

# Commentary on the Teachings of Ramana Maharshi

*An interview with Ram (James Swartz) conducted by  
John Howells in January 2003,  
at Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, South India*

JOHN: *I would like to ask you to comment on Ramana's original teachings.*

Ram: Commenting on these texts is difficult. Who knows what Ramana really said? And who he said it to and why? In a way it is better to check the scriptures and get it directly from the horse's mouth. They are much more comprehensive and great minds have commented on them making the ideas more accessible. This kind of text is called *smriti*, words based on personal experience. The words may very well be true but they may not be true, or only partially true, not necessarily because the person who uttered them was not enlightened (although that is a distinct possibility these days when so many are claiming enlightenment and pontificating mightily on its nature) but because he or she was unable to properly express the subtle truths. So to see if there is anything worth considering in the words of an enlightened soul one needs to check *sruti*, the scriptures, (the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, Bhagavad Gita) since it has been purified of erroneous concepts and put in clear refined language. If statements based on personal experience, *smriti*, does not jibe with *sruti*, scripture, then one needs to take a second look at them.

To find out the true meaning we need to look into the way words are used in this document. Translations of these

teachings are valuable but they are almost always beset with one major problem; the translator often is not a Self realized person or if he is, his ability to express the realization is unsophisticated...so you often get approximations of the true meaning but not the true meaning. It is always a problem.

JOHN: *Are there any other issues that make commenting on the words of a jnani like Ramana difficult?*

Ram: There is one, a rather subtle but important point, nonetheless. And that is that the truth of any statement depends on the point of view from which it was spoken and the point of view from which it is viewed. So both a statement and its opposite can be true. Very often enlightened people speak of enlightenment from the relative plane, even though they know that there is a perhaps higher or better or more accurate way to express their vision. But the person to whom they are speaking needs to be ready to hear it that way and unless they are it is useless to speak from the ultimate standpoint. So if you didn't know what the context was you might conclude that the enlightened person wasn't so enlightened. From one point of view the sun seems to rise in the east and set in the west. From another, the North Pole at the winter solstice, it seems to go around in a circle. From the vastness of space it seems to be a stationary point around which the earth is spinning.

JOHN: *Looking at Ramana's text "Who am I" he is asked what "Who am I?" means.*

Ram: He answers with a typical Vedantic teaching, called the *pancha kosas* or the five sheaths. It is found in the Upanishads. He negates the five sheaths ( erroneous

notions about one's self) and when asked who he is (if he is none of these) says, "that awareness which alone remains".

It is interesting to note that although Ramana was a realized soul he did not 'teach' in the traditional Vedantic way...which is to take a text on Self realization, the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads or one of the many excellent Vedantic texts that have stood the test of time, and unfold it verse by verse, word by word. It is quite a rigorous and formal sadhana. The teacher not only needs to be versed in the scriptures, which Ramana was, but the student need to be qualified. The teachings are wielded systematically on the student over a long period of time because the mind is very resistant to this knowledge, even though it needs it badly and they strip off the student's self ignorance on the spot. I suspect, although we have no way of knowing, that in this case Ramana is probably answering a question by a curious person who is unfamiliar with Vedic culture so he is just giving information, explaining the basic idea found in the Upanishads... which has been corroborated by his own experience.

JOHN: *What do you mean 'strips away the student's ignorance on the spot'?*

Ram: Most people, particularly Westerners unfamiliar with the teaching tradition of Advaita Vedanta, think Vedanta is just about studying scripture and therefore only produces intellectuals, pundits they call them here, who know a bunch of profound concepts...but are not Self realized. And it is true that there are schools that produce pundits...which is not all that bad ...because the ideas need to be kept alive anyway. But Vedanta is not a belief system nor is it a passive body of information that is meant to be interpreted according your own tastes. It is a means of Self knowledge

that works in a very dynamic and practical way to remove the student's ignorance about who he or she is. And very often enlightenment happens right in the classroom as the teacher is unfolding the teachings. This is possible because Vedanta says that you are already enlightened because you are the Self and there is only one Self. All that prevents you from knowing it are the erroneous notions you have about yourself and the world. So assuming you want to be free of your limiting views you expose yourself to the teaching and it let it remove your ignorance.

JOHN: *So what you're suggesting here is that Ramana is not trying to directly enlighten this person?*

Ram: As I said, one never knows because we weren't there and we do not have access to Ramana's intentions. Of course he would always be happy to enlighten someone but...and this is just a guess...what it feels like is that you have a beginner who knows very little and Ramana is playing the role of informant just making the idea known. There are many people on the spiritual path who are not really serious about enlightenment or qualified for it but who deserve answers to their questions. They are good people who have an interest, sometimes a deep love of spirituality, and they hang out with the sages like Ramana because they like hanging out with sages. It's a nice life. Of course they would like enlightenment...who wouldn't?...but the downside is that it would ruin their seeking lifestyle which has become an identity in itself. Nonetheless they feel the need to justify themselves so they always have a number of profound questions. My guru used to say that such people were 'in love with their doubts.' It means they want to know but they really don't want to know. I have no idea of this is the case with this questioner, but it doesn't seem to be a very natural question. If the questioner were an advanced seeker who

was really ready to know, he or she would probably not ask such a question or ask it in this way. He or she would already know the answer and know that asking such a question would not solve the problem. Ramana was a very decent kind person. He would probably take any question at face value and answer it to the best of his ability.

JOHN: *What about this idea that Ramana taught in silence, that all you had to do was to sit in his presence and the silence would enlighten you?*

Ram: I suppose that if you were completely qualified, absolutely ready to pop, you could just sit in the presence of someone like Ramana and maybe figure out that you are whole and complete limitless awareness. But this is highly unlikely. Usually people who are highly qualified only have one or two very subtle doubts separating themselves from *jnanam*, Self knowledge. And usually they already know the answer... they just don't have one hundred percent confidence in it. Experientially they have everything they need and all that is missing is the knowledge of who they actually are. So when they offer their ignorance to a sage like Ramana, who is an authority and for whom they have respect and devotion, he can, with a few very well chosen words, remove their ignorance. Sometimes the person puts the question and gives the answer and the teacher just nods...and that is it. Or sometimes the teacher just asks a question in response to the student's statement and the student understands...without giving a verbal answer.

JOHN: *So you're saying that words are better than silence?*

Ram: Not better than but at least as good. A thing and its opposite may both be true and useful. There is a kind of romantic myth about silence that does not serve people

spiritually. People are tired of words and they want relief and this is understandable but if you are already enlightened and don't know it, then silence is not going to help. Silence will not remove your ignorance.

JOHN: *What do you mean by that?*

Ram: Silence is not opposed to ignorance. They can coexist very nicely. But knowledge is opposed to ignorance and it will destroy it. You start out thinking you're limited but the fact is that you are not limited. It may be that in silence you will realize it but it wasn't the silence that made you realize it, it was the fact that you were doing some kind of enquiry...looking into the nature of the silence and seeing that it was you. This seeing is called *jnanam*, knowledge. You find people who spend years sitting in silence alone and in the presence of a mahatma and nothing happens. Sure, you can argue that they are not ready to get it but if they were able to formulate their doubt and express it to a *jnani* they might have it removed in a second. So the right words spoken by the right person at the right time can be just as effective as silence.

JOHN: *This is very interesting.*

Ram: What I find interesting is that Ramana does not actually use his own words to answer this fellow. He is using the Upanishadic words. He might be doing this because he knows the difference between *smriti* and *sruti* and he wants the words he uses to have the weight of the Upanishad. It shows the great respect he had for the tradition. That he was a great personality is undeniable, but he was not a 'personality' in the conventional sense, like Aurobindo, who may have realized the Self but who felt the need to redefine and more or less rewrite the Vedas

according to his own personal vision...which included the whole notion of human evolution. This notion is definitely outside the Upanishadic tradition which is concerned only with removing ignorance of one's limitless nature. Ramana wasn't a do-gooder, trying to change the world with some sort of messianic vision. He saw the truth clearly and he expressed it in a straightforward manner...just as it is expressed in the Upanishad.

If you look at this statement the question that will naturally arise when Awareness is said to be the self is "What is this natural awareness?" And Ramana, true to the Upanishad, replies, "Existence - Consciousness - Bliss (Sat - Chit - Ananda). If Ramana were a traditional teacher and the question was actually heartfelt, then he might have unfolded the exact meaning of these words so that the student would realize the Self. It is not enough to just give the words. We have all read hundreds of times and heard every guru from California to Calcutta say that we are Satchitananda. They need to be unfolded very carefully...which can take hours or days. Maybe we are only seeing part of the conversation.

*JOHN: You keep making this distinction between the teaching style of Ramana and traditional Vedanta. What do you mean exactly?*

Ram: Ramana wasn't a traditional teacher but had a great respect for the teaching tradition. Let me see if I can explain what I mean. There are two great traditions under the umbrella of Sanatana Dharma, Vedic culture: Yoga and Vedanta. Yoga deals with the experiential side (karma) of spiritual life and is actually meant for the purpose of purifying the mind. It is not a valid means of Self knowledge although yogi types sometimes attain enlightenment, not because of their yoga but because they develop inquiring

minds as a result of all the subtle experiences that their practices generate and intuitively draw the correct conclusion about the Self and their identity with it....during or immediately after a profound epiphany...like Ramana did during his 'death' experience...or by reflecting on their epiphanies over a period of time. Millions of people have the kind of experience Ramana did. I've heard hundreds of such stories. But almost no one becomes enlightened during a particular experience (although it may feel like that) because they fail to grasp the meaning of the experience or the importance of the one to whom the experience is occurring. It is the understanding that "I am the Self" that needs to come out of Self experience.

JOHN: *So it seems you need to come away from the experience with the clear understanding of the fact that you are whole and complete limitless awareness.*

Ram: Vedanta acknowledges the importance of experience but actually deals with the 'meaning' of experience. Any experience is only useful spiritually if it shows you that you are whole and complete limitless awareness. If the experience leaves you incomplete and separate, craving another Self experience, what use is it? This, of course, assumes that you are striving to be free. Many have no idea what liberation is or that it is actually possible so they just chase experience. There are several meditators here right now who have had all kinds of exceptional experiences for years, what you could call Self experiences, but who remain as egos still striving to gain something. Pure beautiful egos, to be sure, but still unaware that they are limitless. The knowledge that the 'I' is actionless awareness, as Ramana says, is called Vedanta, the knowledge that erases one's ignorance. What is that ignorance? The belief that the 'I' is

limited, inadequate, and incomplete, the belief in one's self as a doer.

JOHN: *So chasing experience isn't the way to go? You're saying that you should be looking for knowledge?*

Ram: Yes, absolutely. It is quite rare to have a single experience like Ramana and come away with the firm knowledge that 'I am the Self'....a one a million chance. He was either exceptional or lucky although there really isn't any particular advantage to waking up at a particularly young age. He may have been graced but this does not mean that his enlightenment was exceptional. He certainly didn't behave as if it were. Enlightenment is just enlightenment and over time countless people have attained enlightenment in many unusual circumstances. When you realize that you are the Self it destroys your sense of being special or unique.

But somehow he understood that he needed understanding. He was trying to figure out something and he just happened to be trying to figure out the most important question, Who am I? You can see this enquiry in the report of his 'death' experience. You have a very bright young man making a scientific experiment, dispassionately observing what was happening. This is the essence of Vedanta.

JOHN: *So you're talking about Yoga and Vedanta to give some sort of context to his enlightenment?*

Ram: Yes. Now that Ramana is getting fame it is rather sad to see all these Western people coming to Tiruvannamalai with absolutely no notion of the context of his enlightenment and his life, with no understanding of the depth of the Vedic

tradition and burdened with amazing and ill-considered views of enlightenment based on their Ramana fantasies.

Anyway, Ramana's type of realization, because it did not occur at the feet of a guru in a traditional Vedantic classroom, is more in line with the tradition of Yoga, although most yogis do not become *jnanis* as Ramana did. His lifestyle too, sitting in meditation in a cave, is more typical of the yogic tradition than the Vedantic. The reason *yogis* do not usually become *jnanis* is because they have often been confused by the language of Yoga into thinking of enlightenment as a permanent experience of *samadhi*. So when the experience is 'on' they are not looking to understand anything, they are simply trying to make the state permanent, *sahaja*. The joke is that enlightenment is not an experience, nor is there any permanent experience. Furthermore, they do not realize that to make an experience permanent one would have to be a doer, an agent acting on the experience, maintaining it or controlling it or staying in it...which is a dualistic state, not enlightenment.

JOHN: *This idea that enlightenment is not a particular experience is quite revolutionary, isn't it?*

Ram: It is and it isn't. Let's face it, people are experience oriented...because they feel they need to get something here. And after years of picking up various experiences along the way they get totally conditioned to seeing everything in terms of experience...how they feel about things. But experience is limited. And very dumb. It does not teach you anything. It can't teach you anything...unless you are out to learn something. So when a person becomes disillusioned with experience and turns within to seek the Self he or she will formulate the search in terms of experience. But a few rare people understand that seeking

experience, particularly the experience of enlightenment, is not the way to go. In the old days many more people sought understanding...perhaps because of the nature of society...who knows? The reason Ramana pushes self enquiry is because the problem is ignorance. Experience does not remove ignorance. It is motivated by ignorance. Only knowledge removes ignorance. And you get knowledge by making an enquiry...or being taught. Everybody starts out chasing experience but the clever ones switch off it at some point and head for knowledge.

JOHN: *So how would you express that knowledge?*

Ram: The negative way to express Self realization is “I am not the doer. I am not the enjoyer.” In Ramana’s case he realized “I am not the body” because he found himself to be quite aware even as the body lay there ‘dead.’ “I am not the body” is the equivalent of “I am not the doer” because the body is the doer. Ramana was called a *jnani* because he gained knowledge of who he was during the experience. The experience finished after some time but the knowledge of who he was remained permanently. It was there operating in the background regardless of what experience he was having. At the end of his life he must have been experiencing serious pain...and wished he was dead...but his Self knowledge was unaffected. And he was unaffected...because he was the Self. But the body/mind complex suffered.

JOHN: *Most of the people around here that I meet are looking for a particular experience and think that Ramana was in some special state.*

Ram: When a person becomes a deity or a myth a lot is gained but a lot is lost too. You gain an ideal and inspiration

but you lose a practical connection with the truth. Had Ramana realized in the traditional Vedantic way, at the feet of a *jnani* who was teaching the Upanishad he might have picked up the skill of wielding the means of knowledge and may have gone on to enlighten hundreds...assuming the Lord sent that many qualified people to him. This is not to in any way diminish Ramana, but while he was sitting at the foot of Arunachala teaching 'in silence' there were great Vedantic masters like Swami Chinmayananda and his guru Swami Tapovan churning out many enlightened persons using the traditional verbal methods passed down from the Lord through Shankara and other great links in the tradition.

If you know the real spiritual India, not just the export guru scene and the *satsang* culture, you will understand that while enlightenment is rare with reference to the total number of people on the planet there are tens of thousands of 'fully' enlightened people worldwide and particularly in India. I've lived here many years and was introduced to the highest levels of Indian spirituality when I was quite young and I've lived with a number of enlightened people of the same caliber as Ramana and have personally met more than one hundred enlightened people. And this is just India. Although I am not an expert on Buddhism I know that it is a living enlightenment tradition with roots in the Veda that has been going on for a couple of thousand years, perhaps more. And there are undoubtedly many thousands of enlightened persons who gained it through that means; Tibetans, Indochinese, Sri Lankan and Japanese and now Europeans and Americans.

JOHN: *That sounds like heresy and contradicts the conventional wisdom.*

Ram: Yes, I suppose it does. But conventional wisdom is often wrong. It is rare but not as rare as it is made out to be.

JOHN: *So what accounts for this belief?*

Ram: When you consider that human beings have been on the planet for a couple of million years and that the Self pervades and informs every living being every second of their existence and that the Self has been an object of worship and knowledge forever and that it responds to any sincere desire to know it, and that the soul transmigrates bringing with it the spiritual work it has done before, you can not seriously believe that in any age there are only a handful of enlightened people.

JOHN: *That make a lot of sense. Are there any other reasons why people think it is so rare?*

Ram: One source of ignorance accounting for this belief is the ego's lack of spiritual self confidence. It always resists the truth and in fact often does everything it can to sabotage one's efforts to attain it. So to keep it from doing the work, it imagines that only supermen are capable of it. A more insidious source is the gurus themselves...clever and powerful people who have had some kind of enlightenment experience but who are not enlightened...who are suffering enlightenment sickness i.e. the ego has carefully confused itself with the Self and built a new identity as 'an enlightened being', which is used to gain typically egoic ends: power, respect, pleasure etc. These people have a vested interest in creating the impression that there are only a handful of enlightened people because it makes their enlightenment seem more rare and important. Today you will find gurus who have mapped out their idea of the different 'levels' of enlightenment and have conveniently put the famous gurus

of the past and present on levels lower than themselves. Or, at least, where it was obvious that their fame was not as great as the 'greats', put themselves on the same 'level.' People are so abysmally ignorant spiritually nowadays that they unthinkingly swallow this stuff.

JOHN: *That's not a very kind statement.*

Ram: Perhaps it isn't, but it's true. In fact I'm happy to rant a bit more on the subject if you'll permit me.

JOHN: *OK.*

Ram: One particular manifestation of this ignorance is the arrogance that one sees in so called spiritual people. They feel like they are superior to the religious crowd which they see as a bunch of primitive dualists...separating themselves from God, wrapped up in forms, etc. But the spiritual group is just as guilty of holding irrational beliefs, ill-considered opinions, and mind-boggling superstitions. A simple belief in an external God looks downright sensible compared to some of the views you hear expressed around here.

JOHN: *Like what?*

Ram: Like the idea that there is actually a column of light inside the mountain. Like the notion that there are eight hundred invisible *rishis* circumambulating the mountain on the inner path in a clockwise direction. Like the idea that the guru can do your *sadhana* for you.

Let's go back to my original contention about Ramana seeming to be more of a *yogi* than a *jnani*. Ramana's teachings can be confusing if one does not understand the difference between Yoga and Vedanta because he used

both languages when he was speaking. The language of Yoga is well-known and most people who came to him were not qualified for enlightenment so he used that language. If you are not qualified it does no good to try to enlighten someone with either words...or silence...because they are simply incapable of getting it. So what Ramana did was to encourage them to purify themselves by following a (yogic) path...which typically involved some sort of yogic discipline and surrender to God.

JOHN: *What do you mean by 'qualified for enlightenment?'*

Ram: Many Western people have no idea what *sadhana* is. They actually think that they can just get a ticket to India and get on the spiritual circuit and attend a satsang or two and they will get 'awakened.' They may have some experiences but if you get 'awakened' you will certainly fall back to sleep, usually because there is no *sadhana* in place. And there are gurus who themselves did *sadhana* but are loath to insist that their disciples do it...for fear of losing them, I suppose. You see many people who have been to Ramesh coming through Tiruvannamalai and what they seem to have got is the idea that they are not 'doers.' So their *sadhana* is no *sadhana*. Why? Because they have been told there is nothing you can do because your enlightenment is not up to you. It's all up to 'grace.' I'm not sure why the resolve to do vigorous *sadhana* is not the grace of God...but there you are.

It's true that you are not a doer, but the you that is not a doer is the Self. The ego doesn't become a non-doer by trying not to 'do' anything. This sort of teaching is very misleading because it is tailor made for the ego. It gives it the impression that it can have its cake and eat it too. But it

has value too...for someone addicted to doing, someone whose self worth is tied up in accomplishing things.

People are continually bewildered by the fact that Ramana was supposedly a non-dual *jnani* and that he preached religion and *sadhana* which is *dvaita*, duality. But he is completely in line with traditional Vedanta on this issue. Purification is at least as important as knowledge, perhaps more so, because without a clear mind, you will not get knowledge, *jnanam*. This idea does not sit well with people nowadays. They want it handed to them on a platter. This accounts for the popularity of the *shaktipat* gurus and the miracle makers. Around them you have a whole class of people who actually believe that the guru is doing the work for them!

JOHN:       *But Ramana didn't do sadhana to get enlightenment.*

Ram: That's true...but he certainly did *sadhana* after it. Knowing who he was, he need not have sat in meditation in caves for many years, he could have gone home and eaten his mom's iddlys and played cricket. It was all the same to him. But he didn't. He decided to purify his mind. The glory of Ramana is not his enlightenment. It was just the same as every other enlightenment that's ever been. His glory was his pure mind. He polished his mind to such a degree that it was particularly radiant... a great blessing to himself and everyone whom he contacted. That kind of mind you only get through serious *sadhana*, or yoga, if you will. These modern gurus, particularly the so-called 'crazy wisdom' gurus who seem to revel in gross mind, refuse to encourage people to develop themselves because they do not understand the tremendous pleasure that comes from a pure mind.

JOHN: *Let's look in detail at the text. After telling the person that the self is existence, consciousness, and bliss, he is asked "When will the realization of the self be gained?" and he replies, "When the world which is what is seen has been removed, there will be realization of the Self which is the Seer."*

Ram: The way the question is phrased supports what I've been saying about the language of Yoga and the language of Vedanta. The questioner says, 'When will the Self be gained?' Ramana does not disturb the fellow's mind by attacking the question and bringing him directly to the Self (because the fellow is not capable of it). In the Bhagavad Gita, which has the status of an Upanishad, Krishna says "let not the wise unsettle the mind of the ignorant" (by telling them something they are incapable of understanding). This is Ramana's approach here.

The question is typical of the yoga mindset...something to be gained. Vedanta, the tradition of knowledge which uses the (more accurate) language of identity would say, "The self is already accomplished. It cannot be gained because you are it already. If there is any 'gaining' it will be through a loss of ignorance."

Ramana's response is another teaching from scripture...the Upanishad, Gita, and Sankara (Drk-Drksha Viveka)...for which Ramana had the greatest respect... the discrimination between the Seer and the seen. The teaching establishes the understanding that what one sees (read experiences...including all so-called Self experiences: satories, samadhis, epiphanies, etc.) are "not Self" and the one who sees them is you, the Self. One thing I admire about Ramana was his refusal, unlike the modern teachers,

to reinvent the wheel. It shows his lack of egoism. Based on his experience, he knew the difference between the Self and the objects appearing in it (the seen) but he did not feel compelled to cook up some fancy personal teaching on the subject. Why? Because no fancy, modern teaching is required. Enlightenment is a very simple understanding of the Self and its relationship to experience, the forms. In a nutshell it is the understanding that while the forms depend on the Self, the Self does not depend on the forms. This freedom from experience is called *moksha*, liberation. This wisdom has been clearly stated long before Ramana came on the scene and needs no interpretation or new terminology.

Ramana knows that the question is actually imprecise and that the person will not understand if he attacks the question, so he takes it at face value and puts it in a traditional way. You have a copy. Can you refresh my memory about what he says?

JOHN: *Ramana says, "When the world which is what is seen has been removed, there will be realization of the Self...which is the Seer."*

Ram: This statement is pure Vedanta. The operative words are, "....has been removed". How is one supposed to understand the words "....has been removed?". What kind of removal is it? Is it the yogic view that complete destruction of the unconscious tendencies, *vasanas*, allows you to 'gain' the 'self? Or is it the Vedantic view...removal of the notion that the world is separate from the Self?

In Ramana's teachings you will find both ideas. The first is called the *vasana kshaya* theory of enlightenment by the Vedantis and *manonasa* by the Yogis. Most Buddhist

traditions espouse this view. The word 'world' is actually a psychological term in Yoga. It does not mean the physical world. The physical world is the Self. It has no personal meaning. But the 'world' that Ramana says has to be removed is the psychological projections that make up one's own 'world,' i.e. ignorance. These projections are based on an incorrect understanding of the Self, on a belief that the Self is separate, inadequate, or incomplete. Ramana's teaching, which is Upanishadic teaching, is called *vichara*, enquiry. The purpose of enquiry is knowledge, not the 'physical' removal of the mind. If he had been teaching Yoga as a means of liberation he would not have encouraged enquiry because Yoga is committed to experience of *samadhi*, not understanding that one is the Self.

JOHN: *This is interesting. I never heard it stated this way before.*

Ram: Well, it isn't really revolutionary. People read into Ramana whatever fits with their beliefs. So from that point of view it may seem controversial. But if you know the tradition from which Ramana comes it is just very pure Vedanta. Yoga is very popular and it always has been. I started out as a meatball businessman practicing *hatha yoga* for muscles. And I worked my way up to some very high *samadhis* through meditation. Then I realized that the Self wasn't a state and with a bit of luck a guru came into my life and sorted me. Mind you, I'm not attacking Yoga. Yoga, purification through *sadhana*, is essential for enlightenment.

JOHN: *But I thought the goal was sahaja samadhi.*

Ram: It's only a means. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the *samadhis* are not the final goal. *Sahaja* just means

‘continuous’ and ‘natural.’ So in terms of the mind it means a continuously still mind, one that values everything equally. That is the meaning of *Samadhi*. *Sama* means equal. You actually have this *samadhi* naturally all the time without doing a lick of work.

JOHN: *Oh, how is that?*

Ram: As the Self. Though the Self is out of time and the word ‘continuous’ is an experiential term referring to time, from the mind’s point of view the Self, which is every form of experience, is continuous...and natural. It is your nature.

Anyway, no *samadhi* is equivalent to enlightenment because *samadhis* are only states of mind or no mind, no mind being a state of mind. *Nirvikapa samadhi* is non-dual but unfortunately it is a state that can easily be destroyed. And there is no one there in that state, so when it ends one’s ignorance about the nature of one’s self is not removed and one experiences limitation once more.

*Samadhi* helps to purify the mind and is a great aid to enquiry but if you remove the mind, how will you make an enquiry? Who will make an enquiry? You make an enquiry with the mind for the mind...so it can shed its ignorance...and no longer trouble you. The mind is a very useful God given instrument. Would God have given a mind if He had intended for you to destroy it? And, in fact, Yoga isn’t about killing the mind either because how will you experience a *samadhi* if you don’t have a mind? The mind is the instrument of experience.

If you argue that you are aiming at *nirvikalpa samadhi* where there is no mind, fine, but the problem with *nirvikalpa samadhi* is that a fly landing on your nose can bring you out

of it, not that there is anyone there to come 'out'. And when the 'you' who wasn't there does 'come back,' as I just mentioned, you are just as stupid as you were before... because you were not there in the *samadhi* to understand that you are the *samadhi*. If you are the *samadhi* you will have it all the time because you have you all the time...so there will be no anxiety about making it permanent.

*Samadhi* is actually just a word that describes the nature of the Self. It means equal vision in the sense that whatever object you see has equal value to every other object. Why try to get your mind in this state when you have it already...as the Self? So this description is just as pertinent when the mind is active as when it is dead. If that is so, what is the value of a dead mind?

JOHN: *OK. You're saying that samadhi is not the goal, that it is just the means?*

Ram: Yes. Not the means. A means. There are other ways to purify the mind. Misunderstanding this teaching is perhaps responsible for more despair, confusion, and downright frustration than any other. It is commonly believed that this 'removal' means that all the *vasanas* need to be physically eradicated for enlightenment to happen. And many people believe that Ramana had 'achieved' that state. If you study Ramana's life you will see that by and large he was a very regular guy...a large part of his appeal... head in the clouds, feet firmly planted on the earth. He walked, talked, cooked, read, and listened to the radio. If he did not have a mind, who or what was doing all these things? No *vasanas* means no mind because the *vasanas* are the cause of the mind. How did he go about the business of life? So I think we need to look at the word 'removal' in a different way.

Ramana was called a *jnani* because he had removed the idea of himself as a doer...it is called *sarva karma sannyasa*... which happens when you realize you are the total. Or you realize you are the total when you realize you are not the doer. 'Not the doer' means the Self. It doesn't mean that the ego becomes a non-doer. The ego is always a doer. As the Self he understood that while the few *vasanas* he had left (which were non-binding and are not a problem even for a worldly person) were dependent on him he was not dependent on them. So for him, as the Self, they were non-binding. How can a thought or a feeling affect the Self? It can only affect an ego, a limited being...and then only if that ego lets it. For a person who thinks he or she is the doer, allowing the *vasanas* to express or not is not an option. Actions happen uncontrollably because the ego is pressurized to act in a certain way by the *vasanas*. For a *jnani* *vasanas* are elective, for an *agnani* they are compulsory.

So the 'removal' that Ramana talks about is only in terms of knowledge. He often uses another metaphor which he borrowed from Vedanta, the snake and the rope. In the twilight a weary thirsty traveler mistook the well rope attached to a bucket for a snake and recoiled in fear. When he got his bearings and his fear subsided he realized that the snake was actually only the rope. There was no reason to take a stick and beat the snake to death (which is equivalent to trying to destroy the mind) because the snake was only a misperception. When he calmed down and regained his wits (did some *sadhana*) he inquired into the snake and realized that it was just a rope. And in that realization the snake was 'removed.'

JOHN: *My understanding is that he meant the removal of all the attachments to our conditioned mind.*

Ram: How would that come about?

JOHN: In his Ashram his disciples would sit doing nothing for years. His own attendant, Annamalai Swami spent 10-15 years in daily conduct with Ramana and every minute when they were not working, they would be sitting quietly. Then, one day Ramana said to Annamalai "Now, you stop working and you go away and sit quietly". He then sat for 50 years in his room never again setting foot in Ramana's ashram. Ramana himself sat for almost 15 years in Virupashka cave, with very few people around. So, it involved a lot of sitting presumably witnessing whatever thoughts were coming up.

Ram: Well, sitting doing nothing is doing something...and you can get very attached to a meditation lifestyle...you can get attached to anything, even sannyasis get attached to their sticks and begging bowls... but yes, this idea is completely in line with traditional Vedantic *sadhana*. The texts support it. First you get the mind quiet and then you are capable of realizing that you are the Self. There is no better way to get the mind quiet than staying in close proximity to a person like Ramana whose mind was exceptionally quiet. It sets the tone and the disciple's mind becomes like it. And the longer you do apparently nothing, the more you realize that you don't have to do anything to be what you are. So this practice gradually kills off the doer. One of the misconceptions people have about the talking schools of Vedanta is that the talk somehow obscures the silence and therefore the words are just 'intellectual' and therefore of no use spiritually. But this is not true. My guru, Swami Chinmaya, was a famous Vedanta master who

had many enlightened disciples and he spoke incessantly. But the words were all coming out of the silence, the Self. I personally witnessed thousands of people one night in Bombay in deep *samadhi* as they listened to the truthful uplifting words. The feeling of peace around him was tremendously powerful at all times... whether he was speaking or not. So words and silence are not necessarily opposed. Ramana had a mind. He spoke. He used it efficiently all his life.

JOHN: Yes.

Ram: So, he wasn't removing *vasanas*.

JOHN: *Perhaps the attachment to them? He must have had a pull to go back to his family. He didn't do that and when his mother first came sent her away. He wasn't caught up in that anymore.*

Ram: That was because he understood he was the Self. The way you loose attachment in one go is to understand you are the Self.

JOHN: *It is often called "a constant experience".*

Ram: Sure, but the Self is 'constant experience' anyway. Or put it this way, if this is a non-dual reality and this reality is the Self then each and every experience is the Self. So nobody is short of Self experience, the ignorant and the enlightened alike. The problem is that very few people understand that everything is the Self. So they seek for all these incredible 'Self' experiences.

JOHN: *The Self is a constant experience?*

Ram: No, the Self is 'constant experience' if there is such a thing. In fact 'constant experience' is a contradiction. The Self becomes experience but it does not sacrifice its nature as a non-doing, non-experiencing witness to do it. That means you are free of your experiences.

JOHN: *When one says "constant experience" would that mean "remembering the self constantly?"*

Ram: Yes, remembrance is helpful...up to a point. But you can never make remembrance, like experience, constant. Knowledge is constant. When knowledge takes place, that's it. Remembering is a kind of mental activity that implies forgetting. Once you know you are the Self there is nothing to remember any more. How can you remember what you are? You are the one who is doing the remembering. You are prior to the act of remembrance.

JOHN: *The next question Ramana is asked is "Will there not be realization of the Self even while the world is there (taken as real)? He replies, "There will not be."*

Ram: What does he mean, the world is 'there.' Where is 'there?' And what is the 'world?'

JOHN: *Doesn't he mean that if you believe that 'out there' is real then you cannot realize the Self, at the same time ?*

Ram: I think that is what he meant. The words make it sound as if the world needs to be removed. But this is not likely so what does 'world' mean? It means the belief that something in the world will make you happy or can take away your happiness. It is the belief that needs to be removed. That belief counts as self ignorance because the self is unaffected by anything in your mind.

JOHN: *You can say it's an understanding of the true nature of the world.*

Ram: Correct. Vedanta says you only need to know what the world is and what the Self is. Neither is the source of suffering if you know what they are. When I know that contact with the world will not produce lasting happiness, then I've had it with the world. There is no way it can burn me. It's a problem when I seem not to know that it is endlessly changing. Or put it this way. I want it to last, at least when things are going good, and I want it not to last when things are going badly. What is wrong with this picture?

Enlightenment does not mean that there are two kinds of happiness, one worldly and one spiritual. The small bits of happiness that I'm able to pick up in the world are actually only my own Self too. If I understand that happiness gained through the world will not last, I can certainly enjoy it for as long as it lasts. When it ends, it ends. I just say, "OK, party is over...great!"

Ramana was a *jnani* because he removed his ignorance. I don't think he sat there all day, trying to break his attachments, although he may have done some of that in the years immediately following his enlightenment...when he was a cave dweller. I would think that because he was so young when he woke up his *vasanas* had not had a chance to get entrenched. And Indian culture was pretty pure in those days and he came from a decent family so he would not have had many deep negative attachments like sex and money and so on.

JOHN: *When you would go back to the situation of an 19 - 20 year old boy, who was firstly sitting for long hours, in samadhi in the Temple. He was taken care of so the people there recognised him, to some extent.*

Ram: That is pretty common in India when an incarnation appears. Indians have an innate appreciation of spiritual people.

JOHN: *Yes, so they could feel something and so supported him. But how about him? Would he really know what is happening to him? He has never read any spiritual books, never had a teacher and is sitting there for hours*

Ram: That's a good question. He probably did know because there were all these Mahatmas running about, role models if you will. So, he knew how they lived and he probably got lots of teaching from the *sadhus* who he came in contact with. You need to know that the Indian spiritual scene is a vast network and word of someone's enlightenment gets around very fast. Many great men must have come to see him and speak with him, share with him certain things that would be helpful to him. After all, he was sitting at the hub of one of India's most holy sites, Arunachala, which has been attracting mahatmas for thousands of years.

I stayed with a great mahatma in Kerala, Swami Abhedananda, who was a guru's guru. Many enlightened people came to see him and he would invite them up to his room and I'm sure that they got something very valuable. Many of the Westerners who come to India, even the one's who have been here a long time and who have been only associated with the 'export' gurus often have peculiar notions about saints like Ramana. They believe that he was

a kind of lonely figure, the only one of his kind, head and shoulders above the crowd, lived in a cave like a hermit and sat in silence most of the time and didn't have a social life. He probably was quite distant and emotionally reserved like most Tamil men, but he had love...in spades... and if you have love people come and give you what you need.

And then too you have to understand that his sense of himself being the Self never left him, so he wouldn't be that concerned about his emotional needs.

JOHN: *What I am getting at is how would he really know that his experience was the Self and not something else? How would he know that?*

Ram: How do you know that you are JOHN rather than someone else?

JOHN: *I don't, that is my problem. I don't know that anymore. That's exactly my problem.*

Ram: Do you know that you don't know that?

JOHN: *Yes, I know that whatever JOHN was doesn't work anymore for me. So I know that much.*

Ram: Yes, that's what knowledge is; "JOHN doesn't work for me anymore." When you see the Self, you know what the Self is. Self realization is the recognition of a fact. There is no doubt involved in it. If you are stranded on a desert island deprived of human contact for fifty years and somebody rescues you and they ask you your name, you answer 'John' immediately...even though you had never been asked for it for fifty years. That's knowledge.

JOHN: *Did he know the Self?*

Ram: Yes, it looks like he did. He may have thought it as an object at first which is natural. It's hard to tell. Perhaps the reason he sat in the caves alone was to erase whatever sense of duality there was left in his understanding.. which would show remarkable maturity. But then this kind of enlightenment will only come to a very mature person regardless of his age. Usually, the Self appears first as an object and then, keeping the mind on the Self and repeatedly inquiring into it, the bedrock understanding eventually comes that one is the Self that one is enquiring into. This is certainly what he taught. And he taught it with authority...based on personal experience.

The problem of language comes in here at this level. He uses the language of experience more than he does the language of identity...at least in the work that we have. If you read that statement describing his enlightenment experience in the temple you can get the sense that he knew he was it, perhaps a little vaguely in the beginning, but more clearly as time passed. Again it is very difficult to tell from the words.

It's probably not correct to say that he knew the Self. He knew he was the Self. That is the meaning of the word Ramana.

JOHN: *That seems like a very subtle distinction.*

Ram: It is, but there is a world of difference. To say you 'know the Self' means that you see the Self as an object, as something separate. To say that you are the Self means that there is no duality in your experience or understanding of yourself.

Let's talk about his famous 'enlightenment experience' now. I think it can shed a lot of light on this subject of what knowing the Self actually is

JOHN: *Yes. It's right here. I copied it from the board in the Mother's Shrine.*

*"I felt I was going to die and that I had to solve the problem myself, there and then. The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally without forming the words. Now death has come, what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies. And I at once dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out still as though rigor mortis had set in and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape so that neither the word 'I' nor any other word could be uttered. "Well then," I said to myself, "The body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there reduced to ashes. But with the death of the body am I dead? Is the body 'I'?' It is silent and inert but I could feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means that I am the deathless spirit." All this was not a dull thought. It flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought process.*

*'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that "I". From that moment onwards the 'I' or 'Self' focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that*

*time on. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music but the 'I' continued like the fundamental sruti note that underlies and blends will all other states. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading, or anything else I was still centered on the 'I'. Previous to that crisis I had felt no perceptible or direct interest in it, much less any inclination to dwell permanently in it."*

Ram: First, this is a typical Self experience. Let's not pretend that it is very rare. It happens somewhere to someone every day. Remember that lovely piece of writing by Wren Lewis that you gave me...the guy who got poisoned in Thailand and had what is now called a "near death experience?"

JOHN: *Yes, that would be another interesting one to talk about.*

Ram: It certainly would. My point is that there is now a vast literature of these kinds of experiences.

The first thing one notices is the statement, "the shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards." The mind previously was facing the world. Now it is looking inwards. Spiritual literature is forever reminding us that "The Truth dwells within."

And then we have Ramana's reaction to the experience. This to me is an important aspect...and it reveals the nature of Ramana's mind very clearly. Ordinarily when we have intense experiences involving great pleasure or great pain our emotions take over and cloud our appreciation of the experience. We either get so frightened we can't report what happened accurately or we get so ecstatic we can't

report what happen accurately. But Ramana stayed cool as a cucumber. He says, "Now death has come, what does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies."

I mentioned earlier that Vedanta is concerned with meaning. Here you have it. Here you have an inquiring mind, one not fascinated by the experience, one seeking to understand the experience. Although perhaps the majority of the people coming through here are experience happy there are quite a few who have this kind of mind to some degree. They want to know. But very few have it to the degree that Ramana did. This shows that he was a *jnani*, a lover of knowledge. And using logic he draws the right conclusion, "This body dies." Already we can see by implication that he knows he is other than the body. He has completely objectified it. Then he does quite an interesting thing, he dramatizes it 'to give greater reality to the enquiry.' The rest of his musings up to 'it is silent and inert' are just further confirmation of his understanding that he is not the body.

Then we come to the realization of the Self. This is the positive side, what happens when the world is negated. He says, "but I could feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it." The word 'personality' is quite interesting. I don't know if this was an accurate translation of Ramana's words. But what he meant was the *jivatman*, the Self embodied as an individual. I'm sorry to use these fancy Sanskrit terms but there is simply no English equivalent. The Self is unembodied, but it is capable of 'assuming' bodies. And one of the subtle 'bodies' it assumes is the *jivatman*. The other is the causal body called the *karana shirira*. OK, we can call it the soul or the person...but it's not quite right...throws up too many imprecise associations.

So now he is aware of the dead body and the subtle body... what is called the personality...and 'even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it.' You see the whole structure of the inner world. Then, he concludes correctly, 'So I am spirit transcending the body.' He has answered the 'Who am I?' question...which up to this point he had never even considered.

And then the icing on the cake; he describes *jnanam*, knowledge. "All this was not a dull thought. It flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought process."

When you have any experience the knowledge of that experience arises in the mind. This knowledge needs to be grasped, owned, if you will. In this case (as the Self) he witnessed the knowledge 'flashing vividly through me as living truth.'

JOHN: *So how does this relate to liberation?*

Ram: Many people have these kinds of experiences but do not realize that they are 'spirit transcending body.' It is this knowledge that is called liberation. Why is it liberation? Because thinking you are the body is a huge problem. It makes the world and everything in it real. But as the Self the world appears as a kind of dream that one knows to be a dream...so all the experiences you have in it can't bind you. In the next statement he addresses this issue of what is real. He says, " 'I' was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that 'I'."

This is knowledge. The 'I' is real. The body/mind isn't.

JOHN: *Surely, if it is the Self it has to be real, doesn't it?*

Ram: That's a good point. The answer is 'yes' and 'no.' Yes, because if the Self is everything and the Self alone is real and if there is such a thing as the body/mind it has to be real. There is a statement in the Vedanta that says, '*Brahma satyam, jagan mithya.*' It means the limitless Self is real, the world (read body/mind) is apparently real. Real is defined in spiritual science as what never changes...what lasts forever. So experience and the body don't fit that definition. But experience isn't actually unreal either. It has a peculiar status, neither completely real, nor completely unreal. There is a famous Vedantic text, the Vacarambana Sruti that explains how it is. I won't digress into it because we are just getting to the meat of Ramana's experience.

There is one more thing to understand in this passage which is that Ramana is not quite through with the process he's experiencing. He is at the intermediate stage. Before this experience came and he realized he was the Self he thought that the body was real. But this experience has shown him that with reference to the Self the body is not real. It is important that he completely negate his belief in the reality of the body. So he has to say that it isn't real. Then later, when the knowledge that he is the Self is completely firm, he can take the body back as real because it is non-separate from him. The only actual problem with the body is the belief that it is an independent entity and that the 'I' depends on it. But Ramana realized that the 'I' was free of the body. He says...and this is very important... 'all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that "I"'.

People who are ignorant that they are the immortal Self... what you would call materialists... believe that the 'I' is centered on the body, that it is the body that gives life to the

'I.' But scripture and direct experience shows that the body is centered on the 'I.' In other words the 'I' is the living principle and the body is just matter. Ramana realized that fact.

Now the next statement is very difficult to understand. In a way we would have been a lot happier if Ramana just packed up his meditation carpet and stole silently away into the night. He's the Self and he knows it...shouldn't that be the end? But as usual life always has another surprise in store. He says, "From that moment onwards the 'I' or 'Self' focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination."

Which 'I' did what? If I'm the 'I,' the one without a second, how do we get two 'I's here? Has Ramana lost his realization? How can the Self be fascinated with anything? It would only be fascinated if it felt there was something to experience or know. But you and I that it is whole and complete, lacking nothing, so why is it acting as if it weren't? Furthermore if it is self aware it is already 'focused' on itself.

This experience was not the end. In fact it was just the beginning of Ramana's spiritual journey. He has just become Self realized but he has not become enlightened.

JOHN: *What do you mean by that?*

Ram: The last paragraph shows clearly that he thinks of the Self as an object and that he sees himself a separate from it. He is seeing it, experiencing it, no doubt...it would remain as a 'permanent experience' but he has yet to see himself solely as the non-dual self. He does. He gets there. We don't know when...probably sometime during his meditation phase when he was living in the caves...but he gains the last little bit of knowledge.

JOHN: *How do you know?*

Ram: The language. Let's take the language at face value. Ramana was a very straightforward person. He says, "Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on." So the natural question is "who is absorbed in what?" It seems that the Self was absorbed in itself (by that I think he meant that he, Ramana (who had just realized that he was the Self) was absorbed in the Self that he had realized. This would be a statement that would indicate the end of it all. But a couple of sentences later he says, "I was centered on the 'I'." And one gets the impression that the first 'I' was different from the second. This is a statement of the Self realization phase of the spiritual journey.

And it fits in with the Self enquiry that Ramana taught...which was based on his own experience and backed by scripture. One of the definitions of Self enquiry that Ramana gives is "Holding the mind on the Self is enquiry." So here he is, a young boy of seventeen who didn't have a clue about the Self, with his mind fixed permanently on the Self.

JOHN: *So what is the next phase? How does it happen?*

Ram: You keep watching the Self. You stay alert, which is not hard because the Self is very beautiful. And the more you watch it the more it sets you to thinking. You become fascinated. The words Ramana uses are 'a powerful fascination.' When you're in this phase you need a cave or something like it. You do not want to be in the world. If you stay in the world your connection might be broken.

You fall in love. When you are in love you do not stop thinking. One thing that we need to point out here is very important. You know how I have been saying that this belief that the mind has to stop completely is not true, that it does happen but it need not happen, that having a dead mind can be a big problem?

JOHN: Yes.

Ram: Well, it's clear by Ramana's own admission that his mind had not stopped completely. He says, "Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music..." This 'state' he is 'in' is *savikalpa samadhi* to use the Yogic term. It is a state of clear seeing in which *vikalpas*, thoughts, arise and fall. But the thoughts do not obscure the vision of the Self. This is very important. Ramana says so.

Anyway, where was I? Yes...love. You fall in love. When you are in love you do not stop thinking. On the contrary, you think more, you want to know what your beloved is, what he or she is doing. This thinking is enquiry. Ramana already had the knowledge from his experience to guide him in his enquiry. He knew about himself and the "I beyond the body."

You are getting it all straight about who you are and what your relationship is to this beautiful being. And then one day something happens...we cannot say when...it just happens...if you stay focused on the beloved...there is an Aha! and at that moment the you that was looking at the Self 'becomes' the Self. There is actually no becoming. You were it all along. The becoming is a recognition, a knowing. But the 'becoming' changes your perspective. You are no longer the *jivatman* looking in at the Self, the *paramatman*,

you are the Self looking out at the jivatman. And what do you know? That the *jivatman* and the *paramatman* are one. Or in the words of the scripture, "Tat Tvam Asi," That (Self) you are. Formulated from the Self's perspective the words are "Aham Brahmasmi" I am limitless. Ramana the form is limited. Ramana the Self is unlimited.

This is what Vedanta calls enlightenment. From that point on you do not abide 'in' the Self you abide 'as' the Self. You have only one non-dual identity.

JOHN: *That's a very important analysis that will help many people who are nearing the end of their spiritual journeys.*

Ram: Yes. Now the rest of the statement is Ramana looking back. He does not go into what happened next, the stage I just described, because it was not called for.

JOHN: *Ramana was very clear about the meaning of this experience. He must have had a very pure mind.*

Ram: Vedanta says the mind needs to be purified. About the educated bit, I think he was well educated. I think he was self taught. He obviously was well read...he was conversant with many scriptures. He had a pure *bhakti* for Sankara. He knew the value of the mind. He was a *jnani*, he loved knowledge. He must have studied all this life. He was well informed too. He liked to listen to the radio. It's sad that the spiritual world nowadays is so pro-experience and anti-knowledge. Ramana wasn't an intellectual but he loved knowledge.

JOHN: *At the end of his book "Self Enquiry" he says, "He who is thus endowed with a mind that has become subtle,*

and who has the experience of the Self is called a Jivanmukta.”

Ram: Here’s a vindication from Ramana’s mouth of what I’ve been saying about the mind. The mind does not have to be killed...just the gross part of it. When enough of the gross *vasanas* are exhausted the mind becomes subtle. It still has thoughts in it but the thoughts do not unbalance it. This kind of mind comes about through intelligent living, *sadhana*, and is capable of Self realization.

Experience of the Self is not enlightenment. It may be Self realization but it is not enlightenment for the simple reason that there is an experiencer other than the Self. It is enlightenment when the experiencer realizes that he or she is what is being experienced i.e. the Self. Enlightenment is knowledge, *jnanam*, not experience of anything. People erroneously believe that they will be left as they are and they will gain some incredible experience ‘of the Self’...rather like winning the spiritual lottery. But a *jivanmukta* is free of everything, especially experience. If it was a constant ‘experience of the Self’ how bored the *jivan mukta* would soon become! Any experience, including very beautiful experiences become tiring after a short time. *Jivanmukta* simply means someone who has realized he or she is the Self and has no sense of duality. This statement only applies to the Self.

JOHN: (*reading*) “It is the state of *jivanmukta* that is referred to as the attributeless Brahman and as *Turiya*. When even the subtle mind gets resolved.”

Ram: Well, this is not a correct understanding of *jivanmukta*. In the first place it is not a ‘state.’ States are experience-based and come and go. Attributeless Brahman

would not have any states in it, nor would it be a state. A state is an attribute. Attributeless Brahman are two words that describe the Self. The Self, awareness, has no attributes and is limitless which is the meaning of the word Brahman. A *jivanmukta* is someone who has realized that he or she is the Self. That is all. The resolution of the mind is simply a resolution in understanding. The mind understands that it is the Self and that makes it peaceful and finishes it as an independent entity. It does not mean that the mind dies never to think a thought again.

Turiya is another word that is mightily misunderstood. It does not refer to a 'forth state.' The Mandukya Upanishad does not refer to the Self as a forth state. If you know Sanskrit you can see this clearly. This is another case of the language of Yoga sneaking in and co-opting language of identity. The word 'forth' in the Mandukya points to the invariable awareness in all the three states. That is all.

JOHN: (*reading*) "and when one is immersed in the ocean of bliss and has become one with it without any differentiated existence, one is called a *Videhamukta*. It is the state of *Videhamukta* that is referred to as the transcendent Turiya. This is the final goal."

*So is he saying this is enlightenment?*

Ram: That's the way it seems. He is describing enlightenment in both the language of experience and language of yoga. If you analyze that language you can find the problem. He is experiencing limitless bliss, yet he is talking about it being a goal. Something to be gained. But in the language of identity it is something that you are.

Let's pick apart this statement a little more. In the first place what do the words 'immersed in' mean? These are experiential words. They indicate a person having a particular kind of experience...in this case bliss. The next words of interest are 'has become one with it.' What do they mean? What kind of 'becoming' is it? If the 'becoming' is experiential the experience of bliss stops because the one who was experiencing it is no more. In the state of oneness, non-duality, the subject and object necessary for experience are not present. So if somebody is going to lose the experience of 'the ocean of bliss' why will they merge into the Self? It doesn't make a lot of sense. This is why the Bhakti tradition scoffs at the liberation tradition. The bhaktas say, 'Why would I want to be God when I can experience God all the time?' It's a valid point. However, it doesn't take into account the fact that you can be God and experience God. There is only a contradiction when you have a flawed understanding of the nature of God and the ego.

But what if this 'becoming' is the coming of understanding? By understanding I mean the recognition that the subject, the mind/ego, the one experiencing the bliss, and the object, the bliss, are one. Bliss is a common word describing the Self. One way to describe this understanding experientially is that it is a shift during which the foreground, the ego, which has been experiencing the Self in the form of bliss becomes the background and the Self, which has been the object of experience, becomes the foreground, I. So now the 'I' is the Self looking out at the ego looking 'in' at it. And when this shift takes place there is an instant recognition that 'I' is the Self. One's identification of 'I' with the ego/mind ends... once and for all. From that point on there is no foreground or background, no in or out. The mind is purified of these 'spiritual' concepts.

Videhamukti exoterically is actually thought to mean 'liberation when the body dies.' But this is just a belief. The actual meaning is 'freedom from the body.' 'Vi' means without and 'dehi' means the body and 'mukti' means liberation. So it is not an experiential term; it is a statement of knowledge. It means that when you realize that you are not the body you are free. The realization that one is not the body, if it is a hard and fast knowledge, is enlightenment. We can include the mind/ego in the word 'body' too because it is a body, albeit a subtle one. Body means embodied. This experience and the understanding that arises with it means that from this point on one is no longer embodied. The bodies are in the Self but the Self is not in the bodies. This is why it is called liberation.

JOHN: *You have always been the Self, its like a recognition.*

Ram: That's right.

JOHN: *Its an embracing.*

Ram: Yes, one owns it.

JOHN: *It's the moment the wave sinks into the ocean. Its when the wave stops being this wave...*

Ram: Yes, but...here's that famous 'but'... the wave can be there. If there is a wave in the ocean you know that it is not just an independent wave but it is the ocean too. It won't be a wave unless it is the ocean. The wave depends on the ocean but the ocean does not depend on the wave. So even if there is a wave it has no effect on the ocean. Enlightenment does not destroy dualistic experience. One just realizes that experience depends on me, the Self, but

that I am always free of experience. Acting in the world with this knowledge is quite different from acting in this world without it.

JOHN: *Right. What you are saying now is very important. It's completely contrary to what I have been led to believe. It's a vital point. I can remember talking about this in Australia. Lately a woman came to me quite disturbed because she could not do anything about her mind. She had the idea she must kill her mind completely.*

Ram: All that 'teaching' does is deflate people; it doesn't give them encouragement and is patently untrue. Mind you, you need to get some mind out of the way...your neuroses, your binding likes and dislikes...and for that you need to do some work. That's why Bhagavan talks about doing meditation, *sadhana*. That's what Vedanta says too. The mind needs to be quiet but that does not mean that the world has to go and the mind has to disappear completely. It may disappear completely. But it always reconstitutes itself.

If Self realization only happens when the mind is non-existent, then the Self and the mind enjoy exactly the same order of reality...like sickness and health. When you are healthy you are not sick. The scriptures say that this is not so. Experience shows that it is not so.

The Self is knowable directly when the mind is functioning. The Self doesn't need any knowledge. The mind needs it so it has to be functioning clearly. But when the mind is overcome with heavy duty *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (dullness) it is impossible to know the Self.

JOHN: *So the mind does experience the Self, then? This seems contrary to what you were saying before.*

Ram: That's good. Yes and no. What is experienced is the reflection of the Self in a *sattvic* mind. The *sattvic* mind is like a highly polished mirror and the Self illumines it...so it is experienceable there. There can be no 'direct experience' because the mind and the Self enjoy different orders of reality...the Self is subtler than the mind. Ramana defines enquiry as 'holding the mind on the Self' which means keeping your attention on the reflection of the Self in the *sattvic* mind. The reason you hold your attention on it is to get knowledge. When you get knowledge you can relax. You are trying to figure out what it is and what it has to do with you. And if you are faithful, meaning if you do not involve yourself with the occasional *vasanas* arising in the mind, there will eventually come a point...it is inevitable...when there is the 'Aha!' And that 'Aha!' is simply the recognition that what I am experiencing is me.

When you grasp this knowledge that "I am the self" you are no longer excluding yourself from the experience of the Self. As long as you are experiencing the Self then you are excluding yourself from the Self. You are saying, I am here and the Self is there and I am experiencing it. In the Gita Arjuna has fear when he sees Krishna's cosmic form because he is not included in it. He has separated himself from the vision. If he sees himself in the vision then it is not a problem for him.

JOHN: *In "Who am I" in the seventh answer Ramana says, 'When the mind, which is the cause of all cognition and of all actions, becomes quiescent, the world will disappear.'*

We dealt with this earlier but it is important to go over it, I think. Now this is pure Yoga. Vedanta says that when the world disappears, you do not disappear. For you to know that it has disappeared you have to be there. Seeing that you exist independently of the world is the purpose of this kind of experience. If the world disappears and you do not understand that you are the Self, then what is the point of having this experience?

When the world 'disappears' the Self is revealed as it is and with it should come the knowledge that "I am the self". From this point onward you do not need to experience the self. You do not have to do anything be the Self. The Self is a given. Its already here, already accomplished.

JOHN: *Does that mean, that everything you do everyday, moment by moment that what ever you do is right because it is the Self?*

Ram: Sure.

JOHN: *Therefore there is no question of right and wrong.*

Ram: Yes. You have to follow dharma because you are dharma. Dharma is based on the notion everything is one. Whatever you do is right because you are right.

JOHN: *Can we say that when you realize the self you can do no wrong? You are living in the Self, in fact you simply are the Self. You cannot be doing wrong.*

Ram: For a jnani there is not right or wrong, but this does not mean that a *jnani* is going to go out and kill because he understands that everyone is himself. You don't kill

yourself...unless you think you are someone else. You don't do good... because you are good.

JOHN: *Quoting Laxmana Swami on the subject of Self realization and enlightenment. He says, "Devotees by their own effort can reach the effortless, thought free state. That is as far as you can go by yourself. In that state there are no more thoughts, desires or memories rising up. Then go and sit in the presence of a realized being, the power of the self will make the residual 'I' go back to its source from where it will die, never to rise again. This is the complete and full realization. This is the role of the guru who is identical with the self within. To pull the desire free mind in to the heart and destroy it completely."*

*...destroy it completely you see."*

Ram: This again is the language of Yoga and needs to be looked into. Mind you, I'm not against or for any language. One just needs to know what the words are actually referring to...and see whether or not the words are the best ones for revealing what is. The Yogis are probably talking about the same thing as the Vedantis. But the way a *siddha* like Lakshamana Swami uses words is going to be different from an ordinary person...because he understands what the words actually refer to. And for someone who is not enlightened who is using the words to guide his or her *sadhana* the words need to be very carefully considered. Because at these subtle levels of experience the way you think about things can make or break your endeavor.

I'm going to be a bit hard on this statement of Laxmana Swami without meaning any disrespect. He says speaking of a pure *sattvic* state, "In that state there are no more

thoughts, desires or memories rising up.” Fair enough. Then he says, “Then go and sit in the presence of a realized being...” Now, what is wrong with this statement? If there are no desires rising up why would you want to go and sit ‘in the presence of a realized being?’ You would have to have a desire to do that. If there were no desires you wouldn’t do anything at all because action is motivated by desire. You wouldn’t even scratch the mosquito bite on your nose. And we have seen in the statement of Ramana above that it is quite possible to do Self enquiry when there are thoughts in the mind. In fact you only do Self enquiry when there are thoughts in the mind because enquiry is about getting discrimination, the knowledge of the Self and it’s relationship to the mind. If you have no thoughts you have no mind; if you have no mind, there is nothing to do enquiry with.

Desires are only a problem spiritually if they are binding. Non-binding desires are just fine. Even the Yoga Sutra, which is the authority on this subject, distinguishes between binding and non-binding *vasanas*. But the point is well-taken. It is basically saying what the scriptures say: that you need to have a certain kind of prepared mind. We will not quibble about whether there are no thoughts or whether there are only a smattering of light non-distracting thoughts.

OK, let’s go on with this. Once you are there he says “the power of the Self will make the residual ‘I’ go back to its source from where it will die, never to rise again.”

When the mind is full of passion and dullness it is in the presence of the Self but it doesn’t know it. But when you have purified the mind to the point that Laxmana Swami is speaking about the mind is already in the presence of the Self. That would be the only thing there aside from the

mind. And if one had the desire to be enlightened why wouldn't simply having that desire invoke the power of the Self and cause it to make the mind "to go back to its source...where it will die, never to rise again." In fact, presumably one would only have gone through such an arduous *sadhana* if one were going for liberation...so the Self would have been well aware of the desire of the aspirant. So why would one have to drag one's body off to find a realized soul? Ramana didn't have a guru and his mind was active...yet he realized the Self. If his mind weren't active he would not have been able to simulate death and report the thoughts and feelings he had about it. And, in fact, as we have just read he said there were thoughts rising and falling.

Another problem with this thought-free mind idea is that the mind is already the Self. If this is a non-dual reality and there is such a thing as a pure mind, then that pure mind is going to have to be the Self. So what is meant here is not that the mind is destroyed never to rise again, but that the mind's ignorance...that it is something other than the Self... never rises again... in the presence of the *guru*.

What I'm going to say next is very important. It shows that the problem is ignorance, not lack of Self experience. There is a reason why they called Ramana a *guru*. And the reason is because the *guru* removes ignorance. You only need to look at the word itself to divine the meaning. "Gu" means darkness and "Ru" means 'to remove.' Darkness is a symbol of ignorance. What removes darkness? Light. Light is a symbol of knowledge. So you go to a guru to get knowledge, not to get some sort of permanent experience of the Self.

If this statement of Laxmana's were to be taken at face value we could dismiss it as untrue because here he is using his mind to tell us about enlightenment. If it were dead, 'never to rise again' then who is making this statement? Presumably he is making the statement because he has a desire to enlighten us about enlightenment. If his desire-free mind was destroyed by the power of the Self he would not be able to make this statement on two accounts. First, a desire-free mind would have no desire to enlighten anybody and secondly, if the desire free mind has been destroyed how will it say anything? People speak because they want to speak.

I'm not arguing with Laxmana's statement. I agree that you need a guru if you are going to realize who you are. So the question becomes 'What does the guru have to do with it?' And what is the nature of the experience he calls enlightenment?

However, I don't think we can dismiss Laxmana's statement completely. When I look at any statement, even one that on the face of it seems strange, rather than dismiss it out of hand I try to see how it could be true. Very few people study language and this probably applies to most enlightened beings. So a person like Laxmana, who is respected as a realized soul, probably knows what he is talking about. At least this is probably the way it happened for him. Or this is the best he can do in expressing it. Let's take a look at one sentence, "the power of the self will make the residual 'I' go back to its source from where it will die, never to rise again. This is the complete and full realization."

What power is he talking about here? In Vedantic literature there is a technical term that applies to this situation. It is *jnana shakti* and it means 'the power of knowledge.' Is this

what he means? Or is he talking about some other power? If he's talking about some other power of the self then there would be no need to go and sit with a guru because a person with a dead mind would be sitting in the presence of the self already. But if he means the 'power of knowledge' then he is right. You need to visit a guru. Because, blissful as it is, a dead mind is still an ignorant mind.

There are a few more questions that need to be answered before this statement makes sense. What does 'residual I' mean? What does 'go back' mean? How will the power of knowledge make the residual 'I' go back to its source? And what kind of death is it?

I think the only reasonable interpretation of 'residual I' is an ego that does not know that it is limitless awareness. So the 'going back' is not a physical journey, an experiential journey but the erasing of ignorance. And to be fair, the removal of ignorance and the gaining of understanding has experiential ramifications. It's very subtle but it is a happening, no doubt. 'The source' means the Self. So the going back is the realization of the identity of the residual 'I' and the Self. This 'destroys' the residual 'I.' What kind of destruction is it? It is the removal of the belief in it as the sole reality. The belief does not return but the 'residual I,' contrary to Laxmana's statement, can remain...unless it is defined as nothing but the belief...which is a legitimate position too. Even if it remains it remains like a mirage remains when you realize that it is not water. The ego is effaced completely. Scripture says it is like a burnt rope. It looks like a rope but it can't bind anything.

There is one more point that I'd like to make that concerns the last sentence. He says that the guru will "pull the desire free mind in to the heart and destroy it completely." Again

we need to look at the meaning of the words. But before we do we need to address one glaring contradiction: why would the desire free mind need to be destroyed? One can understand why one would want to rid oneself of a desire filled mind...but a desire free mind? A desire free mind is thought by many to be the goal. Buddhism, for example, defines enlightenment as a desire free mind. The word *nirvana* means a desire free mind. Furthermore why would you want to get rid of a desire free mind only to gain a desire free Self? The Self is nirvana, free of flame, desire. 'Nir' means not and 'Vana' means flame.

This statement is a fine example of the problems that come with the language of experience. Let's give Laxmana the benefit of the doubt and assume that he was misquoted or mistranslated and that he means the guru will remove your ignorance about who you are. If that is so then there is only one other possible source for a potential misunderstanding: that the guru is going to do this. It does look like the guru is doing it but there is one lesson that needs to be learned from Ramana's own enlightenment that applies across the board to all enlightened beings. And that is that the guru may show you the Self...but you have to grasp it yourself. If the guru could do it, every qualified person who had an enlightened guru would be immediately enlightened. But it would effectively finish off the tradition of enlightenment because you would not have the confidence to enlighten others because you would not have enlightened yourself...like Ramana...and every other enlightened being did.

JOHN: *So the destruction of the mind that he is talking about is actually the destruction of ignorance?*

Ram: Vedanta says that it is a destruction of ignorance, not desire. True, ignorance of the fact that one is whole and complete generates a lot of foolish and unnecessary desires. And these need to be gotten rid of if you are going to get a clear mind. And you need a clear mind if you are going to realize who you are. But certain desires are quite fine. In the Bhagavad Gita, which is a liberation scripture with the status of an Upanishad, Krishna, who is the enlightened person, says "I am the desire which is not opposed to dharma." So there you have an enlightened mind that has desires in it.

JOHN: *Laxmana Swami is saying that if you have desire there is no way you can realize the self.*

Ram: Well, he does and then he contradicts himself. If you have a dead mind like he is saying you won't have any desire in it...so why will you go off to an enlightened person to get something? Shankar and the whole of the Vedantic tradition says that you need a discriminating, dispassionate, quiet mind with a burning desire for liberation. If you have that you can realize the Self and realize that you are it. You need the quiet mind so that you can grasp the knowledge. You need discrimination so you can sort out the subtle parts of the inner self and you need dispassion so your emotions and prejudices won't derail your enquiry. So it seems to me that that you need quite a bit of mind...just not a disturbed mind. Ramana realized the Self with a very active mind. He made a little ritual and used logic while it was going on.

JOHN: *Are you saying that a person following the no-mind idea can't get enlightened?*

Ram: No. I'm saying that it is not the only option. This whole argument is rather like the religious argument

advanced by the Christians; you can only come to God through Christ. No other way works. I'm saying that the whole idea of a path, following a certain idea, has to be transcended at a certain point, particularly this idea that the mind has to be completely dead. People often try to kill it, eventually they give up...and sometimes turn to the path of understanding.

JOHN: *It suggests that things are in the way must be gotten out of the way.*

Ram: That's what Buddhism also says. They have this same yoga idea. You have to remove all your unconscious tendencies. When they are gone, that is enlightenment.

JOHN: *But that can take years and years even life times.*

Ram: Sure can. You have no idea how much stuff is in there. You are going to set out to get rid of it all when you don't even know how big a task you're setting for yourself?

JOHN: *But people do it. Or think they are doing it.*

Ram: They are actually doing something else but aren't aware of it. People can't just go sit in a room and do nothing. It's too 'weird.' They need a justification. It's like fishing. A lot of fishermen don't give a damn about fish, they just like to go out and stand in a cool stream looking at the lovely mountains and observing life in the wild. But it doesn't look that good. If somebody comes by and says why are you standing there in waist deep water staring out into space they will be hard pressed to come up with a sensible answer. So they take a fishing rod with them.

Vedanta says all you need to do is to destroy the ignorance that makes you believe that you are the ego, the small 'I'. Then the *vasanas* become non binding. So it is ignorance that causes the thoughts to bind, not the thoughts themselves. You see that water tower?

JOHN: Yes.

Ram: That means that you have a water tower thought in your mind.

JOHN: *OK. I' m with you so far.*

Ram: What are your feelings about it?

JOHN: *Feelings?*

Ram: Right. You don't have any. You don't give a damn about it. You have no relationship to it at all. It is just a thought in your mind. It doesn't help you or hurt you. It just is what it is. It doesn't bind you in any way. What insulates you from it is the knowledge that you are not it...just like Ramana realizing he wasn't the body. He did not have to destroy his body to realize it. He just destroyed it in his mind.

JOHN: *So, it is incredibly rare to find someone with a dead mind?*

Ram: It's rare to find a duck-billed platypus. But what conclusion should we draw from that? The fact is that if you have a dead mind you are either in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, asleep, in a coma, or actually dead. We have already seen that *nirvikalpa samadhi* is not liberation. And the others certainly aren't. There is a great statement by the Buddha

that applies. “Believe nothing you have read or anything you have heard, even if I have said it, unless it agrees with common sense and reason.” This belief totally defies common sense and reason.

JOHN: *Here is an important part of Ramana’s teaching. He says, ‘The Self can only destroy the mind when the mind no longer has any tendency to move outwards.’*

Ram: It means destroy the belief that there is something ‘out there’ that will make the mind permanently happy. When you no longer believe there is anything ‘out there’ the mind automatically turns inward. It’s called *vairagya*, dispassion. You become indifferent toward the world. This is not the end of it. True, the mind is ‘Self realized’... that is it is experiencing the Self... but it still needs to determine if it is what it is experiencing...or if it is something other than what it is experiencing.

JOHN: *That makes sense.*

Ram: I’m not arguing against Self experience. You have Self experience twenty four hours a day. And enjoy all the incredible mind blowing Self experiences you want. But why sit there and just endlessly have Self experience? If it’s a discrete experience, unlike any other, it will naturally exclude every other experience and you will not be able to enjoy the world because you can’t have two experiences simultaneously. In reality you have constant self experience whether or not the mind is ‘experiencing the Self’...you just don’t know that whatever you are experiencing is the Self. So what the teachings of Vedanta try to do is to deal with a small but crucial bit of ignorance...the tendency to exclude yourself from what you

are experiencing by pointing out that all experiences share something in common...an 'I'.

JOHN: *Hmm.*

Ram: I don't take myself into account. So I don't understand that I'm the content of the experience. Without me experience is not possible. So I'm what's valuable, not the experience. Without me there is no possibility of having any experience, including the experience of an empty mind...the situation that Laxmana talks about here where all *vasanas* are exhausted leaving only the ego. Then, according to him what is required is that this person should go and sit in the presence of a master to get his ego destroyed. But let's not get too frightened until we understand what is actually being destroyed. Does that mean there is no ego ever again? If that's the case then Ramana wasn't enlightened, was he? He had an ego, a body, a mind. He walked and talked and acted like a normal person.

JOHN: *Yes. He worked in the kitchen and had very distinct ideas about how the food should be prepared and how things should be done in a particular way.*

Ram: Yes. He had his preferences, his likes and dislikes.

JOHN. *He also had a mind that could design buildings and get them constructed.*

Ram: He read scripture. He's getting a lot of his teachings from scripture. Here's one: "The seer and the object seen are like a rope and a snake." "When the mind comes out of the Self the world appears." And then there are the words 'to be real' appended after 'appears.' Now what does 'the

world appears to be real mean? It means one's private 'world' is only a mental state, a projection. He's talking about the removal of ignorance, it's 'destruction' if you will. Because the world is real. The world is the Self in time. It's not an illusion. The belief that the 'I' needs the world to complete itself is the ignorance that needs to be destroyed.

JOHN. *The ignorance, not the world.*

Ram: Yes. The world is the Self and I'm the Self. The problem is my understanding is confused. I need to know what the world is and what I am and what my projections are. That is all. I need to destroy the confusion I have about each of these three aspects of my being. And he's right that in the presence of the guru this understanding can come.

What does 'in the presence of the guru mean?' What actually happens there? How does the presence of the guru remove my confusion? Sometimes it works through words. This is the best and easiest...if you have an open mind and you only want liberation. Sometimes it works by just sitting there and observing...seeing from where the guru sees...and seeing how the guru operates his life from that position...and seeing that you are that position and that that position is free of everything...the world and your ego/mind. There are a number of different ways that this can come to you. It doesn't mean that the guru gives you a certain kind of glance or some incredible 'energy' just wipes your ego out once and for all.

JOHN: *Laxmana said that you can go so far on your own and then you need contact with a mahatma.*

Ram: I agree with that.

JOHN: *But it is said that enlightenment is very rare.*

Ram: Ananda, who was thought to be the Buddha's most highly qualified disciple, didn't get it when he was with the Buddha. When you are attached to your *vasanas* you will have beliefs like this. Your *vasanas*... meaning ego which is nothing but your *vasanas*... do not want you to believe that it is easy. So you have the belief that there is some impossible experiential situation, in this case a totally dead mind, that will make you whole and complete...happy. Whatever. Or it's holding out for something it thinks the world has to offer... the love of somebody, for example... and won't entertain the belief that you are love. The ego doesn't want you free. So it encourages you to pick up beliefs that conclude that enlightenment is unbelievably rare. Sure, the scripture says it is very hard and it also says it is very easy. It is easy if you are rightly resolved...if you really know what you want. It is very difficult if you are just playing at seeking. You can't have your cake and eat it too.

JOHN: *Let's go on. (reading) "Therefore when the world appears (to be real) the Self does not appear. And when the Self appears or shines the world does not appear."*

Ram: It's a very tricky statement. We need to dig beneath the surface. We have to know what is the meaning of 'appear' and 'disappear.' It sounds like the world or the mind has the power to obliterate the Self.

JOHN: *So he must mean the mind's attachment to the world.*

Ram: What he's doing is giving the mind and the Self the same order of reality. Is this a problem of Ramana's understanding or is this a problem of the translation?

JOHN: *Well, I think this has all been corrected by Ramana himself.*

Ram: There's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip. You don't know what the translator or the typist or printer did with the manuscript, etc. Never mind, it's a statement that bears analysis. Somebody knew that it was a bad statement and put 'to be real' in parentheses because without this qualifier you have nonsense. There should also be the same modifier at the end of the first sentence ...'the Self does not appear' (to be real) and at the end of the second sentence...'the world does not appear' (to be real)'.

Without the phrase 'to be real' we have what appears to be a statement that the world disappears when the Self is known and the Self disappears when the world is known. Which we know cannot be true. But if we amend it with the phrase 'to be real' included in the appropriate places it jibes with scripture...and makes sense... even though it is only partially true. The operative word is 'appears.' Appears means that the mind is misunderstanding something.

Mind you this is not a statement of enlightenment. It is a bit of knowledge that needs to be applied at the intermediate stage, the stage of inquiry. It is meant to help to distinguish between the mind and the Self. The person has the belief that his mind, his 'world' is real. So when he is caught up in that and focused on experience, he does not see the truth, his Self. There's a verse in the Gita that says the same thing.

"What's day for the jnani (sage) is night for the agnani (worldly person). What's night for the *agnani* is day for the *jnani*." It means you can't have it both ways...see the mind

and the Self both as real. You have to come down on the side of the Self as the sole reality. Once you have done that then you can see that the mind is also real...but you know that it enjoys a lower order of reality...an apparent reality...a time-bound reality. So it isn't a problem. There is no conflict between different orders of reality. When you're on the path to enlightenment you have to completely negate the world, the mind, etc. So this statement is meant to help you do that. It's another case of how you can't have your cake and eat it too...until you have attained enlightenment.

JOHN: *Here's another statement. 'When a person enquires into the nature of the mind, the mind will end, leaving the Self as the residue.'*

Ram: This is what is called enlightenment by default and is compromised by the language of experience, the belief that the spiritual path takes place in time. It seems to but it doesn't really because the problem is ignorance and it doesn't take any time for light to destroy darkness...it's immediate.

It's true but it's not the truth because the Self is there all along even when the mind is there. That's how the mind was known to be a problem...because the Self was there. So the Self never just appears at the end of a long *sadhana*. The Self was there all along observing the *sadhana*, motivating the *sadhana*, doing the *sadhana* and was available for understanding at any point during the *sadhana*. Sometimes the person hasn't even done *sadhana*... like Ramana... and they wake up to the Self.

JOHN: *Is this because of their innate purity?*

Ram: Nobody knows.

JOHN: *But it would tend to be somebody who is not much in the world, wouldn't it?*

Ram: Sure, or somebody who has just suffered a lot, Saul on the road to Damascus. That's what happened to me. I was an awful person, a real devil. Life was a living hell. Then one fine morning on the way to the Post Office I was just lifted out of it and instantly became aware of this divine factor. It took me years to get it clear what it was... and that I was it... but I set out to do the work.

JOHN: *Can we go back to the original statement that the mind obscures the Self and that it needs to be destroyed for the Self to shine and the subsequent statement that 'the mind will end leaving the Self as residue?' Maybe there are two kinds of minds.*

Ram: Good! Yes, we need to ask what type of mind he is talking about. Because if that's true, Ramana wasn't enlightened... because his mind kept working. He says so. The mind that needs to be destroyed is the conditioned mind, the extroverted *rajasic/tamasic* mind. The mind created by *sadhana*, the *sattvic* mind, remains. It is the mind that makes the inquiry.

Vedanta's view is that the mind 'ends' when you understand that the mind is not you. In reality the mind keeps functioning but you have divorced it. It may not have ended from its point of view... but it has ended from yours. You don't take it seriously any more.

JOHN: *So it seems that the absence of thought isn't enlightenment.*

Ram: If the absence of thought is enlightenment then we're all enlightened ...because who hasn't slept?

You can use this Yogic language if you want...Ramana wasn't actually in the scriptural tradition...he just picked it up slowly as he went along. He may have eventually understood the limitations of the language of Yoga but we need to also keep in mind who he's talking to...probably most of them were more familiar with the language of Yoga than with the language of Vedanta...it's always like that.

It's the same today...perhaps worse because now you have a lot of people who are switching from *bhakti* and *yoga* and even Buddhism to Advaita Vedanta. Part of this is just a fad because the satsang gurus are all using the words Advaita Vedanta, often without much comprehension, but it is understandable particularly if the person has been on one of those paths for years. Why? Because all their experiences have not solved the problem of limitation and they like Vedanta's idea that you are limitless and that this is something to be understood, not gained as an experience.

Most of these people are quite confused because they are entering new terrain, the language of identity, but they haven't left their old country, the language of experience, so they have conflicting concepts about enlightenment. They have no idea how you can just know the Self and that would set you free. They do not understand that they are already free and that the only thing standing in the way is the belief that they aren't. They also do not understand that beliefs can be destroyed...by knowledge. They hang on to their beliefs...like religious people...as if they were knowledge.

JOHN: *A little while ago you made a statement about enquiry being about getting discrimination. You said that*

*you only do Self enquiry when there are thoughts in the mind because enquiry is about getting discrimination, the knowledge of the Self and it's relationship to the mind. That doesn't fit with what I know about enquiry and Self knowledge. Can you explain what you mean by it? I thought that Self knowledge is non-discriminating wisdom.*

Ram: It is and it isn't. It covers both the situation where there is no mind, in which case there is nothing to discriminate and it covers the situation where there is a mind. It is just a statement of things from the Self's point of view. The Self knows the difference between itself as Self and itself as mind. The mind is the Self appearing as an apparently changing reality. The technical Sanskrit term is *mithya*. It isn't completely real but it isn't completely unreal. It really isn't an illusion, except in the sense that an illusion has some basis in fact. Without the fact supporting the illusion, the illusion can't exist.

JOHN: *Could you give an example?*

Ram: Sure, the famous snake in the rope. You won't see the snake unless there is a rope there. So you won't see the mind unless there is a substrate for it to be sitting on. That substrate is you, the Self.

JOHN: *The world is the mind because the world arises in the mind?*

Ram: Yes. And the mind is the Self because it arises out of the Self. The mind is not independent of the Self. But...and this is freedom... you, the self, are independent of the mind. It is the reason you don't have to kill the mind to be free of it. You are already free of it.

If this is a non-dual reality as the scripture says and there is such a thing as the mind the mind has to be the Self. So the only question is what kind of self is it? It's the self apparently changing. When you know this you aren't afraid of the mind because you understand going in that whatever you are getting out it's relationship with the world is not going to last. So you just enjoy or suffer the mind as it is. The big problem is thinking that the things in the mind and the world should be unchanging. If you do think this way then you suffer periodic disillusionment. When somebody falls in love they need to know that it will not last. If you can enjoy it knowing that it will not last, fine.

JOHN: *So how do you get this discrimination?*

Ram: Well, you pay attention to your experience and respect it. It's funny how people know that nothing lasts yet they perversely expect it to...at least when things are going well. When they aren't...that's another case. Your experience shows that nothing in the world/mind lasts. The scripture harps tirelessly on this subject...*anitya, anitya, anitya*. If the mahatmas say it, you can bank on it.

JOHN: *Ramana makes a strong statement when asked, 'Will there not be realization when the world is there (taken to be real)?' He says, 'There will not be.'*

Ram: I think we spoke about this before. The statement means it will seem to be real if you see the world as an independent reality. They put the phrase 'taken to be real' in because 'is there' makes it seem that the world has to be physically not seen for realization to happen. One might believe that perceptually, experientially the world is going to disappear. It's a common belief among spiritual types.

JOHN: *That's right. And that makes it even worse. It makes it scary.*

Ram: They think that if it hasn't disappeared they aren't enlightened.

JOHN: *And they also think that the enlightened are walking around in some sort of deep grey void.*

Ram: Maybe that's what all these zombie types that congregate at the spiritual centers are doing. Maybe they are the only really enlightened ones.

JOHN: *Ha! Could be.*

Ram: It's probably some sort of imitation syndrome. You have the 'fake bliss' people, the ones running around with ridiculous smiles frozen on their faces...with the eyes unfocused and looking upward... and you have the fake meditators...the ones who have all the meditation paraphernalia and learn some snazzy asanas and stride into the temple with that 'inward' look and sit down dramatically on their meditation mat and close their eyes...for about two minutes. Then you see them sneaking glances around to see who is picking up on their wonderful 'meditation.' Or the fake saints... the ones that are just tripping over themselves to 'help,' to 'be there for you,' to give you that very meaningful support hug...so you know how doggone compassionate they are. Perhaps these zombie types have heard that enlightenment is the grey worldless void... as you so eloquently put it...and they have mastered the grey void look. There's one that comes in the Seshadri Ashram canteen. The waiters figure she's nuts. She looks at her food like it's in South America and it takes about five minutes for her to chew one spoonful of mush. Or the guru

du jour...I won't mention the name...you know who. You ask him a question 'What time is it?' and two hours later after coming back from the deep grey void within he says in this mystical far away voice, "It (ten minute pause)...is...(ten minute pause)... two o'clock" And everyone Oohs and Ahaas..."Wow! Did you hear that, man? It's two o'clock!" That grey worldless void must be quite a wonder.

JOHN: *Indeed.*

Ram: Language is very important because these people are getting their ideas from somewhere. Two languages obtain in the spiritual world. The most popular and most imprecise is the language of experience which has been propagated by the yogic tradition. The least popular and most precise is the language of identity or knowledge employed by Vedanta. You can see that in Ramana's text. It is mostly the language of Yoga. He brings in the language of Vedanta occasionally...at the precise points where it is needed.

In the best of all possible worlds there should be no cross-pollination. Each has its value and is specific to its view of enlightenment. Because the yogic view of enlightenment is 'experiential,' it employs a dualistic language because experience is dualistic, the relationship between a subject and an object. According to this view enlightenment is a unique, permanent experience of the Self. The problem with this view is that the Upanishads, the ultimate authority on the nature enlightenment, describe the self, which is everything that exists, in the language of identity as a 'non-dual' reality and enlightenment as the knowledge 'I am the limitless self' based on the discovery of oneself as such.

You experience yourself as non-dual and then the knowledge that you are one whole complete being arises simultaneously with that experience. Enlightenment is grasping and identifying with that knowledge. The usual progression in understanding takes one from the language of experience to the language of identity. Now this is the crux. It explains the fundamental problem of all these people who have been seeking but not finding enlightenment. There are many people in the spiritual world who have had considerable experience of the reflection of the self in the mind when the mind was in a sattvic condition and who would be classified as self realized according to the stages of enlightenment mentioned above. This is what Ramana calls '*antar mukha*,' turning the mind inward...watching or realizing or experiencing the Self.

But, rightly, these people are not satisfied and continue to entertain doubts about their 'state.' Usually the doubt has to do with making the state permanent, which is impossible since the person and his pure mind is still in the realm of time. In other words there is always the realistic fear that the experience will not last. And even though they are so close to enlightenment experientially, it still eludes them. And the reason? Because they are prisoners of the language of experience. The language we use indicates the way we think. And at this stage, when the experience is more or less continually available, the only barrier to converting the experience to a 'permanent' state, not that enlightenment is a state, is the way one thinks. What needs to happen at this point is that the individual needs to convert the language of experience to the language of identity. The language of identity states that the experiencer and what is being experienced are not two separate things, that they are in fact the same. When any object is experienced the knowledge of that object arises simultaneously in the

intellect. And if the mind in which the reflection of the self appears is pure, the knowledge of the self will arise with it in the intellect. This knowledge is in the form of a thought, an akandakara vritti, an unbroken idea that I am the whole and complete actionless awareness that I am experiencing. (Wow! That's me! Whoopee! I'm it!!!) If the person is accustomed to thinking of the self as an object, (the language of Yoga) he or she will be reluctant to surrender the experiencer, and the self will continue to remain as an experienced object. The surrender is in terms of letting go of the idea of oneself as an experiencer and embracing one's limitless identity. This is the destruction of the mind that the Yogis talk about.

Were the person to be trained in the language of identity, this problem would not arise. In fact the person would immediately recognize the content of the experience as 'I' and that would finish the work. What all this clinging to experience is about is hanging on to the container and therefore sacrificing the content. It's like a person pouring the coke out of the bottle and drinking the bottle. We can throw away the container. It is non-essential. We need the contents...the Self.

The whole of Vedanta can be reduced to one simple equation found in the Upanishads 'You are that' where 'that' is the self and 'you' is the self in the form of the experiencer and the verb 'are' indicates the identity between the two.

*JOHN: Probably that is where JOHN is struggling right now, existentially speaking. Because I think that's probably true of me...I see everything as an experience...*

Ram: That's what I've observed. You describe everything to do with you in terms of what's happening. I believe that

‘Nothing ever happened’ teaching of Papaji’s” is meant to neutralize the belief that what happens has something to do with you.

I’ve been saying that you are the master of the universe...meaning that without you, the I, experience is not possible. I’m saying to hell with the experience...you make it anything you want...because you’re the boss. Experiencing isn’t bossing me. I’m bossing it. Without me it doesn’t amount to a hill of beans. That’s freedom. I don’t have to erase it. I just take it how I please. This is why bad days are good days for the enlightened. They can see themselves in everything. Looking to experience for validation is the tail wagging the dog. We’re trying to set things straight...get the dog wagging the tail. That’s how it is...dogs wag their tails, not the other way around like Yoga says. It says if you get this experience, *nirvikalpa samadhi*, then you are enlightened. Vedanta says that you are enlightened...no matter what experience you are having.

JOHN: *I’d like to go over that statement by Ramana again which says that when the mind comes out of the Self the world appears...*

Ram: This teaching comes from Samkhya and was incorporated into Vedanta and Yoga. It’s called *karana-karya vada*, the cause and effect teaching. “When the mind comes out of the Self” means that the mind is just an effect of the Self, the self transforming itself into a form...a mind. For example this coke bottle is an effect of glass. Glass is the cause and the effect is the bottle. You break the bottle and the bottle is no more...but glass still exists. So the mind is just the self...in a form. It depends on the Self but the Self is independent of it. As I’ve said repeatedly the removal or destruction of the mind, unlike the bottle, is all in

terms of understanding. There is no actual destruction. You see how it is...and that finishes your attachment to the belief that the mind is an independent entity.

JOHN: *This understanding is what you're calling freedom.*

Ram: Yes. There are two kinds of superimposition. When either of them is destroyed the result is freedom. Both take place in the mind and have nothing to do with physical reality. One is where you see the snake and when you understand that it is a rope it doesn't come back. This is unconditioned superimposition. There is nothing left to condition the perception of the rope after knowledge has taken place. The other is the mirage...which you negate through knowledge too...but the perception of water remains. There is still something conditioning surface of the earth after knowledge...but you know it isn't real.

It's only ignorance that make *vasanas* and the mind a problem. If you can see that they are superimposed on the Self out of ignorance...they become non-binding. Let the sex *vasana* come, the money *vasana*, whatever is meant to be unspiritual...it's just me...like the web of a spider...it comes out of me and is drawn back into me...and is made of my own consciousness. The *vasanas* are like a mirage and enjoy only an apparent reality.

JOHN: *Here's another of Ramana's statements on Self inquiry that I think is very interesting. "How could this search be done in books? All the texts say that in order to gain liberation you must make the mind quiet. Once this has been understood there is no need for endless reading. In order to quieten the mind one has only to enquire within oneself what oneself is."*

Ram: This statement may lead a person to conclude that no scriptural information would be useful in Self inquiry. But you can't make in inquiry without knowledge. In fact he starts out this very text with teaching lifted bodily out of the scripture that is meant to negate the whole world. You can't perform inquiry without the knowledge that I am not the body, mind, etc. You can't just sit there without any information like a Dodo and say, "Uh...Who am I? Duh...Hey God...who am I?" This is not going to work. And even if the heavens are rent asunder with the booming voice of God..."YOU ARE PURE CONSCIOUSNESS!!!"

JOHN: *Ha Ha Ha!*

Ram: Even if He tells you to your face, you will have no way to evaluate this information. "Uh? I am? What does that mean?" I need knowledge. I need to know how who I am relates to my body and mind and the world around. It has to be contextualized or it is useless. Scripture does an excellent job of contextualizing the 'I'.

JOHN: *Here's another one. Somebody asks him 'What is wisdom insight, jnana dristi? And Ramana says, "Remaining quiet is wisdom insight."*

Ram: I think I'll argue with that statement. It's the language of experience trying to co-opt the language of identity. Let's use one of Ramana's most frequent teachings to unmask this statement. Let's ask "Who is remaining quiet?" There are only two possibilities, the Self and the ego. It won't be the Self because the Self is silence. And it is not a doer so it can't 'remain.' 'Remain' implies 'not remaining' or noise. So an ego remaining quiet is wisdom insight? I don't think so. I

go to my room get in bed and close my eyes and go to sleep and I'm quiet as a mouse... and that makes me wise?

JOHN: *Papaji's main teaching was 'be quiet.' And by this he meant not being silent but to be still. And in this stillness, inquiry just happens by itself."*

Ram: Yes. It is natural for the mind to become curious and ask questions when it is still. But I think this is quite a relaxed view of Ramana's teaching. He seemed to advocate a more aggressive discrimination.

The term *jnana dristi* is much more easy to deal with when we take it as a statement in the language of knowledge. One way to define '*jnana dristi*' is that when the mind is quiet and a thought arises in it I gain knowledge of that thought. And if that thought, based on my perception of the Self shining on my quiet mind, was "I am limitless awareness" and I took that thought for my own, let it become my identity, then *jnana dristi* means enlightenment, liberation.

Or (which amounts to the same thing) it could be translated as 'the knowledge (*jnana*) that comes from seeing (*dristi*). Seeing what? Seeing what is. And what is? The Self? And what is the Self? The I. So *jnana dristi* means Self knowledge. This is quite different from 'remaining quiet.' So we don't get in trouble with the Ramana devotees let's say that the translator made a mistake or didn't give us everything Ramana said. Or that Ramana knew that the person would not understand the real meaning and just gave him as much as he could sink his mental teeth into.

It could also mean that *jnanam*, knowledge is *dristi*, seeing. The seers, *rishis* who gave us the Vedas saw (*dristi*) the truth (*jnanam*) and enshrined it in the form of the Vedas. It

could also mean, ‘to see is to know.’ You really need to have all of these teaching contextualized. They all fit into the wonderful bouquet of ideas that is called Vedanta.

JOHN: *By ‘quiet’ doesn’t he mean not be caught up in all the thoughts? To have a sattvic mind?*

Ram: Dispassionate.

JOHN: *And to be focused inside.*

Ram: Yes.

JOHN: *He doesn’t mean ‘not talk.’*

Ram: No.

JOHN: *What do you have to say about Ramana’s statement “Desirelessness is wisdom?”*

Ram: The Osho crowd is not going to like this one, are they? Why is desirelessness wisdom? Because the Self is whole and complete. It doesn’t want anything.

JOHN: *Here’s a similar one. “Desirelessness is refraining from turning the mind toward any object.”*

Ram: This is a good one too. Here’s he’s defining it as a quality of the ego. He’s saying that an ego that doesn’t allow the mind to go to objects is wise. No, that’s not strictly correct. The mind naturally goes to objects. He probably means that one doesn’t react to the mind’s contact with objects...just witnesses it and lets it be. That is, when you see a pretty girl you know you’d like to get in bed with her but you don’t go over and chat her up. You just let the

thought die. Why is this wise? Because you are love, you are pleasure, you have it all already. A few sense ticklings are not going to make you happier.

JOHN: *Along this same vein he says, 'Wisdom means the appearance of no object.'*

Ram: All due respect, but this is a misleading statement. I know what he means but the words do not convey the meaning. This makes wisdom sound like your grey void theory of enlightenment. "I'm enlightened. I don't see anything. It's all blank." Actually the statement means that when the object is perceived the mind is not attracted or repelled by it. Or if the 'object' is the mind (and the mind is definitely an object to the Self)... that is when the attractions or repulsions of the mind are the object... there is no attraction or aversion to them. This is either a very dispassionate mind or it is a statement about the Self.

JOHN: *This is a little off topic but what do you think about all the interest in enlightenment and enlightened beings these days?*

Ram: It's good. People are starting to think a bit. But, for the life of me I can't figure out why the gurus are making such a fuss about enlightenment.

JOHN: *The fuss? You're a guru.*

Ram: No, I'm not. I'm the Self. Period. If you need to know something and I can help you know it, then teaching can happen. But that does not give me an identity as a teacher. Even if it does in your mind, I don't accept that projection. When you know you are the Self you know that enlightenment is no big deal. If there is such a thing as 'an

enlightened being' then he or she deserves no respect whatsoever.

JOHN: *What?*

Ram: You are already the Self, even when you think you aren't. It is not that you are gaining something that you didn't have. So when you say you found it, you are actually saying that you were a fool for a long time. In America when some obese person loses one hundred pounds they throw a big party, celebrate the wondrous achievement. But what about the fact the person's greed produced this situation in the first place? You shoot yourself in the foot and then congratulate yourself that you bandaged it up?

JOHN: *So it's saying that you are always the Self. You cannot not be the Self. So the question of bondage and freedom does not arise.*

Ram: Right. It's a myth. 'Realizing' one's true nature does not mean experiencing one's true nature because you are always experiencing your true nature. It means knowing that I am the Self, limitless awareness.

JOHN: *I came across another book published by Shambala Press called The Spiritual Teachings of Ramana Maharshi which is much more comprehensive than the small pamphlets we have been discussing. How do you feel about discussing some additional points concerning Ramana's teachings?*

Ram: Fine. In fact what are called Ramana's teachings are just the tip of the Vedic iceberg. Because of who he was he did not run all over India and the world selling his books and videos, giving satsangs and seminars to see that 'his'

teachings reached a spiritually starving world. So we only have some conversations, questions and answers and pithy statements he made naturally in the course of his life, most of which were not recorded. In one way it's a shame in so far as Ramana had an exceptionally clear mind and went right to the essence. But in another it doesn't matter because he was firmly within the Vedic tradition and never, to my knowledge, said anything that contradicted either the Yoga or the Vedanta shastra. So if someone wanted a more comprehensive view one could study the scriptures.

JOHN: *Yes, it was a different time, no website, Ramana t-shirts. Anyway, I've mentioned several times that we should talk about self inquiry as a practice and I came across an interesting question and answer that addresses this issue. Someone asks him "What is the method of practice?" and he replies "As the Self of a person who tries to attain Self-realization is not different from him and as there is nothing other than or superior to him to be attained by him, Self-realization being only the realization of one's own nature, the seeker of liberation realizes, without doubts or misconceptions, his real nature by distinguishing the eternal from the transient and never swerves from this natural state. This is known as the practice of knowledge. This is the inquiry leading to Self-realization."*

*He seems to be saying that self inquiry is more than just asking "Who am I?"*

Ram: That's right. From speaking with people who come here looking for Self-realization I've learned that many think all one has to do is say "Who am I?" and somehow the answer will be revealed. But this isn't how it is. The fact is that the nature of the 'I' is well known. If you have a doubt just read the Upanishads or Shankara or any Vedantic text.

It is very clear. There are literally hundreds of words that indicate the Self. There is a peculiar belief that the Self is some mysterious unknown presence only apprehended through mystic means about which one can say nothing. Unspeakable. Indefinable. Beyond words, etc. But actually, the Self is the only thing one can speak about with precision and certainty...because it is the only reality. All the rest of it, what people think of as real cannot really be described...because it is neither completely real nor is it completely unreal. In this statement Ramana uses perhaps the most common word to indicate the nature of the Self. He says It is eternal. This distinguishes it from the body/mind/ego complex and the world around...which is constantly changing. We think of the body as real and have a word for it but when you look into the body you can't come up with anything substantial. It keeps resolving into subtler and subtler elements until it disappears altogether. But no matter how much you analyze it, you cannot reduce the Self to anything else. It cannot be dissolved. .

JOHN: *So inquiry is not a matter of getting knowledge then, it is a matter of applying it?*

Ram: Yes, Ramana, says that inquiry is separating the real from the unreal, the eternal from the transient. So it is a practice. Before you can practice you need to know what is real and what isn't. Twelve centuries before Ramana, Shankar uses the exact same words, "practice of knowledge' in Atma Bodh to describe this process. And it was already part of the tradition when Shankar came along. The practice is called 'viveka' and the Vedantic literature is full of it.

JOHN: *It seems quite intellectual. How does it work?*

Ram: It isn't 'intellectual' in the pejorative sense that one hears the world used today. But it definitely relies on an astute use of the intellect. There is this notion that Ramana taught in silence and that only by sitting in silence, not by using the mind in any way, can one realize the Self... but this is patently untrue. Here Ramana is not recommending silence. Mind you, meditation, sitting in silence is a very useful practice but Ramana himself makes it very clear that in Self inquiry the intellect is involved, is in fact the instrument of realization. In his description of his own awakening one can see that he was obviously conscious and thinking. And there is no reason why one can't think when the mind is silent. In fact in that state conscious thinking is beautiful, a real joy. There is even a yogic term for it, savikalpa samdhi. It means samadhi with thought. Vikalpas are thoughts.

JOHN: *This is quite surprising. The common notion is that the intellect needs to be shut down for the Self to be realized.*

Ram: That is the view of Yoga. Controlling the mind is useful to prepare the mind for Self realization but it is not tantamount to Self realization. We need to remember that the mind is transient and therefore unreal. So how are you going to control something that is non-eternal? The one who is trying to change, the ego, is non-eternal, meaning never the same from moment to moment, and what is meant to change is non-eternal. Therefore, how can there be any permanent change? Even if there is change as a result of your efforts you will have to keep up the effort to keep the changes operational. So you find yourself having to do all these things to be what you want to be. This is always the problem when you try to change the mind, or stop the mind. Inquiry is not a question of controlling of the mind.

JOHN: *So how does this discrimination work?*

Ram: Well, first we need to know that any Tom, Dick or Harry cannot just practice inquiry. In the first line of the very next paragraph Ramana says, This is suitable only for the ripe souls.” You need to be prepared. Prepared means mature, indifferent to the blandishments the world has to offer: pleasure, security, power, fame, etc. And secondly, one needs a burning desire to be free of his or her own mind. This is different from saying that one needs a dead or different mind. The mind is going to be with you in one form or another whether you like it or not, so the only sensible question is how to live happily with it. When you realize what the Self is and that you are it you see that you have always been free of the mind.

And this does not mean that any experienced person is qualified to practice Self inquiry and attain enlightenment. Many, perhaps most, experienced people haven't learned anything important from their experience.

JOHN: *Anything important? That's a rather sweeping generalization.*

Ram: Perhaps that is a clumsy way of saying what I wanted to say. By that I mean they haven't learned that experience is not going to solve the happiness issue and that liberation is possible. So they just keep chasing the same things. I read the other day that Ted Turner, who is a billionaire, and his wife, Jane Fonda, a beautiful rich actress, divorced. In the article the interviewer asked what was the cause of the breakup and Jane said that Ted just couldn't stop doing business, meaning he didn't spend enough time with her. Now here is a very successful accomplished person who

literally has everything, except love, and he is unsuccessful in getting love because he can't stop his addiction to making deals. Not only is he unsatisfied with the amount of money he has, his obsession keeps him from enjoying the love of a woman, much less from understanding that his view of himself is the problem. So no matter how accomplished you are in your field of experience, without coming to the right conclusion about oneself you will not qualify for enlightenment.

JOHN: *And discrimination does.*

Ram: Absolutely. And to get to the point, discrimination or inquiry is the moment to moment practice of the understanding that the experiencer and what one is experiencing is not real and that witness, the awareness because of which the experiencer is capable of experience is real. And how it works is that whenever an impulse to do something or have something or feel something or change something comes up in the mind, as it does all the time, one does not just mindlessly set out to manifest the desired result, but one thinks "What lasting benefit will I get by doing, getting, experiencing this?" Will I be more, better, different? Will I gain lasting happiness or will I still be what I am? Assuming that the one doing the practice is the ego... which it would necessarily be... will that person be any wiser with reference to his or her own Self by doing/thinking/feeling/experiencing something? And, the answer is always no. True you may be wiser with reference to a specific idea, but will you actually become whole and complete and free of your mind by doing what you are contemplating doing? For example, you may invest in the stock market and lose a bundle because the corporate fat cats are cooking the books. So you learn to not take people's word for things concerning money, but are you

fundamentally different because you don't have the money you once had? Or are you fundamentally different because you are more wary? No. You are still what you are.

JOHN: *So self transformation is not Self realization.*

Ram: It may be useful to clean up your ego a bit before you set out to set it free but the very fact that you are trying to change means that you are not free. A friend and I rented a house we found on the internet recently from a woman who was going on vacation and when we moved I noticed a collage on the wall celebrating her recent spiritual awakening. And pasted on the collage were different sized words from different periodicals that said, "One day I got tired of being the same so I made the BIG JUMP."

What you have here is a spiritual awakening, but not Self realization. This is a person who has been stuck with some bad values and consequently caught up in some unhealthy habits who finally gets the courage to confront herself and make changes in the way she lives. And this is very good, an important first step. But this is not Self realization. Awakening is not Self realization although during an awakening you may come to experience and understand that there is a Self.

JOHN: *This is an important distinction, I think.*

Ram: Yes it is. The reason this is not Self realization is because the one who landed is the same one who made the jump. Once the proper values and good habits are in place a new problem will surface...is this all? Because you haven't addressed the fundamental problem...who am I...you have just corrected some karmic mistakes the ego made. I'm not saying that spiritual awakenings aren't good

but once you are awake to how foolish you are and the possibility of getting out of it, then you can perhaps start to seek wisdom...which at some point will entail asking who made the jump.

Now, if Ramana is saying that the Self never changes and you are the Self and the Self is endless bliss, then you will never want to jump out of yourself. So what we have in the case of this woman is an ego changing itself. And no matter how much the ego changes for the better it is never going to change into the Self. When you realize that you are the Self it doesn't matter to you what the ego is. You accept it as it is. You understand that it wouldn't be the way it is if it could help it and you let it be. Or you work on it dispassionately if that is your karma. When you no longer see yourself as it, it will gradually become more like the Self...but it will never become the Self. So thinking that you are going to become different is not the way to go.

JOHN: *So you're saying that working out your karma or trying to be different will not produce wisdom?*

Ram: Yes, definitely. There is a belief, a rationalization actually, that one needs to go through all sorts of experiences to get enlightened. But if this were true then anyone who had had a lot of experiences or experiences of a certain type would be enlightened. In the spiritual world you find the idea that you need 'experience of the Self' to be enlightened. But if you interview anybody who has come here seeking enlightenment you will find out that every one of them has had at least one 'experience of the Self,' sometimes many...yet...and here's the point...they are still seeking. During my 'mystic' phase which went on for three years, every other day something extraordinary, something transcendent, happened. But what good did it do? At the

end of the day I was still the same old fool, looking for the next incredible experience.

JOHN: *Come on. It must have had some value.*

Ram: You're right. It made me realize that I was chasing the wrong thing...experience. It made me begin to think in terms of understanding. And shortly after I came to that conclusion I met a jnani.

What I needed was to see that no matter what kind of experience I had I was still the same. This is discrimination. It is very difficult to practice because the ego can't stand its incompleteness and is passionately committed to getting what it wants or avoiding what it doesn't want to feel good. You find people with grey hair, people who should know better, still chasing things in this world. I like to hang out in Peter's cafe and talk with people and I can tell you stories all day of people who came here hot for enlightenment but even hotter for a relationship, people willing to put sadhana on the back burner or take it off the stove altogether when the 'right' person comes along. There was a very handsome German woman who came here two years ago, very 'spiritual,' looked like a proper saint. She went to the ashram and sat in Virupaksha cave, etc. for a month or so. I used to see her meditating in Skandashram. But after about a month she came into Peter's with an eye peeled for something to happen...like people do in coffee shops. And sure enough one day she met this English guy, a real party animal, everyone knew his trip, acting like a very cool yogi and she fell for him like a ton of bricks. I think her fantasy was that they would walk hand in hand into the sunset of enlightenment. And what happened to her sadhana? And after a few weeks they went off to Goa, which is appropriate because it is a conducive environment to what they had in

mind. And someone told me a few months later that they had gone off to Europe to get married and raise a family. A couple of weeks ago she showed up in Tiruvannamalai again dressed like a saintly nun in white with a tilak and a mala around her neck...as if she had never left. And the fellow was nowhere to be seen. And after a few weeks of meditation, etc. she started coming into Peter's again with that look in her eye. This is called aviveka, lack of discrimination

JOHN: *So you're saying that inquiry is always choosing not to go with your vasanas?*

Ram: No, not really. It's knowing that if you go with them you will not get lasting satisfaction. In a way you can't avoid doing certain things, there is too much internal pressure. To fight them would cause too much stress and personality distortion... what is called repression. But you can go through the experiences that life has to offer minus the belief that life is capable of making you happy. You can aim for a clear balanced mind. This is the purpose of viveka and the fruit of inquiry. It neutralizes your likes and dislikes. This is the difference between a samsari, a worldly person, and a mumukshu, a person practicing enquiry.

JOHN: *I have another teaching that I would like to discuss.*

Ram: Sure, but let me make one more comment on this one before we move on because Ramana defines enlightenment in the first part of this quote and it is important to know what enlightenment is if you are seeking it. He says, "As the Self of a person who tries to attain Self-realization is not different from him and as there is nothing other than or superior to him to be attained by him, Self-realization being only the realization of one's own nature...etc.

I think this statement should be required reading for anyone who wants to understand what enlightenment is. Ramana makes it very clear that it is not about being different from what you are or of getting something that is better than what you already have...like a high state of consciousness. He uses a very interesting word here...only...to make the point that incredible spiritual experiences or altered states of consciousness or transforming oneself is not enlightenment. He says it is 'only' realizing what you are.

JOHN: *But isn't this realization something unique?*

Ram: No. What is being realized might be considered unique if you had been ignorant for a long time but this realization is no different from realizing or understanding or knowing anything. When it happens there is always a sense of irony because it is something that has always been well known. What could be any more familiar to you than you? It may seem like a big deal because something that is so obvious can be easily be taken for granted and forgotten. So Self realization is always a re-discovery, not a discovery.

JOHN: *So this is the whole cosmic joke idea.*

Ram: Yes. To solve the riddle you need a trick, a technique, which Ramana calls inquiry or viveka. You need to be reminded that you are eternal, that you have always been, that nothing can be added to or subtracted from you, that experience is impermanent, and that you need to start paying attention to your own mind and its ideas to the contrary and get to work dismissing them. As long as you hold erroneous views about yourself you will not hold the right view about yourself.

JOHN: *Which is that you are whole and complete.*

Ram: Yes, that experience depends on you, but that you do not depend on experience.

JOHN: *That nothing can affect you.*

Ram: That you don't need anything at all to make yourself happy. So what is the next statement?

JOHN: *Ramana lists sadhanas that people should practice to get the mind prepared for moksha. And the last one in the list is jnana. He says, "Jnana is the annihilation of the mind in which it is made to assume the form of the Self through the constant practice of inquiry. The extinction of the mind is the state in which there is a cessation of all efforts. Those who are established in this state never swerve from their state. The terms mouna, silence, and akarma, inaction, refer to this state alone."*

Ram: This is a difficult statement to understand because of the way Ramana is using the words. It needs explanation. Let's go through it carefully and think through every idea.

In the first place this is an unusual definition of jnana. Jnana can have several meanings but generally it means either simple knowledge or Self knowledge. Here the word is defined by what it does. Jnana destroys the mind. Before we get into how and why it destroys the mind I think we need to be clear what the word 'mind' is referring to. I don't think he means that the mind is actually destroyed, if by destruction we mean that it is incapable of ever thinking again. If that were true then Ramana would not be able to discuss this subtle point with us because his mind would have been destroyed. I think what is meant by mind here is

actually ignorance, the power that keeps one thinking incorrectly about one's self and the the world, the ideas, beliefs, and opinions that hide the Self. Knowledge destroys ignorance.

This 'practice of knowledge' is inquiry... as Ramana has already stated. What is the purpose of inquiry? The mind is made to assume to form of the Self. How does this work? Well, the mind has the belief that it is limited, separate, incomplete, inadequate, etc. This is its 'form.' And what needs to happen? It needs to be reconditioned by the application of knowledge. What knowledge? That the 'I' is unlimited, non-dual, complete, actionless awareness. Why do you want the mind 'to assume the form of the Self?' Because an unenlightened mind is samsara. The enlightened mind is nirvana. You are not going to get the Self enlightened because it is already enlightened. You can enlighten the mind because it isn't.

*JOHN: And the way you do this is to change the way you think about yourself? Your thinking about yourself must coincide with the truth about yourself?*

Ram: Yes. Absolutely. If you set out to stop or destroy the mind you haven't understood. Why? Because the one who is trying to stop or destroy the mind is the mind. You will always have to leave a part of the mind untouched. And this untouched part is the ego, ignorance.

The next statement is very important. It shows the primary effect of the removal of one's ignorance about oneself. Ramana says, The extinction of the mind is the state in which there is a cessation of all efforts.

The wording can leave us with a doubt so we need to rephrase this statement. It does not mean that you die or enter a comma...which is what happens when all activity stops. It means that inquiry results in the knowledge that the 'I' is not a doer. 'Not a doer' means that the 'I' initiates no actions...for the purpose of completing itself. It can inspire action in the ego/mind but it has nothing to gain through action. So when you realize that you are the 'I' you no longer run from or chase things in this world. It is the doer, the ego, that is involved in all this getting and keeping, avoiding and rejecting.

The third sentence needs explaining because the language is imprecise. It is, "Those who are established in the this state never swerve from their state." If enlightenment is simply the realization of your nature it is jnanam, knowledge. So there is no question of 'swerving.' Swerving is a verb, an action word, so it implies maintaining one's understanding. This statement is true when one is practicing inquiry because identification with the vasanas can cause you to forget who you are. But it does not apply to a jnani because if knowledge is knowledge it will not be forgotten. For example, have you ever forgotten what a tree is? You learned what it was fifty years ago and never once were you subsequently in doubt when you heard the word tree. The reason you haven't is because knowledge is permanent. When Ramana says, 'never swerve' it does not mean that there is any will power involved. It means that the understanding about who one is is permanent.

Let's take up the last sentence. "The terms mouna, silence, and akarma, inaction, refer to this state alone." I think we discussed the fact that the Self is not a 'state' so let's forget the word state, or lets take the Self to be a 'state' that doesn't change. What is being offered here is the idea that

the cultivation of the qualities of silence and non-action by an ego is not Self realization although it may be a valuable sadhana, but that the Self is silent, meaning free of duality and action. So when you realize who you are you realize that you are free of thought and incapable of acting with the belief that the action or the result will complete or free you. You are free of both because both require duality. And since you are non-dual, doing and thinking do not belong to you.

JOHN: *Great. Here's a statement that I found confusing. Perhaps you can help me make sense of it.*

Ram: I'll try.

JOHN: “Those who follow the path of inquiry realize that the mind which remains at the end of the the inquiry is Brahman. Those who practice meditation realize that the mind which remains at the end of the meditation is the object of their meditation. As the result is the same in either case, it is the duty of aspirants to practice continuously either of these methods till the goal is reached?”

Ram: Brahman is a name for the Self. You will recall that in describing inquiry or viveka Ramana said the self was eternal. Well, if something is eternal it is also limitless. The world 'mind' here does not refer to the thinking mind, since it is definitely limited. The world mind refers to the Self. But inquiry is a way of using the discriminating mind to get knowledge of the Self. The object of meditation is always the Self. One fixes one's attention on the Self, assuming that the mind is properly prepared, and one 'studies' or inquires into it's nature. In other words it thinks about what it is meditating about.

One could read this statement and get the idea that inquiry was one path and meditation another. Meditation without inquiry will not produce jnana, the knowledge that one is whole and complete actionless awareness. It can produce prolonged experience of bliss. But the experience depends on there being a meditator and on that meditator continuing to meditate. So meditation is a subtle kind of action involving a doer. However, when a person has firmly locked the mind on the Self, which is one of Ramana's definitions of inquiry, the meditator can't help but investigate the object of meditation, the Self. True most meditators do not know the Self and many don't even know of the Self because they are practicing meditation for lifestyle reasons, to relieve stress, for example. But someone who is meditating to realize the Self would necessarily have an inquiring mind. But if a meditator believes that Self realization is some sort of permanent experience of bliss he or she may be trying to suppress the intellect which is thought to be some sort of enemy on the path of meditation... and therefore not gain knowledge. It is possible to sit motionless, happy as a clam, for days without so much as a handful of thoughts passing through the mind. But at the end of the meditation what is left? Not jnanam, the knowledge that the meditator, the 'I' is the Self.

JOHN: *I've noticed what seems to be a contradiction when we are talking about moksha. On the one hand Ramana says that Self realization is only the realization of one's own nature and on another he seems to be saying that it is a kind of state that one never 'swerves' from... which implies a doer and an experience to be maintained. Would you care to comment on this?*

Ram: You bet. I've been harping on this distinction for about thirty years because how you see enlightenment has

everything to do with whether or not you attain it. The first statement is a statement of enlightenment as a rediscovery of one's primary identity. The second is a statement of enlightenment as an experience to be maintained. And we find Ramana using both. Is there a contradiction?

There is and there isn't. It depends on what point of view you take. If you take the Self's point of view there is no swerving. So when the knowledge that you are whole and complete ordinary actionless awareness is knowledge, that is, when it is not subject to change, your inquiry, your sadhana, is finished. But until this has happened you are in the Self realization phase, subject to forgetting this fundamental fact about yourself, and therefore, since you can 'swerve' you need to continually remind yourself that you are the Self.