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Our Success is Guaranteed! Or is it? The Wisdom of Action from *All Is One (Ellam Ondre)*

It is a well-known maxim that in order to achieve our worldly ends and to attain our desired goals in life our self-effort is indispensable. With adequate self-effort, also referred to as willpower, obstacles standing in the way of our realizing the fruit of our efforts can be overcome and our success in obtaining our desired end is guaranteed. Yes, it is said that our success is guaranteed when we utilize the magical ingredient of adequate and intense willpower. But is it really so?

Let us look at an example of willpower and the related success of our actions. In the office, imagine that you are regarded as a highly efficient worker. Your reports are submitted on time, your attendance record is unblemished and any request from higher management is acted upon in a timely manner. You and your colleague (whose work habits may not be as fastidious as yours) are both in line for a promotion and you are looking forward to gaining the prestige that accompanies this. Cognizant of the fact that you have applied yourself assiduously to obtain this goal by working late, coming in early, working weekends, sacrificing personal and family time, etc. it is abundantly clear that there is only one logical candidate to choose for this coveted promotion. And that is you, willpower personified.

On the day of the promotion being announced to all, attired in your best suit and having prepared an acceptance speech, you sit ready. With fanfare, the winning candidate's name is presented. And surprisingly, it is not your moniker that resounds over the loudspeaker, but that of your colleague! "What? How can that be? I have applied myself intensely, but to no avail!" you say to yourself. You and your colleague's intention to obtain a promotion was the

same. But the outcome of your intention was not the same. Why is it that the outcome of your concentrated efforts was not as you desired? The reason is this: it is because the results, the fruits of your efforts, are not in your hands. They have been decided by a higher power: upper management!

So also say the sages: the fruits of your efforts are not in your hands. The dispenser of all results is the Lord himself. Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि॥2.47॥

karmaṇyēvādhikāraṣṭe mā phalēṣu kadācana |
mā karmaphalahēturbhūrmā tē saṅgō'stvakarmani ||

Thy right is to work only, but never to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be thy motive, nor let thy attachment be to inaction. 2.47

Sri Ramana Maharshi exemplified freedom from attachment to the results of action in his daily life. It may be recalled that he once spent hours cleaning and polishing a walking stick, and when a visitor stated that he had lost his stick, Bhagavan handed it

graciously to him. Here is the story as told in *Talks*.

“Mr. Rangachari, a Telugu Pandit in Voorhees’ College at Vellore, asked about nishkama karma. There was no reply. After a time Sri Bhagavan went up the hill and a few followed him, including the pandit. There was a thorny stick lying on the way which Sri Bhagavan picked up; he sat down and began leisurely to work at it. The thorns were cut off, the knots were made smooth, the whole stick was polished with a rough leaf. The whole operation took about six hours. Everyone was wondering at the fine appearance of the stick made of a spiky material. A shepherd boy put in his appearance on the way as the group moved off. He had lost his stick and was at a loss. Sri Bhagavan immediately gave the new one in his hand to the boy and passed on.

The pandit said that this was the matter-of-fact answer to his question.” – Talk 118

To show that all actions and their results are governed by a higher power, let us look at a text that Sri Bhagavan recommended to many devotees: *All Is One (Ellam Ondre)*. (This text in its entirety was presented in consecutive issues of this Newsletter in 1998.) The following is an excerpt from Chapter 5 of this small book, entitled “Action”:

“All are doing their respective work. So what has God to do with it? We will first consider the sentient beings and, later on, the insentient objects. We are sentient beings. Let us first see whose actions are ours. We all desire a higher state and work for it. But our achievements are not uniform. Sometimes the goal is the same and so is the work, but why is there a difference in the results? Here God makes us understand that the action is His. Otherwise all must be alike. The difference in the conditions cannot be accounted for. Can there be anyone who does not wish to improve his position? Whatever their intention towards others, their intention towards themselves is surely honest. The conditions of people of the same intention are yet different. This is because all actions are of God.

If it is said that notwithstanding the same intention, the effort can vary according to individual capacity, the question arises: What is the source of this capacity? It is of the body and mind. The environment may also affect it. One must take account of all the

factors before one makes an effort. However, these factors are not under one's control so that the effort may not be equal to the task. Therefore all actions are God's.

Again, if it is said that the body, the mind and the environment will gradually be made equal to the task, it implies a present incapacity. This is to admit that all actions are God's.

Now, is it for good or bad that people do not gain their objectives? It is certainly good. Why? Most of them are selfish. Judge for yourself if their success is for the good of the world or otherwise. You may ask: Should not the attempts of the unselfish be entirely successful? Though to all appearances they may look unselfish, yet they are not free from blemishes. These depend on the ego. If the imagined unselfishness has given rise to a sense of superiority over others, God frustrates their purpose and teaches them that “You are also like others and I govern you.” On the other hand, free from selfishness and free from ego is the representative of God, within whom the cloud of ego that conceals God does not exist and from whom God is ever shining forth. To such a one of true purpose (Sattva Sankalpa) all his intentions come out true. God shines forth directly in him. There is no darkness in him. Only he knows the Divine purpose as it is. Through him God fulfills the purpose of His creation. All actions are God's.

Whatever takes place, it is in the natural order of things. Also, it is right. Everything happens by His will alone. In truth, it is not wrong to think “He makes the thief steal.” Why? Because at the time of punishment He also makes the thief suffer for the robbery. Thus, there should be no ill will directed towards the thief. Such is the fruit of the knowledge that all actions are God's. Although there is no ill-will towards the thief, there is a dislike of theft. This is also the result of our knowledge that all actions are God's. How is this? Because the thief himself dislikes theft: Would he keep quiet if his own belongings were stolen by another? He would not. Who can be unaware that good is right and evil is wrong? Therefore the knowledge that all actions are God's will bring into the world an era of orderly conduct. Our knowledge does not extend further. We can repeat only what we know. We need not worry about

what lies beyond our knowledge. This too is God's will.

One of the fruits of knowledge granted to us by God is the knowledge that all actions are God's. We are powerless to ask God, "Why do you act thus?" Because the fruits of our actions are not always according to our desire, all religions admit similar states of our powerlessness. In other words, because our powers are limited, we cannot but say that all actions are God's. The law that applies to us, applies to insentient objects also. Our law is no better than theirs. All is one. Even though some do not admit that all actions are God's, yet they admit their own incapacity. This itself is the act of God."

This small text highlights in a simple and direct manner that the fruits of our actions are independent of us and are decided on and distributed by the Lord himself.

Let us see what Sri Bhagavan tells us of that sometimes-elusive willpower. Will we be ensured of success when we have sufficient willpower? Our plight may be similar to the devotee who asked Sri Bhagavan about the subject:

"A young man asked: I try to cultivate willpower but do not succeed. How should I do it?"

M.: (No answer)

D.: I came here three years ago and Sri Bhagavan said that willpower is necessary for strength of mind. Since then I have been desiring to cultivate it but without success.

M.: (No answer)

D.: During these years I have had 4 or 5 reverses. They upset me considerably. There is always the fear of failure haunting my attempts. This results in want of faith in myself which certainly foredooms my efforts to failure. Nothing in fact succeeds like success; and also nothing foils one's attempts like failure. Hence my question.

M.: (No answer).

D.: Is not willpower necessary for success? It should ensure success and also rule out failure.

M.: (No answer)

D.: I try to gain willpower. After these years I find myself only where I began. There is no progress.

M.: (No answer)

D.: What are the means for gaining willpower?

M.: Your idea of willpower is success insured. Willpower should be understood to be the strength of mind that makes it capable for meeting success or failure with equanimity. It is not synonymous with certain success. Why should one's attempts be always attended with success? Success develops arrogance and the man's spiritual progress is thus arrested. Failure on the other hand is beneficial, inasmuch as it opens the eyes of the man to his limitations and prepares him to surrender himself. Self-surrender is synonymous with eternal happiness. Therefore one should try to gain the equipoise of mind under all circumstances. That is willpower.

Again, success and failure are the results of *prarabdha* and not of willpower. A man may be doing only good and noble actions and yet prove to be a failure. Another may do otherwise and yet be uniformly successful. This does not mean that willpower is present in the one and not in the other." – Talk 423

We see that Bhagavan emphasizes that willpower is actually equipoise of mind under all circumstances, that is, even-mindedness in success as well as in failure. That is what we are required to cultivate. And failure is even beneficial for us, in that it prepares us for self-surrender. Who can gauge the glories of self-surrender? Sri Muruganar says in verse 477 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai (The Garland of the Guru's Sayings)*: "To those who wholly dedicate their being to the Lord, to them the Lord gives here and now himself. Only those who are egoless and thus are aware that 'they are that' rejoice in the supernal bliss of pure Siva-experience."

It is clear that despite our concerted efforts, our success in undertakings is not always guaranteed. That is to be accepted by us also, for the reasons given above in "All Is One" and by the gracious words of Sri Bhagavan. We see clearly that equipoise in both success and failure is true willpower. This will lead us unflinchingly to that great act of self-surrender, where all our concerns become his. May he ever guide us all! – Editor

Yoga Vasīṣṭha

Translated by Swami Venkatesananda

Once the realization that “I am the Self of all” has arisen, one does not again fall into error or sorrow. It is this Self alone which is variously described as the void, nature, māyā, Brahman, consciousness, Śiva, puruṣa, etc. That alone is ever-real; there is naught else. Resort to the understanding of non-duality, for the truth is non-dual; however, action involves duality and hence functions in apparent duality; thus, let your nature partake of duality and non-duality. The reality is neither duality (for it is the mind that creates division) nor unity (for the concept of unity arises from the antithesis of duality). When these concepts cease, the infinite consciousness alone is realized to be the sole reality.

Vasīṣṭha continued:

The liberated sage who is disinterested in the events of the past, present and future looks at the state of the world with amusement. Constantly engaged in appropriate action, established in the happy medium between two extreme and opposite points of view, he dwells unremittingly, rejecting every form or conditioning or intention. He rests in the supreme state of plenitude; hence, he is not agitated or excited by the events of this world. In hostilities he is the neutral position; endowed with compassion and consideration for all, he remains unaffected by the world appearance. If he is spoken to, he answers simply and suitably; if not spoken to, he is silent; he seeks nothing and he hates nothing. Thus he is not afflicted by the world. He says what is good for all, and when questioned he explains his views convincingly. He knows what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. He is aware of the point of view of other people. He is firmly established in the supreme state; remaining calm and cool in his own heart, he looks at the state of the world amusedly. Such is the state of the sages who have reached liberation while yet living in this world.

We are unable to expound the philosophy of the fools who have not controlled their own mind and who are immersed in the mire of sense-pleasure. They are only interested in sexual pleasures and in the acquisition of material wealth. We are also unable to

expound the path or rituals and routines which bestow all kinds of rewards in the shape of pain and pleasure.

O Rāma, live in the world with unlimited vision, having firmly rejected all limitation. Inwardly be free from all desires and hopes, but outwardly do what has to be done. Examine everything and seek only that which is not limited or finite, and live in this world constantly contemplating the infinite. Without entertaining any hope in your heart, yet living as if you are full of hopes, live in this world with your heart calm and cool, behaving outwardly like everyone else. Inwardly give up all notions of ‘I am the doer’, yet engage yourself in all activities outwardly. Thus live in this world, O Rāma, completely free from the least trace of the ego-sense.¹ There is no bondage and therefore no liberation, in truth. This world-appearance is essentially unreal and is of the nature of a juggler’s trick. The omnipresent, infinite self can never be bound, so how is it to be liberated? All this confusion arises on account of the ignorance of the truth. When the truth is known this confusion vanishes like the imaginary snake in the rope.

1. Sri Bhagavan has translated the above section of *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* into Tamil and it is incorporated as verses 26 and 27 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandam*.



*Sri Arunachala Ramana Mandiram,
Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, Canada*

Fixity of Mind is True Service to the Guru
by Sadhu Natananda and Sri Kunju Swami

The devotee's goal is to render service to the guru. Having come to Sri Bhagavan and taken refuge at his feet, what is the best manner in which to render true service to him? Certainly looking after the guru's physical necessities, maintaining cleanliness of the premises, providing services to his ashrama and devotees, etc. are indeed services worthy of emulation and these actions are a source of grace to any devotee. However, are they the summum bonum of life at the feet of a jnani such as Sri Bhagavan? Sadhu Natananda in his book Sri Ramana Darshanam (edited by David Godman and translated by Dr. Venkatasubramanian) relates Bhagavan's advice in this regard. Sri Kunju Swami also recalls Sri Bhagavan's upadesa on this subject.

Sadhu Natanananda:

Some of the devotees coming to the ashram from far off places to spend their holidays had a tendency to engage in ashram service. They were always directing their attention towards various activities. They would seize even the smallest opportunity to immerse themselves in activities throughout the day, as if they had surrendered their possessions, body and spirit to them. They felt satisfied that such service would alone be sufficient for their salvation. Whenever Bhagavan happened to notice their attitude, he would refer to them by saying:

“In the name of service to the Guru, they should not waste their time in activities and become disappointed later. Such people will have cause to regret their ignorance in their last days. One should not forget, even for a moment, the aim of satsang. Having the belief that residence in the ashram will make Self-realisation, which is most difficult to achieve in other places, easy to attain, one should always remain intent upon the realisation of one's true nature. There is no meaning in people who are not interested in that [Self-realisation] taking this place to be a special place. The spiritual service that devotees render to themselves by exerting themselves on the spiritual path for the attainment of their goal – that alone is sacred service to the Guru.”

“If attention is directed inwards activities will go on of their own accord.”

Through these words Sri Bhagavan made it clear that he cannot be pleased by anything other than a stilling of the mind.

The real benefit of coming to him was the subsidence of the mind. Because of this, he would exhort devotees to try to attend to the Self all the time. Some of the permanent residents of the ashram would make themselves responsible for ashram activities and, without realising their own defects, would then complain that they had no time for meditation.

Referring to those seeking cessation of activities, Bhagavan would remark humorously, “Is it that you have no time for meditation? Or is it that you are unable to remain quiet? If you can remain quiet, go ahead and do so! You will then see how all the ashram activities go on naturally of their own accord. If you do this you will be astonished to discover that the help you receive for your own tapas will be more than the help you are rendering for other people's tapas.”

In this way Bhagavan would point out in a dignified manner their immaturity whenever the occasion arose.

Reforming the mind is true service

A gentleman from the West was once sweeping up the leaf plates that were lying outside the ashram dining room. Bhagavan, who happened to come there at that time, asked the devotee what his aim was in undertaking that act.

The devotee replied, “Since my arrival at the ashram, until today, I have not had any opportunity to render any service to the ashram. Thinking that I may get redeemed by performing at least this humble act, which no one else has performed, I decided to do this.”

Looking at him with compassion, Bhagavan told him, “Is sweeping the used leaf plates the means to get salvation? Is it to perform this tapas that you have come here all the way from abroad. Go! Go! Enough of doing this kind of service! Go inside, sit to one side, turn your mind inward and find out he who wants to be redeemed. *The service of purifying your heart is alone the highest service. That alone can truly redeem you.*”

In this way Bhagavan explained the truth of tapas to him.

The ancient scriptures proclaim that those who have served a jivanmukta are deemed to have fulfilled all the vows to please Siva, Brahma and Vishnu, and have made their birth blessed. (*Kaivalya Navaneeta*)
 “O Supreme! If you make me fit to serve your devotees, the state of bliss will automatically be attained by me.” (*Thayumanavar*)

When such statements extol service to the sages, what is the meaning of Bhagavan’s remarks that imply that the time spent in service is wasted? Service rendered with devotion to sages is also performed with an eye on the result. Its purpose is salvation, which can be obtained by the gracious look of the Guru. However, the grace of the Guru is earned by inner tapas and not by services rendered outside. Only worshipping the Self is worshipping the Guru. Service to the Guru in the form of reflecting on one’s true nature can be performed at all places and at all times. All one needs for this service is earnestness and devotion. It is true that Self-knowledge, which cannot be obtained elsewhere even through great effort, can be won in a trice in the divine presence of the sadguru, either through a look or through a word. A devotee who performs great tapas to obtain a boon from his chosen form of God loses the fruit of his tapas if, through forgetfulness, he omits to ask for it when the deity appears. Similarly, if a devotee has been fortunate enough to come to the divine presence of a sadguru – who unites the devotee with Brahman – he would waste his precious chance if he fails to make use of this rare opportunity to obtain eternal life.

Therefore, even when the limbs of the body are engaged in service, the mind must be naturally rooted in the Self. This, in truth, is what Bhagavan was indicating in his remarks. Some may ask whether it is not good to engage in the service of the Guru with a one-pointed mind, at least for some time, in order to purify the mind. However, even to engage in such service requires fitness. That is why Thayumanavar and others pray to the Lord to make them fit to serve his devotees.

Kunju Swami:

It is inevitable, I suppose, that in an ashram some people will end up quarrelling with others. It is also inevitable that outsiders will find some pretext to quarrel with the ashram. Sri Bhagavan taught us all to stay away from disputes that were none of our

business, and in particular, to avoid taking an interest in matters that were solely the concern of the ashram management. Once, for example, some awkward problems concerning the ashram management cropped up. Without being directly concerned, I was worried about them, as I felt that failure to solve them satisfactorily would impair the good name of the ashram. One day two or three devotees went to Sri Bhagavan and put some of these problems before him. I happened to enter the hall while they were talking about them, and he immediately turned to me and asked me why I had come in at this time and why I was interesting myself in such matters. I did not grasp the meaning of the question, so Sri Bhagavan explained that a person should occupy himself only with that purpose for which he had originally come to the ashram.

He asked me what my original purpose had been. “To receive Sri Bhagavan’s grace,” I replied.

“Then occupy yourself with that alone,” he said.

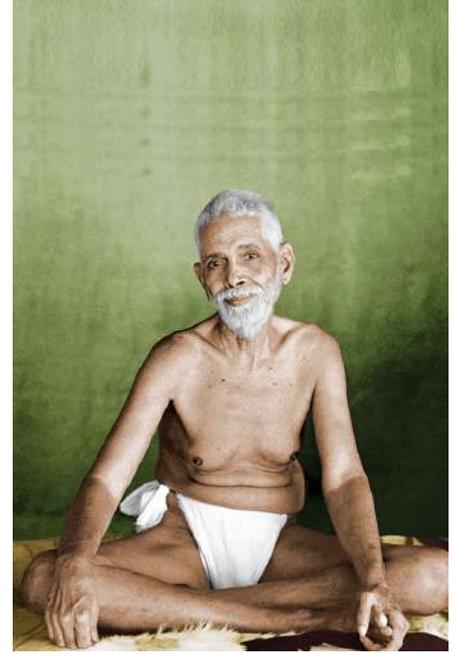
After a pause he continued by asking me whether I had any interest in matters concerning the ashram management when I first arrived. I told him that I had not.

“Then,” he said, “concentrate on the original purpose of your coming here.”



*Side view of shrine at Sri Arunachala
 Ramana Mandiram, Bridgetown,
 Nova Scotia, Canada*

Please join us on January 2nd, 2022 for the online celebration of Sri Bhagavan's 142nd Jayanti Day.



*This day commemorates Sri Ramana's birth on December 30th, 1879. The function will be broadcast from Arunachala Ashrama in New York beginning at 6:30 a.m. EST and will include presentations by Ramana Satsang groups from North America and Europe. The program will be streamed on **YouTube**.*

31. For him who is the bliss of Self arising from extinction of the ego, what is there to do? He knows nothing other than this Self. How to conceive the nature of his state?

32. When the Vedas have declared 'Thou art that' (*tatvamasi*), not to seek and find the nature of the Self and abide in it, but to think 'I am that, not this', is want of strength, because that abides forever as the Self.

– *Forty Verses on Reality (Ulladu Narpadu)*

Updates

Due to continuing health restrictions, Arunachala Ashrama, New York remains closed to visitors until further notice. Please visit our [home page](#) for the latest information. The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page

The Nova Scotia Ashrama (see our [home page](#)) will be open to those living in Canada only, beginning July 10, 2021. Our overnight guests will need to show proof of full COVID19 vaccination completed a minimum of 2 weeks prior to their date of visit at the Ashrama. Kindly request accommodations at novascotia@ashrama.org. Please allocate two hours on the last day of your stay for cleaning your accommodations prior to departure. As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. We ask that groups call ahead of time to avoid exceeding our limit based on NS COVID19 restrictions. Tel: 902-824-2297

For a listing of other centers that are offering virtual satsangs at this time, please see our [online satsangs](#).

For Ramana Satsang locations in the USA and Canada, please see [this listing](#).

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