

Who Am I?

Tenth Edition

First Edition 1939



SRI RAMANASRAMAM

Tiruvannamalai

2004

© Sri Ramanasramam
Tiruvannamalai

Ninth Edition-1959 (3000 copies)
Tenth Pocket Edition-2003 (3000 copies)

CC No:

ISBN:

Price: Rs.

Designed and typeset at
Sri Ramanasramam

Printed by
Kartik Printers
Chennai 600 015

PREFATORY

These are the instructions given in writing by
BHAGAVAN SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI
during His days of Silence, in the years 1901 & 1902
for His devotee,
SIVAPRAKASAM PILLAI.

—
**The Essence of the Teachings
in His Words is:**

*“The body is insentient like an earthen
pot and it has not the ‘I’ sense.
(But) we exist as the self-estab-
lished Atman even in deep
sleep, where there is no
body (-consciousness).
Therefore, ‘I’ is
not the body.*

WHO AM I? WHENCE AM I?

*In the Hearts
of those who seek-
ing thus with keen in-
sight stay in Atma-nishtha
(steadfast and tranquil abid-
ance in the Self), there shines forth
Arunachala Siva as "I-am-That", the
Consciousness, Self-luminous and perfect."*

Who Am I?

EVERY living being in the world yearns to be always happy, free from the taint of sorrow; and everyone has the greatest love for himself, which is solely due to the fact that happiness is his real nature. Hence, in order to realise that inherent and untainted happiness, which indeed he daily experiences when the mind is subdued in deep sleep, it is essential that he should know himself. For obtaining such knowledge the enquiry, 'Who am I?' in quest of the Self is the best means.

‘Who Am I?’ I am not this physical body, nor am I the five organs¹ of sense perception; I am not the five organs of external activity², nor am I the five vital forces,³ nor am I even the thinking mind. Neither am I that unconscious state of nescience which retains merely the subtle *vasanas* (latencies of the mind), while being free from the functional activity of the sense-

¹ The eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin, with their respective corresponding functions of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

² The vocal organs that articulate speech and produce sound, hands and feet that govern the movements of the physical body, anus that excretes faecal matter, and the genital organ which yields pleasure.

³ Which control respiration, digestion and assimilation, circulation of blood, perspiration, and excretion.

organs and the mind, and being unaware of the existence of the objects of sense-perception.

Therefore, summarily rejecting all the above-mentioned physical and mental adjuncts and their functions, saying ‘I am not this; no, nor am I this, nor this’ — that which then remains separate and alone by itself, that pure Awareness, verily am I. This Awareness is by its very nature *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss).

If the mind, which is the instrument of knowledge and is the basis of all activity, subsides, the perception of the world as an objective reality ceases. Unless the illusory perception of the serpent in the rope ceases, the rope on which the illusion is formed is

not perceived as such.⁴ Similarly, unless the illusory nature of the perception of the world as an objective reality ceases, the vision of the true nature of the Self, on which the illusion is formed, is not obtained,

The mind is a unique power (*sakti*) in the Self (*Atman*) wherein thoughts occur to one. On scrutiny as to what remains after eliminating all thoughts, it will be found that there is no such thing as mind apart from thought. So then, thoughts themselves constitute the mind.

Nor is there any such thing as the physical world apart from and independent

⁴This analogy is based on a traditional story of a man who sees a rope in the twilight and mistakes it for a serpent and is therefore afraid without cause.

of thought. In deep sleep there are no thoughts; nor is there the world. In the wakeful and dream states, thoughts are present, and there is also the world. Just as the spider draws out the thread for the cobweb from within itself and withdraws it again into itself, in the same way the mind projects the world out of itself and absorbs it back into itself.

The world is perceived as an apparent objective reality when the mind is externalized, thereby forsaking its identity with the Self. When the world is thus perceived, the true nature of the Self is not revealed; conversely, when the Self is realized, the world ceases to appear as an objective reality.

By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into *That* to which the 'I' refers; and that is in fact the Self. Mind has necessarily to depend for its existence on something gross; it can never exist by itself. It is the mind that is otherwise called the subtle body, ego, *jiva* or soul.

That which arises in the physical body as 'I' is the mind. If one enquires whence the 'I-thought' in the body arises in the first instance, it will be found that it is from *hrdayam*⁵ or the Heart. That is the source and stay of the mind. Or again, even if one merely inwardly repeats continuously to

⁵ The word '*hrdayam*' consists of two syllables, 'hrt' and 'ayam' (centre-this), which signify 'I am the Heart'.

oneself 'I-I', with the entire mind fixed thereon, that will lead one to the same source.

The first and foremost of all the thoughts that arise in the mind is the primal 'I-thought'. It is only after the rise or origin of the 'I-thought' that innumerable other thoughts arise. In other words, only after the first personal pronoun, 'I', has arisen, do the second and third personal pronouns ('you, he', etc.) occur to the mind; and they cannot subsist without the former.

Since every other thought can occur only after the rise of the 'I-thought' and since the mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, it is only through the enquiry 'Who am I?' that the mind subsides.

Moreover, the integral 'I-thought', implicit in such enquiry, having destroyed all other thoughts, is itself finally destroyed or consumed, just as the stick used for stirring the burning funeral pyre is consumed.

Even when extraneous thoughts sprout up during such enquiry, do not seek to complete the rising thought, but instead deeply enquire within, 'To whom has this thought occurred?' No matter how many thoughts thus occur to you, if you would with acute vigilance enquire immediately as and when each individual thought arises to whom it has occurred, you would find it is to 'me'. If then you enquire 'Who am I?' the mind gets introverted and the rising thought also subsides. In this manner, as you

persevere more and more in the practice of Self-enquiry, the mind acquires increasing strength and power to abide in its Source.

It is only when the subtle mind is externalized through the activity of the intellect and the sense-organs that gross names and forms, constituting the world, appear. When, on the other hand, the mind stays firmly in the Heart, they recede and disappear. Restraint of the outgoing mind and its absorption in the Heart is known as introversion (*antarmukha-drishti*). The release of the mind and its emergence from the Heart is known as extroversion (*bahirmukha-drishti*).

If in this manner the mind becomes absorbed in the Heart, the ego or 'I', which

is the centre of the multitude of thoughts, finally vanishes and pure Consciousness or Self, which subsists during all the states of the mind, alone remains resplendent. It is this state, where there is not the slightest trace of the 'I-thought', that is the true Being of oneself. And that is called Quiescence or *Mouna* (Silence).

This state of total inherence in pure Being is known as the Vision of Wisdom (*jnana-drishti*). Such inherence means and implies the complete subsidence of the mind in the Self. Other than this, such psychic powers of the mind as thought reading, telepathy and clairvoyance, cannot be Wisdom.

Atman alone exists and is real. The

threefold reality of world, individual soul, and God is, like the illusory appearance of silver in the mother of pearl, an imaginary creation in the *Atman*. They appear and disappear simultaneously. Verily, the Self alone is the world, the 'I' and God. All that exists is but the manifestation of the Supreme.

For the subsidence of mind there is no other means more effective and adequate than Self-enquiry. Even though by other means the mind subsides, that is only apparently so; it will rise again.

For instance, the mind subsides by the practice of *pranayama* (restraint and control of breath and vital forces); yet such subsidence lasts only as long as the control

of breath and vital forces continues; and when they are released, the mind also gets released and immediately, becoming externalized, it continues to wander through the force of its subtle tendencies (*vasanas*).

The source of the mind is the same as that of breath and vital forces. It is really the multitude of thoughts that constitutes the mind; and the 'I-thought' is the primal thought of the mind, and is itself the ego. But breath too has its origin at the same place whence the ego rises. Therefore, when the mind subsides, breath and vital forces also subside; and conversely, when the latter subside, the former also subsides.

Breath and vital forces are also described as the gross manifestation of the mind. Till

the hour of death the mind sustains and supports these forces in the physical body; and when life becomes extinct, the mind envelopes them and carries them away.

During deep sleep, however, the vital forces continue to function, although the mind is not manifest. This is in accordance with the divine law and is intended to protect the body by removing any possible doubt as to whether it is dead or alive while one is asleep. Without such an arrangement by nature, sleeping bodies might be cremated alive. The vitality apparent in breathing is left behind by the mind as a 'watchman'.

But in the wakeful state and in *samadhi*, when the mind subsides, breath also subsides. For this reason (because the mind has the

sustaining and controlling power over breath and vital forces and is therefore ulterior to both of them), the practice of breath-control is merely helpful in subduing the mind but cannot bring about its final extinction.

Like breath-control, meditation on form, incantations, invocations and regulation of diet are only aids to control the mind. Through the practice of meditation or invocation, the mind becomes one-pointed. Just like when the elephant's trunk, which is otherwise restless, is given an iron chain to hold, will, without reaching out for any other object, hold onto the chain steadily, in the same manner, the ever-restless mind, which is trained and accustomed to a name or form through meditation or

invocation, will steadily hold on to that alone.

When the mind is fragmented, expanding itself into a countless variety of thoughts, each individual thought becomes extremely weak and inefficient. When, on the contrary, such thoughts subside more and more until they finally get destroyed, the mind becomes one-pointed and, thereby acquiring strength and power of endurance, easily reaches perfection in the method of enquiry in quest of the Self.

Regulation of diet, restricting it to *satvic* food⁶, taken in moderate quantity, is of all the rules of conduct the best; and it is most

⁶ i.e., simple and nutritious food which sustains but does not stimulate the physical body.

conducive to the development of the *satvic* qualities⁷ of the mind. These, in their turn, assist one in the practice of *Atma vichara* or enquiry in quest of the Self.

Countless *vishaya-vasanas* (subtle tendencies of the mind in relation to objects of sense-gratification), occurring in quick succession one after the other, like the waves of the ocean, agitate the mind. Nevertheless, they too subside and finally get destroyed with progressive practice of *Atma dhyana*, meditation on the Self.

Without giving room even to the

⁷ Purity of heart, self-restraint, evenness of temper, tenderness towards all beings, fortitude and freedom from desire, hatred and arrogance are the outstanding virtues of the *satvic* mind.

thought, which occurs in the form of doubt, whether it is possible to stay merely as the Self alone — all the *vasanas* having subsided — one should firmly and unceasingly carry on meditation on the Self.

However sinful a person may be, if he would stop wailing inconsolably, “Alas! I am a sinner, how shall I attain Liberation?” and cast away even the thought that he is a sinner and zealously carry on meditation on the Self, he would most assuredly get reformed.

As long as subtle tendencies continue to linger in the mind, it is necessary to carry on the enquiry ‘Who am I?’

As and when thoughts occur, they should, one and all, be annihilated then and there, at the very place of their origin, by

the method of enquiry in quest of the Self.

Not to desire anything extraneous to oneself constitutes *vairagya* (dispassion) or *nirasa* (desirelessness). Not to give up one's hold on the Self constitutes *jnana* (knowledge). But really *vairagya* and *jnana* are one and the same.

Just as the pearl diver, tying stones to his waist, dives down into the depths and gets the pearl from the sea-bed, so every aspirant, pledged to *vairagya*, can dive deep into himself and realize the precious *Atman*.

If the earnest seeker would only cultivate the constant and deep contemplative 'remembrance' (*smrti*) of the true nature of the Self till he has realized it, that alone would suffice.

Distracting thoughts are like the enemy in the fortress. As long as they are in possession of it, they will certainly sally forth. But if, as and when they come out, you put them to the sword the fortress will finally be captured.

God and the Guru are not really different; they are identical. He that has earned the Grace of the Guru shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape. But the disciple, for his part, should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master.

Firm and disciplined inherence in the *Atman*, without giving the least scope for the rise of any thought other than the deep

contemplative thought of the Self, constitutes self-surrender to the Supreme Lord. Let any amount of burden be laid on Him, He will bear it all.

It is, in fact, the indefinable power of the Lord that ordains, sustains and controls everything that happens. Why then should we worry, tormented by vexatious thoughts, saying: 'Shall we act this way? No, that way,' instead of meekly and happily submitting to that Power? Knowing that the train carries all the weight, why indeed should we, the passengers travelling therein, carry our small individual pieces of luggage on our laps to our great discomfort, instead of putting them down in the train and sitting at perfect ease?

That which is Bliss is verily the Self.

Bliss and the Self are not distinct and separate but are one and the same. And *That* alone is real. Not even in one of the countless objects of the mundane world is there anything that can be called happiness. It is through sheer ignorance and lack of discrimination that we fancy that happiness is obtained from them. On the contrary, when the mind is externalized, it suffers pain and anguish.

The truth is that every time our desires get fulfilled, the mind, turning to its source, experiences only that happiness which is natural to the Self. Similarly, in deep sleep, in spiritual trance (*samadhi*), in a swoon, when a desired object is obtained, or when evil befalls an object considered undesirable, the mind turns inwards and enjoys the Bliss

of the *Atman*. Thus wandering astray, forsaking the Self and returning to it again and again, is the interminable and wearisome lot of the mind.

It is pleasant under the shade of a tree and scorching in the heat of the sun. A person toiling in the sun seeks the cool shade of the tree and is happy under it. After staying there for a while he moves out again, but unable to bear the merciless heat of the sun he again seeks the shade. In this way, he keeps on moving from shade to sun and sun to shade.

Thus do the unwise act, whereas the wise man never leaves the shade. In the same way, the mind of the Enlightened Sage (*jnani*) never strays from *Brahman*, the

Absolute. On the other hand, the mind of the ignorant, entering into the phenomenal world, suffers pain and anguish, and then turning for a short while towards *Brahman*, it experiences happiness. Such is the mind of the ignorant.

This phenomenal world, however, is nothing but thought. When the world recedes from one's view — that is, when one is free from thought — the mind enjoys the Bliss of the Self. Conversely, when the world appears — that is, when thought occurs — the mind experiences pain and anguish.

Not from any desire, resolve or effort on the part of the rising sun, but merely due to the presence of its rays, the lens emits heat, the lotus blossoms, water evaporates

and people attend to their various duties in life. In the proximity of the magnet, the needle moves. Similarly, the soul or *jiva* subjected to the threefold activity of creation, preservation and destruction, which takes place merely due to the unique Presence of the Supreme Lord, performs acts in accordance with its karma,⁸ and withdraws to rest after such activity.

But the Lord Himself has no resolve; no act or event touches even the fringe of His Being. This state of immaculate aloofness can be likened to that of the sun, which is untouched by the activities of life, or to that of the all-pervasive ether, which

⁸ i.e., the fruits of past actions which are being worked out in the present life.

is not affected by its interaction with the complex qualities of the other four elements.⁹

All scriptures without any exception proclaim that for attaining Salvation the mind should be subdued; and once one knows that control of the mind is their final aim, it is futile to make an interminable study of them. What is required for such control is actual enquiry into oneself by self-interrogation of 'Who am I?' How can this enquiry in quest of the Self be made merely by means of a study of scriptures? One should realize the Self by the Eye of Wisdom. Does Rama need a mirror to recognize

⁹ earth, water, fire, air

himself as Rama? That to which the 'I' refers is within the five sheaths,¹⁰ whereas the scriptures are outside them. Therefore, it is futile to seek by means of the study of scriptures the Self that has to be realized by summarily rejecting even the five sheaths.

To enquire 'Who am I that am in bondage?' and to know one's real nature is alone Liberation. To keep the mind constantly turned within and to abide thus, in the Self, is alone *Atma-vichara* (Self-enquiry), whereas *dhyana* (meditation) consists in fervent contemplation of the Self as *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Being-Consciousness-

¹⁰ These are the physical, vital, and mental sheaths, and the sheaths of Knowledge-Experience and of Blissful-ignorance.

Bliss). Indeed, at some time, one will have to forget everything that has been learnt.

Just as it is futile to examine the rubbish that has to be swept up only to be thrown away, so it is futile for him who seeks to know the Self to begin enumerating the *tattvas*¹¹ that envelop the Self, and then examine them instead of casting them away. He should consider the phenomenal world with reference to himself as merely a dream.

Except that the wakeful state is long and the dream state short, there is no difference between the two. All the activities of the dream state appear, for the time being,

¹¹ *Tattvas* are the elements into which phenomenal existence — from the subtle mind to gross matter — is classified.

just as real as the activities of the wakeful state seem to be while awake. During the dream state, the mind assumes another form or a different bodily sheath. For thoughts on the one hand and name and form on the other occur simultaneously during both the wakeful and dream states.

There are not two minds, one good and the other evil. It is only the *vasanas* or tendencies of the mind that are of two kinds, good and favourable, evil and unfavourable. When the mind is associated with the former it is called good, and when associated with the latter it is called evil.

However evil-minded other people may appear to you, it is not proper to hate or despise them. Likes and dislikes, love and

hatred are equally to be eschewed. It is also not proper to let the mind rest often on the objects or affairs of mundane life. As far as possible one should not interfere in the affairs of others. Everything offered to others is really an offering to oneself. If only this truth were understood, who is there that would refuse to give anything to others?

If the ego rises, all else will also rise; if it subsides, all else will also subside. The deeper the humility with which we conduct ourselves, the better it is for us. If only the mind is kept under control, what matters it where one may happen to be?