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Work and Renunciation

Sri Ramana Maharshi is the embodiment of perfect silence, peace and stillness. Yet, in his daily life, he was actively engaged in the day-to-day activities of the ashram, such as cutting vegetables, attending to correspondence, cooking in the kitchen, supervising building activities such as the construction of the Mother's temple, etc. His life was an example of one who, though established in the ultimate reality, continued to be active in ordinary affairs in a selfless manner. Many devotees who came to him with a desire to renounce the world and leave all activities behind were counseled by Sri Bhagavan that a change of environment was not necessary, that the spiritual practice required could be done effectively in our current environment. The following conversations are from "Maharshi's Gospel", first published in 1939, and contains divine insights pertinent to all who wish to clarify the relationship between work and renunciation.

Disciple: What is the highest goal of spiritual experience for man?

Maharshi: Self-realization.

D: Can a married man realise the Self?

M: Certainly. Married or unmarried, a man can realise the Self; because That is here and now. If it were not so, but attainable by some effort at some time, and if it were new and had to be acquired, it would not be worth pursuit because what is not natural is not permanent either. But what I say is that the Self is here and now, and alone.

D: A salt-doll diving into the sea will not be protected by a waterproof coat. This world in which we have to toil day in and day out is like the ocean.

M: Yes, the mind is the waterproof coat.

D: So then, one may be engaged in work and, free from desire, keep up one's solitude? But life's duties allow little time to sit in meditation or even to pray.

M: Yes. Work performed with attachment is a shackle, whereas work performed with detachment does not affect the doer. He is, even while working, in solitude. To engage in your duty is the true *namaskar* and abiding in God is the only true *asana*.

D: Should I not renounce my home?

M: If that had been your destiny the question would not have arisen.

D: Why then did you leave your home in your youth?

M: Nothing happens except by Divine dispensation. One's course of conduct in this life is determined by one's *prarabdha*.

D: Is it good to devote all my time to the search for the Self? If that is impossible, should I merely keep quiet?

M: If you can keep quiet, without engaging in any other pursuit, it is very good: If that cannot be done, where is the use of being quiet so far as realization is concerned? So long as a person is obliged to be active, let him not give up attempts to realise the Self.

D: Do not one's actions affect one in subsequent births?

M: Are you born now? Why do you think of other births? The fact is, there is neither birth nor death. Let him who is born think of death and the palliative thereof!

D: Can you show us the dead?

M: Did you know your kinsmen before their birth

that you should seek to know them after their death?

D: How does a *grihastha* (householder) fare in the scheme of *moksha*? Should he not necessarily become a mendicant in order to attain liberation?

M: Why do you think you are a *grihastha*? Similar thoughts that you are a sannyasin will haunt you, even if you go out as a sannyasin. Whether you continue in the household or renounce it and go to the forest, your mind haunts you. The ego is the source of thought. It creates the body and the world, and it makes you think of being the *grihastha*. If you renounce, it will only substitute the thought of sannyasa for that of *grihastha*, and the environment of the forest for that of the household. But the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. It is no help to change the environment. The one obstacle is the mind; it must be got over whether in the home or in the forest. If you can do it in the forest, why not in the home? Therefore, why change the environment? Your efforts can be made even now, whatever be the environment.

D: Is it possible to enjoy samadhi while busy in worldly work?

M: The feeling 'I work' is the hindrance. Ask yourself 'who works?' Remember who you are. Then the work will not bind you; it will go on automatically. Make no effort either to work or to renounce; your effort is the bondage. What is destined to happen will happen. If you are destined not to work, work cannot be had even if you hunt for it. If you are destined to work, you will not be able to avoid it; you will be forced to engage yourself in it. So, leave it to the higher power; you cannot renounce or retain as you choose.

D: Bhagavan said yesterday that while one is engaged in search of God 'within', 'outer' work would go on automatically. In the life of Sri Chaitanya it is said that during his lectures to students he was really seeking Krishna (Self) within, forgot all about his body and went on talking of Krishna only. This raises a doubt whether work can safely be left to itself. Should one keep part-attention on the physical work?

M: The Self is all. Are you apart from the Self? Or can the work go on without the Self? The Self is universal: so, all actions will go on whether you strain yourself to be engaged in them or not. The work will

go on of itself. Thus Krishna told Arjuna that he need not trouble himself to kill the Kauravas; they were already slain by God. It was not for him to resolve to work and worry himself about it, but to allow his own nature to carry out the will of the higher power.

D: But the work may suffer if I do not attend to it.

M: Attending to the Self means attending to the work. Because you identify yourself with the body, you think that work is done by you. But the body and its activities, including that work, are not apart from the Self. What does it matter whether you attend to the work or not? Suppose you walk from one place to another: you do not attend to the steps you take. Yet you find yourself after a time at your goal. You see how the business of walking goes on without your attending to it. So also with other kinds of work.

D: It is then like sleep-walking.

M: Like somnambulism? Quite so. When a child is fast asleep, his mother feeds him; the child eats the food just as well as when he is fully awake. But the next morning he says to the mother, "Mother, I did not take food last night". The mother and others know that he did, but he says that he did not; he was not aware. Still, the action had gone on.

A traveller in a cart has fallen asleep. The bulls move, stand still or are unyoked during the journey. He does not know these events but finds himself in a different place after he wakes up. He has been blissfully ignorant of the occurrences on the way, but the journey has been finished. Similarly with the Self of a person. The ever-wakeful Self is compared to the traveller asleep in the cart. The waking state is the moving of the bulls; samadhi is their standing still (because samadhi means *jagratsushupti*, that is to say, the person is aware but not concerned in the action; the bulls are yoked but do not move); sleep is the unyoking of the bulls, for there is complete stopping of activity corresponding to the relief of the bulls from the yoke. Or again, take the instance of the cinema. Scenes are projected on the screen in the cinema-show, but the moving pictures do not affect or alter the screen. The spectator pays attention to them, not to the screen. They cannot exist apart from the screen, yet the screen is ignored. So also, the Self is the screen where the pictures, activities, etc. are seen going on. The man is aware of the latter but not aware of the

essential former. All the same, the world of pictures is not apart from the Self. Whether he is aware of the screen or unaware, the actions will continue.

D: But there is an operator in the cinema!

M: The cinema-show is made out of insentient materials. The lamp, the pictures, the screen etc., are all insentient and so they need an operator, the sentient agent. On the other hand, the Self is absolute consciousness, and therefore self-contained. There cannot be an operator apart from the Self.

D: I am not confusing the body with the operator; rather, I am referring to Krishna's words in the 61st verse, Chapter XVIII of the Gita:

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति।
भ्रामयन्सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥ ६१ ॥

“The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the Heart of every being, and He by His delusive power spins round all beings set as if on a machine.”

M: The functions of the body involving the need for an operator, are borne in mind; since the body is jada or insentient, a sentient operator is necessary. Because people think that they are jivas, Krishna said that God resides in the heart as the operator of the jivas. In fact, there are no jivas and no operator, as it were, outside them; the Self comprises all. It is the screen, the pictures, the seer, the actors, the operator, the light, the theatre and all else. Your confounding the Self with the body and imagining yourself the actor, is like the seer representing himself an actor in the cinema-show. Imagine the actor asking if he can enact a scene without the screen ! Such is the case of the man who thinks of his actions apart from the Self.

D: On the other hand, it is like asking the spectator to act in the cinema-picture. So, we must learn sleep-waking!

M: Actions and states are according to one's point of view. A crow, an elephant, a snake, each makes use of one limb for two alternate purposes. With one eye the crow looks on either side; for the elephant the trunk serves the purpose of both a hand and a nose, and the serpent sees as well as hears with its eyes. Whether you say the crow has an eye or eyes, or refer to the trunk of the elephant as 'hand' or 'nose' or call the eyes of the serpent



Sri Ramana Maharshi

its ears, it means all the same. Similarly in the case of the jnani, sleep-waking or waking-sleep or dream-sleep or dreaming-wakefulness, are all much the same thing.

D: But we have to deal with a physical body in a physical, waking world! If we sleep while work is going on, or try to work while asleep, the work will go wrong.

M: Sleep is not ignorance, it is one's pure state; wakefulness is not knowledge, it is ignorance. There is full awareness in sleep and total ignorance in waking. Your real nature covers both and extends beyond. The Self is beyond both knowledge and ignorance. Sleep, dream and waking states are only modes passing before the Self: they proceed whether you are aware of them or not. That is the state of the jnani, in whom pass the states of samadhi, waking, dream and deep sleep, like the bulls moving, standing, or being unyoked, while the passenger is asleep. These answers are from the point of view of the ajnani; otherwise such questions would not arise.

D: Of course, they cannot arise for the Self. Who would be there to ask? But unfortunately, I have not yet realised the Self!

M: That is just the obstacle in your way. You must get rid of the idea that you are an ajnani and have yet to realise the Self. You are the Self. Was there ever a time when you were not aware of that Self?

D: So, we must experiment in sleep-waking ... or in day-dreaming?

M: (Laughs).

Our Ashrama in Nova Scotia

by Dr. Nirmala Bharadwaj

Devotees gathered to celebrate the 128th advent of Sri Bhagavan at Arunchala on Sept. 1st, 2024, in the Nova Scotia Ashrama. We had the joy of walking on the woods trail, climbing the mountain, visiting our 'Skanda Ashrama' and the 'Virupaksha Cave' behind the ashrama, and sitting in the Mandir together. Pictures of the devotees' visit can be seen at:

<https://media.ashrama.org/2024/advent/>

The presence of Sri Bhagavan was clearly felt, and is shared in this beautiful poem.

A man rich in faith once had a dream,
So far fetched or so it would seem;
But, this calling was so earnest
And the yearning so true,
Bhagavan sent His finest
To make his dream come true!

The rolling hills of Annapolis
Are far from the hustle of any metropolis;
Its sprawling valley with serene beauty,
At once draws us to the peace of eternity.

We stand on the shoulders of so many devotees,
Whose endless toil has given us this amazing
opportunity.

A tree here, a swing there,
An addition here and a relic there;
As we look around anywhere,
Memories are teeming everywhere.

Every building and its contents
Have been put together,
With diligence, grace and utmost care!

The cottage, the books and the prayer manuscripts,
Help revive and renew us on our personal trip.

Humbled by their toil, sweat and tears,
We all yearn to serve for the rest of our years.
We chanted, read and hiked on trails;
Pondered in silence as words fade and fail...

Be still, says He
In the silence everywhere;
His message, we hear
Loud and clear!

Cooking, cleaning, mending and fixing,
Weeding, washing, painting and planning;
Absorbed in the moment in each other's company;
The power of satsangh was this journey's epiphany!

Quoting names will stir our deep emotional debt..
Instead let's bask in the glory
Of their legacy kept intact.

The trip up to the cave with other devotees,
Put the fear of climbing big rocks for many at ease.
Once inside in its deep recess,
We all felt cramped, I must confess.
But as the candle was lit and the chanting began,
Our thoughts stood still as tears welled up and ran!

A night of solitude and heartfelt silence,
In the mountain cabin was an awesome experience!
Filled with books and pictures
In that blissful ambiance,
That cabin builds our spiritual resilience.

Back in the valley, inside the barn
Is a treasure trove of memories from the years gone.
The saws, the nails, some tools old and rusty,
Reminds us of the work of yet so many...

The lovely spaces that housed
Cows Saraswati and Lakshmi
Are now filled with hay
And a whole lot of sweet memories!

A moment of silence at Shep's site,
We bow to this canine's spiritual insight.

Our hearts often leap with joy and glee
When we think that our Annamalai
Has found it's distant twin surely
Out here in this Annapolis Valley!

Guru Vachaka Kovai
by Sri Muruganar

Translated by David Godman, Robert Butler and Dr.
T.V. Venkatasubramanian

The Greatness of Ahamukha
(Facing Towards the Self)

184. Consciousness, one's real nature, which is the basis of knowing the non-Self objects, is the excellent anchorage for the meditation practice of aspirants. If, unaware of this, they meditate and toil by holding onto another object imagined within that Self, this is like grasping a shadow, the illusory reflection, while ignoring the real object.

185. The intellect, which is the *suttarivu*, the individual consciousness, loses its focus and suffers by constantly directing attention towards objects and their attributes. The way to make it (individual consciousness) unite with and subside in one's *swarupa* (true nature) is to begin taking it, wholeheartedly, as the object of attention through the enquiry 'Who is the "I" who is paying attention to sordid sense objects?'

186. You perceivers! You who endure endless suffering through perceiving the objects of sense without first perceiving the one in whose sight they appear! Happiness is simply the removal of the sense of duality. This occurs when attention is focused inward instead of outward.

Bhagavan: Misery is due to objects. If they are not there, there will be no contingent thoughts, so misery is wiped off. 'How will objects cease to be?' is the next question. The shrutis (scriptures) and the sages say that the objects are only mental creations. They have no substantive being. Investigate the matter and ascertain the truth of the statement. The result will be the conclusion that the objective world is in the subjective consciousness. The Self is thus the only reality which permeates and also envelopes the world. Since there is no duality, no thoughts will arise to disturb your peace. This is realisation of the

Self. The Self is eternal and so also its realisation.

187. O Mind! It is not wise for you to come out and show yourself. Realising that merging your consciousness in the Heart alone bestows on you the ultimate benefit, stay within and safeguard yourself from maya, who seeks every possible means of capsizing you by drawing you outwards.

188. Rather than wasting one's life by racing around seeking sense pleasures and dancing with the intoxication of them, the wiser course is to seek, through consciousness, one's real nature and live merged in it, obtaining the ultimate benefit in the Heart.

189. Dualistic pairs of opposing thoughts are the cause of your misery as they afflict the mind. They banish the bliss of peace, your nature, preventing you from experiencing it. Hence the proper course is to ensure the total cessation of mental *vrittis* (activities) in such a way that opposing thought pairs do not gain a hold over the mind.

Muruganar: 'Dualistic pairs of opposing thoughts' are thoughts that invariably rise together and which never separate from each other, such as virtue and sin, joy and misery, good and bad, and so on. You should know that tranquility is not experienced except by inner harmony, and an inner harmony will only exist for those who have a dead mind. The reason for this is that these aforementioned thoughts always rise in opposing pairs.

190. You people who go on flying like birds to one holy Siva shrine after another, not realising that Siva is dwelling within you! Supreme Sivam is the consciousness that has subsided and focused itself, without the slightest movement, in the Heart.

191. Rather than allowing the mind to spread outwards, like the sail of a ship, to be ruined by the strong winds of the objects of sense, it is wisdom to dive deep and enter the Heart in order to obtain the state of stillness, and [there] be like an anchor that sinks deep and lies settled on the broad ocean's bed.

Excerpts from *Maha Yoga*

by K. Lakshmana Sarma

Sri Bhagavan gave the replies below to devotees who came to him seeking his guidance. They are included in the book titled Maha Yoga, authored and compiled by Sri K. Lakshmana Sarma, who had the great fortune of studying Bhagavan's works (such as Ulladu Narpadu) directly under his supervision.

How to endure Grief: “By turning the mind inwards one can overcome the worst of griefs. Grief is possible only when one thinks of oneself as a body. If the form be transcended, one will know that the Self is eternal – that there is neither birth nor death; it is the body that is born and dies, not the Self; the body is a creation of the ego, which however is never perceived apart from a body; it is in fact indistinguishable from the body. One should consider that in sleep one was not aware of a body; one will then realise that the body is not real. On waking from sleep the ego arises; then thoughts. Find out to whom the thoughts belong. Ask wherefrom they arise. They must spring from the Self, which is consciousness. Apprehending this truth even vaguely helps towards extinction of the ego; and thereafter the one infinite existence will be realised; in that State there are no individuals – only that one being. Hence there is no ground for even the thought of death.

“If one thinks oneself to have been born, one cannot escape the thought of death. Let one therefore question whether one was born at all. One will then find that the real Self is ever-existent and that the body is only a thought — the first of all thoughts, the root of all mischief.”

The three moods of the mind: The mind is alternately subject to three moods; the state of dullness and inertia, called *tamas*, is the lowest; the next higher is restless activity, called *rajas*; the highest is clarity and peace, called *sattva*; the Sage tells us that the disciple should not regret or bewail the prevalence of the first two, but wait till the mood of clarity comes, and then make the most of it.

Death: “The dead are indeed happy, having got rid of the incubus of the body; the dead do not grieve. Do men fear sleep? No, they court it and prepare for it.

But sleep is temporary death, and death is but a longer sleep. If the man dies while alive, if he dies the death which is not death, by the extinction of the ego – he would not grieve for anybody's death. Apart from this, since we know that we persist through all the three states, with the body and without it, why should one desire the continuance of the shackles of the body, for oneself or for another?

On Eternal Life: “Forgetting the Self is death. Remembering it is life. You desire eternal life. Why? Because the present life (in relativity) is unbearable. Why is it so? Because it is not your real nature. You are in truth the pure spirit; but you identify It with a body, which is a projection of the mind, an objectified thought, and the mind in its turn has originated from the pure spirit. Mere change of body is no good, because there is only a transfer of the ego to the new body. Moreover, what is life? It is existence (as consciousness), and that is yourself. That is the true life, and it is eternal (beyond time). Life in the body is conditioned life. But you are life unconditioned. You will recover your true nature as unconditioned life, if the idea ‘I am the body’ dies”.

Happiness: “To seek happiness, identifying the Self with the body, is like trying to cross a river on the back of a crocodile. When the ego rises, the mind is separated from the source, the Self, and is restless, like a stone thrown up into the air, or like the waters of a river. When the stone or the river reaches its place of origin, the ground or the ocean, it comes to rest. So too the mind comes to rest and is happy when it returns to and rests in its source. As the stone and the river are sure to return to their starting place, so too the mind will inevitably – at some time – return to its source.” Thus, it is promised that all shall reach the goal.

“Happiness is your own nature. Hence it is not wrong to desire it. What is wrong is seeking it outside, because it is inside.”

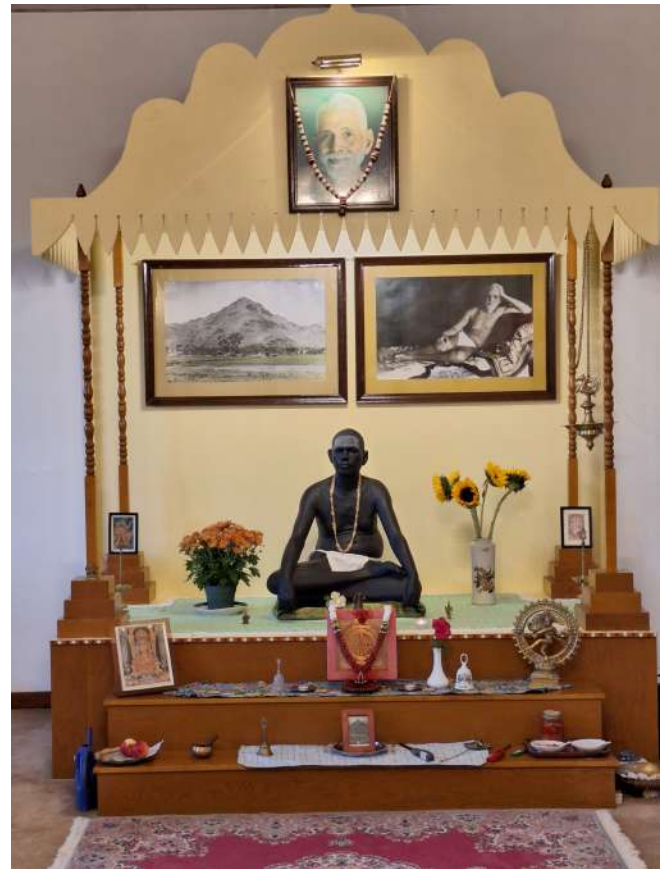
The True State: “Your duty is simply TO BE – not to be this or that. When the ‘I’ flies off at a tangent, saying ‘I am this’, it is egoism, ignorance. When it shines as the pure ‘I’ it is the real Self.”

Renouncing family-ties: In sleep you were not aware of ‘your’ family. And you are the same being now. But now you are aware of the family and feel that it

binds you, and think of renouncing it. Do the members of 'your' family bind you to themselves, or do you bind yourself to them? It is enough if you give up the thought, 'This is my family.' Thoughts change, but not you. To do so, you do not need to stop the mind's thinking. Just remember the source of the thoughts, and be earnest to find it.

On being firm and unaffected: Criticising the outlook which says, 'I am like froth on the ocean of consciousness,' the Sage said: "To think so is the root of all worries and should be given up. The Self is the ocean and the world and souls are froth on it. If one knows and remembers this always, then one will be firm and free from doubts and worries. This truth is verified by diving into the Heart and by the quest. But even without diving inside, one is that, and nothing but that. The ideas of inside and outside can arise only so long as the right view is not accepted and adhered to. The lover of deliverance is told to dive in, because he is mistaking the non-existent individual soul for the Self, who is infinite, including all that is seen. He that knows thus will not desire anything, but will have perfect contentment always. Even before diving inwards, the Self is experienced. No one can deny that he exists. That existence is the consciousness of the Self. Unless you exist, you

cannot ask questions. So, you *are* aware of yourself. The fruit of your efforts to realise the truth of the Self is just to get rid of your present errors. There is to be no new 'realisation.'"



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 [events page](#).

The [Nova Scotia Arunachala Ashrama](#) is welcoming overnight guests. Guests are required to make arrangements ahead of time by contacting nova-scotia@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. Visitors are advised to have health insurance. As usual, the Mandiram is open to daytime visitors for prayers and meditation. Tel: 902 824-2297

Please see our [online satsangs](#) page for a listing of other centers that are offering satsangs.

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