

Ramana and “I”



30 Verses of Devotional Self-Inquiry
for Devotees of Shri Ramana

by
Rajiv Kapur

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Prologue

I started off my journey almost 25 years back by practicing the Kriya Yoga system and while that did provide me knowledge of the intricacies of my inner faculties (mind, ego, chitta, buddhi, pranas etc etc) and how they all are intertwined together to serve our highest spiritual interest, yet at best the yoga system led only to profound inner experiences (awakenings in subtle and void states), intoxicating blissful states, inner sounds and light, stilling of prana and mind but I still felt there was something lacking. The SELF wasn't realized in the sense that the bliss was not continuous and often my vasanas (habitual tendencies) would disturb my state and create agitation within me. I became aware of the inadequacy of yogic techniques for full Self-realization even though I was enveloped in Shakti (blissful feelings within my spine and 3rd eye area) and the thoughtless yogic state. As Sri Ramana rightly commented, Yogic techniques can only lead to Mano laya and not Mano nasa and that a Yogi needs to redirect life force back from sahasrar to the right side of Spiritual Heart where all vasanas are to be finally eliminated.

In the year 2009 I was guided into the SELF through the path of Self inquiry wherein I realized Turiya (the fourth state beyond the waking, dream and deep sleep). My experiences have been well documented in the book "Autobiography of a Jnani" as dialogues between me and Ed Muzika, a disciple of Robert

Adams. It was only then that I completely realized that this world was nothing but a dream and how maya keeps the illusion of the dream real. Bliss and joy have never left me since, even though the knowingness of the world as a dream is more profound than the experience of the Ananda itself. I must be honest here to admit that perhaps without my past 15 years of intense and disciplined Kriya Yoga practice; inquiry may not have delivered the same result as it did to me.

What is this 'I'?

This 'I' is only the ego or the "I-thought". All other thoughts arise on the arising of this "I-thought". The "I-thought" is therefore the root thought. If the root is pulled out everything else will at the same time be uprooted. Therefore, Sri Ramana instructed us to seek the root 'I', question 'Who am I?' Find the source through subjective awareness of *that which arises as a feeling* and then to hold on to that feeling. No verbal answering should be entertained except *that feeling*. Through abidance in such a way, over period of time, and dedicated practice all other ideas will vanish, and the pure Self will remain.

David Godman has described the process of Self-inquiry very beautifully in his books:

“It was Sri Ramana's basic thesis that the individual self is nothing more than a thought or an idea. He said that this thought, which he called 'I'-thought, originates from a place called the Heart-centre, which he located on the right side of the chest in the human body. From there the 'I'-thought rises up to the brain and identifies itself with the body: 'I am this body.' It then creates the illusion that there is a mind or an individual self which inhabits the body and which controls all its thoughts and actions. The 'I'-thought accomplishes this by identifying itself with all the thoughts and perceptions that go on in the body. For example, 'I' (that is the 'I'-thought) am doing this, 'I' am thinking this; 'I' am feeling happy, etc. Thus, the idea that one is an individual person is generated and sustained by the 'I'-thought and by its habit of constantly attaching itself to all the thoughts that arise. Sri Ramana maintained that one could reverse this process by depriving the 'I'-thought of all the thoughts and perceptions that it normally identifies with. Sri Ramana taught that this 'I'-thought is actually an unreal entity, and that it only appears to exist when it identifies itself with other thoughts. He said that if one can break the connection between the 'I'-thought and the thoughts it identifies with, then the 'I'-thought itself will subside and finally disappear. Sri Ramana suggested that this could be done by holding onto the 'I'-thought, that is, the inner feeling of 'I' or 'I am' and excluding all other thoughts. As an aid to keeping one's attention on this inner feeling of 'I', he recommended that one should constantly question oneself

'Who am I?' or 'Where does this "I" come from?' He said that if one can keep one's attention on this inner feeling of 'I', and if one can exclude all other thoughts, then the 'I'-thought will start to subside into the Heart-centre.

This, according to Sri Ramana, is as much as the devotee can do by himself. When the devotee has freed his mind of all thoughts except the 'I'-thought, the power of the Self pulls the 'I'-thought back into the Heart-centre and eventually destroys it so completely that it never rises again. This is the moment of Self-realization. When this happens, the mind and the individual self (both of which Sri Ramana equated with the 'I'-thought) are destroyed forever. Only the Atman or the Self then remains.”

However despite the clear, accurate and descriptive explanation laid down by David Godman, still not many actually “get it”. Is it because of strong vasanas or is that they find it dry and more like a mental and intellectual process or is it because of lack of persistence in practice?

My feeling is that Self-inquiry is not as easy as it is commonly understood or advocated.

The 'I-ness' or "I thought" or I-AM is usually a mixed awareness of the five koshas. These koshas have their energy, vibrations and codes which exert a 'pull' and influence over the Pure I-Am. Hence, when we abide in the sense of I-Am, what we are actually feeling and intuiting as our 'pure existence' is nothing but the totality of these koshas — and NOT the Pure I-Am. For example, if our physical body feels unwell, it is natural to feel its draining effect on how we feel our sense of existence. This "influence" is the effect of the disturbed annamaya kosha (food sheath) on the 'I-ness'. Similarly there are subtle "disturbances" originating from other deeper koshas that condition how we feel the 'I-sense' which cannot be understood easily unless we consciously investigate or inquire about how and why they arise? Upon such inquiry alone can we eliminate them one by one and truly arrive at the Self. These pulls/influences/impacts are called as Vasanas. They attach themselves to our causal body and then manifest themselves as desires and cravings on the subtle body and as habitual behavioural patterns which are eventually played out at the physical level. These vasanas are the reasons why we cannot abide in the 'I-sense' as they displace us from our pure state of Ananda(Bliss) .

So, in my opinion, Self-inquiry is not just about asking a question "Who Am I" and just keep feeling the 'I-ness' (for the Self to reveal itself someday). It is also to tease out the layers (the influences that attach themselves to the 'I-sense'). That is why it

is more complicated than what is understood as a simple practice. Hence it becomes advantageous for a serious sadhaka to take help from other modalities like yoga and observe spiritual virtues and ethics (abstaining from habitual patterns that create hindrances on the path) so that one could avoid impurities manifesting as “pulls” or “heaviness” on the pure I-AM feeling. As one begins to feel lighter on the path, the pure I-AM or “I-sense” begins to shine itself and eventually dissolves into the unmanifest Turiyatitta state (The Absolute).

I can also understand that not many can do Kundalini yoga. They may not be temperamentally suited or may not be inclined towards taking such practices considering that one needs guidance from a real Yogi Guru to direct the sadhaka, without whom such practices can cause more harm than good.

What then, is the solution?

For the majority of those interested only in Self-inquiry, I would advocate the path of Bhakti along with Self-inquiry. That would provide the “juiciness” we need to deepen the inquiry and move it from our head to our heart and eliminate the vasanas too.

Effort is absolutely needed in sadhana as shifts don't just happen by themselves. Wrong actions of past breed wrong results and

we must make newer efforts to undo past mistakes. However, effort alone is not what actually delivers. It is Bhakti and Grace that removes the ultimate darkness of the vasanas.

Sri Ramana said “There are two ways: either ask yourself, ‘Who am I?’ or submit.” On another occasion he said “Submit to me and I will strike down the mind.” (The collected works Sri Ramana Maharishi).

When I read these words my heart recognized what I already knew. Bhakti to Sri Ramana is as important as the application of His teachings. Nothing is our doing. It is all in His hands (It always has been). All happen by virtue of His Grace alone. That inspired me to bring forth 30 devotional verses of reality wherein I have placed His name along with His message as part of our devotion towards Sri Ramana and His teachings. I hope these pointers/musings will provide clarity and inspiration to all devotees on any path.

The two prominent words that are repeated in these verses are Ramana and “I”, where “I”, represents the path and Ramana, the goal.

Sri Ramana cannot be confined to any verbal description as language itself is mired in polarities. Whether He should be worshipped in form, or formless, personal or impersonal, attributes or beyond any attributes is up to each individual. So I leave the bhava of Sri Ramana to the apperception of the devotee.

Obeisance to Sri Ganesha! Victory to Self! Victory to the great sage and saint Sri Ramana who is none other than Shiva Himself and who appeared as one of us for the good of all of us.

I place this work at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana who has always been my guiding light and inspiration.

The Verses

1. The journey for a sadhaka begins with the firm conviction that only the “I” exists. Attention is repeatedly brought to this “I” until it begins to fade away. “I” is then known to perish and dissolve revealing the Self. Further Self abidance leads us to the profound knowingness that even Self is a concept and there arises a deeper conviction of loving surrender to Sri Ramana with or without any knowingness. This is real Mukti.

2. The world and all its objects depend upon the existence of the “I”, if “I” exists, all others will exist and if “I” disappear all others too will disappear, but something exists even in deep sleep even though the knowledge “I” has gone. What is that which allows this? Is it not natural faith and surrender that allows us to rest deep and joyfully even as the “I” slips away? Surrender is therefore, the primary, natural and effortless state of liberation.

3. The “I” appears to do many practices, putting effort and attention, often to its own self, with the hope of getting dissolved for the higher Self to emerge, yet in the heart of its own heart, the “I” knows that it cannot dissolve itself. Only Grace of Sri Ramana can do it.

4. Senses turned within leads to “I-thought”, “I” turned within leads to the background Self, but the one whose mind is ever at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana doesn’t need to turn or direct anything anywhere.

5. For every “I” that is felt, there will be another “I” witnessing and abiding in that. How much deeper do we need to go for the “I-thought” to be known and then dissolved? Why be puzzled? Better attend to the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana and the “I” shall automatically surrender on the spot.

6. Whether there exists anything like a Self is unknown. Even Vedanta has declared so. What point is there then to dwell on the nature of something that may or may not exist? Rather keep your heart ever at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana and rejoice!

7. Through repeated effort your mind will be able to remain centred at the “I-thought” or “I-AM” uninterruptedly, providing bliss and joy, yet the seeds of vasanas and karma cannot be removed through any way, understanding or practices, except through devotion to Sri Ramana.

8. “I-thought”, I-AM”, “Self” are all ideas and concepts that gather and centre our mind and heart at one place. That is the best we can ever do and manage. Once brought there, only Grace of Sri Ramana can dissolve all.

9. The source of “I-thought” is indeed the Self, which is beyond knowing and unknowing, but the LOVE that ever flows through Sri Ramana is the source of Self itself. Recognize Sri Ramana as the cause and origin of all, including the Self.

10. As long as there exists the feeling “I-I-I”, there is still subtle ego at play. Dissolve your heart in loving remembrance of Sri Ramana and get rid of ego right away.

11. Vasanas, karma, prarabdha are all concepts attached to the “I”. If “I” dissolves nothing remains. But how can the “I” get rid of itself? Keep your heart opened only to the Grace of Sri Ramana and soon there will be no “I” that was ever known to exist.

12. “There is no Self to seek for we are ever the Self” is the final Truth yet we keep looking for confirmation of the same. Isn't it so? That is indeed a pitiable state of affair. No effort,

experiences, knowledge or practices can provide that assurance for long. Just few words from a sage and the veil of darkness disappear into light. There can therefore be no better confirmation than the Grace that pours out of Sri Ramana's lips and His presence. Devotion to Sri Ramana is final liberation.

13. Truth can never be touched by fear irrespective of time, place and person. Yet often we fear losing Self abidance and try frantically to hold and seek it. Is Self an object that we can hold on to or lose? Yet our understanding fails us from time to time. But a devotee whose heart is ever filled with love of Sri Ramana transcends all such fears and he rests in the abode of Sri Ramana (at Spiritual Heart) as ever effulgent light, love and wisdom. What purpose is then left for him to seek the Self? Just another concept to chase.

14. Meditation can keep thoughts away. Thoughts kept away can lead to bliss of Self. Bliss of Self will eliminate vasanas. Vasanas eliminated will eventually lead to devotional and effortless love for Sri Ramana. Why not then begin with Love for Sri Ramana in the beginning itself?

15. The “I-thought” arises and sinks into the Heart. But from where does the Heart itself arise? Does it not arise at the thought of Sri Ramana? He is hence the source of the Heart itself.

16. No doubt one needs to conquer lust, greed and anger to be able to abide effortlessly in Self, but often the mind tricks us and makes us drift into the world of objects. The pull of the world can often weaken the pull of the Self and a state of conflict and confusion happens. Drop the fight and instead hold on to the Love of Sri Ramana and you will witness how the boatman will navigate through the turbulent waves of the senses and help you cross to the other side.

17. The most direct method is to drop the concept of a higher Self, which needs to be known or even recognized. The Truth is mind itself is the manifest form of Sri Ramana and is ever free and ever pure. This pure natural mind itself is the highest Truth and Sri Ramana presides over it.

18. We know Sri Ramana existed in human form and continues to exist in our hearts. Is he ever gone? An imaginary Self that is recognized one moment but gone another is therefore secondary to Sri Ramana. Drop that quest for Self and remain as a servant and devotee of Sri Ramana.

19. A pure mind devoid of conflict, desires, lust, anger and greed automatically falls at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana at the Heart. This is certain.

20. O beloved Sri Ramana, I have seen what it is to be the Unknown and the freedom it has offered me. Yet I would much prefer dying with the knowledge “Glory to Sri Ramana that alone exists” than to dissolve as the Unknown.

21. Set aside all talk centred around fate and effort. Leave them for discussions between the wise and the ignorant. Be rest assured that fate and effort are all ordained by Sri Ramana and nothing ever happens without His will.

22. Can the ego ever eliminate itself? Even after death it remains hidden as latent tendencies in causal body. The intimate relationship that efforts have with ego (doership) is well known. How then can we trust our efforts alone to deliver? Yet it is also true that we will need to make efforts for some time to inquire and to remain still. But the one who understands that efforts made or not made are equal and unconditionally surrenders both at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana is indeed a Jnani.

23. Whatever effort one puts from time to time in inquiry about the “knower-knowing-known” triad should also be dropped with the firm conviction that only Sri Ramana knows when all will be revealed. Faith alone can remove all forms of ignorance.

24. For a Jnani, after persistently holding on to the “I-thought”, the knowledge or light of “I-I” (Aham Sphurna) continuously shines and throbs at the Heart, but for the devotee, the Heart itself, instantly throbs with the name of Sri Ramana. Wise is the One whose continuous inquiry keeps the Heart ever surrendered at the Lotus Feet of Sri Ramana.

25. There is no Self other than a pure mind devoid of vasanas, brimming with bhava for Sri Ramana.

26. The key to entering the Heart cave is only through Sri Ramana’s Grace. One who pursues Him with pure mind and right intention has the key already.

27. The unsteadiness of the five senses can indeed be arrested through the means of breath control, but the one whose mind is

ever at the Feet of Sri Ramana does not need to employ any means. It happens all so effortlessly for him.

28. Recognize this Truth that the mind established in devotional service to Sri Ramana is Sri Ramana in the formless itself. There is nothing left to seek.

29. Why does the silent sage of Arunachala smile? For he knows the source of “I thought”- the Self and its source is nothing other than Him.

30. There exists only ONE Truth; Sri Ramana.

AUM NAMO BHAGAVATE
SRI RAMANAYA