trust it. Don't take refuge in being a victim or in being a victimizer. But you can trust in this awakened awareness. And that trust is humbling. It isn't like believing in something. It's learning to relax and be. Trust in the ability simply to be here, open and receptive to whatever is happening now. Even if what's happening is nasty or whatever the conditions you're experiencing are, that's not a problem if you trust in this purity".



“You can be aware when you’re at your best or your worst, when you’re feeling really good and inspired and love the life, and when you’re feeling down, despairing, lonely, and depressed and disheartened. This awareness is your refuge. Awareness of the changingness of feelings, of

attitudes, of moods, of material change and emotional change: Stay with that, because it’s a refuge that is indestructible. It’s not something that changes. It’s a refuge you can trust in. This refuge is not something that you create. It’s not a creation. It’s not an ideal. It’s very practical and very simple, but easily overlooked or not noticed. When you’re mindful, you’re beginning to notice: it’s like this”.

“My personality is wide open to be hurt, to be offended, to be upset by anything. But personality is not my refuge. It’s not what I would advise as being a refuge, if your personality is anything like mine. I wouldn’t for a minute want to recommend anyone taking refuge in my personality. But in awareness, yes; because awareness is pure. If you trust it more and more, even if you’re feeling hurt and upset, disrespected and unloved and unappreciated, the awareness knows that as being impermanent. It’s not judging. It’s not making any problems. It’s fully accepting the feeling that “nobody loves me, everybody hates me” as feeling. And it goes away naturally. It drops because its nature is change”.

## Surrender: The Foundation of Kriya Yoga



When I was first initiated into Kriya Yoga, the teacher asked us to pick a topic to contemplate in one of the meditation practices. I chose 'Surrender'. The topic just came naturally to me and I could have filled pages after pages writing about it after coming out of the meditation. I did not realise it then but I know now that surrendering to the Divine is the foundation of Kriya Yoga which supports our entire practice.

My friend recently shared a story with me which illustrates this:

*Recently I faced some problems at work. I prayed to the Divine to bring peace to my heart while I go through this challenge. One night, I dreamt that I was a construction worker working on a skyscraper. I was very high up in the sky walking along the steel beams. I have a fear of heights and the*



*Divine chose a good way to get His point across! I was scared stiff but the Divine said to me that I have protective wires tied to me. All I need to do is to test those wires once by falling off in the scariest way possible. Once I see that I am protected by the wires, I will no longer be afraid! So, I let go of the beam which I was clinging to and spread my hands out. I then leaned back with my eyes closed and fell off. I was caught by the security wires and pulled back to safety.*

*After I woke up, I could still remember the dream clearly. I know that whenever I remember a dream with clarity, it is a message from the Divine. It was clear to me that the Divine asked me to trust in Him. The*

*message was simple: Do not be afraid of falling because I will be there to catch you!*

The purpose of Kriya Yoga is for spiritual evolution and the practices lead to the purification of one's karma. It may draw to the present, future difficulties that we have to go through. However, the challenges may be less burdensome and we may be in a better position to face it now compared to later on when we are older and weaker. It is better to face our challenges when we are younger and leave the good times for our old age! At the same time, we can rest assured that the Divine will always be there to guide us and catch us when we fall.

We can surrender to any Divine Form which we feel a close connection with. We may see the Divine as Kriya Babaji, Lord Shiva, Jesus, Buddha or any other Divine form. When we love a person, it does not matter which aspect of the person we love the most; we still love the person. This is the same with the Divine. The Divine takes on different forms to represent different aspects of His Divinity but all these forms are still the Divine.

When the Divine shows us miracles, He is not trying to entertain us. He is merely asking, "When will you rest and just trust me?"

*OM KRIYA BABAJI NAMA AUM*

## Spiritual Independence: Trusting One's Divinity

There was a story in the news about a family who went to a priest for spiritual help to resolve some family problems. Instead of helping them, the priest gave them milk laced with poison to drink and subsequently stole all the jewellery in the house.

Recently, a friend told me about the problems he faced at work and how he hoped to resolve them by going to a priest to help. I questioned him about the nature of the problems he faced at work and realised that the problems are due more to his attitude than the external circumstances. I realised that because he was expecting Divine help, he failed to see his contributions to those problems. Similarly, in the first story, the family members refused to see how their own negative habits and habitual thinking patterns were contributing to their family problems. Instead of making personal changes, they chose to put the blame outside of themselves.

I want to make it clear that I am not against asking for Divine help. I just have two important points to make. Firstly, we must know that we are closer to the Divine than we think. Our prayers are always heard. The Divine does not practice favouritism and answer prayers only from priests. If we just let go of our expectations about how the Divine should help us, we can start to see the Divine's hand in the resolution of all our problems. Our expectations about how the Divine should help us can actually blind us to the assistance given. To illustrate this; recently I went shopping with my wife. Along the way, I got distracted and lost her in the crowd. I thought that she was wearing a red dress but in actual case, she was wearing one in another colour. Because I was looking for a red dress, I failed to see her even when she was just a few steps away. I only saw after she called out my name.

The second point is that the greatest assistance that the Divine can give us is to grant us with the wisdom to see our own errors and provide us

with insights on how we can overcome the problems ourselves. That is why we often hear others say – God helps those who help themselves.

We can only solve our problems through self-understanding and removing our negative tendencies. We should stop putting blame on others and start to look within ourselves to see how our thought processes and attitude contributed to the problems. If we are too quick to conclude that the problems lie in other people, we will lose the opportunity to improve ourselves. Because we still cling to the negative tendencies, we will continue to attract the same problems to our life. Many times, I have looked at my problems and found my own hand in them. These experiences inspired me to write the article '[Destiny and Character](#)' which can be found in my free e-book 'Candles of Celebration 2'.

In Buddhism, especially in Theravada Buddhism, spiritual independence is one of the core principles. The Buddha refused to say if there is a Creator. The Buddha emphasised on self-practice and urge all his followers to practice hard and discover all these things for themselves. He urged them to remove their own delusions in order to have happiness. We should stop trying to change the world but change ourselves instead. By changing ourselves, we can change the world.



## The Yoga of the Buddha

Richard sat in his garden, enjoying the fresh morning air as he sipped a hot cup of coffee. The beautiful songs sung by the birds never fail to relax him. His mind turned towards his spiritual practices as he admired the colourful flowers his wife planted around the garden.

He started practicing Buddhism before he discovered Yoga and now he practices both teachings, taking techniques from both paths that appeal to him. Richard rubbed his chin as he contemplated how he had integrated both paths. So far, he had been doing it unconsciously but recently, he began to see a pattern; he began to see how both paths are complementing each other.

Richard admired the spiritual independence taught by the Buddha. The Buddha taught that suffering has its causes. It is possible to be free from suffering and he showed the path that can lead to that freedom.

However, he emphasised that One must make the effort to walk the path as no one else can do it for him. The Buddha refused to say if there is a Creator because he wanted his followers to be spiritually independent. He never solved the problems of his followers by performing miracles but instead, took the opportunity to help them understand themselves and the causes of their suffering. God help those who help themselves; the Buddha taught that principle in his own unique way.

When the Buddha died, his disciples asked him who he wished to appoint to be his successor. The Buddha said that the teachings he gave will be their new teacher. He told his disciplines not to build statues of him and not to pray to him. They can only find salvation by putting the teachings he taught them into practice.

Richard smiled and whispered to himself, “No one can solve our problems for us”. He finally understood. Our problems are caused by our bad habits and habitual thinking patterns. He recalled the experience of one of his friend: John had financial difficulties and went to pray for help. His prayer was answered and he won a lottery. That solved all his financial



difficulties...temporarily. However, he never learnt to control his craving and end up spending all the money, and again, got himself into a financial crisis. That is why it is important for us to pray to the Divine for the wisdom to solve our problems rather than solving our problems for us.

Richard also admired the Buddha's emphasis on the development of



concentration and awareness, which leads to understanding the 'Self'. The Buddha taught his disciples to strengthen their concentration by focusing on their breath. When their concentration was developed to a sufficient degree, they were able to be aware of their thoughts, emotions and senses. In everyday life, our thoughts, emotions and the stimulation of our senses occur rapidly and are bound tightly to

each other like tightly strung prayer beads. This creates an illusion that an 'entity' exist. This entity is called the ego or Maya.

But as the practitioner maintains his awareness on his thoughts, emotions and senses, they slow down and begin to move apart. They start to leave gaps. As he continues to meditate, they move further and further apart. The practitioner starts to see more empty space than the beads.

Eventually, he reaches the state of 'no-mind' and he does not see any bead at all. When he gets out of his meditation, he realises that the illusory entity temporarily disappeared during his practice. If he was truly that entity, he would by definition be dead. But because that entity is merely his thoughts, emotions and senses, that entity is pure energy that cannot die. Death is merely an illusion.

Richard could see how his Yoga practices are important for his spiritual evolution. During the Buddha's time, his disciples were encouraged to become monks. As monks, they spend their day listening to the Buddha and meditating. Because they are not distracted, they do not waste as much prana or life force as compared to a householder. Because the

householder uses up a lot of prana while carrying out his daily responsibilities, he has very little left for his spiritual practices. When One lacks prana, One will find it difficult to maintain One's awareness. Therefore, the householder needs Yogic practices that enable him to draw prana into his body. With sufficient prana, he is able to better maintain his awareness and gain wisdom.

Richard also acknowledged that we sometimes do not 'see' our bad habits. Richard recalled that he recently got very angry with a friend but later when he calmed down, he realised that what his friend did was not bad at all. He realised that he had a bad habit of getting angry and that habit merely made his friend a convenient target; perhaps because his friend was a safe target whom he knew would forgive him for his show of irritability. It took him many years to realise that he was the real cause of his anger. He also realised that his Yogic practices somehow managed to remove some blockages within him that enabled him to finally see that bad habit.

Richard laughed at himself. Sometimes, even when we 'see' the problem, our ego can come out with a thousand excuses for us to indulge in our bad habit. Richard knew that buying a new car could make it difficult for him financially but still went ahead to buy one because his desires and emotions got the better of him. He regretted that decision.

Richard realised that even with the wisdom to know the causes of suffering, he may succumb to bad habits if his awareness is not strong. Richard is aware that whenever he is possessed by strong negative emotion such as anger, it is very difficult to use wisdom and try to talk himself out of that anger. It is like using one part of his ego to fight with another part of his ego. Of course, the stronger habit will always win. Whenever, he is overcome by a strong negative emotion, he finds it effective to just be aware of the emotion and it will fade away quickly. After it fades away sufficiently, he will use his wisdom faculty to understand and learn from the incident.

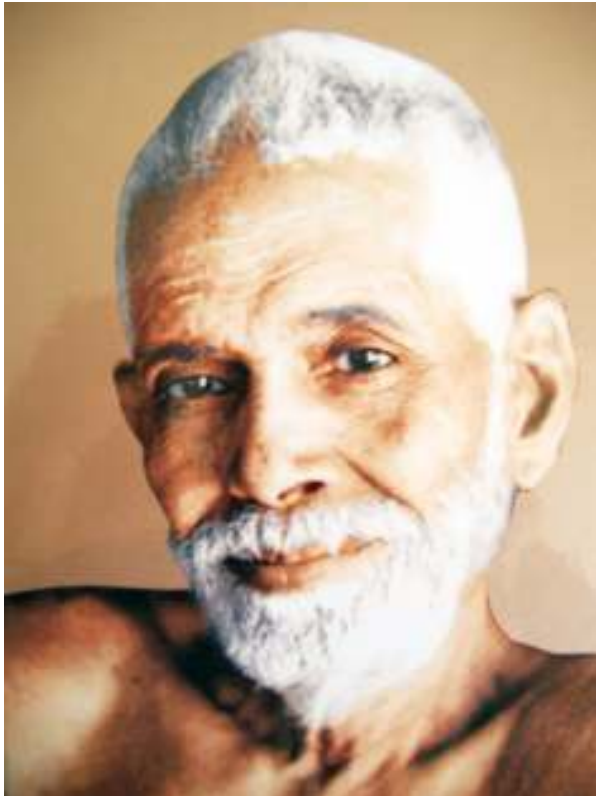
He recently heard someone say that happiness is hard work. When he heard it, he laughed, not because he found it ridiculous but because he knew how true that statement was. We are unhappy because we developed habits and habitual ways of thinking that keep us unhappy. We need to undo that.

We need to develop habits and habitual ways of thinking that lead to happiness. An effective way is to develop contentment and the habit of being grateful for what we have. If we are constantly being thankful, we will have very little space left in our mind for craving and jealousy. All our problems stem from our desires; even anger which arises when we meet an obstacle to our desires. By being contented, there is no room for desire.

Richard looked forward to the day when all the spiritual paths and religions becomes an integrated whole but the practitioners can still pick from the whole, those practices that suits them best. When that time comes, there will be no more fights and wars in the name of religion. He knows that there is no such thing as the 'best path' but everyone must find the most suitable path for his mental make-up.

## The Enlightenment of Ramana Maharishi

The following is the description by Ramana Maharishi of his death experience or enlightenment<sup>1</sup>:



“It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good that the great change in my life took place. It was so sudden. One day I sat up alone on the first floor of my uncle’s house. I was in my usual health. I seldom had any illness. I was a heavy sleeper. ... So, on that day as I sat alone there was nothing wrong with my health. But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death seized me. I felt I was going to die. Why I should have so felt cannot now be explained by anything felt in my body. Nor could

I explain it to myself then. I did not however trouble myself to discover if the fear was well grounded. I felt ‘I was going to die,’ and at once set about thinking out what I should do. I did not care to consult doctors or elders or even friends. I felt I had to solve the problem myself then and there”.

“The shock of fear of death made me at once introspective, or ‘introverted’. I said to myself mentally, ‘Now, death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.’ I at once dramatized the scene of death. I extended my limbs and held them rigid as though rigor-mortis had set in. I imitated a corpse to lend an air of reality to my further investigation. I held my breath and kept my mouth closed, pressing the lips tightly together so that no sound might escape. Let not the word ‘I’ or

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<sup>1</sup> Source : ‘Ramana Maharishi: His Life’ by Gabriele Ebert.

any other word be uttered! ‘Well then,’ said I to myself, ‘this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body, am “I” dead? Is the body “I”? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the sound “I” within myself, - apart from the body. So “I” am a spirit, a thing transcending the body. The material body dies, but the spirit transcending it cannot be touched by death. I am therefore the deathless spirit”.

“All this was not a mere intellectual process, but flashed before me vividly as living truth, something which I perceived immediately, without any argument almost. ‘I’ was something very real, the only real thing in that state, and all the conscious activity that was connected with my body was centred on that. The ‘I’ or my ‘self’ was holding the focus of attention by a powerful fascination from that time onwards. Fear of death had vanished once and forever. Absorption in the Self has continued from that moment right up to this time. Other thoughts may come and go like the various notes of a musician, but the ‘I’ continues like the basic or fundamental sruti note which accompanies and blends with all other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading or anything else, I was still centred on ‘I’”.

“Previous to that crisis I had no clear perception of myself and was not consciously attracted to it. I had felt no direct perceptible interest in it, much less any permanent disposition to dwell upon it.”

“When I lay down with limbs outstretched and mentally enacted the death scene and realized that the body would be taken and cremated and yet I would live, some force, call it atmic power [power of atman] or anything else, rose within me and took possession of me. With that, I was reborn and I became a new man. I became indifferent to everything afterwards, having neither likes nor dislikes.”

“After the ‘death’ experience I was living in a different world. How could I turn my attention to books? Before that, I would at least attend to what

the other boys repeated and repeat the same myself. But afterwards, I could not do even that. At school, my mind would not dwell on study at all. I would be imagining and expecting God would suddenly drop down from Heaven before me.”



“Formerly I would go there (Meenakshi Temple) rarely with friends, see the images, put on sacred ashes and sacred vermilion on the forehead and return home without any perceptible emotion.

After the awakening into

the new life, I would go almost every evening to the temple. I would go alone and stand before Shiva, or Meenakshi or Nataraja or the sixty-three saints for long periods. I would feel waves of emotion overcoming me. The former hold on the body had been given up by my spirit, since it ceased to cherish the idea I-am-the-body. The spirit therefore longed to have a fresh hold and hence the frequent visits to the temple and the overflow of the soul in profuse tears. This was God’s (Isvara’s) play with the individual spirit. I would stand before Isvara, the Controller of the universe and the destinies of all, the Omniscient and Omnipresent, and occasionally pray for the descent of his grace upon me so that my devotion might increase and become perpetual like that of the sixty-three saints. Mostly I would not pray at all, but let the deep within flow on and into the deep without. Tears would mark this overflow of the soul and not betoken any particular feeling of pleasure or pain”.



## The Enlightenment of Osho

Here is Osho's story regarding his enlightenment:



I am reminded of the fateful day of 21 March, 1953. For many lives I had been working -- working upon myself, struggling, doing whatsoever can be done -- and nothing was happening. Now I understand why nothing was happening. The very effort was the barrier, the very ladder was

preventing; the very urge to seek was the obstacle. Not that one can reach without seeking. Seeking is needed, but then comes a point when seeking has to be dropped. The boat is needed to cross the river but then comes a moment when you have to get out of the boat and forget all about it and leave it behind.

Effort is needed, without effort nothing is possible. And also only with effort, nothing is possible. Just before 21 March, 1953, seven days before, I stopped working on myself. A moment comes when you see the whole futility of effort. You have done all that you can do and nothing is happening. You have done all that is humanly possible. Then what else can you do? In sheer helplessness one drops all search. And the day the search stopped, the day I was not seeking for something, the day I was not expecting something to happen, it started happening. A new energy arose -- out of nowhere.

It was not coming from any source. It was coming from nowhere and everywhere. It was in the trees and in the rocks and the sky and the sun and the air -- it was everywhere. And I was seeking so hard, and I was

thinking it is very far away. And it was so near and so close. Just because I was seeking I had become incapable of seeing the near. Seeking is always for the far, seeking is always for the distant -- and it was not distant. I had become far-sighted, I had lost the near-sightedness. The eyes had become focussed on the far away, the horizon, and they had lost the quality to see that which is just close, surrounding you.

The day effort ceased, I also ceased. Because you cannot exist without effort, and you cannot exist without desire, and you cannot exist without striving. The phenomenon of the ego, of the self, is not a thing, it is a process. It is not a substance sitting there inside you; you have to create it each moment. It is like pedalling bicycle. If you pedal it goes on and on, if you don't pedal it stops. It may go a little because of the past momentum, but the moment you stop pedalling, in fact the bicycle starts stopping. It has no more energy, no more power to go anywhere. It is going to fall and collapse.

The ego exists because we go on pedalling desire, because we go on striving to get something, because we go on jumping ahead of ourselves. That is the very phenomenon of the ego -- the jump ahead of yourself, the jump in the future, the jump in the tomorrow. The jump in the non-existential creates the ego. Because it comes out of the non-existential it is like a mirage. It consists only of desire and nothing else. It consists only of thirst and nothing else. The ego is not in the present, it is in the future. If you are in the future, then ego seems to be very substantial. If you are in the present the ego is a mirage, it starts disappearing.

The day I stopped seeking... and it is not right to say that I stopped seeking...better to say the day seeking stopped. Let me repeat it: the better way to say it is the day the seeking stopped: Because if I stop it then I am there again. Now stopping becomes my effort, now stopping becomes my desire, and desire goes on existing in a very subtle way. You cannot stop desire; you can only understand it. In the very understanding



is the stopping of it. Remember, nobody can stop desiring, and the reality happens only when desire stops.

So this is the dilemma. What to do? Desire is there and Buddhas go on saying desire has to be stopped, and they go on saying in the next breath that you cannot stop desire. So what to do? You put people in a dilemma. They are in desire, certainly. You say it has to be stopped -- okay. And then you say it cannot be stopped. Then what is to be done? The desire has to be understood. If you can understand it, you can just see the futility of it. A direct perception is needed, an immediate penetration is needed. Look into desire, just see what it is, and you will see the falsity of it, and you will see it is non-existential. And desire drops and something drops simultaneously within you.

Desire and the ego exist in cooperation, they coordinate. The ego cannot exist without desire, the desire cannot exist without the ego. Desire is projected ego, ego is 'introjected' desire. They are together, two aspects of one phenomenon. The day desiring stopped, I felt very hopeless and helpless. No hope because no future. Nothing to hope because all hoping has proved futile, it leads nowhere. You go in rounds. It goes on dangling in front of you, it goes on creating new mirages; it goes on calling you, 'Come on, run faster, you will reach.' But howsoever fast you run you never reach.

That's why Buddha calls it a mirage. It is like the horizon that you see around the earth. It appears but it is not there. If you go it goes on running from you. The faster you run, the faster it moves away. The slower you go, the slower it moves away. But one thing is certain -- the distance between you and the horizon remains absolutely the same. Not even a single inch can you reduce the distance between you and the horizon. You cannot reduce the distance between you and your hope. Hope is horizon. You try to bridge yourself with the horizon, with the hope, with a projected desire.

The desire is a bridge, a dream bridge -- because the horizon exists not, so you cannot make a bridge towards it, you can only dream about the bridge. You cannot be joined with the non-existential. The day the desire stopped, the day I looked and realized into it, it simply was futile. I was helpless and hopeless. But that very moment something started happening. The same started happening for which for many lives I was working and it was not happening. In your hopelessness is the only hope, and in your 'desirelessness' is your only fulfilment, and in your tremendous helplessness suddenly the whole existence starts helping you.

It is waiting. When it sees that you are working on your own, it does not interfere. It waits. It can wait infinitely because there is no hurry for it. It is eternity. The moment you are not on your own, the moment you drop, the moment you disappear, the whole existence rushes towards you, enters you. And for the first time things start happening. Seven days I lived in a very hopeless and helpless state, but at the same time something was arising. When I say hopeless I don't mean what you mean by the word hopeless. I simply mean there was no hope in me. Hope was absent.

I am not saying that I was hopeless and sad. I was happy in fact, I was very tranquil, calm and collected and centred. Hopeless, but in a totally new meaning. There was no hope, so how could there be hopelessness. Both had disappeared. The hopelessness was absolute and total. Hope had disappeared and with it its counterpart, hopelessness, had also disappeared. It was a totally new experience -- of being without hope. It was not a negative state. I have to use words -- but it was not a negative state. It was absolutely positive. It was not just absence, a presence was felt. Something was overflowing in me, over-flooding me.

And when I say I was helpless, I don't mean the word in the dictionary-sense. I simply say I was selfless. That's what I mean when I say helpless. I have recognized the fact that I am not, so I cannot depend on myself, so I

cannot stand on my own ground -- there was no ground underneath. I was in an abyss... bottomless abyss. But there was no fear because there was nothing to protect. There was no fear because there was nobody to be afraid. Those seven days were of tremendous transformation, total transformation. And the last day the presence of a totally new energy, a new light and new delight, became so intense that it was almost unbearable -- as if I was exploding, as if I was going mad with blissfulness.

The new generation in the West has the right word for it -- I was 'blissed out', stoned. It was impossible to make any sense out of it, what was happening. It was a very non-sense world -- difficult to figure it out, difficult to manage in categories, difficult to use words, languages, explanations. All scriptures appeared dead and all the words that have been used for this experience looked very pale, anaemic. This was so alive. It was like a tidal wave of bliss.

The whole day was strange, stunning, and it was a shattering experience. The past was disappearing, as if it had never belonged to me, as if I had read about it somewhere, as if I had dreamed about it, as if it was somebody else's story I have heard and somebody told it to me. I was becoming loose from my past, I was being uprooted from my history, I was losing my autobiography. I was becoming a non-being, what Buddha calls 'Anatta'. Boundaries were disappearing, distinctions were disappearing.

Mind was disappearing; it was millions of miles away. It was difficult to catch hold of it, it was rushing farther and farther away, and there was no urge to keep it close. I was simply indifferent about it all. It was okay. There was no urge to remain continuous with the past. By the evening it became so difficult to bear it -- it was hurting, it was painful. It was like when a woman goes into labour when a child is to be born, and the woman suffers tremendous pain -- the birth pangs. I used to go to sleep in those days near about twelve or one in the night, but that day it was

impossible to remain awake. My eyes were closing, it was difficult to keep them open.

Something was very imminent, something was going to happen. It was difficult to say what it was -- maybe it is going to be my death -- but there was no fear. I was ready for it. Those seven days had been so beautiful that I was ready to die, nothing more was needed. They had been so tremendously blissful, I was so contented, that if death was coming, it was welcome. But something was going to happen -- something like death, something very drastic, something which will be either a death or a new birth, a crucifixion or a resurrection -- but something of tremendous import was around just by the corner. And it was impossible to keep my eyes open. I was drugged.

I went to sleep near about eight. It was not like sleep. Now I can understand what Patanjali means when he says that sleep and samadhi are similar. Only with one difference -- that in samadhi you are fully awake and asleep also. Asleep and awake together, the whole body relaxed, every cell of the body totally relaxed, all functioning relaxed, and yet a light of awareness burns within you... clear, smokeless. You remain alert and yet relaxed, loose but fully awake. The body is in the deepest sleep possible and your consciousness is at its peak. The peak of consciousness and the valley of the body meet.

I went to sleep. It was a very strange sleep. The body was asleep, I was awake. It was so strange -- as if one was torn apart into two directions, two dimensions; as if the polarity has become completely focused, as if I was both the polarities together... the positive and negative were meeting, sleep and awareness were meeting, death and life were meeting. That is the moment when you can say 'the creator and the creation meet.' It was weird. For the first time it shocks you to the very roots, it shakes your foundations. You can never be the same after that experience; it brings a new vision to your life, a new quality.

Near about twelve my eyes suddenly opened -- I had not opened them. The sleep was broken by something else. I felt a great presence around me in the room. It was a very small room. I felt a throbbing life all around me, a great vibration -- almost like a hurricane, a great storm of light, joy, ecstasy. I was drowning in it. It was so tremendously real that everything became unreal. The walls of the room became unreal, the house became unreal, my own body became unreal. Everything was unreal because now there was for the first time reality.

That's why when Buddha and Shankara say the world is maya, a mirage, it is difficult for us to understand. Because we know only this world, we don't have any comparison. This is the only reality we know. What are these people talking about -- this is maya, illusion? This is the only reality. Unless you come to know the really real, their words cannot be understood, their words remain theoretical. They look like hypotheses. Maybe this man is propounding a philosophy -- 'The world is unreal'. When Berkley in the West said that the world is unreal, he was walking with one of his friends, a very logical man; the friend was almost a skeptic.

He took a stone from the road and hit Berkley's feet hard. Berkley screamed, blood rushed out, and the skeptic said, 'Now, the world is unreal? You say the world is unreal? -- then why did you scream? This stone is unreal? -- then why did you scream? Then why are you holding your leg and why are you showing so much pain and anguish on your face. Stop this? It is all unreal. Now this type of man cannot understand what Buddha means when he says the world is a mirage. He does not mean that you can pass through the wall. He is not saying this -- that you can eat stones and it will make no difference whether you eat bread or stones. He is not saying that.

He is saying that there is a reality. Once you come to know it, this so-called reality simply pales out, simply becomes unreal. With a higher reality in vision the comparison arises, not otherwise. In the dream; the

dream is real. You dream every night. Dream is one of the greatest activities that you go on doing. If you live sixty years, twenty years you will sleep and almost ten years you will dream. Ten years in a life -- nothing else do you do so much. Ten years of continuous dreaming -- just think about it. And every night.... And every morning you say it was unreal, and again in the night when you dream, dream becomes real.

In a dream it is so difficult to remember that this is a dream. But in the morning it is so easy. What happens? You are the same person. In the dream there is only one reality. How to compare? How to say it is unreal? Compared to what? It is the only reality. Everything is as unreal as everything else so there is no comparison. In the morning when you open your eyes another reality is there. Now you can say it was all unreal. Compared to this reality, dream becomes unreal. There is an awakening -- compared to THAT reality of THAT awakening, this whole reality becomes unreal.

That night for the first time I understood the meaning of the word maya. Not that I had not known the word before, not that I was not aware of the meaning of the word. As you are aware, I was also aware of the meaning -- but I had never understood it before. How can you understand without experience? That night another reality opened its door, another dimension became available. Suddenly it was there, the other reality, the separate reality, the really real, or whatsoever you want to call it -- call it god, call it truth, call it dhamma, call it tao, or whatsoever you will.

It was nameless. But it was there -- so opaque, so transparent, and yet so solid one could have touched it. It was almost suffocating me in that room. It was too much and I was not yet capable of absorbing it. A deep urge arose in me to rush out of the room, to go under the sky -- it was suffocating me. It was too much! It will kill me! If I had remained a few moments more, it would have suffocated me -- it looked like that. I rushed out of the room, came out in the street. A great urge was there just to be under the sky with the stars, with the trees, with the earth... to

be with nature. And immediately as I came out, the feeling of being suffocated disappeared.

It was too small a place for such a big phenomenon. Even the sky is a small place for that big phenomenon. It is bigger than the sky. Even the sky is not the limit for it. But then I felt more at ease. I walked towards the nearest garden. It was a totally new walk, as if gravitation had disappeared. I was walking, or I was running, or I was simply flying; it was difficult to decide. There was no gravitation, I was feeling weightless -- as if some energy was taking me. I was in the hands of some other energy. For the first time I was not alone, for the first time I was no more an individual, for the first time the drop has come and fallen into the ocean. Now the whole ocean was mine, I was the ocean.

There was no limitation. A tremendous power arose as if I could do anything whatsoever. I was not there, only the power was there. I reached to the garden where I used to go every day. The garden was closed, closed for the night. It was too late, it was almost one o'clock in the night. The gardeners were fast asleep. I had to enter the garden like a thief; I had to climb the gate. But something was pulling me towards the garden. It was not within my capacity to prevent myself. I was just floating.

That's what I mean when I say again and again 'float with the river, don't push the river'. I was relaxed, I was in a let-go. I was not there. IT was there, call it god -- god was there. I would like to call it IT, because god is too human a word, and has become too dirty by too much use, has become too polluted by so many people. Christians, Hindus, Mohammedans, priests and politicians -- they all have corrupted the beauty of the word. So let me call it IT. IT was there and I was just carried away... carried by a tidal wave.

The moment I entered the garden everything became luminous, it was all over the place -- the benediction, the blessedness. I could see the trees for the first time -- their green, their life, their very sap running. The

whole garden was asleep, the trees were asleep. But I could see the whole garden alive, even the small grass leaves were so beautiful. I looked around. One tree was tremendously luminous -- the maulshree tree. It attracted me, it pulled me towards itself. I had not chosen it, god himself has chosen it. I went to the tree, I sat under the tree. As I sat there things started settling. The whole universe became a benediction.

It is difficult to say how long I was in that state. When I went back home it was four o'clock in the morning, so I must have been there by clock time at least three hours -- but it was infinity. It had nothing to do with clock time. It was timeless. Those three hours became the whole eternity, endless eternity. There was no time, there was no passage of time; it was the virgin reality -- uncorrupted, untouchable, unmeasurable. And that day something happened that has continued -- not as a continuity -- but it has still continued as an undercurrent. Not as a permanency -- each moment it has been happening again and again. It has been a miracle each moment.

That night... and since that night I have never been in the body. I am hovering around it. I became tremendously powerful and at the same time very fragile. I became very strong, but that strength is not the strength of a Mohammed Ali. That strength is not the strength of a rock, that strength is the strength of a rose flower -- so fragile in his strength... so fragile, so sensitive, so delicate. The rock will be there, the flower can go any moment, but still the flower is stronger than the rock because it is more alive. Or, the strength of a dewdrop on a leaf of grass just shining; in the morning sun -- so beautiful, so precious, and yet can slip any moment. So incomparable in its grace, but a small breeze can come and the dewdrop can slip and be lost forever.

Buddhas have a strength which is not of this world. Their strength is totally of love... Like a rose flower or a dewdrop. Their strength is very fragile, vulnerable. Their strength is the strength of life not of death. Their power is not of that which kills; their power is of that which creates. Their



power is not of violence, aggression; their power is that of compassion. But I have never been in the body again, I am just hovering around the body. And that's why I say it has been a tremendous miracle. Each moment I am surprised I am still here, I should not be. I should have left any moment, still I am here. Every morning I open my eyes and I say, 'So, again I am still here?' Because it seems almost impossible. The miracle has been a continuity.

Just the other day somebody asked a question -- 'Osho, you are getting so fragile and delicate and so sensitive to the smells of hair oils and shampoos that it seems we will not be able to see you unless we all go bald.' By the way, nothing is wrong with being bald -- bald is beautiful. Just as 'black is beautiful', so 'bald is beautiful'. But that is true and you have to be careful about it. I am fragile, delicate and sensitive. That is my strength. If you throw a rock at a flower nothing will happen to the rock, the flower will be gone. But still you cannot say that the rock is more powerful than the flower.

The flower will be gone because the flower was alive. And the rock -- nothing will happen to it because it is dead. The flower will be gone because the flower has no strength to destroy. The flower will simply disappear and give way to the rock. The rock has a power to destroy because the rock is dead. Remember, since that day I have never been in the body really; just a delicate thread joins me with the body. And I am continuously surprised that somehow the whole must be willing me to be here, because I am no more here with my own strength, I am no more here on my own. It must be the will of the whole to keep me here, to allow me to linger a little more on this shore. Maybe the whole wants to share something with you through me.

Since that day the world is unreal. Another world has been revealed. When I say the world is unreal I don't mean that these trees are unreal. These trees are absolutely real -- but the way you see these trees is unreal. These trees are not unreal in themselves -- they exist in god, they

exist in absolute reality -- but the way you see them you never see them; you are seeing something else, a mirage. You create your own dream around you and unless you become awake you will continue to dream. The world is unreal because the world that you know is the world of your dreams.

When dreams drop and you simply encounter the world that is there, then the real world. They are not two things, god and the world. God is the world if you have eyes, clear eyes, without any dreams, without any dust of the dreams, without any haze of sleep; if you have clear eyes, clarity, perceptiveness, there is only god. Then somewhere god is a green tree, and somewhere else god is a shining star, and somewhere else god is a cuckoo, and somewhere else god is a flower, and somewhere else a child and somewhere else a river -- then only god is. The moment you start seeing, only god is.

But right now whatsoever you see is not the truth, it is a projected lie. That is the meaning of a mirage. And once you see, even for a single split moment, if you can see, if you can allow yourself to see, you will find immense benediction present all over, everywhere -- in the clouds, in the sun, on the earth. This is a beautiful world. But I am not talking about your world, I am talking about my world. Your world is very ugly, your world is your world created by a self, your world is a projected world. You are using the real world as a screen and projecting your own ideas on it.

When I say the world is real, the world is tremendously beautiful, the world is luminous with infinity, the world is light and delight, it is a celebration, I mean my world -- or your world if you drop your dreams. When you drop your dreams you see the same world as any Buddha has ever seen. When you dream you dream privately. Have you watched it? -- that dreams are private. You cannot share them even with your beloved. You cannot invite your wife to your dream -- or your husband, or your friend. You cannot say, 'Now, please come tonight in my dream. I would

like to see the dream together.' It is not possible. Dream is a private thing, hence it is illusory, it has no objective reality.

God is a universal thing. Once you come out of your private dreams, it is there. It has been always there. Once your eyes are clear, a sudden illumination -- suddenly you are over-flooded with beauty, grandeur and grace. That is the goal; that is the destiny. Let me repeat. Without effort you will never reach it, with effort nobody has ever reached it. You will need great effort, and only then there comes a moment when effort becomes futile. But it becomes futile only when you have come to the very peak of it, never before it. When you have come to the very pinnacle of your effort -- all that you can do you have done -- then suddenly there is no need to do anything any more. You drop the effort.

But nobody can drop it in the middle, it can be dropped only at the extreme end. So go to the extreme end if you want to drop it. Hence I go on insisting: make as much effort as you can, put your whole energy and total heart in it, so that one day you can see -- now effort is not going to lead me anywhere. And that day it will not be you who will drop the effort, it drops on its own accord. And when it drops on its own accord, meditation happens. Meditation is not a result of your efforts, meditation is a happening. When your efforts drop, suddenly meditation is there... the benediction of it, the blessedness of it, the glory of it.

It is there like a presence... luminous, surrounding you and surrounding everything. It fills the whole earth and the whole sky. That meditation cannot be created by human effort. Human effort is too limited. That blessedness is so infinite. You cannot manipulate it. It can happen only when you are in a tremendous surrender. When you are not there only then it can happen. When you are a no-self -- no desire, not going anywhere -- when you are just here-now, not doing anything in particular, just being, it happens.

And it comes in waves and the waves become tidal. It comes like a storm, and takes you away into a totally new reality. But first you have to do all

that you can do, and then you have to learn non-doing. The doing of the non-doing is the greatest doing, and the effort of effortlessness is the greatest effort. Your meditation that you create by chanting a mantra or by sitting quiet and still and forcing yourself, is a very mediocre meditation. It is created by you, it cannot be bigger than you. It is homemade, and the maker is always bigger than the made. You have made it by sitting, forcing in a yoga posture, chanting 'rama, rama, rama' or anything -- 'blah, blah, blah' -- anything. You have forced the mind to become still.

It is a forced stillness. It is not that quiet that comes when you are not there. It is not that silence which comes when you are almost non-existential. It is not that beatitude which descends on you like a dove. It is said when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River, god descended in him, or the holy ghost descended in him like a dove. Yes, that is exactly so. When you are not there peace descends in you... fluttering like a dove... reaches in your heart and abides there and abides there forever.

You are your undoing, you are the barrier. Meditation is when the meditator is not. When the mind ceases with all its activities -- seeing that they are futile -- then the unknown penetrates you, overwhelms you. The mind must cease for god to be. Knowledge must cease for knowing to be. You must disappear, you must give way. You must become empty, then only you can be full. That night I became empty and became full. I became non-existential and became existence. That night I died and was reborn. But the one that was reborn has nothing to do with that which died, it is a discontinuous thing. On the surface it looks continuous but it is discontinuous. The one who died, died totally; nothing of him has remained.

Believe me, nothing of him has remained, not even a shadow. It died totally, utterly. It is not that I am just a modified RUP, transformed, modified form, transformed form of the old. No, there has been no

continuity. That day of March twenty-first, the person who had lived for many many lives, for millennia, simply died. Another being, absolutely new, not connected at all with the old, started to exist.

Religion just gives you a total death. Maybe that's why the whole day previous to that happening I was feeling some urgency like death, as if I am going to die -- and I really died. I have known many other deaths but they were nothing compared to it, they were partial deaths. Sometimes the body died, sometimes a part of the mind died, sometimes a part of the ego died, but as far as the person was concerned, it remained.

Renovated many times, decorated many times, changed a little bit here and there, but it remained, the continuity remained. That night the death was total. It was a date with death and god simultaneously.

## Do Enlightened Beings Suffer?

Do enlightened beings suffer? No, they do not suffer, they just experience things as they are. The following story about Ramana Maharishi clearly illustrates this<sup>2</sup>.

*In 1924 there was a robbery at the Ashram. One summer night Sri Ramana and four of his companions were sleeping in one of the thatched huts near the windows, when they heard thieves trying to climb in through the window. Kunju Swami was furious and wanted to confront the thieves, but Ramana dissuaded him saying, "Let these robbers play their role; we shall stick to ours. Let them do what they like; it is for us to bear and forebear. Let us not interfere with them." He suggested to the thieves that he and his companions would leave the hut so that they could take whatever they wanted. But when they came out, the robbers beat them with sticks. They also beat Ramana on his thigh, who said, "If you are not satisfied yet, you may strike the other leg also." And to Ramakrishna, who wanted to protect him, he said humorously, that he had only received his appropriate puja (puja in Tamil means worship but also beating).*

*The Ashram inmates waited in the northern hut while the thieves rummaged through everything. The things they found, however, were worth no more than a few rupees. Being extremely disappointed and not willing to believe that this was everything, one of them returned brandishing a stick and threatened, "Where is your money, where do you keep that?" Maharshi answered that there was no money as they were poor sadhus living upon alms.*

*At two in the morning the thieves finally left and Kunju Swami, who had managed to escape to get help from town, returned accompanied by several policemen. But Ramana was sitting in the northern hall conversing calmly with his disciples about spiritual matters as if nothing had happened.*

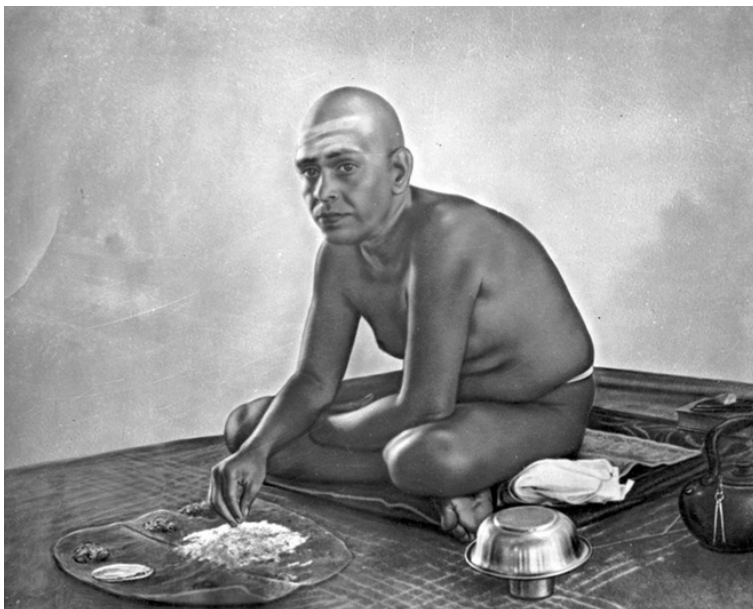
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<sup>2</sup> Source: Ramana Maharshi – His Life by Gabriele Ebert

Enlightened beings such as Ramana Maharshi experience events as they are without ego involvement. No fear or anger or thoughts are added to the experience.

Normal beings will react based on their past conditioning. They may become angry and fight back and this may aggravate the burglars further and bring them further injury. Ramana Maharshi was hit on his leg with a stick. He might have felt pain but he did not add to the pain by getting angry or scared. This is because he no longer has an ego and there is no past conditioning to cause a reaction to the pain.

When having a sore throat, different people will react differently based on their past conditioning. One may be happy because it gives him a day off from work. Another may add mental suffering to the illness by thinking of the fun things he could be doing if he did not have the sore throat. Both of them added something to their illness; there was ego involvement. An enlightened being with a sore throat does not add anything mental suffering or delight to the experience. To him, it is merely an experience.



Even 'taste' is merely an experience and there is no pleasant or unpleasant food because there is no 'mind' to judge the food, as the following story illustrates.

*Since his enlightenment experience in Madurai, what he ate meant nothing to him. He no*

*longer had any preferences. This was evident in his later eating habits, as he liked to mix the various sour, sweet and spicy dishes together into a mash on his banana leaf. When once a lady devotee served him a variety*



*of dishes, he asked her not to take so much trouble in future on his account, saying, "All of you have many tastes but I have only one taste; your taste is in the many, mine is in the one." Then he mixed it all together to a mash and ate it.*

*On another occasion he said, "What is taste? It is what our tongue tells us. We think that taste is in the food itself, but it is not so. The food itself is neither tasty nor not tasty; it is the tongue that makes it so. To me no taste is pleasant or unpleasant; it is just as it is."*



Once, Ajahn Siripanno visited the famous Thai Buddhist forest monk, Ajahn Chah when he was already very old and ill. After paying his respects, Ajahn Siripanno commented to a senior monk how sad it is that a great being like Ajahn Chah had to suffer. The senior monk found that amusing and just replied, "Why do you think he is suffering". Ajahn Siripanno was taken aback by the answer. He realised at that point that it was his past conditioning that caused him to think that Ajahn Chah was suffering. Ajahn Chah was not actually suffering.

Before that point, Ajahn Siripanno only wanted to be a monk for two weeks. His father was a multi-billionaire and he was going to start work after the short retreat. But that experience with Ajahn Chah made him realise that there is more to life than he needed to know. He then decided to remain a monk for the rest of his life.

This leads to only one conclusion: Enlightened beings only experience complete inner-peace and nothing else. When the ego disappears, only peace remains.





## Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba



Swami Murali Krishna or more popularly known as Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba or simply, Babaji, was born in 1979 in the village of Srikrishnapuram in Palakkad district of Kerala State, South India. His divine nature could be seen even when he was just a baby; snakes could sometimes be found in his crib, protecting him from harm. As he was born in poverty, he had to help his family by begging for alms. Unknown to his parents, he would sometimes give away some of his alms to others who are in greater need<sup>3</sup>.

In his book, 'The Global Mission of Sadguru Sharavana Baba', Professor Ramnath Narayanswamy wrote:

*I met Sadguru Murali Krishna for the first time on 28 July 2007 when He had come to inaugurate the establishment of Bangalore Ashram. The late Sri Ravindran had gifted Him an acre of lush virgin land with a lot of fruit, coconut and teak trees.....*

*I had heard of Swamiji for the past two years from my close friend Sri Gokul Raj. Ever since I heard of Him, I had entertained no*



<sup>3</sup> Source: The Global Mission of Sadguru Sharavana Baba by Ramnath Narayanswamy.

*doubts of his divinity. There were no doubts at all. Inexplicably, I knew in my heart that He was a self-realized master and that I was destined to see Him....*

*I met him that day in the evening. He looked regal and majestic. He had a beautiful and captivating smile and it seemed to be there almost all the time. When I came near him, I clutched both his feet in desperation and muttered in Tamil, "Swamiji, you must save me!" He was as I have always come to know him since that date, calm, purposeful and every firmly grounded in a state of divine exaltation. I could not control myself. I broke down and cried without feeling any sense of shame or restraint. With tears streaming down my face, I told him again, "Only you can save me!"*

*.....Then he asked me to come a little nearer to Him, which I did. He then whispered an incident that had occurred in my past (almost twenty years earlier) which was known only to my wife and a few of my friends. This was no big dark secret. It was a very painful episode in my life. He explained the significance of what had transpired in my life then in terms that I found completely astonishing and revelatory. Years of ignorance and darkness gave way to effulgence and luminosity. In one mighty stroke, he made me aware of His divinity and His omniscience! He made it very clear to me that He was my Guru and from the very first day, He spoke to me authoritatively like a Guru does to a sishya or disciple. It was at that precise moment that I became profoundly and deeply conscious of the fact that I had met my Guru! I knew I had arrived at my destination. There was nothing more to be accomplished in this respect.*



They met again a few days later and Babaji said to Ramnath (who is a university professor), "People tell me that you love your students just as much as you love your children. Is that true?" Ramnath remained silent and Babaji continued, "There are a lot of children in this world who are suffering because they do not have a father, mother or Guru. You will be

responsible for bringing such children to me and I will heal them. I will give you a lot of work to do and you must complete that work”.

Then he suddenly hit Ramnath’s chest and continued, “ I will take care of your body and you take care of My Word”.

### **My meeting with Babaji**

Babaji visited Malaysia in June 2012. I have never heard about him when my friend mentioned about a satsang with Babaji later that evening. We did not expect to be able to attend as both of us were to attend a meeting which we expected to carry on late into the night. However, to our pleasant surprise, the meeting went on smoothly and was concluded early. We decided to take the opportunity to attend the event.

When Babaji walked into the event hall, I was struck by the divine glow radiating from him that was very refreshing. I could not take my eyes off his face that carried a captivating smile. The entire event was held in Tamil which I could not understand but I felt very lucky because I could stay focused on my emotions without the interference of my mind. Throughout the event, I just stared at him, enjoying the peace that was radiating from him. I felt like I was in the presence of the Divine Mother although he is known as the avatar of Lord Muruga.

During the event, he walked around the hall to bless the participants. When he reached me, he touched my head and held my hands. I felt completely at peace. After he walked away, I could feel movements at the top of my head or crown chakra. It lasted for a few minutes. I felt this only once before but it was only momentary but this time, it lasted much longer and it certainly took me by surprise. I could feel the movement every time I looked at Babaji. When I shifted my eyes away, the movements stopped but when I looked at Babaji, the movements commenced again. I shifted my line of sight a few times to test this. I found it fascinating.

A strange thought came to me. It could have been my own imagination but I heard Mahavatar Babaji said to me, “In the past, you have asked to see me in my physical form. See Him as me”. Deep within, I felt like I was in the presence of the Divine Mother. Swamiji must have sensed this because a few days later when I went to see him for a personal blessing, he touched his hands to his heart and said “prem”, which meant love. To me, the Divine Mother represents love.

I enjoyed myself so much that I attended two more satsangs with Babaji. The third gathering was a private event and I was lucky to get invited because while I was talking to a new friend I just met there, the organiser came up to him to invite him to the private event as he happen to be a reporter from the New Straits Times. Because I was standing next to him, he turned to me and asked me to come along. At the three events, I stayed passed midnight because there were huge crowds at the events and Babaji made sure that he gave personal blessings to everyone there.

During the personal blessings, he would tell the devotees something that they need to know. One participant shared with me that she was surprised that Babaji knew about the specific problem she was facing and gave her the assurance that everything would turn out fine.

On the second day, I was talking to a new friend about Kriya Yoga. Miraculously, when he approached Babaji for a blessing, Babaji said to him that He was happy that we were talking about Kriya Yoga!



On the third day, I had the opportunity to speak to one of the organisers of the event. He told me that Babaji took off a flower garland that he had on Him and gave it to the organiser’s young

daughter in the morning. His daughter wore it the whole time and by

evening, he was surprised to note that the flower garland had lengthened! My reporter friend was there during the conversation and he commented that he had met many masters and the only other master that he heard of a similar miracle was Satya Sai Baba.

Sadguru Sri Sharavana Baba or Babaji has devoted his life to feeding the poor and needy, providing quality healthcare to people in the rural and semi-urban areas, providing clothing and shelter to the underprivileged and providing education to children who cannot afford formal education. He also seeks to provide free housing to widows and destitutes. His aim is for the women to be provided with employment opportunities so that they can regain their dignity and joy.

Babaji's mission to bring spiritual teachings to the world and at the same time, help the poor and destitute is certainly inspiring. I am sure that we will be hearing more about him in the years to come.

*OM SHARAVANA BHAVA!*



## The Power of Devotion



Devotion is the foundation of Bhakti Yoga. To realise its full power, Devotion must go hand in hand with Surrender to the Divine. Otherwise, it creates a separation between us and God. This is an incorrect view because the Divine is all-pervasive and therefore, is within every single one of us.

We must surrender totally to the Divine. A key aspect is

Acceptance. With total Surrender to the Divine, we accept whatever circumstances that we face with total faith that the Divine is with us every second of the time. We do not know why we go through hard times but we can rest in the assurance that the Divine is holding our hands the entire time and we will come out stronger in the end.

Sadguru Sharavan Bhava said that when we pray to God, we should only pray for wisdom and strength. That is a powerful guiding principle. We should not have any expectation about how the Divine should help us or even solve our problems for us. If the Divine solves all our problems the way we want Him to, then we will not grow. We will continue to be reborn in an endless karmic cycle. Believe me, if the Divine does this, we will never find happiness.

The Divine will help us, but often not in the way we expect. We need to let go of our expectations so that we can clearly see His loving hand in our life. If we hold on to our expectations on how our problems will be solved, we will not be able to see how He has helped us. It is better that the Divine gives us the strength and wisdom to solve our problems ourselves instead of solving them for us.

Another important aspect of Devotion is seeing the Divine in all beings. Sadguru said that when he see others, he see only their hearts. He only sees their Divinity. When Mother Teresa and her nuns help the poor, they see that they are really helping Jesus who has taken the form of those they help. When they look into the sufferings' eyes, they see only love.

True Surrender to the Divine will quieten our mind. We become less angry because we are more willing to let go of our past hurts. How can we be angry at anyone when we know that the Divine is actually behind the mask of the person who hurt us? The Divine is merely taking on a role to help us evolve. We willingly accept our past as experiences which were necessary for our spiritual evolution. We worry less about the future because we trust that the Divine will always be there. When our mind does not travel back to the past or into the future, it will then remain in the present moment. When we are resting in the present moment, we are actually resting our head on the lap on the Divine Mother.

There is a simple approach to develop this healthy habit of Surrendering to the Divine. Whenever we are troubled, we just pray silently to ourselves, "Divine Father/Mother, I surrender this problem to you with all my heart". We then bring peace to our mind by focusing our awareness on our emotions while focusing also on our breath; as if we are breathing into the emotions and breathing out from them. We observe and really feel the emotions that are in our hearts. We allow ourselves to feel those emotions deeply. The emotion will slowly fade away but that is not our goal. Our goal is to merely feel those emotions.



Our emotions are the bridge to the Divine. By being aware of our emotions, we are also surrendering them to the Divine. We can feel the healing touch of the Divine that removes the negative emotions from our hearts. We can bring much peace into our life by just developing this habit alone.

This is far more effective than trying to 'think' ourselves out of our problems or negative emotions. Wisdom arises out of our awareness. By being aware, we allow the best solutions to come to us intuitively.



When our Devotion is supported by total Surrender and seeing the Divinity within others, it becomes a powerful force to lead us to Self-Realisation. This is because over time, our ego will slowly fade away until we eventually

become one with the Divine.

## Putting Equanimity into Practice

Ajahn Brahm taught in his book, *Simply this Moment*, “Equanimity doesn’t mean just to endure. Equanimity should always be practised alongside investigation because otherwise it cannot be maintained and will turn into more problems. Equanimity that is practised alongside



investigation – especially with pain – means you are not going to try and get rid of the unpleasant physical feelings, nor are you going to just grit your teeth. Equanimity should be done with a sense of interest, with a sense of investigation, with a sense of curiosity, finding out what these things really are. That is a good way of dealing with physical pain: you watch it with equanimity. You watch it in the same way that a scientist needs to watch an experiment, without a vested interest in what they are going to find. Because, if you’re looking for something, if you’re looking to prove your pet theory, then you’ll never have that evenness of mind, you’ll never have the equanimity to be really able to see the truth. You’ll only see what you’re looking for. That’s what delusion is”.

“With equanimity you have to put aside all prejudgement and all the past, because prejudgements arise from our past experiences and past biases. Practising equanimity, you have to look upon the object that you find painful as if seeing it for the first time. If you can do that then you really can see that thing clearly and you can investigate it and find out what that pain really means and how it works”.

Ajahn Brahm equates equanimity with a sense of curiosity. Let’s say that while meditating, we become aware of a shoulder-ache. We practice equanimity by bringing our attention to the ache and begin to investigate

the nature of that ache as if we have to write a two page report on it after our meditation. There are many ways of looking at it. Where does the ache reside? Does it stay in one place or does it move about? Does it come and go or does it persist? Can we call it 'pain' or just 'discomfort'? Is it more painful before or after we started looking at it? Is it a big deal as we gave it before we started looking at it?

Of course, we do not ask ourselves these questions while we are meditating but while looking at the shoulder ache, we will notice such things. Ajahn Brahm once had a toothache which he could not do anything about because he was in the middle of the jungle. He tried to distract himself by chanting and other practices but the pain was just too distracting. He then looked at the pain with equanimity and he was surprised when the pain just disappeared. My late father had a similar experience. He had a toothache and as he meditated, he told the toothache that it can do whatever it wanted; the toothache just faded away.

Just a word of caution: If we have a toothache, it will not work if we try to meditate with the intention that it disappears. If there is a desire, the ego gets involved. Instead of looking at the pain, we will be asking ourselves; when will it disappear? Is it fading? Why is it still here? Is there something wrong with my meditation? Am I doing it wrong? Our mental chatter will keep us from truly investigating the nature of the pain.

Ajahn Brahm said, "So you have to have some understanding of physical pain and discomfort. That's body awareness, body contemplation, because that is where that physical pain usually arises. If we can do this – look on pain with equanimity and investigation – we can gain a lot of freedom from pain and the fear of pain. So often pain is fearsome because we never really know it. We are always running away from it, trying to overcome it, never stopping to look at it with equanimity to find out exactly what it is. The Buddha said there are two aspects to pain, two thorns, a mental thorn and a physical thorn. You can take out the mental

thorn because the mental thorn is due to wanting, not being at peace with, and not accepting the physical pain. That's something you can control. Very often you can do nothing about the physical pain. But taking away that mental thorn, that mental dart, is something you can do from time to time. You can pull it out so that you really are looking on with equanimity. As I said earlier, you know you have equanimity in the mind when everything gets peaceful, when there is no struggle anymore".

We can also practice this while doing work that we do not enjoy. We can observe ourselves and the work to understand why we find it unpleasant. Is the work unpleasant or is it just what we tell ourselves while we are doing the work? Housework is a good example. Sometimes it is pleasant and sometimes it's a pain. Why is that so?

Ajahn Brahm said, "We can also practise it with some of the things that we have to do, things we don't like, things that we disagree with. We can do this to overcome that 'fault-finding' mind, which I talk so much about in this monastery. I talk so much about it because it is one of the big obstacles to living happily in a monastery, or in any community; it's a great problem for living happily and gaining deep meditation. When one is sitting on one's cushion that fault-finding mind is one of the big obstacles, and you can understand that the fault finding mind is very far removed from equanimity, from just looking on".

"With the fault-finding mind you are dealing with perception. Perception is searching out things to complain about. It's a fascinating aspect of the mind to be able to see, to be able to capture this essence, because you see that this creates so much suffering and disappointment and problems for you. Why is it that the mind is bent on finding faults? Sure the faults are there, but they are surrounded by things that we can be grateful for, things that we can develop loving kindness towards, things we can be at peace with. Why is it that so many human beings incline towards finding faults? They find faults with their fellows in the holy life, find faults in the monastery, find faults in themselves, find faults in the teachings, and find

faults in the meditation cushions. 'It's not good enough, they're too lumpy'. You can see that the faultfinding mind creates work. It creates conflict; it creates things to do; and it goes in the opposite direction to peace".

## Seeing the Ego as it is



Let us break down the ego into parts so that it can be easily seen for what it is. At the most basic level, our ego is our thoughts. Our thoughts are essentially our memories, put there by others. When we are 'thinking' or even trying to come out with a solution to a problem, we are essentially piecing together different memories to come out with 'new' ideas. These 'new' ideas are merely old ones

rearranged differently.

Our mental pictures are another part of the ego. When we daydream about a past event, we are brought back in time. At that moment, we are no longer where we are at the present moment but we exist in the past. We become totally oblivious of what is happening in the present. Similarly, when we daydream about the future, we are dragged away from the present and projected into the future. We see ourselves as having the objects we desire or if we are worrying about something, we see ourselves facing some difficulties. Both visions are not reality, but fictions created by the mind.

Our thoughts and mental pictures trigger various emotions within us and those emotions in turn cause various muscular reactions in our physical body. If we are recalling a recent heated argument, anger will arise within us and all our muscles will become tense, especially our chest, shoulder and neck muscles. These emotional and physical reactions within our body give tangibility to our mental projections. They make our mental

projections appear real even though they are merely memories and mental projections; *they make our ego appear tangible*.

The continuity of thought, mental projections and emotions gives rise to an illusory entity which we take as the self or what Ramana Maharshi calls the 'I'. Our mind is like a supercomputer that can generate thoughts and mental projections at a

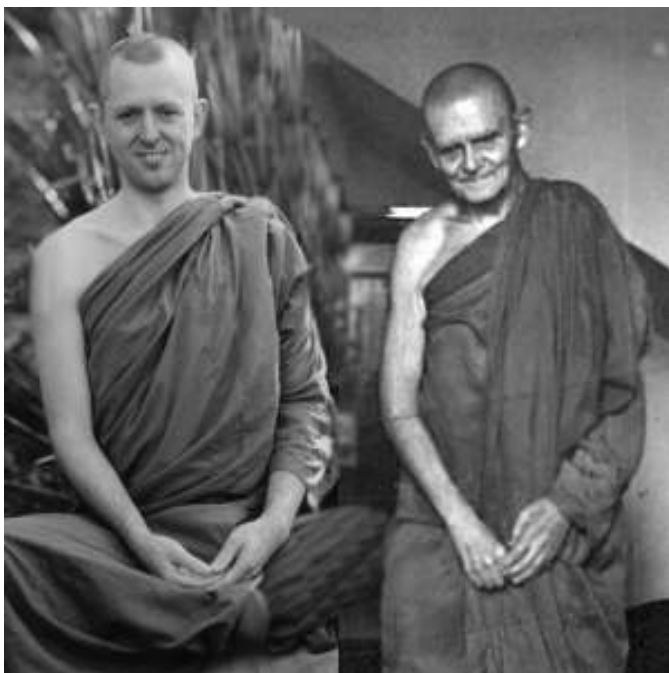


tremendous speed to create that illusory entity. A crude example would be that of the blades of a fan which when turned on, appear as a single round object.

The problem is that we are conditioned to 'think' all the time and we become uncomfortable when we do not have anything to distract our mind. That is how the 'ego' is able to continuously sustain its appearance or maintain the illusory self.

When we meditate, our thoughts and mental pictures slow down and we start to see what they truly are. The gaps between our thoughts allow us to look at this illusory entity more clearly. As the gaps or silence increase in length, we start to question what this illusory entity is. We start to see that those thoughts, beliefs and perceptions are not ours but put there by others; our parents, teachers, friends and everyone else that we have come into contact with. It is scary to see that our habitual thinking patterns are not ours because then, we start to realise that we do not really exist; and that is the point that the Masters are trying to help us see.





Ajahn Brahm said, “I remember once, on a meditation path in a monastery in Thailand. I was watching my thoughts and getting some separation from them. As I watched the thoughts without getting too involved in them, they appeared to me to be so stupid, because I could trace how every thought that came

up was conditioned. They were all conditioned; I was just repeating what I had been taught in the past. There wasn’t even one original thought. The thoughts weren’t really coming from me. I could see the same words coming from my own biological father, or from people who had impressed me. I was just repeating the words like a parrot. When we see that with mindfulness, the inner conversation is seen for what it is, just the echoes of the past. We believe in something that has no substance, something that isn’t real and which has no truth to it. I just couldn’t believe in it anymore and then a wonderful thing happened. When I didn’t believe in the thinking, it just stopped and I had one of my most beautiful meditations”.

“Before that insight I had believed all of my thoughts. I’d argue with my friends but I’d never argue with myself. I’d never doubted any thought that came up into my mind; I’d always take it as absolute truth. If I didn’t like something, if that’s what the thought was, then I didn’t like it and that for me was the truth. Afterwards, because I completely pulled the rug out from beneath my own thinking, I wouldn’t easily believe what other people said. I’d be very questioning about what I read in books, I was always challenging it. On the meditation path when we are challenging thought itself, we realize how much of a bubble it is. I pricked

the bubble, it went ‘pop’, and there was nothing left. That’s what thinking is! It is thinking that blows you from place to place. It’s thinking that creates all the trouble if you believe in it. Watch those thoughts, reflect upon them, and see them from a distance as an observer”.

“Watch this inner conversation going backwards and forwards with a sense of detachment. The more we watch it with detachment, with mindfulness, the more we will loosen our belief in the accuracy of our thoughts. But if we can’t believe in what we think, what can we believe in? The answer is: we can believe in the silence, in that emptiness. That emptiness is far more truthful, far more real than the thinking”<sup>4</sup>.

As our meditation gets even deeper, the thoughts and mental pictures become so infrequent that we truly remain in the present moment. However, our ego still exists in the form of sense objects. We become sensitive to everything that is occurring in the present moment. The breeze blowing against our body; the sounds, smells and any other sense objects that capture our attention. Because the ego does not have mental objects to create the illusion, it starts to use these sense objects. These sense objects make us think that we are limited to our body. We think that because we can experience these sense objects, we are our body. When we are day dreaming, we cling to the ‘body’ created by our mind. When we are not day dreaming, we cling to our physical body. Ramana Maharshi learned at a very young age that he was not his physical body as shown by the following story<sup>5</sup>:

*In February 1892 Sundaram Iyer (Ramana Maharshi’s father) unexpectedly died, he was in his mid-forties. He left behind him his wife Alagammal, their three sons, Nagaswami aged fourteen, Ramana aged twelve and Nagasundaram aged six and their daughter Alamelu aged four. When Ramana returned from his school at Dindigul to Tiruchuli, to see his dead father for the last time, he reflected thoughtfully, “When*

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<sup>4</sup> Source : ‘Simply this Moment’ by Ajahn Brahm.

<sup>5</sup> Source : Ramana Maharshi : His Life by Gabriele Ebert

*Father is lying here, why do they say that he has gone?" One of the elders answered him, "If this were your father, would he not receive you with love? So you see, he has gone."*

The sense objects may trigger some memory and again create mental pictures, and emotional and physical reactions. The 'I' then pops up again! When the mind is quiet, consciousness is still there. Consciousness is the ego's playground. It is the cinema screen which the ego is projected upon. When the mind is quiet, only a white light is projected on the screen, but we still see the white light as something existential.

But, as we continue to move deeper within, even the senses fade away. That is when the ego is non-existent. When there is nothing to be conscious of, consciousness disappears. The cinema screen is removed and there is nothing for the ego to project itself on. We cannot be aware of it at that moment because being aware of it would trigger thoughts and cause the ego to reappear. We can only realise that the ego had temporarily disappeared when we come out of the meditation. It is like sleep. We do not realise that we are having a good sleep during sleep but only realises it after we have woken up. This gives us a glimpse of self-realisation. The ego is still there when we come out of our meditation. We are actually using the ego to understand the ego; we are using our mind to try to make sense of our experience.

But, a change would have occurred within us. The ego is somehow more controllable. Yes, our habitual thinking patterns and conditioning will still be there but now that we have seen them, we have taken back the power to think outside our habitual thinking patterns; to think 'outside the box' created by our habits. We do not need to follow our habits like slaves. *Every thought that exist in our ego is not ours.* It has been put there by others and we have also put thoughts into others. Ajahn Brahm experienced this and we can too.....easily. Our deep meditation has given us the ability to watch our thoughts and reject those that bring us suffering. We can let go of our bad habits the moment we see the

benefits of letting them go. The Masters tell us to peel away the layers of our ego layer by layer; one at a time until nothing exists. When the last layer is removed, we will only be left with inner-peace and bliss. That is when we can truly call ourselves the master of our mind.

What the ego is; is an obvious fact but difficult to see because it is held too close to our eyes. But once we see it as it is, the gates of the jail that we are in is suddenly flung open and it is up to us to decide if we want to walk out of the cage or not. We have existed as the ego for so long and letting it go can be scary. If we let it go, there is nothing left. It appears that way but it is not true, when we walk out of the cage, we cease to allow our mind to be our master. No longer will we react based on habits. No longer do we subject ourselves to the 'karma' of our habitual patterns. When we walk out, we become the master of our mind. Every thought, perception and belief is subject to our scrutiny. If it is not useful, it is rejected. The process is long and tedious but the rewards are beyond measure<sup>6</sup>.

By seeing what the ego is, we can understand the importance and purpose of meditation. Only through meditation are we able to slow down our thought processes and see the true face of the ego. Once we have an actual experience of this truth, all the teachings of the Masters takes on a new meaning. There is a whole new clarity to their teachings. We can see why Ramana Maharshi's core teaching is to investigate what the 'I' is. We can see why the masters say that everything is illusory and that we are deathless. Thoughts and mental formations cannot die.

Similarly, in our day to day life, if we can frequently maintain our awareness, we will be able to slow down our thought processes and gain more control over ourselves. We will be less likely to react based on our habitual patterns. When the mind is active, the ego tends to be more prominent. We can easily see this when we are very angry. The thoughts

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<sup>6</sup> My first book, 'We are here to celebrate' deals with negative habitual patterns that we have in common in various degrees. My second book, 'Filling our Life with Celebration' covers positive habits that we can inculcate to replace those negative habits. When we are filled with positive habits, there is no space for negative ones.

that fuel anger flood our mind like a tsunami and we have no choice but to go with the flow. Only later when we have calmed down, do we start to question what got over us. But if we are sufficiently aware when the angry thoughts are arising, we may realise that those thoughts are silly. We may be saying things that are untrue merely to get ourselves angry; for example, Mr. X tried to get the attention of a waiter but the waiter did not see him. He got angry for nothing because he told himself that the waiter is purposely ignoring him because he is not important. In the actual case, the waiter was just rushing to serve an earlier customer and did not notice him calling.

Therefore, we should constantly watch our thoughts to see the things we tell ourselves that trigger negative behaviours. When we clearly see the stupidity of these thoughts, we will naturally let go of them.

Understanding what the ego is, we can also see why it is so difficult to convince others about what *we think* is right. By trying to convince others, we are actually asking them to let go of a part of their ego; something that is not easy to do. We can also understand why it is extremely difficult to change others. The wise say that it is better to change ourselves. When we change ourselves, the world changes with us.

Most people have to go through suffering before they can let go of the habits that brought on those suffering at the first place. That is why Tibetan Buddhists embrace suffering and face them with courage. They do not indulge in escapism behaviours by indulging in intoxicants and other distractions.

Similarly, we spend a lot of effort trying to convince others to our views because it is a way for the ego to strengthen itself. When we see this, we become more flexible and open to changing our views if doing so can bring us more happiness.

Therefore, understanding what the ego is cuts through our ignorance like a sharp knife. From this understanding springs the solutions to all our

problems. Working on our problems without understanding the 'Self' is like chopping at the branches of an unwanted tree. Understanding the 'I' is like removing the entire unwanted tree at its roots.

## Ramana Maharshi's 'Nan Yar'

I must admit that my previous article, 'Seeing the Ego as it is', is incomplete without reading Nan Yar ('Who am I'). In her autobiography of Ramana Maharshi, Gabriele Ebert wrote about the origins of Nanyar:

*Another of Sri Ramana's disciples was Sivaprakasam Pillai, a philosopher, who was employed in the Revenue Department. In the many books he had studied he could not find the answer to his existential quest "Who am I?". In 1902 he came to Tiruvannamalai for the first time on official duties. He heard about the Swami on the hill, visited him and asked him the burning questions that were troubling him. Again the answers were written down by Ramana on the floor or with chalk on a slate. Afterwards Sivaprakasam Pillai made notes of the questions and answers from memory. In 1923 he published them under the title 'Nan Yar' (Who am I?), which is again found in 'The Collected Works'.*

*What was explained by Sri Ramana to his early disciples in his first works, when he was barely more than twenty years old, has remained unchanged over the years. Above all 'Nan Yar' contains the essence of what Ramana taught throughout his life. When newcomers used to arrive at Ramanashram and ask him about his teaching, he would point to this booklet. He insisted that it should be sold so cheap that even the poorest could afford it.*

Who am I? **It is not so much what the 'I' is but what the 'I' is not that is important.** We have the problem of identifying with what we are not and the question 'Who am I' shines a bright light on that problem. Whenever a thought arise and I ask the question 'Who am I', the thought suddenly becomes inconsequential or even downright silly. The question somehow draws energy from the thought and the mind suddenly becomes silent. It is almost like a Zen 'koan' whereby the student is required to ponder a question where there is no answer. A famous 'koan' is how do you take out a goose that has grown up in a bottle without breaking the bottle or



killing the goose? Eventually the mind just gives up trying to find the answer and there is silence. Of course, the student must not know that there is no right answer! Every time the student comes back with the answer the Master will scold and even hit him. Eventually his mind will give up completely and remain silent.

The following is a translation of 'Nan Yar' by Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan:

*As all living beings desire to be happy always, without misery, as in the case of everyone there is observed supreme love for one's self, and as happiness alone is the cause for love, in order to gain that happiness which is one's nature and which is experienced in the state of deep sleep where there is no mind, one should know one's self. For that, the path of knowledge, the inquiry of the form "Who am I?", is the principal means.*

### *1. Who am I ?*

The gross body which is composed of the seven humours (dhatus), I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz. the senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, which apprehend their respective objects, viz. sound, touch, colour, taste, and odour, I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz. the organs of speech, locomotion, grasping, excretion, and procreation, which have as their respective functions speaking, moving, grasping, excreting, and enjoying, I am not; the five vital airs, prana, etc., which perform respectively the five functions of in-breathing, etc., I am not; even the mind which thinks, I am not; the nescience too, which is endowed only with the residual impressions of objects, and in which there are no objects and no functioning's, I am not.

### *2. If I am none of these, then who am I?*

After negating all of the above-mentioned as 'not this', 'not this', that Awareness which alone remains - that I am.

### *3. What is the nature of Awareness?*

The nature of Awareness is existence-consciousness-bliss

### *4. When will the realization of the Self be gained?*

When the world which is what-is-seen has been removed, there will be realization of the Self which is the seer.

### *5. Will there not be realization of the Self even while the world is there (taken as real)?*

There will not be.

### *6. Why?*

The seer and the object seen are like the rope and the snake. Just as the knowledge of the rope which is the substrate will not arise unless the false knowledge of the illusory serpent goes, so the realization of the Self which is the substrate will not be gained unless the belief that the world is real is removed.

### *7. When will the world which is the object seen be removed?*

When the mind, which is the cause of all cognition's and of all actions, becomes quiescent, the world will disappear.

### *8. What is the nature of the mind?*

What is called 'mind' is a wondrous power residing in the Self. It causes all thoughts to arise. Apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as mind.

Therefore, thought is the nature of mind. Apart from thoughts, there is no independent entity called the world. In deep sleep there are no thoughts, and there is no world. In the states of waking and dream, there are thoughts, and there is a world also. Just as the spider emits the thread (of the web) out of itself and again withdraws it into itself, likewise the mind projects the world out of itself and again resolves it into itself. When the mind comes out of the Self, the world appears. Therefore, when the world appears (to be real), the Self does not appear; and when the Self appears (shines) the world does not appear. When one persistently inquires into the nature of the mind, the mind will end leaving the Self (as the residue). What is referred to as the Self is the Atman. The mind always exists only in dependence on something gross; it cannot stay alone. It is the mind that is called the subtle body or the soul (jiva).

*9. What is the path of inquiry for understanding the nature of the mind?*

That which rises as 'I' in this body is the mind. If one inquires as to where in the body the thought 'I' rises first, one would discover that it rises in the heart. That is the place of the mind's origin. Even if one thinks constantly 'I' 'I', one will be led to that place. Of all the thoughts that arise in the mind, the 'I' thought is the first. It is only after the rise of this that the other thoughts arise. It is after the appearance of the first personal pronoun that the second and third personal pronouns appear; without the first personal pronoun there will not be the second and third.

*10. How will the mind become quiescent?*

By the inquiry 'Who am I?'. The thought 'who am I?' will destroy all other thoughts, and like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will arise Self-realization.

*11. What is the means for constantly holding on to the thought 'Who am I?'*

When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them, but should inquire: 'To whom do they arise?' It does not matter how many thoughts arise. As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, "To whom has this thought arisen?". The answer that would emerge would be "To me". Thereupon if one inquires "Who am I?", the mind will go back to its source; and the thought that arose will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will develop the skill to stay in its source. When the mind that is subtle goes out through the brain and the sense-organs, the gross names and forms appear; when it stays in the heart, the names and forms disappear. Not letting the mind go out, but retaining it in the Heart is what is called "inwardness" (antarmukha). Letting the mind go out of the Heart is known as "externalisation" (bahir-mukha). Thus, when the mind stays in the Heart, the 'I' which is the source of all thoughts will go, and the Self which ever exists will shine. Whatever one does, one should do without the egoity "I". If one acts in that way, all will appear as of the nature of Siva (God).

*12. Are there no other means for making the mind quiescent?*

Other than inquiry, there are no adequate means. If through other means it is sought to control the mind, the mind will appear to be controlled, but will again go forth. Through the control of breath also, the mind will become quiescent; but it will be quiescent only so long as the breath remains controlled, and when the breath resumes the mind also will again start moving and will wander as impelled by residual impressions. The source is the same for both mind and breath. Thought, indeed, is the nature of the mind. The thought "I" is the first thought of the mind; and that is egoity. It is from that whence egoity originates that breath also originates. Therefore, when the mind becomes quiescent, the breath is controlled, and when the breath is controlled the mind becomes

quiescent. But in deep sleep, although the mind becomes quiescent, the breath does not stop. This is because of the will of God, so that the body may be preserved and other people may not be under the impression that it is dead. In the state of waking and in samadhi, when the mind becomes quiescent the breath is controlled. Breath is the gross form of mind. Till the time of death, the mind keeps breath in the body; and when the body dies the mind takes the breath along with it. Therefore, the exercise of breath-control is only an aid for rendering the mind quiescent (manonigraha); it will not destroy the mind (manonasa). Like the practice of breath-control, meditation on the forms of God, repetition of mantras, restriction on food, etc., are but aids for rendering the mind quiescent. Through meditation on the forms of God and through repetition of mantras, the mind becomes one-pointed. The mind will always be wandering. Just as when a chain is given to an elephant to hold in its trunk it will go along grasping the chain and nothing else, so also when the mind is occupied with a name or form it will grasp that alone. When the mind expands in the form of countless thoughts, each thought becomes weak; but as thoughts get resolved the mind becomes one-pointed and strong; for such a mind Self-inquiry will become easy. Of all the restrictive rules, that relating to the taking of sattvic food in moderate quantities is the best; by observing this rule, the sattvic quality of mind will increase, and that will be helpful to Self-inquiry.

*13. The residual impressions (thoughts) of objects appear wending like the waves of an ocean. When will all of them get destroyed?*

As the meditation on the Self rises higher and higher, the thoughts will get destroyed.

*14. Is it possible for the residual impressions of objects that come from beginningless time, as it were, to be resolved, and for one to remain as the pure Self?*

Without yielding to the doubt “Is it possible, or not?”, one should persistently hold on to the meditation on the Self. Even if one be a great sinner, one should not worry and weep “O! I am a sinner, how can I be saved?”; one should completely renounce the thought “I am a sinner”; and concentrate keenly on meditation on the Self; then, one would surely succeed. There are not two minds - one good and the other evil; the mind is only one. It is the residual impressions that are of two kinds - auspicious and inauspicious. When the mind is under the influence of auspicious impressions it is called good; and when it is under the influence of inauspicious impressions it is regarded as evil.

The mind should not be allowed to wander towards worldly objects and what concerns other people. However bad other people may be, one should bear no hatred for them. Both desire and hatred should be eschewed. All that one gives to others one gives to one’s self. If this truth is understood who will not give to others? When one’s self arises all arises; when one’s self becomes quiescent all becomes quiescent. To the extent we behave with humility, to that extent there will be good results. If the mind is rendered quiescent, one may live anywhere.

*15. How long should inquiry be practised?*

As long as there are impressions of objects in the mind, so long the inquiry “Who am I?” is required. As thoughts arise they should be destroyed then and there in the very place of their origin, through inquiry. If one resorts to contemplation of the Self unintermittently, until the Self is gained, that alone would do. As long as there are enemies within the fortress, they will continue to sally forth; if they are destroyed as they emerge, the fortress will fall into our hands.

### *16. What is the nature of the Self?*

What exists in truth is the Self alone. The world, the individual soul, and God are appearances in it. Like silver in mother-of-pearl, these three appear at the same time, and disappear at the same time. The Self is that where there is absolutely no “I” thought. That is called “Silence”. The Self itself is the world; the Self itself is “I”; the Self itself is God; all is Siva, the Self.

### *17. Is not everything the work of God?*

Without desire, resolve, or effort, the sun rises; and in its mere presence, the sun-stone emits fire, the lotus blooms, water evaporates; people perform their various functions and then rest. Just as in the presence of the magnet the needle moves, it is by virtue of the mere presence of God that the souls governed by the three (cosmic) functions or the fivefold divine activity perform their actions and then rest, in accordance with their respective karmas. God has no resolve; no karma attaches itself to Him. That is like worldly actions not affecting the sun, or like the merits and demerits of the other four elements not affecting all pervading space.

### *18. Of the devotees, who is the greatest?*

He who gives himself up to the Self that is God is the most excellent devotee. Giving one’s self up to God means remaining constantly in the Self without giving room for the rise of any thoughts other than that of the Self. Whatever burdens are thrown on God, He bears them. Since the supreme power of God makes all things move, why should we, without submitting ourselves to it, constantly worry ourselves with thoughts as to what should be done and how, and what should not be done and how not? We know that the train carries all loads, so after getting on it why



should we carry our small luggage on our head to our discomfort, instead of putting it down in the train and feeling at ease?

*19. What is non-attachment?*

As thoughts arise, destroying them utterly without any residue in the very place of their origin is non-attachment. Just as the pearl-diver ties a stone to his waist, sinks to the bottom of the sea and there takes the pearls, so each one of us should be endowed with non-attachment, dive within oneself and obtain the Self-Pearl.

*20. Is it not possible for God and the Guru to effect the release of a soul?*

God and the Guru will only show the way to release; they will not by themselves take the soul to the state of release. In truth, God and the Guru are not different. Just as the prey which has fallen into the jaws of a tiger has no escape, so those who have come within the ambit of the Guru's gracious look will be saved by the Guru and will not get lost; yet, each one should by his own effort pursue the path shown by God or Guru and gain release. One can know oneself only with one's own eye of knowledge, and not with somebody else's. Does he who is Rama require the help of a mirror to know that he is Rama?

*21. Is it necessary for one who longs for release to inquire into the nature of categories (tattvas)?*

Just as one who wants to throw away garbage has no need to analyse it and see what it is, so one who wants to know the Self has no need to count the number of categories or inquire into their characteristics; what he has to do is to reject altogether the categories that hide the Self. The world should be considered like a dream.

*22. Is there no difference between waking and dream?*

Waking is long and a dream short; other than this there is no difference. Just as waking happenings seem real while awake, so do those in a dream while dreaming. In dream the mind takes on another body. In both waking and dream states thoughts, names and forms occur simultaneously.

*23. Is it any use reading books for those who long for release?*

All the texts say that in order to gain release one should render the mind quiescent; therefore their conclusive teaching is that the mind should be rendered quiescent; once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to inquire within oneself what one's Self is; how could this search be done in books? One should know one's Self with one's own eye of wisdom. The Self is within the five sheaths; but books are outside them. Since the Self has to be inquired into by discarding the five sheaths, it is futile to search for it in books. There will come a time when one will have to forget all that one has learned.

*24. What is happiness?*

Happiness is the very nature of the Self; happiness and the Self are not different. There is no happiness in any object of the world. We imagine through our ignorance that we derive happiness from objects. When the mind goes out, it experiences misery. In truth, when its desires are fulfilled, it returns to its own place and enjoys the happiness that is the Self. Similarly, in the states of sleep, the mind becomes inward-turned, and enjoys pure Self-Happiness. Thus the mind moves without rest alternately going out of the Self and returning to it. Under the tree the

shade is pleasant; out in the open the heat is scorching. A person who has been going about in the sun feels cool when he reaches the shade. Someone who keeps on going from the shade into the sun and then back into the shade is a fool. A wise man stays permanently in the shade. Similarly, the mind of the one who knows the truth does not leave Brahman. The mind of the ignorant, on the contrary, revolves in the world, feeling miserable, and for a little time returns to Brahman to experience happiness. In fact, what is called the world is only thought. When the world disappears, i.e. when there is no thought, the mind experiences happiness; and when the world appears, it goes through misery.

*25. What is wisdom-insight (jnana-drsti)?*

Remaining quiet is what is called wisdom-insight. To remain quiet is to resolve the mind in the Self. Telepathy, knowing past, present and future happenings and clairvoyance do not constitute wisdom-insight.

*26. What is the relation between desirelessness and wisdom?*

Desirelessness is wisdom. The two are not different; they are the same. Desirelessness is refraining from turning the mind towards any object. Wisdom means the appearance of no object. In other words, not seeking what is other than the Self is detachment or desirelessness; not leaving the Self is wisdom.

*27. What is the difference between inquiry and meditation?*

Inquiry consists in retaining the mind in the Self. Meditation consists in thinking that one's self is Brahman, existence-consciousness-bliss.

## *28. What is release?*

Inquiring into the nature of one's self that is in bondage, and realising one's true nature is release.

SRI RAMANARPANAM ASTU

Maharshi pointed out that the so called 'Self Realization' is neither a spectacular happening nor something new to be gained, "What is Self Realization? A mere phrase. People expect some miracle to happen, something to drop from Heaven in a flash. It is nothing of the sort. Only the notion that you are the body, that you are this or that, will go, and you remain as you are. Indeed, Realization is but another name for the Self." And elsewhere he said, "It is false to speak of Realization. What is there to realize? The real is as it is, ever. How to real-ize it? All that is required is this: We have 'realized' (made real) the unreal, i.e. regarded as real what is unreal. We have to give up this attitude. That is all that is required for us to attain jnana.

Just by reading Nan Yar alone, one can see that the master is a manifestation of Lord Shiva. He lived his life as a perfect example for all to see. His death was no less spectacular. Gabriele Ebert wrote in 'Ramana Maharshi: His Life':



*At the exact minute of his death an object variously described as a shooting star or a meteor appeared on the horizon, moved slowly across the sky in the direction of Arunachala and disappeared behind its peak. The French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, who had been staying at the Ashram for two weeks, rushed into the Nirvana room shortly after the moment of the Maharshi's death and asked those present for the exact minute of his death. He later reported, "I was in the open space in front of my house, when my friends drew my attention to the sky, where I saw a vividly- luminous shooting star with a luminous tail, unlike any shooting star I had before seen, coming from the South, moving slowly across the sky and, reaching the top of Arunachala, disappeared behind it. Because of its singularity we all guessed its import and immediately looked at our watches – it was 8.47 – and then raced to the Ashram only to find that our premonition had been only too sadly true: the Master had passed into mahanirvana at that very minute."*

*This unusual phenomenon was witnessed by large numbers of people over a wide area. On 16th April all English and Tamil newspapers published reports on the death of the Maharshi and also about the appearance of the shooting star.*

## My Personal Analysis of 'Who am I'



Who am I?

Am I my body? If I am my body, then I will still exist after I die and my body is somehow prevented from rotting. If I am my body, I would be different after a heart transplant or if I lose a body part. I cannot say

that I am my hand or my leg. If a part of my body is not me, then the total of all my body parts cannot be me. If I am my body, I would have total control over it but it seems to ignore my wants. It ages and weakens over time against my will and I cannot make a toothache go away no matter how hard I demand. No, I am not my body.

Am I my mind? What is the mind? Essentially, my mind is my thoughts. What are thoughts? My thoughts are everything that has been taught to me. It was put into me by others from the day I was born. What I perceive as good and bad or right and wrong is conditioned into me by others. Therefore, the bulk of my mind came into existence after I was born. I have little control over my thoughts. Random thoughts arise due to external stimuli. When I see a cute baby, loving thoughts arise but when I see an enemy, angry thoughts arise. I cannot tell my mind to remain silent whenever I want it to. External circumstances seem to have more control over my mind than me. When I watch a movie, my entire mind is absorbed in the movie. Am I then the movie? I am not. When I am listening intently to another person, both of us will have the same exact thoughts at that moment. Am I the other person at that point? I am not. I often picture myself when thinking about my past and my future. Am I that picture? No, that is just a creation of the mind and cannot be me. I can see myself as my brain but my brain is no different from any other

organ in my body. Saying that I am my brain is like saying I am my liver. No, I cannot be my mind.

Who am I?

Am I what the world perceive me to be, for example, if the world sees me as a doctor, am I the doctor? No, being a doctor means my mind contains more thoughts and knowledge relating to medicine and similarly, being an engineer means my mind contains more thoughts and knowledge relating to engineering. My job title and any other titles I hold merely describe to a certain extent the nature of my thoughts. Thoughts are not existential. I am not my thoughts and therefore, I am not what the world perceives me to be. Even so, I am not the name given to me at birth.

Am I my senses? After all, I am caught up with sense objects all the time. My senses allow me to process external stimuli. At any one time, I can only be aware of one or two sense objects and be oblivious of other sense objects, for example, I may be looking deeply at a painting and may be unaware of the surrounding sounds or temperature or smell. Does that mean that I am only my sight at that point? No, that cannot be. When I am thinking, I may not hear what another person is saying to me. Does that mean I have temporarily disappeared? When I am asleep, there are times when I am not aware of any sense objects at all. At that point, am I dead; only to be reborn the next morning? No, I cannot rationally say that I am my senses.

Am I my emotions? Again, my emotions are determined more by external circumstances than me. If that is not the case, I can will myself to be happy all the time. No doubt, my emotions can make my thoughts more 'real' for example, my emotions can make a storybook interesting because many emotions are stimulated when I read the book but studying can be boring because my emotions remain dormant while I am reading. The thoughts that arise in my mind determine my emotions. If I



am not my thoughts, I cannot be my emotions as well. My emotion makes my experiences real but I have little or no control over it. I cannot be something that I cannot control. Therefore, I am not my emotions.

Am I my consciousness? Consciousness only exist when I am 'conscious' of something. I may be conscious of what I am thinking about (mental objects) but may not be conscious of my other senses. Therefore, when I am conscious of my thoughts, am I my thoughts and when I am conscious of some sound, am I that sound? What happens in deep meditation or deep sleep when I am not conscious of anything at all? At that point, consciousness cannot be said to exist. If I am my consciousness, what happened to me at that moment of no-consciousness?

Who am I?...Who am I?



Wait! I see it now: My problems arise not because I do not know who I am. My problems are due to taking *what I am not* to be what I am. I have mistaken myself to be all the above when I am none of them! That is the root cause of my suffering. I do this out of habit. It is as if I have been wearing a mask for so long that I have forgotten

that I am wearing a mask! How can I constantly remember that I am not the mask I am wearing?

I know....I shall follow Ramana Maharshi's advice: Whenever I meet with disturbing thoughts, emotions or sense-objects, I shall ask myself "Who am I" to remind myself of what I am not. If, for instance, someone insults me, I shall ask myself, "Who is the 'I' that is insulted? Is it my body, my name, my emotions, my mind etc?" If for some reason I get angry at myself, I shall ask myself, "Who is the 'I' getting angry? Who is the other 'I' which is the target of the anger?" By constantly asking myself these questions, my habit of taking what I am not to be what I am, will weaken.

Although I can clearly see that each of the above aspects is not me, together, they create an illusory 'I' that is very convincing. My consciousness shifts between these aspects so quickly that I see an illusory self that is not real; like the blades of a fan appearing to be a circle when they are moving very fast.

## Living Meaningfully

### How Spirituality enhances Work Performance

When I was younger I used to see spirituality and work performance as different ends on a very long pole. I could not see any correlation between the two. I have heard others argue that the spiritual masters are often not successful in the material world (unless they are fake!). They imply that these masters are not successful because they are spiritual. That is a wrong understanding. We see what we want to see and often perceive the world in a way that corresponds with our beliefs and conditioning. These masters are not after worldly success. They have found the ultimate happiness that nothing in this material world can compare to.

Now I can clearly see that our spiritual practices can be very helpful for our work performance; and I have scientific evidence to prove it.



Nowadays, we tend to put too much emphasis on IQ and school performance. No doubt, people with high IQ do better in school and school-like settings but beyond that, it is of little relevance. David Brooks wrote in his international bestselling book, 'The Social Animal',

"Once you get beyond the school environment, it is not a reliable predictor of performance. Controlling for other factors, people with high IQ do not have better relationships and better marriages. They are not better at raising their children". Richard K. Wagner of the Florida State University said that IQ predicts only 4 percent of variance in job performance.

In his book 'What Intelligence Test Miss', Keith E. Stanovich highlighted that the real contributors to performance are, among others, "the tendency to collect information before making up one's mind, the tendency to seek various points of view before coming to a conclusion, the disposition to think extensively about a problem before responding, the tendency to calibrate the degree of strength of one's opinion to the degree of evidence available, the tendency to think about future consequences before taking action, the tendency to explicitly weigh plusses and minuses of a situation before making a decision, and the tendency to seek nuance and avoid absolutism".

*In short, our habitual tendencies are more important to our work performance than our intelligence.*

The karmic tendencies that we brought with us from our previous life can be seen when we are just babies and can have a significant influence on our life. David Brooks wrote, "Some newborns startle more easily than others when confronted with strange situations, and their blood pressure rises. Their bodies react more vividly. In 1979 psychologist Jerome Kagan and his colleagues presented five hundred infants with a series of unfamiliar stimuli. About 20% of the babies cried vigorously and were labelled 'high reactive'. Another 40% showed little response and were labelled 'low reactive'. The rest were in between"

"A decade or so later, Kagan ran the same children through a battery of experiences that were designed to induce performance anxiety. Very few kids jumped from high reactive to low reactive and vice versa".

David Brooks also wrote about another famous research done by Walter Mischel that showed that one's habitual tendencies as a child are reflective of how successful one can become as an adult. He brought a series of four year-olds into a room. He placed a marshmallow on a table and told each child that she could eat the marshmallow now but if she is willing to wait until he comes back again, he will give her two

marshmallows. Walter then walks out of the room and there is a hidden camera to record the child's reaction.

The results showed that the kids who could wait a several minutes subsequently did much better in schools and had fewer behavioural problems than the kids who could only wait for a short while. They had better social skills in middle school. The kids who could wait a full fifteen minutes had, thirteen years later, SAT scores that were 210 points higher than the kids who could wait only thirty seconds! Twenty years later, they had much higher college-completion rates, and thirty years later, they had much higher incomes. The kids who could not wait at all had much higher incarceration rates. They were much more likely to suffer drug and alcohol-addiction problems.

So, what can we do if we have some negative habitual tendencies that can hamper our work performance? I used to read many motivational books. I did feel motivated but I also noticed that I became more irritable whenever I stumbled on obstacles that prevented me from achieving my goals. I failed to see that those obstacles were merely the shadow of the Divine's loving hand guiding me towards my destiny. I read many such books and bought audio tapes on motivation to listen to over and over again while I drove to work. They gave me a little emotional uplift but it was never lasting. Any small problem could easily wipe off the positive filling I gained. They did not create the change in me that I wanted. I was still dissatisfied but I just did not know what the problem was. This dissatisfaction led me to turn to spirituality and I never looked back.

My spiritual practices help me to look within myself and look at my habitual thinking patterns and tendencies with equanimity. The Buddha taught the four right efforts; we should reduce the negative conditioning that we have, prevent those negative conditioning that we do not have from arising, strengthen our positive habits/tendencies that we already have, and developed those positive habits/tendencies that we do not have. My spiritual practice is the tool that enables me to understand

myself; to see my strengths and weaknesses. It enables me to at least see that I have problems and gives me the strength to change. When I compare myself to how I was five years ago, I can see that I have changed significantly. Even if I look back just one year, I can see significant changes. Many things that bothered me a year ago, no longer bother me now.

Rudra Shivananda shared with me that he took a personality test when he just joined one of the organisations he worked in. The results showed that he was an introvert....not that it is a bad thing! A few years later, when he acted as the trainer, he took the test again. When the consultant looked at the results and compared them to the results he took previously, he was puzzled. The results no longer showed that Rudra was an introvert. He said that such significant changes could never happen. Rudra explained to me that his Kriya Yoga practices contributed to the change.

What if one just started out with one's spiritual practice and one's meditation has not deepened significantly enough to bring about changes to oneself? No problem. Our ego is made up of our memories and our experiences. If we want to make changes to our ego, we can do it indirectly by changing our experiences or environment. David Brooks wrote in *The Social Animal*, "Researchers have done a lot of work over the past few years analysing social networks. It turns out almost everything is contagious. If your friends are obese, you are more likely to be obese. If your friends are happy, you are more likely to be happy. If your friends smoke, you smoke. If they feel lonely, you feel lonely. In fact, Nicholas Christakis and James H. Fowler have found that a person's friends have more influence on whether he or she will be obese than a person's spouse". So, if we want to make changes in our life, we can look for friends who already have the attributes we desire to have.

However, we need to be careful. Our conditioning acts as a strong filter which distorts what we see. Instead of seeing reality, our conditioning

presents a very different picture to us. Ajahn Brahm in his book 'Simply this Moment' shared a story that illustrates this. He said, "Another example is from a disciple of mine. Many years ago she had a very big problem because her husband was sexually abusing her children. He went to jail. She couldn't see what was happening for many months. She was a very loving mother and a very loving wife. As sometimes happens in those terrible situations, it came out at school. The teachers saw the signs and when they investigated they found that they had assessed the situation correctly, the children were being abused. The mother felt very guilty, but why was it that she couldn't see those signs? As a Buddhist monk – who knows about the mind, knows about conditioning, knows about the psychology of all this – I had to explain to her the reason she could not see what others could see. The situation was so horrendous that subconsciously she didn't want to see it. If you don't want to see something you just cannot see it. It's not a matter of suppression, which is done openly. It's blocked out at a subconscious level. It happens before this process comes to the mind's consciousness. It's already been filtered out".

"There was a very interesting experiment done a few years ago at Harvard University. In front of some volunteer students, psychologists flashed images on a screen and asked the students to write down what they thought the image represented. The image was flashed so quickly that at first they could not really make out what the image was. Gradually the length of the exposure was increased until they could record some idea of what it was. Then the time on the screen was further increased so that the students could record whether it was what they had expected it to be, until the time the exposure was long enough for them to clearly tell what it was".

"The findings are illustrated with one example. The actual photograph was of a very well known part of the campus, a set of steps going up to one of the faculty buildings. There was a bicycle by the side of the steps. One student saw it as a ship at sea, but because the image was flashed so



quickly it wasn't much more than a guess. However, once that idea was in his mind, when the length of exposure on the screen was increased incrementally, he still saw it as a ship at sea, again and again. He saw it as a ship when every one else could see it as a well know part of the campus. He insisted it was a ship at sea until the exposure was so long that he eventually saw his mistake and corrected it. The lesson from that was that once you form a view it interferes so greatly with your perception that even though the image is right in front of you, you cannot see it. You see it in a different way than it truly is".

"One of the images took the students a particularly long time to figure out; it was a picture of two dogs copulating. It was such an obscene or unpleasant thing to see that the students were in complete denial, again and again and again, until it was so obvious that they had to see it for what it was. This is solid evidence for what the Buddha said about the perversions of our cognitive processes. Even though we think we know what our partner is saying to us, even though we think we know who they are, how often we are wrong. This is so not just in relationships with others, but also in our relationship with ourselves".

## Seeing Work Related Problems Differently

Richard felt totally frustrated. All the things that could go wrong at work are happening at the same time and the office politics are making the problems even tougher. His sleep last night was disturbed and he felt like he did not have any sleep at all. While staring at the bathroom mirror, he silently asked the Divine, “Why am I going through all this? What is there for me to learn?”

The answer came back to him intuitively, “Everyone is given a basket of white eggs and black eggs. The white eggs represent pleasant circumstances and the black eggs represent difficulties and challenges. My child, where do you intend to put the black eggs - with your work, health or family?”

Immediately, Richard felt the burden lifted off his shoulders. He would have placed all the black eggs with his work and it appears that this is his present circumstance. Suddenly, the work related problems seem easier. They are not problems if they can be solved. Anyway, it is unreasonable of him to expect everything to flow nicely perpetually. Life is a series of ups and downs. It is exactly these moments of challenges and harmony that make life interesting. The joy of solving problems or overcoming problems requires that there be problems and challenges at the first place.

Richard looked back at when he first joined his organisation. He was fearful at first of not meeting the expectations that his job require but after a while, his fear was replaced by the joy of learning new things and helping the organisation improve. The problems he faced actually contributed to his happiness!

He considered other aspects of his family life. Everyone is healthy and they are all contented and happy. There is nothing more that he could ask for. He is thankful to the Divine and this feeling of gratitude gave him an

emotional lift. He laughed at himself for feeling sorry for himself when there is so much to be thankful for. He remembers reading about a research which showed that the most important factor to a person's happiness is a happy family. He can face ups and downs at work but if he has a strong family support, he will feel generally happy. Even if he loses his job, after the initial disappointment, he will revert back to his general well-being. It is like striking lottery. Research has also shown that after the initial euphoria, the winner will always revert back to his original state of happiness (or the lack of it).

"Yes," Richard said to himself with full conviction, "Work-related problems are the best problems to have!" He started whistling a happy tune while he prepares himself for work.

## Be your own Therapist

When we are troubled, it may be useful if we have a friend or relative to talk to. Talking to a friend enables us to vent and clear our thoughts. However, our friend may not always be there to listen to us and he/she may not know us well enough to give us proper advice. If we keep turning to our friends whenever we have problems, we will become dependent on them for solutions. We lose the power over ourselves. Pretty soon, our friends will start avoiding us because they feel dragged down by our negative emotions.

The good news is that we can be our own therapist if we just follow some simple rules. Our mind has three faculties. One faculty is the part that complains and says things that incite negative emotions within us. The second faculty is wisdom. It listens patiently to the first faculty and says things that are peaceful. The problem is, the complaining faculty is the more talkative portion of our mind and this leaves very little room for our wisdom faculty to respond.

The third faculty is silence. It is experienced when neither the first and second faculty is talking. We experience this faculty during meditation. This third faculty is not the subject of this article.



So, how do we give more power to our wisdom faculty? We keep a spiritual diary and write down our thoughts. It is important to feel safe with the diary because we do not want to hide anything from it. We want to write down everything freely. Therefore, it is best to keep

the diary locked up or better still, keep the diary in Word document and protect the document with a password.

We start writing in the spiritual diary by allowing the first faculty to vent. Allow it to complain as much as it wants. However, when we start to

write, we start to activate our left brain which is more rational. After a while, our wisdom faculty will start talking. You will know when the wisdom faculty starts talking because it will speak slowly and in a calm manner. Every word will bring peace to our hearts.

The more we turn to our spiritual diary for guidance, the stronger our wisdom faculty becomes. It is a great friend to have because it is with us 24 hours a day. Our wisdom faculty knows everything about us and may even make us recall some experience we went through as a child in order to make us see a solution to our problems. We may not solve all our problems but at the very least, it puts all our problems in the proper perspective. Our spiritual diary should be the first friend we turn to whenever we face difficulties.

The other day, I was talking to a friend who was suffering from a severe backache. He said that if he is given a choice between a 100 million dollars and the chance to be free from that backache, he would select the latter. This makes me think that sometimes we give more attention to our problems than we should. Our mind is very fragile and it troubles itself over minor issues. If we are healthy, have a roof over our head and have enough to eat, we have every reason to be happy. That is why we need to train our mind by keeping a spiritual diary. An untrained mind is the cause of unnecessary mental suffering.

A trained mind is the cause for happiness and inner-peace.

## Fear of Failure

Robert Kelsey wrote in an article, 'Is fear of failure holding you back' about a research in the 1960s by John Atkinson, then working at Stanford University, who conducted a series of experiments on children. Atkinson noted that they could be divided into two categories: those focused on winning the reward, who approached the task with what he called a "need for achievement," and those focused on their seemingly inevitable failure, who had what Atkinson termed a "fear of failure" based on their desire to avoid the public humiliation of failure.

Kelsey wrote, "In one experiment the children played a game of hoop-the-peg, with greater rewards offered for greater distances. The "need for achievement" kids stood a challenging but realistic distance from the peg -- adding concentration if they failed. Those with fear of failure, meanwhile, stood either right on top of the peg or so far back that failure was almost certain."

"Of course, those choosing the impossible distance effectively disguised their fear of failure, not least because everyone failed at such a distance. Yet that was the better response. Many of the fear of failure kids became disruptive -- intoning that they didn't care for the game with some even trying to halt the entire process."

In other words, the children who suffered from the fear of failure (which Kelsey labelled High-FFs) either set impossible goals so that they have an excuse for failure or set goals that are too easy, where success is guaranteed. All of us have a fear of failure to a certain extent but when it becomes disruptive to our life, it must be addressed. Kelsey wrote, "From here, it's easy to see how such a divide can impact our career progression: indeed, our entire lives. High-FFs keep their ambitions either low or -- as a mask for their insecurities -- extraordinarily high (knowing that failing to become a TV star will be kindly judged). It's the challenging

but achievable career choices (such as joining the professions) that are avoided by High-FFs”.

How do we solve the problem if we are High-FFs? If we have the problem and are willing to admit it, then we are already half way through. That is why I advocate that our spiritual practices can improve our work performance by helping us to better observe our thoughts and emotions, thus leading to better self-understanding. By understanding how the fear of failure is adversely affecting our life, we can choose to reject the negative thought patterns that we had previously accepted to be correct. If we can see the link between our fear of failure and the resulting negative thought patterns, those thought patterns will no longer be able to cause a reaction from us. Even if we are not High-FFs, it is useful to understand the problems they face in order to see how we may be impacted in a milder manner.

Kelsey developed a seven step process of overcoming the fear of failure. He wrote:

“1. Discover your true values. If those pop-star goals are a mask you'll need to go back to square one and calculate what really motivates you. This requires you to establish the values and principles that underline your existence. It's these that should drive your goal setting, not your insecurities.

2. Establish your goals. With your values written down, visualise yourself 10-years' hence. Every detail should be imagined: house, car, partner, office, dog (or cat). Importantly, also focus on the details of your career. What will you do day-to-day, where and with whom? Then ensure it dovetails with your values -- otherwise it will almost certainly fail.

3. Work out the milestones. The 10-year horizon is long-enough to make anything possible: including professional exams. Yet you have to ensure the path you take is the right one. So visualize yourself in five years' time. What has to be in place to ensure the 10-year goals are achievable? Then



do the same for two years -- thinking about the needs for the five-year horizon. Then one year. Then six months. Then three months, one month and one week. And what can you do tomorrow to make sure the one-week goal is conquered?

4. Develop a strategy and tactics. Of course, goals fail without strong execution, while "busyness" can lead us in the wrong direction. We need a strategy -- a plan that ensures our actions lead us towards our objectives. So undertake a SWOT analysis: looking at your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats. This should help a strategy emerge because we can execute tactics on our strengths while developing skills to overcome our weaknesses. Meanwhile, we can pursue the opportunities (if goal-focused) and plan to navigate the threats.

5. Execute efficiently. According to Stephen Covey, all activities fall into four boxes: urgent and important, urgent and unimportant, not urgent and important, and not urgent and unimportant. We spend our time on urgent-box activities neglecting the not-urgent-and-important box that is vital for achieving our long-term goals. Yet if we start here, our activities become driven by our goals allowing us to control urgent-and-unimportant activities (otherwise called interruptions) and potentially reframing our not-urgent-and-unimportant activities as refreshing moments where we can enjoy our progress.

6. Deal with people. For High-FFs, other people are a problem. Too often, we become reactive and defensive, or potentially manipulated by people leveraging off our insecurities. Yet dealing with difficult people is possible once we have "developed our compassion" -- i.e. we've stopped seeing the world from our own perspective and, instead, seen it from theirs. If done genuinely, we can then forge win-win strategies that turn potential enemies and barriers to our progress into allies that can help us achieve our goals.

7. Find your unique gift. Still struggling? Just maybe you haven't found your unique gift. Everyone has a special talent or insight that they should

first discover and then offer to others. Mine was a curiosity regarding my condition (as a High-FF) and a background in writing. I combined the two to write 'What's Stopping You?' What's yours?"

The fear of failure may manifest itself as seeing only the negatives in One's endeavour and coming up reasons to give up on One's endeavour instead of persevering on. For example, at work, instead of putting in the effort to earn a promotion, One may come out with numerous reasons why One does not want that promotion. The fear of failure may cause us to give up prematurely.

Therefore, another way to remove the fear of failure from our life is to consciously focus our mind towards the happy moments and things in our life. In his article 'Is happiness the secret of success?' Shawn Achor wrote, "Scientifically, happiness is a choice. It is a choice about where your single processor brain will devote its finite resources as you process the world. If you scan for the negative first, your brain literally has no resources left over to see the things you are grateful for or the meaning embedded in your work. But if you scan the world for the positive, you start to reap an amazing advantage".

"A decade of research in the business world proves that happiness raises nearly every business and educational outcome: raising sales by 37%, productivity by 31%, and accuracy on tasks by 19%, as well as a myriad of health and quality-of-life improvements. Given the unprecedented level of unhappiness at companies and the direct link between happiness and business outcomes, the question is NOT whether happiness should matter to companies. Given this research, it clearly should. The first question is: What can I do in my own life to reap the advantage of happiness?"

Shawn Achor gave the following advice:

1. Write down three new things you are grateful for each day;

2. Write for two minutes a day describing one positive experience you had over the past 24 hours;
3. Exercise for 10 minutes a day (*I am sure we can do better than that!*);
4. Meditate for two minutes, focusing on your breath going in and out (*I recommend at least 15 minutes each session*);
5. Write one quick email first thing in the morning thanking or praising someone in your social support network (family member, friend, old teacher).
6. Be Giving. Anchor found that employees high on provision of social support are 10 times more engaged at work and have a 40% higher likelihood of promotion over the next four years. In other words, giving at the office gets you more than receiving.

## A Happy Marriage

Ravi and Stephen were sitting together in a playground as they watched their children play. They are both in their forties. Stephen looked haggard and he appeared as if he had not gotten a good rest for a very long time.

Ravi sensed his friend's mood and asked, "Is something troubling you?"

Stephen was hesitant about sharing his problem with Ravi as it was an embarrassing secret but Ravi is his trusted friend and he had always turned to him for advice. He is good at hiding his emotions but today he had a big fight with his wife and he just could not pick himself up.

He sighed and said in a weak voice, "My wife and I have not been intimate for a long time. She said to me that she is just staying married to me for the sake of our children".

Ravi listened intently and nodded to Stephen to encourage him to carry on.

Stephen continued, "This is a very heavy emotional burden for me. I have been carrying it for a year now. We have been very critical of each other and do not have one good thing to say about each other. This is affecting every other aspects of my life, including my work," Stephen felt his anger rising and continued, "She is not putting any effort into the marriage at all. I have tried very hard to make it work. I even took up a course to learn how to give her a massage in the hope of rekindling our passion".

Ravi responded with sympathy, "I understand how you feel. A happy marriage can give you the strength to weather any challenges and an unhappy marriage can nullify all the other good things in your life".

Stephen looked down and sighed.

Ravi continued, "Every marriage moves from a stage of passion to a stage of companionship. The second stage of companionship is more rewarding

and fulfilling. It is the stage when unconditional love develops. It may take years to get into that stage”.

Stephen gave a nervous chuckle, “I think my marriage is stuck between these two stages”.

Ravi smiled, “I don’t think you are. Research has shown that in a happy marriage, both couples will say five good things for every bad thing said about each other”.

Stephen countered, “I have tried that but it just does not work”.

“No Stephen, you are missing the point. What you think and feel is enormously more important than what you say or do. My advice to you is to respect your wife’s wishes and at the same time, appreciate her for all the positive experiences that she has given you. Your love for her is being blotted out by your anger”.

Stephen nodded in agreement. It suddenly became clear to him. He had been so negative that there was no space in his mind to appreciate his wife. As the negativity built up, he found more reasons to push his wife away from him. He looked at his sons and the joy in their faces. Without his wife, he would not have them. He is totally grateful to her for this alone. Why has he not seen this? He felt guilty for allowing the small things to get to him to such an extent that he failed to see the big picture.

Ravi smiled as his face softened, “We are creatures of habit. If you have the habit of seeing the negative aspects of other people, you will not be able to see their good sides even if they are saints. Your habit will just prevent you from being grateful for the positive things in your life”.

Stephen started to feel defensive but he did not respond because he knew deep down that Ravi is right and has a compassionate heart. Ravi is a good friend who is unafraid of highlighting his weaknesses because he sincerely wants to help him.

Ravi continued, “I do an exercise everyday which I find very helpful. I am sure it can help you too. Every morning, I think of three new things about my wife and children which I am grateful for; just three new things each day,” Ravi paused and then cautioned Stephen, “Your habitual pattern will make it difficult for you at first but after a while, that negative habit will weaken and the new positive habit will develop. This will rekindle your love for her. It is easier to change yourself than to change others”.

Stephen knew that being grateful for the things that one has is one of the most important causes of happiness. He has many friends who have everything in the world but could not be happy because they are not contented with what they already have. This negative habitual thought pattern is keeping them from finding happiness. They could only cling on to a hope of finding happiness in the future. Stephen gave Ravi and grateful smile, “You know what, that is exactly what I will do. I do not know if it will help with my marriage but I am certain that it will at least make me a happier person. Thank you”.

## Compassionate Communication



In the chapter on “Seeing the Ego as it is”, we saw that our thoughts form the basis of our ego. We can go one step deeper and question what is the foundation of our thoughts? *It is the words we use.* Marshall Rosenberg gave a very good example in his book, ‘Nonviolent communication: A

language of life’. In the war crimes trial of Nazi officer Adolph Eichmann, he was asked if it was difficult for him to kill all the prisoners. He responded to everyone’s surprise that it was easy. When asked why, he responded that the language they used made it very easy. Marshall wrote:

*“...he and his fellow officers had their own name for the responsibility-denying language they used. They called it ‘Amtssprache,’ loosely translated into English as ‘office talk’ or ‘bureaucratese.’ For example, if asked why they took a certain action, the response might be, ‘I had to.’ If asked why they ‘had to,’ the answer would be ‘Superiors’ orders’ ‘Company policy’ or ‘It was the law’”.*

In our normal day to day communication, we have been conditioned to express our judgment or put blame on others instead of telling others their actual behaviour that we found unpleasant. Marshall gave the following example:

*I became acutely aware of this difficulty while working with an elementary school where the staff and principal often reported communication difficulties. The district superintendent had requested that*



*I help them resolve the conflict. First I was to confer with the staff, and then with the staff and principal together.*

*I opened the meeting by asking the staff, “What is the principal doing that conflicts with your needs?” “He has a big mouth!” came the swift response. My question called for an observation, but while “big mouth” gave me information on how this teacher evaluated the principal, it failed to describe what the principal said or did that led to the teacher’s interpretation that he had a “big mouth.”*

*When I pointed this out, a second teacher offered, “I know what he means: the principal talks too much!” Instead of a clear observation of the principal’s behavior, this was also an evaluation— of how much the principal talked. A third teacher then declared, “He thinks only he has anything worth saying.” I explained that inferring what another person is thinking is not the same as observing his behavior. Finally a fourth teacher ventured, “He wants to be the center of attention all the time.” After I remarked that this too was an inference—of what another person is wanting—two teachers blurted in unison, “Well, your question is very hard to answer!”*

*We subsequently worked together to create a list identifying specific behaviors on the part of the principal that bothered them, and made sure that the list was free of evaluation. For example, the principal told stories about his childhood and war experiences during faculty meetings, with the result that meetings sometimes ran 20 minutes overtime. When I asked whether they had ever communicated their annoyance to the principal, the staff replied they had tried, but only through evaluative comments. They had never made reference to specific behaviors—such as his story telling—and agreed to bring these up when we were all to meet together.*

*Almost as soon as the meeting began, I saw what the staff had been telling me. No matter what was being discussed, the principal would interject, “This reminds me of the time . . . ” and then launch into a story*

*about his childhood or war experience. I waited for the staff to voice their discomfort around the principal's behavior. However, instead of Nonviolent Communication, they applied nonverbal condemnation. Some rolled their eyes; other yawned pointedly; one stared at his watch.*

*I endured this painful scenario until finally I asked, "Isn't anyone going to say something?" An awkward silence ensued. The teacher who had spoken first at our meeting screwed up his courage, looked directly at the principal, and said, "Ed, you have a big mouth."*

*As this story illustrates, it's not always easy to shed our old habits and master the ability to separate observation from evaluation. Eventually, the teachers succeeded in clarifying for the principal the specific actions that led to their concern. The principal listened earnestly and then pressed, "Why didn't one of you tell me before?" He admitted he was aware of his story-telling habit, and then began a story pertaining to this habit! I interrupted him, observing (good-naturedly) that he was doing it again. We ended our meeting developing ways for the staff to let their principal know, in a gentle way, when his stories weren't appreciated.*

Marshall introduced a new way of communication which he termed 'Nonviolent communication ("NVC")' or 'Compassionate communication'. The NVC process is as follows:

- a) State the actions that we are observing that are affecting us negatively. It is important to state our observation and not our evaluation of the person as in the example above.
- b) Express our feelings in relation to our observation. It is important not to express our feelings in a way that is more of an expression of our judgment instead of our feelings, for example, 'I feel betrayed' or 'I feel taken for granted' implies that the other person has betrayed us or does not appreciate us. It is our judgment which may not be true. We need to express actual feelings such as I feel sad, disappointed, angry or so on'. Expressing our feelings can be

difficult because it makes us look vulnerable but on the other hand, it can open up an empathetic connection with the listener. It is better to express our feelings instead of allowing others to misjudge us as in the following example shared by Marshall illustrates:

*I was teaching a course in NVC to a group of inner city students. When I walked into the room the first day, the students, who had been enjoying a lively conversation with each other, became quiet. "Good morning!" I greeted. Silence. I felt very uncomfortable, but was afraid to express it. Instead, I proceeded in my most professional manner, "For this class, we will be studying a process of communication that I hope you will find helpful in your relationships at home and with your friends."*

*I continued to present information about NVC, but no one seemed to be listening. One girl, rummaging through her bag, fished out a file and began vigorously filing her nails. Students near the windows glued their faces to the pane as if fascinated by what was going on in the street below. I felt increasingly more uncomfortable, yet continued to say nothing. Finally, a student who had certainly more courage than I was demonstrating, piped up, "You just hate being with black people, don't you?" I was stunned, yet immediately realized how I had contributed to this student's perception by trying to hide my discomfort.*

*"I am feeling nervous," I admitted, "but not because you are black. My feelings have to do with my not knowing anyone here and wanting to be accepted when I came in the room." This expression of my vulnerability had a pronounced effect on the students. They started to ask questions about me, to tell me things about themselves, and to express curiosity about NVC.*

- c) Explain our needs or desires that are not being fulfilled and that are causing those feelings. This helps the other person to understand our feelings. Examples of needs include, recognition, acceptance, financial security, some time alone and so on.
- d) Lastly, request for actions in order to enrich our lives. The actions must be clear. Request such as 'I need you to be more responsible' is vague and not actionable. It is better to say, 'I need you to call me whenever you will be home late'.

It is also important to use NVC to understand the needs of others. When we focus on their needs, we will be less likely to become defensive and react aggressively. Marshall gave the following example in his book:

*This dialogue occurred during a workshop I was conducting. About half an hour into my presentation, I paused to invite reactions from the participants. One of them raised a hand and declared, "You're the most arrogant speaker we've ever had!" I have several options open to me when people address me this way. One option is to take the message personally; I know I'm doing this when I have a strong urge to either grovel, defend myself, or make excuses. Another option (for which I am well-rehearsed) is to attack the other person for what I perceive as their attack upon me. On this occasion, I chose a third option by focusing on what might be going on behind the man's statement.*

*MBR: (guessing at the observations he was making) Are you reacting to my having taken 30 straight minutes to present my views before giving you a chance to talk?*

*Phil: No, you make it sound so simple.*

*MBR: (trying to obtain further clarification) Are you reacting to my not having said anything about how the process can be difficult for some people to apply?*

*Phil: No, not some people—you!*

*MBR: So you're reacting to my not having said that the process can be difficult for me at times?*

*Phil: That's right.*

*MBR: Are you feeling annoyed because you would have liked some sign from me that indicated that I have some problems with the process myself?*

*Phil: (after a moment's pause) That's right.*

*MBR: (More relaxed now that I am in touch with the person's feeling and need, I direct my attention to what he might be requesting of me) Would you like me to admit right now that this process can be a struggle for me to apply?*

*Phil: Yes.*

*MBR: (Having gotten clear on his observation, feeling, need, and request, I check inside myself to see if I am willing to do as he requests) Yes, this process is often difficult for me. As we continue with the workshop, you'll probably hear me describe several incidents where I've struggled . . . or completely lost touch . . . with this process, this consciousness, that I am presenting here to you. But what keeps me in the struggle are the close connections to other people that happen when I do stay with the process.*

I may not have done justice to NVC in this short article. I encourage you to read Marshall's book or watch the video of one of his workshop on youtube. The process may feel uncomfortable at first because we are more used to our negative habitual patterns of communication. But if we persist on applying the process, we will eventually reap the benefits of its application and using it will become natural to us.

## Seek First to Understand

*By Desmond Yeoh SC*

When someone complains to us, we may become defensive and argue back if the complaint is about us; or If the complaint is about something or someone else, we may jump straight to giving a solution or giving some sort of reassurance by saying things like 'that is not so bad' or sharing an experience which we think is worse than what the other person is going through in an effort to make his problem seem smaller. We do so because we failed to recognise the close connection between the other party's mind and emotions.

Our thoughts and emotions moves in a circle to reinforce each other. An external stimulus may trigger an angry thought causing anger to arise. The anger in turn triggers more angry thoughts which further reinforce our anger. Unless we break that cycle, the other person will get angrier and angrier.

The cycle is even more difficult to break if the other person has suffered some loss such as the death of a loved one. Sometimes our consoling words leave the other person feeling worse because we failed to address his emotional issues.

Giving advice is useless we are able to truly understand the other person's problems. The other person must first feel understood before he can be receptive to our advice. It is only then that we have established an emphatic connection with him. If we do not make the effort to truly understand him, we may end up giving him a wrong advice.

How do we address his emotions? We do so by listening attentively to his issues and try to describe his feelings and his needs which we think is not being fulfilled. Every negative emotion is a result of some unfulfilled desire or need. If we can indentify that unfulfilled desire or need, we can help the other party to clarify his thoughts and come to the solution

himself. Sometimes, our role is to help the other person to gain clarity on the issues he is facing rather than to give advice.

When describing the other person's emotions, we should avoid words which implies some value judgment such as 'you feel betrayed, cheated, taken for granted, unappreciated and so on'. It is best to stick to basic feelings: Angry, sad, disappointed etc.

If we are the source of the complaint, getting defensive and arguing back will only aggravate the situation. If we focus our energies on trying to understand the other person, we will be less emotional. If we are able to express in words his feelings and unfulfilled need, he will feel that we have truly listened to him. Once the emphatic connection is established, the need to win the argument is removed and both parties can work towards a win-win situation.



When we listen with full awareness, we allow his problems to flow through us to the Divine. All of us are Divine. By listening without judgment, we are allowing the Divine to help the other person at an emotional level. This is also how we help ourselves. When we are

troubled, it is useful to just rest in our awareness and pay attention to the emotions within us instead of trying to 'think' how to solve the problem. By resting in awareness, we are surrendering our problems to the Divinity within and allowing the Divine to guide us. The solution provided by the Divine may not be what we expected or what we prayed for but if we look back a few months or years later, we can see that it was the best way that the problem could have been resolved. At that point, if we are conscious, we can even see God smiling at us lovingly.



## The Foundation of Happiness

When asked what is happiness, Ramana Maharshi replied, “Happiness is the very nature of the Self; happiness and the Self are not different. There is no happiness in any object of the world. ***We imagine through our ignorance that we derive happiness from objects. When the mind goes out, it experiences misery. In truth, when its desires are fulfilled, it returns to its own place and enjoys the happiness that is the Self***”.

“Similarly, in the states of sleep, the mind becomes inward-turned, and enjoys pure Self-Happiness. Thus the mind moves without rest alternately going out of the Self and returning to it. Under the tree the shade is pleasant; out in the open the heat is scorching. A person who has been going about in the sun feels cool when he reaches the shade. Someone who keeps on going from the shade into the sun and then back into the shade is a fool. A wise man stays permanently in the shade. Similarly, the mind of the one who knows the truth does not leave Brahman. The mind of the ignorant, on the contrary, revolves in the world, feeling miserable, and for a little time returns to Brahman to experience happiness. In fact, what is called the world is only thought. When the world disappears, i.e. when there is no thought, the mind experiences happiness; and when the world appears, it goes through misery”.

When we read the wisdom above, we can clearly see the greatest trickery of the mind. When we stand out in the hot sun for a long while and then step into an air-conditioned room, we can feel the coolness of the room. If we had been in the air-conditioned room all along, we may not notice the coolness of the room after a while. Being in the hot sun does not add to our enjoyment of the room but we merely felt relief from stepping out of the sun. We mistake that relief for happiness.

When we are craving for something, our mind is completely occupied with thoughts of getting the desired object. We keep thinking about the beauty of the desired object and worry about not getting it. ***Our mind is***



***burdened with thoughts of the object.*** When we eventually get the object, we suddenly feel relieved because the thoughts are temporarily removed and we can remain silent for a while to be *present* with the object...until we shift our mind to another desired object. In the space when our mind shifts from one desired object to another, there is a moment of silence. It is similar to when we are driving and need to make a turn at a junction. We first need to stop the car or at least slow down substantially before making the turn.

Worry is the same thing. The only difference is that we are filled with fearful thoughts of losing the desired object. Once the fear is resolved, there is temporarily relief from those fearful thoughts...until our mind creates another thing for us to worry about. Worrying can become a bad habit if we do not see it for what it truly is; mental pictures of the worse case scenario; most of which will never happen, at least not in the extreme way which we pictured it.

Therefore, a wise person will not wait for the thoughts to disappear because he knows that he can enjoy staying in his Higher Self which is by nature Happiness. When we remain in the silent gap between thoughts, there is a feeling of relief; as if we have put down a heavy luggage which we have been carrying for a long time. Staying in the silent gap between thoughts is a useful habit to develop because we can then stop depending on the external world to slip into the Higher Self whenever we obtain the object desired.

### Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

I was having a bad day at the office and was feeling down until a friend emailed to me some pictures that shifted my mood:



These are pictures of a father and mother kissing their little daughter good-bye. The last picture shows the hospital staff bowing to the family because the brave little girl has agreed to donate her kidney and liver to save the lives of two other girls.

I started thinking about my own daughter and felt a deep gratitude to the Divine that she is well and healthy. I realised that we are so caught up with our day to day life that it is so easy to forget to thank God for the matters that are truly important to our happiness.

Here is a simple rule to follow: To be at peace, don't sweat the small stuff.

*The freedom from suffering that the Buddha talked about isn't in itself an end to pain and stress. Instead it's a matter of creating a choice. I can either get caught up in the pain that comes to me, attach to it, and be overwhelmed by it; or I can embrace it, and through acceptance and understanding, not add more suffering to the existing pain, the unfair experiences, the criticisms or the misery that I face. Even after his enlightenment, the Buddha experienced all kinds of horrendous things. His cousin tried to murder him, people tried to frame him, blame him and criticize him. He experienced severe physical illness. But the Buddha didn't create suffering around those experiences. His response was never one of anger, resentment, hatred or blame, but one of acknowledgment.*

*This has been a really valuable thing for me to know. It's taught me not to ask for favours in life, or to hope that if I meditate a lot, I can avoid unpleasant experiences. "God, I've been a monk for thirty-three years. Please reward me for being a good boy." I've tried that and it doesn't work. To accept life without making any pleas is very liberating, because I no longer feel a need to control or manipulate conditions for my own benefit. I don't need to worry or feel anxious about my future. There's a sense of trust and confidence, a fearlessness that comes through learning to trust, to relax, to open to life, and to investigate experience rather than to resist or be frightened by it. If you're willing to learn from the suffering in life, you'll find the unshakability of your own mind.*

*- Ajahn Sumedho*

*Om Kriya Babaji Nama Aum*

*May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness  
May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering*