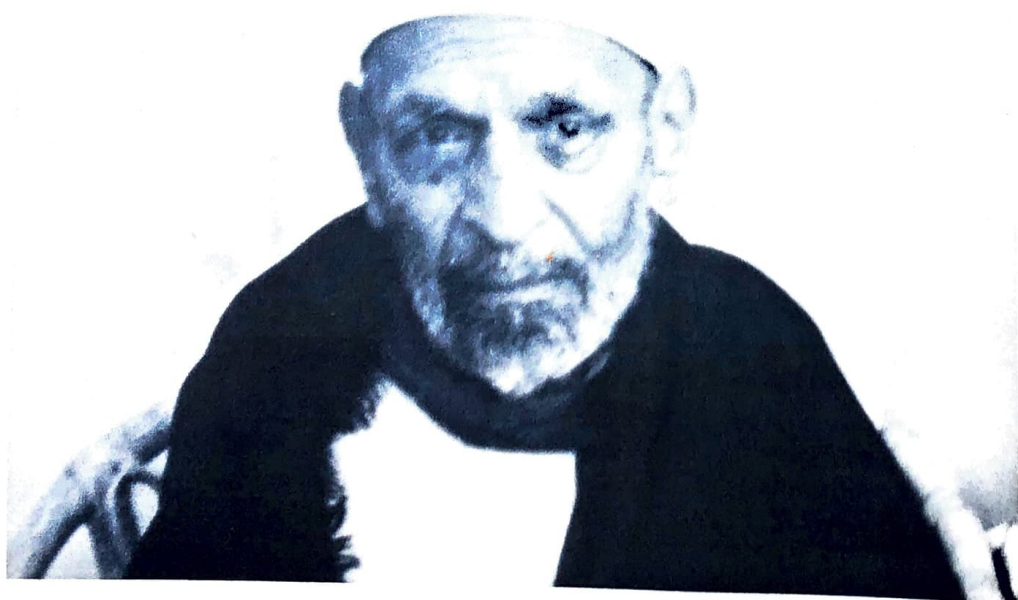


I AM I



Sri Ratan Lal

“The ego has to sacrifice itself so that man’s divine nature can manifest itself. ‘Mine’ is death; ‘not mine’ is immortality. Renunciation results in peace. The golden key of non-attachment opens the lock which keeps the door to heaven shut.”

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

I AM I

Ratan Lal

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Ratan Lal possesses a unique ability to articulate, in a clear and powerful manner, the fundamental principles that underlie the spiritual path known as Self-inquiry or Abidance in the self. For some time now, he has given regular, hour-long, midmorning talks to aspirants from various overseas countries who are visiting the ashram of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. In so doing he has been delighting and enlightening devotees who have become serious and sincere about practicing Baba's teachings.

These talks, which are quite informal in their nature, normally take place in the beautiful garden area of the ashram, against a backdrop of magnificently-fashioned statues of the God form for each of the major religions of our day. Many of the national groups who request these talks are non-English speaking, and thus they provide their own translator. It is quite uplifting to witness the enthusiastic question and answer interplay that takes place on these occasions.

The author's previous book, *Oneness of Divinity*, sprang directly from such talks. In the present work, he greatly expands the scope of the informal talks and dives deeply into the essence of Bhagavan Baba's teachings, in a simple and most straightforward fashion. Echoing the repeated assurances of our Divine Master, the author offers encouragement to the reader to plunge into a routine of regular practice of the technique described. The approach is cogent and rational and will be surely mastered

by anyone willing to commit to a few minutes of serious practice each day. On the other hand, he is quick to warn that without steady practice, success will remain a remote concept. Moreover, success in this endeavor does not require one to retreat from society or to ponder over innumerable mystical texts. Rather, all that is needed is the steady practice of turning the mind inward on itself, thereby gradually weakening its tendency to wander outward.

The book is in three parts. In Part I we are presented with some wonderful spiritual and moral stories that can be read over and over again, with each reading resulting in a further clarification and deeper understanding of the Truth that All is One. Further, these stories render the reader into a reverential mode that carries forth, making him or her highly receptive to the remaining parts of the book.

In Part II the author goes directly to the heart of the matter, as it were, and gives a detailed and most elucidating description of the nature of the Ego and the Self. Great benefit will be realized by the repeated reading of this section as well.

It is in Part III that this humble and soft-spoken seeker organizes for us what he considers to be the essence of Bhagavan Baba's teachings. Again, the clarity of presentation is noteworthy. May the Divine Lord Sai bless us all to seriously contemplate this material, and what is more important, to practice the knowledge thus gained.

Jai Sai Ram

William M. Harvey
St. Louis, Missouri USA

FOREWORD

This small book is another loving offering by the author at the Lotus feet of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. It is a summary of a number of talks given by him to overseas devotees of Bhagavan during the recent months at Brindavan and Prasanti Nilayam. These were kindly compiled by Ms. Irene Larsen.

TRUTH is one. It is "What IS" and "What IS" is "As It Is." Though simple by itself, people often have some difficulty in understanding it. The perception and cognition of all phenomena by the sentient being is made possible only in the presence of Consciousness, by a process of division into subject and object. However, this phenomenal manifestation is only an illusion, an appearance in Consciousness. Consciousness, which is not aware of itself in its unmanifested state, perceives itself as the phenomenal manifestation, as its own objective expression. Thus, the totality of all that exists is only that "ONE," Consciousness. This truth is not easily understood by everyone; and the teachings of the Avatar, sages, and saints are of great help in this understanding process.

Sri Ratan Lal, who has been practicing the spiritual path of non-duality, has helped many of his friends to perceive the basic truth and encouraged them to undertake the necessary sadhana, (spiritual discipline) along the right lines.

Part One of the book deals with a number of spiritual stories told by Bhagavan, during His Divine discourses, over the years. Great Masters have always used stories and parables in their teachings to make it easy to understand the truths told by them. The modern mind finds it difficult to understand Truth. It is to make explicit what is implicit that such stories are used. Part Two deals with some elaboration of the thoughts conveyed by the spiritual stories. Part Three gives, in short, the essence of Bhagavan's teachings and the final Truth and ultimate understanding of the same.

The reader will find that some of the ideas and even the same words have been repeated in several places. This is necessary, as in any spiritual exposition repetition is important to enable the reader to grasp and assimilate the fact that, in whichever way it is explained, Truth is "One."

I am sure this short publication will be of great help to many genuine seekers in their spiritual pursuit.

—Dr. M. BALASUBRAHMANYAN

Brindavan, Whitefield.

PREFACE

The greatest spiritual event of the twentieth century is the Advent of Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. We will be celebrating the Seventy-fifth birthday of the Avatar this year. During the last sixty years, after His announcement of His Avatarhood, Bhagavan has been engaged in teaching and answering the prayers of His devotees all over the world. A unique feature of His teachings is the universality of its appeal to people professing various faiths and catering to the needs of people at different levels of spiritual attainment.

Spiritual aspirants can be classified into three categories. The first is like gunpowder, which will immediately burst into flames with the touch of a single spark of fire. The second category is like charcoal, which needs considerable fanning and blowing before it can catch fire and start burning. The third group is like freshly-cut tree trunks which need much splitting and drying before they can be set afire.

The first group probably needs just any stray incident to spark off the final attainment. The third category needs to go through various practices such as bhajans, worship, japa, meditation, etc., before they can reach the level of the second group. It is the second category which needs some closer and deeper insight into the advaitic teachings of a real guru to reach the goal. While there may be only a handful of people in the first group at any given time, the

number in the second group may be considerable. In the third category, the number may be enormous. This has to be so, considering the fact that man has to put in a lot of effort and practice to climb up the spiritual ladder.

It is interesting to note that Bhagavan Baba has been able to cater to the needs of all the three categories of spiritual aspirants. This is possible only for an Avatar, since He alone knows the level of understanding and attainment of each human being. This can be appreciated only when we understand that an Avatar is a special manifestation of Super Consciousness. The present Avatar has apparently manifested for the specific purpose of the spiritual upliftment of humanity and for the fulfilment of the purpose of human birth.

It is my good fortune that, by Bhagavan's grace, I have been able to understand and practice, in my own way, the advaitic teachings of Bhagavan. During the last five years, by His grace, I had been sharing my thoughts with other devotees of Bhagavan, especially those from overseas. Some of these talks have been compiled and published by some of the listeners. The present volume is comprised of some of the talks given at Brindavan and Prasanti Nilayam. They have been kindly compiled by Ms. Irene Larsen. I hope this publication will be of some use to true seekers of real spiritual knowledge.

With all humility and love, I offer this little flower at the Lotus Feet of Bhagavan during this Seventy-fifth year of His Advent and pray for His blessings and continued grace on the entire humanity.

— RATAN LAL

“I AM I”

Once Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba was amidst some of his students in the ashram. Bhagavan told the students that He would give a prize to the one who could answer His query correctly. The students naturally got excited and were ready to vie with one another to secure the sacred prize from Bhagavan. They were intrigued by what the question would be. The salvo from Bhagavan was, “Who am I?” Pat came an answer from one boy, “Swami you are God.” Swami shook his head and said, “No.” Another boy interjected, “You are the Avatar.” Bhagavan said, “No.” A third boy naively exclaimed, “You are a Godman.” “No,” said Bhagavan. The suggestions from a few other boys also did not meet with His approval. Finally the boys gave up for good and prayed to Bhagavan for an answer. Then Bhagavan sweetly said, “I am I” which implies that their answer should have been “You are You.”

The formless and nameless Consciousness which is our true nature is called Atma by sages and saints, which means, “I am I,” so as to distinguish it from the ego-sense (body Consciousness) which says, “I am so and so.” To realize the “I” behind the “me” and “mine” is to lose the finite ego in the infinite Self. Very often Bhagavan affirms that “I” or Aham, is the first name of God. The same primordial “I” is Consciousness that pervades all of us. This “I” is Atma, the spiritual Heart of all. No one denies one’s own existence. Even that assertion “I am” is done in the presence of the ever-present Consciousness.

The "I" holding onto the "I am" in meditation will lead on to the "I" Consciousness. It is the best meditation. The real Self reveals itself to itself and not to the one with a sense of duality, who tries to hold onto it. The holder is the pseudo-I. This little "I," the meditator, should vanish and then the real "I," the "Being Consciousness," Sath Chith will remain. This "I" is the Self that Bhagavan Baba was referring to in the statement "I am I."

PART I

SPIRITUAL STORIES

The King and The Jester

In olden days, among many courtiers in a king's court, there used to be a jester. One day the jester was being more of a nuisance than fun, so the king ordered that a label with the word "Fool" be worn on his forehead. It so happened, sometime later, that the king took seriously ill. Lying on his deathbed, he was repeatedly saying, "I am going ... I am going." The jester overheard this and asked the king, "Oh king, kindly tell me where you are going so that I may get ready the horse and carriage for you." The king said, "Neither the horse nor the carriage can go to that place." The jester was surprised and asked, "Sir, where is that place that cannot be reached on horseback or by a carriage?" The king answered, "I do not know!" Then the jester had the temerity to say, "Oh king, who is the bigger fool, you or I? I know I came from God, I am in God and I will go back to Him. You say you are going but do not know where you are going; so this label 'fool' should adorn your forehead more aptly than mine."

No Shortcuts

Once an Indian boy was sent to America for higher studies. His parents desired that he should keep up the spiritual practice and be constantly inured in the Indian culture. So they advised him that he should write the holy Gayatri Mantra twice daily, ten times before going to work in the morning and ten times before retiring to bed at night. The boy was steadfast in this holy exercise in the beginning, but later he slackened in the practice due to other diversified interests. It took a long time for him to write the Gayatri Mantra ten times. Getting vexed with the imposition, he thought of a smart plan to overcome the drudgery. At the top of the paper he would write the Gayatri Mantra once, then nine times he would write, "Ditto, Ditto, Ditto..." to complete the assignment!

In spirituality there are no such insincere shortcuts. To achieve something both in spiritual and mundane life one should have integrity and sincerity and should uphold patience, practice, and perseverance. We are willing to spend much time and effort in order to achieve something in worldly life. Likewise we should be willing to spend time to progress in spirituality. All people want to be happy and blissful. They should guard against fake gurus who promise quick results. One has to strive for a number of years to gain proficiency in any profession. So it is unreasonable to expect that there should be a push button technique for realizing God. According to

J. Krishnamurthy our ultimate nature is “Choiceless, effortless Awareness.”

In order to be what you are, it is necessary for you to make an effort. What we cannot give up is our essential nature, which is God or Atma. That is prior to everything else; it is apriori and axiomatic.

Lord Vishnu Hides Himself

Lord Vishnu was tired of attending to the countless requests of his devotees, who only wanted the fulfillment of their worldly desires. He decided that he would hide himself in a solitary cave in the Himalayas or deep in the ocean floor where nobody could find him. The great devotee Narada, however, told Lord Vishnu wherever he hid himself, people are sure to discover him. So Narada suggested that Lord Vishnu should become the indweller in all beings because nobody will think of looking for him there!

The mind's tendency is to always go outwards. It would rather see everything that is external to itself than seek the place from where it arose. It has to be clearly understood that “You” as “so and so” are not the indweller of the body. It has no person as such inside it. But rest assured, the Atma is the only indweller in each of us. That is where we should look for Lord Vishnu, who is none other than our Atma. Let us direct our prayers to Him there.

Respect Your Parents

In the beginning of this century there was a well-known writer named Munshi Premchand. He had two

sons who were studying in Delhi. Once Premchand and his wife were going to Haridwar by train and the train was to stop for one hour in Delhi. The two sons came to meet their parents at the station. The elder son, in accordance with Indian tradition, touched the feet of his parents. The younger one just said “Hi, mom! Hi, dad!” The parents did not say anything, but as the train moved on, the wife noticed Premchand in a pensive mood. “What is wrong?” she asked. Premchand said, “The elder son is all right, I am only worried about the younger one.”

It so happened that, after some years, the elder son became a judge in the High Court, the younger son became a clerk in the same court. Everybody had to pay respect to the judge when he entered the court, while the clerk, on the other hand, had to salute everybody who entered the court!

The moral of the story is that a person who respects his parents receives respect from everybody, and the one who fails to respect his parents will not win respect from anybody.

Lord Krishna's Flute

You all must have noticed that on the majority of the images we see of Lord Krishna, he is depicted as holding a flute in his hand. Once the devotees of Krishna asked the flute, “Even though we are all devoted to Krishna, why is it He keeps you close to himself all the time and not us?” The flute answered, “It is because I am hollow. I do not, in any way, hinder

the mellifluous music that flows from His divine breath. There is no obstructing ego in me to impede the voice of God. So, give up your egos and you will also enjoy the proximity to God and will become the instruments through which His voice can be heard, unimpeded.”

Only when the individuality is erased can one realize the nearness of the indwelling Lord. Nothing can be nearer to one than one’s own Self.

The Efficacy of Mantras

Once Lord Vishnu asked Narada to recite the mantra “*Om Namō Narayana*” in the ear of a bird. The bird immediately fell dead on the ground. Again Lord Vishnu directed Narada to recite the same mantra in the ear of a calf. It is a heinous sin for a Brahmin to kill a calf. Remembering the previous instance, Narada obeyed the command with trepidation. The calf immediately died. A baby was born to a king in his palace. Lord Vishnu told Narada to go there and recite the same mantra in the baby’s ear. Narada was nervous. He thought that if the king’s son died, his own life would be in danger. Yet he obeyed Lord Vishnu’s command and went to the king’s palace. Narada was wholeheartedly welcomed, as the presence of a holy person to bless a newborn child was deemed auspicious. As Narada recited the mantra in the baby’s ear, the child burst into laughter and said, “I heard this mantra both as a bird and as a cow. Hearing it again now after having been born as a human being, I will surely be liberated.”

Mantras are very helpful in order to purify the mind. But remember that while reciting a mantra one should always synchronize the mantra with the in breath and the out breath. If each word of the mantra is recited with the throb emanating from the spiritual heart, the peace of your true nature can be experienced.

Shivoham

A man was advised by his guru that every time he took a breath he should utter the word "*Shivoham*." Thus, during the waking hours he would be uttering the name of God several thousand times a day and this would be a simple and good spiritual practice. The man followed the advice and went on uttering the word every time he took a breath. A friend who saw this asked him what the word "*Shivoham*" meant. "It means that I am Lord Shiva," said the man. The friend asked, "If you are Shiva what is Parvathi to you." Quick came the reply "Parvathi is my Divine Mother." The friend, to the shock of the devotee asked, "If you are Shiva how can Parvathi, His wife, be your Mother?" Bhagavan Baba said that the devotee should have answered, "I am Parvathi also," which implies that Siva and Parvathi are not different from one another. The same divine Atmic principle is present in both. One who has realized this truth is the one of wisdom.

This shows how most people who practice spiritual sadhana ritualistically carry on such practices without deep conviction. Mechanical repetition of

I AM I

mantras or divine names cannot take a person to the desired goal.

The Essence Behind The Form

Once a rich man, who was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna, decided to have the Lord's idol made in gold for his daily worship. He went to a goldsmith and got a beautiful idol of the Lord in pure gold. A few days later he had the goldsmith make a golden cow. He felt that the Lord loved cows and hence there should be a cow by his side. One day he thought that there were lots of peacocks on the banks of the Yamuna river and Lord Krishna was very fond of them. So he went again to the goldsmith and had a golden peacock made. This he put on the altar with the other statues which he worshipped.

During the course of the next few years, the man lost all his wealth and became very poor. He argued within himself that, after all, God is in everything and hence it should be all right if he worshipped Lord Krishna in a stone image, then he could sell the three golden idols and obtain some money. So he went to the goldsmith and offered the three idols for sale. The goldsmith weighed the idols and found that their weights were identical. Hence he offered a sum of fifty thousand rupees for each. The devotee got angry and shouted at the goldsmith, "Don't you have eyes? How can you offer the same price for the idol of Lord Krishna as for the cow and the peacock?" The goldsmith calmly answered, "My dear Sir. I am not interested in the names and forms but only in the

essence that is the gold in them. Since all the three are equal in weight, I offer the same price for each of them!”

This is how we attach importance to names and forms and forget the essential divinity behind them.

Faith Heals

A group of monkeys was devastating an orchard full of fruits. The annoyed caretaker shot a stone missile at them with a slingshot. One monkey fell dead on the ground. The other monkeys carried the corpse to a saint. Looking at the dead monkey the saint just remarked, “Man is mortal. The person who killed this monkey will also die someday,” meaning death is inevitable. The saint’s remarks reached the contractor at whose behest the stones were shot at the monkeys. He was then critically ill and in that condition he construed the saint’s remarks to be an ominous curse. Through some emissaries he prayed for the saint’s blessings and sought some prasad from him to release him from the curse. The saint said that he does not curse anyone nor does he have any prasad to distribute. The emissary begged the saint to give some token of his blessings. The saint in his compassion casually picked up some ash from the fire, burning in front of him, and gave it as a gesture of his good will. The contractor reposing firm faith in the saint’s goodwill quickly regained his health.

An abiding faith in God is necessary to acquire His grace. The faith has to be unconditional and total, amounting to surrender.

The Ever-Present Presence

A man had stayed ten years with his guru in an ashram in India. Due to compelling circumstances he had to go elsewhere leaving his guru. With tears in his eyes he approached his guru and cried, "After ten years with you I have to leave your gracious presence." The saint looked at him and said, "Is that what you have learned after ten years of stay with me here? How can you ever be away from that PRESENCE? That presence is the core of your being, your true SELF. To be that is the ultimate experience! Knowing becomes Being! With your eyes closed, be in a contemplative mood and say silently to yourself, 'I do not exist.' Feel that you are saying this in the presence of the enduring background of silence."

The Most Important First

Once upon a time a king, with his huge army, was passing through a thick forest in India. Along the way he saw a sadhu sitting silently with his eyes closed. Being curious, the king stopped and asked the sadhu, "What are you doing?" The sadhu answered, "I am meditating." In his turn the sadhu asked the king what he was up to. The king said, "Can't you see, I have come with my whole army to conquer the world." There was a benign smile on sadhu's face who said, "Is that so? You must have a purpose for embarking upon such a stupendous task. What will you do after the conquest?" The king replied that he would engage himself in silent meditation after completing his desire.

If one knows that ultimately peace is attained by meditating, by being still, why not do it right now.

Bhagavan Baba says that many people come to him and pray that they want peace. He invariably tells them, "Cut out the 'I' that wants peace as well as the desire and you are left with the abiding peace." Peace cannot be had from pieces in the world. Permanent peace can only be had from that which is permanent itself.

Animal's Compassion

It happened one time that two snakes got into a fight and one of them was badly hurt. A boy who was passing by saw the injured snake and started nursing it. The other snake was watching his enemy being tenderly taken care of and, overtaken by anger and jealousy, it wanted to attack the boy. But before the angry snake could bite the boy, the injured snake saw what was happening and, with a last effort, it reared itself up and foiled its enemy's treachery. It thus sacrificed its own life to save the boy who had cared for it. This amply demonstrates that the spirit of sacrifice can be found even in animals while at times we human beings lack it.

True Renunciation

Once there lived a king and a queen in their kingdom, enjoying a worldly life. After some time, the queen pondered over the purpose of life. It became clearly evident to her that if life is only to enjoy the pleasures of the senses, then there is no difference

between a human being and an animal. This process of ratiocination deepened into meditation on the Self. The queen got illuminated due to constant self-inquiry, and she became indifferent to the pleasures of worldly life. The king noticed this and asked her the reason for the change in her attitude towards worldly enjoyments. The dignified demeanor of the queen very much impressed the king and he also decided to practice self-inquiry in right earnestness. He abandoned his family, palace, and the kingdom and retired to a forest hermitage to practice self-inquiry. In the absence of the king, the queen ruled over the kingdom. After some time she wanted to know how her husband was progressing in his spiritual quest. She went to his hermitage disguised as a sage. The king felt very happy to meet the sage and welcomed him with due ceremony. The sage inquired of the king how he fared in his quest and the progress he has made in his spiritual practice. The king felt elated and answered, "Sir, I left my family, the palace, and my kingdom, and I have also renounced everything except the barest needs like this hut and a jug of water." He said he was engaged in this penance to find out his true reality. The sage observed that the king had not renounced everything. The king said, "All I have is this hermitage and I will set fire to it and that will be the end of all my possessions. The sage shook his head to indicate that the king had not renounced everything. The king hastened to add that the only thing that he would be left with his physical body and he was ready to sacrifice it by jumping off the cliff. The sage calmly

observed that the body is innocent and had not done any harm, so there was no reason to destroy it, but the king had failed to renounce the one cardinal quality that vociferously proclaims that he has renounced all. That one is the ego with its sense of doership. Then his true identity dawned on the king with all clarity. His ego was erased by this awakening and he realized the truth. His sense of individuality totally disappeared with the supervening of impersonality and he went back to the queen and the kingdom.

True renunciation is giving up one's individuality. We are in the world like a boat in water. The boat can float in the water but the water should not be allowed to enter the boat. Similarly we should not allow the world to enter within us. We should remain in the world unattached to anything.

Sincerity Rewarded

Two sadhus were doing penance sitting under a tree. One day they heard a divine voice from above saying, "Listen, you will get liberation after as many lifetimes as there are leaves on this tree." One of the sadhus got up in disgust and said, "I am fed up with this penance. How can I wait for innumerable lifetimes to attain liberation?" He walked away disillusioned. The other sadhu felt happy that his liberation was certain and his final release was guaranteed in the course of time. He unabatedly continued his penance. The Lord was pleased with the steadfastness of this devotee and gave him instant liberation. This shows that it is the attitude and sincerity with which the

actions are done that is important and not the mere action itself.

God evaluates a devotee purely on his love and sincerity and purposeful striving towards the goal of liberation.

Humility Accompanies Refinement

In a small ashram in Southern India, there lived the great sage Ramana Maharshi, an exponent of Advaita and the paths of self-inquiry and surrender. He taught these two paths as the direct ones for realization of God. Many people from near and far used to visit his ashram to have his Darshan. One day a prominent government official paid a visit to the ashram. With an overbearing poise, he and his small group of people tried to push their way to the front of the crowd of seated people. Some of the devotees present gently told the official that he should not do so. The man got visibly annoyed and turned round and exclaimed, "Don't you know who I am?" The devotees of Ramana humbly folded their hands and inquired of him, "Sir, please tell us who you are! That is exactly why we all are here, to find out who we are! We have been pursuing this path of self-inquiry, 'Who am I,' which Bhagavan has been teaching us. If you have already succeeded in that inquiry, we would be happy to know who you are!" The official realized his mistake and was humbled.

On the spiritual path we should each try to refine our personality and try to make it less assertive.

Humility accompanies refinement. That is the qualification of a cultured human being.

From God To God

An ardent devotee of Lord Ganesha used to worship Him every morning before commencing his daily routine. Once, during his travel, he passed through a village where he could not find a single idol of Ganesha to whom he could offer his daily worship. "What shall I do?" he lamented. "How can I carry on my work without having first worshipped Lord Ganesha?" After much thinking he came up with a solution. Out of a lump of jaggery which he was carrying he made an idol of the elephant-headed God to offer worship. But he faced another problem. "I have to offer something to the Lord; what shall I offer Him?" he thought. The only solution he could come up with was to break off a piece of jaggery from the idol and offer it to his jaggery Ganesha! This is actually what we are all doing in our various forms of worship of God. We offer back to God what is already His; because there is nothing in creation which is outside God. Even the I-notion is nothing but Consciousness, which is God. Our mind, which is already part of God, is offered to God. A true understanding of this will enable us to give up the sense of separation from God and of the false assumption of individuality.

It is actually wrong to consider something as ours, which already always belonged to God. True self-surrender is to recognize this misconception and realize that we have no separate existence from God.

The Ghost In The Forest

Once a little boy and his father were going to the next village. On the way they had to cross a dense forest. As they were about to enter the forest the boy said, with a frightened look in his eyes, "I don't want to go in there. I have heard from my friends that there is a ghost in the forest." The father smiled and said, "Don't be afraid. I am with you, and if the ghost comes I will protect you and chase the ghost away!" The boy felt reassured and they continued their walk and crossed the forest. The next time the boy had to cross the forest his teacher was accompanying him. Again the fear of the ghost gripped the mind of the boy and he expressed his fear to the teacher. The teacher told him, "Look my boy! There is no such thing as a ghost. There never was one in this forest. So there is nothing for you to be afraid of." The boy was convinced and the fear of the ghost once and for all left his mind.

The ghost is the ego. Many of our well-wishers, like the scriptures, will tell us, "Yes, there is an ego, but we will show you how to deal with it and show you different paths to erase it." But only a true teacher or a spiritual master will tell you the direct path. "There is no such thing as ego." All is Atma and there is no second to cause the feeling of separation from IT.

God Is Present Everywhere

There was a Vithoba temple where the idol was so much worshipped that it became alive and talked to the real devotees. One such devotee would come to the temple everyday to talk to the Vithoba idol. Soon

the Lord became like a close and intimate friend to him. Lord Vithoba, knowing the heart of this devotee, decided that the man was too intimate with Him to understand His omnipresence. So one day He told the man that he should go to a master and get some teaching from him. He also explained to him where and when to go. The devotee felt a little sad in his heart and thought to himself, "I know that Vithoba taught me that God is everywhere, but I still would like to stay with Him here." However, to obey his Lord's command, he went to the place as directed. There he found an old man, lying on the floor, unable to sit up. The old man looked up at the visitor and said, "So Krishna has sent you?" (Vithoba is another name for Krishna). The devotee was taken by surprise and wondered how the old man could know. He was even more astonished to see that the old man had rested his feet on a Shivalingam? "Master," he asked, "Is it not a great sacrilege to have your feet planted on a Shivalingam?" The old man answered, "Oh, I didn't know there was a lingam there! Will you kindly move my feet to another place?" The devotee lifted the old man's feet away from the lingam and placed them down at another point. But to his utter surprise and dismay a new lingam appeared at the spot! He moved the old man's feet again and again to new spots, and every time a lingam appeared at that spot! Finally, not knowing what to do, the devotee placed his own head under the feet of the master and it was instantly transformed into a Shivalingam. After this experience, the devotee returned to his village, but he did not visit

the Vithoba temple any more. He had understood what he had to understand. He could experience the presence of a Higher Power, call it Atma or God, everywhere, all the time.

We humans like to superimpose a personality on the impersonal Atma, because we imagine ourselves to be persons. Give up this wrong identification and experience your true Self. It is not enough to be intellectually convinced that God is everywhere. One has to experience through intuition the Omnipresence of God.

Everything Happens for Our Good

Long ago there was a king who had a minister who always used to say, "Whatever happens is for one's good." One day the king asked for a sharp knife to cut some fruit and in the process of cutting, he cut his finger. The minister who was present said, "Don't worry, all is happening for your own good." The king was exasperated with his minister's equivoque and felt angered at his attitude towards the injury sustained by him. So he promptly imprisoned the minister. A few days later the king, along with his attendants, went hunting in a nearby forest. While riding his horse, he lost his way in the thick forest and got separated from his attendants. While trying to find his way back, he came across a tribal habitation where the people were preparing for the annual sacrifice to their Gods. On seeing the handsome king they felt happy to have such a being to offer as sacrifice to the Gods. They tied him up in front of the deities and were about to kill him.

Suddenly one of the tribesman exclaimed, "How can you offer him as a sacrifice when he has a deformed body? Look at his finger!" Because a maimed body could not be offered as sacrifice, he was released. When he returned, he called the minister from the jail and told him, "Now I have understood what you have been telling me, that whatever happens is for our good. Because of my cut finger my life was saved! But what about you? You had been imprisoned. What good has that brought to you?" The minister answered, "Dear king, don't you see if I had not been put in prison, I would have accompanied you into the jungle as I always do. There, instead of sacrificing you, the tribals would have offered me as sacrifice! So it was for my good that I was imprisoned."

Have the firm faith that whatever happens is the Will of God. Accept that whatever comes to you or does not come to you is for your benefit. That will keep your mind in a state of equanimity. Refrain from sitting in judgement on His Will. That is true surrender.

Put A Brake On Your Mind

Once a young man was riding his bicycle at dusk. It was already dark when he reached a road crossing. Seeing that the man had no light on his bicycle, a policeman whistled to him to stop. The man rode a short distance ahead and then stopped because the cycle not only did not have a light but did not have brakes either. When the policeman questioned him, he had to accept the double offense. The policeman advised him, "Young man, even if you don't have a

light on your bicycle, you can get one and fix it. But if you don't have brakes on it, you are going to get into an accident and possibly get killed. Go and get your brakes fixed first!"

During our journey through life, we may not yet have received the Divine light in us. But it is of prime importance to put a brake on our mental activity since an aimlessly wandering mind is the worst enemy of man. Bhagavan often emphasizes sense control and advises that one should not be dictated to by the mind but should follow the voice of conscience.

Don't Chase The Shadow but Hold On To The Substance

On a hot day a man was walking along the road. The afternoon sun was scorching and the shadows had already started lengthening. The man was thirsty and could not see any water source to quench his thirst. Fortunately for him, he saw a tall coconut tree throwing a long shadow in front of him. There were lots of coconuts visible in the shadow, and he thought he would quench his thirst with some coconut water. He went to the top of the shadow and tried to pluck a coconut from the shadow. Obviously he could not get one. He realized his stupidity and with great difficulty he climbed up the real tree and got hold of a coconut and was drinking the water sitting on the top of the tree itself. When he accidentally looked down, he was surprised to see his own shadow on the top of the shadow tree sitting and drinking the water! Then a great truth dawned upon him. Instead of running after

the worldly life, which is only a shadow of the Reality, if we anchor to the substance itself, our needs in the material world will also be automatically taken care of.

If we run after the world the world runs away from us; but if we turn away from the world, the world runs after us.

The Guru Assesses The Disciple

Once a guru called a disciple of him and told him, "You have been here in the ashram for a long time and by now you should have learned what is to be learned. Now go back to the world and continue your spiritual quest." Sometime after the disciple left, the Guru wanted to find out how much he has progressed after leaving his ashram. So one day the Guru disguised himself as a rustic villager and went to the city. There he found his disciple standing on the roadside watching a procession. The "villager" asked him, "What is happening here?" The disciple answered, "Don't you see? The king is riding an elephant and going in a procession?" The villager said, "Excuse me Sir. Who is the king and which is the elephant?" The disciple remarked, "You ignorant man, can't you see the elephant below and the king above?" The villager again asked, "What is below and above? Sir, please tell me." The disciple got annoyed, "Do I have to explain even that to you? All right, bend down on your hands and knees." The rustic obeyed and the disciple sat on his back and said, "Now do you understand? You are below and I am above!" The

villager still appeared perplexed. "Excuse me, Sir," said he. "I now understand what is above and below but what is meant by 'you' and 'I'?" The disciple immediately realized that only his Guru could ask such a question. He instantly jumped down and fell at the master's feet, asking for pardon. The Guru expressed his disappointment at the disciple's lack of progress in his spiritual advancement.

True Seeker Is One Who Assimilates Truth

Once a rich man wanted to buy an antique statue. Three statues were brought into his presence by a merchant. The buyer called in an expert to ascertain which statue was the best among them.

The expert asked for a thread and inserted it in the ear of the first statue. The thread came out from the other ear. He was not pleased. He then inserted the thread into the ear of the second statue. The thread came out from its mouth. He wasn't happy with that statue. He moved on to the third statue and repeated the same action. This time the thread did not come out. The expert announced that this was the best statue since it assimilated all that is heard and did not throw it away like the other two statues.

Change of View Point

Once a king was going around his kingdom. He saw that people had painted their houses in different

colors. The king, being fond of green color, thought it would be nice if all people painted their houses green. So he issued an order to that effect. The minister thought over this foolish order and came up with a solution.

He brought a pair of green spectacles and made the king wear them during his tour of the kingdom. The king was very pleased to see that his subjects had all painted their houses green!

Duty of Parents

Once a mother was walking in the market place carrying her infant on her shoulders. The child, a precocious baby, on looking around discovered that he could pluck objects from the baskets of the street vendors passing by. Soon, he spotted a vendor carrying oranges. As the basket of oranges passed by he picked up a couple. A little later, when the mother wished to rest a little she put the baby on the ground. The baby looked happily at her and held out the two oranges he had picked. At this the mother cooed with pleasure and fondled her child. She told him how clever he was. This encouraged the child and he grew up to be a great thief. Soon, the thief became a dacoit (robber). In the process he committed a murder for which he was sentenced to death by hanging. As the moment of his death approached and he stood with the rope

around his neck, he was asked if he had any last wish. The dacoit asked to be allowed to see his mother. The moment she came to him he throttled her with his bare hands. The people around were too shocked to move. On being asked the reason for his gruesome act, he answered that it was his mother who was responsible for the state of affairs he found himself in. Had she corrected him at the time he had stolen the two oranges, he would not have been a thief and a dacoit and would have the chance of living a long life.

Illusion and Reality

A man sat facing a corner where two walls met. He imagined a third wall enclosing him from behind and cried out, "I'm in prison, I'm in prison!" A passerby saw his plight and freed him from his illusions and the man felt happy.

The third wall represents the ego which is an illusion.

One Should Not Be Ego-Reliant

A blind man approached a sage and prayed to him to restore his sight. He said that when he had sight he was self-reliant, but now he was dependent on others. At this the wise one quipped, "You were not self-reliant, but you were ego-reliant."

The world and all phenomenal manifestation exist in Consciousness. It is one's defective vision which

finds fault with the world, and our ego wants to change the world to suit one's preconceived notions.

These stories or parables help to acquaint the modern man with the abstract Truth. This is why seers and saints, while teach-ing us, use parables to illustrate the abstract Truth.

PART II

THE EGO AND THE SELF

Mistaken identity

All suffering arises due to a mistaken identification with the body. Bhagavan Baba has advised us in His discourses to find out our real identity and to discover who we really are through the direct paths of devotion and wisdom. The path of devotion helps to dissolve the notional of “I,” whereas self-inquiry questions the very existence of the notional “I.” When one says “My body, My mind,” one is indicating that these are one’s instruments. It is the ego which limits the limitless by identifying the infinite Self with its instruments. I, the subtle mind in the gross body, reflects the reality which is the light of Atma. While considering itself to be an independent entity, it has the impertinence to forget its origin and support. The body-mind complex is inert by nature, but it misuses the divine power to satisfy the physical and mental desires. Thus, the ego considers itself autonomous and doubts the existence of its origin. In its self-created slavery, the mind later performs various spiritual practices in order to release itself from this bondage. The direct path of self-inquiry amounts to

giving up the tendency of identifying with the finite body. When this tendency is given up, the mind essentially being Consciousness, recedes back to its source.

The real Self is infinite, like space, and cannot be limited either to a totality or individuality.

Individuality is a myth. To individualize the indivisible is like trying to draw lines on the surface of water.

The Atma is the basis of the Relatively real, and at the same time transcends it. Atma is that from which everything emerges and into which everything returns. As the sun is unaffected by whatever happens under it, so also Atma is unaffected by anything that appears or disappears in it.

You know that you are. You cannot deny your existence at any moment because you have to be there in order to deny it. This pure existence is felt when the mind becomes still. The mind is an outward-going faculty. When it transfers its attention from the world to Reality, it will become still after sometime; and only the sense "I am" will remain. "I am" is the absolute Truth.

The self-inquiry has to be constantly practiced during the waking state. It cannot be restricted to half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the evening. At any moment during the day, when any thoughts occur, when a reaction arises, or when the desire to

express an opinion or make a comment is felt, one has to immediately revert the attention and try to discover to whom these ideas pertain. By doing so, one will be able to distinguish between the ego and the enduring background of silence. The false I comes and goes. The Self is constant. The I-thought is the first thought to appear. Everything else comes into being simultaneously with the rising of the I-thought. Try to hold on to the I-thought and all the other thoughts will disappear. Through this practice the mind will get used to taking refuge in its own basis. One can say that the best hobby for the mind is to seek its source, and not to stray away from it.

Bhagavan Baba says that there is no point in reading tons of books if nothing of what is read is put into practice. Bhagavan has given us two examples to illustrate how the Self is experienced.

1. The Self is like the fire that gets covered by ash. As soon as the ash is blown away, the fire shines forth again from the embers. In the same manner the ego arises from the Self and covers it. When it is removed, the Self shines forth in full splendor.
2. When a white piece of cloth gets dirty it is given to a washerwoman. When she returns it we say that she has whitened the cloth. Actually the cloth was always white; it remains as it is. The washerwoman only removed the dirt to recover the original whiteness. So also we have to remove the impurity

of the mind so that the stainless Self can be experienced.

Let us pray to Bhagavan that we, with His Grace and our effort, may discover our own nature and experience the unity which the Self really is.

“I” Is The First Thought

The Divine Atma is nameless and formless. But in the beginning of spiritual practices it is no doubt very useful to choose the name and form of a particular deity or Guru and concentrate on this. It is a very good devotional practice. But, on the path of devotion the love for the form has to be expanded to a love for all beings, to the limitless Divinity. Bhagavan Baba often says, “Love is expansion not contraction.” One example of limited love is the love between wife and husband, father and son, etc. These relationships are like passing shadows. Before you were born, where were your parents? Before you married, where was the husband or wife? Bhagavan does not call these relationships love, but attachments. For Him the only real love is devotion to the Divine. God is omnipresent, that is why Bhagavan Baba says, “Love all. Serve all.” We should recognize God in all that we see. The *Bhagavad Gita* recommends renunciation **in** action, not **of** action. Act, but without attachment to the fruit of the action. Perform those actions that will lead you to Divinity.

First, the mind has to be stable. A balanced mind

is very important. The mind has three characteristics: inertia (*thamas*), activity (*rajas*) and purity, and balance (*sathwa*). These characteristics, including the last one, separate one from Divinity. To give an example: In a pond of dirty water the reflection of the moon cannot be seen. If the water is clean but is in constant movement, the reflection of the moon is seen, but its reflection is distorted. Only if the water is still and clear will the reflection of the moon be seen perfectly. Still, what we see is only the reflected light. To see the real moon we have to turn our gaze towards the sky. That means we have to transcend the three characteristics of the mind, and then bypass the mind itself, to intuit Consciousness. All concepts, all understanding, appear and disappear in the constant presence of Consciousness.

Of all thoughts, the first thought to rise is the I-thought. All other thoughts derive from it. The technique of self-inquiry lies in keeping this initial "I" under observation, the disappear of their own accord. Finally even the concept n automatically all other thoughts or concepts will of "I" will be absorbed, and in its absence only Consciousness remains. Observe the thoughts and desires, and watch the point where they arise and disappear. All we have to do is to hold on to this point in us. The technique mentioned above is just one of many. Study, reflect, and practice. The time will come when you will understand.

Somebody asked me, "How is it that sages and seers, with their empty minds, can think and act better than people with their mind full of thoughts?" This is very logical because when the mind is occupied with all kinds of thoughts it is weakened, and in a weak mind thoughts and words cannot be consistent. When the mind rests in the Self or Consciousness, it acquires peace, power, and concentration. A mind which is at peace with itself functions more efficiently. However, in the beginning people think, "If I lose the mind, what will happen to me? I will become an idiot." It is not that the whole mind and its functioning is lost, but it finds its origin and dwells more and more in its basis. What is lost is its tendency to limit itself to a particular body, but its ability to think and function does not get lost. Therefore, there should be no fear of what is called "Destruction of mind." On the contrary, it will be a great help to let the mind reside in its own source, because it will make the mind function much more efficiently in practical life, and it will contribute in a greater degree to the spiritual progress.

The idea of being the body-mind-complex may disappear in a moment, or it may take days, months, or years, depending on the individual. Once one is convinced that, "I am the Self," which is not limited to any particular body, then the rest is easy. In this moment you may think that you are having a direct experience of the Reality when you perceive the world through your senses. It is not like that. The real is that

which enables you to see, to speak, to experience. Even in a market place, the attention can be fixed on the Self and after some practice you will notice that the interest for the external world diminishes gradually. By so doing one will be more and more established in the Reality inside. Then the attention finally gets focused on itself. In the beginning the Self experiences the world, then it experiences the void, and finally, it gets focused upon Itself.

The veiling power of Maya makes the individual soul (*Jiva*) forget its true nature which is Eternal existence and though without hiding it completely, it projects itself on it:

Maya has two meanings:

- 1) It is the power by which one appears as many, Consciousness as matter, the Infinite as finite. Maya, in its immaculate and formless state, when it is still unmanifested, in its latent form, is not separate from Brahman.
- 2) It is pure, potential creative energy, still not differentiated, one with God. It becomes nescient only when it starts functioning and manifesting through the apparent world of names and forms. This active aspect of Maya is called polluted Maya (*avidya*). This aspect is related to the notion of being the body. If one wants to experience the Self, one has to inquire about the nature of mind. What is it?

Where is it from? Where does it rise? Doing this it will be reabsorbed in its place of origin.

The mind goes through the three states of waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep daily. The Atma is the witness of these three states. When the individual I and the three states disappear, the action of witnessing will also disappear. Thus, the Atma is the substratum of the three states.

When the mind ceaselessly investigates its own nature, it discovers that there is no such thing as mind. The mind is a bundle of thoughts, with the I-thought as the root of them all. In the morning when one wakes up, the notion of being "I" is the first thing to arise, followed immediately by the appearance of all other thoughts. One starts thinking about one's daily duties, about breakfast, the work, the worries, the things one has to do, etc. In turn while going to sleep at night, the "I" is the last thought to disappear. When the I-thought disappears everything else also disappears.

Bhagavan Baba gives the following examples. Once there was a wedding, and the family members of the bride and the groom were lodged in separate houses. A stranger came to the bride's residence and started asking about the arrangements for the festivity. He even started to command the people around. The relatives of the bride thought it was a representative from the groom's group. Later the stranger went to the groom's group and did the same; oversaw the

preparations, complained that they were late, and that they caused many problems to the bride's family. The groom's group thought this was a representative from the bride's family.

The wedding came and the two groups started inquiring from each other about the incident and the stranger roaming about with so much self-confidence. The stranger realized that they were inquiring about him and immediately vanished. In the same manner, Bhagavan says that when one inquires about the nature of the mind, it simply disappears.

The external world, the body, the senses, and the ego are like a myth, i.e. they are neither real nor false. Their appearances are not permanent. They are subject to change any moment. Therefore, they cannot be absolutely real. It is only when one remains free from thought, after having got rid of the impurities of the gunas, that the mind will be pure and steady. The accumulated tendencies in man to seek pleasures will not arise, and a state of true detachment occurs. The thoughts will merge in the Self, the sense of a limited "I" will go away, and the knowledge of perfect oneness happens spontaneously.

The Natural State Of The Self

Stillness accompanied by awareness is our natural state. The natural state of the self is the state of I-lessness. The spurious "I" is superimposed on the transparent Self due to one's tendencies. Then the play

of the triad commences. The triad of the seer, the seen, and the act of seeing are a projection on the screen of Consciousness. The seer and the seen, the subject and the object, are the contents of the mind. The seer is so engrossed in the play that the screen is overlooked. If one practices ten to fifteen minutes every day, to withdraw the attention from the seen to the seer, one can experience how even the seer is a projection on the screen of Consciousness. It is a shadow of Atma and thus has no existence of its own. According to Vedanta, whatever appears and disappears has no absolute existence and is not real. In the beginning the practice consists of holding onto the first person. When one comes to know that the first person has no independent reality, the Atma is revealed as the basis of everything.

People want to know the Self using the mind, but since the Self is beyond the mind, it is not possible. The mind is a very useful instrument for practical life, but one has to be convinced that it cannot be used to realize the Self. One cannot experience both mind and the Self at the same time. How then, can the mind contemplate on something that is free of thoughts?

When one is without thoughts, at that instant the mind effortlessly withdraws into the spiritual Heart. This can be observed not in the usual issue of mind-oriented observation, but by the omnipresent Awareness within and without one.

To contemplate on the Self is to be what we are. The Self will reveal itself to itself. Atma is transparent and can be known only by abiding in the Self. It is a direct experience, which doesn't require the mind's intervention. This is the natural state of the Self.

The complete withdrawal of the mind into the spiritual Heart is the ultimate experience in spirituality—the one who experiences and that which is experienced are both dissolved. Any seeker, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, or sex, can evolve to this blessed state. In this state the mind becomes so expansive that it becomes the Omnipresent Awareness apparently perceived in the body in the Spiritual Heart. This is proclaimed as enlightenment.

Holding on to the “I” feeling, entirely unassociated with anything perceived or conceived, makes the mind percolate from the head to the Spiritual Heart.

Consciousness

When the world appears, the Self is not experienced. Self is experienced when the world disappears. Consciousness is one but it manifests in different forms as God, the world, and the individual (Jiva). However, its essence does not suffer any change. Atma or Consciousness cannot be directly investigated, only indirectly through the not-self, which in turn is destroyed during the investigation.

What is the not-self? The not-self is the body, the mind, the intellect, the senses, and the ego or the I-conceit. The Self, on the other hand, is the Atma, the Real, the self-evident and self-effulgent. How to investigate into the not-self? By asking oneself, "Who am I." If one concentrates on the I-thought and holds on to it, automatically all other thoughts fade away. Why are we told to focus all the attention on the "I"? Because the "I" is the root thought on which all other thoughts are strung. When all the attention is held on the I-thought, it will not stray towards a second and third person, but will get reabsorbed in its source. The identification with the body-mind-complex constitutes the false "I," which has to be removed in order to unveil the real "I" or Consciousness, shining in all its splendor.

The state in which the I-notion doesn't appear or arise is the state of being "That" Consciousness in which there is neither subject nor object. One is neither the understanding subject nor the understood object. That which remains once the "I" ceases to exist is the independent and luminous Self which is its own anchorage. Occupy the mind in this search and don't allow it to wander on other thoughts. The practice has to be maintained so long as the sense of separation from Atma exists. To realize the Self is to be oneself, not knowing anything or becoming anything. That which is, has always been. So who has to realize why and how if the Self is the only thing that exists?

Realization is not only the humbling of the ego but its complete extinction. For this the aspirant has to put an end to the *vasanas* (impressions on the mind) and root out the ego.

The world is seen or known through the body-mind complex with the help of the light of Consciousness reflected in it. Only when the mind is illumined can it act and be conscious of the world. Thus the knowledge of the world is indirect, while the effulgence of the Self can be directly intuited. Don't let the mind be lost in concepts. Let it be fixed within on the source of light, where the objective knowledge ceases and the Self shines by itself.

To see the seer, to know the knower is the key that reveals the nature of the Self and the origin of the world. When the world appears, investigate to whom it appears. The world itself is like a castle built in air. All this world-drama is created by the mind and is carried out in it. It is like a dream, and the dreamer is real only so long as the dream lasts. When the dream ends the dreamer also disappears.

When we locate ourselves as the Self, all sufferings vanish and the world and the body will not be treated as something external, but rather as a phenomenon inside our own being.

The discrimination, the absence of desire, the tranquillity, and the yearning for liberation are characteristics which qualify man for self-inquiry.

Self-inquiry

Self-inquiry is done in the mind, by the mind, by seeking its place of origin. Therefore, we first have to know and locate the mind. What is it? From where does it arise? The mind rises from Consciousness and superimposes its own limitation on it. The identification of Consciousness with body and mind is the basis for all thoughts and desires. Therefore, there exists the need for understanding the nature of the mind and knowing its origin.

Due to inauspicious tendencies accumulated during many lifetimes, the infinite Consciousness appears as limited to a particular body. This feeling of individuality arises within the body as a knot in the heart. This feeling of separation from the Divine gives rise to the imaginary state of bondage.

The purpose of all *sadhana* (spiritual practice) is to destroy this tendency of the mind to limit and individualize the infinite all-pervading Self. This amounts to eradication of the mind's prejudices, preferences, likes, dislikes, etc. By removing these negative tendencies of the mind, its power to think, feel, and act is purified, resulting in a clear and balanced mind.

Actually, mind as such doesn't exist. Only good and bad tendencies are there. The spiritual practice consists in strengthening the good tendencies and eradicating the bad. Goodness leads to Godliness.

In this room there is space; so also outside the room. Space is space, whether this house is there or not, only mind tries to limit or divide it. Sai Baba of Shirdi used to say, "Break the walls! Break the walls!" which means "Be free! Shed the sense of individuality." We should see space as space, and not limit it to "this room" or "this glass." The mind is the unlimited Consciousness imagined to be limited within a body.

The truth is very simple, but unfortunately the majority of people don't want to listen to it. This is so because their attention is, all the time, on the world and its manifestations. They are distracted and become attached to the relative and fail to turn their attention on the Real or the Absolute. Also, today's man expects to experience the bliss of Being without undertaking the necessary spiritual practice. The realization of the Self is very simple because the Self is always realized. You, as mind, cannot do anything about it. You can inquire into it, but any answer got from the mind will be wrong. One has to go behind and beyond the mind. The only language known to the Self is silence.

The true answer, therefore, can only be intuited in silence. The Self is not realized by doing something, but by refraining from doing, (that is, giving up the notion of doership), not by thinking anything, but by remaining still.

The fleeting experiences we have during the

waking state do not constitute the reality. However, for the common man, this experience constitutes the touchstone of reality. According to Vedantic philosophy, Reality is changeless and permanent. But we mistakenly associate existence with the individual body, which is subject to change, decay, and death. Whatever appears at a certain point of time and disappears at another is not real. The real is the substratum of all that appears and disappears. Existence means that which is the same now and will remain the same tomorrow. That is why I sometimes say, "I was what I am, I am what I am, and I will be what I am," which implies that existence is unchangeable and unaffected. Everything else that seems to exist is called "attributed existence." Atma shines in its own splendor, revealing in turn everything else. It is its own support and does not require any affirmation for its existence. It is the substratum and support of everything.

The moon shines with the reflected light of the sun. So also, the mind, intellect, and body function with the light borrowed from the Divine Atma.

Many years ago Bhagavan Baba told me, "Consciousness is your reality." He meant the absolute Consciousness, which transcends the relative knowledge as well as the relative ignorance. When Consciousness becomes conscious of something, it is called mind. Consciousness totally unrelated to the

body, transcending the mind, is a matter of direct experience.

When thoughts arise, allow them to arise, but don't follow them. Instead ask yourself, "To whom do these thoughts arise?" Naturally the answer will be, "To me." Then with a quiet and calm mind ask yourself, "Who am I?" and know that any answer coming from the mind will be wrong. When the mind's attention is removed from the objects of the senses and concepts of mind, and turned towards That, which sees, it will calm down and remain still. This, in brief, is the technique of self-inquiry. The mind habitually interrupts the enduring background of silence. If on the contrary, a single effort is made to make the mind interrupt itself, this will make the mind peaceful.

The Vision Without Beginning Or End

In the beginning spirituality is practiced from a mental point of view. One imagines God as an object to contemplate upon. But with persistent practice the attention gets fixed in the spiritual heart (on the right side of the chest), and the seeker merges in the Self.

No person is egoless. One implies the other. To be egoless means to become impersonal. No ego or limitations exist when one comes to know oneself as Consciousness.

We imagine that happiness is derived from the external world by gaining whatever we desire. But what really happens, when happiness is felt, is that

the mind has stopped for a moment; it is free of thoughts and desires, and bliss wells up from within. A restless mind cannot experience bliss. But if in a fraction of a second it is still, the empty mind will unconsciously sink into its source, which is bliss.

The Self, or happiness, is the basis and support of the mind. So do not lose sight of the Self by going after experiences, not even those experiences which you consider to be spiritual and think to be important. All visions and experiences appear only at the level of the mind which itself is based on that which is neither coming nor going, the basis that makes all other experiences possible. To "see" God is to realize Him in the depth of one's very existence.

Thoughts cannot exist without Consciousness, but Consciousness exists without thoughts. Consciousness is the screen, the basis, on which thoughts are displayed. Don't consider Reality as something external to you. The spiritual practice consists in separating ourselves from mind and body, which are nothing but projections on Consciousness. They are like shadows without any substance in themselves.

Surrender

Surrender or renunciation is not to abandon one's possessions. But, of course, if one has more than necessary, one can make donations for good causes. True surrender is to surrender the mind to the personal God or Guru, remaining in a state of acceptance of

whatever comes or goes. True devotion is acceptance of the Will of God. What does it mean to surrender the mind? First one has to understand what is meant by the word "mind." The mind is an endless stream of thoughts created by desires. The mind, or subtle body, has the power to think, feel, and act. When we surrender the mind, it doesn't lose this ability. What is lost are the bad tendencies, prejudices, in short, the limiting faculty of mind. To think that we are limited individuals is like thinking the waves to be different from the ocean. Nothing else is needed than to remove the false knowledge. Space remains space whether the room is full of furniture or not, but to see the space as space, the furniture has to be removed.

Consciousness is not an object which one can contemplate upon. Its only language is silence, and it can be felt only when the mind is free from thoughts, when the attention of the mind is not directed to any other object. In the beginning we contemplate by holding on to one single thought; finally even this thought disappears. What remains? The Self or Consciousness. This is the Truth.

In a film we see a flood; does it make the screen wet? Does the fire projected on the screen burn it? Our likes and dislikes are superimposed on the screen of Consciousness, which remains unaffected. On a mental level we experience sadness, compassion, happiness, suffering, but our true nature neither accepts nor rejects anything.

Bhagavan often says, "Life is a game; play it." The inner significance of this is that one has to play his or her part in life without being affected by it. Under the most provoking situation one must abide by the "rules" of the "game" of life:

"Help ever hurt never."

"One cannot always oblige, but can speak always obligingly," etc.

This is possible only when one is constantly aware of his or her true identity as the Atma. Knowing that life is a game where one only has to play his part helps one to learn to distance oneself from one's thoughts, feelings, joys, sorrows, victory, defeat—the vicissitudes that make up life.

Usually we think the experience of the waking state to be the touchstone of Reality. But the touchstone of Reality is Reality itself. What is this Reality? It is the permanent existence not subject to change, decay, and death, which shines by itself. It is the light, which doesn't require any other light to reveal itself; it reveals itself and in turn reveals everything else. It reveals everything through the subtle instruments of intellect, mind, and body. This is a state of Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss.

What can destroy the mind? The mind itself. Watching the mind, with the mind, makes the mind come under the control of the Self. Watching the mind,

we can see it sometimes appearing and sometimes disappearing. It consists of thoughts generated by the desires of the senses. Desires in turn arise from the wrong notion of body-identification. There are an infinite number of methods to get rid of this wrong notion. For instance, repeat to yourself "I am not this, I am not this," (meaning the body), until you are convinced of the truth.

The most common mistake made is to treat the mind as an independent entity. It imagines itself to function on its own accord, and it even wants to understand and sit in judgment upon Atma. The mind is a reflection of Atma! The purpose of all spiritual paths, such as the path of action (Karma Yoga), the path of devotion (Bhakthi Yoga), and the path of wisdom (Jnana Yoga) is to get rid of this pride, this limiting tendency of the mind. Atma cannot be conceptualized. It is the power which enables you to think in the first place.

To know its own nature is also a desire of the mind, but there is nothing wrong in it. All that is needed is to remain free from thoughts, to remain in the ever-present natural state of the Self. There is nothing mind can do to prolong the state or the interval between two thoughts; just leave the mind aside and the natural state will reveal itself as it is.

To abstain from the feeling of doership makes one accept that everything comes to us as a gift of

God. Very soon one will realize that we don't do anything; everything just happens. The mind of the seeker disappears. It loses its feeling of separation, of its identity, of its ego. When the mind remains empty, the grace of the Guru flows on a continuous transmission towards it.

The Ego and The Self

Only as long as one believes in the ego, having forgotten ones true nature, do ideas of liberation and bondage seem to exist.

Rather than entertaining the intellect and mind, one should try to transcend them. Following the traits of the ego to its place of origin, we come to perceive the energy that is emanating from the spiritual heart.

In true wisdom there is not any object to be known. It transcends both knowledge and ignorance and remains as itself. A person does not dream in the waking state and is not awake in the deep sleep state. The two states mutually exclude one another. In a similar way, if one is attached to the body, one is bound. If one is not attached to the body, one is free. A liberated being is one who sees himself as the witness and substratum of everything.

As light dispels darkness, so also the revelation of Atma dispels ignorance. When the jug breaks, its inner space merges with the outer space. The same thing happens when the physical body dies; the spirit merges with the Absolute.

The main difference between meditation and self-inquiry is that meditation requires an object for the subject to meditate upon, while in inquiry only the subject is focused upon. In self-inquiry the very existence of the mind is doubted, and this is the easiest way to dispel the illusion of its existence.

Atma gives light to the mind and shines within it as its substratum.

Dive deep within and inquire, "Who am I? Where is the personal I?" You will discover that only the Self exists, while the false, limited I fades away.

The world cannot be seen, neither in the total darkness of ignorance nor in the total light of Atma. Remain as the I, without any adjuncts, and the thought fades away. What remains? Try to experience it. Meditation is not undertaken for mind to realize the Self, but for realizing the unreality of the not-self.

For those who always abide in the Heart, the seer and the seen are one. The idea of the seer being different from the seen originates in the mind. The enlightened one knows the Self as vividly as the ignorant perceives his body. When the knot of ego is cut, Atma shines everywhere and one can never again get entangled and lost in the world. It is a state of supreme peace.

The ultimate Truth is the recognition of the pristine Self as our own Self, and the Self of the universe, as well as of all beings. If you give priority

to worldly matters, the experience of God is hidden; but if you seek only God, He will reveal Himself as the Self.

The essence of Vedanta can be summarized in four words "*Deham? Naham. Koham? Soham.*" This means, "Am I the body? I am not. Who am I? I am That." Be what you really are! You are already That, but you imagine to be what you are not. A king plays the role of a beggar in a play. Would you not laugh at him if, after the play was over, he continued to think of himself as a beggar?

Put Apart The I

What does Puttaparthi mean? In the past it was a remote village with no facilities. Today it has become an international city. Puttaparthi, Bhagavan explains, means "PUT APART THE I." Bhagavan once very compassionately explained to me the meaning of the expression "*Thath Thwam Asi,*" meaning, "That You are." That is Consciousness, your true Self. Be That! You are That. Put apart, or leave aside, the ego!

PART III

ESSENCE OF BHAGAVAN'S TEACHING

Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha

The above words are well known in Indian philosophy. Bhagavan Baba explains them a little differently from the traditional interpretation.

DHARMA is normally understood to mean duty, righteousness, or religion. Bhagavan adds yet another meaning to it, namely "*Swadharma*." "*Swa*" means Self or Atma. Your Swadharma is to realize your true Self.

ARTHA is not only the possession of worldly wealth but also to have the "wealth of wisdom."

KAMA means desire and is normally understood as desire for material wealth. Bhagavan explains that the desire should be for the "wealth of wisdom."

MOKSHA In this word, "*Moha*" stands for attachment. "*Kshaya*" means "giving up." "Give up" all attachment and moksha, or liberation, is attained. The truth is so simple.

The nature of the state before the emergence of the ego is known only to those who have experienced it.

Relative and Absolute Existence

Truth is one. There are no degrees of it. The difference lies in relative existence and absolute existence. Take an example: you are seeing a film projected on the screen. While seeing the film it seems real, when it is over it is not real anymore.

Only the screen is seen. Relative existence is dependent upon Absolute Existence, as there can be no projection without the screen. Whatever comes and goes is relative existence. Absolute existence exists in itself, by itself. It does not need any other basis or support, it is its own anchorage. Absolute existence is unruffled, uninterrupted, unaffected Awareness.

Atma Has Neither Attributes Nor Aspects

Divinity in Indian tradition has come to be called as "Being, Awareness, Bliss." But, one should understand that these are not aspects or attributes of Atma. *They are Atma!* Take the example of the sun and sunlight. Light cannot be apart from the sun; the sun cannot be apart from the light. Real existence is identical with Consciousness. What is seen is not sentient; it does not shine of its own accord. The moon shines with the light borrowed from the sun. Mind-body is also insentient and is illumined by the light of Atma. Mind can, therefore, be said to be relatively real. Still, Reality is one; there are no levels or aspects of it. It is only when reality appears to put on limitations that it is called mind.

Devotion To A Name and Form

It is a great help to install the Divine name and form of your choice in your spiritual Heart. It is much better to be attached to God's name and form than to an individual's. If this is done, one will not be liable to do anything wrong. Thoughts, words, and deeds will be in harmony. Having God's image installed in the heart will help to develop the ability to listen to one's conscience and to improve one's power of concentration. It is unnecessary to be worried about how to get rid of the attachment to the Guru's name and form, before you have given up attachment to your own name and form. If the latter is achieved, the attachment to all other names and forms will vanish. Actions performed with a pure and steady mind will be performed much more efficiently. Listen to the voice of God. Remember Him all the time, and by this, transfer your attention more and more from the world to God.

At the most you can claim to be an instrument of God. It is better to practice a little bit of what you have read than to continue reading tons of books.

Shakti

A person asked how Shakti, manifested in the body, could be experienced as colors, heat, or cold. The speaker answered, "I am talking. I feel a divine power talking through me. The same power is enabling the listener to listen. Can one say that this power is

warm or cold, has colors or not? Do not be disturbed by what you read and hear about Kundalini and Chakras. This is what people are entertained by, not the simple Truth. Visions and experiences come and go, but you as 'You' are always there. You are the witness, the ever-present awareness. Understand that your true state is nothing new to be acquired."

Turiya is the witness. It is called the fourth state which witnesses the three states of mind. But these three states are not absolutely real. Thus there is nothing to be witnessed. So *Turiya* is *Turiyatita* - it is beyond mind. It is Consciousness alone.

Mental Satisfaction Is Not Enough

Mental satisfaction is said to be the highest accomplishment. It is what most human beings seek both through the world and the spiritual path. But the highest truth is beyond mind. A recurrent question then is how to contemplate on it. To make the mind be as the Self is to contemplate on it. The mind, after shedding its limitations, reverts to its true nature, namely Self. If we think we can know the Absolute, there must be two, one to know the Absolute and the Absolute itself. It is not so. The Absolute Reality is one. The mind thinks itself to have understood the truth and acquires intellectual pride.

Brahman Cannot Be Seen

Many people have understood intellectually, as Bhagavan says, that everything is Brahman. Still, they

are able to differentiate—seeing a wall there, a man here, a woman there, etc. It is not that after understanding that everything is Brahman, one will be able to see with the physical eyes Brahman everywhere. The various forms (objects) will still be there. Atma is “seen” through an intuitive experience. Atma is the basis for everything. It is the basis for the one who wants to see it. Be as you truly are, that is how to experience Brahman everywhere.

Brahman is neither the object nor the subject, but their substratum! That which is, is Atma. It is as it is!

Duty

There seems to exist a confusion among people today as to what one's duty in the world is. Is it right to renounce one's duties in order to wholeheartedly follow the spiritual path? Do I still have a duty to my married children? The answer is that as long as you feel as an individual entity, you do have a duty. When you merge in the Absolute, the question about duty will not even arise. Remember whatever you are bound to do will happen even after realization. Realization does not mean that one disappears from the world. On the contrary, there will be no questions about one's duty; but one's duty will be performed much more efficiently. So egolessness is to uproot one's bad tendencies and sense of doership. It does not stop us from performing the actions we are supposed to perform. If the enlightened beings had not continued

to act, there would be no examples for mankind to follow, no teachings, no spiritual books.

Seer and seen, knower and known, are contents of the mind. Practice lies in transferring the attention from the seen to the seer. Hold on to the seer—in due course, one will experience that the seer, as a person, disappears. What remains? That which is Atma. It is uninterrupted awareness. This is liberation.

Many people come to their Guru saying, “I want peace.” It is very simple—give up the “I” that wants something, let go of desires, and you have peace!

Bhagavan Baba says, “Are we not at peace in the interval when one thought ceases and another does not yet arise?”

What One Knows Seems Easy

Never pay attention to the thought that it is difficult to uproot one’s bad tendencies. With practice, everything becomes easy both in practical and spiritual life. Ask me to pilot an airplane, I will say it is very difficult. Ask the pilot, he will say it is very easy. You say it is difficult to give up habits and bad tendencies and experience the Self because you haven’t tried. Rather ask yourself, “Who finds it difficult?”

Remember the ego is not something tangible. There is no compartment in the body for it to reside.

Some people imagine that they cannot think about God when they have to make decisions in worldly

matters. I tell you that only when thinking about God while making decisions can the right decisions be made!

Silence is only the language known to Atma.

The moment you imagine that the body-mind is not there, you are left with uninterrupted awareness.

True meditation can only be experienced in the absence of the notional I, that is, in the absence of the one who wants to meditate. First the object of meditation disappears. Then the subject also disappears; only stillness remains.

As a statue is made by repeated hammering, bit by bit, so also the truth is needed to be hammered again and again into the mind.

“You have to watch That, be one with That. Then there is ceaseless, continuous peace.”

“The day when selfishness is given up, you will awaken to Divinity. Then there will be unity and peace in the world.”

“Goodness leads to Godliness. Morality leads to immortality.”

—BABA

Ocean In A Drop

Have you seen the ocean in a drop? The same water that is in a drop is in the ocean. Divinity can neither be limited to individuality nor totality. Both have to be transcended.

Humility is one of the characteristics of a true seeker. Humility is appreciated also in practical life. For instance, if while walking on the street a person is coming towards you in the opposite direction, whether that person is rich or poor, a humble person will give way for the other to pass.

“That which is is that which sees.”

When we say, “Hold on to the “I” to the “I am,” we assume that there is a holder. Once the holder is held on to, one recognizes that the holder vanishes. A shadow can not hold on to its source.

Be vigilant in seeing that the mind does not get distracted from the path one wants to practice. Then one experiences the music of eternity. Finally the mind will be totally established in the absolute existence. That rooting is permanent.

Real Joy

Bhagavan explains the word “Joy” as follows:

J stands for Jesus, that is God,

O stands for others,

Y stands for yourself.

This is how our priority should be: first God, then others, and lastly ourselves, the ego. What are we doing? Our priority is the other way! Know that when the ego arises, the world will also arise. Then comes around the notion of God. Only as long as the ego is there can concepts of others, of a second and a third

person, be there. We should seek that which is there before the ego arises. What is the basis for this world, its support? One will find the Divinity is always there. The ego comes and goes. You as ego can never find God. You can only come back to God. Find out how! Find out if you ever left Him! With the mind you start inquiry. When the inquiry ends, there will be no mind.

Be Attached To The Permanent

Because the mind does not remain stable in Truth, it strays away. Mind wants to know, but not to abide in its source. Make the mind pure and steady. That will help also to conduct one's worldly life in a better way. Bhagavan Baba teaches that the most important thing to remove is the ignorance that hides God, our real Self. We feel, because we are so engrossed in the world, that to lead a spiritual life is hard, it requires an effort, whereas to lead a worldly life is easy, effortless. Learn to discriminate between what is real and unreal. Learn to become attached to that which is permanent. People want to do anything under the sun but to seek the true Self. We are easily entertained, easily mislead by false gurus. Have full trust in God. Trust Bhagavan when He says that He knows how, when, and what to do with each one of us.

If the mind would be rooted in Consciousness, it would be unaffected and experience uninterrupted, unbroken awareness. We find it easy to be what we are not. Shiva is said to be *Sathyam*, *Shivam*,

Sundaram—Existence, Consciousness, and Beauty. These are not aspects of Atman, they are Atman itself. Remember you too are Shiva.

Shiva + Ego = Man, Man - Ego = Shiva.

Thinking is not your nature!

In order to think you first have to exist. Existence can be there without thoughts. Thoughts cannot be there without existence.

The mind arises from Consciousness but imagines itself to be independent from its source. The mind is Consciousness only, but it has identified itself with a particular name and form thus assuming an illusory individuality.

Faith In God

People ask me how to cultivate faith in God! Recently, a lady asked me the same question during a *Satsang* session.

“Do you have faith in what you see?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” the lady replied.

“Isn’t it quite paradoxical that you have faith in what you see, but not ‘what’ enables you to see—‘What’ *actually* sees?”

The lady was beginning to understand.

“That ‘what’ is Divinity, God,” I explained.

We have faith in the barber, that he will not cut our throat. We have faith in a pilot of a plane or in a

taxi driver, that he will take us safely to our desired destination. But we find it difficult to have faith in God, the very basis of our existence. What digests the food we have eaten? What is that power that enables us to speak, to hear? That power is God! God's nature can be experienced in the interval between two thoughts.

The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am that I am." Silence is the language of God.

We are all God's children. We are all playing different parts and should be truthful to our part in the play. In this play of the Divine, the entire humanity is an integral part functioning as one unit. Bhagavan says, "The whole world is a mansion and the entire humanity is one family. There is no multiplicity. We live under the same sky, tread the same earth, breathe the same air and drink the same water. So it is foolishness to develop diversity in this underlying principle of unity." Without understanding this oneness of humanity, one cannot understand the oneness of Divinity. Baba, on another occasion, explained this as follows: "Madalasa began teaching her sons from their childhood in this manner: child, you are not a son, nor am I a mother. Both of us are manifestations of *Sath-Chith-Ananda*. (Being-Knowledge and Bliss). We are like waves in the ocean, not different from each other. All have arisen from the ocean of *Sath-Chith-Ananda*."

Then try to, as Bhagavan simply puts it, "See

good. Be good. Do good!" Love all, Serve all! Help ever, hurt never! Be an instrument of God by serving our fellow human beings without a sense of individual doership.

The Self always remains unaffected. Without that there would be no you! We can call that a void, as Buddha did, but that nothingness is everything! Aspiration and Grace will meet at one point, no aspiration, no Grace. God is always waiting for you to be in that egoless state where He can be experienced.

Everything Is Based On God

A common question is how to move away from the ego. First one has to know what the ego is. The ego is the same as the sense of individuality. This individuality is a notional I, a false I; it is a reflection of Atman. If the mind were not to identify with a name and form, it would recede back to its real state. We are nothing but projections on the permanent screen of Divinity. We are one human family. To get away from the ego, one has to begin with thinking more about God than of this passing show. To know God—Be still. Don't will!

Ultimately everything is God. But we have to distinguish between Self and not-self. To know that everything is God is to understand that everything is based on God. Because of our bad tendencies, we are now more attached to the not-self than the Self. That is why we, again and again, have to remind ourselves to transfer the attention from world to God.

If we withdraw our attention totally from everything external and sit still, the experience arises of attention focused upon itself. In that absolute stillness, no thought can trouble you. Only abundant peace prevails.

No Time for Spiritual Practice

Some people say they have no time to undertake spiritual practice because they work ten hours a day. I tell them you might work twelve hours a day—but give up the sense of individual doership. That is a spiritual practice in itself. Unselfish actions will be performed more efficiently. Also, such selfless actions will not leave any imprint on the mind. If actions are bad, they will leave a bad imprint on the mind.

Karma and Rebirth

Bhagavan Baba has said that we are born with a garland of Karma around our neck. What takes rebirth is our tendencies. Baba says we are reborn according to our last thought before dying. Spiritual practice is needed throughout life so that at the last moment we will be able to think of God. The garland, as such, is not there; it is the tendencies we bring with us from previous births. You might be born contemplative, dull, etc. Somebody asked me if the soul comes into the body together with the Karma? Soul is not different from Self or Atma. There is no person as such indwelling in a body. Only accumulated tendencies take birth. There is no individual soul! Individuality

is the greatest upholder of sense of separation from God.

In the beginning while practicing, the mind sometimes becomes still. That is called *manolaya*. With practice, the mind will ultimately be irreversibly established in the Self; it will not rise again. This is called *manonasa*. That can only happen if the egoistic tendencies of the mind are uprooted. The mind has to give up the tendency of slipping away from its true nature.

Mind Control

Watch, whence the I notion arises. Then the mind gets absorbed in that. That is penance.

If the mind is genuinely still, the desire to practice will not be there, nor will there be a necessity for it. Don't slip away from the stillness. Once it is gained, the still mind does not have any desires, not even for liberation. The Self is already what you are. We make an effort to be in our natural state, because we are used to being in the unnatural state.

The intellect must not be blurred by egoistic tendencies.

There are three stages in the process of Self realization.

1. Intellectual conviction.
2. Serious and sincere practice.
3. Instant experience of the Self.

Without control of the mind it is not possible to be convinced. Without being convinced, it is not possible to practice. Without practice there will be no experience.

Be sincere in order to achieve something! We see that in order to have an experience of Truth, control of the mind is essential in the beginning. Be eager to reform yourself, not others. God will take care of the world. One who has developed the Atmic viewpoint is like a lion, a giant. One without the Atmic attitude will have fear at every step. Why have fear for giving up your egoistic tendencies?

Thoughts, words, and deeds have to be in harmony. Practice wholeheartedly, then the experience will also be wholehearted.

A moment will come when the experience of destruction of the egoistic or selfish tendencies will become irreversible—that is manonasa.

Mind is any time ready to act and react. Before it arises, watch it! Detect it. It is not only about witnessing. When the mind is alert, it can be detected at the point of rising; and when you detect it at such a time, it will not rise. Then the mind will turn back to its origin. After experiencing the peace of its source, it will not react the way it was intending to react in the first place. Without practice, the mind is always ready to rise and react, to judge others more than itself. This is the egoistic tendency which has to be given up.

Hands In Society, Head In Forest

At times one is asked the inner meaning of such Divine utterances. They imply that one should play one's role in society, without forgetting one's true identity. One should not get identified with the part one has to play in the world. This can be done only by remaining awake to the Real Self, and asleep to the world. This in turn, means merging the relative consciousness into the Absolute Conscious-ness. This can be achieved through constant Self-attention, keeping the mind unaffected by the events of the world.

Hurdles On The Way

When one is engaged in spiritual sadhana, certain experiences and powers often manifest themselves. Do not look upon psychical or so-called supernatural powers as the goal of Self-realization. They are hurdles on the way to the final goal. Pay no attention to them. They will disappear themselves in the course of time.

Who Realizes What

People ask me if I have realized? I as ego cannot realize. The I is the individual or the person. When there is ego the person cannot realize and when the individual becomes egoless, then there is nothing to realize, which is the real realization. When I becomes egoless Reality reveals itself as unbroken. To say I am so and so is ego. "I am" is the truth.

The Highest Devotion

The highest devotion that one can achieve is to love the Self. This love is also the path of surrender to the Self, and becoming one with It. To be one with the One, to be in a state of Being, is the highest devotion. There is nothing more to do. Sometimes mind feels as if it should have devotion to something else. As long as one feels as if one is a separate entity, one should do any practice, bhajans, mantra, etc., in order to reach the state of ultimate devotion. The ultimate devotion is to merge in Divinity.

To be attracted to Divinity is a wordless experience! Love of True nature is essential for experiencing one's Self. Love cannot be rationalized. The strange thing is that one feels separate from God. The one who feels independent, the individual, is a myth. There is nothing apart from Consciousness.

Love all, Serve all

“If you can acquire Prema (Love), then you can dispense with the Sastra (teachings). For the purpose of all the Sastras is just that; to create that feeling of ‘Sarva Jana Samana Prema’—Equal love for All.”

—Sri Sathya Sai Baba

This equal love for all will lead one to the love of Self which is the indweller in all forms of creation. This is why Bhagavan advises, “Love all. Serve all.”

Such love also prevents one from even thinking of doing any harm to others. The service motive based on this love enables one to adopt a helpful attitude to everyone. Hence Bhagavan lays down the maxim, "Hurt never. Help ever."

ULTIMATE UNDERSTANDING

(Theory and Practice)

Bhagavan Baba says, "The purpose of human birth is to kill the wrong notion of I."

Even if one has read a large number of spiritual texts, without living through them the information obtained through such text remain merely intellectual and is used only to conform to the whims and fancies of the ego. One is easily influenced by one's surroundings, and the mind is led astray by sensual pleasures and experiences. One's vasanas, or tendencies, accumulated through several earlier births, tend to keep one bound to worldly attractions and transactions. Such tendencies may even lead one to misinterpret the spiritual knowledge acquired from the texts and even to quote great masters in justification of one's deviation from what is good.

It is important for the human being to have a clear understanding of the final Truth and realize that Truth is "What Is." That 'IS' is the consciousness immanent in, and is the basis of everything. Until he understands this, man is bound to consider himself as mortal and live in misery and suffering. Bhagavan often says, "The proper study of mankind is man." In this connection it is interesting to note that this is mentioned in any book

on deductive logic. Man is mortal. Peter is a man; so Peter is mortal. In order to understand the true nature of man, one has to understand his essential nature which is immortal. It is logically held that man is mortal, thinking himself to be the mind-body complex, totally ignoring the essential divinity indwelling everything including himself. The real Self is not mortal. The ego, having wrongly created the "me" and "the other," develops its own likes and dislikes, and consequently it under-goes the misery and suffering.

The manifest universe, with all its contents, has no independent existence of its own, other than Consciousness immanent in it and which forms the basis of everything that exists. The entire manifestation is like a shadow, which cannot have an independent nature of its own other than that of its substance.

All phenomenal existence is external to Consciousness, immanent in the former, and it has mistakenly assumed subjectivity and is trying to conceive its own substance as an object. Before the mind comes consciousness. The mind comes only after consciousness and it is only a shadow of Consciousness. How can the shadow know its substance? How can the imaginary comprehender comprehend the final Truth? This is possible only when it eliminates "itself" and stays as its substance.

What is liberation? Who wants liberation and from what? It is the illusory identification with the body complex that creates an illusory individuality with its associated misery and suffering. This illusory

individual develops an imagined bondage. It is the “me” that wants liberation. How can the illusory entity be in bondage? When the “me” itself is an illusory phenomenon, which has no existence of its own, how can it aspire for liberation? So, to put it simply, there is no “me” at all, and the false notion of “me” is the only bondage from which the notional “I” wants liberation! Hence a seeker’s prayer has to be, “Take away me from ‘me’!”

When asked who I am, I say, “I am nobody.” “Nobody” has a double significance. From the worldly point of view, I am not of any great consequence—I am an ordinary man, just like any other person. From the Spiritual point of view, I am not the body: I am the eternal omnipresent Self—The Real “I.”

To believe that you are nobody is practical spirituality. Practicing this you can attain spiritual illumination while in the world. In life everyone loves and respects a humble man. Humility also slowly erases your ego so that, spiritually, you can realize that you are not the body complex. One of the ways the ego can be diminished will be clear by an example. Suppose somebody speaks rudely to you. Your immediate reaction may be to get even by an equally rude reply. But wait... your mind withdraws to its source—the Spiritual Heart. Peace laden it surfaces, no longer vindictive.

Any similar occasion in worldly life—when the mind reacts—can be used as an opportunity for practicing the withdrawal of the mind into the spiritual

Heart, the Self. Gradually with practice, the reactive part of the mind will be finished forever. The mind will then only exist to carry on the day-to-day activities required for the upkeep of the body complex.

At this point, it may be clarified that the end of the mind does not mean that one will become “mindless,” an idiot. The reactive part of the mind is finished; the other functions of the mind, necessary for conducting the business of daily life, not only remain intact, but become sharper too. This should allay the fear of those who hesitate to venture on the spiritual path, thinking that they would lose their minds.

In the initial stages, it is not easy to withdraw one’s interest and attention from the external world. Thus it suggested that one may choose any image of God and install it lovingly in one’s spiritual heart and contemplate on it. In course of time this practice will subdue the wheel of thoughts and desires generated by age-old tendencies (Vasanas).

When this is clearly understood, the final conclusion that one will arrive at is, “I am not what I thought I was or what I appear to be.” “I, as the finite, am not the ‘me’ but just the ‘I,’ the infinite, impersonal ‘I.’”

“I Am I”

The wonderful technique of Self-enquiry is succinctly presented with its paradoxes turned into tools for intuitive realisation. The mind enquires, "Who am I?" but the Self answers "I am I", for there is no mind! Doubt the doubter, seek the seeker, and renounce the renouncer for Truth to manifest.

This powerful book is divided into three parts to tell you who you really are. Starting with simple but catchy **Spiritual Stories**, Ratan Lal prepares you for deeper understanding of **The Ego and the Self** leading you into **The Essence of Bhagawan's Teachings**