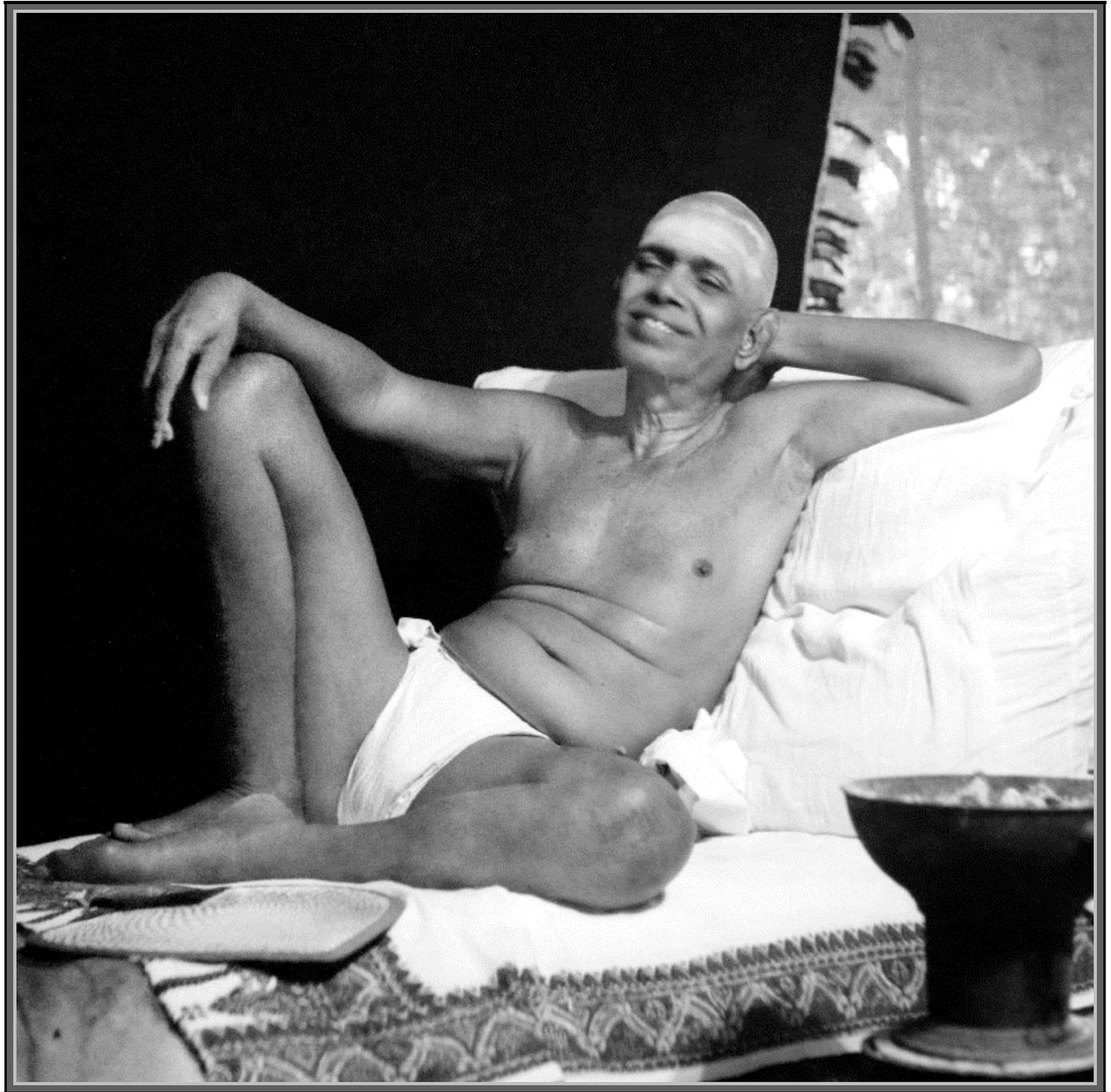


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**THE TRUE MEANING AND NATURE OF
“SURRENDER”**

If there is one term describing an essential aspect needed for success that can be found in all schools of spiritual practice, irregardless of the methods prescribed and their scriptural foundation; one single aspect of approach or revelation of the Divine, the Self, the Eternal, the Perennial Ground of which all humans claim inheritance- it is “surrender”.

If there is one thing that can be universally said concerning this fundamental cornerstone upon which is built a life of what is deemed Spiritual and Real, it is undeniably that from it’s very definition onwards – practically everyone has it wrong. Of course, this statement is bold and presumptuous, even arrogant. But before such judgment is passed, let us analyze the proper *Sanskrit* dictionary etymology and meaning of the word ‘*saranagati*’, which is commonly translated into English as ‘surrender’.

The meaning of *saranagati* is derived from two root words. First is the word ‘*saranam*’, and finally from the word ‘*agati*’. ‘*Saranam*’ is defined with a list of synonyms including refuge, shelter, protection, succor, and interestingly, a place of rest. ‘*Agati*’ means to come to, to go to, even to go to quickly as an arrow released from a bow.

In the 18th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu Bible, Lord Krishna uses this word twice in His final summation to Arjuna. The Lord is revealing in verses 62 and 66 the highest and most profound secret regarding how to “surrender” and what is its result.

Verse 62

tam eva saranam gaccha
sarvabhavena bharata
tatprasadat param santim
sthanam prapsyasi sasvatam

Fly unto Him alone for refuge
With your whole being, Arjuna.
From His grace, you shall attain
Supreme peace and the eternal abode.

Verse 66

sarvadarman parityajya
mam ekam saranam vraja
aham tva sarvapapebhyo
moksayisyami ma sucah

Abandoning all duties,
Take refuge in Me alone.
I shall liberate you
From all evils; do not grieve.

It is essential to note the words the Lord uses to imperatively modify ‘*saranam*’ in both verses. In verse 62 the use of the word “*gaccha*” signifies the exclamatory imperative act “to go!” In verse 66 the word “*vraja*”, coming from the root ‘*vraj*’, implies a command “take, vow!” Grammatically both usages are to be defined with extreme emphasis, for they are both 2nd singular imperative acts. The implication that *Sanskrit* scholars derive from this is that the Lord is revealing the act of surrender as a process of determined and totally concentrated effort (*prapatti*, an often used synonym for “*saranagate*” meaning total surrender to God through devotion and adoration combined with a life of purity and virtue).

Sri Ramana Maharshi clarifies the application of this secret revelation in the Gita when answering questions of devotees from both the *Jnana* and *Bhakti Marga* (way):

*“The ‘I’ casts off the illusion of ‘I’ and yet remains as ‘I’. Such is the paradox of Self-Realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it. Take the case of bhakti - I approach Iswara and pray to be absorbed in Him. I then surrender myself in faith and by concentration. What remains afterwards? In place of the original ‘I’, perfect self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the ‘I’ is lost. This is the highest form of devotion (parabhakti), **prapatti**, **surrender** or the height of*

vairagya... You give up this and that of 'my' possessions. If you give up 'I' and 'Mine' instead, all are given up at a stroke. The very seed of possession is lost. Thus the evil is nipped in the bud or crushed in the germ itself. Dispassion (vairagya) must be very strong to do this. Eagerness to do it must be equal to that of a man kept under water trying to rise up to the surface for his life.”¹

The *Jnani* “casts off”, the *Bhakta* “approaches, prays and becomes absorbed”. Both are an active effort requiring “strong dispassion and concentrated eagerness” to avoid being drowned in the waters of *samsara* (an ocean of sorrows).

Can we now pass judgment that to believe “surrender” a whimsical act of “letting go”, “giving up the effort”, or casually and shyly “going with the flow” is an erroneous and mistaken understanding?

Mistaken! For Bhagavan and the Bhagavad Gita are declaring that “surrender” means flying like an arrow to a shelter, a refuge and a place of rest in God!

And if we try and try again to attain this most Blessed state, but find no help, our prayers will at least give us “ears to hear” the proclamation from the *Jagat Guru*, the Spirit of Guidance:

Devotee: “ We surrender; but still there is no help.”

Maharshi: “Yes. If you have surrendered, you must be able to abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you. Things may turn out differently from what they look apparently. Distress often leads men to faith in God.”

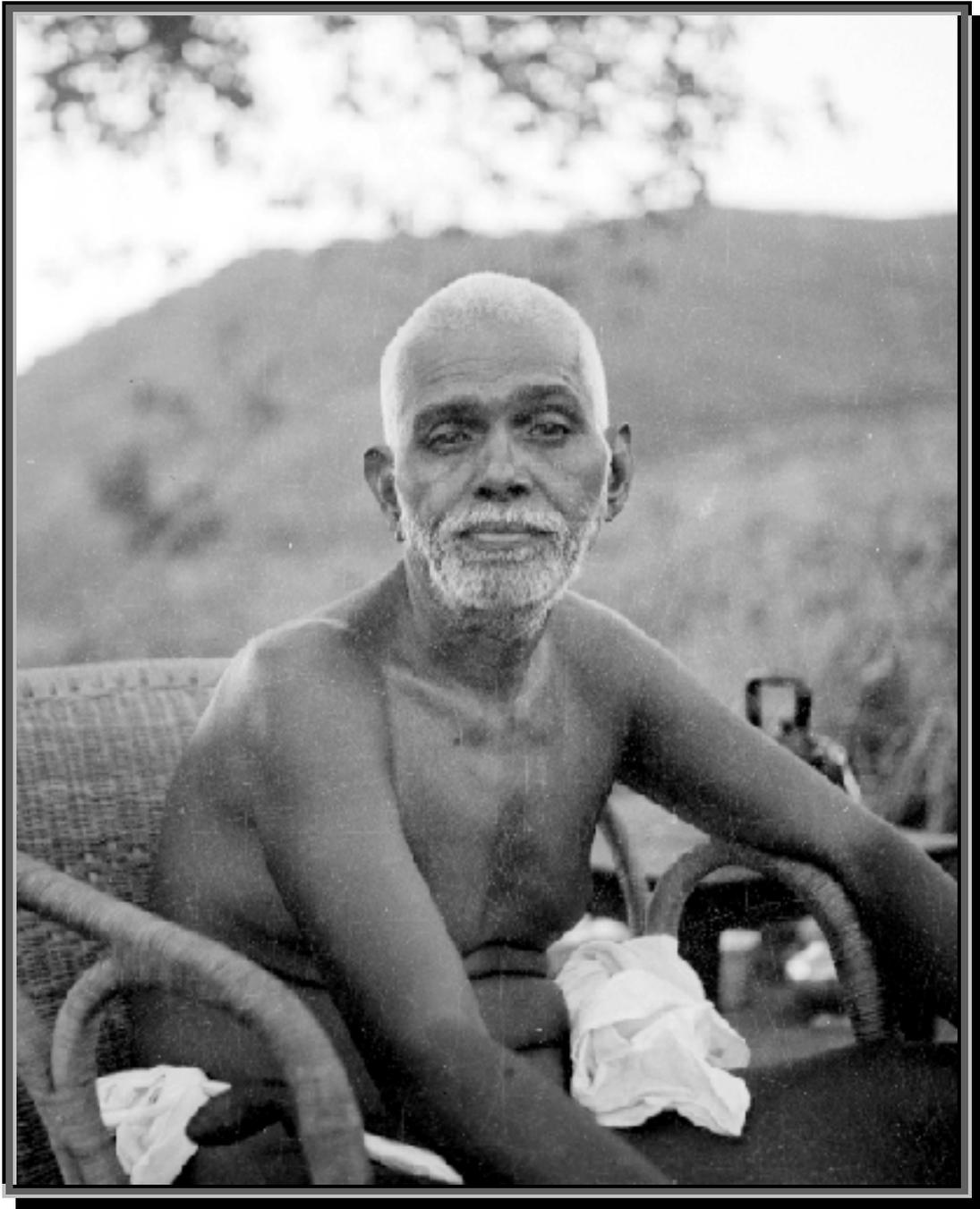
¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 28.

Devotee: “But we are worldly. There is the wife, there are the children, friends and relatives. We cannot ignore their existence and resign ourselves to Divine Will, without retaining some little of the personality in us.”

Maharshi: “That means you have not surrendered as professed by you. You must only trust God.”²



² *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 43.



“SARANAGATI - SURRENDER”

PART II

“IN ORDER TO ANNIHILATE WHAT IS UNDESIRABLE AND HARMFUL (*ANISHTA*), THE MIND HAS TO BE STEEPED IN THE ADORATION OF THE BELOVED (*ISHTA*).”

Sri Anandamayi Ma

The first presentation on “*Saranagati*” concluded with an understanding of the nature of surrender as being a concentrated and definitive movement of the mind and heart towards God. Sri Krishna extolled us to “Fly unto Him, and take refuge in Him alone”. Sri Ramana Maharshi’s guidance gave us the conviction to “abide by the will of God and not make a grievance of what may not please you, for distress often leads men to faith in God. Therefore you must only trust God.”³

Without doubt, these words are full of Truth and inspiration. But, as is often said in the scriptures of both East and West: “Inspiration is one thing, the effect it has on our life and *sadhana* is quite another.” Soothing words do soften the sorrow of the human heart, but too often their effect fails to translate into lasting progressive movement towards God. Even if we are truly motivated to “Take wings and fly to the shelter of the bosom of our heavenly Father”, we remain human by inheritance, and thus a sybarite by nature. One may be really very zealous in his austerities and vows in the beginning, but if one is not on a very proper guard, slowly the vigor will be relaxed, comforts will creep in the mind and man will be caught very miserably. For this very reason, an understanding of the nature of “surrender” pales in significance when compared with an exact knowledge of “What “*saranagati*” practically is, and more importantly, how it is done.”

For clarification of this most essential question let us now rely further on Bhagavan and the Bhagavad Gita as our Guru, as our “Spirit of guidance.” Taking their hands of Guidance and Blessing, may we proceed onwards to the “further shore”.

³ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 43.

**“BLESSINGS ON YOUR JOURNEY TO THE FURTHER SHORE
BEYOND DARKNESS!”**

(Mundaka Upanishad 2.2.6)

A visitor once asked of Bhagavan: “What is self-surrender?”

Bhagavan replied: “It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognizes the higher authority of the Atman. This is the beginning of surrender...⁴ “Complete surrender to God means giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karmas*, i.e., the actions of the mind, speech and body, are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be on Him.” Bhagavan continued with a quote from the Gita: “Lord Krishna told Arjuna in the Gita,

*ananyas cintayanto mam
ye janah paryupasate
tesam nityabhiyutanam
yogaksemam vahamy aham*

Those men who worship, directing their thoughts to Me,
Whose minds do not go elsewhere;
For them, who are constantly steadfast,
I secure what they lack and preserve what they already possess.
(Bhagavad Gita IX, verse 22)

Bhagavan continues and explains: “Arjuna had to do the fighting. So Sri Krishna said, ‘Place all the burden on Me, do your duty; you are merely an instrument. I will see to everything. Nothing will bother you.’ But then, before one surrenders to God, one should know who it is that surrenders. Unless all thoughts are given up there can’t be surrender. When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one’s Self. If surrender is in terms of *bhakti*, the

⁴ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 56.

burden should be thrown on God, and if it is in terms of *karma*, *karma* should be performed until one knows one's own Self. The result is the same in either case. Surrender means to enquire and know about one's own Self and then remain in the Self. What is there apart from the Self?"⁵

Here, very definitely, Bhagavan is guiding us towards a practice of what will culminate within an effective meditative process of *Atma Vichara*. Many of the most learned Sanskrit scholars define "vichara" as a process primarily of "reflection" and secondarily as "enquiry". We can see the efficacy of this within the guiding words of Bhagavan above in relation to "surrender".

In order to, "Place all the burden on God, and do our duty merely as an instrument, for God will see to everything", we surely must 'somehow' invoke and perceive THAT VERY PRESENCE. Otherwise, how in heaven or on earth are we to "throw our burden on the Lord" if we do not know the place where to drop off the delivery!

The followers of all religions uniformly face the same dilemma; how is God to be found? All who seek to solve this 'mystery of life' find guidance in the saints. It is not essential to become a saint in order to find God, nor is it necessary. What is essential is that someone did it, and through their compassion they shed 'light on the path' that we may follow as we proceed onwards toward attainment.

In India, one who sought and found, one who struggled and came through victorious, one which beheld the Face of God, was Swami Ramdas of Anandashram in Kerala.

"Swami Ramdas gave great emphasis to constant chanting of God's Name, His ceaseless remembrance and absolute surrender to His will. He even adds that these three are synonymous with God-realization. This means he who chants God's Name constantly, has ceaseless remembrance of God and his surrender to God is absolute. He is as good as having realized God.

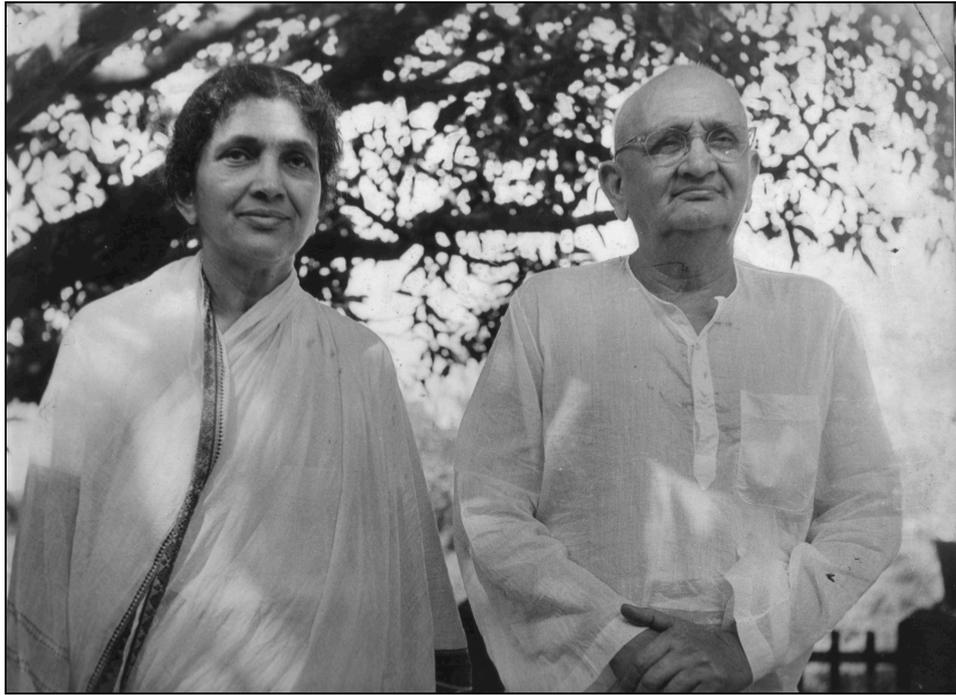
⁵ *Letters from Sri Ramanashramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 225-227.

“Surrender” is a word that appears in Beloved Papa’s (Swami Ramdas) utterances very often, because it is a magic word for him. He is very fond of it and extols it whenever he gets the opportunity. He assures, the moment we surrender to His will, we are flooded with peace.

“But, for the common man, , the term “surrender”, means a sense of defeat and disappointment. When two persons or countries are engaged in a fight, one who feels too weak to defeat the opponent, decides to admit defeat and face the serious consequences of humility and ignominy. He raises his hands in surrender. The fight ends with one in deep dejection because of the defeat and the other boisterous in his victory. To a devotee, however, “surrender” has an entirely different meaning. There is no fight. There is no defeat. There is no humiliation. There is only victory and the consequent joy. If at all we call it a fight, it is a fight with the ego, the individuality, for its survival. The ego, which is apparently fighting for its survival, does not really exist. It is only a product of the illusory veil put on by the *Atman*, on Himself, just for play – *Lila* - as the devotees say. “Surrender” here is the process of tearing off the illusory veil, which caused a sense of separation between the devotee and God. The result is the realization of the devotee’s oneness with Him. So “surrender” here denotes the vanishing of the non-existent ego and therefore a victory of the devotee.”⁶

Death of the ego is swallowed up, through liberating surrender, in the victory of the devotee’s love of God. For the illusory veil being rent a sundered, the tune of the sweet “Song of the Spirit” touches the human heart.

⁶ *Points to Ponder; Talks and messages of Swami Satchidananda*, Anandashram Publications 2000, p. 78-79.



The touch of Love Divine transmutes thee into purest light
A very mould of Truth in which the Spirit Immortal
Sings to ageless tune; The sweet strain fills limitless space
Love be thy God - only Love - The liberating Mother Supreme.
- Swami Ramdas

To conclude this segment on “surrender”, and to continue onwards with future segments, various methods of how to “invoke and perceive” the object of our reflection and enquiry for which we attempt to achieve true “*saranagati*” will be presented by the most renown and authoritative *Jagat Gurus* (world teachers). Though various methods of *sadhana* will be presented, they all will lead, if correctly practiced with patient endurance, to the same goal. As Swami Vivekananda exclaimed to his Master, Sri Ramakrishna (who was delighted at the hearing): “God is infinite, and infinite are the ways to find Him!” All great Gurus and Masters universally agree that to control the mind and reflect upon its true Nature, a quietening of thoughts is an essential prerequisite. Only the rare few that are firmly constituted in the Self (usually from performing this aspect of *sadhana* in past lives) dare to skip this stage of spiritual effort.

Never the less, even those rare few are seen to undergo this quietening of the mind, mainly through the supplanting of the diffusive thought processes with the single sound (*aksara*) of God's Name. This fact is evidently brought forth in the diary of Sri Muruganar, who is revered and known to be one of Sri Ramana's closest and most advanced disciples.

“Though Bhagavan rarely gave out *mantras*, when he did, he generally recommended “Siva, Siva’. Muruganar himself was given this *mantra* by Bhagavan, as were several other devotees including Annamalai Swami, the brother of Rangan of Bhagavan's childhood friends), and an unknown harijan.”⁷

Perhaps Bhagavan himself declared the reason for this by saying:

“*Japa* reaching to the source of sound is the best course for those who are not firm in consciousness which is the source of the ‘I’.”⁸

Perhaps we can take the liberty to conjecture that if one can say Bhagavan had ‘motives’, a profound one would have been to guide his disciples through stages of the bliss of the self, which would act as catalysts to finally return, through *sadhana*, to their true home in the Self, God – the further shore.

“The purport of prescribing meditation on the *Pranava* is this. The *Pranava* is *Om*...the *advaita-mantra* which is the essence of all *mantras*.... In order to get at this true significance, one should meditate on the *Pranava*. ...The fruition of this process is samadhi which yields release [*moksha*], which is the state of unsurpassable bliss.”⁹

It has been said by both the direct disciples of Sri Ramana Maharshi and the devout that later followed: “If there is a “twin

⁷ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar*, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 224 - 225.

⁸ *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 145

⁹ *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, sixth edition, p. 25,26

Spirit” of Bhagavan, an exact embodiment shrouded within a ‘different’ physical form; that is seen in Sri Anandamayi Ma.”

If Bhagavan defines “self-surrender” to be the same as “mind-control” in a practice that reveals the knowledge of the Self, surely Mother Anandamayi guided Her devotees with a means to achieve the same glorious end.

Bhagavan declared to us: “When there are no thoughts at all, what remains is only the Self. So surrender will only be to one’s Self.” Sri Anandamayi Ma spoke directly about the means to annihilate the thoughts of the mind, which results in the direct knowledge of “Who we are” and from “Whence we came”:

“In order to annihilate what is undesirable and harmful (*anishtha*), the mind has to be steeped in the adoration of the Beloved (*Ishta*). The notion that He is far away must be altogether given up. Thou art within and without, in every vein and artery, in every leaf and blade of grass, in the world and beyond it. The awakening of the sense of want is to be welcomed; it opens the way. He is there at every step to make the unfit expert. ‘As the sense of want and emptiness appearest Thou and no other—Thou art close by; Lord, I take refuge (*saranagati*) in Thee, I take refuge in Thee!’

“The Name and the Named are identical; for He Himself appears as the Name. The sound (*Aksara*, the *pranava Om*) is indeed God’s own guise. When the Name one repeats becomes alive, it is as when a seed is sown the tree grows out of it. If the Name that appeals most to any particular person is constantly repeated, one arrives at the realization that all names are His names, all forms His forms. Furthermore, that He is without name and form will also by and by come to light.

“*Karma* accumulated for ages and ages, sins and desires are wiped out by God’s sacred Name. Just as lighting a lamp illumines a cave that has been in darkness for centuries, even so

the obscurity of numberless births is annihilated by the power of a divine Name.

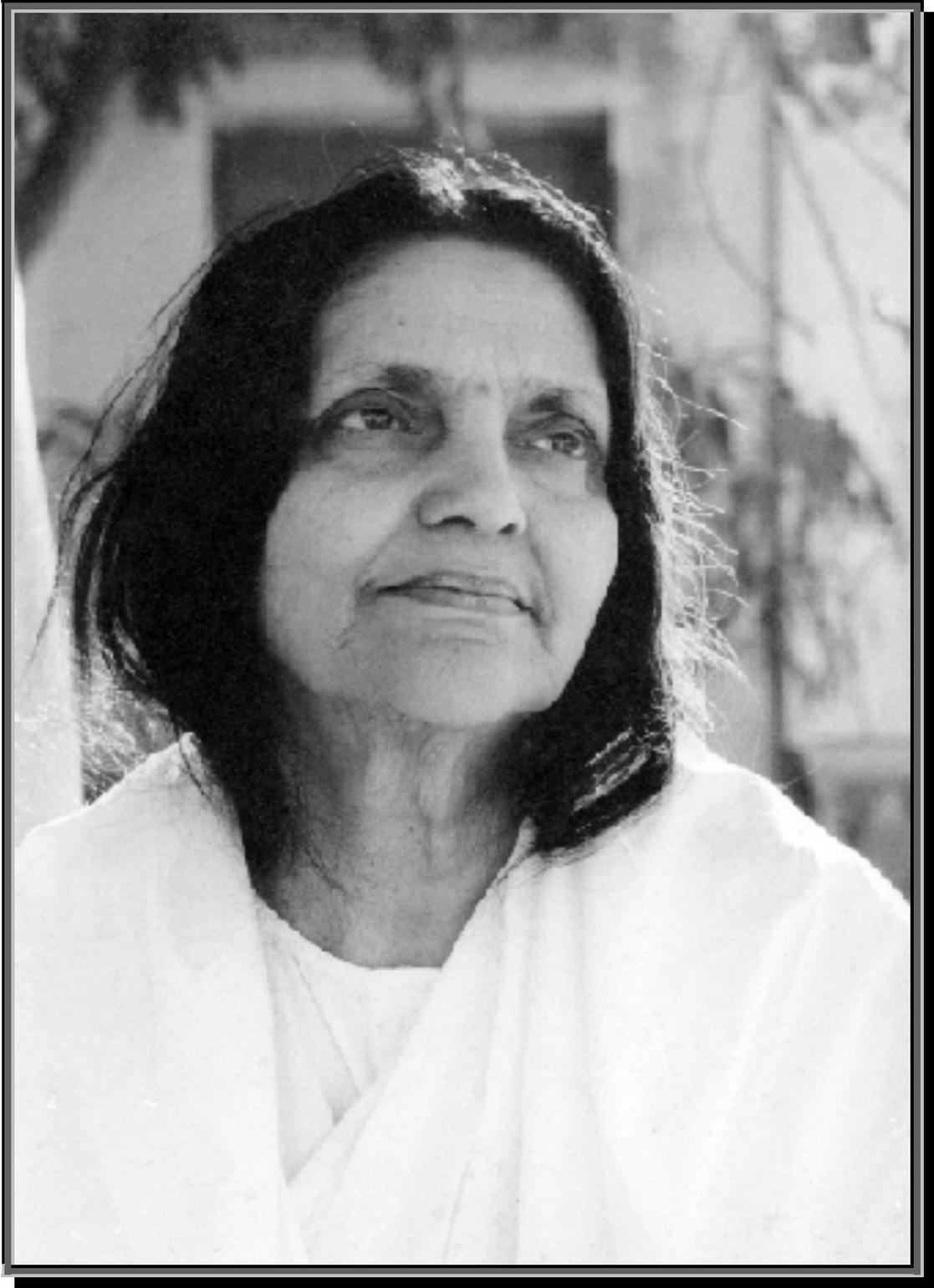
“The moment that has passed does not return. Time must be used well. Only when spent in the effort to know ‘Who am I?’ has it been used well.”¹⁰

Sri Ramana recommended, as did Sri Anandamayi Ma, study of the Ribhu Gita, a traditional text of Advaita. It simply says:

“The syllable ‘Om’ is the Self.” (*Ribhu Gita 10:22*)



¹⁰ Excerpts from Sri Anandamayi Ma, *Ananda Varta* publications.



SRI ANANDAMAYI MA



**LET ME, THY PREY, SURRENDER UNTO THEE AND
BE CONSUMED, AND SO HAVE PEACE,
OH ARUNACHALA!
I CAME TO FEED ON THEE, BUT THOU HAST FED ON
ME; NOW THERE IS PEACE,
OH ARUNACHALA!**

(Five Hymns to Arunachala - #28)



SURRENDER

PART 3

**"WITHDRAW WITHIN INTO THE
SHELTER OF ONENESS WITH ME."**

Bhagavad Gita 18:66

This third part of the series on '*Saranagati*' will attempt to reveal "How to cultivate surrender". In addition to bringing forth the practical aspects of spiritual practice (*sadhana*) taught by Sri Ramana Maharshi, we will seek guidance from the profound depths of cherished wisdom brought forth by Paramahansa Yogananda.

Many have mistakenly conjectured that the Maharshi was unlike all other Spiritual Masters, in that he did not have a teaching. The only adequate response to this contrived falsehood should come from the Maharshi himself. In a documented lecture given by Sri Ganeshan, the grandson of Chinna Swami (Bhagavan's brother) and a living direct disciple of Bhagavan, the following actual account was related.

In the early evening of April 14, 1950 (the very day of Bhagavan's Mahasamadhi – the day of physical absorption in Arunachala), all of the disciples and devotees were assembled around the room where Bhagavan lay virtually motionless in the final throws of his body's endurance with terminal cancer. Though all were in a state of protracted grief, they still sought for a final word of guidance from Bhagavan. None dared approach, nor were permitted to do so, for the Maharshi's body had begun its final struggle for breath. Amongst the tears and heartbreak of the devoted, the thought arose that if anyone could approach Bhagavan at this final hour prior to the seeming demise of his body, it would be Sri Muruganar. They therefore beseeched Sri Muruganar to request Bhagavan to utter a "final word", by which they could be guided throughout the years to come. He did so, and as the Maharshi's still radiant eyes and beatific smile fell on him, Bhagavan spoke:

"Take my teaching and put it into practice!"

As yogis, those who seek "union" with the Divine, we are given by the Masters of Yoga a means of yogic practice. In the most traditional sense, Sri Ramana Maharshi, like all of the *Jagat Gurus* (world teachers), guides us along the time-honored means of practice towards the highest attainment.

In Part 2 of this series Bhagavan replies to a devotees (and our) question: “What is self-surrender?” His answer was “*purna*” (perfection) in that the definition is couched in terms of the method of attainment.

“It is the same as mind-control. The ego submits when it recognizes the higher authority of the Atman. This is the beginning of surrender... ¹¹ “Complete surrender to God means giving up all thoughts and concentrating the mind on Him. If we can concentrate on Him, other thoughts disappear. If *mano-vak-kaya karmas*, i.e., the actions of the mind, speech and body, are merged with God, all the burdens of our life will be on Him.” ¹²

Bhagavan went on to quote, as he often did as a means of guidance, from the Bhagavad Gita. Let us now return to this very “Song of God”, seeking further clarification regarding the means by which we can cultivate “surrender”.

In Paramahansa Yogananda’s wonderful commentary *The Bhagavad Gita - God talks with Arjuna*, we find a deep and mystical revelation that points us towards the direction by which a beginning foundation of “*saranagati / saranam*” can be laid. In further discussion of Gita 18:66 we are shown:

“*Mam ekam saranam vraja*” to literally mean, “Become (*vraja*) sheltered (*saranam*, 'protected' - from delusion) in oneness (*ekam*) with Me (*mam*).

“Always keep your consciousness in My sheltering Presence”; i.e., “Remember Me alone... Indicating the practice of yoga; the Sanskrit may also be rendered “*Withdraw (vraja)* into the Shelter of oneness with Me.”

¹¹ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, p. 56.

¹² *Letters from Sri Ramanashramam*, Suri Nagamma, p. 225-227.

What needs to be understood and absorbed is the essential "how to", which Sri Krishna, as such a compassionate Lord, never fails to uncover for us. There is another secret "for those who have ears and eyes to hear and see" which tells just "how to", found in the beginning of verse 66.

Sarvadharmam parityajya - which common translation renders for us something that even the most advanced find "too obscure, and thus far beyond normal comprehension." It is mistakenly shown to mean: "Abandon all Dharmas!" Actually, correct comprehension of the verb (the action, "how to" word) *tyaj* is paramount for finding the actual key to the proper 'door to right understanding'. *Tyaj* - means "relinquish all but one!"

So the Lord is actually telling us how to "surrender" to the Sheltering safe harbor of rest in Him:

Sarvadharmam parityajya, Mam ekam saranam vraja - means "Forsaking by relinquishment all other *dharmas* (lesser duties), remember Me alone!"

Paramahansa Yogananda reveals for us the true import and thus the method to begin partial surrender, which is deemed to be the highest achievement of human spiritual endeavor; the very heraldry of Shraddha (faith) – which the Maharshi has declared to be the "Cause of self-Realization."

"A prosaic interpretation of the counsel unequivocally advises the deeply motivated Arjuna, and all true renunciants, to relinquish [attachment to, not necessarily the engagement in] all worldly duties entirely in order to be single-pointedly with God. "O Arjuna, forsake all lesser duties and fulfill the highest duty; find your lost home, your eternal shelter, in Me! Remember, no duties can be performed by you without powers borrowed from Me, for I am the Maker and Sustainer of your life. More important than your engagement with other duties

is your engagement with Me; because at any time I can recall you from this earth, canceling all your duties and actions.¹³

In Sanskrit, the word “*dharma*”, derived from the root verb *dhri*, means “to hold, to put on”, also literally as an imperative act, “to wear!” Here we see the correlation with the command of Jesus in the Gospels: “Put on the armor of Rightness... wear the robe of Salvation!”

“Dharma, therefore, is the cosmic law that runs the mechanism of the universe; and after accomplishing the primary God-uniting *yoga dharma* (religious duties), man should perform secondarily his duties to the cosmic laws of nature. One should observe rational conduct in all ways!¹⁴

The Masters and scriptures of a “Life in the Spirit” confirm; the beginning of partial surrender essentially engages man in the performance of virtuous *dharma*. We should begin our partial surrender by adhering to the *upadesha* (spiritual teaching) of Devaraj Narada, who declared in His *Bhakti Sutras*: “Seek *satsanga* and abandon (relinquish) *dussanga*.” The central point surrounding an understanding of “surrender” as having the dual role of maintaining an inwardly God-pointed consciousness with an ongoing movement (a seeking) of *satsanga* does not present a contradiction in terms of direction.

Sri Ramana defined the true meaning of “*satsanga*” to Srimat T.R. Kanakammal, one of the few remaining direct disciples of the Maharshi. She has related that Bhagavan declared the Sanskrit word “*sat*” to mean “Being”, and the word “*sanga*” to mean “melt”. Thus to seek *satsanga* is conscious movement within by which we melt into Being! Therefore, by implication, the meaning of *dussanga* is to melt through conscious external movement into non-Being (devoid of Godliness). This is brought about by habitually seeking *adharmic*

¹³ *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks with Arjuna*, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India 2002.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

(non-virtuous) pleasures that destroy intelligent discrimination. The end result of one such as this is clearly described by Sri Krishna in Gita 2:63: “*Buddhinasat pranasyati* – From destruction of discrimination, one is lost.”

The “melting within” referred to by Bhagavan is a protracted process of *sadhana tapa*, a spiritual process of purification. It is not a whimsical imaginative fantasy of drifting within to a so-called instant blissful awareness of “oneness” with the Self. Bhagavan’s use of the word “Being” undeniably refers to *Jnana* (direct Knowledge of the Self), the *Vijnana Vedanta* of the *Kaivalya Upanishad*, direct experience of full awareness of Divinity within. The process of mind control (*tapas*) that induces the melting of impurities is a protracted meditative process of concentration, often empowered by contemplation (thinking of the Lord) or invocation through remembrance (*japa*) of God, which at the final stages culminates with *vichara* (reflection, enquiry). In direct reference to this truth, Bhagavan related how this is achieved:

“Know that the wondrous *jnana vichara* is only for those who have attained purity of mind by softening and melting within. Without this softening and melting away of the mind, brought about by thinking of the feet of the Lord, the attachment to the “I” that adheres to the body will not cease to be.”¹⁵

For many, this guidance from the Maharshi inspires determination to forge ahead with a conviction that the end is glorious, even close. For many more, these words fall upon us as more “tall talk”, being far beyond comprehension, much less as a means of guidance with practical application. There is, however, some consolation afforded to us in the undeniable fact that even if Bhagavan were to convey his teaching to us face-to-face, as he did to

¹⁵ *Padamalai, Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi Recorded by Muruganar, Avadhuta Foundation 2004, p. 186. (Reference to Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham, vol. 7, verse 340).*

many, there would still be “mountains to move” through personal effort before we could lay aside our tools of *sadhana*.¹⁶

This fact was observed and documented by a disciple of Bhagavan who remained under his direct guidance for 14 years:

“To beginners as well as advanced *sadhakas* alike, this mind control appears to be a formidable feat, yet the Master encourages them to go ahead and practise – at all events to make a beginning. He constantly dings into us the inspiring notion that we are already Self-realised and that, if we are not aware of it, the obstruction to that awareness should be removed by investigation – *vichara* – which is as logical as it is simple.

“To hear it direct from him, this “Self-knowledge”, rather the way to Self-knowledge, is “the easiest thing there is” (*Atma Vidya*); but, judging from the questions constantly asked of him, and later of his disciples, there appears to be the need for much spade work before its central idea takes a firm hold on the seeker. The Master’s obvious meaning seems to be that, even apart from the psychological efficacy of the *vichara* proper, preoccupying the mind with a single theme to the exclusion of all others, if doggedly practiced, will not fail to produce beneficial results. It will tend to reduce the oscillations of the thinking processes, and thus render the mind amenable to concentration on the supremely important work which is to follow, which by itself is a splendid achievement. Finding the answer to the query “Who am I?” is not the immediate burden of the practice in the beginning. Stability and fixity of the restless, mercurial mind is the first aim, and this can be achieved by constant practice and by frequently pulling oneself back to the subject of the meditation whenever the mind strays away. When the mind has attained an appreciable degree of concentration, which means of depth, it will be time to think of the answer. Some *sadhakas* are fortunate enough to begin with a mind already accustomed to concentration, either

¹⁶ *Sadhana* is derived from the Sanskrit root “*sadhan*”, which means “instruments or tools”. *Sadha-na* therefore means the methods by which the tools are employed to achieve the desired goal.

“naturally”, or by training, or through intense fervor, so that they are able to go straight to the application of the *vichara*, and thus make a more or less rapid progress, according to the intensity of their determination, without much strain. For the Master tells us that mental calmness, that is, controlled mind, is essential for a successful meditation.”¹⁷

Even knowing this, and even being graced with daily having the cherished gaze of the Maharshi rest upon you, still one succumbs to human frailty and a heart that cries out:

Devotee: “Surrender is impossible.”

Maharshi: “Yes. Complete surrender is impossible in the beginning. Partial surrender is certainly possible for all. In course of time that will lead to complete surrender. Well, if surrender is impossible, what can be done? There is no peace of mind. You are helpless to bring it about. It can be done only by surrender.”

D.: “Partial surrender - well - can it undo destiny?”

M.: “Oh, yes! It can.”

D.: “Is not destiny due to past karma?”

M.: “If one is surrendered to God, God will look to it.”

D.: “This being God’s dispensation, how does God undo it?”

M.: “All are in Him only.”

D.: “How is God to be seen?”

M.: “**Within.** If the mind is turned inward *God* manifests as inner consciousness.”¹⁸

¹⁷ *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Sri Ramanashramam 2003, p.66-67.

¹⁸ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 244.

But alas, to be instructed merely to “turn within”, hardly ever satisfies an aspirant who is engaged in an active practice of meditation. For they know from direct experience that what lies “within” can, and usually does, contain more concentrated forms of a great danger - a powerful and destructive enemy. Lord Krishna warns Arjuna of this great foe to the realization of the Self in the beginning chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Arjuna said: “By what is a man impelled to commit evil, *Varshneya* [an epithet of Lord Krishna], seemingly against his own will, as if urged thereunto by force?” The Holy Lord said, “It is desire, it is anger, that’s born of the *rajo-guna*: of great craving, and of great sin; know that to be the enemy...The senses, mind and intellect are said to here be its abode...thus restraining the self (here the use of ‘*atman*’ denotes the mind) by the Self, then destroy that enemy so hard to conquer: desire.”¹⁹

In the closing chapters of the *Gita* the Lord clearly declares the means by which we can “put His teaching into practice.” Paramahansa Yogananda again helps to metaphysically clarify for us this oft-quoted sixty-sixth stanza of Chapter 18, which although is deemed by the most learned scholars as the quintessential heart of the entire *Gita*, is paradoxically the stanza that receives the most varied and diversified interpretation!

Sri Krishna says: “O Arjuna, be a real renunciant! By the practice of yoga meditation withdraw (*vraja*) your mind, intelligence, life force, and heart from the clutches of the ego. From the physical sensations of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and from the objects of sense pleasures! Forsake all duties toward them! Be a yogi by uniting yourself to My blessed presence (*mam ekam saranam*) in your soul. Then I will save you; by nonperformance of the lesser duties to the senses under the influence of delusion, you will automatically find yourself free from all sinful troubles. If you remain in ecstasy with Me,

¹⁹ *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 3, sections of verses 36-43.

fulfilling all divine duties as directed by Me, forsaking all ego-instigated duties, you will be liberated.”

“The ordinary man’s mind is usually identified with external possessions and sense pleasures connected with the surface of the body. Therefore, physical consciousness is sustained by the mind, intelligence, and life force operating through the lower (rajasic and tamasic) centers of awareness. Thus, the searchlights of intelligence, mind, and life energy continually operate externally, feeding the nervous system and sustaining and revealing the sense pleasures and physical consciousness.”²⁰

The yogi who persists in withdrawing awareness within through meditation (*aksara japa*, repetition of the sound of the Name of God), or *atma vichara* (reflection upon from ‘Whence we came’) effectively reverses the searchlights of intelligence, mind, and life force inward toward the sheltering presence of the object of meditation – God! This is a protracted process, for through it the mercurial mind is first rendered steady, then ultimately still. For it is in stillness that man approaches the altar of the Spirit!

Sri Ramana Maharshi assented in full agreement with this understanding of the *Gita*’s “teaching put into practice”. With his lustrous gaze, communicating to us the very embodiment of divine stillness, and his voice emerging from pure consciousness, he declared:

“IN THE *BHAGAVAD GITA* IT IS SAID THAT IT IS THE NATURE OF THE MIND TO WANDER. ONE MUST BRING ONE’S THOUGHTS TO BEAR ON GOD. BY LONG PRACTICE THE MIND IS CONTROLLED AND MADE STEADY.”²¹

²⁰ *The Bhagavad Gita, God Talks with Arjuna*, Sri Paramahansa Yogananda. Yogoda Satsanga Society of India 2002.

²¹ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, recorded by Sri Munagala Venkataramiah, Sri Ramanashramam 2006, Talk 91 p. 89.



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