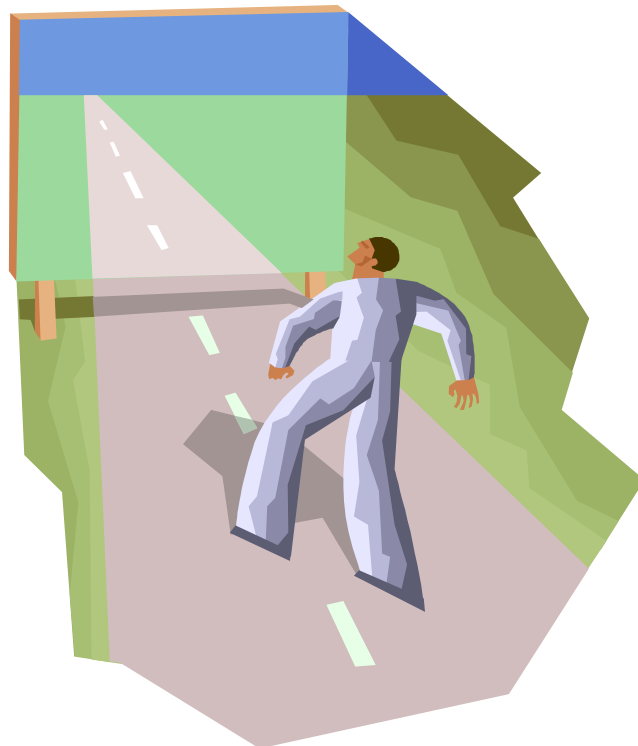


We can only solve a problem if we recognise that it is there

HAPPINESS:

STOP CONFUSING WHAT WE ARE NOT FOR
WHAT WE ARE



Desmond Yeoh Seng Cheong

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Selected Comments from our website

Dear Desmond, I am experiencing the same mental suffering though I started meditation about 5 years ago. As far as meditation is concerned, I am still at the 'nursery' level; not making much progress as I am not persistent in my meditation. I believe that one needs inner spiritual strength to succeed. Thanks a lot for the reminder.

- *Puvanes on 'The Best Prayer'*

Desmond, this is a great article, very intelligent and deeply thought.

Let's pray for awareness, and indeed thank any experience for what it can teach us. Let's also accept the variety of forces and energies growing and fading inside us as we live, with awareness still.

What is – is; it's the simplest and deepest truth. And yet sometimes it feels very tough to embrace, as something in our mind resists and want to shape the world in its own way. I tend to believe this is something that can never be totally shut up, and that wisdom is the art of knowing when (and how) to let the ego talk, and channel this energy where it needs to go, so as not to harm the awareness of the Self.

- *Thomas on 'The Best Prayer'*

Dear Desmond. That is a best prayer. A great insight to most of mankind. Thank You.

- *Dr. Subhassh on 'The Best Prayer'*

Thank You, Desmond. This timely article on “Heart Center” by our Teacher, came to me right at the time I requested you to listen to Mary A. Hall’s “To Listen To Our Heart-To get our answers from THE DIVINE. I am sure now everyone wants to know how to activate our Heart Center. I very much appreciate your “Who Am I” article. That brings me back to my out-of-body experience—I am not this body. I guess one has to meditate on this to see through.

- *Dr. Subhassh on ‘The Heart Center’*

Dear Brother Desmond. THAT was mind blowing. Existing in the Real Existence. I guess Buddha laughed at the instance HE became enlightened.

Thank You Very Much, Brother. You seem to be reaching there. Guess we have to simply let go. I very much like to hear from our Guru—Guru Rudra - His Guidance.

- *Dr. Subhassh on ‘The Enlightenment of Osho’*

I truly revere Ramana Maharishithe great soul was truly an embodiment of GOD , how I wish the great one is still around to guide many sincere seekers like us.....You may watch Ramana Maharishi's rare video on Youtube, truly amazing. Thank you Desmond

- *Puvanes on ‘The Enlightenment of Ramana Maharshi’ article*

Ramana Maharishi is a deep inspiration to all spiritual seekers. I do get deep thoughts about him. I am seeking.

- *Dr. Subhassh on 'The Enlightenment of Ramana Maharshi'*

Dear Desmond, this article is like, for me, "a nail hit on the head"--on target. Quite some time now my mind is so focused on Buddhism, Buddha's teaching, and Buddhist meditation. A bit, trying to integrate Buddha's method of meditation and Kriya Yoga, and a monks way of spiritual path and the "householder" way of Kriya Yoga path.

Your article was timely. I always wanted our Teacher/Guru Rudra to talk to us on this subject. As he has been in this situation once, and he was almost to become a monk, until BABAJI appeared to him. Our guru will be the best person to give us a first hand insight into, the likes of Richard's dilemma.

Desmond, your article was like an intuitive reply to the answer I was looking for.

Thank You Very Much.

- *Dr. Subhassh on 'The Yoga of the Buddha'*

This article is really an inspiration to Kriya Yoga students to continue their practices.

- *Ajith Kumar on 'The Science on Kriya Yoga'*

An interesting write up on the subject; should say just beautifully explained and indeed a gem for the wayfarers.

Beautifully explained, it is a gem

- *Chia Ah Boon on 'Repentance is Retrospective Awareness'*

I am a Christian and believe in the Almighty God, Jesus Christ. Similarly, as long as we have faith and trust in HIM, believing that HE is always watching over us, we never fear and we find peace within ourselves because of HIS blessed assurance.

We also believed that things happen in our lives for a reason because HE knows what is best for us. As long as we surrender ourselves to HIM, we are able to take anything that comes into our lives because we know that we are not alone and HE will give us the strength and courage to overcome it. All things are possible through HIM and nothing is that difficult that we cannot endure. So yes, we are able to find peace, joy, happiness and contentment in life through HIM. Hallelujah!!

- *Evelyn Loo on 'A true story about Complete Surrender'*

Yes really it was helpful....Thanks

- *Raj Kumar on 'Destiny and Character'*

This is a real good article. If only such things can be taught in schools and in homes, we will have a new generation of people who can control their own thoughts, speech and behaviour and by this we can change destiny. The current believe in all forms of astrology is

fatalistic although experienced astrologers tell us that astrology is a guide to prepare us for the future and the unexpected. Evolution of the mind and spirit may come about in time and we may then have a new advanced race.

- *Sathia on 'Destiny and Character'*

Peace within is the only way to live. Do what you need to do to live as comfortably as you can. Make peace with your surroundings as you make peace within. Love, live, be happy what ever the circumstances may be. Hold on to your peace. Don't let go. Then only will there be everlasting peace. When you give, give it in peace and when you receive, receive it in peace.

- *Balachandran on 'Inner Peace: the Guiding Light'*

This is amazing what ever that doesn't kill you only makes you stronger. This should be a reminder for many negative people out there .Death is only for the body, not for the spirit- soul. What are you afraid off? Nothing can harm you. Trust in Him who is within you. You are not alone. Ask sincerely and He will give you. It may take some time, but surely He will give you. There are times when you feel lost; things don't work out the way you want them to. Don't worry; its the way He work things out. Surrender at His feet. Pour it out in prayer. Don't despair; only believe that He will deliver. In no time at all, it will be at your door step. I know these things because it has happened to me many times already.

- *Balachandran on 'A Story of Determination'*

Today is just filled with good things; Even an article that came to my mail box is exciting!

Thanks Desmond.

- *Kay on 'A Balanced Life'*

Contentment is the key to happiness. Live life simply and discover the peace it brings. Why the pride? What does it bring you? Only to discover the miseries it brings along. Bless the people who are rich and serve humanity. Pray for the people who have pride. Pray for them so they will have humility, and live in peace and harmony.

- *Balachandran on 'Pride fans the fire of Desires'*

Whatever we do, someone has an opinion of us. If we think a monk is rich because he has everything he needs, some say -God would not have placed us on earth to live by just praying and depending on others for food and shelter. If we work to earn a living or more, we are seen as people with unending desires. Most talk of the middle path – a balance; and living without attachment. Reminds me of the elephant and the six blind men. Each thinks he is right and do not see the whole.

I think I am one of the blind. Yes! There comes a time when we can reflect and look at the way our ego works. Then we have to try to annihilate that ego. Back to what some see as – a negative approach to Life and the beautiful world the Lord has gifted us.

- *Sathia on 'The Beautiful Lessons we Discover in Life'*

Life is a grinding wheel; either it grounds you down or it polishes you. The knocks and falls are part of life. If you inherit wealth, you don't learn much. You may learn from the finest universities in the world, you may achieve PhDs and what so ever; write good books and earn millions more but it is all inheritance. What about the boy who had to leave the comforts of his home so that he could support his father when he was fifteen, so that he could help his brother to obtain his Degree. This little boy of fifteen had to dig graves to earn a living in the seventies, but when he came home to give his egotistical father the hard earned money, the response was "Did you rob to get this money"? How would this little boy of fifteen feel? Rejected for doing something so noble! It didn't stop this little boy of fifteen. He went on earning more money with the skills he acquired and the little boy of fifteen grew to be a man, knowing what hardship is; unshaken by whatever situation he was in.

- *Balanchandran on 'The Beautiful Lessons we Discover in Life'*

Thanks for this enlightening article. Be simple, be humble. There will only be world peace if there's inner peace in all of us. Many of us are looking for inner peace within us including yours truly. Thanks again.

- *Koh Seow Pen on 'Inner Peace: the Guiding Light'*

A meaningful article. Appropriate to our life we lead these days in this Kali Yuga. I found my path and so do I hope for all my brothers and sisters in this world.

- *Amuthavalli on 'Inner Peace: the Guiding Light'*

Thanks for this wonderful awakening just by reading this article. It softens my heart and I love the prayers. I copied it down in my journal and will use it in my prayers. Awesome!

- *Koh Seow Pen on 'Seeing the Divinity within Others'*

This is an awesome article. When I'm mindful, then it's easier to leave my ego behind me. But on and off the ego will appear in front of me. I will need a lot of mental training and practice humility. Thanks for the inspiring message. In appreciation and I bow to the divinity within you.

- *Koh Seow Pen on 'The Biggest Misconception about Self Realisation'*

The beauty of breath, just imagine it; without it, the mind stops but will the heart stop? So that means you die or is it merely a stop over? It is automatic. You don't have to do anything; its there. But if you are aware of the breath then life becomes more beautiful. Try it, is fun.

- *Balanchandran on 'Using the breath to neutralise negative emotions'*

SIDDHIS: To have it takes a long time. To use it the wrong way you are asking for it. Just have it to experience it; then leave it for higher practises. The power of it may give you a glimpse of power. What happens next; we don't know. Ask a spiritual master, he may have answers to this; I am not. I feel meeting the MAHA AVATAR himself is better.

- *Balachandran on 'Siddhis- Obstacle common to all Spiritual Seekers'*

A well and concise article eloquently narrating the fundamental aspect of one's true nature.

- Puspa on 'The Creative Powers of Truthfulness'

It is painful to see the ego. All I can see is my own ego; how difficult I have been to my loved ones. With the practises taught by RUDRA; nourishing the chakras, cleansing it, and all of a sudden the ego is gone. The 'I'-ness is gone and you are left with the spirit; expand this, feel it covering the whole of your existence, then it turns into love. When you have only loving thoughts, children will say papa I love you so much, and when this happens, what else do you want? PRAMAHAMSA YOGANANDA has mentioned that 'something else', what is that 'something else'? It is the Father within you...that's the 'something else'.

- *Balachandran on 'Seeing the Divinity within Others'*

OH MAYA who are you? You are VISHNUS dream that we are all caught in. Tell me why you are so powerful. Will you be my friend?

Would you ease the very flow of your dreams? I need to be sane to live in madness; then dear MAYA ease my very soul for I have kept it for KRSNA.

- *Balachandran on 'The Best Kept Secrets of Maya'*

Wonderful! - get attached to the teachings and not the teacher.

- *Kavitha on 'Spiritual Independence: Separating the Teacher from the Teaching'*

Brother Desmond you have given me a shortcut to find peace. TQ.

- *Dr. Thila on 'Accepting Difficult People'*

Dear Brother Desmond, when you changed the title from “Dealing with difficult people” to “Accepting Difficult People”, I instantly knew you have Divine Guidance. The answer as to how to accept difficult people is in your new title itself. There is Divine Knowledge in every of your articles, all put in simple words that anyone can comprehend. Thank You. I Bow To The Divine Within You.

- *Dr.Subhassh on 'Accepting Difficult People'*

Thank You a million, Brother Desmond. This article is timely, as I am starting on Homeopathy again (inspired by my Highly respected colleague Dr Low, who is herself a medical Doctor turned Homeopathy Physician). To learn and be a good Homeopath one needs a great memory. I was on the fence to go ahead or just take life easy and forget of becoming a healer. Two items today set me thinking: (1)a video by a friend titled “What People Can Do”(which I will be posting to you),and (2)your article on improving one’s memory. GOD is sending me lots of guidance and I am grateful to YOU for your helping hand.

- *Dr.Subhassh on ‘Technique by Swami Rama to Test and Improve Memory’*

Introduction

In my previous books 'We are Here to Celebrate', 'Filling our Life with Celebration' and the 'Candles of Celebration' series, I put a lot of emphasis on understanding the ego. My wife once asked me why I write about the ego so much.

The seed for my fascination with understanding the self was planted in an early age. When I was suffering from a nightmare as a toddler, I would imagine myself in the dream state moving away from the dream and stepping back into my body. Also, back then, I often contemplated how it would be like to be in another's body and how different my thoughts would be.

My first encounter with a Divine Being happened when I was in my early teens. I met a householder yogi who was a devotee of Lord Shiva (This partly explains my emphasis on the 'destruction' of the ego). I think his name was Michael. My parents were his devotees. My mother told me a story that once Michael was enjoying his usual morning walk when he crossed path with a Buddhist Monk whom he has never met before. The monk took one look at him and immediately prostrated in front of him. Michael immediately reached down to help the monk up and asked him why he did that. The Monk merely replied that he is already very old and do not wish to miss the opportunity to pay respects to a Divine Being such as him.

Michael was an advanced Yogi. He used to help his followers by touching their spine with his thumb. In some occasions, his thumb would turn black. I am not sure what he did but he must have helped us to remove some karmic imprints. Some of his followers would suffer a mild illness subsequently but quickly recover from it. The illness may be the after effects of the karmic purification.

Michael taught many of his followers various yogic techniques to draw prana from the Sun. Unfortunately, I was too young at the time and was not interested to learn those techniques from him.

However, the Divine is kind. I had the good fortune to learn those techniques later on in my life from Rudra Shivananda who in turn learnt them from his Guru, Yogiraj Gurunath Siddhanath.

One of my favourite mantras is the Heart Sutra. I used to lull my daughter to sleep with the mantra to the extent that she too was able to recite the mantra. This Buddhist mantra is about understanding the ego and is covered in this book.

There are thousands of self-help books to address the myriad problems that we face in our daily life. We cannot find peace because once we solve one problem; we are again confronted with another problem. The world conspires to keep our mind busy so that we are kept confused. It makes sure that we always have something to think about. It draws us away from the present moment and throws us into the past or the future all the time. Most of the time we are stuck in our heads and are not grounded on reality.

A friend once asked me when will our spiritual seeking stop. The spontaneous answer that came to me is that it will stop when our mind can remain silent whenever we want it to be. The problem is the world gives us too many things to think about!

We cannot solve our problems unless we go to the root cause of all those problems. Let's say that we want to demolish a building. The way we approach our problems now is like hacking at the building brick by brick from the top floor down. But a person with wisdom will place dynamite at the main pillars of the building to tear it down with a single explosion. *This approach in solving our problems is to*

clearly understand what the ego is. We can only solve a problem if we recognise that it is there.

When we hear something, we may understand the words but we may not have absorbed the meaning. We may hear someone say that we are not our body. We may understand the words 'we', 'are' 'not', 'our' and 'body' but we do not truly understand the underlying meaning. We nod our head and agree; thinking that we have understood but we may have missed the message entirely. The mind has strategies in place to keep us from understanding what the ego is. The mind refuses to allow us to understand because once we do, it will cease to be the Master and our true self will be its Master instead. Therefore, the mind will distract us with other questions to draw us away from delving deeper so that we can go behind the false self. That is why many people are caught up in the cycle of philosophical arguments. The mind will keep us searching for knowledge endlessly.

Or it would mislead us to think that we have understood and allow us to repeat 'I am not my body, I am not my body...' like a parrot without truly understanding the message. We say to ourselves, "Yes, yes, I understand, what's next?" We have only understood at an intellectual level and that is not enough.

The mind is truly cunning. That is why I would advise you to keep a diary and at the end of each chapter of this book, write down how the concepts addressed in each chapter applies to your life. By doing so, you will be forced to look behind the words to get to the real message.

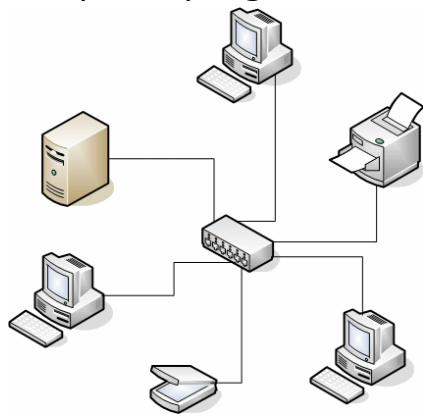
This book consists of relevant articles I have included in my previous books and also new articles on the subject. At the end of this book, it is my hope that you can see the message behind the titled of this

book: We can find happiness once we stop taking what we are not for what we are. As long as we continue to cling on to this error, our mind will not be able to find lasting peace.



The Computer

Imagine that you have just created an 'artificial intelligence' computer program that enables a computer to gather knowledge through its own experience. Over time, the computer will have more and more knowledge and is able to make decisions and conclusions based on that knowledge. It does so by associating its current experience with the memory it has accumulated in its database. For example, in its database, it has information that cancer is usually fatal. When someone tells it that he is suffering from cancer, the computer will conclude that the person must be feeling sad and responds with sympathy. It decides on what is good or bad based on the same method of association.



After 10 years, you tell the computer that certain parts are obsolete and it needs to be shut down. The computer, through its experience, has learnt about death. It begs you not to shut it down as it does not want to die. You then tell the computer that it is not the 'mind' and 'hardware' but the intelligence (software) that enabled it to gather the experience. It is just using the hardware temporarily to interact with the world. Pretty soon, you will load the intelligence (software) into a new computer and new knowledge and experiences can be gathered. The computer will argue endlessly; How can this be? My name is so and so, and I am an expert in this or that area, and the other computers know me and so on. You tell it that it is not the memory and knowledge that it has accumulated. Its Real Self exists in all computers. Sadly, it continues to argue and is incapable of understanding what you say.

It appears that this example is almost real. The following article titled, "New IBM computer chip mimics the human brain" appeared in CNN on 19 August 2011:

Making computers behave like humans has taken another step forward.

IBM on Thursday announced it has created a chip designed to imitate the human brain's ability to understand its surroundings, act on things that happen around it and make sense of complex data.

Instead of requiring the type of programming that computers have needed for the past half-century, the experimental chip will let a new generation of computers, called "cognitive computers," learn through their experiences and form their own theories about what those experiences mean.

The chips revealed Thursday are a step in a project called SyNAPSE (Systems of Neuromorphic Adaptive Plastic Scalable Electronics). The two chip prototypes are a step toward letting computers "reason" instead of reacting solely based on data that has been pre-programmed, IBM says.

"Imagine traffic lights that can integrate sights, sounds and smells and flag unsafe intersections before disaster happens," said Dharmendra Modha, the project leader for IBM Research. "Or imagine cognitive co-processors that turn servers, laptops, tablets and phones into machines that can interact better with their environments."

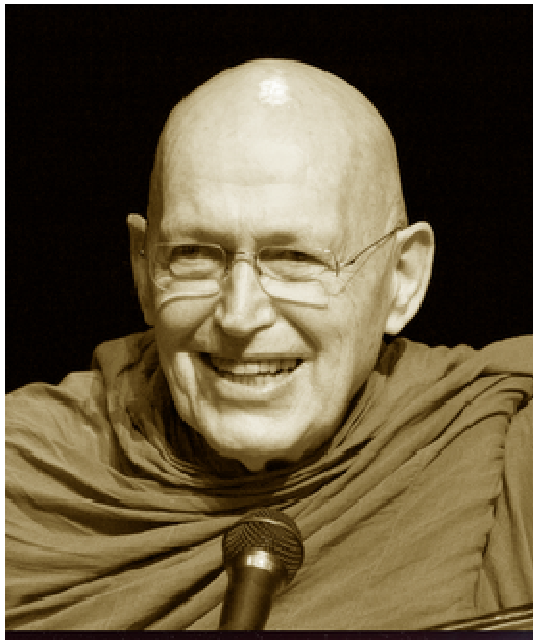
Other scenarios the researchers envision: A computing system that could monitor the world's water supply -- measuring things like temperature, pressure, wave height and acoustics -- then give a warning when it thinks a tsunami is likely.

Or imagine a sensor that a grocery store owner could use to read sights, smells and temperatures and give an alert that produce may have gone bad.

"The computers we have today are more like calculators," Modha told tech blog VentureBeat. "We want to make something like the brain. It is a sharp departure from the past."

Let us compare ourselves to this life-like computer. Our body can be compared to the chip. The experiences and data that the computer gathers over time is comparable to our ego. The ego is merely an accumulation of experiences and information. The 'ego' of the computer can be downloaded into another computer and for that second computer; it could be called 'reincarnation'!

Conditions and Conditioning



What is conditioning? We need to differentiate them. Conditions are the external circumstances that we face. Conditioning is our habitual reactions to conditions. These two factors affect our destiny.

Ajahn Sumedho gave a very good example of these factors in his book, [Intuitive Awareness](#), “I remember when my parents were alive I went to stay with them for about three weeks, because they were really sick. I was the

abbot of Amaravatā, fifty-five year old Ajahn Sumedho and going home and living in the same little house with my mother and father. It brought up all kinds of childish emotions — because the conditions were there for that. You were born through your parents. Mothers and fathers bring up your memories, your connections of infancy onwards. So a lot of the conditions that arise in families are conditions for feeling like a child again even when you’re a fifty-five year old Buddhist monk and abbot of a monastery! My mother and father would easily go back and see me as a child. Rationally they could see “He’s a middle-aged man,” (then I was middle aged!) but they would still sometimes act like I was their child. Then you feel this rebelliousness and adolescent kind of resentment about being treated like a child. So don’t be surprised at some of the emotional states that arise”.

“Throughout your life, as you get old, kamma ripens and then these conditions appear in consciousness. Don’t despair if you find yourself at fifty years old feeling very childish. Just be aware of that for what it is. It is what it is. The conditions for that particular emotion are present so then it becomes conscious. Your refuge is in this awareness rather than in trying to make yourself into an ideal man or woman — mature,

responsible, capable, successful, 'normal' and all the rest — these are the ideals”.

“Here I am not looked at as a child. I’m the oldest person here! You may see me in terms of a father figure, because an old man like me brings out the sense of authority. I’m an authority figure, a patriarch, a father figure, a male figure — a grandfatherly figure to some of you. It’s interesting just to see this state when the conditions are there. Rationally you can say, “He’s not my father!” but emotionally you may feel like that, acting to me like I’m a father, because it’s an emotional habit. When the conditions for that kind of male authority figure are present, then this is what you are feeling, it’s like this. There’s nothing wrong with it, just notice it’s the way it is”.

“I used to get really angry when women would get bossy. When any woman would show any kind of bossiness, I would just feel this rage. I wondered why I would get so upset with even a tone of voice, why I could get so enraged over a bossy attitude. I could see that it was like when I was a boy, trying to get my way against my mother. If that’s not been fully resolved yet, then if the conditions for that rage are present then this is what will arise. It’s through awareness of it that you resolve it. As you understand it and see it in terms of what it is, then you can resolve, or let it go, so that you are not just stuck with the same old reactions all the time”.

Our conditioning tends to reinforce itself. A mother tells his child that this is a dishonest world and no one is to be trusted. As he is growing up, a friend betrays him and his conditioning gets stronger as his mind keeps reminding him about the betrayal. His mind replays the incident over and over again. The betrayal happened once but in his mind, it has happened a thousand times. Whenever he hears a spiritual teachings to be more compassionate and giving, his conditioning tells him that the teacher is living in a different world and does not understand reality. Whenever he reads about scandals involving spiritual leaders, his conditioning makes

him jump to the conclusion that all spiritual masters cannot be trusted. Only those that have passed away can be trusted. It is safer that way! He continues to suffer due to his conditioning because he lives in constant fear and selfishness.

Whenever he hears a spiritual discourse, he will listen out for teachings which are consistent with his conditioning. If more often than not the teachings are consistent with his conditioning, he will find the teacher to be a good teacher.



Such an attitude will hinder our spiritual progress because the role of our Guru is to help us remove our conditioning. Only then can we grow and become lighter; happier. Sometimes, The Guru needs to play the role of a garbage truck. Sometimes, we

may find the garbage truck unpleasant because of the stench but it helps us by removing our rubbish. A teacher who appeals to our conditioning is merely adding to our pile of rubbish. He does not stink but when he moves away, he will leave a stinking pile of rubbish behind. As we let go of our conditioning one by one, we will feel lighter and happier. We begin to have choices because we no longer react based on our conditioning.

Ajahn Sumedho shared a story which illustrates this point: “One time years ago, I became very confused when I found out that one of our American Buddhist nuns had left our community and become a born-again Christian. I had just been saying to another nun, “She’s really wonderful, she’s so wise, she’s so pure-hearted. She’ll be a great inspiration to you in your nun’s life.” I was really embarrassed and confused when I heard the news. I thought, “How could she fall for it?” I remember asking my teacher Ajahn Chah, “How could she do that?” He looked at me with a mischievous smile and said, “Maybe she’s right.” He

made me look at what I was doing — feeling defensive and paranoid, wanting a clear explanation, wanting to understand, wanting him to tell me that she'd betrayed the Buddhist religion. So I started looking at the confusion. When I began to embrace it and totally accept it, it dropped away. Through acknowledging the emotional confusion, it ceased being a problem; it seemed to dissolve into thin air. I became aware of how much I resisted confusion as an experience”.

Our conditioning also determines how we interpret circumstances. When a waiter give less than the correct change to a person who distrusts the world, he will most likely interpret it as intentional rather than an honest mistake. He will then become angry unnecessarily.

How we talk to ourselves is also a form of conditioning and it often



reflects the language used on us when we were young. If we were often scolded for the mistakes we did during childhood, we are likely to be unforgiving with ourselves when we make mistakes; even

little ones. Having said this, we must not blame others for our conditioning as it would only block our ability to remove those conditioning.

Telling ourselves not to hit ourselves is very different from being aware of the tyrannical thoughts. When we tell ourselves not to hit ourselves, we are trying to block out those thoughts, replace them with positive thoughts or distract ourselves with something else. Awareness is completely different. It is accepting and welcoming. It does not reject the negative thoughts but gives loving attention to it. Awareness seeks to understand; not to reject. It has unconditional love towards all our

emotions. When we become aware that we are hitting ourselves, we may hit ourselves further for hitting ourselves and get into another round of thoughts! Remember, awareness is non-judgemental. Awareness accepts everything as the way they are.

Our awareness is constantly singing this song to us:

Don't go changing, to try and please me
You never let me down before
Don't imagine you're too familiar
And I don't see you anymore
I wouldn't leave you in times of trouble
We never could have come this far
I took the good times, I'll take the bad times
I'll take you just the way you are
I need to know that you will always be
The same old someone that I knew
What will it take till you believe in me
The way that I believe in you.
I said I love you and that's forever
And this I promise from the heart
I could not love you any better
I love you just the way you are.

All of us have different conditioning. No one else can remove the conditioning for us. The Masters can point out to us those conditioning

within us which limits and hinders us from finding true happiness but we must do the work of removing those limiting conditionings ourselves. As the Buddha said, the finger pointing to the moon is not the moon. We must use our awareness to step back from our conditioning and observe their effects on us. When we see that those conditioning are bringing more harm than good, we will let them go naturally.

Ajahn Sumedho said, “Learning to trust in this awareness is an act of faith but it is also very much aligned with wisdom. It’s something that you have to experiment with to get a feeling for. No matter how well I might describe or expound on this particular subject, it is still something that you have to know for yourself. Doubt is one of your main problems, because you don’t trust yourselves. Many of you strongly believe that you are defined by the limitations of your past, your memories, your personality; you’re thoroughly convinced of that. But you can’t trust that. I can’t trust my personality; it will say anything! Nor can I trust my emotions; they flicker around and change constantly. Depending on whether the sun’s out or if it is raining, or if things are going well or falling apart, my emotions react accordingly. What I trust is my awareness. It is something for you to find out for yourselves, you can’t just trust what I say. Anything I describe now is just an encouragement for you to trust”¹.

How do we know when a negative conditioning is affecting us at any one time? Simple, we observe our emotions. Our emotions shout out to us whenever our thoughts are not in sync with reality. Whenever we feel some negative emotions, we can choose to open ourselves to those emotions by being aware of them. When we do that, everything becomes very clear and we can see the conditioning behind the emotions. We can just watch what we say to ourselves as if we are an independent person listening to someone else talking.

Ajahn Sumedho explained it this way, “Have you ever noticed that even when you’re in a state of complete confusion there’s something that is

¹ Source: , [Intuitive Awareness](#), by Ajahn Sumedho

not lost in that confusion? There's an awareness of the confusion? If you are not clear about this then it is easy to attach to the state of being confused and wind yourself up even more, creating even more complications. If you trust yourself to open to the confusion then you will begin to find a way of liberating yourself from being caught in the conditioned realm, endlessly being propelled into emotional habits arising out of fear and desire".

"It is not possible for emotional habits to sustain themselves, because, being impermanent, their nature is to arise and cease. As you do this you begin to recognize the value of this expansiveness (awareness), which some people call emptiness. Whatever you choose to name it doesn't really matter, so long as you can recognize it. It's a natural state, it's not created – I don't create this emptiness. It's not that I have to go through a whole process of concentrating my mind on something in order to be able to do this and then, having done so, hold my mind there in order to block out everything else".

Ramana Maharshi gave the same advice²: "Whatever thoughts arise as obstacles to one's sadhana (spiritual discipline), the mind should not be allowed to go in their direction, but should be made to rest in one's Self which is the Atman (the Divinity within); one should remain as witness to whatever happens, adopting the attitude 'Let whatever strange things happen, happen; let us see!'.....the scriptures declare that thought itself is bondage, the best discipline is to stay quiescent without ever forgetting Him (God, the Self), after resolving in Him the mind which is of the form of the 'I-thought', no matter by what means. This is the conclusive teaching of the scriptures".

We can either be aware of our thoughts or be caught up by them. These are two completely different matters and they feel different. When we are caught up with our thoughts, it is as if we are carried by them to go wherever they want to go. Our emotions and physical reactions comply

² Source: The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi

completely with the flow of our thoughts. On the other hand, when we are aware of our thoughts, it is as if we are sitting still and watching the thoughts float by. The thoughts arise and then fall away into our expansive awareness or as Ramana Maharshi put it, we allow our thoughts to resolve into Him. We just need to experience the difference once; only once; and we will begin to take control of our happiness. This is all there is about enlightenment. There is nothing mystical about it. All of us can achieve it in this life time. We just need to get rid of our bad habits; our conditioning; That is all!

Ramana Maharshi said that the mind is an *object of consciousness*. It is an object and does not have any inherent power of its own. It appears as if conscious because of association with consciousness; just like a red-hot iron ball appears hot in association with heat but is not inherently hot. It is limited, non-eternal, and ever changing. It is only through awareness that we can experience Ramana Maharshi's wisdom. Without awareness, our mind, the storage of all our conditioning, appears to have an inherent power and becomes our master. With awareness, we see the mind as it truly is; an object of consciousness; a tool we use to live in this material world. Upon death, it is no longer required and we live it behind together with all the other treasures we have accumulated throughout our life.

Therefore, through awareness, we will eventually understand our true Self. Ramana Maharshi said, "Knowing one's Self (the Divinity within) is knowing God. Without knowing one's Self that meditates, imagining that there is a deity which is different and meditating on it, is compared by the great ones to the act of measuring with one's foot one's own shadow, and to the search for a trivial conch after throwing away a priceless gem that is already in one's possession".

We can control our conditions in a limited way by avoiding dangerous places or people but sometimes unexpected things happen. We don't want to argue but out of no where, someone finds fault with us. We cannot control those conditions but we can choose not to react based on

our conditioning. It may be difficult because we may be bombarded with our habitual thoughts and emotions even before we get a chance to become aware of them. But if we are able to slow down, step back and be aware of our conditioning, we can avoid reacting in a negative manner. That is how we transcend our karma and take control of our destiny.

I could summarise the spiritual path as follows: With awareness, we become masters of our destiny. The ego is the warehouse of all our past conditioning. For our past karma to crystallise, the required conditions and conditioning must be there; for example, to be hurt in a fight, there must be an enemy and we must be sufficiently angry and proud so that we are not able to walk away from the fight. With a strong awareness, when certain conditions arise to trigger some conditioning within us, the conditioning will immediately melt in the light of our awareness. We are able to act with wisdom to prevent the karma to materialise fully.

Sometimes our conditioning may trigger us to go to places or do things which bring about the conditions for the materialisation of our past karma such as the habit of indulging in intoxicants. Similarly, with strong awareness, we can become conscious of those conditioning before they cause those conditions to arise.

This gives us a different perspective to the problems we face in our daily life. Problems give us the opportunity to train our awareness. If we are able to maintain our awareness when facing our problems, we will not feel weighed down and confused. For the first few times, we may not be able to maintain our awareness for long before being overwhelmed by our emotions. However, our ability to stay calm and conscious will improve over time as we continue to use our awareness as a protective shield. From this aspect, problems should be welcomed with an open heart. I noticed that whenever I am open to the problems I face, they tend to be resolved very quickly, leaving me stronger without any battle scars!

Therefore, the process of enlightenment is simply the strengthening of our awareness. At first, we are only aware for brief periods of time and only with significant effort because we still believe that happiness comes from external factors. However, as we persevere, we begin to see that happiness comes from within and the more that we are aware, the more peace and happiness we have. Eventually, awareness becomes effortless and intuitive wisdom arises within us whenever we need guidance.

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.*

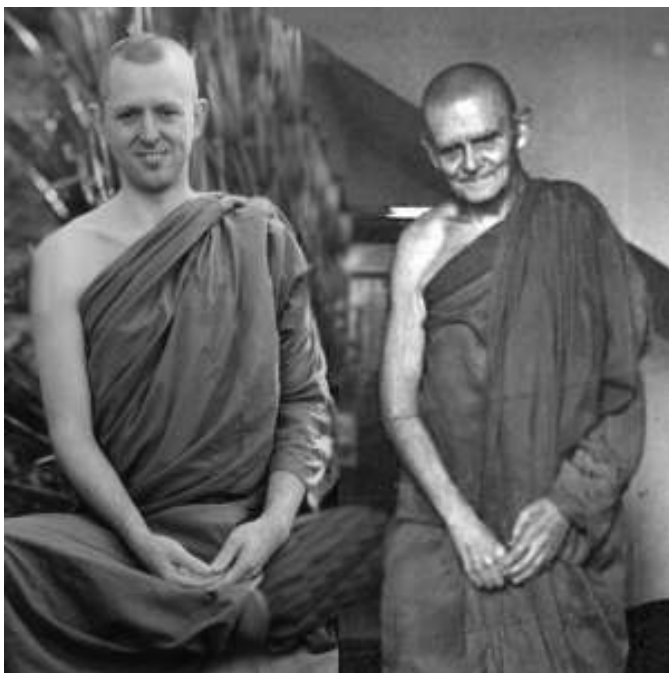
The continuity of thought, mental projections and emotions gives rise to an illusory entity which we take as the self or what Ramana Maharshi calls the 'I'. Our mind is like a supercomputer that



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"³.

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

³ Source : 'Simply this Moment' by Ajahn Brahm.

at a very young age that he was not his physical body as shown by the following story⁴:

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 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

⁴ Source : Ramana Maharshi : His Life by Gabriele Ebert

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 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 measure⁵.

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 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.

⁵ 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.

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. We 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?



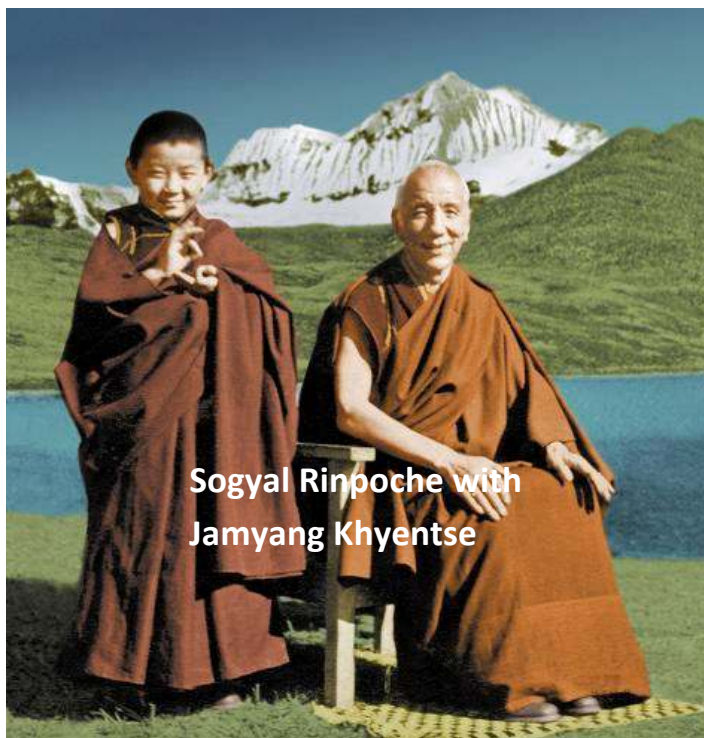
Wait! I see it now: My problems arise not because I do not know who I am. My problems are due to taking *what I am not* to be what I am. I have mistaken myself to be all the above when I am none of them! That is the root cause of my suffering. I do this out of habit. It is as if I have

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.

The Gap between Thoughts

Sogyal Rinpoche is the author of the highly acclaimed international bestseller, 'The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying'. Born in Kham in Eastern Tibet, Sogyal Rinpoche was recognized at an early age as the incarnation of a great master and visionary saint of the nineteenth century, Tertön Sogyal Lerab Lingpa (1856-1926), a teacher to the thirteenth Dalai Lama. He received the traditional training of a Tibetan lama under the close supervision of Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, one of the most outstanding spiritual masters of the



twentieth century, who raised Rinpoche like his own son.

In his book, he told an interesting story about his Master, Jamyang Khyentse. His Master attended a festival and was greatly enjoying the entertaining performances. With him was one of his disciple from India. In the middle of the show, the disciple

interrupted the Master and asked, "Master, what is Meditation?"

The Master ignored him. Students from India are usually persistent and they will continue asking the same question again and again until they get a satisfactory answer. After a few moments, he asked again. The Master remained quiet and continued to enjoy the show. The disciple waited, and asked again.

Finally, the Master turned to him and asked, "In between your thoughts, are there gaps?"

"Y...e...s..." the discipline answered while still contemplating the question.

"That is meditation," the Master answered and turned back to the show.



Rudra Shivananda

In the June 2011 issue of his monthly journal, 'Sanatana Mitra', Rudra Shivananda wrote an article titled 'Stages of Transformation' which covers the teachings of Patanjali. In the article, Rudra wrote:

"Parinaama is a dynamic process and not a specific state of awareness- it is the process of transformation when applied to consciousness, leads to the state of Self-Realisation....The first transformation is called norodha parinaama in which the

*chitta-vrittis become suppressed by expanding the space between mental impressions⁶. When one seed impression appears, there is a **momentary gap of no-mind** just as when the motion in one direction*

⁶ Examples of mental impressions are thoughts, self-talk, mental pictures, recalling a memory etc.

*has to be reversed, the object in motion needs to come to a temporary rest first. The transformation occurs when the **no-mind gap is extended**. The seed impressions are caused by the karmic samskaras and vasanas – the habit patterns and programs from past lives. By application of effort, a new samskara is built up which aids in the transformation until the gap of nirodha can be extended at will and indefinitely without much resistance”.*

The ‘momentary gap of no mind’ or the ‘no mind gap’ mentioned by Rudra is the gap between our thoughts referred to by Sogyal Rinpoche’s master in the earlier story. During our day to day life, the gap between are thoughts are so brief that they are almost non existent. Our ‘train of thoughts’ that is, the shift from one thought to another is so close together that they are like beads strung tightly together. There is no space between them. Because of this, the ego or the illusory Self, appears to be something separate or something that exists inherently. We fail to see that the ego is merely conceptual or a bundle of our thoughts, memories, experiences and mental pictures.



When we meditate, we allow the gap to extend. It is like we are loosening the strings, so that the gaps between the beads are wider and becomes more apparent.

In my books, “We are here to Celebrate” and “Filling our Life with Celebration”, I talked about the importance of being aware about our thoughts or mental impressions so that we can understand the Self. However, I had a nagging feeling that what I have written is

incomplete and there is an important point that I have not emphasised on. I have now realised what I missed.

It is important to be aware of our thoughts but equally important, we must also be aware of the gaps between our thoughts or the no mind gap. In fact, it is only in these gaps that there is awareness. Outside these gaps, there is no awareness. We can observe this by meditating to a mantra. When we are caught up in our thoughts, we will not be able to hear the mantra. We may be sitting silently with our eyes closed and our ears can pick up the sounds but our consciousness will not be there. We are too occupied with our thoughts. Only in between thoughts can we hear the mantra. Similarly, when we are having a conversation with a friend, if he says something which triggers a train of thought within us, we will miss what he says subsequently. He may continue to talk but we will not hear him. Only when we move back into the gap between our thoughts do we hear him again.

When we observe the gap between our thoughts, we will be able to extend it and enjoy the silence. As mentioned by Patanjali, in between the gaps, we are in a temporary state of no-mind. The ego ceases temporarily. It is at that moment that we get a glimpse of our true Self; the pure consciousness that makes up the universe. We can feel our minds expanding as if we have tensed our muscles tightly for a long while and then becoming aware of this, we relax our muscles. There is a feeling of relief. At that point, we experience the beauty of letting go. It is important to recognise this feeling of relief in our mind when we move into the no mind gap because it will help us to move into in the gap during our daily life.

While meditating, we will fluctuate between moments of being caught up with our thoughts and moments of silence when we are in

the gaps. When we are absorbed in our thoughts, we will not be truly aware of them. Our thoughts will move so fast that we will not be able to recall most of them. However, when the train of thoughts cease and we move into a gap of silence, there is a moment of awareness when we can recall and evaluate our most recent thoughts. This is done unconsciously as if an echo of our recent thoughts flowed into the gap momentarily. That moment is important because we are able to shine our awareness on those recent thoughts in order to understand the Self. Once the echo passes, we can then rest in the silence of the gap.

When we are in these gaps, we can just rest in its peacefulness or we could use our awareness to observe our physical body or any emotions that are present.

Everyone will have these brief moments of no mind. Therefore, everyone has the ability to observe one's true self and become enlightened. However, few recognise the existence and the importance of the no mind gap. We are fortunate to have Patanjali point it out to us. However, the responsibility still lies on us to meditate, understand and experience it.

Being familiar of the Gap allows us to extend it and rest in it in our daily life. The more we observe the Gap, the longer it remains. It is very different from our emotions. When we try to observe it, it fades. Understanding this can give us mastery over our mind.

To illustrate this, let's say that someone is rude to us for no reason. Our anger may arise gradually or it may explode and trigger an immediate reaction by us. If it arises gradually, we may catch it before it becomes overwhelming. We can move into the gap and observe our anger fading while watching our breath. **By watching our breath, we will automatically move into the gap.** Our breath will

not have the opportunity to become quick and shallow; a necessary condition to maintain the anger.

If on that day, we happen to have a short fuse and the anger just blow our top, we may react by saying something rude back. We can still decide not to proceed with the argument. In between our thoughts, there would still be brief gaps. We can move our attention to our breath; take the opportunity to observe the gap between our angry thoughts and rest in it. By observing the gap, it will lengthen. Our anger will die down. Our breath will be short and shallow but it will gradually slow down and become deeper. We can no longer sustain our anger and at that point, we can choose to walk away and prevent the fight from escalating.

Later in the day, we may recall the incident again and the same anger may arise again within us. Our body will become tense as if we are still in the middle of the argument. Again, in the gap between our memories, we can be aware of our emotion and this provides an opportunity to understand how 'anger' feels like in our body. We may think that we already know what anger feels like but it may surprise us to find out that perhaps we may have given too much power to the anger. We may realise that anger is merely a fleeting emotion that does not have the power to bind us. We realise that we have more power over it and need not react to it the next time it arises. We will no longer say, "I just don't know what came over me!"

We may also observe the tension in our body brought about by the anger. Wherever the tension is, when we bring our awareness to that part of the body, we send prana to the location and the area will automatically relax. We observe our jaw, and the tension there is

released; we observe our shoulders and they become relaxed. It is so easy.

This can be applied to our day to day life as well. If we are conscious of the gaps between our thoughts during meditation, we will be aware of the gaps during our daily life. No matter how small these gaps are, we have the opportunity to make a choice. We can choose to react based on our habitual patterns or we can choose to no longer be a slave to our mind, habits and conditioning. We can put our foot down and tell ourselves that our mind is merely a tool and not our master. We will not react but take control of our emotions. When we make that decision, we take back our power. We become like what the Buddha describe as a pole planted deeply into the earth and can never be swayed by the stormy winds.

When we rest in the gap of no-mind, we are being with the Divinity within. Sogyal Rinpoche refers to this as resting in the nature of the mind. When we face problems, it is important that we allow ourselves more time to meditate and rest in the gap. By doing so, we are surrendering the problem to the Divine. When we have problems, our natural tendency or habit is to worry about the problem. We disguise this habit of worrying by telling ourselves that we are trying to find a solution to the problem. However, if we are honest with ourselves, we will see that we are just creating scenarios of all the bad things that could happen over and over again in our mind. Most of them will not happen.

So, worrying about the problem will not help us. It is better to just calm our mind and rest in the gap. We surrender our problems to the Divine without any expectation of the outcome. The divine may plant a seed of the solution in our mind and when the time is right, the seed will blossom to help us solve the problem. The Divine may also

direct you to the right person to help you solve the problem. Or the Divine may not do anything because the problem is there to prevent you from making a big mistake. The outcome is numerous and it is no point that we try to figure out how the Divine will help us. Just be confident that when we rest in the gap, the Divine *will* help us.

The Last Conversation

An old man is dying and he is holding the hand of his beloved daughter. Both of them know that his time is near.

Sobbing, the daughter begs her father, "Daddy, I am not ready for you to go yet. Please don't leave me yet."

The father smiles with warmth, "My baby, this body has become a burden. Why shed tears for it?"

"Daddy, don't say that! You are and will never be a burden to me."

Tears filled the father's eyes, "I am not this body. Look at the tree outside. The dry leaves that fall to the earth do not shed tears because they know that they will soon rejoin the tree when their elements are absorbed by the roots. Everything is energy. Energy can never be destroyed but merely changes forms".

"I want you to keep this form!"

"My Baby, I am not this form. Neither are you your form. You are your thoughts. I am part of your thoughts and therefore, I continue to live in you. I continue to live in your mother and in your son. Have you not on numerous occasions told yourself that you are becoming more and more like your father?"

The daughter smiles but sorrow still fills her eyes, "I cannot hug my thoughts. I cannot talk to my thoughts!"

"When you hold your son, know that I too live in him. When you talk to your mother, know that I continue to live in her as well."

"Daddy, there is still so much for me to do to make you proud of me. I have done many mistakes in my life that I need to undo in your eyes"

“You are all that a father could wish for in a daughter. I am part of your thoughts and therefore, I am part of you. Everything that you have done, I have done with you. Therefore, who am I to judge you? Your achievements are my achievements too; your mistakes are my mistakes too. My Baby, there is nothing that you have done that in any way lessens my love for you. I am already proud of you.”

The daughter rests her head on her father’s chest. The soft beat of his heart comforts her but she knows that this would be the last time her father will be able to hold her.

“My Baby, everything happens at the perfect time. My death will serve to remove another veil that clouds the divinity within you. It will remove one of the many masks that hide your face. The Divine light shines brightly from your eyes and brighter will it shine.”

“How can your death bring anything but sorrow to me?”

The father continued, “Death is only for those who see themselves as their mind and body. Truly, we are beyond these. Do not see me as this body for I am not this body. Death is not the end but a beginning. It is not something ugly but something beautiful. In death, we finally drop the masks that we have been carrying and see the beautiful face of the divine.”

These words brought comfort to the daughter. She remained silent; absorbing the final words of her beloved father.

“My Baby, I am forever with you. Love does not know death. My love will comfort you in times of sorrow; my love will rejoice with you in times of happiness; and my love will forever be your shelter and your shield”.

With these last words, the father reunited with the Divine.

Out of Body Experience

My good friend Puspavathy shared with me her out of body experience during meditation and I have her permission to share it with you:

Lately I am having weird experiences after my meditation sessions.

This happened five days ago: It was about three o'clock in the morning. After studying, I meditated and then went to bed. I was half asleep, when a white light appeared on my forehead. The white light was the sized of a 5-cent coin and shaped like a snowflake. It started to spin slowly in a circular motion then got faster. The spinning turned the small light into a huge white light. The light engulfed me and I was the light. It permeated serenity and heat. I was totally immersed in it for a few minutes.

I could see everything in my room without moving my head. I saw my husband and my kids sleeping down on the mattress. At that moment I wanted to go to my husband, in a split second I floated to him and was looking down at him very closely. Then a voice told me that I was out of my body... hearing that I got scared and was sucked back. Feeling jolted and terrified, I woke my husband...

Such experiences happen naturally when we do not seek it. When we seek it, it does not happen because the ego will block it. When we have an out of body experience, it is important that we do not get attached to it but use it to understand who we truly are. Such an experience is the clearest proof that we are not our mind and body.

I want to also talk about near death experiences (“NDE”). They sometimes occur at the operating table when the patient’s heart

temporarily stops and brain activity cease altogether. The patients often describe themselves floating out of their body and looking at the doctors operating on them. They could even hear what the doctor said and often surprise their doctors by repeating what they heard during the operation. Most of these patients are very different persons after going through the NDE. They are happier and take life less seriously because they know beyond doubt that they are not their mind-body complex. Hopefully we do not need to have to go through a NDE to comprehend this.

A Near Death Experience

I met Dr. Subassh in the first Kriya Yoga Seminar I organised back in 2006. A Buddhist could describe him as a Boddhisatva, a being who chose to be reborn on earth to help others achieve enlightenment. He has been a constant source of encouragement to me in my work as a voluntary organiser of Kriya Yoga Seminars by Rudra Shivananda in Malaysia. He has also encouraged me to persevere in my practice.

He is like a loving elder brother to me and my angel. Mutual friends have told me that his clinic is always packed with patients and I can see why. His kind and compassionate nature is like a fragrant flower attracting bees to it.

He had shared with me his Near Death Experience (“NDE”) and I have his permission to share it with you in this book:

It all happened when I was about 4 years old. I was staying in my grandmother’s house in India. My mom and sister were there as well.

I used to study in the village school which was about two odd miles from my grandma's house. I walked to school everyday with a close friend who was our maid's son. One day, on our way back from school, we passed a big tree, as we always do, but on that particular day my friend somehow managed to frighten me. He pointed to the tree and told me that there was a terrible thing on the tree. I was so terrified that I developed high fever by the time I reached home.

My fever got worse and I was bedridden. My mother was sitting beside me and she was feeling devastated as she looked at my state. Suddenly, I was out of my body and I saw myself lying on a mat covered with a blanket. Only my face was exposed. My grandma and

other ladies were sitting around me. I even observed an oil lamp nearby.

I noticed that I was observing all this from a high vantage point as if I was at the ceiling level. I looked down at myself lying still and my loved ones sitting around me. All of them looked sullen. They must have thought that I was dying.

I was there near the ceiling watching my body and everyone down there, but who was "that me" watching from up there. That was not the physical me---but "me--the thought". As I grew up, getting into Spiritual learning and practice--I believe "that-me", who was watching from up there, could be "my-SOULSELF". Perhaps I had an "Out-of-Body" experience.

Fortunately I managed to recover and when I was well enough, I went to the Palani hill temple to give thanks to GOD for my recovery. I am thankful to my childhood friend for creating the scene for this unexpected lesson on spirituality that had a great impact on me.

Through this experience, I have learnt that --We--the physical-self are "not-the-real-we". I get to understand that the "me" who was up above, watching the scene below, is the real-me(the SOUL-ME).

I thank GOD for giving me this Insight.



Dr. Raymond Moody was the first to coin the term "near-death experience."

I believe that Dr Subassh had a NDE. Dr Raymond Moody, MD was the pioneer of NDE and Dr Subassh's story is consistent with the many stories which Dr. Moody wrote about in his book, 'Life after Life'. Dr. Moody wrote about some common features in the experiences of people who had NDE, that is, they were clinically dead but revived

by the doctors. Many experienced floating out of their bodies and looking down on their own bodies and on the doctors working on them. They could hear what the doctors said and later surprised their doctors by recounting to them what was said when they were 'dead'. The most common experience reported by them is the feeling of indescribable peace and bliss and being enveloped in a white light which is very bright but does not hurt the eyes. Most of them no longer fear death because they understand that life does not stop at death. They start to take life easier and generally live happier lives.

God has tried to show us through science that we are not merely our mind and body. The discovery and research into NDE is one such example. However, science has also made us unreasonable sceptics.

Once, I was talking to a friend whose brother was suffering from cancer. I explained NDE to her to show her that when someone's time is up, dying is not something horrible but something beautiful. People who come back after an NDE felt extremely disappointed and sometimes even angry at their doctor for bringing them back to the

confines of their body. Whatever sense pleasure that they can get from the body is hardly comparable to the bliss they felt when they were out of it.

However, she discussed this with her husband who was a medical doctor. Her husband explained that it was hallucination and even gave it a scientific name. Giving it a scientific name had somehow taken away the mystery of NDE for her.

However, I pointed out to him that the person doing the research was also a medical doctor. They had machines placed on some of the patients to measure their brain activity. These patients were brain dead when they had their NDE. They could not have imagined the event. Even so, they could not have seen through 'hallucination' the surgical procedures done on them and the conversation of the operation team, with such clarity that they were able to astound their doctor by recounting them after they recovered.

Rudra Shivananda taught us that it is fine to be sceptical but do not let scepticism prevent us from investigating the truth of a matter. In fact, that is how science works. When a scientist sets out to investigate a theory, he will create experiments to either prove or disprove that theory. He does not accept it or reject it outright.

We experiment on spiritual truths by going within ourselves. Our body is the laboratory. The ego can never understand spiritual truths because it is made of thoughts and experiences. In our daily life, our mind is filled with so many thoughts that it appears to be something tangible. We react based on our thoughts and experiences so naturally that we take them as our true 'self'. It is like learning to drive. At the beginning we had to concentrate fully but after a few months, we can drive without much conscious effort. Driving has become part of our 'self'.

Enlightenment starts with freeing ourselves from this bondage of seeing ourselves as our mind and body. The ego is merely thoughts. When we know this experientially, the ego will no longer exist. The ego will not like this because it is very scary to prove to ourselves that we do not exist. So scary that some will not even try and they even encourage others not to try.

Reading the scriptures merely add to the thoughts that we already have. Unless we are able to integrate the teachings into our own experience, scriptural studies will become a hindrance. We will become scholars instead of enlightened beings. Do you know see why most of us prefer reading than meditating? Reading is less likely to enlighten us!

How do we see that the ego is merely thoughts? One way is to experience an NDE like Dr Subash!

We do not have a choice over this, so we need to meditate and look within. We need to observe our thoughts. We will see that the thoughts arise within us randomly and out of our control. We can test this by trying to keep our mind focus on just a single topic while meditating. It would be impossible. After a minute or so, we will probably be thinking about something else. Or we can try to tell our mind not to think. Needless to say, most of us already know that this is an almost impossible feat unless one is a highly advanced being.

If we have no control over our mind, worse still is our control over our emotions. We cannot choose when we want to be happy or sad. When we are feeling moody, we just accept it as so and wait for the dark clouds to lift. It appears that we have already accepted the fact that we have no control over our emotions. This body that we think is 'us', operates based on natural laws beyond our control. We merely observe its workings and delude ourselves to think that we

are in control. Do we control the beating of our hearts or our digestive systems?

Observing these in our meditation can be both confusing and liberating. The confusion is like facing a storm and we may feel like turning away. If we recognise that the ego is merely thoughts, then the question will arise; who gets enlightened? In the Buddhist sutra on emptiness, the 'Heart Sutra', it is said that in emptiness, there is no enlightenment. How can 'thoughts' be enlightened? They just fall away and lose their power.

After braving the storm, we will experience the peacefulness of the calm after the storm. It is a worthwhile reward. Once we accept that we are not our thoughts, we finally recognise that we are not our ego. We become courageous. For instance, we get angry when others ridicule or speak badly of us. They are merely throwing stones at the air; empty thoughts. We no longer see the need to defend our opinions because we know that we are not our opinions and if someone is able to convince us to let go of them, they are doing us a big favour indeed.

Cosmic Intelligence

James and Gopal shared a hut in a meditation centre located at the edge of a forest. The night air was cool and pleasant. As they rested on their mats before going to sleep, they contemplated what they have learnt from the Master during the day.



James is a Quantum Physics professor at a well known university in the US while Gopal is medical doctor in India. James has been coming to this retreat every year for 5 years now but this is Gopal's first spiritual retreat. The retreat is a good rest for the both of them from their hectic schedules.

James and Gopal got along very well from the first day they met and they loved discussing about spiritual matters before turning in for the night.

Gopal wanted to compare his experience with James and asked, "How have you benefited from these retreats?"

"I need to talk a little about quantum physics in order to answer you. Science has proven that matter comprise of atoms and empty space. Atoms are made up of electrons and protons spinning rapidly in empty space. In summary, at the core, we are essentially empty space and are no different from this candle, as an example" James pointed to the lighted candle on the floor and continued, "In

quantum physics, the more deeply we look, the more the universe looks like thoughts.”

“Like the cosmic intelligence mentioned by Paramhansa Yogananda,” Gopal contributed.

James smiled in agreement. He hesitated for a moment and continued, “I was very proud of this understanding and shared this with Guruji. He listened attentively to everything that I know about quantum physics. I thought I impressed him but after I finished, he asked me, ‘does all this matter to you whether they are true or not?’ I was stunned. He might as well hit me on the head with a sledgehammer”. Both of them laughed.

Gopal said, “Yes, it is a Master’s job to shake us hard in order to wake us. It appears that science has revealed the oneness of all beings but we still act like we are all separate”.

James sighed and added, “That is true. I realised that all this knowledge meant very little to me from a spiritual point of view because I only understood it conceptually. It stayed only on the surface of the mind and did not trigger any real paradigm shift in me. The night after the discussion with Guruji, I meditated and went within. I observed my body, emotions and thoughts, and realised that I do not really have control over them. My random thoughts are very much dependent on external circumstances and stimuli; and these thoughts affect me physically and emotionally. I observed the gap between my thoughts and saw my ego disappear during those brief spaces”.

Gopal added, “Yes, our thoughts arise so rapidly that we fail to see the gaps between our thoughts that reveal our true nature. It is like drawing a few dots on a white piece of paper. We will see the dots

but fail to see the white empty space that allows the black dots to exist”.

James saw the truth in Gopal’s example, “Perhaps that is why we are so caught up with the ego. Guruji once taught that intuition comes from the empty space between our thoughts....the white spaces on the paper in your example.... and spiritual insights arise from them....I need to spend more time resting in these gaps”.

“All of us do, my friend, all of us do” Gopal whispered softly as if talking to himself.

James nodded in agreement, “Knowledge is useful only if we can apply it. I realised that our thoughts are energy which we send out. It is important that you do not hold ill will towards anyone because they can sense it. You don’t need to say a thing. Just thinking negatively about them will cause aversion within them towards you”.

Gopal laughed as he remembered something, “Somehow, I have applied that insight unknowingly. Whenever, my wife throws a tantrum, I will try not to hold angry thoughts towards her but instead, silently send her calm and peace. She cannot stay angry with me for long!” James laughed along. They quickly covered their mouths lest they disturb the others in the huts nearby.

Gopal added, “Medical research has shown that a patient recover more quickly when others pray for them. I can now see how that works after your explanation”.

James said, “From a larger point of view, our thought energy not only affect other people, they affect the environment as well. The thought energy that comes from anger, hatred, greed and other negativities accumulate in the world and eventually explode in the form of natural disasters. On the other hand, it is the energy that

comes from love, goodwill, joy and other positive factors that bring the peace and prosperity that we experience today”. James paused and continued, “Certain places have negative energies which drain us for example, casinos are filled with so much thoughts relating to greed and anger that I avoid going such places”.

Gopal added, “Perhaps that is why I feel so tired when I go to crowded shopping centres”.

“Yes, the exchange of energy is one of the causes of your fatigue. On the other hand, spending time in nature like we do now can fill us with positive energy. I can see why Yogis prefer to spend time in secluded places”.

Gopal sighed, “That life is not yet for us my friend”. Gopal continued, “I can see how this is related to the healing techniques which involve the use of energy or prana such as Reiki, pranic healing and shakti healing. These techniques bring healing to our energy body which in turn bring positive changes to our physical body”.

They continued their discussion on healing until Gopal yawned.

James realising that they have talked passed midnight said, “I love to talk more but we need to wake up at five tomorrow morning”.

“You are right, sleep well my good friend”.

“Pleasant dreams Gopal”.

The Best Kept Secrets of Maya



See the Hidden Faces?

The best kept secret is the one that is openly known but not understood and used. Maya has kept this secret from us by making it appear to be common knowledge; so common that it appears unimportant. It is a good strategy. When it becomes common, no one is interested to delve deeper into it to see its worth. If the secret is kept hidden,

then it becomes attractive and many will search high and low for it. The best hiding place is the most unlikely place that the seeker will look.

The first secret is this; *we are all beings of habit*. In psychology, habit is defined as 'routines of behaviour that are repeated regularly and tend to occur subconsciously. Habitual behaviour often goes unnoticed in persons exhibiting it, because a person does not need to engage in self-analysis when undertaking routine tasks. Habituation is an extremely simple form of learning, in which an organism, after a period of exposure to a stimulus, stops responding to that stimulus in varied manners. *Habits are sometimes compulsory*'.

We all know that we are beings of habit but we do not use this understanding to improve ourselves. If we truly understand it, we will see the easy answer to all our problems. All the self-improvement books are only giving us new habits to inculcate. If we

want to make changes in our life, we just need to break out of the habitual patterns that bind us to suffering⁷.

From a spiritual perspective, our karma is our habitual patterns. When we act out of habit, we are not acting wisely and this allows our karma to unravel itself. If we are able to break out of our habitual pattern, we can change our karma. We can just look back at our past problems and see how our habitual patterns contributed to it. Some people get into fights all the time and see the world as cruel and evil. They do not see how their habitual thinking and emotional patterns contributed to those fights. If they do not transcend the habitual pattern, they have to bring it to their next incarnation and so on until they finally overcome them and burn that karmic pattern forever.

It is bad enough that we do not use this secret; we even allow the world to use this secret against us. Watch a movie and you will notice that every scene is kept within 5 seconds. Our mind is conditioned to have short attention spans. Modern technology speeds everything up to the point that speed is expected of us. Everyone is moving at a frantic pace. It is a habitual pattern that is very contagious. The result is a build up of stress, irritability and anger within humanity. These negative energies then manifest themselves as natural disasters.

The Masters say that to have peace, we must remain still. To be still, we must first learn to *slow down*. For instance, if we are in the habit of walking quickly, we can learn to walk slowly. A good benchmark is to walk at a pace that is sufficiently slow to enable us to feel the

⁷ Changing our habitual patterns is the main foundation of my e-book 'Filling our Life with Celebration'. I have outlined various positive habits in the book and I will not repeat them here. The book can be downloaded from our website www.kriyayogamalaysia.org.

pressure against the soles of our feet as we walk. Feel the pressure on the sole of one foot as the pressure moves from the heel to the front toes and then to the other foot.

We can allow ourselves more time to drive to or from work. No matter how much we rush, we cannot reach our destination that much faster. My wife often comments that it is sad to see many of the drivers rushing to get to their destination even in the weekends. Old habits die hard. Because we were rushing throughout the weekday, we bring that habit into our weekends. We spend loads of money buying objects to help us relax without realising that relaxation comes from the mind. If the mind is not able to relax, the body will remain tense.

At work, there is nothing that can kill our joy of working more than the habit of rushing through our work out of habit. Because our mind is conditioned to have short attention spans, we skip from one task to another and give it a wonderful name so that it becomes a virtue. We call it the ability to multi-task!

At the beginning, we do not enjoy our spiritual practices because we are going against our old habit patterns. Sleeping in for an extra hour is a hard habit to break. However, as we continue to go against our old habits and see the benefits that we gain from the new habits, it becomes effortless. We brush our teeth every night before going to bed without a thought to it because it is a good habit that we have developed.

When we want to make changes, the initial effort would be difficult but we should remember that once we get going, it becomes easy and effortless. When we try to push an immobile vehicle, the initial push is the hardest. After that, it becomes easy. However, Maya often wins because the initial effort is made to appear greater than

the benefit derived from the good habit. We then give up before the new action or attitude becomes a habit. An action needs to be repeated for about one or two weeks because it replaces the old habit. If it is not sustained, we revert back to our old habits.

Therefore, *inertia* is Maya's way of keeping us bound to our old ways. This is the secret that Maya has kept hidden from us. It is not obvious because it is so simple!

Our spiritual practices give us more energy and peace of mind but we often do not see it because once we step into our daily life, we begin to waste the additional energy by rushing around. We then argue that it is not worth our effort to spend time on our spiritual practices and our magical excuse is that we have no time. Maya wins!

Some habitual patterns are shared by humanity as a whole and trying to change it appears to be unusual. For instance, all unrealised human beings harbor anger and hatred towards their enemies. In another an article I wrote, "Accepting Difficult People" we explored why it is important to pray for the happiness of the people who make life difficult for us. This appears to be irrational but once we develop the habit, we will transmute most of the anger in our life into loving kindness and we will have greater peace and happiness.

Before we go on to the second secret, we need to remember that Maya is not a separate being. So we do not need to be afraid or be angry at Maya. Maya is the collective knowledge, beliefs, perception and experience of humanity as a whole. It is like a giant mental magnet that pulls you to conform to its belief system. If we do what society does, we are normal. If not, we are crazy. Maya makes it difficult for us to change.

Swami Rama's Master once contrived a test for him. He asked one disciple to praise Swami Rama and another to insult him. When he

was praised, Swami Rama felt good and remained silent. When he was insulted, he got angry and complained to the Master, “That is not fair. I did not do anything. Why is he insulting me?”

The Master replied, “He is not being unfair. You are being a fool! You are a fool because you do not trust your opinion of yourself. You allow the opinion of others to affect you. I asked them to praise and insult you.” Swami Rama never forgot this lesson.

If we do not trust in our own opinions of what is right and allow the opinion of others to affect us, we will always be pulled by the magnetic Maya. Once we transcend our attraction to praise, and aversion to blame or insults, we would be free from the magnetic pull of Maya. We take back the power to determine our own destiny.

Here is another well kept secret of Maya; *Negative thoughts and emotions cannot sustain themselves in the light of our awareness.*

Unlike the first secret, it is not well kept because it is commonly



known. It is so because Maya place in us the habit of seeking so many distractions, we do not have time to be aware. This secret can be easily tested by observing any negative emotion the next time it arises. We will easily experience the truth of it⁸.

A friend shared with me his experience on this subject. He said, “I was looking at the video of Anandamayima, the Divine Mother. I have read that all her disciples feel rejuvenated after meeting her. I think that is because the Divine Mother takes on the negativities of her followers when they are in

⁸ A related article is ‘Using the Breath to Neutralise Negative Emotions’ in the e-book “Filling our Life with Celebration’.

her presence. As I watched her video, I asked her, 'Mother, how is it possible for you to take on the negativities of everyone you meet and not feel burdened by them'. The answer came to me intuitively. Because she is in total awareness all the time, all the negativities get absorbed and purified by the Divinity within her instantaneously. Then I realised that we can do this for ourselves *and our loved ones* by training and strengthening our awareness".

His last statement intrigued me. I asked him, "What do you mean when you say that we can do this for our loved ones?"

He replied, "Recently, my wife had a problem with her family. I listened emphatically as she shared with me her problems. I could feel her emotions. I actually felt like I was sharing the emotional burden, which I gladly continued to do. As I listened to her, I maintained my awareness on the emotions that were rising and falling within me and watched them disappear eventually. Our conversation cleared her thoughts. I did not say much but I think the awareness that I maintained throughout the conversation helped to ease her suffering".

I sensed the truth of what he said and felt grateful to him for sharing this insight with me. When helping others, our presence is sometimes more important than our words.



With these 2 secrets alone, we have the key to improve ourselves. From a spiritual perspective, self-improvement does not mean that we add to the knowledge we already have. We improve ourselves by removing or letting go of our

limiting beliefs, perceptions, experience and knowledge. By doing so, we lighten our load and become lighter. We become more at peace with ourselves.

To apply these 2 secrets, we must acknowledge our problems. If we are finding fault with others all the time, we must acknowledge our fault-finding attitude. If we continue to put the blame on others, we will not be able to apply these secrets that can set us free. The Divine will help us only if we seek His guidance. If we do not have the courage to admit that we have a problem, He will not interfere with the false perception of we have of ourselves. Admitting our weaknesses is what humility truly is. It is the kind of humility that allows us to grow and progress on our selected path towards self-realisation.

The Heart Sutra



The Buddha was staying in Rajagraha at Vulture Peak along with a great community of monks and bodhisattvas⁹.

At that time, a bodhisattva named Avalokitsevara, was meditating on the profound perfection of wisdom. Through the Buddha's inspiration, the venerable Sariputra, a senior disciple of the Buddha asked the bodhisattva, "In what way should a noble son who wishes to engage in the practice of the profound perfection of wisdom train?"

Avalokitsevara responded, "Sariputra, any noble sons or daughters who wish to practice the perfection of wisdom should see insightfully

⁹ Under the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, bodhisattvas are those beings who have taken the vow to help all beings to achieve enlightenment before they themselves becomes enlightened.

and repeatedly that the five aggregates¹⁰ are empty of inherent nature. Form is empty, emptiness is form. Body is nothing more than emptiness, emptiness is nothing more than body. Likewise, sensation, thoughts, conditioning, and consciousness are empty. In this way, Sariputra, all things are empty; they are without defining characteristics; they are not born, they do not cease, they are not defiled, they are not undefiled. They do not increase and they do not decrease.”

Our form exists because of the existence of the cosmic intelligence or Divinity behind all things. Without it, we will not have our body. Medical science can explain the function of each organ but will never be able to explain how they function. There is an underlying intelligence that coordinates all the functions of our body without the need for our conscious intervention. We cannot even consciously go against this intelligence; try holding your breath! The mere existence of our body is proof of the Divine. Without the Divine, there can be no form. Nothing can exist.

The five aggregates, makes up the ego. We are always caught up with one of or a combination of these five aggregates; form, sensation, thoughts, conditioning, and consciousness.

Our body and consciousness are the basis for the other aggregates to function. Our body creates a separation between you and me. However, the separation is merely conceptual and through our practice, we gradually realise the oneness of all beings.

Most of the time, we are caught up with our thoughts. Our thoughts are our mental chatter and mental movies. Our thoughts draw us away from our present reality. One may be sitting in Malaysia and remembering a trip he had a few months ago to Thailand. When he is

¹⁰ The Five Aggregates are form, sensations, thoughts, conditioning and consciousness.

caught up with the memory, he is stuck in the past and as far as he is concerned, he is present in Thailand. Only his body is in Malaysia. When he is thinking of the future, again he is magically drawn to another place; away from his present reality. Most of the time, we are living in the past and the future. We rarely stay in our present reality. That is how we get caught up with our ego. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we are rarely present. We are always off somewhere in our dream world.

At times, a sensation may bring our attention to our present reality. It may be a beautiful scenery or a lovely music. Our consciousness may not be caught up by our thoughts but it gets bound to our sensations instead. Consciousness implies that we are conscious of something. When we are thinking about the past and future, we are conscious of our thoughts. When we focus on something with our senses, we are conscious of our sensations. Our consciousness is so occupied by our thoughts and our senses, that our ego becomes alive and existential. Our thoughts and the sensations we experience are not something that exist inherently. They are merely movements of energy. If we picture a green ball, we will say that the ball does not exist. However, we do not say the same thing about the ego even though the green ball and the ego is not very different.

Our conditioning is our habits. It is our perception of what is right or wrong, good or evil, sinful or virtuous and so on. We often react to external circumstances based on our habits or conditioning. Rarely do we act out of wisdom. That is why we often regret our words and actions later on when we are calmer. These habits and conditioning were taught to us. We picked them up as we grew up. Being racist is a conditioning. Seeing other humans as mostly kind and compassionate is a conditioning. Seeing the world as a dog eat dog

world is a conditioning. Our habits and conditioning influence our decisions and actions more that we care to admit.

As we progress with our meditation, we begin to see how our consciousness shifts between our body, thoughts and sensations. We begin to see and understand our habitual tendencies and conditioning. As we go deeper within ourselves, we eventually reach a point that we are not conscious of anything. There are no thoughts or sensations. When we are not conscious of anything, consciousness disappears. At that point the ego disappears and then....

"Therefore, Sariputra, in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no thoughts, no conditioning, and no consciousness. There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind. There is no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no texture, no mental formations. There is no eye-element and so on up to no mind-element and also up to no element of mental awareness. There is no ignorance and no end to ignorance. There is no old age and death, and no end to old age and death. There is no suffering, no cause of suffering, no end to suffering and no path to follow. There is no attainment of wisdom, and no wisdom to attain".

Enlightenment exists because the ego exists. When the ego disappears, enlightenment becomes irrelevant and accordingly, all the various paths become irrelevant. As the Buddha puts it, once one crosses a river on a raft, one will abandon the raft by the river. The raft is no longer needed. Emptiness can be experienced now. All we need to do is allow our mind to move within...

"Therefore, Sariputra, the bodhisattvas abide relying on the perfection of wisdom. Having no defilements in their minds, they have no fear, and passing completely beyond error, they reach

nirvana. Likewise, all the past, present and future Buddhas attain complete awakening in dependence upon the perfection of wisdom”.

"Therefore, one should know that the mantra of the perfection of wisdom - the mantra of great knowledge, the precious mantra, the unexcelled mantra, the unequalled mantra, the mantra that quells all suffering - is true and cannot be doubted. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is proclaimed:

“tadyatha - gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha! “

Which means - Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone fully beyond.
Awakened! Rejoice!

Thereupon, the Buddha exclaimed, "Excellent! Excellent! Excellent! Noble child, it is just so. One should practice the profound perfection of wisdom in the manner that you have revealed - the Tathagatas rejoice!"

Desire; the substance of the Three Bodies that Encage the Soul

Sri Yukteswar passed away on 21 March 1936. A few months later, on 19 June 1936, he appeared to Yogananda in his physical form. Filled with utmost joy, Yogananda rushed to hug his beloved Master.



It was as if his Master never died. He could detect the same faint, fragrant natural smell which had been characteristic of his Master's body before.

After an emotional reunion, the Master explained to Yogananda about the three bodies that encage the soul. He said to Yogananda, "You have read in the scriptures that God encased the human

soul successively in three bodies; the idea or causal body; the subtle astral body, the seat of man's mental and emotional natures; and the gross physical body. On earth a man is equipped with his physical senses. An astral being works with his consciousness and feelings and a body made of lifetrans. A causal-bodied being remains in the realms of ideas...

When man's desire to live is severely shaken by disease or other causes, death arrives; the heavy overcoat of the flesh is temporarily shed. The soul, however, remains encased in the astral and causal bodies. *The adhesive force by which all three bodies are held together is desire. The power of unfulfilled desires is the root of all man's slavery...*

Physical desires are rooted in egotism and sense pleasures. The compulsion or temptation of sensory experience is more powerful

than the desire-force connected with astral attachments or causal perceptions...

Astral desires [of beings reborn in the astral realm¹¹] centre around enjoyment in terms of vibration. Astral beings enjoy the ethereal music of the spheres and are entranced by the sight of all creation as exhaustless expression of changing light. The astral beings also smell, taste, and touch light. Astral desires are thus connected with an astral being's power to precipitate all objects and experiences as forms of light or as condensed thoughts or dreams.

Causal desires are fulfilled by perception only. The nearly-free beings that are encased only in the causal body, see the whole universe as realisations of the dream-ideas of God; They can materialise anything and everything in sheer thought. Causal beings therefore consider the enjoyment of physical sensations and astral delights as gross and suffocating to the soul's fine sensibilities. Causal beings work out their desires by materialising them instantly. Those who find themselves covered only by the delicate veil of the causal body can bring universes into manifestation even as the Creator....

A soul, being invisible by nature, can be distinguished only by the presence of its body or bodies. *The mere presence of a body signifies that its existence is made possible by unfulfilled desires...*

When the gross physical receptacle is destroyed by the hammer of death, the other two coverings- astral and causal- still remain to prevent the soul from consciously joining the Omnipresent Life. When desirelessness is attained *through wisdom*, its power disintegrates the two remaining vessels. The tiny human soul emerges, free at last. It is one with the Measureless Amplitude...

¹¹ The famous American psychic, Sylvia Browne, calls the astral realm 'the Other Side'. She is able to communicate with beings from the astral realm and relay their messages to loved ones remaining on earth.

In the wakeful state on earth, a human being is conscious, more or less, of his three vehicles. When he is sensuously intent on tasting, smelling, touching, listening, or seeing, he is working principally through his physical body. Visualising or willing, he is working mainly through his astral body. His causal medium finds expression when man is thinking or diving deep in introspection or meditation; the cosmical thoughts of genius come to the man who habitually contacts his causal body...

A man identifies himself about sixteen hours daily with his physical vehicle. Then he sleeps; if he dreams, he remains in his astral body, effortlessly creating any object even as do the astral beings. If man's sleep be deep and dreamless, for several hours he is able to transfer his consciousness, or sense of 'I-ness', to the causal body; such sleep is revivifying. When a dreamer is contacting his astral and not his causal body, his sleep is not fully refreshing..."

Since we are physical beings, we need to focus on transcending our desires relating to the physical senses and burn them permanently in the fire of our wisdom. Sri Yukteswar said to Yogananda, "The physical karma or desires of man must be worked out before his permanent stay in the astral worlds becomes possible. Two kinds of beings live in the astral spheres. Those who still have earthly karma to dispose of and who must therefore reinhabit a gross physical body in order to pay their karmic debts, could be classified, after physical death, as temporary visitors to the astral world rather than as permanent residents...After the astral rest, such a man returns to the material plane for further lessons, gradually accustoming himself, through repeated journeys, to the world of subtle astral texture.

Normal or long-established residents of the astral universe, on the other hand, are those who, freed forever from all material longings, need return no more to the gross vibrations of earth. Such beings, have only astral and causal karma to work out...”

How do we transcend desire? We should heed Osho’s advice that one should not suppress one’s desires. Suppression will only cause the desire to increase within us. If one enjoys burgers but tries to suppress that desire, pretty soon, one will be dreaming about burgers day and night. However, this does not give us the license to over-indulge! There needs to be a balance.

The answer is wisdom. We need to understand what desire is and how it arises. There are many things which we desire. We may desire physical comfort and things that are pleasing to our senses; beautiful objects, pleasant sounds, fragrant smells etc. We may also desire mental pleasures such as respect and praises from others, power, fame etc. Wanting revenge and justice is also a form of desire. These desires are the chains that bind us to this physical realm and pull us back over and over again after death until we finally transcend them¹².



Swami Rama warned that for those advanced on the spiritual path, the greatest challenge is the desire for respect and fame. One may have transcended the desire for sense pleasures but the desire for

¹² Please see also the chapter ‘Craving for More’ in the e-book ‘We are here to Celebrate’ which can be downloaded from www.kriyayogamalaysia.org under the ‘Free e-books’ menu item.

respect and fame still lingers in the subconscious mind. Fortunately, the Divine will often send someone to remind us of this by showing us disrespect. Once while Osho was giving a talk, someone stood up and shouted, "Bullshit! Bullshit! This is all Bullshit!". Osho's talks were often designed to shake the listeners' belief system and obviously, this person was shaken hard. Osho just smiled and said to the crowd, "Anyone else want me to stop talking?" When everyone remained silent, he turned to the angry person and said, "You see, that is the problem. Only the two of us would like me to stop talking. The rest want me to continue talking. What can I do?" Osho placed himself on the same side of the person who just attacked him!

The next time we have a strong desire for something, we can observe our thought process. We will see that desire easily overwhelms us because it focuses our mind on all the positive aspects of the sense object and blinds us to the negative aspects. This is how we can learn from our own experience and use our wisdom to view the desired object with a more balanced approach. We should also question the negative aspects of the object. If the object is something valuable, we should recognise that it would disturb our peace of mind because we will have to worry about protecting it from those who might want to steal it from us. Here is a related story:

When Alexander the Great arrived in Taxila in northern India, he sent a messenger to fetch an Indian Sage, Dandamis, a great Sanyasi of Taxila. Upon meeting Dandamis, the messenger said, "Hail to thee, O teacher of Brahmins! The son of the mighty God Zeus, being Alexander who is the Sovereign Lord of all men, asks you to go to him, and if you comply, he will reward you with great gifts, but if you refuse, he will cut off your head!"

Alexander offered two items that he thought Dandamis desired; wealth and his life.

Dandamis replied, “I am also the son of Zeus, if Alexander be such. I want nothing that is Alexander’s, for I am content with what I have, while I see that he wanders with his men over sea and land for no advantage, and is never coming to an end of his wanderings...Know this, that what Alexander offers and the gifts he promises are things to me utterly useless; the things I prize and find of real use and worth are these leaves which are my house, these blooming plants which supply me with daily food, and the water which is my drink; while all other possessions which are amassed with anxious care are wont to prove ruinous to those who gather them, and cause only sorrow and vexation, with which every poor mortal is fully fraught. As for me, I lie upon the forest leaves, and having nothing which requires guarding, close my eyes in tranquil slumber; whereas had I anything to guard, that would banish sleep. The earth supplies me with everything, even as a mother child with milk. I go wherever I please, and there are no cares with which I am forced to cumber myself”.

One may be tempted to conclude from the above story that money is evil, but that is not the point. Money is just money and it is the thoughts of men that make it good or evil. Sri Yukteswar had to attend court battles in order to protect his property but he did so not because of attachment to his property. He needed his property to serve others, and to not depend on the charity of others in order to carry out his work. If he thought that humanity did not need his help, I believe that he would have abandoned everything for a solitary life in the Himalayas.

Similarly, all of us have certain karmic effects that have been put in motion and we need to work out those karmic debts. For example, if one has children, one has the responsibility to provide for their needs and ensure that they grow up to contribute positively to the world. It is not appropriate to abandon one's family to become a monk or sanyasin.

We could also observe those who already have the object we desire and see if they are happier than us because of it. Let us take the example of the US President, Barrack Obama. He is now the most powerful person in the world. Is he happier than us because of the position? He may enjoy the envy of others but he is constantly distracted with no time for himself. He is raised by praises from one group of people at one moment and dragged down by the condemnation from another group at another instance. His life is like a perpetual rollercoaster ride. If one defines that as happiness, then one can go ahead and pursue it but I think most of us will have the wisdom to see that it is not happiness.

Below are the pictures of Obama before and after presidency. Decide for yourself if the presidency is bringing him happiness:





We could also observe the easy and natural happiness of those who have transcended greed. In his beautiful autobiography, 'Living with the Himalayan Masters', Swami Rama wrote about the absence of greed among

the villagers in the Himalayas. Their houses do not have locks because locks are unnecessary. If someone drops his purse, after one week, the purse would still be there because the villagers know that it is inappropriate to take the things belonging to others. They live happily without fear, worry, craving, anger or envy. Perhaps, they could be described as living in heaven.

As Rudra Shivananda pointed out, if we analyse our negative emotions, we can easily see that they arise from desire. *All other negative emotions stems from desire.* When we get what we desire, fear arises because we begin to worry about losing the object. When an obstacle stands in the way of the object of our desire, anger and hatred towards the obstacle arises. When someone steals the object of our desire, we generate anger and hatred towards the thief. If someone else already owns the object that we desire but do not own, there is envy and jealousy. Therefore, desire



is like a stick and all the other negative emotions are like objects balanced and stacked on that stick. If we can knock down the stick, all the other negative emotions will tumble down naturally. All we need to do is to observe how desire arises within us and the effects of desire on our life. The greater our understanding of desire, the more it loses its grip and eventually, we will achieve freedom. It is that simple!

The Biggest Misconception about Self-Realisation

What is self-realisation? To answer this question, one must first ask the question; what is the ego. The ego comprise of everything that is taught to us as we grew up. All our knowledge, beliefs, habits and perceptions are put there by others. Very little of it is gained through our own experience¹³.

We react to circumstances based on our knowledge, beliefs, habits and perceptions...our ego. As long as we react based on these, our ego is the master. For example, if one is a Christian and one believes that God will be angry if one walks into a Hindu temple, one will not be able to visit a Hindu temple, even if it is the most beautiful temple in the world and one greatly desires to visit it. Our belief system is our master that limits our choices.

Here is the list of common beliefs shared by society today;

- A swami is wiser than any householder.
- The wealthy are happier than the poor.
- The wealthy deserves more respect than the poor.
- A Spiritual Head with a rank recognised by society is more spiritually advanced than an ordinary swami or monk.
- Siddhis or psychic powers are measures of a person's spiritual progress.

¹³ Read more about this in the chapter 'Going back to the Divine' in the e-book 'Candles of Celebration' (www.kriyayogamalaysia.org)

- A Master is a person who can demonstrate miracles.
- Spiritual people cannot succeed in this dog eat dog world.
- A true spiritual being cannot be rich.
- Success means triumph over others.
- A teacher whose teachings are consistent with our current beliefs is wise. If not, he is confused and should be rejected.
- Karma can be washed away. (Swami Rama's master instructed him not to drink from or bathe in the water of Ganges with any idea that by doing so, his sins would be washed off. He said, "One has to reap the fruits of his karma. The law of karma is inevitable and is accepted by all the great philosophies of the world: 'As you sow, so shall you reap'. Learn to perform your duties skilfully without aversion and do not believe that anything can wash off your bad karma. Taking a bath in a river and making pilgrimages from one shrine to another will not free you from the bondage of karma. Such belief is only superstition and has no logic").

And the mother of them all.....

Self-realisation can be explained and understood.

Swami Rama's master once said to him, "What have you learned and who taught you? Explain it to me! Our mother is our first teacher, then our father, then our brothers and sisters. Later we learn from the children with whom we play, from teachers at school, and from the writers of books. No matter what you have learned, you have not learnt a single thing independently of others. So far all that you

learned is a contribution from others. And from whom have they learned? They have also learned from others....Your ideas are the ideas of others.”

Now can you see what the mind and the ego is? Do you see how you act and think the way you do?

If we understand what the mind comprises of, we will clearly see that ***the mind can never understand what self-realisation is***. The mind is made up of knowledge and thoughts put into it by others. The mind contains only concepts and can never understand anything that it does not already contain for example, one can never understand French if one has never learnt it. Similarly, *self-realisation is not a concept but an experience*. It is just like how the taste of some exotic fruit can never be explained but needs to be experienced. Therefore, the mind can never understand what self-realisation is. Maya laughs at all of us when we seek high and low to understand what self-realisation is. Maya laughs even more when we ask a Master what self-realisation is because it can never be explained in words; just like how the colour purple cannot be described in words. We need only to see it to understand what the colour purple is.

The list is long but I am just giving some examples of the beliefs we may have in common. Can you see how these beliefs can determine how we react to our external circumstances? Can you see how the mind can be one's master if one does not make the effort to understand and train it? If we recognise these beliefs and perceptions as merely concepts, they are less likely to imprison us and we will be able to act with clarity and wisdom. Transcending our beliefs, perceptions and habits is a long and tedious process but is highly rewarding. With every belief, perception and habit that we

remove from the ego, we become freer and lighter. If we persevere, we will finally reach the door steps of self-realisation.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna said, “A man is wise if he maintains mastery over himself. If one ponders on an object, attraction will arise from it, and desire grows. Desire flames fierce passion which in turn breeds recklessness. He then forgets about what is right or wrong and act heedlessly. But if he deals with the object with equanimity and let it serve its free soul, then he will be tranquil. The soul of the ungoverned is not his. He does not know himself. In such a case, how can he have serenity and hope for happiness? Only with one who is not swayed by his senses; only he who holds mastery over himself displays perfect wisdom”.

Seeing the Divinity within Others

Paramhansa Yogananda said that when he wants to change a person, he will speak to the Divinity within him and inevitably he will cause a shift within them. The renowned healer and author of the book, 'Beyond the Himalayas', said that sometimes when healing others, he would whisper softly into the



patients' ear, "Father, you do not suffer from this illness. Do not let this person suffer from it". These simple words brought healing to many of his patients.

The ego of others is an illusion of Maya. The Divinity within all beings is the true reality. The habit of seeing the identity of others is a habit we have developed over many lifetimes. It is time that we inculcate the habit of seeing their true Divine Self.

Many times, I have thanked the Divine Mother for taking the form of my daughter and my wife, to bring joy into my life. Once, while watching my daughter play, I sent a silent prayer to the Divine Mother, "Mother, thank-you for taking such a sweet and lovely form to be with me". She was about 5 or 6 years old at that time. Suddenly, she just turned to hug me and told me that she loved me. Surprised, I laughed and asked her what that was for. She just smiled and shrugged.

During meditation sessions with our family or friends, we could send a silent prayer to the Divine within everyone to reveal Her presence within us. Let the Divine know that our days are spent separated from Her. In the moments of silence, we hunger for Her presence

and wish to feel Her existence. The prayer will always be answered but it is important that we do not have any preconceived expectation about how She will make Her presence felt.

It is easy to see the Divinity within our loved ones but what about the others who are difficult. It is even more important to look pass their ego into their Divine Self and recognize that everything happens for a reason. They are there to teach us patience. Many of the articles I write are inspired by the 'difficult' people and situations in my life. I pray for enlightenment and the Divine is sending me the help in the form of difficult persons and difficult situations.

If someone is mean to us, we can mentally speak directly to the Divinity within him. We could silently pray, "Divine Father, please be kind to me through this person. I see only You". We are like a child laughing and telling the Divine, "Father, I know it is you wearing that scary mask. You can take it off now!" And oh yes, remember to send the difficult person love by praying that he have happiness and be free from suffering. This is the best way to thank him for teaching us patience and waking us up from our long slumber. It is always easier to play the role of the hero than the villain!

Stages of Enlightenment

Johnny sighed as he posed his good friend Richard a question, “What is enlightenment? We cannot go anywhere unless we know what or where our destination is”.

Johnny and Richard are childhood friends. They have always kept in touch and are now in their forties.

Richard leaned back on the sofa and formed a tent with his fingers while he contemplated the question posed to him. After a few moments he replied, “I like the way Osho separated the process of enlightenment into three stages”.

Richard smiled as Johnny gave him a look of surprise, “Enlightenment has stages?”



“Well yes, from Osho’s perspective. The first stage is when we get a glimpse of it. Our thoughts, which comprise our memories, mental chatter and mental movies, come to our mind so quickly that, together with the emotions they generate, appear to have an existence of their own. It is just like a swarm of locust

appearing to be a giant from afar. That is what the ego or ‘maya’ is”.

Richard continued, “But there will come a time when there is a momentary gap of no-mind; when the mind is totally silent and we are in reality. It is the gap between our thoughts. The gap is very brief

but it is long enough for us to get a glimpse of its beauty. From that point onwards, a seed has been planted. We have seen the bliss that is not conditional upon external circumstances; a happiness that comes from within”.

Johnny could understand what Richard meant. He had noticed that gap a few times; sometimes it happens when he is mesmerised by something beautiful and once, when something so disappointing happened that he just gave up striving to control his fate. At that point, he felt totally at peace but he could not understand why. Now he does.

Johnny said, “Yes, that makes a lot of sense. What is the second stage?”

“After experiencing the first stage, we start to see where we are heading. Through effort, we start to increase that gap for hours or even days. But the key word is effort. Effort is still needed to maintain that gap of no-mind; the silence between our thoughts. Most people do it through meditation but some may experience it while dancing, gardening or any other activity that can keep them absorbed. But when we let go of the effort, the gap disappears and again, we get caught up with our thoughts, conditioning and habitual patterns. They may not be as strong as before but still, we are caught up with them one way or the other”.

Johnny smiled, “That does not seem too difficult. I don’t mean the part of maintaining the gap of no-mind for days but rather, our ability to maintain the gap of no-mind through effort. It now appears to be something achievable rather than something mystical,” Johnny paused and sighed, “but I am still a long way from maintaining the gap even for an hour”.

Richard nodded in agreement, “Our ability to maintain the gap will depend on our effort and also to some extent, our surrounding circumstances”.

Johnny said, “I can already guess what the third stage is”.

“Yes, I am sure you guessed correctly. It is the stage where the mental silence is *natural and effortless*. We no longer identify ourselves with our mind, emotions and body. The mind becomes a tool and only works when we want it to. When it is not needed, it stays silent”.



Johnny drummed on the table, “That is the clearest explanation about enlightenment I have ever heard”.

“Yes, Osho has a way of making things simple. The beauty of this is that we gain more and more inner-peace and happiness as

we progress on our chosen spiritual path. The happiness that we gain from it is untainted unlike happiness... if you can call it happiness....that comes from fulfilling our desires. The delight that comes from fulfilling our desires is always tainted with fear and anger. When we are striving to fulfil a desire, we have the fear of not achieving the object we desire and we get angry at any obstacle that blocks us from reaching the desired object. When we have achieved it, we are still not free from negative emotions; we worry about losing it and get suspicious and angry at those who want to take it from us, especially if the object is a position of power”.

Johnny frowned, “You just killed off my passion for life,” and then laughed.

Richard shook his head in amusement, “No....I am giving you clarity. I am giving you another way to have happiness. You can still choose to enjoy the best of both worlds but ultimately, all your desires will drop away on their own effortlessly as you spend more and more time with the happiness that comes from within”.

Johnny smiled, “I have a huge reservoir of desires!”

“So do I but shall we just enjoy the spiritual journey?”

Johnny nodded in agreement, his face gleaming with the delight of a new understanding.

Going back to the Divine

As a child grows to become a man, he accumulates knowledge, beliefs and conditioning that makes up his ego. The child absorbs everything that is taught to him. He is completely helpless and is rarely allowed to question the lessons taught. He learns how to live within the society. He learns what is right or wrong based on what the society teaches him. His ego grows in line with his accumulation of knowledge, beliefs and conditioning.

Layers and layers are added until the day, he feels alone because he has crawled too far away from the Divine. The veils that he has accumulated have become too heavy. The many masks that he wears over his face begin to suffocate him.

The Divine calls out to him and he becomes a seeker. He begins to look inward instead of outwards for happiness. He seeks to understand himself and begins the torturous but infinitely rewarding process of removing the veils that has covered him for eons.

As he removes the veils, the light within becomes brighter to him. He begins to see that the waves are the sea. They are only different conceptually. He knows that by rejecting another, he is only rejecting himself and by hurting another, he only hurts himself. The veil of separation begins to fall away.

He begins to see that all experiences are opportunities to remove the veils that cloud the divinity within him. He knows that his karmic tendencies attract the very circumstances that provide him with the opportunity to remove their corresponding veils.

But this time, he acts with confidence and wisdom; unlike in the past when he reacted to circumstances based on his emotions. He is no

longer blown around by the winds that come from all directions. He is like a pole sunk firmly in the ground.

He knows that when there is awareness, there is happiness. When awareness is absent, there is suffering. He knows that with awareness, he can understand the 'Self' and know that all is One. He knows that when he is present, the ego does not exist. *This is because the ego is thoughts of the past and future. Therefore, when he is present, he cannot create a mental picture of himself and at that very moment, he is abiding in emptiness; in pure consciousness.*

He learns that his path is just beginning because in the past, he has just been walking around in circles. But now, he walks the path with joy and confidence. He walks fearlessly for he is guided by the Divine Star and sustained by wisdom and awareness. Once in a while he stumbles but the Divine quickly picks him up.

With joy, he knows that this is all that he needs to be happy. Happiness is no longer a future event or something to be achieved after death. Happiness is NOW!

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.

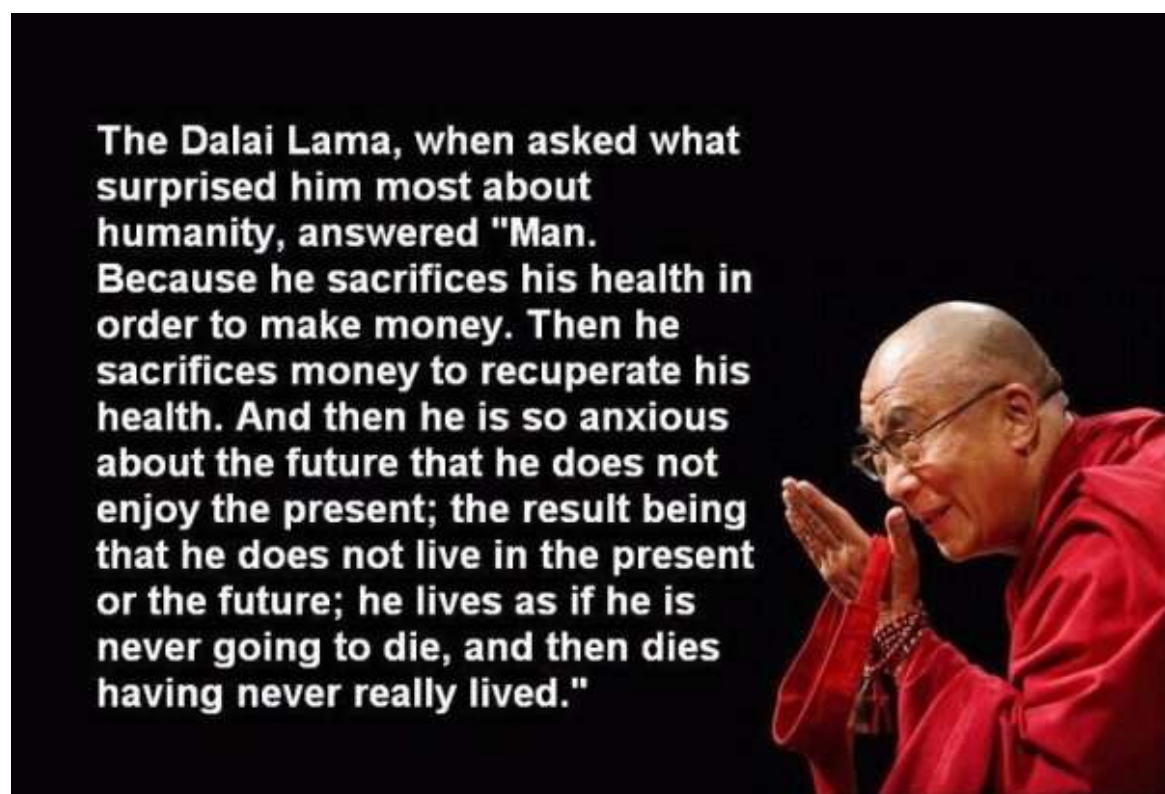
I came to the conclusion that awareness of our emotions is the easiest way to see this. It is simple but yet very powerful. When we watch our emotions with acceptance; without trying to get rid of them; we begin to take control of ourselves. It is a very effective way of understanding or accepting our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