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From the very beginning, as far back as I can remember, when I was in my crib, a little man with a grey beard, white hair, about two feet tall, would appear before me at the other end of the crib, and speak gibberish to me. Of course, being a child, I didn't understand anything he said. I thought this was normal, that everybody had this experience.

When I was about five or six years old, I told my parents about it. They thought I was playing games. I told my friends and they laughed at me. So I stopped saying anything about it. The visitations stopped when I was about seven. My father died and all of a sudden the little man stopped coming to me.

I asked my mother, "What am I doing here? I don't belong here." I didn't understand what I was saying but I felt that I was out of place. My mother thought I was crazy and so did a lot of other people. She took me to a doctor. The doctor told her that it would go away.

Something very interesting happened. Whenever I wanted anything, a candy bar or a toy, I would say God's name three or four times and somebody would bring it to me or it would come from somewhere.

Once, I wanted to play the violin. My mother told me that it would be too hard for me to play, so she wouldn't buy me one. I said, "God, God, God," and a few hours later my uncle appeared, whom I hadn't seen for about five years. He had thought I needed a violin and brought me one. This went on and on while I was going to school. When I was at school, I never really fitted in because I was always daydreaming. I never used to study. When we had a test I would say, "God, God, God," and the answers would come.

When I was fourteen, a strange phenomenon occurred. I was in my junior high school class. There were about 35 children. The teacher's name was Mrs. Riley. She weighed about 300 pounds, and when she got angry she used to jump up and down. So, of course, we used to get her angry [laughter]. I would borrow a pin from a girl. There was a hinge in the back of the seat. I would stick the bobby pin in the hinge and twang it, and she would go crazy. She didn't know where the noise was coming from and she'd jump up and down — a very interesting phenomenon [laughter].

Anyway, it was the end of term and we were taking our final test. It was mathematics. I never studied it, so I didn't know anything. I said, "God, God, God." Instead of the answers coming, the room filled with light, a thousand times more brilliant than the sun. It was like an atomic bomb but it was not a burning light. It was a beautiful, bright, shining, warm glow. Just thinking of it now makes me stop and wonder.

The whole room, everybody, everything was immersed in light. All the children seemed to be myriad particles of light. I found myself melting into radiant being, into consciousness. I merged into consciousness. It was not an out-of-body experience. This was completely different. I realized that I was not my body. What appeared to be my body was not real.

I went beyond the light into pure, radiant consciousness. I became omnipresent. My individuality merged into pure absolute bliss. I expanded. I became the universe. The feeling is indescribable. It was total bliss, total joy.

The next thing I remembered was the teacher shaking me. All the students had gone. I was the only one left in the class. I returned to human consciousness. That feeling has never left me.

Q: What score did you get on the math test? [Laughter]

R: [Laughs] Zero. I didn't take it.

When I was about fourteen, I went to the library to do a book report. I passed the philosophy section and saw a book on yoga masters. I didn't even know what that meant at the time. I opened a book "Who am I?", by Ramana Maharshi and there was a picture of Ramana Maharshi. My hair stood on end, because it was the same person who appeared to me when I was a baby in my crib!

Since then I have never been the same. I went back to school and made believe I was normal, whatever that is.

Joel Goldsmith was actually my first teacher. He was a Christian mystic who has written several books on mysticism. He explained to me what was going on within, my feelings, because I used to think I was crazy. Joel Goldsmith told me about Paramahansa Yogananda.

I went to the Self-Realization Fellowship in Encinitas to see Yogananda. I was initiated and was going to become a monk, but after Yogananda talked to me, he said, "Robert, you don't belong here. You've got your own path. Go to India."

So I did. Through the grace of Paramahansa Yogananda I went to Sri Ramanasramam. It was with Sri Ramana that my eyes were opened to the meaning of my experience. I confirmed my feelings. Ever since I was born, I had never believed I was a body.

Q: When you first saw Ramana Maharshi, did he remind you of the person you had communication with as a baby?

R: Definitely, yes.

Q: Did you speak of this later with him?

R: No, I never did. We just smiled at each other. I had some personal conversation with him, but even at the end of 1947 he was sick. He couldn't walk very well — he had a cane — and had to be assisted by his devotees.

Q: Ramana Maharshi was a doer.

R: On the contrary, Ramana Maharshi didn't do anything himself.

Q: Yet things happened.

R: He denied he had anything to do with it.

Q: He can deny all he wants, but other people had the experience of him doing things.

R: They believed things happened because of him. It was their belief that made it happen. A sage does nothing purposely, yet all kinds of things can happen around him.'

Q: If one has strong faith in these teachings, then nothing can stop Self-realization, right?

R: It is not that simple. It has to do with God's grace, which is always available. You awaken into that grace. You can't pinpoint what leads to Self-realization.

Q: Are you a student of Nisargadatta Maharaj?

R: I wasn't a student of his, but I was with him for a while.

Q: Was that before you were with Ramana Maharshi?

R: No. Many years later, I spent six months with him.

Q: What kept you there for six months?

R: I was interested in watching his actions. I was there when Ramesh Balsekar was his interpreter.

Q: What was your conclusion after watching him?

R: My conclusion is that all is well, and everything is unfolding as it should.

Q: When seekers came to Ramana with difficulties in their lives, was he able to help them?

R: He never helped anybody voluntarily. He simply sat on his couch and everybody did what they wanted to do. He asked them a couple of questions now and again, and kept silent most of the time.

When people came to him with all kinds of problems, he used to look at his attendant and say, "They come to me to help them with their problems. To whom should I go?"

Q: I am confused.

R: He was not the doer! How could he help people with problems? He was not a psychologist.

"Devotee: Is not the Self the witness only (sakshimatra)?

Maharshi: 'Witness' is applicable when there is an object to be seen. Then it is duality. The Truth lies beyond both. In the mantra, sakshi cheta kevalo nirgunascha, the word sakshi must be understood as sannidhi (presence), without which there could be nothing. See how the sun is necessary for daily activities. He does not however form part of the world actions; yet they cannot take place without the sun. He is the witness of the activities. So it is with the Self."

Q: I know someone who is not a doer. Some one came to him with a physical problem. This person went up and did something to the other's body, and that person was helped.

R: By Ramana's presence people were helped. Ramana was silent most of the time. People did all kinds of things in the silence. Just by sitting in his presence, all their troubles vanished.

Q: In the presence of someone like that, you seem to feel something...

R: You are feeling your real Self, your own bliss and happiness. That is beyond words.

Q: I have different feelings in the presence of different teachers.

R: That is confusion. You have never changed. The whole idea is to get the feeling to go deep within yourself. A real sage gives you the feeling you want to dive deep within yourself, deeper than you have ever gone before.

Q: Could you talk about the importance of a teacher for Self-realization, and how the relationship between teacher and student works?

R: The teacher is really yourself. You have created a teacher to wake you up. The teacher would not be here if you were not dreaming about the teacher. You have created a teacher out of your mind in order to awaken, to see that there is no teacher, no world — nothing. You have done this all by yourself. Congratulations!

This is your dream. You have a teacher in front of you, explaining all these things to you, saying that you have to awaken sooner or later. If you go further, you will see, in truth, that you are already awake. Then all the rest will disappear.

While this is going on, there is a relationship between the student and the teachings. You are playing a game you created yourself. You create a teacher to wake you up, but you are already awake and do not know it. A teacher gives you teachings, gives you grace, and lets you understand that you are already awake and in peace. In return, you take care of the teacher. It is a reciprocal game. It is your game, it is your dream. Therefore, awaken now and be free.

I was at Sri Ramanasramam during the last three years of Bhagavan Ramana's life. Through his grace I was able to confirm and expand my own experience. Subsequent to my years with Bhagavan, and other masters in India [over the next 17 years], I have traveled, moving frequently, avoiding any notoriety. A few devotees gathered around me at various places, but I have been able to avoid crowds of seekers.

When I was in Benares, I went to see a jnani no one had heard of, named Swami Brahmananda. He was called "the Staff of God". He was about 90 years old and had three disciples who had been with him for about 50 years. I was invited to sit by him. I think I was the first Westerner to get permission to stay with him. So I sat with him for a few days, listening to him say nothing. He was mostly silent.

On the third day that I was there, he announced to his disciples that his body was in pain, that it was arthritic, but that he still had work to finish on this plane. He said he was going to leave his body the next day at 3 pm and take on the body of a younger person. He said that someone would slip on the street and crack his head. "I will take up that body," he said. I listened as I usually do, and we couldn't wait for the morrow to come [laughter]. Nobody cared that he was going to die. We wanted to see if he could do what he said [laughter].

At 3 pm the next day, he was sitting in the lotus posture, he stiffened, and he did die! I felt for a pulse but there was none. I pinched him. Nothing happened. His body was an empty shell. We fooled around with his body for about a half hour to see if we could bring him back to life. Nothing.

We heard a commotion outside. Sure enough, a young man had slipped on the street — it was raining — and hit his head. A crowd had gathered and a doctor was there. He was pronounced dead. All of a sudden, the young man got up and ran into the forest. No one ever heard of him again.

Many times I have visions where I am walking with Ramana Maharshi along the Ganga. We discuss simple things like the weather. A vision is not a dream. A vision is an actual experience in the phenomenal world. Anything is possible. Never believe that something is impossible. It limits you. Even if you haven't experienced it yourself, have faith that within you lies infinite possibilities.

My body has exhibited symptoms of Parkinson's disease for the past few years and it has, therefore, been forced to settle in one location to receive the appropriate care. I still wish to avoid crowds of seekers. I prefer to work with a small number of dedicated devotees. I do not write books or publish anything. Nonetheless, some of the Satsangs which I hold weekly have been recorded and transcribed. Thank you again for your enquiry. My blessings to you and all at the ashram.

Excerpts from Satsang transcripts:

The Highest Teaching

The highest teaching in the world is Silence. There is nothing higher than this.

A devotee who sits with a sage purifies his mind just by being with the sage. The mind automatically becomes purified. No words exchanged, no words said. Silence is the ultimate reality. Everything exists in this world through Silence.

True silence really means going deep within yourself to that place where nothing is happening, where you transcend time and space. You go into a brand new dimension of nothingness. That's where all the power is. That's your real home. That's where you really belong, in deep Silence where there is no good and bad, no one trying to achieve anything. Just being, pure being.

The only freedom you'll ever have is when you go deep into the Silence and you transcend, transmute the universe, your body and your affairs.

Boundless Space

It is when you begin to feel in your heart that you are boundless space that something begins to happen. As you feel yourself as boundless space, all your stuff begins to drop away. Yet you do not affirm to yourself that you are boundless space. You merely observe, you watch, you become the witness. You look out at the world and you see that the trees, the mountains, the planets, are all hanging in space. And you begin to consider that your body, what appears to be your body, is like the trees, and the moon, and the sun. It seems to be a thing of itself, and it is also hanging in boundless space.

Because you are able to observe this and see this and feel this, the realization will come to you that you must be this boundless space, which your body and your mind and the rest of the things of this world are attached to.

As you begin to consider this, the mind becomes quieter and quieter and quieter, until the day comes when it falls away completely. Then you become boundless space. And yet you appear to be a body also. This is a paradox. This is why it's better to sit in the silence and not talk at all.

It's All A Dream

You are real. What you appear to be is false. Identify with the real, not with the false. Do not accept anything you see as reality. The only freedom you've got is to turn within. One day you will awaken from this dream, for this is also a dream, and you will be free.

There is no such thing as birth, and there is no such thing as death. Nobody is born, no one dies, and no one prevails in between. Nothing that appears exists. Only the Self exists. All this is the Self, and "I am That".

You are absolute reality, ultimate oneness. You are consciousness, emptiness, sat-chit-ananda. That is your true nature. Why not abide in it and be free?

Empty your mind. Become still, and everything will happen of its own accord. There is really nothing you have to do. Just be still. "Be still and know that I am God." I am as the Self! Accept that and be free.

Why do you think of other things? Why concern yourself with the body? Or your mind? Or the world? Quit trying to solve problems. This doesn't mean that you are going to do nothing. Your body is going to perform the acts it came here to do. If you are meant to be an accountant, you are going to be an accountant. If you are meant to be a preacher, you'll be a preacher. If you are meant to be a homeless person, you will be a homeless person. You have absolutely nothing to do with it.

Allow your mind to say and think the way it will, only don't identify with it. Allow your body to do what it must, but do not react to it. Everything will happen of its own accord. When you allow your mind to think of its own accord, the thoughts begin to dissipate, and soon you have empty mind. Empty mind is consciousness, realization.

As soon as you begin to identify with reality, with consciousness, all fear leaves you, all doubt leaves you, all false thinking leaves you, and you become free.

Only One Self

There is only one Self. What you feel toward somebody else, you are feeling toward yourself. What you do to anybody else you are doing to yourself. If you help somebody else, you are helping yourself, and if you hurt somebody else, you are hurting yourself.

What your body does is karmic. It has nothing to do with you. When you realize, "I am not the body, I am not the mind, and I am not the doer," then you are safe. But as long as you think you are doing something kind for somebody, then you want a reward, you want recognition. But when you know there is only one Self, you are automatically kind to everybody. Virtue is its own reward.

Q: So Self-realization is the erasing of me as a separate entity?

R: Yes, exactly. It's also the erasing of the idea, "I'm self-realized." There is only Silence. It's beyond explanation. It's a mystery. The finite can never comprehend the infinite. There are no words to explain it. All is well. Consciousness is bliss, love — not as we know it, but a million times stronger. And that's our real nature. Be your Self.

"So long as there is vibhakti, there must be bhakti. So long as there is viyoga, there must be yoga. So long as there is duality, there must be God and devotee. Similarly also in vichara. So long as there is vichara, there is duality too.

But merging into the Source there is unity only. So it is with bhakti too. Realizing the God of devotion, there will be unity only. God too is thought of in and by the Self. So God is identical with the Self. If one is told to have bhakti for God and he does so straight away, it is all right. But there is another kind of man who turns round and says, 'There are two, I and God. Before knowing the far off God, let me know the more immediate and intimate 'I'. For him the vichara marga has to be taught. There is in fact no difference between bhakti and vichara."

