

LOVE AND PURITY



Sri Ratan Lal

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BY

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Edited By William M. Harvey, Ph. D.

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Mind is erroneously considered to be mankind's crowning achievement. Man feels it is what sets him apart from lower animals, and that only through it can he understand and cope with the inerrancies of the world around him. Mind alone, he believes, enables him to know what is real and true, so that he may lead a happy and productive life. However, from the standpoint of Vedantic understanding, this elevated conception of mind is unwarranted. Vedanta considers mind to be but a mere shadow of the Truth.

This point may be illustrated with a small example. Let us suppose we are observing a tree while the sun is shining. The tree casts a shadow, and the shadow keeps moving. Being a reflection, the shadow changes, but the tree does not change. In our example, the tree represents true Existence, which is the Self. The shadow, its reflection, represents the mind. Vedanta says that the mind is but a reflection of the Self.

What is the Self? The Self is Absolute Existence, identical with Pure Consciousness, or 'I AM.' 'I AM' signifies unbroken and pure Awareness. One must learn to contemplate and hold on to the 'unbroken' aspect, and not allow the mind to jump and bump around, which it does due to its tendency to turn its attention towards the external world of multiplicity, instead of directing it towards the essential Oneness.

We may also ask, "What is Existence?" Ordinarily, we say something exists if we can apprehend it through at least one of our five senses. But Vedanta tells us that what we apprehend through the senses is only 'attributed existence.' Real Existence is self-evident and permanent. Permanent, because it does not undergo any change in the three periods of time: past, present, and future. Being unchangeable, it is unaffected by anything else. It is the mind, not the Atmic Consciousness, that gets affected by the incidents of day-to-day life, by praise and blame, and all the other dualities.

Atmic Consciousness is self-evident because it does not require the testimony of the mind to prove its Existence. It is That which gives light to the mind and enables the mind to function. It is there both in the presence and in the absence of thoughts. Thoughts, however, are possible only in Its presence. It is the source of the mind, its very basis. Sometimes it is also called the 'enduring background of Silence,'

in the presence of which thoughts come or do not come.

Let us return for a moment to our example of the shadow and the tree. In darkness, there is no shadow. Nor is there a shadow at twelve noon, when the sun is at its highest point. Likewise, in absolute ignorance, the mind is not there. Nor is it there when there is total illumination. Absolute ignorance occurs in the deep sleep state, whereas total illumination occurs in the fourth or transcendental state of Pure Consciousness, devoid of anything else. Total illumination would be experienced when one recognizes and experiences his true Self. Then there is no reflection, no thoughts. It is thoughts that constitute the mind, which themselves are generated by worldly desires.

Unfortunately, we find that one is very much inclined to ignore one's true Self, and instead, runs around all the time in the pursuit of external objects, thinking the happiness one looks for is to be found there. These objects are thought to be very valuable to us. But, objects external to us cannot really give us happiness; and once we realize this, we begin to lose our craving for them. They become distant from us, and we are able to detach ourselves from them. Our desires then decrease, resulting in fewer thoughts. This is in itself a sign of process. Our mind becomes clear and we are not confused.

The mind gets weakened due to its tendency of straying away from the Self. Why does it stray? Because it considers these external things as very colorful, as irresistibly charming and attractive, so it feels life is not worth living without all these external things. As already mentioned, they are thought to contain the happiness one is looking for. But, how can permanent happiness be derived out of things which are themselves temporary in nature? Permanent happiness is our True nature.

The mind is always directed towards the external, temporary world. Therefore, it fails to recognize that true happiness is to be found within, and not in the 'passing show' which is called the world, and which goes on changing. When we stop and reflect, we appreciate that the process of life goes on, and that it is only appearances that change. Life itself never comes to an end. Life is the Self, life is Consciousness, it is uninterrupted.

What is the meaning of Truth? Truth is that upon which everything is based, but which itself has no anchorage other than Itself. It is that which is the basis for everything else and its own basis as well. This basis is Nameless and Formless Reality, from which everything rises, and into which everything ultimately gets dissolved. That is the basic Truth.

In speaking about Truth, Bhagavan Baba often says, "Truth is not merely to speak truthfully, but

Truth is that which is permanent, changeless, unaffected.” That is the basic Truth, the presence of which cannot be denied. It is ever-present, permanent, eternal. It is in Its presence that everything happens or does not happen.

According to Vedanta, anything that ‘appears and disappears’ cannot be regarded as absolutely Real. Absolute Reality has no relationship at all with that which appears and disappears, with that which comes and goes. The question may arise, “Then, how to experience Reality, who or what experiences Reality?” Reality reveals itself when the mind is purified.

Mind has three characteristics: the *sathvic* (pure), the *rajasic* (active), and the *tamasic* (dull). In Vedanta, great emphasis is laid upon making the mind pure and stable. Until it is purified and stabilized the mind can never experience its own Vision; and as long as it remains in its polluted state, it will remain a separate entity from its basic Truth. As such, mind is dictated to by its innate tendencies, which are impure. They thrive on seeing differences, they are not willing to accept Oneness, they do not want to see unity in multiplicity. Only a pure and still mind, a silent mind, will allow one to experience the Self.

Mind is a mere reflection of the ultimate Reality. One takes what one sees to be everything, to

be all there is. However, there is the Unseen that lies beneath that which we see, and that is Absolute Existence, which is identical with Pure Awareness. It is That which is our true Being, the Self from which the mind strays away again and again.

Actually, the best hobby for the mind is not to be curious, not to seek knowledge of this, that, and the other. Rather, it should seek its own source, and then remain as the source. It should try to remain in its source for as long as possible. Remaining as its source is called Self-realization.

In this connection Bhagavan Baba often uses four terms: Self-confidence, Self-sacrifice, Self-satisfaction and Self-realization. Self-confidence means confidence in the Atma. When one has confidence in Atma one gets satisfaction. When one is satisfied, one is willing to sacrifice anything. One becomes naturally detached from that which is temporary, from that which comes and goes. After becoming detached from that which is temporary, one begins to become attached to That which is permanent. This will lead ultimately to Self-realization. As the clouds hide the permanent sky, so also the mind, with its outgoing tendencies, hides its own Reality.

The mind has four states. The first three are familiar to us: the waking state, the dream state, and the dreamless deep sleep state. Food taken in the

waking state satisfies waking hunger. Similarly, dream food satisfies dream hunger. So what is then the difference between the waking and the dream states? The difference is that in the waking state one can make a conscious effort. Hence, the waking state is very important.

In the deep sleep state the mind is absent, though one is there as Consciousness. But the mind, being absent, is not conscious of the Self. The Self is there without being consciously experienced.

The fourth state is called *Turiya*, the witnessing state. *Turiya* becomes *Turiya-tit*. *Turiya-tit* means the transcending of *Turiya*. As one remains as the witness, the mind, itself being a non-entity, disappears. When there is nothing to be witnessed, also the witness disappears. This is called *Turiya-tit*, the transcendental state, where there is no subject-object relationship. Subject and object are the contents of the mind. They are not contents of Consciousness as such. Consciousness is content-less. It is constant, unbroken, like light. It is simply there. We cannot say it is "conscious of" anything. However, it gives light to the mind, and thus enables the mind to be "conscious of" things.

In reality, mind is nothing but unbroken Consciousness. Having put on a cloak of limitations, it appears to be separated from its Reality. Remove those imagined limitations, remove the ignorance,

and Reality shines forth of its own accord; no effort is required. The only effort required is to remove the deep-rooted ignorance. It is very difficult to remove because one is all the time identified with the mind/body complex. One identifies the 'I' with the mind/body complex, thereby personalizing the impersonal, eternal 'I.' This has the effect of limiting the limitless 'I,' which is our real Identity and the source of the imagined, personal 'I.' One imagines that the testimony of the mind, the testimony of this limited 'I,' has to be there in order to prove the Reality of its Source, the absolute Truth from where it rises.

What is the yardstick of Reality? Normally, man considers the experiences he goes through during the waking state to be the yardstick of Reality. But the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep states are stages pertaining to the mind. The truth of Reality is not dependent on mental concepts. It is not dependent on the mind. The yardstick of Reality is Reality itself. When the mind is pure, then Reality reveals itself, to itself.

Who goes through the experiences of the mind? The experiencer itself is a part of the triad that makes out the contents of the mind: the experiencer, the act of experiencing, and the experience; the knower, the act of knowing, and the known; the seer, the act of seeing, and the seen, etc. Such distinctions exist so long as we are in the realm of relativity, in

the realm of the mind. But, Reality is beyond the mind.

Now, how does mind, with all its desires and thoughts, arise? It rises as a shadow from basic Truth. That is, it rises from unbroken Consciousness. After rising, in order to sustain itself, it instantly gets identified with a name and a form. Further, it feels that if it gives up this wrong identity, which is but an illusion, it will have to recede back to its source, which is Pure Consciousness, Divinity. Thus, in order to sustain its separate identity, it does everything under the sun to maintain its imagined autonomy, its imagined independence from its Source.

That is the problem, when one identifies oneself with the mind all the time. "Today I am not in a good mood, tomorrow I am in a good mood." "Today I am in a dull state, tomorrow I am in a pure state." These are states of mind only, not of our Reality.

In order to experience our true nature, we have to practice withdrawing our attention and interest from the 'passing show' which seems so irresistible; and instead focus our attention and interest on our basic Reality. We have to attempt to experience That which "sees," instead of being all the time concentrated on the "seen." Unfortunately, we find this to be very difficult, because the "seen" is so

attractive that we don't want to experience That which Is.

'That which Is' is not known by the mind. However, once the mind gets a glimpse of It, it will want to taste It again and again. The mind will then seek to prolong It. But, It cannot be prolonged by the mind. That state is permanent, it is our true nature. It is the mind that interrupts it. In order to be all the time in that state, mind will have to merge into "That which Is." "That which Is" is as it is. It cannot be conditioned. It will not accept any superimposition. It is totally impersonal, transparent.

This shadow mind goes through different phases. Sometimes it is happy, sometimes unhappy, depending upon what it wants in life. But, one thing is certain: mind does not want to seek its Reality. Actually, all the problems we face in life arise due to one's mistaken identity. Mind will automatically become pure, stable, and peaceful if we understand our real identity, even intellectually. Today there are clouds, so the sky cannot be seen. The clouds are passing clouds, but the sky is permanent. There is no relationship whatsoever between the passing clouds and the permanent sky. Still, the clouds hide the sky. Passing clouds, passing thoughts, passing desires for the objects of the world, all hide the Reality. If one purifies his mind, the experience of constant Divinity can be had. This will be done not by you as you think yourself to be, but by you as you really are.

As a limitation, as a reflection, mind cannot know the infinite Self. It must learn to discriminate between that which is permanent and that which is impermanent. If one discriminates between the permanent and the impermanent, one gradually becomes detached from that which is not permanent. If one can learn to discriminate between thoughts and the enduring background of Silence, which is ever-present Consciousness, one has practically succeeded in the search for Reality. Thoughts are 'passing,' they keep on changing. Thoughts cannot be there without Consciousness; but Consciousness exists even in the absence of thoughts. Consciousness is ever-present, it is permanent.

In South India there was a great sage who lived in a small ashram. One day, one of his followers, an official of the Government, learned he was being transferred to a far-off place. He was very sad about this, because he felt he could no longer be in the Presence as he had been till then. As he was about to leave, he told the sage about his sadness. The sage replied: "Is this what you have understood in the last ten years? Can you ever be away from the Presence?"

This little story brings out an important point. It is the mind that changes, the Self is ever-present. However, in order to develop this discrimination, very deep introspection is required. One has to look deeply within. Then, the intuitive experience of the Self can be had.

Why is it that one does not want to look within? It is because of lack of love for the Self. One has to develop faith and love for It. Only then one will seek It. The Self, one's true nature, is also the nearest to oneself. Though nearest to oneself, one does not love It. One loves the objects of the external world, and feels therein one finds all happiness, even if it is transient.

One should try to know how this personal 'I' arises, why it rises. Coming to know this brings one nearer to the basic Truth. But 'near' is not always 'dear.' The 'I' as personal I is not real from the absolute point of view. But, even if it is granted reality from the relative point of view, we should ask ourselves, what is nearest to it? Naturally, its source is nearest to it. Source is one's real Self, one's Reality. But as long as one doesn't have the faith and conviction needed in order to perform some spiritual practice so that the mind will be purified, the mind, in its actual condition, will be always looking outwards. It is only when the mind is purified that the true Self can be experienced.

A pure mind is the Self. But believing happiness to be in the external world, one does not feel any attraction to look within. By chasing shadows in the external world one distances oneself from one's nearest Reality. Nearest is what one really is.

The Self is not only the nearest, but also the dearest. So, why is it not experienced? It is because love is directed somewhere else. One has to develop love for one's basic Truth; and one has to purify his mind. Love and purity of mind are like the two wings of a bird. One of them is not enough. If the mind is in an impure state, love alone will not take us forwards, because it will be directed outwards. The purity of mind alone is also not enough, because one will feel attracted to seek one's Reality only if one loves It. One has to love one's Reality in order to experience it, in order to be It.

Why does the mind get impure? Consciousness is pure, absolutely pure, just like sunlight. Sunlight is pure light. When it gets associated with matter, then the shadow arises. Similarly, when Consciousness gets associated with matter, these egoistic tendencies arise. Why? Because of the mistaken identity with the mortal body.

Give up this wrong identity. Give up the notion that 'I am the body.' How? By making the mind more and more to abide in its source. Then all tendencies will get uprooted. If one tries to uproot these egoistic tendencies one by one, it may take lifetimes. Consciousness, totally unrelated to the body, transcending thoughts, is one's true nature. It is a matter of direct experience. It may be associated, otherwise how would it be possible to talk, walk, etc.? Association is necessary. But it should not get

identified with matter. This mistaken identity is not necessary. It is the cause of ignorance.

Even a superficial understanding of Reality is not possible without purity. Only with purity of mind will one be able to proceed nearer to one's Reality. Hence, one should make one's mind as pure as possible. After making the mind pure, the love for Purity will naturally be there. That is why we find ourselves so attracted to the Embodiment of Purity, Perfection, and Peace—Bhagavan Sathya Sai Baba.

Bhagavan Baba repeatedly tells us that the purpose of life is to realize one's true identity. Liberation is not for the mind. Liberation is from the mind. Mind itself is a bundle of limitations appearing to be superimposed upon the limitless Consciousness. The Limitless can be experienced only when we get rid of those limitations.

Strictly speaking, there is neither bondage nor liberation. It is a mere myth of imagination. Because one wrongly identifies oneself with the 'I-notion' that refers to the mind/body complex, one believes oneself to be in bondage. But, once one realizes one's true identity, there is neither bondage nor liberation. It is because of ego or mind, that one says, "I am in bondage," or "I want liberation." Liberation is from this notional 'I.' If one gives up that notion, one is, effortlessly, in one's natural state.

A seeker went to see a Sufi saint, saying that he wanted to be in a state of bliss. The saint gave him a spiritual practice to follow. After following that practice for some time, the seeker came to experience bliss. But, the experience of bliss later disappeared again. So the seeker went back to see the Sufi saint and mentioned it, saying that he wanted to be in that blissful state permanently. The saint told him to: "stop practicing."

You see, it was the notional 'I' who was practicing. When this notional 'I' is absent, it is then that the blissful state is there.

There is a small story that illustrates the non-existence of the notional 'I.' Once a boy went for a walk with his father. After a while, they approached a forest. The boy pleaded with his father not to go in, because there is a ghost in that forest. The father told his son not to be afraid. He said that since he was with him, the ghost would not dare to appear. A few days later, the boy had to pass through the same spot. This time he was walking with his teacher. Again the boy felt afraid, and he told the teacher to take some other route, in order to avoid the ghost in the forest. The teacher told the boy not to be afraid, because there was actually no ghost at all.

In this story, the father may be said to represent the scriptures. The teacher would represent a preceptor; and the boy would represent the spiritual

seeker. The scriptures are somewhat like parental love. They cater to all situations, making allowances for the way the seeker thinks. This is in order to gently lead the seeker, to encourage, as one would encourage a child. The preceptor, on the other hand, will be more strict and truthful, more direct, as was the teacher in the story.

So, just as was the case of the 'ghost' that was thought to be in the forest, the ego is also non-existent. Yet, even though we are repeatedly told of the ego's non-existence, we regard it as real, because it continues to find ways to justify its presence.

Normally one considers the personal 'I' as being of uppermost importance. Then comes the world, and lastly, God. However, this is the wrong order of priority. Since God is the very basis of everything, God should have top priority. Next should come the world, and last would be ego, or the personal 'I.'

One doesn't need a candlestick to see the sunlight. Sunlight reveals itself, to itself, by itself. So also with the Reality of one's immortal nature. Why is the word "immortal" repeatedly used? All the books on Logic give the example that "Man is mortal. Peter is a man. So Peter is mortal."

However, that is a very superficial study of man. Without the immortal Indweller, this

body/mind complex, which is inert, would not be able to function. In fact, without life in the body, can the body function?

This is why it is mentioned by sages, seers, and saints that God is One and the Same everywhere. It is man that creates distinctions in God, for superficial reasons, because of narrow-mindedness. The tendency of the mind is to always see differences. It doesn't want to see Oneness.

Purity of mind will lead to Unity. Unity will lead to Divinity. However, if mind is impure, there can be no Unity.

In the absence of Purity, what one sees is multiplicity. One develops an outward vision, and is always looking here, there, everywhere. But one will never look inward to see the One Indweller, call it God, call it Atma, call it Self. Whatever words one may use, the meaning of Reality doesn't undergo any change. Just as one can call water by any name: Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, yet, water is water. Water doesn't change.

Once the mind gets convinced that it has no power of its own, but is enabled to function by a higher Power called Self, it will lovingly surrender to this Higher Power that is the Self. The Self is the Light and Power that enables one to function, to speak, to do anything.

What is surrender? Surrender means to develop a sense of equipoise. This implies that one should accept everything as God's Will, and be equally happy whatever is one's predicament, good or bad. Whether things happen according to one's wishes or not, one should remain in a state of equipoise.

Often we find that while one is supposedly, 'surrendering,' one makes certain demands on God, telling God what to do. Can this be called surrender? That would mean we want God to surrender to our will.

Surrender is sometimes called the "mother of Wisdom." In order to Know, one has to Love. In order to Love, one has to Know. So, both are complementary.

To surrender is to realize that one's true love can only be for God. In common parlance, we say that 'we love our children,' 'we love our family,' 'we love this place and that place,' and so on. However, true love can never be for anything external to the Self. This is why the Divine Baba advises us that the word 'love' should only be used for God. It should not be used for anything external to us. Those external things we say we love are mere attachments. Where was the wife before marriage? How can the word 'love' be used for that which is not permanent?

Love and Wisdom go together, converge towards the same goal. To consider God as something external to oneself is a mere mental image. The so-called personal God is, without doubt, external to oneself, but the essence is the same, the Self, Divinity without name and form. Many people are under the wrong impression that the Self is identical with a personal God, be it Rama, Krishna, Sai Baba, or so many other forms of God. The Self is Atma. It is nameless, formless, attribute-less Divinity. It is the Reality from which everything rises, and into which everything will have to merge again. Even the personal Gods who appear from time to time, emerge from the nameless and formless Divinity. And ultimately, they go back to It. The entire creation arises from that nameless and formless Divinity.

One accepts the findings of the natural scientists; so, why not accept the findings and teachings of the spiritual scientists? Names are many, Incarnations are many, but God is One. The difference between what we call 'personal Gods' and the human beings is very fundamental. The personal Gods are not at all under the spell of ignorance. They know their Reality, and they are all the time identified with It. But man, due to the impurity of the mind, has forgotten his source, his Reality. Therefore he is under the spell of ignorance.

One remains from birth to death identified with the perishable body, which is subject to change,

decay, and death. Sometimes one prays, 'Lead us from mortality to Immortality.' That means there is something immortal in one. But it remains only a prayer, not the realization of the Truth within one. That immortal aspect can be explained in a very simple way. That immortal Light or Current which enables the speaker to speak at this time, the same light enables the listeners to listen. Can anyone say there is the difference? That is Divinity. That is the Self. Can a lifeless body speak to a lifeless body? Life is constant, content-less Consciousness.

What is the purpose of life? It is to realize one's true identity. Be it the path of action, the path of devotion, or the path of wisdom, what is to be done is to give up selfishness and egoistic traits of mind. This means that one has to sacrifice the ego and stabilize the mind in order to attain the goal of life. Purifying and stabilizing the mind will also prove helpful in one's worldly life. The more unselfish one is in the worldly life, the better it will be; and the more efficiently he will perform his duties.

In the path of action, one has to act without a sense of individual doer-ship. Actions performed without ego leave no imprint, no impression, no tendencies in the mind. In the path of devotion or surrender, one has to merge one's sense of individuality in God. In the path of wisdom one has

to realize that there is no individual, that individuality is a myth.

Why do we find individuals behaving aggressively at times? Like animals, human beings have instincts and tend to react instinctively to whatever confronts them. If someone is aggressive or unpleasant towards the person, his instant reaction might be to respond in the same manner. That's why it is sometimes recommended that instead of reacting immediately, one should pause for a few moments. What happens during the time period of that pause? The mind or ego sinks into its source, it goes back into its place of origin. That place of origin is the spiritual Heart, which is located in the right side of the chest, and which is the seat of Consciousness. It is full of peace and bliss, and during that pause, the mind gets immersed in this peace. Then, after rising from there to react, the reaction will be different. It will no longer be instinctive. Having derived peace, the reaction will be peaceful. If one goes on practicing this technique of pausing, a time may come when there will be no reaction at all. Then there will be no one to practice even.

Practicing this and other spiritual techniques will tend to minimize one's interest in those things which are external to oneself. Only then will the mind agree to turn within and seek its Source. Until one reaches that point, the mind will be going here and there, looking for pleasure and happiness. But it

will never be able to obtain permanent pleasure and happiness from external objects which in themselves are not permanent.

Someone asked Swami, "I want peace." Swami's reply was that there are three words in the request. He said if you remove the first two words, 'peace' alone will remain. Getting rid of 'I' means getting rid of ego. Getting rid of 'want' means getting rid of desire.

Peace cannot be obtained by the imagined 'I.' Peace and the Self are identical. If during the waking state one observes himself carefully, he may find that at times, without making any effort, mind is free from thoughts. He might say that the mind is a blank at those times. Why does this feeling arise? The attention of the mind is usually focused on the external world. Once it is withdrawn from the external world, through some spiritual practice, it may seem to be a blank. Why? Because, the attention is still in the mind. Once it sinks into the spiritual Heart, the experience of one's Reality can intuitively be had.

Consciousness is always there. It is permanent. It is only in Its presence that things happen or do not happen, that thoughts appear or do not appear. If one keenly observes the inward working of the mind, he can instantly detect when the mind is about to rise and react. That is the moment to subdue it. But one's

vision is very rarely turned inwards, all the time one is looking outwards.

There are a variety of spiritual practices that can be undertaken. For example, one may simply recite the name of God. However, the tongue should not be used. One should recite the name of God mentally, rhyming it with the breath. The source of the mind and of the breath is the same. When one is agitated, one's breathing will also be agitated. And when mentally one is at peace, one's breathing will be peaceful.

Another practice is to witness the mind, to witness the thoughts. Let the mind witness itself. Become the Witnessing Consciousness. When thoughts know they are being watched, automatically they will lessen. When a thief knows he is being observed, he will run away. The same happens with the thoughts. Then one starts remaining unaffected by whatever happens or does not happen. Finally the wheel of thoughts will come to an end. At that time, can one's existence be denied? No. Thoughts are dependent upon Awareness; but Awareness is not dependent upon thoughts. Awareness is ever-present. Awareness is existence, real Existence. Awareness is one's true nature.

Another practice is to hold on to the 'I-thought.' Everything happens only after the rising of the 'I-thought.' Once the 'I-thought' rises,

everything else also rises. In the dreamless deep sleep state there is no 'I-thought.' In that state, the mind is not present. Then, who is the one who would have thoughts? Only the Self is there, but it is not consciously experienced.

In the beginning, holding on to the 'I-thought' is prescribed in order to strengthen the mind, so that it will be able to concentrate. First the mind concentrates on something external, for instance on the image of God. When we concentrate on one single thought, all other thoughts disappear. Who is the one who concentrates? It is the personal 'I.' Then, gradually, you have to withdraw the attention from the external object and focus it on the subject, the 'I.' Find out who this 'I' is. Find out from where this 'I'-notion arises, and remain as the source of the 'I.'

Sometimes, during self-inquiry, the mind gets distracted. This happens due to the innate tendencies of the mind. The mind will try to justify itself, its presence. It wants to know what we are seeking, it even tries to answer this inquiry. But any answer given by the mind will be a wrong answer. Why? Because, Reality is beyond the mind. The basic Truth is wordless; it is beyond words, beyond the mind. This is why any answer given by the mind can never be a correct answer. The current of constant, contentless Consciousness, which is the Self, can only be intuited in the absence of the mind. However, the

mind keeps on rejecting this idea. It doesn't want to admit that its presence itself is a great handicap for performing the inquiry.

Another practice is to hold on to the seer. In one's daily life there are three factors: that which is seen, the act of seeing, and that which sees, the seer. The great masters advise that we should leave aside the seen and the act of seeing and hold on to That which sees, That which enables us to see. The seer, the act of seeing, and the seen are the contents of the mind.

In the beginning, through these practices, one tries to abide in the Self. In due course, this will result in abidance as the Self, which is our natural state. But one has got so used to the unnatural state of one's attention being focused always on everything external to oneself, that the natural state at times appears as newly attained. Whatever is newly attained will be lost again; whatever is newly attained is not one's natural state, and as such is not real.

The mind appears to be conscious by itself, but that is because of the light it receives from the Self. The Self gives light to the mind and shines also within it as its basis, its substratum. Thus, the mind cannot be assigned its own sentiency. Mind appears to be sentient. But mind is as insentient as the gross body. One speaks of the moonlight, but the moon has no light of its own. It shines with the light borrowed

from the sun. As the moon shines with the light borrowed from the sun, so also the mind and the body are enabled to function with the light they borrow from their Reality, from their Source, which is the Self. Mind which has no sentiency of its own is a reflection of the Self. It appears to be sentient by the light of the Atma, of Divinity. It is entirely dependent upon the Self. This, one has to understand, realize, and become convinced of.

One's true nature is Pure Attention. But all the time one is attending to this or that, to everything external to oneself. Once attention gets focused upon itself, when it is out of touch with the objects of the senses and the concepts of thoughts, this state is called Realization. In that state one is not aware of anything else. It is Consciousness itself.

Mind thinks it has to do something in order to realize its true nature. It has only to be made quiet, to be made still; and then it has to be bypassed.

SATSANG

Question:

I want to know the difference between Grace and effort. Is effort an obstacle?

Ratan Lal:

Effort is necessary, so long as one is identified with the mind/body complex. However, once one has become rooted in one's natural state of Atma, effort is neither necessary nor possible.

When one becomes established in one's essential, immortal Reality, there will be no one to make an effort. That experience of Divinity is possible only in the absence of the individual. One cannot attain Self-realization, and still retain individuality. That would be contradictory because one's Reality, the Self, is unconditioned. It is neither conditioned by individuality nor by totality. As I said often, sky is sky, whether it is called Indian sky, Pakistani sky, Italian sky, or American sky. Similarly, water is water, whether in a drop or the ocean. How can one understand the real meaning of 'I' if one is identified with one's individuality? When you say, "I am so and so," that is ego.

"I AM." That is the truth. The ego wants to enjoy the bliss of the egoless state, but that is not possible. To be in that state, the ego has to be

sacrificed. Then there will also be no ego to make an effort. Grace is permanent.

Question:

To contemplate on an image of God, isn't this also Maya?

Ratan Lal:

On the contrary, very often it is recommended. It is a practice, a very good practice. If one likes a particular image of God, one should contemplate on that holy form. Later, one should progress to a stage which seeks that form in one's spiritual heart, and contemplate on it there.

Why do you associate it with Maya? This only shows one's confusion. It is a spiritual practice. One can talk of Maya from the absolute point of view. But once one is there, this question will not arise.

Question:

On the wall of a famous Sufi Ashram the following sentence was written: "As you take your shoes off and come into the ashram barefoot, take your ego off and come in." As there exists no ego at all, how can one overcome it, or take it off?

Ratan Lal:

Again this is mixing up two levels of awareness. From the absolute point of view, there is no ego, that is true. But from the relative point of view, there is

ego. Otherwise, why would one be asked to shed the ego? There is no ego once the Truth is realized. But so long as one is laboring under the spell of the ego, how can one say there is no ego?

Consider who it is that is seeking. Atma doesn't seek. Atma is happy, ever happy. It is the ego that seeks. Ego is equal to ignorance. Ignorance has to be removed. Ego is there until one becomes enlightened. When one removes the ignorance, it means the ego is removed.

Bhagavan Baba expresses His basic teaching in a very simple form. He says, "Love all, serve all; help ever, hurt never." Yet, we cannot practice even this simple teaching. Why? Because of the ego. The ego has likes and dislikes, pride and prejudices, partialities. That is why we cannot practice this simple teaching of "love all, serve all."

When things are explained in a simple way, the mind feels bored because it is not entertained. We want to ignore the screen of the cinema, which is the base of the film projected on it. We are more interested in the movie. The same thing happens with the life in the world. We want to ignore the base, the origin of the mind, and we want—the mind wants—to enjoy everything that is external to itself, because of its past tendencies.

The ego is also not willing to transform itself. Even though one has heard Bhagavan Baba's advice of "Love all, serve all" a thousand times, one continues to be at the same level. If one will not help oneself, what can God do?

Question:

What to do when you find your ego is always controlling and doesn't want to go?

Ratan Lal:

The ego will not let go so easily. Because once it has emerged, it wants to remain as an entity separate from its source, which is the Self. It gets identified so strongly with the body that it will not be ready to let go. The ego knows that if it removes this wrong identification it will have to go back to its source and it is not willing to do that. It prefers to go through joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, even if it has to face more pain than pleasure.

I will give you a very simple example. It is like a doll made of salt. If you place that doll in the ocean, it will get dissolved immediately. But, if the doll does not want to go to the ocean, it will remain as a separate entity.

The greatest defect of the ego—apart from its likes and dislikes, its pride and prejudices—is its wanting to limit the limitless. The ego treats the Self as an object without realizing that the Self is its very base

and support. That is why it is necessary to repeatedly engage in Satsang, to read spiritual books over and over again. Eventually, the ego will have to accept itself as unreal. That is to say, intellectual understanding occurs prior to realization. But true understanding will only come when we get rid of our preconceived notions. The ego doesn't want to give them up, because it is very attached to those notions. It is very attached to itself.

We have to repeat to ourselves that the 'I' as we conceive it, the personal 'I,' limited to a particular name and form, is but a mere notion. How can a mere notion demand something as its own? When the personal 'I' is only a notion, and not really there, how can it determine something as its possession?

Whether we are referring to tendencies, preconceived ideas, or physical objects, it cannot be said that something belongs to us. When the 'I,' this erroneous 'I,' is a notion, what is it that can belong to me?

But we do not consider that notion as a notion. We consider that notional 'I' as if it were the real 'I.' That is where discrimination is essential. But even if we recognize this fundamental Truth, the ego is not willing to accept it.

The notional 'I' thinks, "the shadow is a shadow, how can we deny it, it is a shadow and as a shadow it is there."

We should ask ourselves, “to whom does this shadow belong?” But, we do not ask ourselves this question.

It is the shadow of the Self. The Self is the Reality. The shadow is a shadow. In order to get the ego to accept this basic fact, one must acquire perfect understanding and conviction. Until we have this understanding and conviction, we are not able to seriously and consistently undertake the necessary spiritual practice that can lead to our realizing, our true reality.

Thus, understanding is important; but practice is equally important. We should try to develop both at the same time. The reason we are not doing so is because we are allowing various erroneous assumptions to influence us. For example, we consider spirituality as something secondary. We believe that what we see in the external world is Reality and therefore important. Hence, we are neither truly interested in understanding nor in practicing.

Once we correct our understanding and begin doing spiritual practice with intensity and consistency, the ego will be forced to disappear.

Question:

Is the interest in the Self something spontaneous or do we need to cultivate it? And how to cultivate it?

Ratan Lal:

It is the same question with different words. The answer will practically be the same. You must cultivate interest in your Reality. Until now, you have cultivated such a strong interest in your unreality! In order to overcome that effort, you must make effort in the opposite direction.

An example may make the point clearer. If we take a piece of carton, and we fold it and keep it like this for five years, it will be difficult to straighten it again. What we would have to do is fold it the other way around, and hold it like that for a long time. In like manner, we withdraw interest from the unreal and transfer it to our Reality.

Unfortunately, we have for so long considered ourselves to be something we are not, it is very difficult to see ourselves as we truly are. Yet, we must keep making the effort to feel this Eternal Presence within. We should not ignore or forget this Presence. This is the way to cultivate interest.

Question:

How to constantly feel that Presence?

Ratan Lal:

Who is the one who wants to feel it? It is the mind who wants to feel that Presence. But, how can the mind feel That which is permanent? This is the correct way to put the question. That permanent

Presence can be felt directly, once the mind is quiet. It is then very easy to put aside the mind, once it is quiet. Then, That which is permanent will reveal itself, because there won't be anyone to interrupt. It is the mind which interrupts the spontaneous current of the Self.

Question:

What would happen with us if we knew the Self?

Ratan Lal:

You are the Self, but you imagine you are not.

Question:

How to follow only one thought system, if for example we are Christians and we want to follow Sai Baba's teaching?

Ratan Lal:

Do you find any difference between the teachings of Sai Baba and Christianity? In all religions, at the highest level, the teaching is the same. It is not different. It is the mind which wants to create distinctions in God. You think that you are a Christian. Before being a Christian, you are a human being. Is it not so? You are a Christian because you were born into a Christian family. At the early stages of your spiritual progression, you may worship a particular form of God, as in the name and form of Christ. Another person may be attracted to a different form of God, for example Buddha. There are many religions, each one has one image of God. So long as

we continue at the lowest level, there will be no end to differences. If you want to see the differences, there is no end to them.

Here we try to see the Oneness of Divinity, to realize It, to experience It, to be It. The Indweller in all of us, no matter which language we are speaking, or from what country we are coming, or whatever beliefs we have, is the Self, the Divine Self. The same Self is in the Christ, in Buddha, in Sai Baba, and in each one of you. The Self does not undergo any change. Only your name and form are different from others. Seeing differences is a superficial vision. At a deeper level, the Self does not recognize any religion. The Self recognizes only the Divinity. It recognizes Itself.

The religion, the church, the temple, the mosque—we use so many words for the worship that we carry on. We pray to get something. But, the highest prayer is to ask God to eliminate our ego. Then, you will not see any more differences. The rituals are different, be they of the Christian religion, the Hindu religion, or the Muslim religion; but the goal is the same. There is no harm in their being different methods of worship. Let others worship in their own way and you worship in your own way. Why should we devalue the rituals of other religions? Who are we to judge? We should not judge. We should be tolerant. We should be patient. But the question itself shows the strength of the ego. It is the ego that wants

to find these differences in the teachings of Sai Baba, for example, and in what is taught in Christianity.

Question:

The other day you spoke about a base that is always steady. What is this base?

Ratan Lal:

We can compare the Self with a cinema screen. This white cinema screen is permanent. On the screen is projected a film. The mind is interested in the story of the film, in the hero, the villain, etc. Sometimes in the film we see fire, but it does not burn the screen. Sometimes you can see a flood in the projection, but it does not wet the screen. In the same way, the Self is unaffected by anything that the mind is experiencing.

We have to treat this world as if it were a passing show. We are having all different roles in the world. Someone will be a chemist, another will be a mathematician, and so on. In the Bhagavad Gita it is written: "Detachment in action, not of the action." We should remain detached when we are working.

Sometimes, in the theater, the same person has to play the role of a mendicant and at other times the role of a king. If he were to get attached to this role and forget his reality, he would be called mad. If after finishing his representation of a king, he stays in

the role and says, "I am the king," people would laugh at him.

The same thing happens in the world. One person says, "I am a chemist." Another person says, "I am a lawyer." These are the roles they play in this passing show which is called life. But it is not their real Identity. Our true identity is the Self. The Self is the base. You cannot analyze it. You cannot see it as you would see an object. Without the Self, there is no 'you,' nor anyone to ask a question.

Question:

I read that spiritually speaking, a powerful mind is of great help. But I want to get rid of the mind.

Ratan Lal:

Yes, a strong mind is of great help. A strong mind helps us to transfer the attention from the outer world towards the Self. The mind, when it is in a weak state, gets easily distracted, it runs from here to there and cannot be controlled. It has to be strengthened first. It has to be stabilized and purified.

Question:

When I want to control the mind, it is possible only for a certain period of time. Afterwards it appears to be even stronger.

Ratan Lal:

If the mind is stronger, this also means that it can focus better, it can concentrate more easily on its Reality. You mistake a strong mind, a powerful mind, with strong tendencies. You need a strong mind in order to be able to transform bad tendencies into good tendencies. Try to understand this. A strong mind is necessary in order to be able to transfer its attention from the passing show to its permanent basis, in order to be able to bypass it. If the mind is weak, always running from here to there, it cannot be focused or controlled. That is why we are told to strengthen the mind.

Actually the mind is a shadow. It is not something tangible. It arises and sets in its source, which is the Self. It appears and it disappears. One has to merge this shadow in its Reality. But, as we are so used to feel and to think with the mind, in the beginning we have to say that it is necessary to strengthen the mind in order to transfer its attention. When we say it is good to have a strong mind, it means that instead of having a weak and distracted mind, full of thoughts, it is better to be one-pointed, to have a concentrated mind.

Question:

Is an empty mind the same as an absent mind?

Ratan Lal:

An absent mind is a weak mind. The absence of mind means that the mind has not enough strength to concentrate on something. The focusing of the mind is not possible when the mind is absent. An empty mind is different. An empty mind is when the mind is free from thoughts, when it is pure. You can make the mind free from thoughts when there is no desire in the mind. It is then that it can remain free from thoughts. When during the waking state, the mind is free from thoughts, you are conscious all the time.

The goal must be to bring about the stillness of mind. Rather than having to do something to realize its Reality, the mind has only to remain still. Then realization will be there.

Question:

Could you tell something about Mahashivarathri?

Ratan Lal:

It is celebrated once a year, sometimes during February, sometimes during March, depending on aspects of the moon. It is the night of Shiva.

I will give you a spiritual explanation. That night you should be awake to your Reality, which is the Self, and asleep to everything else. That can be interpreted for example with the singing of bhajans all night long. But the spiritual meaning of this festival is to be awake to the Self and asleep to everything else.

Usually, one sees people singing all night long in order to keep themselves awake—whether awake to the Self or not, this I do not know. The highest meaning is to awaken to the Self. But we cannot do it until we are asleep to the world. Because we cannot do that, at least, we spend the whole night in a ritualistic manner.

Question:

How to awaken to the Self?

Ratan Lal:

Through a committed spiritual practice. First we have to understand the nature of the mind, and then we have to control the mind. Once controlled, it becomes pure. After the mind is controlled and pure, you have to choose a committed spiritual practice. Whatever practice you choose, do not become impatient. Do not expect immediate results. In order to obtain worldly objectives, we willingly invest a lot of time and effort. But in spiritual matters we want quick results. We want the ego to experience the bliss of the ego-less state without making any effort. That is not possible. The ego has to be eliminated, It has to be dissolved through spiritual practice. This will require consistent effort and time.

The Self cannot be denied by anyone. It is our very basis. But the ego wants to ignore its own basis, its own Reality. It will be willing to run after anything

external, but disinclined to go within. God cannot come and sit on your lap with you doing nothing.

There are many practices: You can meditate. Whenever sitting in meditation, we should be merging the ego in the Self.

You may also install the image of God in the shrine of your spiritual heart and contemplate on it. That is a spiritual practice. As you know, the ego will be willing to get attached to anything it likes. So tell it to interrupt itself whenever it starts to run after worldly things.

Question:

It seems to me to be a very difficult thing to do.

Ratan Lal:

Anything you have not done before will seem to be difficult. You are so used to living in this world full of shadows, in this unreal world, that you find it almost impossible to withdraw your attention from it.

We consider the experiences we go through during the waking state to be real, but the touchstone of Reality is Reality Itself, and not the experiences the mind goes through. Not even the one who does the experiencing is real.

In the beginning, any practice will seem difficult. But, once you start practicing continuously, it will

become easier and easier. We find it difficult to get detached from the objects of our desires. We feel attachment to be natural. The Divine Baba explains this in a very simple manner. To hold a handkerchief requires certain effort. But to let it go does not require any effort. In order to keep attached to something we have to make an effort, to get detached from that which is not real seems to be very difficult, because until now we have taken the Real as unreal and the unreal to be Real. This is the cause of ignorance. There are many practices. But you have to put in the effort. And as long as you are not interested and convinced, you will not undertake any practice seriously.

Question:

People also speak of charkas.

Ratan Lal:

Chakras, kundalini, people are more interested in these complex things than in following the direct path. I have been told that all these paths direct the attention of the mind to the center of the head. Finally, the attention should go back to the spiritual heart. Then why not go directly to the spiritual heart? Why go up, to later come down? Why go through this unnecessary effort? This is done only to satisfy the curiosity of the mind, to entertain the mind.

Question:

I understand we are all seeking God. But, actually, how can we get closer to God? How do we know that something is taking us closer to God? Is it because we feel peace?

Ratan Lal:

You just answered yourself, when you feel peace. Peace is God, love is God. Live in peace, live in love. That is God.

To realize the oneness with God, you don't need to know it. You have to be it. You should feel this unity. It is not an intellectual or a mental knowledge. It is rather a question of feeling. Feel the unity, feel the loss of individuality that makes you feel separate from God. Once you renounce the shadow, then what will remain? Only you will remain there. You, not as you think you are, but as you truly are. As long as you see the shadow, treat it simply as a shadow. But unfortunately, we treat the shadow as if it were real, and our Reality as something unreal.

Question:

I heard that we can only reach this through God's Grace?

Ratan Lal:

God's Grace is permanent. Whether the mind feels it or not, His Grace is always there. The mind might not be able to feel His Grace due to erroneous

tendencies that cover it up. But Grace is always there. Purify the mind and you will be able to feel it.

Someone once said, "If you seek God, turn your mind inwards, towards your spiritual heart. There, in the spiritual heart, God is waiting for you—like a magnet to attract you, that is to say, to attract the mind, to its source." The only effort you have to make is to withdraw your attention from what you see. The rest of the work is done by God, you have nothing to do with it.

Everything one does, should be done from the heart and not automatically like a machine. One should do it slowly. This can be applied to everything. Talk from the heart and not from the mind or intellect. Also, when we read, we must do it from the heart. Any work performed, mundane or spiritual, should be done from the heart. Many people say, "Yes, I understand intellectually." This is good at the beginning, but as time goes by you must understand from the heart. Only then will whatever you have heard and understood become a conviction.

Regardless of whether the work is mundane or spiritual, if it is not done with love, it is better not to be done. Because if you do your duty without love, it will become something dry. Your words will have no effect on people unless they are said from the heart. Until one implements his words by putting them into practice, it is all useless. To do things half way will

not be of any help. Do not act mechanically. Talk, think, meditate from your heart. No practice can be successfully implemented unless it is done from the heart.

When Bhagavan Baba talks to large groups of people, He calls them 'Embodiments of the Divine Self.' What does it mean? Actually, it enshrines all His teachings. But the mind gives more importance to the incarnation than to What has incarnated. The same happens with our Indweller, our own Reality, the mind ignores it. The mind pays more attention to names and forms. Names, forms are many, but the Indweller is One. Our Reality is the Indweller and not name and form. But the tendency of the mind is to limit everything and to possess everything. It wants to monopolize all.

Question:

Would you explain something on meditation?

Ratan Lal:

When your eyes are open you see many things coming and going. People also come and go, appear and disappear. You should simply develop an unattached vision of all these comings and goings, of all that appears and disappears; and then hold on with all your heart to that Light that enables you to see this passing show. This Light, which we call the Self, is permanent. It is the light that enables us to see this passing show. However, when you have become so

very attached to the 'seen,' it causes you to ignore the inner Light. Therefore, in the initial stages, we have to make an effort to remove our attachment to the objects that are seen, and attach ourselves to this Light. After we have done it for some time, it will eventually become spontaneous.

Once this meditation becomes spontaneous, without any effort at all, you will realize your own true nature. That is Self-realization. Now if you close your eyes and try to practice it intellectually, you won't succeed. Do it with your heart and not through your intellect. Practicing through your intellect will not help you.

Question:

You said one should be attached to the Light, our own Reality.

Ratan Lal:

It is at the beginning that the mind must attach itself to the Light, because we feel we have some form of limited freedom. As long as we identify ourselves with the body/mind complex, we believe we have freedom to go here and there. So, attach yourself to the Light and Power that enables you to see, instead of attaching yourself to what you see.

Question:

Does that means we should not see forms and colors?

Ratan Lal:

This is not the point. The point is to be unattached. Some forms are very beautiful, others not. It is the habit of the mind to feel attracted to the beautiful forms, it is natural. But this habit can be stopped. These are habits of the mind. Maybe they seem to be difficult to interrupt, but when one puts his heart into it, he will succeed.

Question:

How can we use spirituality in our daily life?

Ratan Lal:

Spirituality, or the search of God, will help us to purify the mind. This means to purify the mind from its turbulence and its selfishness. In this way, we can also undertake our duties in a selfless way, altruistically. When you undertake your duties in a selfless way, you can avoid being too individualistic. When you avoid being individualistic, in a natural way, you will have less ego. And once you are free from ego, then you will have instantaneous Realization of God, or of your true Self. For then there is nothing obstructing that Realization. It is the selfishness that obstructs it, and altruism helps. That is why we are repeatedly told to undertake good and selfless actions.

But, because we consider the world to be real, our main interest is to acquire some powers, whether physical or economical. Yes, money is necessary to

carry on with the daily life. What is not necessary is greed. The same seems to happen in spirituality. Why do we follow spirituality? Is it to gain peace or powers? To want powers is to misuse the Divinity. The proper use of the Divinity is to become Divine, to realize our true identity. That is the purpose of spirituality, to see the unity, and to be one with the One.

Question:

Can you elaborate further on meditation?

Ratan Lal:

In meditation, there are three characteristics: the object upon which we meditate, the action of meditating, and the one who meditates. Leave aside the object of meditation and the act of meditating, and remain as the one who meditates. After some time the meditator will disappear as well. What is remaining then? Only the Self, your true Self.

First, ask yourself, "Who is the one who meditates?" Then, remain as the one who meditates, without any object to meditate on. It can happen that at the beginning, it seems to be a little difficult, but as you become more contemplative, it will become easier.

What is meditation? It is your true nature. The name for meditation in Hindi is 'Dhyana,' and it means 'attention.' Dhyana, the state of pure attention, is permanent. Dhyana is interrupted by the selfish

tendencies of the mind, by the mind's tendencies to become separate from the Self, by its tendency to direct its attention towards the external, phenomenal world.

Most people are interested in things external, rather than to this state of pure attention. Our interest comes from curiosity. We want to know what is this and what is that, what is happening there or not happening there, or why nothing is happening. But these are mundane questions. Mind is interested in such things because of mundane purposes. There is nothing wrong in that. But do not become totally submerged in such pursuits. Be in the world, but do not let the world be in you. That is, do not allow the world to constantly occupy your mind. Allow your mind to give more attention to God, to the Self, to the Atma, whatever you choose to call It. This is the purpose behind meditation. The highest state is reached when you manage to still the mind; and make it become unattached to mundane or external matters.

Do your duty unattached, and do not identify yourself with the worldly role assigned to you in this life due to your past births, due to the tendencies or desires from the past. We should perform our role in a heartfelt manner, with a total concentration.

Question:

When, for example, we are meditating, how do we know that it is really meditation? How do we know that our attention is in the spiritual heart and not in the mind?

Ratan Lal:

Who is the one who wants to know? Who is the one who wants to distinguish?

Question:

My spiritual Self.

Ratan Lal:

God does not want to know, God has no questions. The Indweller does not want to know. It is the ego. Give up the ego, dissolve it. The mind is a reflection, chasing shadows. It does not want to accept anything which cannot undergo the examination of the mind. This is its arrogance. Remove this arrogance of the mind.

You are not the mind. Your true nature is the Self. Be convinced of it; and then undertake some spiritual practice. Then you will be able to experience it. But, without doing that, questions come one after the other. The mind is too analytic, it wants to analyze everything. But the Self cannot be understood by the mind. We have to dissolve ourselves in the Self. That is to say, the mind or the individuality has to be dissolved in the Self.

Question:

I practice meditation, but I didn't reach what you are talking about.

Ratan Lal:

Why? Because the meditation is not appropriate. The tendencies, the desires, the worldly interests are stronger than the interest in the Self. That is why it is said, get detached, make the mind to be detached from the seen. Only then, meditation will improve.

But before starting with meditation, stabilize, purify the mind in order to develop discrimination and detachment. Up to that time it will be only a pose, wherein you close your eyes and say, "I am meditating."

As you advance, you can meditate even while speaking, with your eyes open. Many times we can be interacting with people and talking, being at the same time inwardly detached from what is being said. Once you cultivate detachment from that which comes and goes, which appears and disappears, then your meditation will improve. But if without detachment you say, "I am meditating," what kind of meditation could this be?

Question:

Could you speak about the fear which sometimes arises from the mind when we are meditating, fear to lose the personal 'I' maybe, or fear to lose the body

consciousness, which leads to fear of the death of the physical body?

Ratan Lal:

The personal 'I' represents the body consciousness. The personal 'I' has to merge itself in the impersonal 'I,' in the Self. But it can merge itself only when we renounce the wrong identification of the Self with the body. The moment we renounce it, the goal is attained. Then there will not be any more a personal and independent 'I.'

Who is the one who fears? It is not the impersonal Self. It is the personal 'I.' That is to say, the mind is the one who fears. The mind, which is a shadow, ultimately has to merge back into its source, which is the Self. The Self does not have fears, nor hopes. The Self does not have any desires, It does not want anything. All the games are played by the mind, in the mind.

Death has nothing to do with the spiritual teachings. As we know, all the bodies are mortal. According to your destiny, you have to go through certain experiences in life; but finally all bodies have to die. Those who die have no problems at all. The ones who are still alive are the ones who suffer, according to the relation, affection, or the attachment they had with the person who passed away.

Sometimes the example of a glass made of crystal is given. If you have a crystal glass which slips and

breaks, this is like the death of the body. What happens? The space present in the glass gets merged in the space around. The mind or the body is not your true identity, it doesn't matter how beautiful they are. Your identity is the Self, and That doesn't die whether your body dies in young or old age. Those who remain behind will remember you for some time. But as we know, time is a great healer. Even those who are deeply attached will forget in due course of time.

Let us go back to the subject of meditation. At the beginning choose any image of God you like and contemplate on it. Even so, as you try to do it for some minutes, the mind will become dispersed. This shows that the mind must be purified and controlled. Until this purification happens, it will not be possible to follow any *Sadhana* or spiritual practice. Once the selfish tendencies of the mind are uprooted, the mind will automatically become pure. If your practice is sincere and honest, you can control the mind. It is not an impossible task. When so many saints, seers, wise and good people could control their minds, why can we not do it? But we have to become earnest and sincere. We have to be genuinely interested in getting rid of our selfish tendencies.

When you start any spiritual practice, do it as the first thing in the morning, as soon as you wake up. Other tendencies will take hold of your mind as the day goes by. During the early morning time the mind is

fresh, clean, free of thoughts. Later in the day there is an accumulation of thoughts and desires. The more the mind is free of them, the greater the depths of meditation you will reach. However, if you want to remain attached to your tendencies, likes and dislikes, do not attempt meditation.

There are various levels of meditation. So to start, do it with any method because ultimately the attention will turn towards itself. Attention will focus on its existence. The aim of meditation is to still the mind.

Question:

What is it that we have to achieve?

Ratan Lal:

What we have to achieve is the Oneness of Divinity. That is, to be one with the Self. But, we are the Self already. It is not something that has to be achieved. What we must really do is to eliminate our ignorance. It is not something that is to be achieved newly, since if it were so, we could lose it again. That which is permanent in us cannot be lost. This unity, this oneness within yourselves, is what has to be realized. It is not something to achieve or attain newly.

Question:

Is spirituality synonymous with seriousness?

Ratan Lal:

The counter-question is whether the running after worldly objectives is synonymous with seriousness?

For everything you do, in every task you undertake, you have to be serious. I do not know from where this question arose? Perhaps from some confusion. Seriousness is needed in the world and in spirituality as well. Is it not important to be serious while piloting a plane? Is it not needed to have seriousness when driving a car? Is concentration not needed even for shaving? Everything requires seriousness.

Question:

I mean I see many people who undertake spiritual practices have a very serious face, as if they were angry.

Ratan Lal:

Who is the one who feels happy or miserable, or serious? It is the ego. Happiness and sorrow come from the ego only. The Self is not related to the pairs of opposites. If someone has a happy face or a serious face, it is only interesting for the ego. It has nothing to do with the Self, the Indweller. It is not necessary to make difficult what is so simple. If you see an angry face, don't look at it. If you see a happy face, look at it! The pairs of opposites such as joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, etc., are the contents of the mind only, they are not the contents of the Self.

Question:

Can you speak about attachment?

Ratan Lal:

One develops attachment due to one's wrong identification. One thinks, "I am a person," "I have such intelligence," "I have emotions," etc. One feels so much attraction to the people that he forgets the voice of the conscience and follows the dictates of the mind. We do not consider whether they are temporary attachments or attachments for a longer time. In this moment, we are so intensely attached that we do not think about anything else. If one attaches himself to God in this way, then enlightenment would be very simple, liberation would be there. But it seems very difficult to us to get attached to the Self, and very easy to get attached to this person or that. Why? Because of the attraction of the senses. The mind follows the senses and does not listen to its Reality. The Divine Baba says, "Do not feel that you can love someone. The highest love can only be for your true Self. The others are secondary attachments." You love yourself. That is why you want to satisfy yourself; and you think you can do so by getting attached to some certain person. According to the Divine Baba, the word 'love' should not be used for human relationships, whether it be between siblings, between parents and children, between husband and wife, etc. All these are temporary relationships. They are not permanent. They do not last forever. How can you really love

something that is not permanent? Only the Self is permanent.

But people have more faith in the shadow than in the origin of the shadow. The more one can impersonalize life, the better it will be. It is also the way to subdue the ego. It is the ego that constantly wants to get attached, but in the absence of the ego, who will get attached to whom? The transparent Self remains transparent. Is the sun attached to something? The same happens with the Self. The Self is not attached. It is the mind that gets attached, having superimposed limitations to the limitless Self. Remove the limitations, and the question is over.

To be as impersonal as possible in our daily life does not mean to forego our responsibilities and duties. It means to renounce the sense of 'mine' and 'thine.' Eliminate the ego and you will attain God.

Question:

Sometimes the mind is absolutely still, and there is no doubt or question appearing in it, all is perfect. But there are times when thoughts arise in the mind and with them come the doubts and questions.

Ratan Lal:

These states of the mind are always alternating. Why? Because, as has been explained, mind has three characteristics: dullness, activity, and purity. Sometimes, when dullness and activity are

predominant, that happens. When the characteristic of purity is predominant, then the mind is quiet, peaceful. There is no thought to disturb it. This is why it is repeatedly said that the mind must be purified. Try to harmonize the mind, to avoid the changing of its states. When your thoughts, words, and deeds are in harmony and consistent, this will not happen.

Once the mind is quiet, free of thoughts, do not disturb it. Do not let other thoughts interrupt this stillness. The mind, due to its preconceived ideas and due to its tendencies, tends to interrupt the silence. Try to gradually purify the mind, and teach it to seek its own source, which is nothing else but the Self. If the mind is occupied seeking its source, such thoughts will not arise, and the tendency of the mind to interrupt this state of silence will stop.

Question:

What can we do when the mind is quiet and one has entered into deep contact with oneself, but suddenly different feelings such as fear, happiness, or anxiety appear.

Ratan Lal:

That is again to go from one mental state to another. It has nothing to do with the Atma, the Self. You must look upon feelings as part of the mind. But the feeling of the eternal Presence of the Self, the Consciousness, is not part of the mind. This state is

permanent, it is always present, and everything that is permanent is also changeless, unaffected. It does not have fear nor joy. Being beyond the mind, it is also beyond the pair of opposites. Your question is referring again to a state of mind. It is not the experience of the Self. Everything that appears and disappears belongs to the mind. That which is beyond the mind does neither appear nor disappear.

Question:

It is said that the control of the breath is a very good spiritual practice, for example to breath in counting a certain number of times, to hold the air, then while exhaling to count again...

Ratan Lal:

The source of the mind and of the breath is one. When you are angry or agitated, the breathing will also be agitated. When the mind is at peace, the breathing is also peaceful. This shows that the source is the same. That is to say, you can control the breath and make the mind peaceful thereby, or you can still the mind and automatically the breath will be stable. What you said regarding the counting while breathing, the holding the breath, etc. should be done only with the careful guidance of an appropriate master, who is an expert in teaching the control of the breath. If you do it by yourself, it can be dangerous.

When you control the breath it is like whipping the horse. When you control the mind it is like giving carrots to the horse. That is to say, it is of greater help to directly control the mind than to start with the control of the breath.

Relating to the control of the breath, there is a simple teaching of Bhagavan Baba, which will be very beneficial if you devote to it some time every day. Watch your breath, and while inhaling think or feel 'so,' while exhaling think or feel 'ham.' This itself will control your breath. Do not try to hold the air; this will not give you any good results, and it is not necessary.

The different practices are prescribed for different types of seekers. To a person of a very active mind, if you tell him to contemplate or meditate, he will run away. If you tell the same thing to a contemplative person, he will be happy. However, if you tell a person who is contemplative to be very active in life, it will not be possible for him.

Hatha Yoga could be dangerous if you do not have a good teacher. Many teachers promise quick results and they promise also to teach you how to prolong your life in this world. But ask them if they have been able to prolong their own period of life and the answer will be 'no.'

The great masters teach simple methods and the simple Truth which will purify our mind and help us to function even in worldly life in a more efficient and impartial way. But we are not interested in that. If someone promises you instant realization you immediately will follow him. Give up the ego and then you will have instant realization.

Once a lady said, "Even when I achieve Self-realization, I will not be able to produce vibhuthi with a wave of the hand."

Is Realization for this? These are the ideas that some people have. You have to renounce such ideas right from the beginning. The Truth remains veiled, not by itself, but by our selfish tendencies. We have to remove this veil. And for this we have to go through a process of churning, we have to undertake some spiritual practices. The mind is the thief. It is the mind which has to be controlled. To control the mind, there are many practices. Interrupt the mind, this is of great help. That is to say interrupt the mind when it wants to jump from here to there, which it does due to its past tendencies. These tendencies are very difficult to control, but it is possible to control them in an easy way with simple methods, not with difficult methods. When the mind goes outside, teach it to interrupt itself, to interrupt the wheel of thoughts. Go back to the thought of God. Is there anything more simple than this?

You can make the mind witness itself, witness the thoughts. Interrupt the mind as many times as possible during the day, this practice will give good results. You will be full of peace. Once you obtain peace through the control of the mind, go on controlling the mind more and more, until you do so without any conscious effort.

Question:

I observe my thoughts as something external to me. As a witness, I observe them coming and going. But I am never free from thoughts.

Ratan Lal:

Get convinced that thoughts are only possible in the presence of the Self, in the presence of Consciousness. Consciousness is there also in the absence of thoughts. One is so identified with the mind that one completely forgets one's Reality, which is the Self. It is like seeing pictures. The scenes change, but you remain the same. You, as the Self, remain the same. Once one has experienced this state, even if it is for a moment, one will seek to prolong it. This state can be tasted during the interval between two thoughts.

Question:

I have experienced it. But how to prolong it?

Ratan Lal:

Who is the one who wants to remain in that state? The mind doesn't want to accept that this state is permanent. It is permanent, whether the mind is there or not. It is the mind which obstructs the experience of that state. It resists being left aside.

Question:

So what can one do in order to be able to settle in the interval between two thoughts?

Ratan Lal:

The words are different but the question is the same. Again ask yourself, who wants to prolong it? The Self doesn't want anything, it doesn't desire anything, it doesn't make any effort. The Self is permanent, it doesn't change, it is not affected by anything.

So the question would be, "how to prolong this permanent state?" This permanent state is interrupted by the mind. Ignore the ego, leave it aside, and that state is there. It is a permanent state. It appears as impermanent due to the ego. Once the mind becomes absolutely quiet, the Self alone remains, which is Absolute Consciousness. It is never absent. And you want to prolong what is never absent? The one who wants to prolong this state is the one who should be absent, it is very simple.

Question:

One quiets the mind, but it seems impossible to kill it.

Ratan Lal:

See, mind is a word only. There is no entity such as the so-called mind. This machine can be called a tape recorder, but mind is not something like that. A cloak of limitations is apparently superimposed on constant, content-less Consciousness. Thereby, in its ignorance, it splits itself into subject and object. All that has to be done is to remove the ignorance. In order to remove the ignorance, so many paths have been mentioned. One path suits one person, another path suits another person. The only thing is that one has to be honest and conscientious in whatever one does.

Question:

I am practicing to contemplate, to remain free of thoughts. I am trying not to react. But even then, there are subtle thoughts, for example if we see a pink flower and think of it.

Ratan Lal:

The seeds must be destroyed. If one simply goes on cutting off the branches of the tree, the branches will go on growing again and again. Until one uproots the seeds, they will go on growing.

Question:

How to eliminate the seeds?

Ratan Lal:

It takes time. One has to go on practicing. Continue this practice of not reacting, it will take you to the state of being established in the Self, which is one's true Reality.

Many people want power, whereas peace is more important. They want to be great, not good. They are more interested in the powers of God, not in the Reality, the Essence or Peace of God. Why run after powers, why not peace? The greatness of peace is higher than greatness itself. The power of goodness is far beyond power itself. One should extol peace and goodness, not greatness and power. Greatness follows goodness, whereas goodness does not necessarily follow greatness. Those who love God, the basic Truth, would crave for peace and goodness. Those who do not have love for the basic Truth would crave for power and greatness.

Question:

I find in myself a great resistance to believing that there is a permanent state of Consciousness.

Ratan Lal:

There are two ways to remain permanently in that state. One is to bypass the mind, to go beyond the mind. You can also make the mind understand that its nameless and formless Reality is beyond the mind, and that the mind is not required. The way to convince it, is to make it contemplate constantly on

its source. Then it will become the source, which is the Self.

A great Master was asked this question, "How to make the mind contemplate on something beyond the mind?" The answer was, "Make the mind be the Self. Let it be as it really is. Be what you are!"

But we have become strangers to our own Reality. First, we have to renounce our unreality, renounce our wrong understanding. If we do not give up our wrong understanding, how can we be what we are? Make the mind be as it really is. This can only be done by eliminating this wrong cloth of limitations that the mind seems to have superimposed upon itself, to limit itself and identify itself with a body and a name. There are many steps in the path.

As we know, Bhagavan Baba emphasizes purity, patience, and perseverance. In mundane life we persevere until we get what we want. But this intensity of perseverance is not there when we are seeking God or the Self. We should develop determination and perseverance in order to experience the Self.

Generally, common people want name, fame, power, money. But there is something superior to the money and the power, something that is permanent. It is something that can give permanent peace, that is to say, enlightenment. It is something that never

diminishes, nor increases. Money and power are there, but they are things which come and go, they are not permanent. They can increase one moment, and decrease the next moment. Sometimes it may be there, and sometimes it may not be there. But if we want the permanent peace, we have to experience the Self.

Question:

Is it not a paradox that the mind should have the desire to become what it really is?

Ratan Lal:

If the mind has this desire, follow it. The mind has to develop this desire to find its own source. This source is the Self. After having risen from the Self, it identifies itself immediately with a gross body in particular. And that is what creates the sense of separation from the Self, which is the cause of ignorance and illusion. This illusion can only be removed, when we remember again and again, that whatever the mind can do, it can do so only with the power of the Self, that by itself it cannot do anything.

Tell the mind not to get identified with a gross body. The mind is doing so in order to sustain its imagined autonomy. After it stops identifying itself with a particular name and form, automatically it will go back to its source and will identify itself with the Self. Renounce the identification with the body. The mind tends to limit the limitless Self to a limited

body. Give up this wrong identification. To do so is also a spiritual practice.

You are the Self, but you are laboring under the illusion that you are not the Self. This ignorance has to disappear. And it will disappear only when the mind becomes still and seeks its source. When the mind is told, "the Self is beyond the mind," the mind will want to know what it has to do. The only thing that the mind has to do is to remain still. The Self is realized not by doing something but by not doing, not by thinking, but by being still. The Self is Pure Consciousness identical with Absolute Existence.

Question:

If the mind would really have merged even for a few seconds, I would not have been there...

Ratan Lal:

It can merge in a few seconds, even if you laugh at it or not. If you are ready for this, it can happen in one second. But to make you ready for it can take many lives.

Once there were two ascetics practicing austerities for many years. They were sitting under a tree for so long a time, that dust started accumulating on their heads and beards. But they were indifferent to everything. One day, they suddenly heard a Divine Voice, which told them that they would get liberation

after as many lifetimes as there were leaves on that tree.

One of them was annoyed that it would still take so long and just got up and left. The other one felt so happy that even if it had to take such a long time, he was being assured of getting liberation. So he persevered with even more intensity in his austerities. God was so pleased with his genuine devotion, that He gave him instant Realization.

To see God as something separate from us is only a mental image. To think that He is our Reality, our Basis, this is the Truth. As the Divine Baba says, "God is as far from you as you are from your true Self." This means that God and the Self are the same. The true meaning of 'I' is the Self. It is impersonal. We have to understand what is the personal 'I' and what is the impersonal 'I,' the real 'I.'

The more we impersonalize the 'I,' the nearer we get to the Self.

Remain impersonal. You personalize because you identify yourself with the body. When you stop identifying yourself with the body, you will remain impersonal. The mind will be free of contents, as the Self is. The mind will merge in the Self and will become the Self. Then, it will not have to do any effort.

In the afternoon when you walk towards the sun, your shadow is behind you. The shadow represents the ignorance. When you go away from the sun, the shadow will be in front of you. The sun represents the Self. You have to learn to walk towards the Self. You are so used to being and remaining in ignorance, that you consider this ignorance as if it were the Reality.

Question:

Does it mean to remain as the observer, as the witness?

Ratan Lal:

This is one of the practices. The mind has three states: the waking state, the dream state, and the dreamless deep sleep state. The Self or Consciousness as Pure Consciousness is ever present during all the three states of the mind. But only during the waking state can we make some effort.

If we become the witness, if we observe the thoughts in the mind, this is a good practice. But finally when we understand that the three states belong to the mind, and that the mind itself is a shadow and is not real, who is to witness what? When there is nothing to be witnessed, also the witness will disappear. Then the Self or Consciousness alone remains.

Question:

How can the mind, if it is not there, experience the Self?

Ratan Lal:

This you will realize once you experience it. And then this question will not arise. It is not something that can be debated. Look deep inside in order to feel this eternal Stillness, this 'I' which is ever-present, which is present as you speak as well as when you do not speak.

This Presence reveals itself to itself, by itself. It does not require the mind. In the same way that the light does not require the reflection. But some persons feel that the light depends on the shadow. The truth is that the shadow is there because of the light. This is our ignorance, to feel that without the mind there is nothing.

But it has to be experienced. It is not something about which we can debate. It is something beyond words.

You have to learn to love God, then you will develop faith in God. Without loving the Self, how can you develop faith in the Self? You have more faith in the shadow, then why do you want to do some spiritual practice? Renounce this faith in the shadow and develop faith in the light.

Question:

How can we realize when we leave the ego aside?

Ratan Lal:

Once the mind is free of contents, it will merge in the Self. Actually, it does not need to merge in the Self, because it is the Self. It is the mind that creates a sense of separation from the Self. When it renounces its selfish tendencies and other bad habits, once it is purified, it becomes the Self because it is the Self. It is all a mental game that the mind plays with itself. But, one time or the other, we will have to stop playing the game, which is the cause of ignorance.

Question:

What is the 'Ahamkara'?

Ratan Lal:

The ego. 'Aham' is the Self. Actually 'Aham' means 'I,' but it refers to the Self. When you add the word 'kara,' then you are relating God to a name and form and that is ego. When you say "I am so and so," this is ego.

"I am I," this is the Self. Do not disturb this 'I.'

Question:

God is everywhere. Then what is the spiritual heart?

Ratan Lal:

Do not just talk like this. First you have to experience it. A debate will not lead to the experience of God.

When you undertake some spiritual practice, this will lead you to the experience of God, and then you can speak like you are doing now. But to speak in this way, without experiencing it, should not be done. Some intellectual introduction is necessary, but this introduction should not confuse you. What is the eye? What is the ear? What is this? What is that? That is information, but information is not of great value by itself. What is important is transformation. What is important is to uproot our negative tendencies. Make an effort to do this, instead of trying to find out what is this and what is that. This is not spirituality.

But the mind does not want to attend to its Reality. It thinks that what it cannot think of, what it cannot conceive, has no value. The mind has to be dissolved in order to experience its Reality.

Question:

I have a question about dreams. Are dreams helpful in order to judge ourselves through them?

Ratan Lal:

Dreams do not represent the Reality. Dreams are like shadows. We are told to treat shadows as shadows. Then also treat dreams as dreams. Sometimes, we have dreams that have never happened. Someone saw me running in a dream—but I was not running, I cannot run at this old age. Dreams are very inconsistent. That is to say, we cannot trust the dream state, we cannot rely on it. Nor can you make any

effort in the dream state. The effort required to realize our true Identity, our Reality, can only be made in the waking state. From this point of view, the waking state is of greater help. Of course, the ideal would be to consider the waking state as another dream state. But this ideal will only be fulfilled when we realize our Reality.

All the states of the mind—the waking state, the dream state, the dreamless deep sleep state, the state of *turiya*—all of them belong to the mind. But the mind itself is not real, from the absolute point of view.

From a relative point of view, yes, we have to consider it as real. But here we are trying to understand and realize the Absolute. If we only remain in the relative realm, we will never be able to cross the barrier of relativity and reach the Absolute.

Question:

Can you talk about self-inquiry?

Ratan Lal:

What is self-inquiry? Self-inquiry has nothing to do with inquiring into the nature of the Self. The Self is beyond the mind, it cannot be understood by the mind. In relation to the Self, the mind is a non-entity.

When thoughts are coming to you, when the mind is agitated, kindly ask yourself, 'To whom belong these thoughts? To whom do they come?' 'To me' will be the natural answer. Ask yourself 'Who am I?' Ask yourself in this way, with sincerity. Any answer given by the mind will not be a correct answer. In this way the mind will be controlled by itself. Once the mind is controlled and purified, in the stillness of the mind you will be able to feel the eternal Presence of the Self.

Sometimes, when people ask questions, the counter-question is asked, "Who is the one who is asking?" It is done so as to clarify to the person who is speaking or asking, the difference between the Self and the ego, the personal 'I.' The Self has no questions. God does not have any questions. It is the ego or the mind which has questions.

The inquiry is in the mind and it is done by the mind. The Self has nothing to do with it. But never forget that you are inquiring in the eternal Presence of the Self. The Self is never absent. It may be that the mind is not aware of it. Why? Because the veil of thoughts covers the experience of the Self. It is in order to remove that veil that we are advised to still the mind.

The self-inquiry does not mean to inquire into the nature of the Self. The Self can never be an object of the mind. Actually, instead of using the word 'self-

inquiry,' which can only be an inquiry of the mind into the nature of the mind, we could also say it in a different way, using the expression 'attention towards the Self.'

Attention is our true nature. But all the time we are attending to one thing or the other. Most of the time we are attending to things pertaining to the world. We take care of the body, we lookout for its comfort, its enjoyments. You ask for practices. The first practice is to remove our attention from what we see. We have a firm faith in what we see. We consider the seen as if it were permanent. The base of what we see is That which is permanent.

Question:

What is surrender?

Ratan Lal:

Surrender means to surrender our mind, our temperament, our egoistic tendencies. You will lovingly surrender to the Supreme Power once you are convinced that you, as body/mind, are as inert as this stone, that without this Supreme Power you can neither think, nor move, nor do anything. Could there be any thought without the Self, which is ever-present Consciousness?

But, the Self is there also in the absence of thoughts. Aren't you convinced that without the Self, without the Light, everything is just inert matter? Once you

know that this Supreme Power, call it Self, call it God, is what enables you to do anything, then you will lovingly surrender to It.

Question:

What are the consequences of the surrender?

Ratan Lal:

The consequence of surrendering is that you will become one with the Self, once the surrender is complete, once you surrender the mind.

When you renounce the mind, when there is no mind, when there is no sense of separation from the Divinity, then you will become That.

Question:

How can we adore the formless Divinity, God without form?

Ratan Lal:

He does not require your adoration. Just to be It, that is Its adoration. To make your mind free of content, just as the nameless and formless Divinity is, this is the way to adore Him.

Adoration implies duality. For example, you say, He loves you. That involves two people. In non-dualism who is going to love whom? The way to love God without a form, the Self, is to merge the mind in Him.

Question:

I read that some people feel so much devotion that they want to remain in duality.

Ratan Lal:

The Divine Baba says that a dual mind is half-blind. If you want to remain half-blind, fine. *Parabhakti*, the Supreme Devotion, means that God is not different from you. This is the Absolute Devotion. It means that you, as a separate entity, disappear and only God remains.