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Effort, Grace and Destiny by Arthur Osborne

*For many devotees, the writings of Arthur Osborne (Sept. 25, 1906 – May 8, 1970) were our first introduction to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Osborne's eloquent and engaging style, coupled with his sincere devotion, enabled him to explain clearly the intricacies of the path of self-inquiry to those who were not necessarily familiar with the cultural nuances of daily Hindu life. He, along with Sri Ganesan, established The Mountain Path journal in 1964, and this journal, published by Sri Ramanasramam, continues to radiate the grace of Sri Bhagavan until the present day. Arthur wrote many editorials and articles for The Mountain Path, some under his name and others under a nom de plume. They were all grounded in and inspired by Sri Bhagavan, and his words never fail to provide us all with an impetus to dive deeper into the heart, the source of all. Below is an editorial from the book *Be Still, It is the Wind That Sings*¹, on the necessity of the dissolution of the false ego.*

It is said in scriptures and by gurus that an aspirant must make effort on the path but that grace also is necessary and that in the end realization is bestowed by grace, not achieved by effort. It is said in the Upanishads that the Atma chooses whom it will.

This is a hard saying. Those in whom the spiritual urge is powerful do not worry their heads over it but strive because they must, because they are drawn to without any thought of reward. Those, however, in whom the mind is too active and the spirit too weak are apt to be puzzled and ask why they should make any effort if the final achievement is not to be won by effort but bestowed by grace. They also ask why the Atma should choose one rather than another. For such people I will try to clarify the saying.

Who is the 'you' that has to make effort, and who is the 'God' or 'Atma' that chooses and that bestows grace on one rather than another?

The essence of a man is pure spirit or, which comes to the same, pure being or pure universal

consciousness. This spirit prowls in the lion, spreads in the tree, endures in the stone; in man alone it not only lives but knows that it lives. The difference between man and other animals is not that man has greater ability (in many ways he has less), but that he knows that he is man; he is self-consciously man. This is through the human mind which, looking outward, knows and dominates the world; looking inward, knows and reflects being as the essence and source of the world. However, the ability to do this implies also the ability to not do it, to regard oneself as a complete autonomous individual, and forget the inner reality.

The various religions express this simple truth through myth, allegory and doctrine and are apt to be puzzling. In the Koran, it is said that Allah offered the trust to the heavens, earth and the mountains but all declined it; only man accepted and was untrue to it. Religions assert that God gave man free will, which implies the freedom to rebel. In Christianity, it is said that man is fallen on

1. Sri Ramanasramam, 2000

account of original sin. The Book of Genesis gives the story of how man fell into the domain of opposites, the differentiation of good and evil. All these are allegories of the simple truth stated above.

The mind creates an ego, a seemingly complete autonomous individual self which, although illusory, seems to be the reality of one. This is the state known in Hinduism as 'ajñana' or ignorance. In Christianity it is called 'original sin', in Islam, in its more violent form, it is known as 'kufr' or 'denial', while in its milder form, recognizing the spirit as real but believing the ego also to be real, it is called 'shirk' or 'association' (of other with God).

This is the obstruction to self-realization. Therefore, it has to be removed. That is why the masters say that self-realization is not something new to be achieved but an eternally existent state to be discovered or revealed. Therefore, they compare it to an overcast sky – the clear sky does not have to be created, only the clouds covering it to be blown away; or to a pond overgrown with water lilies – the water is there all time and only has to be revealed by clearing away the plants that have overgrown it.

To do this constitutes the effort of which the teachers and scriptures speak. The mind has created the obstruction; the mind has to remove it. But merely to recognize this, to recognize that the ego is (according to the Advaitin) an illusory self or (according to the dualist) a creation of the spirit to which it should be submitted and totally passive, is far from constituting the full effort required. Indeed, it increases the obligation for total effort and therefore the guilt in not making effort.

The effort involves the will and emotions as well as the understanding and therefore has to be persistent, determined and skillful. The ego has put out tentacles which cling to the world, and either these have to be lopped off or the ego itself killed. It craves the admiration or submission of other egos, and therefore humility is enjoined.

It craves enjoyment of creation in its own right instead of being a mere channel through which the spirit perceives and enjoys, and therefore celibacy and asceticism are sometimes prescribed and self-indulgence is always, in all religions, forbidden. The attempt to lop off the tentacles of ego has been

compared in mythology to a battle with a many-headed giant who grew two new heads for each one lopped off. The only way of disposing of him was to strike at the heart and kill the entire being, not deal with the heads individually.

The campaign must be skillful and intelligently planned as well as ruthless. What wonder if different masters in different religions have prescribed different ways of conducting it. The goal in all cases is the same: the taming or destruction of the ego or the discovery that it never really existed.

Methods such as I have been alluding to consist largely in curtailing the ego's outer manifestations so as to induce the mind to turn inwards to the self or spirit behind it. It is also possible to proceed in the opposite direction by turning inward to the spirit and thence deriving strength to renounce the outer manifestations. This is the path of love and devotion, worshipping God, submitting to him, calling upon his name, striving to serve and remember him with one's whole life. Either path can be followed, or both together. A third part is that of questioning the very existence of the ego by self-enquiry.

All this is effort. Then what about grace? Grace is the natural flow of the spirit into and through the mind and faculties. There is nothing capricious or erratic about it. Bhagavan said: "Grace is always there; it is only you who have to make yourself receptive to it." It is likened traditionally to the sunlight falling on a flower garden – if one bud opens and not another it is not due to any partiality on the side of the sun but only to the maturity or immaturity of the buds. Or if the sunlight penetrates one room but not another it is simply because the doors and windows are open in one and in the other shut.

Why then is it said that the Atma chooses whom it will and that the final realization comes by grace, not by effort? In order to remove the insidious idea that the ego-self can continue to exist and attain something called 'realization', whereas all it can do is to immolate itself and be replaced by the realized state of the spirit, which is ever-present grace. The mind makes efforts to remove obstructions; it is hard for it to understand that it is itself the final obstruction. The very desire for

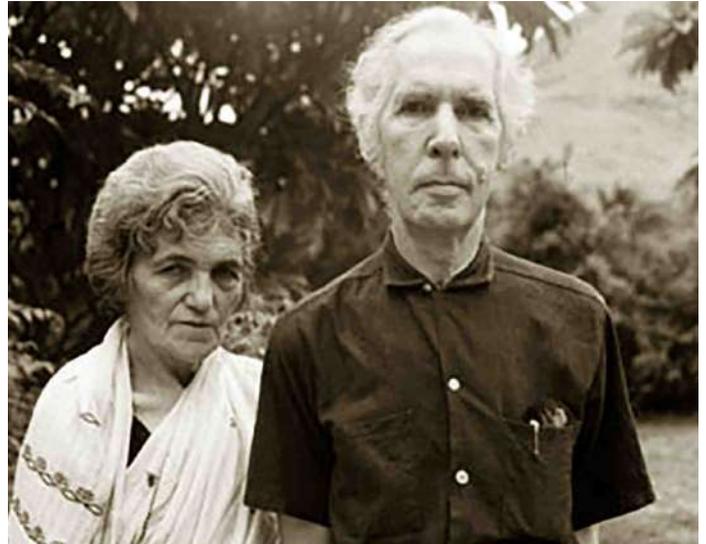
realization has to be carefully watched and can become an impediment, for it implies someone to achieve something. At the end all that the mind is called on to do is to keep still and allow the grace to flow unimpeded—but that is the hardest thing of all for it to do.

Till in the end,
All battles fought, all earthly loves abjured,
Dawn in the East, there is no other way
But to be still. In stillness then to find
The giants all were windmills, all the strife
Self-made, unreal; even he that strove
A fancied being, as when that good knight
Woke from delirium and with a loud cry
Rendered his soul to God.

On the devotional path this danger of supposing that it is the ego who strives and attains, this warning against desires, even the desire to get realization, is expressed in the attitude that true service of God must be for love alone with no thought of reward. He who asks for reward is a merchant, not a lover.

The impossibility of achieving when there is no one to achieve explains why a guru will never answer the question: “When shall I attain realization?” It implies the false presumption: ‘There is an individual me; when will it cease to exist?’ whereas the guru realizes the ultimate truth that: ‘There is no being of the unreal and no not-being of the Real.’² Not that the unreal ego will cease to be at such and such a point in time, but that it is not now, never has been and never could be. Therefore, the attitude of mind that questions when one can attain realization or whether it is one's destiny to be realized in this lifetime is an obstruction sufficient to prevent realization, being an assertion of the temporary existence of the unreal. Similarly, if you assert that you cannot attain realization in this lifetime you are thereby preventing yourself from doing so by postulating the existence of a 'you' who cannot attain.

And yet, paradoxically, it is also an impediment to assert that no effort need be made on the pretext that, as “there is no being of the unreal and no not-being of the real”, one is that now and has therefore no need to strive to become that. It



Arthur Osborne and his wife Lucia

sounds plausible, but it is an impediment because it is the pseudo-self, the illusory unreal, that is saying it. The master can say that there is nothing to achieve because one is that already; the disciple can't. Bhagavan would sometimes say that asking the best way to realization is like being at Tiruvannamalai and asking how to get there, but that could not be the attitude of the devotee. He expected the devotee to make effort, even while appreciating the paradox that there is no effort to make. In the same way he could say that for the realized man there is no guru-disciple relationship but add that for the disciple the relationship is a reality and is of importance.

For the disciple effort is necessary, but it is also necessary to remember that effort can never attain the final goal, since he who makes the effort must dissolve, leaving only the spirit. The spirit, which is the true self, replaces the illusory ego-self when the latter has removed the obstructions; and that is grace. The spirit flows into the vacuum which remains when the ego-self dissolves; doing so is the 'choice' that the spirit makes. It is for the aspirant to create the vacuum by removing the obstructions.



2. *Bhagavad Gita, II. 16.*

Three Walls
from *The Path of Sri Ramana*
by Sri Sadhu Om

Sri Sadhu Om was drawn to the holy presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi and dove deep into the ocean of his grace. Sri Sadhu Om composed many works expounding the teachings of Sri Bhagavan. One such work was The Path of Sri Ramana (Śrī Ramaṇa Vāṇi).

A new English edition of The Path of Sri Ramana was recently published by Sri Ramana Center of Houston. Sri Kumar Saran, working with the assistance of devotees including Michael James, Robert Butler, Nalani Venkat, Savithri Venkataraman and P. Subramanian among others, undertook to provide a new translation that more clearly reflects the current Tamil text.

In addition, verses from Sri Bhagavan's works including Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu and Arunāchala Stuti Panchakam, Sri Muruganar's verses from Guru Vāchaka Kovai and Sadhu Om's works such as Sādhaṇai Sāram also have been given updated translations.

An excerpt from the new edition that details the importance of investigation of the first person by means of the inquiry "Who am I?" follows.

The Path of Sri Ramana is available as a free audiovisual book at <https://ramanahou.org/psr>, read beautifully by Jani and Robert Butler. It is also available in paperback from Amazon.

Someone was yelling and shouting out, "Help! I have been imprisoned. I have been trapped in this triangular room! How can I escape?" Standing in a corner, at the point where two walls meet, he was feeling the two walls in front of him, moving his hands from the left wall to the right by turns and wailing, "There is no door, no opening of any kind through which I can escape. How can I get out?"

A friend of his, who was standing a short distance away in the open air, heard this wailing, turned around and looked at him and realized the situation in which his friend found himself. There were just two walls standing there in the open air. The two walls met, blocking only two sides. From this, his friend deduced that the man, who was standing between the two walls, facing just them, was

falsely assuming that there was a wall behind him and was grieving over the fact that he was trapped in a triangular room. So his friend asked, "Why are you feeling the walls and weeping?" The man replied, "I am trying to find out if there is some way in which I can escape from this triangular prison, but I can't find any way out!"

Friend: Ok; why don't you look and see if there is any way through the third wall behind you?

Man (turning and looking): Oh, there is nothing at all stopping me! I'll run away in that direction. (So saying, he starts to run.)

Friend: Why are you running? What need is there to run? Will you remain in prison if you don't run?

Man: Oh, yes! I wasn't imprisoned at all. When there wasn't a wall behind me, how could I be imprisoned? The idea that I was imprisoned was pure delusion. I was never imprisoned, nor have I now escaped. In order to be free, I don't need to run to get away from these walls. The reason for my bondage was my own error in failing to look behind me. The practice which will lead to my freedom is simply to turn around and look. I remain simply as I am, free of both bondage and liberation.

Reflecting thus, he remained at peace.

"To think that we have at some time or other lost or forgotten ourself is not true. If on the contrary, it were true, then even if we were to make effort and attain ourself, we may again lose it. Then what to do?" (*Sādhaṇai Sāram*, verse 311)

"The true state of oneself is not a state that can undergo changes, such as being lost, or again being attained. Know that this state is that which is never lost. In the clear light of the sun of self-knowledge, which is devoid of changes such as being lost or being attained, how can such changes, which are an unreal darkness, take place?" (*Sādhaṇai Sāram*, verse 312)

"The true state is nothing other than to remain free of the useless imagination that the real has not been attained. To eliminate that imagination all we need to do is abide with our attention turned inward towards ourself." (*Sādhaṇai Sāram*, verse 313)

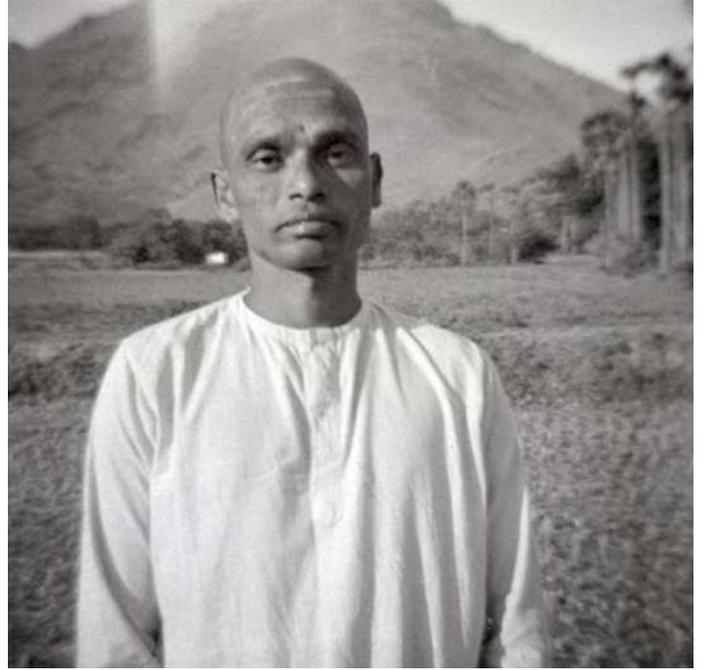
The two walls in this story are the second and third persons. The third wall which was imagined to be behind is the first person. The path to liberation does not lie in investigating the second and third

persons. Only through the first person investigation ‘Who am I?’ will the true knowledge arise that ego, the first person, never exists. Only when ego, the first person, is thus destroyed will the false nature of both bondage and liberation be realized.

“Only so long as one says, ‘I am someone bound’ [that is, only so long as one experiences oneself as if one were bound] [will there be] thoughts of bandha [bondage] and mukti [liberation]. When one looks at [observes, examines or scrutinises] oneself [to see] who is the one bound, and when [thereby] oneself, the one who is eternally liberated [alone] remains as *siddham* [what is firmly established or always accomplished], since the thought of bondage will not remain, will thought of liberation henceforth remain?” (*Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, verse 39)

Just as we described the three walls as the first, second and third persons in relation to ‘space’, we can view those three walls as past, present and future in relation to ‘time’. Through the present time investigation also as to what is the truth, performed in the present, without thinking of the past and future, all thoughts are annihilated, whereupon the ‘present’ is revealed as non-existent and disappears. Then all that remains is self-awareness, which is timeless. How is this so? We call that which happened a moment before ‘the past’, and that which is going to happen a moment later, we call the ‘the future’. Therefore, if we try to identify the present moment, without paying attention to the moment which preceded it or the moment which followed it, even the 10 millionth part of one instant, which appears as ‘now’ will be found to belong either to the past or the future. If we put aside these infinitesimally small particles of the past and of the future and attempt to discover what present time lies between them, no actual present time whatsoever can be identified. Thus the mental creation, known as ‘the present’, will disappear, leaving only self-awareness, ‘I am’, which is outside of time.

“Past and future stand holding [or depending upon] the present. While occurring, they too are actually the present. [Therefore] the present is the only one [the only time that actually exists] [alternatively this sentence can be interpreted as meaning: the present alone [is all these three times]; the present



Sri Sadhu Om

alone [exists]; or [there is] only the present] [so the implication of all these interpretations is that there are not three times, namely, the past, present and future, but only one, namely the present, which alone is what seems to be these three]. [Hence] without knowing the reality of today [the present moment, now], trying to know the past or future is [like] trying to count [calculate or evaluate] without [knowing the value of] one.” (*Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, verse 15)

“When we investigate [ourselves], except we, where is time and where is place? If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place. [But] are we a body? Since we are the [same] one [without any change], now, then and always, the [same] one in [each] place, here there and everywhere, there is [only] we, [the timeless and placeless] we. Time and place do not exist.” (*Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, verse 16)

Therefore, investigating only the first of the three persons and only the present of the three times is the path of liberation. Even this, the path of Sri Ramana, is not really for the removal of bondage or for the attainment of liberation! The path of Sri Ramana is designed for the enjoyment of supreme peace, free of thoughts of liberation, through the true knowledge that realizes that in truth there was never any bondage for us.

Selected Verses from *Guru Vachaka Kovai*
(*The Garland of Guru's Sayings*)

by Sri Muruganar

The following verses from Sri Muruganar's defining work, *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, containing the teachings of his guru Sri Ramana, appear in the first chapter titled "The Reality of the World". It has been lovingly translated from the original Tamil by David Godman, Robert Butler and Dr.T.V.Venkatasubramanian and is available on [David Godman's website](#).

34. The world that associates with us as an appearance of names and forms is as transient as a lightning flash. The faltering understanding 'I am the body' is the deceptive device that makes us desire the world as it were real [thereby] entrapping us instantaneously in the powerful snare of bondage.

Muruganar: Since the world does not appear without the body, the confused belief 'I am the body' is said to be the *maya* that projects the appearance of names and forms. The delusion that causes the name-and-form appearance to be seen as different from *swarupa* is that which insists that the world is real. Its root is the primal ignorance 'I am the body'.

35. This world of phenomenon, consisting of dualities and trinities, shines because of thoughts. Like the unreal circle traced in the air by a whirling firebrand, it [the world phenomenon] is created by the spinning of the illusory mind. However, from the point of view of *swarupa*, the fullness of intense consciousness, the illusory mind is non-existent. This you should know.

36. You worldly minded man, [you] who do not accept as true the fair and reasonable teachings of supreme *jnana* that are declared by *jnanis*! If you thoroughly examine the world, this vision misperceived by a jaundiced eye, this bloating out of a great delusion, it is merely a deception caused by *vasanas*.

(*Vasanas are mental habits or tendencies.*)

37. What exists is the plenitude of object-free *jnana*, which shines as unconditioned reality. The world appears as an object that is grasped by your *suttarivu*. Like the erroneous perception of a person with jaundice who sees everything as yellow, this entire

world is a deluded view consisting wholly of a mind that has defects such as ego, deceit, desire and so on. (*Suttarivu is a key word in Muruganar's writings. Arivu means consciousness or true knowledge, and it is often used in Tamil as an equivalent of jnana. 'Suttu' means 'pointed at'. Arivu is the true consciousness, the true knowledge that is aware of nothing other than itself. However, when attention is externalized and 'pointed at' phenomena that are assumed to be external, the trinity of seer, seeing and seen arises. This creates the idea of an individual self who sees an external real world, and while this suttarivu process is functioning, the reality of the undivided Self is hidden.*)

38. Just as yellow turmeric powder loses its color and becomes white under sunlight, this wholly mental world perishes before the sunlight of the knowledge of reality. Therefore, it is not a creation of God, the sun of true *jnana*. Like the many-hued eye of the peacock feather, this bright world is only a vast picture, a reflection seen in the darkened mirror of the impure mind.

39. In the experience of true knowledge, which is the reality of the Self, this world is merely the beautiful [but illusory] azure-blue color that appears in the sky. When one becomes confused by the veiling, the 'I am the body' delusion, those things that are seen through *suttarivu* are merely and imaginary appearance.

40. This world, a vast and harmful illusion that hoodwinks and ravages the intellect of all, has arisen though nothing other than the mistake of *pramada*, which is abandoning one's true nature instead of remaining merged with it.

(*Pramada is another key word in the text. It denotes forgetfulness of the Self that arises when one puts one's attention on anything that is not the Self. When attention is wholly on the Self, 'this world, a vast and harmful illusion' ceases to exist. The world only comes into existence when Self-awareness is absent.*)

41. This worldly life is a dreamlike appearance, sapless and deluding, that functions through the mixture of the pairs of opposites such as desire and aversion. It appears as if real only as long as one is under the spell of *maya*-sleep. It will end up being totally false when one truly wakes up into the *maya*-free Self.

Maharshi's Gospel

Answers of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi to
Questions put to Him by Devotees

D: Why should Self-enquiry alone be considered the direct means to *jnana*?

M: Because every kind of sadhana except that of *atma vichara* presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the sadhana, and without the mind it cannot be practised. The ego may take different and subtler forms at the different stages of one's practice, but is itself never destroyed. When Janaka exclaimed, "Now I have discovered the thief who has been ruining me all along. He shall be dealt with summarily", the King was really referring to the ego or the mind.

D: But the thief may well be apprehended by the other sadhanas as well.

M: The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through sadhanas other than *atma vichara*, is just like the thief assuming the guise of a policeman to catch the thief, that is himself. *Atma vichara* alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists, and enables one to realise the pure, undifferentiated being of the Self or the

absolute. Having realised the Self, nothing remains to be known, because it is perfect bliss, it is the all.

D: In this life beset with limitations can I ever realise the bliss of the Self?

M: That bliss of the Self is always with you, and you will find it for yourself, if you would seek it earnestly.

The cause of your misery is not in the life without; it is in you as the ego. You impose limitations on yourself and then make a vain struggle to transcend them. All unhappiness is due to the ego; with it comes all your trouble. What does it avail you to attribute to the happenings in life the cause of misery which is really within you? What happiness can you get from things extraneous to yourself? When you get it, how long will it last?

If you would deny the ego and scorch it by ignoring it, you would be free. If you accept it, it will impose limitations on you and throw you into a vain struggle to transcend them. That was how the thief sought to 'ruin' King Janaka.

To be the Self that you really are is the only means to realize the bliss that is ever yours.

– pp. 51-52, *Maharshi's Gospel*,
Sri Ramanasramam, 2002

Updates

For the latest information regarding Arunachala Ashrama, New York, please visit our [home page](#). The Ashrama has been having regular satsangs online which can be found on our [upcoming virtual events](#) page

The Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama (see our home page) is welcoming overnight guests. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting novascotia@ashrama.org. Guests will be responsible for cooking vegetarian food during their stay and ensuring that their rooms have been cleaned and their linens and towels are laundered and replaced before they leave.

Wearing a mask while inside the temple is optional. It is advised that you have health insurance.

As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. 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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