

Self-enquiry directly leads to  
Self-realisation by removing the  
obstacles which make you think  
that the Self is not already realised.

*Sri Ramana Maharshi*



**Above:** Arunachala from Perumpakkam Road, south face

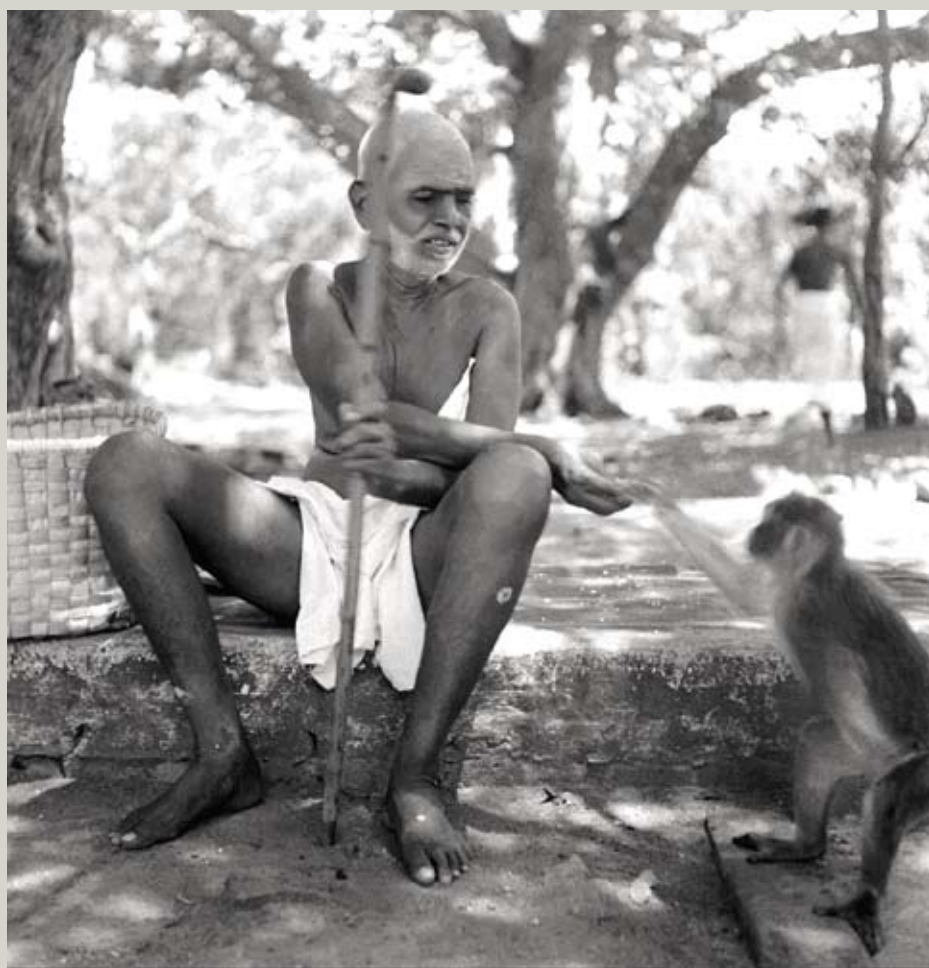


**Left:** Sri Ramana with Kariyanur Natesa Swamigal of Esanyamutt (left)

**Below:** Ashram Dining Hall today

**Right:** Sri Ramana in the ashram with monkey





## CHAPTER 9

# Excerpt

## How to conduct Self-Enquiry

*Practical commentary on part of  
'Who Am I?' (Nan Yar)  
from a Satsang with Premananda*

[Sri Ramana's direct words are in bold]

*This chapter is taken directly from Premananda's Satsang. He draws our attention to the fact that we are always occupying our minds with some story. When we make the space by becoming still and quiet, the Self is revealed. He asks us to become aware of our conditioning and our attachment to our thoughts – my thoughts, my life. Questions and answers from Who Am I? (Nan Yar) where Sri Ramana talks about Self-enquiry are discussed and clarified. Premananda clearly explains how to do Self-enquiry, leaving no doubt as to how to proceed. Quotes from Sri Ramana on Self-enquiry are scattered through the chapter.*

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Sivaprakasam Pillai, a scholarly devotee, approached the young Sri Ramana on Arunachala when he was living in Virupaksha Cave and asked him for his teachings. He approached Sri Ramana when Ramana was about twenty-two years old, by which time he'd been living on the mountain, alone and in silence, for about three years. What resulted was this small booklet with twenty-eight questions and answers.

It's very small and will fit in your pocket. It's called *Who Am I? (Nan Yar)*. At the end of all the different spiritual traditions, with all the different techniques, you come to this question about the 'I'. It's about the fact that we believe in the false 'I', this video, 'my life'. We believe I am these strange beliefs, judgments and desires, this whole package I call 'my life'. But it's simply not true. It's just a wrong idea.

Self-enquiry begins with changing the focus from outside in the world to the inside. We become Self aware. We watch. This is only possible when our mind has become quiet. If the mind is constantly full of thoughts we cannot get anything from Self-enquiry. Sri Ramana has outlined a clear method for using Self-enquiry intensely in our everyday life to bring the mind to rest at the source.

**You have to ask yourself the question 'Who am I?' This investigation will lead in the end to the discovery of something within you, which is behind the mind. Solve that great problem and you will solve all other problems.**

*Sri Ramana Maharshi*

We will look at the questions and answers from the booklet which have a direct bearing on how to conduct Self-enquiry. Sri Ramana's words are printed in bold. The complete booklet is reproduced in Chapter 4.

What I'm calling the True Nature is called the Self in the booklet. You can call it the Higher Self. You can call it God. You can call it the Soul. 'The world' means the thoughts and feelings and all the objects, including people, which can be perceived by the five senses.

Sri Ramana was asked:

*When will the realisation of the Self be gained?* [Q4]

**When the world which is what-is-seen has been removed, there will be realisation of the Self which is the seer.**

*Will there not be realisation of the Self even while the world is there (taken as real)?* [Q5]

**There will not be.**

This is very clear and very shocking because he's saying that if you want to know the Self, then the world has to be recognised for what it really is, an illusion. He is also saying that if the world is there you don't know the Self. It suggests that what we take as the world is not really as solid as it appears. Our whole conditioning has always been that the world is real as it is, that it is solid and that we are a separate part of that world. This world, which we take as real, must be seen as an illusion in order to know the Self.

People who have had a taste or a glimpse of the Self or who have found the Self, know this to be true. It doesn't actually mean, for example, that Premananda doesn't see any trees in the garden. I see the trees in the garden. I even see you sitting here. In that way the world looks like it used to look, but something changes. When we merge with the Self then it's as if our whole awareness is just there in this stillness. It's as if the world then disappears. We only know the world through our senses but when we come deeply into the Self we're not so busy with our senses and it's as if the world fades or becomes like a shadow.

Any words I might say about this don't make sense because the mind can't understand. If you are quite new to this, your mind can only freak out. It can't catch it, yes? There's no way for the mind to make sense of this. The understanding has to be from your own being, from deeper than the mind.

When people come to *Satsang* they become quiet, they leave their stories and dramas behind for two or three hours. They drop their attachment to these stories and come to stillness. They go back to work, families, relationship, everyday life. Just walking in the street there's a collective sense about life that we've been conditioned by for so many

years. We pick up again all those invisible structures and we're back in the movie called, 'my life'. Immediately this stillness seems to fade away and then we say 'Oh! *Satsang* didn't work.' But it can't not work because we are that stillness. That is our nature. It has to work. It's always working, we just don't know it.

A prerequisite to know the Self is to have achieved a still mind through a spiritual practice. Most people have such a busy mind and are so identified with their story that there is simply no space in which Self-enquiry can work. There needs to be some work, some time spent to get to know the mind and to quieten it. It is important to come to a *sattvic* mind, a clear and peaceful mind. This is a mind that is available to understand the Truth.

So *Satsang* absolutely works. It's absolutely beautiful because it's so simple. It's so incredibly simple and it's a complete change, a revolution, because you don't need anything from the outside. You don't need anything from anybody. You've got it all there, everything, all the wisdom of the universe, all the knowledge, all the love, everything is just there, right there inside you. I say 'inside'. Actually it's not inside. It's all around and through you.

So how to stay in touch with this stillness? There's a suggestion from Sri Ramana who was asked:

*How will the mind become still?* [Q10]

**By the enquiry 'Who am I?'. The thought 'Who am I?' will destroy all other thoughts, and like the stick used for stirring the funeral pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will be Self-realisation.**

In India, when they burn the body, they use one stick for making sure everything burns and in the last minute they also throw that stick into the fire and then nothing is left. It is the same with Self-realisation. The question 'Who am I?' acts like the stick in the fire and it will destroy all the other thoughts. He says, '**Then, there will be Self-realisation.**' When all the thoughts are destroyed then Self-realisation is simply there.

Persist in the enquiry throughout your waking hours. That would be quite enough. If you keep on making the enquiry till you fall asleep, the enquiry will go on during sleep also. Take up the enquiry again as soon as you wake up.

*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, (D. Mudaliar)

Yesterday, when we did this enquiry together, almost everybody arrived for the meeting with some excitement in the body. Perhaps there was a little bit of pressure in the chest or some other bodily sensations, maybe some fear or other emotions, or lots of thoughts. You'd been busy driving a car or arranging something on the telephone. Then we all just became quiet.

We sat together for twenty or thirty minutes and we became more and more quiet. There was no talking, no discussing. Then I asked everyone to look: What is there? In the beginning people found a thought, they found a feeling, because we are always looking for something. When we look at the sky we always see clouds, an aeroplane, the sun, the moon or the stars at night. We never even notice the blueness of the sky because our minds are programmed to always look for something. It's the same when we look inside. We're always looking for something – a thought, a feeling, a body sensation, something.

Actually what we're really looking for, the Self, is simply an empty nothing. It's just a huge space of nothing, like the sky without any boundaries, without any colour, without anything in it. It's just emptiness. It's like a vast dark ocean. Sometimes people experience it as light, but most people experience it as a kind of shiny black ocean. Once you come into this shiny black ocean even a few thoughts don't matter. There can be a few thoughts coming and going and they're just bubbles in the ocean. They don't disturb anything.

But we so easily get attached to the world. There's some drama with the children, or suddenly there's heavy rain and the roof starts leaking. Then there's the drama of getting the builder to come. Where's the money to pay for it? A big telephone bill arrives. It's so easy to get caught up in the world. We need some way to come from the world back to this ocean, back to the source.

*What is the means for constantly holding on to the thought 'Who am I?' [Q11]*

When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them, but should inquire: 'To whom do they arise?' It does not matter how many thoughts arise. As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, 'To whom has this thought arisen?' The answer that would emerge would be 'to me'. Thereupon if one inquires 'Who am I?', the mind will go back to its source; and the thought that arose will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will develop the skill to stay in its source.

'When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them ...' What does he mean by 'not pursue them'? Usually when some thought appears in our head, 'Lunch!' then we think, 'What kind of lunch?' 'Fish.' 'Where to buy the fish?' Okay, then, 'How to get to the fish shop?' 'Oh! My bicycle is broken.' Before long, this first thought about lunch has suddenly taken us a long way and we're thinking about how to borrow our friend's bicycle. (Laughter) It started just with a thought about lunch and now we're thinking, 'Well, how can I borrow my friend's bicycle?' You see? Don't pursue the thought. The thought comes, 'lunch'. It's okay, no problem, and then it will disappear.

If you get really quiet you can see the thoughts popping out of nothing. There's this stillness, there's this ocean and suddenly out of the ocean comes a thought. Usually we take this thought and we say, 'It's my thought. I thought that. I'm thinking about lunch.' But actually it's just a thought. We're very attached to all these thoughts. 'They're my thoughts.' But actually it's not true. They're just thoughts. So Sri Ramana is saying don't pursue the thoughts. The thought of lunch comes and then it will go, and then another thought, 'football'. Then that one goes.

*Question from the audience: When do you eat?*

When you're hungry.

*When you're hungry. That's different from thinking of lunch?*

Yes. You just go through your day and when the body needs food you'll feel hungry. It's all arranged. The body is arranged like an alarm clock and when it's hungry you know it. But of course, we human beings have made all these things into a programme. Lunch is at one o'clock, tea is at four o'clock and dinner is at seven o'clock. But in fact you can simply trust your own body. When the body is tired then you sleep. Maybe you want to sleep at four o'clock in the afternoon. Maybe you sleep at eleven at night. Maybe it changes. When the body is tired you can sleep. When the body is hungry you eat.

Sri Ramana says, **'When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them ...'** That's very important. Don't go into the thoughts, don't become attached to the thoughts. Don't follow lunch back to the friend's bicycle. Treat the thought just as a thought, not my thought. No attachment. Rather, he says, **'As each thought arises, one should inquire with diligence, "To whom has this thought arisen?"'** You're not interested in the thought. You are not interested if it's about lunch, money or a new girlfriend. You're not interested in the quality of the thought or the content of the thought. You're just interested to ask, **'To whom has this thought arisen?'** The answer is **'to me'**. It's always **'to me'** because our whole attachment is to this **'me – my life'**.

Then he said, **'Thereupon if one inquires "Who am I?" [or "Who is this me?"] the mind will go back to its source ...'** So it is two questions: you ask, **"To whom has this thought arisen?"** The answer that would emerge would be **"to me"**. Thereupon if one enquires, **"Who am I?"** [or **"Who is this me?"**] **the mind will go back to its source; and the thought that arose [it doesn't matter what it is] will become quiescent. With repeated practice in this manner the mind will develop the skill to stay in its source.'** If you continue to enquire intensely, after some time the mind will become quieter; there will be fewer thoughts and the mind will get into the habit of simply being still.

In the beginning there is a bit of a battle, but after some time it works by itself. If you do this intensely, after some time you don't have to ask the two questions. It comes to the point where just to remember

the questions is enough, or even a shorthand like 'who'. Just the remembering, and you are back into stillness.

Sri Ramana also suggests that when you start Self-enquiry you sit and with your eyes closed. As soon as you close your eyes sixty percent of the world disappears. Then you've only really got the thoughts, the sounds, some emotions and body sensations. In the beginning you can make it like a practice, sit and look inside and do the Self-enquiry. Once you have mastered Self-enquiry with your eyes closed, then you're ready to take Self-enquiry and put it in your ordinary day.

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