
SRI RAMANA'S UPADESA SARAM
THE ESSENCE OF SPIRITUAL INSTRUCTION



A TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY
BY RAJIV KAPUR

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I offer this translation and commentary for the 'Upadesa Saram' at the Lotus feet of its author, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, who has been my guiding light. Without Bhagavan's blessings, I would not have dared to present his masterpiece in the light of my own modest understanding.

- Rajiv Kapur

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~ Rajiv

The Origin of the Text

Among the various works of Sri Ramana, the ‘Upadesa Undiyar’ is considered a supreme legacy, much along the lines of his ‘Ulladu Narpudu’.

There is a bit of history as to how Sri Ramana came about to write this text which is considered one of his best works apart from ‘Ulladu Narpadu’. It is said that the great Tamil poet, Muruganar, was once composing a poem based upon an ancient legend about a group of ascetics who were performing various rites in the Daruka forest. These ascetics believed that *Karma* (path of action) is God itself. They believed that by performing ritual austerities through their own free will and actions, they could attain power and happiness. *Karma* alone was of foremost importance to them. They arrogantly believed that their efforts in performing *Karma* were bound to yield fruit and that even Gods couldn’t prevent their fruition. It was Lord Shiva who then appeared in the Daruka Forest to deflate the pride of the ascetics and to offer them the right instruction (*upadesa*) so that they could all be liberated.

As Muruganar came to the point where Lord Shiva was about to give them his spiritual teachings, his pen came to a halt. He realized that it would be wrong on his part to expound Shiva’s subtle knowledge and that only Sri Ramana, being Lord Shiva himself, could do justice to it. Hence, Muruganar prayed to his Sadguru, Bhagavan Sri Ramana, urging him to reveal the essence of the teachings which he Himself, in the form of Lord Shiva, had given to the ascetics of yore who were blinded by their attachment to the path of ritualistic action or *Karma*.

Thereupon, Sri Ramana Maharshi composed thirty verses in Tamil entitled ‘Upadesa Undiyar’, *expounding* the various paths to liberation, all of which

culminate in the path of Self-Inquiry. Sri Ramana himself translated the work into Sanskrit as the 'Upadesa Saram'.

In the first 15 verses, Sri Ramana has laid down the path of selfless *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Yoga* while the remaining 15 verses (Verses 16 to 30) are devoted to the path of Self-Inquiry.



Introduction

Even though Self-Realization or *Atma Jnana*, is attained only through the highest path of Self-Inquiry, Lord Shiva knew that this sublime path would be beyond the scope of the ascetics due to their current spiritual immaturity and the gross state of their minds. Such minds needed to be refined and made pure for them to be able to dive deeper and understand true Self-Inquiry. They had to be made ready and hence the above three paths were given to prepare and purify their minds.

Thus, all paths including the indirect ones like the *pujas*, *japa*, and *bhakti* paths of worship through a personal God, *pranayamas*, etc., must be respected and in fact even be embraced if need be, in order for the seeker's mind to be ready for the direct path of Self-Inquiry. Sri Ramana too offered instruction on every kind of spiritual practice for the benefit of those who were not yet ready to come to the direct path of Self-Inquiry. It is well known that Sri Ramana gave *mantras* to many of his devotees. One of his very close disciples was Yogi Ramaiah who was an ardent *Yoga* practitioner.

This proves that Sri Ramana's approach was broad and all-encompassing. He did not advocate the path of Self-Inquiry alone, though he did strongly recommend it. Therein lies Sri Ramana's greatness. He welcomed and guided every kind of seeker, irrespective of whether he was a beginner or an advanced seeker, whether *Yogi*, *Bhakta* or *Jnani*. Even though his main emphasis was always on the path of Self-Inquiry which is a short-cut and a direct path to Self-Realization, he knew that it wasn't an easy method and that it required maturity of understanding. This is why he prescribed the three *margas* (paths).

He clearly stated: “*If, however, the aspirant is not temperamentally suited to Vichara Marga (to the introspective analytical method), he must develop bhakti (devotion) to an ideal - may be God, Guru, humanity in general, ethical laws, or even the idea of beauty. When one of these takes possession of the individual, other attachments grow weaker, i.e., dispassion (vairagya) develops...*

In the absence of inquiry and devotion, the natural sedative pranayama (breath regulation) may be tried. This is known as Yoga Marga... If an aspirant be unsuited temperamentally for the first two methods and circumstantially (on account of age) for the third method, he must try the Karma Marga (doing good deeds, for example, social service). His nobler instincts become more evident and he derives impersonal pleasure. His smaller self is less assertive and has a chance of expanding its good side...” (Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, Talk 27 - Sri Munagala Venkataramiah).

After much maturation through the preparatory *margas* (*Karma, Bhakti* and *Yoga*), the path of Self-Inquiry becomes naturally easy to understand in its true essence and the *sadhaka* is ready to make the inquiry into the SELF.

It has been my own experience, both as a *sadhaka* and now as a teacher, that a blend of various paths is much required as the capacity of seekers differs depending on their temperament, natural inclination and their present level of understanding. Any practice in any form done with complete dedication, perseverance and devotion will open the doors of Self-Inquiry automatically just as it happened with me. The path of Self Inquiry, then, would be an entirely different journey — more natural, effortless and with least interference from the mind.

There are two things which every reader or aspirant desires of any text. First, it should be easy to understand and second, he should be able to put

that understanding into practice right away. I have tried my best to meet both these expectations, avoiding jargon and using as few spiritual concepts as possible.



Verses of the Upadesa Saram

For an in depth explanation of a particular verse, click on the number beside that verse and you'll be taken directly to that verse and its explanation.

- [1](#) *By the law/will of the Creator, the fruits of actions are realized. How is action then supreme? It is not. It is inert.*
- [2](#) *The results of actions are impermanent and pass off. Yet, their seeds form an ocean of Karma which becomes a barrier in the progress of a seeker.*
- [3](#) *Work which is performed as an offering to the Almighty and done without any expectation of the fruits, helps in purification of the mind and thereby leads one to Liberation or Realization.*
- [4](#) *The actions performed by the body — ritualistic puja, japa (chanting) and contemplation (inner meditation) — each is superior to the other in an ascending order.*
- [5](#) *Worshipping any of the eight forms, thinking they are all forms of God, is good worship [puja] of God.*
- [6](#) *Singing the Lord's praises is good but better than that is loud chanting of Japa, while superior to loud chanting is soft Japa. However, best of all is silent, mental Japa.*
- [7](#) *Like an unbroken flow of oil or a stream of water; continuous meditation is better than that which is interrupted.*
- [8](#) *Meditation without duality, that is meditating as 'I am HE', is superior to meditation which assumes a separation between the Bhakta (devotee) and the beloved Lord.*

- 9 *A state of void, free from thought, is gradually attained, making abidance in the background state of 'I AM' complete. This is supreme devotion.*
- 10 *Fixing the mind in the heart (Source) is true Karma (action), Bhakti, Yoga and Jnana*
- 11 *Through breath-control, the movement of the mind is contained, just as a bird is restrained when caught in a net.*
- 12 *The mind and pranas, which carry out various thought processes and actions within the body, emerge from one common source.*
- 13 *Mind control can be achieved through two modes — either through absorption/abeyance or through complete destruction. In the case of the first mode, the mind emerges again as it is merely absorbed in the void and hence temporarily held in abeyance. In contrast, through the second mode, when the mind is destroyed, it can never emerge again.*
- 14 *When the mind is held in suspension through breath control, it must then be completely destroyed through one-pointed attention to that ONE reality.*
- 15 *What action remains for an exalted Yogi whose mind has been completely destroyed and who is ever established in the SELF?*
- 16 *When attention is withdrawn from objects and focused exclusively on the Self, Truth is revealed.*
- 17 *When one inquires "What is the mind?", he finds out that there is no mind. This is the direct path to reality.*
- 18 *Mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts. These thoughts depend upon the I-thought alone. Hence the mind is nothing but this I-thought.*
- 19 *Ask the question: "From where does this I-thought arise?". On inquiring deeply, the I-thought will vanish. This is Self-Inquiry.*

- 20 *When the I-thought or Ego is destroyed, the real I springs forth on its own in the spiritual heart and shines as I-I, in all its fulness.*
- 21 *And this unbroken continuous I-I is the real I, as the I-thought (egoic I) disappears and dissolves in deep sleep.*
- 22 *This real I-I is the only Truth or Reality. Neither the body, nor the senses, nor the vital air (prana), nor breath, nor intellect, nor ignorance may be considered real as they are all gross, inert, insentient and illusory.*
- 23 *Is there any other thing apart from Consciousness that illumines existence? Indeed, existence itself is Consciousness and Consciousness is 'I AM'.*
- 24 *Between the Jiva (the Individual) and Ishwara (Unity), there is a difference only with respect to the body and the intellect (gross and subtle bodies), but from the standpoint of True Nature, the Absolute Reality alone is.*
- 25 *When the various conditionings of body-mind and identifications with name and form are shed, the SELF is realized. The vision of the Lord as Self is true Self-Realization.*
- 26 *Since the Self is non-dual, establishing oneself in the Self alone is the vision of the Self, and that alone is abidance in the Self.*
- 27 *Consciousness transcends all dualities and is devoid of the thought of knowledge, as well as the thought of ignorance. Is there any knowledge other than Self Awareness itself, to know the Self?*
- 28 *What is the nature of Me — the Self? Thus inquiring one realizes the Self as Indestructible, Unborn, Perfect and of the nature of Consciousness and Bliss.*

[29](#) *The individual who has realized the Divine State (his own real nature) gains supreme happiness and bliss beyond bondage and freedom, here, in this world itself.*

[30](#) *Self-Inquiry, devoid of ego, is a great penance. Realize this truth articulated by Sri Ramana.*

Karma Yoga: The Path of Action

Verses 1 to 4

Most people today believe that *Karma Yoga* is about doing such actions as can bestow happiness and joy to them and their family. Many sweat it out day and night, so that they can meet all the desires of their near and dear ones. To such people, the results of their actions are more important than the actions themselves and they delude themselves into believing that theirs is the path of *Karma Yoga*, as they are ‘selflessly’ serving their near and dear ones. They follow a ritualistic pattern of work where they work tirelessly to accumulate wealth, property and power so that they can satisfy every desire. They see no other God except the actions they perform for the fruits they will receive. The complete focus of their attention is on the results of their actions. They don’t even realize how easily they fall into the trap of feeling that they are the doers. They actually believe that they can bring about any results they desire through action, much like the ascetics of the Daruka forest who performed rituals believing that they could acquire *siddhis* and powers. Happiness and fulfillment completely elude them because the focus of their attention is on profit-oriented action.

Then there are others who feel that *Karma Yoga* means serving others. They engage in humanitarian work, trying to alleviate other people’s suffering. It is true that Self-Inquiry cannot divorce itself from feeling compassion for our unfortunate brethren. In fact, deep Self-Inquiry has to necessarily result in the rise of compassion and love for fellow human beings. However, just the criterion of doing good to others doesn’t constitute *Karma Yoga*. It is not a matter of doing good acts alone but an inner mental attitude of doing one’s best to serve God and renouncing actions and their results to Him. The sense of doership is very subtle and acts done with a sense of pride, lacking humility, can give rise to ego. One

must be constantly watchful not to fall into this trap. Continuous inquiry into the sense of doership must be carried out. Any sense of pride or inflated self-image means ego is very much in place.

Given our current, fast-paced, hyperactive lives, it is crucial for us, perhaps more than ever before, to understand the nature of ‘right action’ and the Path of *Karma Yoga*.



Verse 1

*Karturagya praaypyate phalam
Karma kim param karma tajjadam*

By the law/will of the Creator, the fruits of actions are realized. How is action then supreme? It is not. It is inert.

Before we can discover who the Creator is, let us first find out who can recognize the Creator. Is it not Consciousness? Unless we are conscious we cannot recognize the Creator or for that matter anything at all. Can anything be done or created without Consciousness? Can we act, perform, perceive or desire anything without the help of Consciousness? Consciousness has to be present before we can desire or create anything. Consciousness is hence the Creator. We can refer to it as God or *Isvara* or the Lord.

If I were to ask you to point out where your consciousness is directed, you will say that it is everywhere. It is limitless. But if I were to ask you specifically where you think it originates from, you will always point to a place within yourself. The seat of Consciousness lies within you and it is from there that both creation and the Creator originate. So, if the Creator originates from within, we need to turn our attention within. Then we can surely know Him.

That is why Sri Ramana said that irrespective of whether we have free will as regards any act or not, we certainly have the will to turn inwards. No matter what actions take place, we can always bring our mind within. Sri Ramana always instructed that we direct our attention to the Self.

Sri Ramana said that Consciousness or God gives us the fruits of our action. This truth can easily be realized by the fact that every goal-directed action we perform will NOT NECESSARILY bring out the results that we seek for ourselves. Had it been so, then all of us would have worked with singular focus and got what we desired. But this is not always the case. It is very evident that there is some other force or power which decides what is ordained for each of us. God or Consciousness itself ordains what we need most at a particular time for our inner spiritual upliftment. One must willingly and whole-heartedly accept even failures as they are in our best spiritual interest and bring about our evolution. Suffering and setbacks often become our best teachers in life, offering us an opportunity to humble our inflated egos.

It is prudent therefore to surrender the fruits of our actions to Consciousness itself. Our job is to merely perform the act to the best of our ability and leave the rest to the will of God. God or the Lord, no matter what name or form you attribute to Him, is always available to us in the form of pure or still Consciousness. The more we surrender to this power of still Consciousness within us, the more we will realize how potent and powerful it becomes in our lives. We will then be able to place our faith and trust on it in all situations.

We not only have no control over the fruits of our actions, but are also unable to select the actions. Every act that we perform is already predestined. Our past patterns of thoughts and tendencies (*vasanas*) create a *prarabdha* for each individual body-mind. Each body-mind then simply acts according to the *prarabdha* or acquired habit, conditioned by a series of past events (pertaining to various past lives). Even if you closely observe your own actions you can clearly see the reactive body-mind mechanism at play. We are mere instruments performing acts commanded by our past *samskaras*.

But neither the actions nor the habit-driven *samskaras* are true. Both are insentient and false. Only the Absolute Consciousness which is the source of all is true. For example, when we watch a show on television, there are various characters that play out their roles. Each may appear as performing certain acts as if he or she is the one carrying out his or her own wish, but in actuality each is only enacting his or her respective role as per the instructions of the director. This director is our past *vasanas* and *samskaras* and we are mere actors carrying out the commands of our inherent *vasanas*. But then none of the pictures, characters, actions would even appear without electricity or the source of power which feeds them. Everything appears/arises due to that which, in our case, is Consciousness or the power source. As a natural consequence, the source alone is important and sentient. That source is manifest *Isvara* or God.

Verse 2

*Krithi maho dadhau pathana kaaranam
Phalam asashvatham gath nirodhakam*

The results of actions are impermanent and pass off. Yet, their seeds form an ocean of Karma which becomes a barrier in the progress of a seeker.

The common man is prompted to act because he wants to enjoy the results of his actions. He gets lost in the midst of various activities thinking that they will help him acquire objects that make him happy. But this ocean of activities sucks him into the mire of various desires which, when fulfilled, bring only temporary happiness and when not fulfilled result in anguish and sadness. He is disillusioned due to that. Even if a particular activity does bring about a desired result, yet the greed for more never ends. Indeed, the moment a desired object is acquired, we lose interest in it and run after another and yet another. This brings about a vicious cycle of activities and desires.

A mind full of desires is weak and impure. It lacks the power to introspect, to dive deeper and to apprehend the ultimate reality of who we really are. It is therefore clear that actions performed with an eye on the results of such activities will only bring about more discontentment in life due to the impermanent results they bring about.

Actions themselves are conditioned by time, space and the capability of a person. Often, people feel that if they can work tirelessly, they will be able to enjoy a post-retirement pension, the reward of all their hard work when they grow old. What happens is just the opposite. In most cases the excessive indulgence in activities without the inner renunciation of the fruits destroys mental peace and happiness. A person who is a workaholic

develops the disease of 'being at no-ease' with himself. Constantly, and often subconsciously, he is looking for some work even if there isn't any. He can't stay alone, quiet and still for long. If his body finds no work then his mind works overtime, often worrying about many petty matters because it has acquired the habit of constantly working at something. Often, in old age, when the body is incapable of putting in long hours of work, such people find themselves victims of depression and other mental illnesses. The only remedy for such a person is to place faith in God (that inner stillness, ever present and available), who provides us with everything we need, rather than in actions.

Effort (*prayas*) is laudable only when made for the right cause. The ancient Indian sages differentiated between effort made for *preyas* or sense-pleasures linked with the body-mind complex and *shreyas* or everlasting spiritual bliss. The wise aspire for the latter, as *preyas* binds, bringing in its wake pain and sorrow, while *shreyas* liberates the *sadhaka* from time, bringing eternal joy.

Verse 3

*Ishwara arpitam na icchayaa kritam
Chitta shodhakam mukti sadhakam*

Work which is performed as an offering to the Almighty and done without any expectation of the fruits, helps in purification of the mind and thereby leads one to Liberation or Realization.

On reading the above two verses, a question may naturally arise in the mind of the seeker, that if all acts are predestined and if the result of such acts only gives impermanent results, what is the point in performing any action at all?

The fact is that no one can remain without some form of action. Not a moment goes by without some action (physical or mental). It is a very precarious situation. One can neither give up action nor find everlasting happiness as a result of actions. What then is the way out?

This verse clarifies this issue brilliantly and is the backbone on which rests all of *Karma Yoga* as a path to Self-Realization. While the first two verses point out the limitations of action, this verse emphasizes how action done with the right attitude and practice can bring about liberation. It explains the very essence of *Karma Yoga*, glimpses of which are often found in the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads.

‘*Karma*’ means action. ‘*Yoga*’ means union. Put simply, *Karma Yoga* means those actions which result in union with God or Self-Realization. Actions that are performed as offerings to the Lord are not binding because they are done without expectation of any personal gains and with a sense of deep surrender. Such actions become purifying as the mind is now

constantly engaged not in the fulfillment of outer, carnal desires, or for egoistic self gratification, but in pleasing God.

But, who then is this God? No one has seen God. It is obvious that to serve someone I must first know who I am serving. It is also obvious that He is not someone who is seen or known like any other external object. We instinctively know that God is not someone or something that lies outside oneself and that He can be easily recognized within each one of us. God seems to originate from within us and not outside of us. He can be known instantly as peace or joy pulsating in our sense of 'being' (the simple feeling that I AM without the thought of being this or that). This peaceful, joyous sense of being can be felt right here and now provided thoughts are stilled.

Thoughts are a hindrance and therefore take us away from that inner peace and bliss which we know as God. Countless thoughts get triggered due to expectations and by continuously dwelling on the results. However, if we don't focus on the results and rather pay attention only to the act (no matter how big or small it is), then thoughts subside and there arises a natural, peaceful state (even in chaotic work situations) which is instantly recognized as still awareness.

That still awareness is God itself. The more we act for the joy of the act itself and renounce thoughts associated with the results arising from such acts, the more we will be able to connect to that inner joy and bliss. With good practice one will realize that no matter how boring, unpleasant or chaotic the work situation is, one's attention which was initially on the act now shifts to that inner bliss and stillness. Holding on to that stillness and silence amidst all activities is true *Karma Yoga* — union with God through action.

As an advanced *sadhaka* further stabilizes in this state, often, he may even be oblivious of what act is taking place through him. His attention never wavers from that blissful substratum and he may even be inattentive to acts and happenings around him. The practice that starts as an attention to an act, far transcends the act itself in due course of practice and transforms into deep surrender to that blissful substratum. God is not a form, name or an image. God is simply recognized as joyous, still awareness manifesting itself as pure Consciousness or pure I AM.

An ancient story about Raja Janaka will help throw light on the true essence of *Karma Yoga*. Once, a *brahmin* who wondered why Janaka was praised so highly for his spiritual advancement, visited Mithila (Janaka's kingdom). The *brahmin* was confused as to how Janaka, who was a wealthy king, enjoying all the pleasures that a palace can bestow, could be regarded as a great devotee and a renunciate. He appeared to be indulging in all kinds of administrative duties, wars and above all, various *vasanas*. When they met, the king read the *brahmin's* mind which was filled with doubts regarding Janaka's lofty status. Thereupon the king asked the *brahmin* to tour the whole of Mithila with his guardsmen. He gave a pot of oil to the *brahmin* to be placed on his head and instructed the guardsmen to cut off the *brahmin's* head if even a single drop was spilt! The *brahmin* went around the city, constantly paying attention only to the pot of oil. When the *brahmin* returned, Raja Janaka asked him what he had enjoyed seeing in Mithila. The *brahmin* replied that he had noticed nothing — his focus never veered away from the pot of oil. Janaka smiled and explained that he ruled the kingdom in a similar fashion — “I live as if there is a sword dangling over my throne, suspended by a single hair. I too see nothing around me. All the time, I just watch my attention. Where is it going? I make sure that I don't spill even a drop of oil (the inner blissful I AM) despite all the happenings around me. If I waver away from God, I will be destroyed.”

The dangling sword signifies the possibility of spiritual death and the need for eternal vigilance to avoid slipping back into ignorance (*avidya*). In the absence of beingness or oneness with the Source, the aspirant is as good as dead. Until the sense of beingness is firmly established and becomes your true and only nature (*sahaja*), the *sadhaka* must be on his guard and put in conscious effort. Raja Janaka had already attained that effortless state of being or Self-Realization.

Thus, Raja Janaka is a wonderful example of a great *Karma Yogi*. *Sadhakas* may feel that Raja Janaka was destined to attain Self-Realization and that they may not be as capable and blessed as him. Indeed, there are seekers who wonder whether there is any point in putting in any effort at all, if their fate is already pre-determined.

‘Free will versus destiny’ is an age-old debate. According to Sri Ramana, in absolute terms, everything happens according to Divine Will. However, so long as there is a sense of individuality, there is free will to ‘act’. The *sadhaka* would therefore do well to shun laziness, forget the ‘free will versus destiny’ controversy and put in maximum effort (*prayas*) to advance spiritually, without expectation of any reward. In fact, on attaining Self-Realization, it will be realized on hindsight that the ability to put in efforts itself is a result of your own good *karmas* and has attracted Divine Grace. Furthermore, with Self-Realization the *sadhaka’s* individuality merges with the Absolute One, thereby liberating him from the bondage of destiny or *karma*. Thereafter, all his actions are effortless and unfold according to Divine Will. The seeming contradiction between free will and destiny is then resolved. Until that happens, the *sadhaka* must continue to put in his best and most sincere efforts.

Verse 4

*Kaya van manah karyam uttamam
Pujanam japa cintanam kramat*

The actions performed by the body — ritualistic puja, japa (chanting) and contemplation (inner meditation) — each is superior to the other in an ascending order.

As mentioned in the earlier part of this commentary, concerted effort (*prayas*) for inner bliss (*shreyas*) must be made to attain Self-Realization. Verse 4 states various kinds of effort that can be made to attain *shreyas* and which among them is the most superior.

Puja (ritualistic worship) offered to a deity, *japa* (chanting of mantras) and silent meditation on the I AM (formless sense of being), are such acts or *karmas* which lead to liberation. The act of *japa* is superior to ritualistic *puja*, while the act of holding on to the sense of I AM is superior to *japa*. Therefore, the highest form of practice is holding on to the sense of the formless I AM. It goes without saying that all these acts have to be done with *nishkamya bhava* which means without a thought for the fruit of one's actions. In Verse 3, Sri Ramana has already described what true *Karma Yoga* is.

When it is stated that holding on to the I AM is superior to *puja* and *japa*, it does not mean that *puja* and *japa* are to be shunned. These are stepping stones to liberation and bring about the deepening of one's practice. In fact, they are almost indispensable and should never be rejected as they go a long way in moulding the mental quality of a *sadhaka*.

Almost invariably, when a *sadhaka* begins his spiritual journey, he finds it impossible to meditate on the I AM as his mind has no idea of what it means. During meditation, his mind tends to wander about in the world of objects and forms because all his life he has only learnt to gather knowledge through various forms and objects. How can his mind then allow him to meditate or to hold on to the I AM for long? It is natural that when a choice is given to a beginner as to whether to offer ritualistic *puja* to a particular deity or do formless meditation, he will choose the former. This is because his mind feels comfortable holding on to the form. By focusing on the form, he will find that his mind can easily settle down. He will find peace by doing so.

Conversely, a very advanced *sadhaka* may find it extremely hard to focus on a form or to chant mantras as he will have far transcended that stage. He will therefore find it easier to hold on to the sense of beingness (I AM) which is formless.

To conclude, we can say that a beginner will naturally be attracted to rituals, intermediate *sadhakas* will be drawn to *japa* or chanting while advanced *sadhakas* will take to meditation on the formless I AM.

However, this does not mean that advanced seekers will never feel like chanting, doing *japa* or performing *puja*. Some may still continue to do so due to past habits or because they are fond of it. But it is for certain that no practice satisfies the advanced *sadhakas* as deeply as holding on to their sense of being. Such *sadhakas* find that they quickly return to the practice of abidance once the chant or *puja* is over. Even a Self-Realized *Jnani* may continue to chant or perform *puja*, but he would not do so due to force of habit or because of any particular liking for it. Rather, he would do so because he finds the SELF in everything he does. He cannot separate the SELF from anything. Indeed, the SELF captivates his attention no matter what activities he engages himself in.

Bhakti Yoga: Path of Devotion

Verses 5 to 10

Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion, is the method of Self-Realization through the way of love. While in Karma Yoga the practice involves paying attention to the performance of right action with right attitude as a means to Self-Realization, in Bhakti Yoga, the attention is directed towards an object — usually a deity, a guru or any Godly form.

The key word in Bhakti is LOVE. Love is a very powerful emotion. It is very natural and universal. That is why it is so easy to practise it. Bhakti exudes the fragrance of love, spreading joy and happiness to one's own Self and to others. Love makes us forget ourselves since our complete attention is focused on the object of devotion. Wondrous are the ways of Bhakti. The journey of Self-Realization becomes dry without the element of love and devotion. In contrast, when combined with intense love and longing for the beloved, the journey itself becomes a blessing.

Traditional Hindu texts such as, *Vishnu Purana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* mention nine types of Bhakti:

Sravanam — Listening to sermons and stories of the Lord's lilas or plays.

Kirtanam — Chanting of God's glories.

Smaranam — Remembering the presence of the Lord constantly by repeating His name or Mantra.

Padasevanam — Worshiping the Lord's feet by serving humanity.

Archanam — Worship of God through rituals such as: puja, havan or homa, offering flowers, incense, food etc.

Vandanam — Prostrating physically before the Lord in deep humility.

Dasyam — Feeling of being the Lord's servant.

Sakhyam — Feeling of friendship and a personal relationship with God.

Atmanivedanam — Complete surrender of self/ego — experience of non-duality.

Another traditional classification of types of Bhakti is as follows:

Sakaamyam Bhakti — With attachment/desire of fruit.

Nishkaamyam Bhakti — Without attachment/desire of fruit.

Apara Bhakti — For beginners, through rituals.

Para Bhakti — Recognizing the transcendental nature of God.

Gauna Bhakti — Secondary devotion based on the qualities/gunas of the devotee.

Mukhya Bhakti — Primary, spontaneous, unconditional devotion.

Vidvesha Bhakti — With animosity to none and love for all.

Jnana Bhakti — Devotion based on wisdom.

Moodha Bhakti — Devotion based on ignorance.

Sri Ramana's *Upadesa Saram* avoids all elaborate classification and goes straight to the point. Verses 5 to 10 subtly explore the various, finer aspects of Bhakti, indeed the very essence of Bhakti, showing how Self-Realization is possible through it.



Verse 5

*Jagata Ishadhi yukta sevanam
Astha murthy bhr deva poojanam*

*Worshipping any of the eight forms, thinking they are all forms of God, is good
worship [puja] of God.*

The eight forms mentioned in this verse are earth, water, fire, air, space, moon, sun and living beings (Jivas), all of which are forms of God, the one Reality underlying the appearance of this whole world.

Usually, when anyone talks about puja, the image of an idol and a devotee instantly comes to mind. The devotee offers a seat to God, washes His feet, bathes and clothes Him, offers incense, food, etc. Various mantras are recited in His glory. But true worship or puja is not just about sitting in front of an idol of choice and following a ritualistic pattern. Real puja far transcends all rituals and eventually, also the idol of worship itself. Rituals can become mechanical and will defeat the purpose of puja if our reverence and devotion are not extended to everything and everyone around us. Real puja therefore is not limited to a Diety but extends to Consciousness Itself as everything within Consciousness is God.

When we look around us, we see that Consciousness manifests as Mother Nature. We see the mountains, the trees, the rivers. We feel the cool breeze, the hot summers, the rains and the space that pervades everything. We immediately see the role of the five elements, viz. earth, water, air, fire and space, coming into play there. Worshipping these five elements is worship of Consciousness. All these elements are also within the body. So, to begin worshipping these five elements, we must start with our own body. The body is a temple wherein God resides. If we don't worship and

take care of our body, how can our mind turn towards the ONE that resides within us? Therefore a healthy body is a must.

To worship the moon is to worship Consciousness for the moon is the fastest moving planet¹, much like our mind. The mind is nothing but the surging of thought waves — always fluctuating and moving. Hence, the moon symbolizes the mind. Worship of the mind means keeping a watch over its movements as no worship is possible without deep attention. With alert, attentive awareness, we can locate a ‘gap’ between two thoughts and find a centre in that gap. That ‘gap’ between two thoughts is later found to be the background witness.

Worshipping the body/mind should not imply an identification with it. When we identify with the body/mind, we ignorantly fulfill all carnal desires, mistaking the body/mind to be our own Self. The purpose of true worship is to keep the body/mind healthy, clean and pure so that the body/mind instrument can easily turn inwards in pursuit of the highest goal — SELF REALIZATION.

The sun represents ‘the supreme light’. It denotes illumination. It is therefore that part of Consciousness which reflects truth. It is the state of Turiya — the pure unadulterated state of I AMness. It is the Centre from which the life-force is distributed and the gateway to retire back into the SOURCE. Worshipping Turiya is to worship Consciousness in its purest essence.

If we seek to worship Consciousness, how can we avoid serving living beings? Going within by disassociating with the world in order to serve the inner divinity, is indeed a great virtue. However, the highest virtue is to come back into the world and serve all sentient beings. How can we separate ourselves from each other? All the five elements, thought energy, consciousness, and prana (life-force) are common to all living beings and

bind us into oneness. We may appear separate from each other but who can deny that space connects us all together. There is always a connection and if we are open enough, we can feel a strong sense of oneness with each other. A loving, kind and compassionate heart knows God.

The Buddha said that wisdom and compassion are two important prerequisites of enlightenment. Wisdom is gained through the worship of I AM and abidance in the SELF, while compassion is gained by serving all sentient beings. The word “Namaste”, which is a very common form of greeting in every Hindu household, symbolizes the worship of living beings by joining one’s hands close to one’s heart and bowing to each other.

To conclude, this verse points out that everything is God. The whole of God’s creation is also God. The waves appear to be different as they arise and fall into the ocean, yet, who can deny that they are a part of the ocean itself? That is why there should be reverence for everything around us, right from the body made up of five elements, to the mind, pure consciousness and all living beings. There should be a feeling of gratitude towards every sentient being and every inanimate object as well. That is true worship.

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1. According to Indian Astrology [which does not always tally with Western science], there are nine (9) planets [‘Navagraha’] including the sun and the moon; among the nine planets, the moon is considered the fastest .
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Verse 6

*Uttama stavaat uccha mandathah
Chittajam japa dhyaan muttamam*

*Singing the Lord's praises is good but better than that is loud chanting of Japa,
while superior to loud chanting is soft Japa. However, best of all is silent,
mental Japa.*

A Bhakta (devotee) can approach his beloved Deity in any form and manner. The Lord accepts all kinds of worship. One can sing hymns of praises to Him loudly in the form of kirtans, bhajans and chantings. The mind gets easily absorbed within, thanks to the enchanting atmosphere created by the accompanying music. The musical notes, the chants and the voices of other singers in the group intoxicate the mind, making it easy for it to dive deep within, most effortlessly. As a result, devotion arises automatically. An ardent devotee will notice that, with the passage of time, a natural shift takes place which draws his attention away from music, ambience, etc. and focuses it only on Japa.

Japa is the constant remembrance or repeating of a 'Mantra' or the 'Name' of a God/Deity. The principle behind recitation of Japa is that by repeating the same word or words, the mind gets concentrated. A concentrated mind can focus on the object of its devotion much better. The 'Mantra' or the 'Name' denotes all the qualities of the God/Deity being worshipped. It is a way to invoke the presence of that Deity and please Him. Through such 'Mantra Sadhana', the Deity is pleased and bestows various forms of blessings. The Mantra vibrates at a certain frequency of energy which acts as a protective and powerful shield against many upheavals and setbacks that the devotee may face. The Mantra serves as a huge support to the Bhakta during challenging times. The

biggest blessing bestowed by a Deity on a Bhakta is an ever deepening stillness and peace of mind. It is very important that the Mantra be given by only a Self-Realized Guru. Such a Guru alone can make the Mantra a Siddhi, or a charged, instrument of power.

Japa is often chanted aloud with full attention at the outset, because the articulation of the sounds and syllables needs to be exact. However, later, with evolving practice, the chanting of Japa becomes softer and more internalized and this results in chitta shuddi (purification of the mind). Further, Japa **deepens into more of a feeling** than actual words. There may not be the presence of any words or sound and yet, the feeling of devotion and love associated with that Japa or name becomes more and more profound. This mental or silent Mantra Japa, without sounds or words, is the best. The next verse describes Ajapa-Japa which takes mental Japa to the next level.

Verse 7

*Aajya dhaarayaa srotasaa samam
Sarala chintanam viralatah param*

Like an unbroken flow of oil or a stream of water; continuous meditation is better than that which is interrupted.

That form of mental Japa which becomes effortless, smooth and continuous, much like the unbroken flow of oil, is referred to as Ajapa Japa. In the previous verse, Japa is a deliberate holding (dharana) of the feeling of the impersonal sense of I AM while in Ajapa it is the other way round. The non-verbal feeling of I AM is what holds your attention effortlessly, without any interruption. Ajapa Japa is referred to as real meditation (Dhyaan). Japa (Dharana) matures into Ajapa (Dhyaan) automatically through perseverance, devotion and faith. Not once does the attention move away from the true centre of I AMness. The body/mind may still appear to be functioning in the world; the senses may still appear to be indulging in the bhoga vasanas (enjoyments and pains) yet the intoxicating joy of the pure state of I AM never once leaves a true Bhakta.

An ancient story about Raja Janaka and Sukadev is very illuminating. Raja Janaka, the great king who ruled Mithila was also a great Bhakta and Jnani. Sukadev was the son of the great sage, Rishi Vedavyasa. Sukadev considered himself to be the greatest renunciate among all sages because he did not even wear clothes. He was completely naked and had started taking egoistic pride in his spiritual progress. His father saw that this was becoming an obstacle in his path for Suka. Hence, when Suka approached him for further spiritual instruction, he advised him to go and meet Janaka. Vyasa said *“There is only one Guru for you and that is King Janaka of Mithila.”* Suka protested, saying, *“Father, are you out of your mind? There is*

nothing in common between a king and a renunciate like me. How can I regard him as my Guru?" The sage replied, *"There is nobody else who could be your Guru"*. Reluctantly, since he had to comply with the wishes of his father, Suka left for the Raja's palace. Upon arrival, he was shocked beyond belief at what he saw. Janaka was resting on his throne, with a glass of liquor in his hand. He seemed completely drunk and was surrounded by young women who were dancing around him, entertaining him. Sukadev's eyes went red with rage on taking in this 'scandalous' scene. He couldn't believe that his father could send him to such a person who seemed to be steeped in various vasanās (sensual enjoyments). He was about to leave the palace in disgust when Janaka noticed him. He requested Suka to spend some time with him before leaving.

King Janaka knew that Suka was bloated with pride about his renunciation. With his spiritual powers, Janaka staged an illusory situation. Just as Suka sat down next to him, a servant came running in with the news that the entire town was on fire. *"It's all God's Will."* said Janaka coolly. After a short while, another report came in that all of the king's courts were reduced to ashes. *"God's Will"* said the king, once again. Then followed the news that the king's own palace was on fire. *"All God's Will"* repeated the king. Suka thought that the king was a real fool not to do anything about the fire. After a short while, another report came in stating that Janaka's wife and children had all been burnt to death and that the fire was making its way to his throne. *"God's Will"* Janaka replied again. Seeing that the fire had almost reached them, Suka grabbed his tiny bag and took to his heels to save his skin from the approaching fire. Just then, the king caught hold of his arm and exclaimed, *"Look! All my worldly possessions, including my wife and children, have been burnt to ashes, but I haven't been perturbed by these huge losses. Now that the fire has reached the palace, you have taken hold of this tiny bag with the intention of saving your possessions. After all, what is your small bag worth compared to what I have*

just lost?” Further, peering deeply into Suka’s eyes, Janaka asked him, “So tell me now, who, exactly, is more detached — you or I?”

Suka realized his mistake and admitted that the king was indeed a true Yogi whose renunciation was total. With tears in his eyes, he fell at Janaka’s feet and urged him for initiation.

Such is the power of effortless Dhyaan. No matter what happens in the world outside, a Bhakta like Janaka who is firmly established in the inner state of joyous, impersonal I AMness, is unperturbed in all circumstances.

Verse 8

*Bheda bhaavanaath soham itbyasau
Bhavanaa bhidha paavani mataa*

Meditation without duality, that is meditating as 'I am HE', is superior to meditation which assumes a separation between the Bhakta (devotee) and the beloved Lord.

The earlier verses speak of the contemplator and the object of his/her contemplation (the beloved Lord). There is an assumed separation between the two. The transition from loud — to soft — to silent, mental Japa is possible through intense longing, abidance and surrender, until finally, meditation (Ajapa) is realized. When this state of meditation further deepens, it leads to Samadhi. This verse describes the state of Samadhi. When that happens, all names and forms disappear and what arises is only a deep sense of blissful 'I AMness'. That feeling of an impersonal 'I-I', arising from within, destroys the illusion of duality, that is, a subject that is separate from the object.

The devotion is turned inwards to find that the devotee (subject) himself/herself is the Lord (object). The outward deity of worship merely reflects the joy and bliss which the devotee as 'I' always and already is. The joy 'I' seek through puja, meditation, mantras and sadhanas is nothing but 'Me'. This 'Me', of course, is not the limited ego-self of every-day life but the expansive, all-encompassing pure I AMness which erases the false sense of separation in ordinary life, between 'me' and 'you', 'self' and the 'other'.

There is no Krishna, no Rama, no Christ and no Shiva. Everything appears because the primary principle 'I AM' appears. The 'I AM' is prior to all. Without 'I AM', can anything even be recognized, let alone

worshipped? Even in the sentence 'I am He' what precedes the word 'He' is the expression 'I AM'.

When devotion matures, all objects disappear and the attention falls back to the subject (I AM) and remains in that state prior to all names, forms and distinctions.

Verse 9

***Bhaava soonya sad bhaava susthithih
Bhaavana bhalaath bhakthir uttamaa***

A state of void, free from thought, is gradually attained, making abidance in the background state of 'I AM' complete. This is supreme devotion.

Realizing nothingness is the real test of devotion. The word 'Soonya' means a state of void. It is in this state, which is devoid of any thought, that the impersonal 'I AM' lies hidden. It is not possible to remain stabilized in this background state of 'I AM', without first being firmly established in the void.

The Bible says, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind...”* Luke 10:27 New International Version (NIV)

That is only possible when your entire life-force, which is normally dissipated in fulfilling various sensory desires, is pulled back from there and invested one-pointedly in the background 'I AM'. The Life-force (i.e., Primal force) has to retire from the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste), thoughts and other pranas (life-forces) that look after the functions of the body/mind instrument. This is real abidance in the Source. Such abidance happens quite naturally and effortlessly during the deep sleep state. The five senses are inoperative, thoughts are absent, the life-force is withdrawn from the body/mind instrument and yet we remain immersed in the most blissful and joyous state of 'I AM'.

It is unfortunate that we do not recognize this happy state on waking up, as our minds don't allow us to. That is why we must realize this state in

our meditation, wherein we can move beyond the mind and can witness this torrential bliss which otherwise lies hidden under the veil of 'Maya' or ignorance. Beyond the objectless state of void, I find myself worshipping my own Self with my entire attention, energy, strength and love. After such a realization, I remain continuously aware of myself as a pure state of impersonal 'I AM'. This is real devotion.

Verse 10

*Hrit sthale manaah svasthathaa kriya
Bhakti yoga bhodaascha nishchitam*

*Fixing the mind in the heart (Source) is true Karma (action), Bhakti, Yoga
and Jnana.*

This verse actually is the very essence of Sri Ramana's teachings. Advaita (non-duality) is not a path but the destination itself. No matter what path one adopts, the final destination is the non-dual state of Advaita. Hence, whether one uses Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga or Jnana Yoga, the end result is always the same — the merging of the mind through a U-turn, with its Source (Heart). The mind here does not refer to the usual inflowing or outflowing thoughts of every-day life, which have already been arrested much earlier in the case of the advanced seeker. Rather, it refers to the identification with the single final thought which is of the pure 'I AM'. Even this 'I AM' sense is false and is therefore the last barrier to truth.

Having established firmly in the sense of 'I AM' (the uninterrupted state of bliss mentioned in Verse 9), the aspirant further intuits that even this 'I AM' sense is false and retires/goes back to the Source. When he traces back the origin of this blissful state of pure 'I AM' (Turiya), he comes upon the 'Timeless'.

'I AM' or pure consciousness still has a centre but the 'Timeless' has none as it is not limited by space, time or any other attributes. Any attempt to describe this state (which is, paradoxically, a 'stateless' state) is completely futile, as it is impossible to capture it in words. Sri Ramana urges the

aspirant to fix his mind on the 'Heart' because it is the Source of 'I AM', whence the sense of 'I' arises, and with which it eventually merges.

Once a devotee asked Sri Ramana, *"How do you say that the Heart is on the right, whereas the biologists have found it to be on the left?" The man asked for authority.*"

Sri Ramana replied, reiterating the same point (all bolded highlights are mine):

*"Quite so. The physical organ is on the left; that is not denied. **But the Heart of which I speak is non-physical and is only on the right side.** It is my experience, no authority is required by me. Still you can find confirmation in a Malayalam Ayurvedic book and in Sita Upanishad; and he produced the quotation (mantra) from the latter and repeated the text (sloka) from the former."* (from Talk 4, "Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi")

And in Talk 97, Sri Ramana says:

*"There is no one who even for a trice fails to experience the Self. For no one admits that he ever stands apart from the Self. He is the Self. **The Self is the Heart.**"*

In deep sleep you exist; awake, you remain. The same Self is in both states. The difference is only in the awareness and the non-awareness of the world. The world rises with the mind and sets with the mind. That which rises and sets is not the Self. The Self is different, giving rise to the mind, sustaining it and resolving it. So the Self is the underlying principle.

When asked who you are, you place your hand on the right side of the breast and say 'I am'. There you involuntarily point out the Self. The Self is thus known..."

Taking Sri Ramana's reply literally, many aspirants start to hold the right side of the chest as an object of meditation. This is not correct practice, for the mind will be kept alive trying to figure out whether the attention is on the right side or not. Sri Ramana was clear that the 'heart' he was referring to was not an object — were it an object, the fixing of one's mind on it would become a form of concentration. Realizing the true heart is beyond all practice. To know the true heart, the mind has to disappear first, and for that, one has to allow it to be submerged within. One has to trust one's instinctive awareness and allow the mind to disappear. When the mind dissolves, the heart appears.

As this point is critical, here is a further explanation by Sri Ramana from Talk 98:

*“**The Self is the Heart.** The Heart is self-luminous. Light arises from the Heart and reaches the brain, which is the seat of the mind. The world is seen with the mind, that is, by the reflected light of the Self. It is perceived with the aid of the mind. When the mind is illumined it is aware of the world. When it is not itself so illumined, it is not aware of the world. If the mind is turned in towards the source of light, objective knowledge ceases and Self alone shines forth as the Heart.”*

The moon shines by the reflected light of the sun. When the sun has set, the moon is useful for revealing objects. When the sun has risen, no one needs the moon, although the pale disc of the moon is visible in the sky.

So it is with the mind and the Heart. The mind is useful because of its reflected light. It is used for seeing objects. When it is turned inwards, the source of illumination shines forth by itself, and the mind remains dim and useless like the moon in day-time.

The Bible is also clear on this point:

“The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.”
Ecclesiastes 10:2 (NIV)

The significance of the right side is that, it is the area where the bliss of pure ‘I AM’ is first experienced, as a recollection, on returning from the ‘Timeless’ to the waking state of consciousness. That is the state of Turiya. He is speaking here from that level, in the context of the highest state of samadhi. This is where the pure bliss of ‘I AM’ first arises.

Raja Yoga: The Royal Path of Yoga

Verses 11 to 15

In the next five verses of the *Upadesa Saram*, Sri Ramana talks about the Path of controlling the mind with the help of breath control (Pranayama). This Path is often referred to as Raja Yoga or 'Ashtanga Yoga'. The phrase 'Ashtanga Yoga' immediately brings to mind the famous Sage called Patanjali who belonged to the 2nd Century B.C. and authored the famous *Yogasutras* [i.e. Verses on Yoga].

The term Yoga stands for 'union' and implies the alignment/union of body, mind and spirit, which together give rise to health and happiness.

At the global level today, Yoga is often erroneously projected as just a mechanical set of exercises performed for the purpose of physical fitness. In actuality, however, Yoga is a profound philosophy, a whole way of right living. There are different schools of Yoga, including the two prominent ones called 'Ashtanga Yoga' and 'Hatha Yoga'.

Patanjali's 'Ashtanga Yoga', or eight-fold path, comprises eight aspects which are metaphorically referred to as 'limbs'. These limbs intertwine like the branches of a tree. They are interconnected and offer guidelines in the form of rules that could aid the practitioner/student of Yoga. The understanding and observance of these rules has been known to be conducive to a transition from ordinary living to a higher state of spiritual growth.

Eight Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga

The following are the eight limbs of Patanjali's 'Ashtanga Yoga', each of which we will discuss briefly here:

1. [Yama](#)
2. [Niyama](#)
3. [Asanas](#)
4. [Pranayama](#)
5. [Pratyahara](#)
6. [Dharana](#)
7. [Dhyana](#)
8. [Samadhi](#)

1. Yama

Yama refers to a set of social norms and moral principles to be observed in order to enrich our lives and harmonize our relationships with others. There are five *yamas* as listed below:

Non-violence (*ahimsa*): Non-violence has to be practiced, not just in deeds, but also in thoughts and words. It is no use if you are outwardly non-violent and use sweet words just on the surface, whereas deep within, you harbor ill-will towards others. Thoughts of jealousy, anger and hatred are often suppressed and not expressed outwardly, either due to unwritten rules of social propriety or fear of the law. However, such suppressed thoughts arise repeatedly in the mind and consume the persons who harbor them, thereby harming or doing violence to them. The practice of non-violence is therefore applicable not just to others but also to one's

own self. Moreover, violence that is harbored within for long is bound to be reflected outside, and vice-versa.

Truthfulness (*Satya*): This implies being truthful and telling no lies. To be truthful is a sadhana in itself. Many ancient Yogis affirmed, as well as demonstrated through their own example, that adherence to even just one single principle of truthfulness would lend tremendous power to the words uttered by its practitioner. It bestowed *Siddhis* [spiritual powers].

Mahatma Gandhi considered *Satya* (Truth) to be God itself. He based his life on the two fundamental principles of *Satya* and *Ahimsa*. We all know the impact he had on India's Freedom Struggle; he paved the way to India's Independence through his words and principles. Indeed, his guiding principles continue to light the lives not only of Indians, but of different Nationals across the Globe. However, having said that, one must be aware, mindful and discreet while practicing truthfulness, to the extent that one must even be ready to abstain from telling the truth in case it is likely to have any wrong/hurtful impact on someone. Telling a blind man that he cannot see is definitely a truth, but it is very hurtful and points to the speaker's lack of compassion. Truth that serves no righteous purpose or higher cause, and causes harm instead, is worse than a lie.

Non-stealing (*Asteya*): This means not to steal from others anything which does not rightfully belong to you. Usually, stealing refers to the act of unlawfully taking away someone's property, money, belongings, possessions, etc. However, the worst thing to steal is someone's peace of mind. Often, we drag others into our conflicts, accuse them, or gossip behind their backs. One must be wary of committing such acts as they can cause needless distress to others.

Contenance (*brahmacharya*): This refers to moderation in sexual indulgence and does not imply total abstinence. Lustful tendencies pull

one's attention away from the spiritual heart and fix it on the body. True celibacy lies in harboring pure thoughts rather than in abstaining from the sexual act. What kind of thoughts attract a sadhak's attention and preoccupy him, is the question he must ask himself from time to time.

Non-possession (*Aparigraha*): Again, this does not mean living in poverty without any money, property or luxuries. The question to ask is "Are you possessed by the desire to keep collecting, accumulating and hoarding as much as you can? Does greed dominate your daily life?" On the other hand, it is important to realize that extreme austerity, and being obsessed with the goal of living in abject poverty, is as much a sign of ignorance as being obsessed with living a luxurious life. The key factor is not what you possess or do not possess; rather it is the spirit of true, inner contentment.

2. Niyama

Niyama is the inner discipline needed to purify, harmonize and direct one's body, mind and energies. *Niyamas* are sometimes called observances and are, in all, five in number:

Purity (*Shauca*): It is ironic that while we don't allow dust and dirt to accumulate inside our homes, we have no problem if such impurities accumulate within our bodies. We do not realize that the body is the temple wherein God resides. We must take care of our bodies and remain healthy so that we are able to worship the God within us. How can a sick body perform any worship? Therefore, without being over obsessed with our bodies, we must do whatever we can to maintain a healthy body. We must exercise and eat healthy foods to keep our body in good shape. Similarly, our minds must be kept away from thinking negative thoughts. We must keenly observe whether our minds follow a negative pattern of

thinking and, if it does, we must correct it by replacing negative thoughts with positive ones. A healthy body/mind is a pure vessel that reflects divinity.

Contentment (*Santosha*): No matter what situations we face or live through, we must be ever content. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to better our present lot or strive to upgrade our material and spiritual goals. What it means is that we must joyously accept every situation that has arisen, the efforts we put in to change it and the result thereof.

Austerity (*Tapas*): This refers to putting in effort in order to realize spiritual goals. Continuous effort is essential until one's spiritual life-journey becomes completely effortless (*sahaja*), with no trace of ego. Never giving up is the essence of austerity.

Study of I AM (*Svadyaya*): Some texts refer to *Svadyaya* as the study of scriptures such as the ancient *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. They believe that the study of ancient scriptures/spiritual books is enough for the seeker. No doubt it is very helpful to have an understanding of, and insight into the ancient texts, for they are authorities in themselves and are wonderful tools that facilitate the seeker's journey. However, true study lies in understanding one's own inner state of being. That is the real book to read and understand.

The Sanskrit word *Svadyaya* comprises two words — 'Sva' and 'dhyaya'. 'Sva' points to Self and 'dhyaya' to study. Thus, the word is self-explanatory. It is no use studying all the scriptures in the world if one has little knowledge of the Self. Self-knowing comes through abidance in one's true state of being.

Surrender to God (*ishvara-pranidhana*): Our beingness, or sense of existence, is primary to knowing God. If I am not, there can be no God and hence no sense of surrender either. The study of SELF is incomplete

without surrendering to whatever my being appears to be. That surrender is only possible when there is acceptance. True acceptance of ‘what is’ is true surrender.

3. Asana

Sthira sukham asanam is a quote we often find in most yoga schools (especially in Hatha Yoga). Literally, it implies that our way of sitting should be steady and comfortable. In order to sit in formal meditation for a lengthy period of time, one needs a very supple and steady body. Sage Patanjali advocated a set of asanas or postures to prepare the body for meditation. However the word “*Sthira*” doesn’t just mean a steady or firm physical posture, but also implies mental stillness and vigilance. *Asanas* stand for an all-round balance and equanimity — both at the physical and the mental level.

4. Pranayama

Prana is the life-force or energy that sustains the entire creation. There are several types of *Prana Vayus*/Life Breezes within our bodies as well as outside in the Universe. Within the human body, five types of *Prana Vayus* have been identified. They are *Prana*, *Apana*, *Samana*, *Udana* and *Byaan Vayu*. Collectively, these five types of *Prana Vayus* are termed as “*Prana*”.

The seat of *Prana Vayu* is the heart and it flows upwards from the navel; that of *Apana Vayu* is the anus and it flows downwards from the navel; that of *Samana*, is the region of the navel itself; that of *Udana* is the

throat; while *Byaan* is all-pervading and hence moves all over the body. The word “*ayama*” means control. Therefore, literally, the word “*Pranayama*” means control of life-force.

The Yoga system discovered that the breath and life-force are closely related and inter-dependent; it also found, as a result, that it is easier to control *Prana* through breath. Therefore, all schools of Yoga refer to *Pranayama* as control of breath.

The basic movements of *Pranayama* are inhalation, retention of breath, and exhalation. The practice of *Pranayama* purifies the life-force and directs it to higher spiritual centres (such as the third eye or the heart centre). It arrests needless mental distractions and aids meditation, eventually rendering it totally effortless.

5. Pratyahara

Pratyahara is withdrawal of the life-force from the five senses. It is the result of *pranayama*. When the life-force is withdrawn from the senses, the body feels like a corpse. The five senses (viz. touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight) are held in abeyance and the entire life-force can then be used for concentration on the object of attention or devotion.

6. Dharana

The word “Dhar” means to hold. The life-force made available through the practice of *Pratyahara*, is used to concentrate or hold on to the object of attention. *Dharana* involves a lot of effort, especially in the initial stages,

as the attention tends to waver or move away from the one, single object of concentration. Bringing the mind back and re-directing the life-force to the one, single object of concentration, again and again, through repeated effort, is called “*Dharana*”.

7. Dhyana

The uninterrupted flow of attention to an object, without any effort, is called *Dhyana*. Concentration (*Dharana*) leads to the state of meditation. Therefore, effort is a must for the effortless state of meditation to eventually happen.

8. Samadhi

The ultimate goal of the eight-fold path of Yoga is *Samadhi* or Divine Union. Here the barriers of object-subject disappear. The objects and subject melt into each other as ONE.

Verse 11

*Vaayurodhanaath leeyathe manah
Jaala pakshivad rodhasaadhanam*

*Through breath-control, the movement of the mind is contained, just as a bird
is restrained when caught in a net.*

A slow, calm breath naturally results in a serene and quiet mind. A still mind can then have communion with the God or Divinity within. To understand how this is made possible, one has to know the relationship between breath, life-force (Prana) and the mind.

Our bodies are maintained by a vital energy called Prana. It is this life-force that governs our heartbeat, sensory impressions, and motor responses — indeed, it governs all the functions of the body. It supplies energy directly to the brain, to the heart, lungs, diaphragm — to every organ and every cell in the body.

A continuous supply of prana is needed to sustain life and its activities. That is supplied by food, sunshine and the oxygen made available through breathing. One must realize that Prana is not just inside the body, but also outside in the cosmos. It is all pervading. Here, too, it is the breath which acts as the much needed link between the pranas inside and pranas outside.

Breath supplies energy to the body through the intake of prana, which is highly concentrated in oxygen. Through such sustained supply of prana, the body is vitally recharged. Breath, therefore, proves to be a perfect vehicle to connect and integrate the diverse pranas together.

The Yogis realized that breath can play an important role in understanding the life-force or energy which sustains creation. They therefore turned their attention to the breath, with the full awareness that any understanding of the breath would deepen their understanding of prana.

By repeatedly focusing their attention on the breath, the Yogis observed that the frequency of their breathing [i.e. the number of breaths per minute] began to reduce, and as a result, the life-force within was also getting stilled most naturally.

Usually, the various Pranas are scattered throughout the entire body, looking after the needs of each body and mental function. But by concentrating on the breath, the energies or life-forces which were functioning in various parts of the body, independent of each other, were now being withdrawn from their normal roles and brought together, or channelled, as one. Naturally, this also resulted in the body requiring less and less oxygen and therefore proportionately lesser need to breathe.

Thus, the Yogis realized the interconnection between prana and the breath. Through breath control, the life-force could be controlled and vice versa. Often breath is considered to be synonymous with Prana (life-force) because they are so closely related to each other and it is hard to separate the two. The breathing technique used by Yogis is called “pranayama” — a term which actually means life-force control but is often used to mean breath control. For all practical purposes, the two are one and the same and hence, we can regard them as one.

Now we will try to understand the relationship between Mind and Breath (Prana). Mind is a series of thoughts and emotions which we always identify with. Depending on what the mind projects in terms of thoughts, ideas, emotions, dreams, imaginations, daily activities, etc., the life-force (prana) carries out the diverse commands of the mind. We can easily notice this whenever our mind is calm, our breathing is steady and normal. Whenever our mind is disturbed due to fear/anger or excited due

to sexual desires, that inner turbulence too will be reflected in our breathing pattern. Thus, the breath/life-force moves wherever, and in whatever manner, the mind dictates it to move.

Breath or life-force is often compared to a horse, while our mind is regarded as the rider astride it. If the breath/prana slows down, so does the mind, and if the breath stops, the mind stops too. That is why Yogis control the breath, so that the life-force automatically withdraws from all its activities and the mind is forcibly and effectively brought under control. Just as a bird can be caught in a net and its movements restrained, similarly the movements of the mind can be controlled when its wings (the pranas) are forcefully trapped within through breath control and it is prevented from flying in all directions. Allowing no “freedom to the wings” means withdrawing prana from all the activities initiated by the mind.

Verse 12

*Cittavaayavaas citkriyaayutaah
Saakhayor dvayee saktimulakaa*

The mind and pranas, which carry out various thought processes and actions within the body, emerge from one common source.

The earlier verse points out the inter-relationship of the breath, pranas and mind, and emphasizes the inter-dependency among the three. Through regulation of breath, pranas are controlled and so is the mind. They are all one as the existence of each of them depends upon the state of the other two.

This verse further provides the insight that the three are not just one, but have one common source — void or nothingness.

Every night we go to sleep, and when that happens, all that we know — our perceptions, the sensations felt within our body — all retire into this “nothingness”. Everything withdraws into that one common void. No thought is perceived, no actions are performed, yet we are happy to withdraw into that void every night and emerge from it every morning.

Unfortunately, most people don't develop the 'skill' of consciously knowing this state of void. Only regular meditation as given by one's teacher, under his supervision, can provide knowledge of the void. A Yogi, fervent in practicing various techniques of pranayamas can indeed bring the mind (thoughts) under control and know the void. In fact, even without the use of various complex breath control techniques, which could even prove harmful if done the wrong way, the experience of the void can be firmly established through the powerful Third Eye Meditation under the direct supervision of a Self-Realized Master.

As children we used to play a game of focusing the sun's rays through a magnifying glass to the point of burning the paper held beneath. How did the paper catch fire? That is because the sun rays, which were originally scattered in various directions, were brought together and concentrated on one single point. Thus, at that point, tremendous energy was generated, which burned the paper underneath.

Something similar happens in the Third Eye Meditation. Energy which is usually scattered in all places of the body is brought to one place (the point between the eyebrows) and then from there it is directed inwards with great force and momentum leading to unusual sensory experiences (sounds and lights) and ultimately to the experience of the void.

Details of this meditation can be accessed by contacting [rajivsatsang](#). A point to be noted here, however, is that the goal of the true seeker is not the void, but the SELF. This is further explained below in Verse 13.

Verse 13

*Layavinasaane ubhayarodhane
Layagam punarbhavati no mrtam*

Mind control can be achieved through two modes — either through absorption/abeyance or through complete destruction. In the case of the first mode, the mind emerges again as it is merely absorbed in the void and hence temporarily held in abeyance. In contrast, through the second mode, when the mind is destroyed, it can never emerge again.

As pointed out in the earlier verse, a Yogi can, in a short period of time, control the mind and bring about a state of Samadhi where thoughts have ceased and the state of void is realized.

A meditator gains the knowledge that every single thing that he perceives, every object, arises and falls within this void and when the mind is controlled, or stilled, those objects no longer appear. Only the void remains.

This is a big milestone for a serious meditator and he feels he has realized the SELF, but this is a mistaken belief. This state lasts only as long as the meditation session lasts. In no time thereafter, the thoughts and mind-impressions (vasanas) make a comeback and continue to haunt the meditator once again during the course of the waking state. Therefore, mere laya (or absorption/abeyance) is not the final remedy as the vasanas are not completely uprooted by virtue of a temporary Samadhi, or absorption into the void. That is why a further, and deeper, inquiry needs to be carried out in order to find out where the void itself has arisen from.

Verse 14

*Praana bandhanaath leena maanasam
Eka chintanaath naasham etyada*

When the mind is held in suspension through breath control, it must then be completely destroyed through one-pointed attention to that ONE reality.

This is the most important part of Sadhana. Many meditators and yogis can reach and attain the void, and can spend lifetimes lost in it, but realization of the SELF still eludes them. This is because of their failure to recognize the substratum upon which the void is superimposed.

Knowing the void and being established in it is no small attainment, but the real challenge is ahead — knowing that state from which the void arises.

So how can a Yogi recognize the source?

Through effort and various pranayamas, it is possible to attain the void, but the state beyond it cannot be attained through will or effort. Wisdom alone is also not enough. It needs a ‘devotee’ to realize the “Reality”. Only love in one’s heart, coupled with joyful surrender to the Divine, will help.

Wisdom provides direction, but Love provides the much needed passion, intensity and drive for one’s beingness to make this vital breakthrough into the domain of the unknown — which sends blissful and torrential waves of joy to every part of the body-mind instrument. Every cell explodes with tremendous joy as latent energies are released and deeper levels of ecstasies are reached.

Only a loving heart can be graced with such a blessing. Joy falls on itself and the mysterious beloved is revealed as the SELF. The joy then flows uninterrupted from one's heart towards one and all. Everything becomes joy. Until this state of continuous and uninterrupted bliss is realized, the vasanas persist.

Verse 15

*Nastha maanasotkrishhta yoginab
Kriyam asthi kim svasthithim yathab*

What action remains for an exalted Yogi whose mind has been completely destroyed and who is ever established in the SELF?

Man works and performs duties in order to obtain objects and fulfill his aspirations so that he will become happy. But if he realizes that he has already attained deep joy and happiness, what will be left for him to seek anywhere?

Nothing will drive or tempt such a Yogi to do any work in that exalted state. Nothing at all will lure or interest him any more. Words fail to describe such a state. It is experiential.

Of course, for all practical purposes, the Yogi may still appear to be working and involved, as viewed from outside, but his actions do not bind him as they are bereft of any sense of desire or possession. For such a Yogi, bliss alone decides what needs to be carried out in the outside world while he remains forever immersed in the ocean of great joy.

Jnana Yoga: The Path of Knowledge

Verses 16 to 30

We now come to the final and the most important section wherein is expounded the path of Self-Inquiry — viz. Jnana Yoga. Many believe that this path is for those who have a more intellectual frame of mind. Such a misconception probably arose because Sri Ramana always urged seekers to ask themselves the question “Who am I?” or “To whom do these thoughts or objects occur?”

To many, this appears like an intellectual question-answer session wherein a seeker poses this question to himself and awaits an answer from within. This cannot be the correct practice because no matter what answer arises from within, it is all at the level of the mind and hence false.

When the question “Who am I” is posed in the right spirit, as advocated by Sri Ramana, no answers are sought and all that arises is a subjective feeling of awareness upon asking this question.

At the beginning of the practice, it is felt as a stillness or silence which is intuited as the background substratum on which thoughts, emotions, images etc. are superimposed. On continuous and relentless inquiry, the questioning, which begins as a waking-state practice, goes beyond the waking-state and slips effortlessly into dream, deep sleep and turiya states wherein the subjective awareness and feeling changes, becoming more and more subtle, according to the level of consciousness attained through deep inquiry.

Sri Ramana maintained that Self-Inquiry was only for a few mature or evolved souls who have prepared themselves by practicing other paths for

many years, or even incarnations, and are then finally ready to embrace the challenging path of Inquiry.

Many ardent aspirants who spend years in Bhakti and Raja Yoga increasingly find themselves experiencing an intense pull towards Self-Inquiry due to the development of the discriminatory faculty within them. They sense, over a period of time, that the practice they are indulging in regularly, and with intensity, still involves objects outside of themselves, while something within them begins to crave for an apprehension of Self (subject).

All forms of worship, or practice of techniques, begin to fade away. Practice of repetition of mantras, performing breath pranayamas, etc. start to become very exhausting and laborious exercises while, simultaneously, the thirst to dive deeper intensifies. They subconsciously feel that they need to move more inwards towards the background substratum (Self). This very shift is indicated at the the beginning of the section Jnana Yoga, in the very first verse.

Verse 16

*Drishya vaaritham chittam atmanah
Chittva darshanam Tattva darshanam*

*When attention is withdrawn from objects and focused exclusively on the Self,
Truth is revealed.*

This verse lays down the very basic premise of Jnana Yoga. Withdrawing or shifting one's *attention* away from all distracting outward objects and fixing attention exclusively on the subject 'I', sums up the entire practice of Self-Inquiry.

The world around us is a ceaseless interplay between subject and object(s). The subject is 'I' or 'me' which sees or perceives the object(s) [he/it or them].

How we perceive the world is based on the relationship the subject has with the various objects it interacts with. When things or conditions around us (objects) appear to be in our favor then we (subject) begin to feel happy and vice versa. The subject is therefore *conditioned* by the objects.

The Jnanis and sages, however, warn us that objects are known deserters and deceive us; the happiness we derive from them is temporary and fleeting. These objects *appear* to exist, but are not at all real, much like a mirage in a desert. The promises made by the objects are all false. Sages therefore advise us to pay attention to the subject (the seer) rather than the objects (the seen).

When we pay exclusive attention to the subject, a feeling/sensing arises in the background of space or stillness. Then all objects (thoughts/emotions/

stories) are perceived to fall and rise upon that 'space-like' awareness. This is the initial and vital breakthrough in one's practice. As the practice deepens further and further, this 'space-like' awareness, which is felt as stillness or peace at the outset, eventually transforms into uninterrupted joy and bliss (SATCHITANANDA). That bliss is our real nature.

Verse 17

*Maanasam tu kim maargane krithe
Naiva maanasam marge arjavaath*

*When one inquires “What is the mind?”, he finds out that there is no mind.
This is the direct path to reality.*

What makes Self-Inquiry a very direct approach is that it questions the reality of what appears, discards it when it is found to be unreal, and instead latches on to what is real.

Most spiritual practices use the mind in order to gain intellectual knowledge of scripture, use images of deities for devotional purposes, chant verses and mantras, or even apply energy and attention to stop or simply eliminate the mind. But how can you trust the mind — something which is itself unreal — to find the real?

How can you destroy something which doesn't exist in the first place? The objects appear due to the mind, thoughts appear due to the mind, your emotions appear due to the mind, and so do all forms of spiritual practices. In fact the whole world appears due to the mind.

Where does the world go in one's sleep? It disappears and so it can't be real — but so does the faculty called mind. It too disappears during deep sleep. How can that be real then?

So the Jnani urges the aspirant to get to know this fact and dive deep into THAT space where the mind dissolves. *Abide by THAT which swallows the mind and make your effort worthwhile instead of focusing on the mind*, says the Jnani.

Verse 18

*Vritthayasthvaham vrittim aasrithaah
Vrittayo manah viddhyaham manah*

Mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts. These thoughts depend upon the I-thought alone. Hence the mind is nothing but this I-thought.

What is the mind except a continuous flow of thoughts, emotions and images? Other than that, there is no mind. Look carefully inside and try to find the mind or thoughts and you simply won't find them. Without thought there is no mind, and without mind there is no thought because, after all, they are one.

Yet, there is something called the 'I'. This 'I' is the feeling of existence, independent of mind or thoughts.

You know that you exist as a witnesser of the mind and the mind-generated thoughts and emotions. The feeling of that witnesser is a simple and basic existence — the 'I-ness'. Without the presence of this I-ness, no mind or thoughts can arise and therefore this I-ness is primary to everything.

This I-ness is the source of the mind. It is easy to know this simple fact. Every night we withdraw from the outer world into ourselves and fall into deep sleep, wherein there is no mind or thoughts. Yet on waking up, 'someone' tells us that we slept well or not. That 'someone' is awareness, our I-ness.

This knowledge is given to us by this I-ness. This I-ness cannot stay alone for long and seeks to attach itself to some form or the other, through *identification*. Therefore, as soon as one wakes up, this I-ness is quick to

leap up and identify with our body, creating the illusion or false sense that 'I am the body/mind', unless it has been permanently arrested in the spiritual heart through Self-Inquiry.

The I-ness that is ready to rush outwards feeding the body/mind awareness on waking up is called the 'I-thought'; while the I-ness that is stilled within, with its movements arrested at the spiritual heart is called 'I AMness' or pure beingness.

One can thus see that the I-thought is the mind itself.

Verse 19

*Abam ayam kuto bhavathi chinvatha
Ayi patathyaham nija vicharanam*

*Ask the question: “From where does this I-thought arise?”
On inquiring deeply, the I-thought will vanish. This is Self-Inquiry.*

This is a VERY important verse as it clearly states that for an aspirant to be practicing correct Self-Inquiry, he must follow the inquiry beyond the waking-state into dream, deep sleep and turiya.

Most contemporary teachers offer little by way of practice and advocate only a waking-state feeling of stillness, which is nothing but a pleasant bodily sensation (pertaining to the outer physical sheath or Annamaya kosha). This is just a temporary resting place which the ego actually uses for its perpetuation by disguising it as a ‘spiritual’ state. It is perfect for the ego to thrive and exist there by such manipulation. The seeker thus remains in a trance due to the false comfort this state offers.

A true Guru is quick to warn his student against getting intoxicated by this waking-state “stillness”—“hereness”—“nowness” and instead prods the aspirant to delve deeper in order to find the source or origin from where the I-thought arises in the first place.

As explained in the earlier verse, the I-thought only arises in the waking-state, while I-ness is beyond the waking-state; so one has to consciously know the state beyond the waking-state. Paradoxical as it may seem to the logical mind, one has to be awake while in sleep and only then can one realize how the I-thought dissolves.

Verse 20

*Abami naasha bhaajyaham abam taya
Sphurathi Hrut Svayam parama poorna sat*

When the I-thought or Ego is destroyed, the real I springs forth on its own in the spiritual heart and shines as I-I, in all its fulness.

When the I-thought dissolves and sinks into the spiritual heart — and that pure state is realized — the illusion of outer objects is seen through and Truth shines forth.

Every cell of one's body, one's existence and the entirety of the universe explodes, or rather, implodes, with ever new joy and bliss. The joy is uninterrupted and continuous, unlike the bliss experienced by a Yogi that arises only on sitting for meditation, or the joy of a devotee on seeing his beloved deity or Guru.

This joy is unconditional, uninterrupted and immutable. The I-I is not a mantra or a word which is heard within, or which needs to be chanted. Rather, it is symbolic of the changeless nature of our being which is limitless, ever new, and in continuous joy. This cannot be grasped through words in any way. It can only be intuited or realized.

Verse 21

*Idam Aham pada abhikyamanvaham
Ahami leenakepyalaya Sattayaa*

*And this unbroken continuous I-I is the real I, as the I-thought (egoic I)
disappears and dissolves in deep sleep.*

This verse highlights the basic ignorance of associating oneself with the I-thought (egoic I) rather than the real 'I'.

The I-thought is always associating with names and forms, but none of these are real and, in fact, often become the cause of one's suffering.

The I-thought itself is unreal as it dissolves in deep sleep into the spiritual heart. We are unfortunately oblivious of this truth. Our consciousness is not able to witness this as we are constantly in a trance, being stimulated by the objects and the senses that draw us toward them.

The ecstatic pulsations of the real 'I-I' that throbs at the center of our being is unfortunately ignored even though it is the ONLY reality that exists in all the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep respectively. This reality is further elucidated in the next verse.

Verse 22

*Vigrahendriya praana dheetamah
Naham eka sat tad jadam hi asat*

This real I-I is the only Truth or Reality. Neither the body, nor the senses, nor the vital air (prana), nor breath, nor intellect, nor ignorance may be considered real as they are all gross, inert, insentient and illusory.

The real 'I' is the only reality, but one fails to apprehend the real 'I' because it presents itself as a mixed awareness and is therefore not easily noticed or grasped.

The real 'I' remains hidden under the veil of mixed awareness. This mixed awareness is our existence as gross body (waking-state), subtle body (dream state) and causal body (ignorance/nothingness/void state). These states are referred to as the five Koshas [Sheaths] in the Yoga system.

The gross body (waking-state) constitutes the Annamaya (physical) Kosha, the subtle body (dream body) constitutes the Pranamaya (breath), the Manomaya (mind) and the Vijnanmaya (super mind) Koshas, while the causal body (the void) constitutes the Anandamaya (joy) Kosha. These koshas are false/illusory coverings or wrappings that obscure the real vision of the SELF.

The relative reality of our existence is never constant and undergoes a change of form in each of these three states, whereas the primary principle, the real 'I' always remains unchanged. However, due to our ignorance, we are unaware of the real 'I'. Through diligent practice of the Self-Inquiry technique given by one's Advaita Guru, step by step, the real 'I' is teased out of such mixed awareness (wrapped in the five Koshas). Through deep

meditation, the body awareness falls away, the movement of the life force (prana) is arrested, and the breath stilled; then the senses fade away and finally, the aspirant reaches a state of void which also dissolves and sinks into the substratum (real 'I').

The Implosive Self-Inquiry Protocol (ISIP), which evolved through Sri Ramana's Grace, operates effectively by breaking the knots at the throat, navel and third eye (Nadi knot). In this approach, after stabilizing the throat and navel, the attention is first brought to the 'third eye' and the life force is directed upwards towards the sahasrara (the crown of the head). This helps in arresting the incessant flow of thought and also pulls the life-force away from the sense organs. This, in turn, brings about what appears to be a complete collapse of the body-mind mechanism, *laya* (Samadhi or total equanimity) is attained and the Nadi knot at the third eye is severed. This is the first phase of the ISIP.

With no distracting pull from the body/mind, consciousness is then redirected downwards, or sent spiraling backwards (through an extension of Shushumna), into the 'heart' through an intuitive perception of surrender. This results in the untying of the Heart knot, whereby even the first principle 'I' folds into the timeless. The sadhaka/aspirant then enjoys uninterrupted periods of peace and bliss. This constitutes the second phase of the ISIP but it cannot be accomplished consciously as it requires Grace, which may descend on oneself if one can function in a spirit of total surrender and the absence of doership.

Quoted below are a few sentences from *NĀYANA*, the biography of Sri Ganapati Muni, the chief disciple of Sri Ramana. This biography, by Gunturu Laksmikantam, was originally in Telugu and has been adapted into English by Dr. G. Krishna. Therein, the biographer, using symbols from Hindu iconography, specifically talks about the close relationship between the third eye and the Amrit Nadi:

“In the case of those who had achieved the power of inner vision, this energy like the vajra (weapon of Indra) rends the Rudragranthi (the nerve-knot behind the centre of the eyebrows) leading the aspirant to the heart centre through the Amruta Nadi. This Amrutha Naadi which leads to self-realisation, is represented by the single faced Kumaraswamy (Eka Mukha Kumaraswamy). This achievement was called the Amrita (the deathless) Siddhi. The first part of the achievement, leading to demolition of Rudra Granthi, was described as grace of God Ganapati, the elder brother, and his trunk was the Vajra Ayudha (weapon) or the spine (Sushumna Naadi) the vehicle of Kundalini Sakthi. The second part of the achievement which settles the aspirant in the SELF is described as the grace of Kumaraswamy the younger brother and his Shakthi weapon was represented by the Amruta Naadi.” (Excerpts from pages 104 and 105 of NĀYANA - Kavyakantha Vasistha Ganapati Muni - a biography)

A Vajra is a weapon, and here it refers to the weapon of Lord Indra, which stands for the collective life force that feeds our Indriyas (the ten senses). With the pulling of the life force upwards, through concentration on the third eye, a slight thrust or jerk is applied at the 3rd eye to sever the Rudra Granthi. Once the Rudra Granthi is severed through such concentrated awareness, energy moves effortlessly to the heart through the Amrita Nadi.

Lord Ganesha/Ganapati is placed at the mooladhar chakra (base of spine) and it is from there that the Shushumna nadi (middle channel) originates. The trunk of Lord Ganapati is long and is symbolic of the Shushumna nadi which is along one's spine. Kumaraswamy is referred to as the younger brother of Ganesha, thereby symbolizing the close connection that the Amrita Nadi has to Shushumna Nadi. The Amrita Nadi is actually an extension of the Shushumna which leads the aspirant to his ultimate goal -- the spiritual heart.

Kumaraswamy, in Hindu iconography, is shown to be mounted on a peacock, the proud bird, which again symbolizes the taming/conquest/destruction of one's ego.

Indian scriptures are rich in deep spiritual truths, but these are conveyed in symbolic form. These scriptures and symbols can be understood, truly, only in the presence of — and under the guidance of — a Self-Realized Jnani.

Verse 23

*Satva bhaasikaa chit kvavetharaa
Sattayaa hi chit chittayaa hi aham*

*Is there any other thing apart from Consciousness that illumines existence?
Indeed, existence itself is Consciousness and Consciousness is 'I AM'.*

There are two forms of existence. One is what is commonly known and experienced as individual consciousness (Jiva), while the other is Unity consciousness (Ishwara).

The part of individual consciousness that predominates our sense of 'reality', and keeps us hooked on a false trance-like state, is Human consciousness.

Human consciousness, however, is a fragmented form of existence. We are divided on the basis of religion, caste, gender, social class, nationality, the roles we play, and many other factors. These divisions often create conflicts resulting from our rigid association with a particular identity.

Great wars have been waged throughout world history on the basis of religion, class, etc. This has led to untold violence, bloodshed, destruction and misery — all because we are habituated to living a fragmented life and haven't looked deeper (in totality) as to whether there could be some form of unifying consciousness that holds together and binds all our identities.

The world, the objects and all our identities actually have no existence apart from deep consciousness. Can they exist on their own unless a deep consciousness lies underneath them? Every night, when we go into deep sleep, our identities disappear altogether and they return, as does the world, only when we wake up. This world that we worship so much, this

body that we care so much for, the family that we nurture and love so much — ALL of these cease to exist every single night!

As far as we are concerned, the existence of ALL of them is dependent on one factor alone — that we will wake up the next day, fully conscious. If we don't wake up one day, but die in our sleep, none of these will exist for us. Well, one may argue that they may still exist when one is no more, but if one is dead, one won't be able to pose that question. How, then, would it matter anymore?

Unity consciousness is THAT substratum on which individual consciousness appears and disappears, rises and falls. Unity consciousness knows no caste, religion, gender, class, nationality, etc. It only knows itself as pure existence, devoid of any quality or attribute, except eternal peace and bliss.

Unity consciousness is the big, blank screen (or backdrop), on which images comprising various human forms of existence and dreams — and also the sensation/thought/image-free state of nothingness as in deep sleep — appear and disappear. Images are all illusory sensations, concepts or emotions *while the screen alone is real*.

One must, therefore, identify with the bigger screen rather than the fleeting images that appear on it which constantly undergo change. After all, the screen remains eternally. This big screen in the background is, in fact, the I AM itself.

It must be emphasized here that we are not to deny our humanness — our human existence with all its sensations, emotions, relationships and existence. We can be actively playing various human roles at the outer level, but it is important for us to inwardly remain detached and untouched. The human roles we need to play outwardly should be in

adherence to Dharmic (i.e., basic, universal, life-enhancing, moral) principles of non-violence in thought, speech and action.

Violation of Dharmic principles will never reveal the I AMness and may at best provide only a glimpse of pure beingness (I AM) rather than stability and sustained peace and bliss.

Verse 24

*Isha Jeevayoh Vesha Dhee bhidaah
Sat Svabhaavatah Vasthu Kevalam*

Between the Jiva (the Individual) and Ishwara (Unity), there is a difference only with respect to the body and the intellect (gross and subtle bodies), but from the standpoint of True Nature, the Absolute Reality alone is.

The seeming dichotomy between the Individual (Jiva) and Unity (Ishwara) established in the previous verse is shown to be invalid in this verse; for in the absolute sense both are the same — as their common essence is the same.

The beauty of the Advaita teaching is that it doesn't require anyone to suppress or deny anything, be it one's gross body, emotions, intellect, even thoughts and stories; instead it advises one to accept everything that arises in the moment, embrace it totally and then observe it attentively and aloofly, without forming a judgement or opinion about anything.

Many seekers brush aside their human existence as trivial and begin to 'look' for the 'Divine Soul' within, thereby creating false images in their minds about themselves. All images are false as they are projections of one's own mind. Therefore, to arrive at the truth, Advaita practice advocates keen observation of what is taking place within and outside oneself as an impersonal witness. But such keen witnessing will not be possible if there is already a bias or judgement. Therefore, ALL must be accepted, whether it is an emotion or a thought, whether it seems pleasant or unpleasant, desirable or undesirable, 'good' or 'bad' — whatsoever it appears to be — and then such a thought/emotion must be observed very keenly and objectively.

Thus, for example, if you suffer from a foul temper, Self-Inquiry practice requires that you first *accept* that there arises within you such anger and then watch it as a witness without getting involved with the ‘stories’ that usually trigger such anger. After sustained practice, one’s attention naturally and effortlessly falls backwards to the still Subject ‘I’. This way, every emotion or story can actually lead one to the subject and every moment of one’s life can be a moment of Self-Inquiry practice.

Another important feature that specifically needs to be stressed here is that *acceptance* of one’s negative tendencies *does not mean indulging them*. It is NOT a validation of these tendencies or in any way a sanction to nurture or feed them. Allowing one to accept one’s emotions or habits is merely to admit to oneself that they are there, without resisting them or escaping into some other thought/activity in order not to face them. *There is a huge difference between accepting/understanding these unwelcome tendencies with a view to overcoming them* on the one hand, and on the other indulging in them, validating them, thereby giving them energy to persist. While the former (i.e., acceptance) will eventually help one overcome unwanted tendencies and arrive at the background subject, the latter (i.e., indulgence/validation) will only strengthen and perpetuate these deep-rooted tendencies which bind one to the ‘I am body-mind’ awareness.

The correct view therefore is to accept them, observe them, and allow them to manifest as they arise and fall naturally (without suppression or resistance) so that they can be fully understood and attention can then be re-directed and focused on the Subject ‘I’ or the experiencer. Acceptance brings up what is hidden deep within oneself. Unless one accepts it and allows it to rise and manifest fully, how can it be seen through and overcome/transcended?

When one sees through one's bodily sensations, thoughts, emotions, tendencies, etc., one is not affected by them and allows them to arise and manifest, knowing full well that one's background state of absolute bliss, upon which they rise and fall, is undisturbed by their presence or absence, being totally tranquil.

One's humanness is part of the Divine and is, indeed, the Divine itself, much as the waves of an ocean, appearing to rise and fall on the surface and the calm depth of the ocean are basically one and the same, both being constituted by WATER. It is only at a superficial level that they appear to be separate and are felt as different from each other. The ocean need not, and does not, get rid of the waves as they are very much a part of it. After all, the ocean depth is calm and unaffected in all circumstances. The ocean just *knows* that it is not bound by the limitations of the surface waves.

Verse 25

*Vesha haanatah svaatma darshanam
Isha Darshanam Svaatmaroopatah*

When the various conditionings of body-mind and identifications with name and form are shed, the SELF is realized. The vision of the Lord as Self is true Self-Realization.

The 'I am the body' idea cannot thrive without the support of various concepts and conditionings that have been harbored and nurtured over many incarnations. Such conditionings become hardened tendencies and habits which get stored in our causal body (plane of ignorance) and perpetually compel us to act in set patterns that replicate themselves automatically. It is these cumulative patterns that reinforce the 'I am the body' idea.

With guidance from one's Guru, and the sustained practice of systematic modes of Self-Inquiry, such as the Implosive Self-Inquiry Protocol (ISIP), these ego-patterns are reversed, sent back to the source I AM, and then held there permanently. God is then realized as the ever-joyous, ever-free and ever-blissful SELF.

The habit-ridden tendencies of the ego may still seem to arise in a God-realized Jnani, but they will be ineffectual in that they will leave no imprints within him to compel him to act according to ego-patterns, much like a burnt rope which still appears to be a rope but has lost its strength to tie someone/something up.

Verse 26

Atma Samsthithih Svaatma Darshanam
Atma nirdvayaat Aatmanisthathaa

Since the Self is non-dual, establishing oneself in the Self alone is the vision of the Self, and that alone is abidance in the Self.

So far, the Self-Inquiry practice has been described as follows:

- 1) Acceptance of 'what is'.
- 2) Impersonal witnessing of all without judging or giving opinion.
- 3) Attending to the background subject 'I' on which everything arises and falls.
- 4) Practicing the Implosive Self-Inquiry Protocol (ISIP) sitting meditation to raise consciousness to higher spiritual centers.
- 5) To direct and sustain such heightened attention to the background Subject 'I' for an increasingly longer duration of time.

The goal of Self-Inquiry, however, is reached only when there is neither the witnesser, nor the witnessed, nor witnessing. No observer, no observed and no observation.

When the relationship between subject-object no longer exists, and there is no state that is arrived at or known, then this non-dual Self or stateless state is realized. It is then known that there are no bodies, no pranas, no mind, no koshas, no vasanas, no birth or death; those were all figments of our imagination in an illusory dream-world. Then, abidance in this

stateless state or non-dual Self becomes the natural state of a Jnani. Indeed, abiding in that state then becomes as effortless as breathing.

Verse 27

*Jnaana varjita ajnaana heena chit
Jnaanam asthi kim jnaatum antharam*

Consciousness transcends all dualities and is devoid of the thought of knowledge, as well as the thought of ignorance. Is there any knowledge other than Self Awareness itself, to know the Self?

All knowledge of the outer world stems from a relationship between the Subject and the Object. This knowledge is ‘object(ive) knowledge — knowledge about various external objects and the corresponding impact they have on the Subject ‘I’.

No ‘object(ive)’ knowledge is complete or perfect because all objects depend on the Subject ‘I’, or consciousness, for their very existence and hence are all relative. Vedanta asserts that whatever is relative cannot be real because it depends on something else (a substratum) for its existence. The objects are therefore inert and non-existent in themselves.

The Self on the other hand is self-luminous. It requires nothing else to illumine it. The Sun, which makes objects visible to the eyes of all beings, is self-luminous. It does not depend on an electric bulb, or a candle, to be known or seen. The waves can never measure the ocean, as the vastness of the ocean will consume the waves the moment they rise upon its surface. Similarly the mind or intellect, which are limited instruments used to perceive the world and have ‘objective’ knowledge of it, can never be used to know the limitless Self.

It must be stressed, however, that though the Self cannot be known through the mind/intellect, it is not a form/state of ignorance, as in the

case of sleep, wherein the awareness of the Self slips into unawareness. There is a definite 'SELF-knowing'/'SELF-knowledge', but it is NOT an 'objective' knowing.

Eyes cannot see themselves, yet they do exist. There is *awareness* that eyes exist, irrespective of whether the instrument of sight is used to know this fact. Similarly, awareness of the Self is known only by going beyond the five senses (which are used to attain 'objective knowledge' of the world) and the mind/intellect which interprets the sensory data sent in by the five senses. The next verse (Verse 28) attempts to capture in words the very nature and qualities/features of such 'SELF-awareness'.

Verse 28

*Kim svaroopam ithi Atma darshane
Avaya abhava aapurna chit sukham*

What is the nature of Me — the Self? Thus inquiring one realizes the Self as Indestructible, Unborn, Perfect and of the nature of Consciousness and Bliss.

This verse clearly lays down the nature of the Self as uninterrupted and unchanging bliss and joy. This verse also brings out the difference between mere spiritual awakening, and true Self-Realization.

Awakening merely points to what you are *not* (not the body, mind, intellect, life force, void); but true Self-Realization brings out what you actually *are* — unending bliss.

Most contemporary non-dual/Advaita teachers or Gurus may be awakened to what they are not (not the body, mind, intellect, prana, void, etc.), or may be able to point their students to what is 'here' and 'now', but they are clueless as to what the Self is because their apparent vasanas do not let them stabilize at the spiritual heart for long. The 'here' and 'now', or 'what is', is often just a background bodily sensation of stillness or peace, which a simple recognition of the present moment may bring about, but that is not Self-Realization.

At best, they have glimpses of joy and bliss but these quickly leave them, as they still have unfulfilled vasanas (tendencies) which prevent the bliss from being permanent. A Self-Realized Jnani knows himself as SATCHITANANDA all the time.

One must go beyond the five senses and uproot the vasanas from their origin, for then alone can the mind find itself resting in the spiritual heart; then, the realization of the *timeless* that continuously emanates from the spiritual heart dawns.

Verse 29

*Bandha Muktyatheetham param sukham
Vindhathi iba jeevah thu daivikah*

*The individual who has realized the Divine State (his own real nature) gains
supreme happiness and bliss beyond bondage and freedom,
here, in this world itself.*

Every individual in this world wants to be happy, and to be so he realizes that he needs to be in a state which can make him feel liberated and free. By accumulating wealth, property and power, he may, temporarily, experience the freedom and happiness he seeks inwardly. However, as mentioned several times earlier, objects are known deceivers. The promises they make are all honey traps and soon the individual finds that he is increasingly becoming a prisoner of his own needs and wants, rather than actually feeling free. This is because of the *vasanas* (tendencies) that leave imprints as ego-patterns and force an individual to act contrary to *dharmic* [i.e., moral, life-enhancing] principles which are liberating.

Once an individual becomes aware of this, he is disenchanted with the world, turns away from material objects, which are the cause of bondage, and dives within in search of real freedom. However, no matter how deep he dives in meditation, he still feels that his freedom is not complete.

Merely withdrawing from objects that bind is not enough because one's inherent attachments and self-centered tendencies or *vasanas* still remain and stand in the way of complete freedom. The tendencies or *vasanas* themselves are projected on to the objects and hence the remedy does not lie in renouncing objects but in addressing the root cause — viz. the *vasanas* which need to be uprooted from their origin.

Even those who have long hours of sitting meditation, controlling breath and mind, find that they only manage to suppress the *vasanas* for some time (*laya*) but sooner or later, falls prey to them again. Thus, it is important to stress that the solution does not lie in either non-possession of material objects or in suppression.

A radical method (like ISIP) involves addressing the hidden *vasanas*, while being in constant interaction with the world, its objects and people. Through the application of this protocol, the tendencies (*vasanas*) which are stored in the causal body are addressed naturally, even in the waking state, and not through manipulation/escape, using visualization, mind-control and breathing techniques. Through a combination of waking and sitting meditation in a specific way, as given by one's Guru, the *vasanas* stored up in the causal body begin to stir up and surface with full ferocity.

This may be a very unpleasant, even unbearable state. By watching this process impersonally, accepting and embracing one's feelings without trying to fix them or getting rid of them, a dense form of energy is initially felt within the body (usually at the solar or heart plexus). This dense form of energy slowly begins to loosen up, causing intense burning (*tapas* or purification) and turmoil, often for days. If one has the detachment and courage to stay with the burning, it eventually melts into the background or substratum, causing the *vasanas* to dissolve and merge with the source wherefrom they emerged originally.

When that happens, a *Jnani* realizes that trying to 'fix' a *vasana* or getting rid of it (i.e., struggling to be free), is itself a *vasana*. At that stage, both the idea of being free and that of being in bondage are known to be unreal. You are beyond the need to be free because you realize that you were never in bondage in the first place.

The individual imagines/dreams of being in bondage and wanting to be free. It is all part of a dream much like the way one takes the dream of falling off a cliff for real, only to realize on waking up that it was just a dream.

The falling off the cliff, and the measure one took to prevent oneself from falling off, were all part of a dream and unreal. All it took to realize this fact was waking up from the dream. But it is obvious that you cannot awaken by merely reading these words or understanding their meaning through the instrument of the mind. This is because the instrument (the mind) itself is a part of the dream.

One has to find a way to locate/arrive at an awareness that is independent of the mind, as well as the five senses, in order to realize this Truth.

Verse 30

*Aham apethakam nija vibhaanakam
Mahad idam tapo ramana Vaageyam*

Self-Inquiry, devoid of ego, is a great penance.
Realize this truth articulated by Sri Ramana.*

In this final verse, Sri Ramana assures the seeker of the value of devoting his time, energies and attention to the practice of Self-Inquiry (*Atma Vichara*), sincerely and with honesty.

When practiced with total dedication, humility, inner silence and surrender, Self-Inquiry proves to be the fastest and most direct method of purification (*tapas*) as it takes you to the very source from which ignorance/the ego is born.

May all earnest aspirants have the staying power and Grace to return to the eternal Source and realize their freedom!

* The Sanskrit word “tapas” is usually referred to as “penance”. “Penance” doesn’t have a negative connotation in Vedanta translation — it is a quite positive quality. It is a qualification needed to study Vedanta to burn past karmas (prayashchit). The literal translation of “tapas” means ‘to burn’ and the discomfort that arises from this is often referred to as “penance”. In some spiritual texts “penance” is used to denote inner purification and discipline.

“Tapas” is a term with absolutely positive connotations that is rather difficult to translate, but perhaps may best be denoted metaphorically by the English term “smelting” which refers to the process used for obtaining pure metal [such as gold or iron] by burning ore and getting rid of all the dross/impurities.

It is important to stress here that “tapas” is a wholesome, positive process of self-purification, far removed from any perverse, life-denying self-mortification/self-flagellation. It is a case of being ‘cruel to be kind’, like undergoing a surgery/surgical procedure, wherein both patient and doctor are objective and courageous, with full faith in the life-enhancing procedure.