

Paul Brunton and Ramana Maharishi on the 'Self' and Ego

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Excerpts from 'Conscious Immortality' and from the Notebooks of Paul Brunton

Ramana Maharshi:

"The universe does not exist apart from Self. All 'evolution' of external objects is spun out from the Self and disappear into It. Where does the world disappear when we enter into deep sleep? Then we exist but the world no longer exists. Self is hence the substratum which gives reality to the universe. If our Self did not exist, there would be no universe for us. The Reality is in the Self, therefore, not in the universe. Realization of this comes to the Realized person."

"This Self is the screen; the universe and its events are the cinema pictures shown thereon. The screen does not change, but the pictures are transient and changing."

In the beginning of his notebook in which he recorded the Maharishi's words, Paul Brunton wrote the following note:

"To bring Maharishi's terminology into line with my own thought, interpret his 'Self' by 'Mind' and his admonition to 'Look Within' as 'Look within the Mind' and NOT 'Look within the body' thus raising it from the mystical to the philosophical."

Here we see PB working to adapt the Maharishi's presentation of the eternal truth (known in Hinduism as 'Santana Dharma') to avoid confusion and to make it more understandable and accessible to Westerners.

In this regard, one day Maharishi said to PB:

"You are saying the same thing in your books that I say, only you do it in a modern way."

In the Notebooks we find PB's presentation of these teachings:

"It is not the five senses which know the world outside since they are only instruments which the mind uses. It is not even the intellect, since that merely reproduces the image formed out of the total sense reports. They are not capable of functioning by themselves. It is the principle of Consciousness, which is behind both, and for which they are simply agents, that really makes awareness of the world at all possible. It is like the sun, which lights up the existence of all things."

"It is not possible for sincere, scrupulous thinking to admit, and never possible to prove, the existence of a world outside of, and separate from, its consciousness. The faith by which we all conventionally grant such existence is mere superstition."

"The way out is constantly to remember to think and to affirm that the world and all one sees and experiences in it has no other substance than Mind and gets its brief appearance of reality from Mind. When this is thoroughly understood and applied its truth will one day stay permanently with him."

Back to Maharishi:

“Everything is really an idea to you. Nothing appears to you except through the mind and as its idea.”

“Who sees stones? They are perceived by your senses which in turn are actuated by your mind. So they are in your mind. Whose mind, is it? If the self is found, this question would not arise. The self is more intimate than objects. Find the subject and the objects will take care of themselves.”

More from Ramana on the Self (Mind for PB) and on the death experience:

Ramana:

“The Self is the Electricity, Dynamo, the mind is the contact with the switch-board, while the body is the lamp and when the karma hour comes to give death, the mind switches off the current and withdraws the light-life from the body. Both mind and vitality are manifestations of the Supreme Life Force, the Self.”

The sages teach that the moment for the end of life is pre-determined. For us this moment comes upon us as unexpected if we are unprepared, but because the Sage is prepared, he or she anticipates and is aware of when this will occur, and experiences it calmly.

PB:

“All humans pass through the portal of death, but which of them pass through it ‘knowingly’, consciously, and calmly.”

Ramana was asked:

“Do memory, sleep and death affect the I?” Answer “This is a confusion due to the non-differentiation between the false and the real I. These three attributes and modes pertain to the false ego.”

And here PB describes the death experience of Ramana and Ramakrishna:

“What sort of a death experience is he likely to have? What if he dies, as Ramana Maharshi died, as Ramakrishna died, as heroes of the Spirit--some anonymous and obscure, others famous--known to this author died, of that dreadful and contemporary malady, cancer? I can only tell what I have seen and heard when present during the last days as privileged co-sharer of the unbelievable atmosphere. To each there came a vision, a light seen, first far off, later all around; first a pinpoint, later a ray, then a wide shaft, lastly filling the whole room. And with the Light came peace; it came as an accompaniment to the cancer’s pain, a compensation that as it grew made the peace grow and gave detachment, until to the amazement of doctors, nurses, family, the triumphant words were uttered before the final act, Spirit’s victory over matter proclaimed. This is not to say that it makes no difference whether one dies quietly in sleep through nothing worse than age, or whether one dies through cancer, that peace and pain are equally acceptable to the emotions of an illumined man...”

At the moment of Ramana’s death a bright star was seen to be streaking in the sky.

Ramana:

“You are eternal... Until this truth is realized there will always be this grief (when someone dies) due to wrong identification. Birth and death and rebirth should only make you investigate the question and find out that there are no births or rebirths, they relate to the body and not to the self.”

Insights about the Ego from Ramana and PB

One of the most difficult questions in spiritual philosophy is the question of the ego – the everyday personality that we live inside of and which we allow to define and limit us so that we continue to live in the dark. Here Ramana and PB provide us with clear guidance about the ego and its relationship to the Self and also help us to perceive that we do not need to and cannot get rid of our egos. The idea that we need to destroy the ego is a very common misunderstanding in spiritual teachings and both PB and Ramana correct this misunderstanding by instructing us that what we need to get rid of is ‘egoism’ and of our attachment to the ego. Once we put the ego in a correct relationship to the Self, it remains but can now serve a divine purpose – even for one who is a Jnani or Jivanmukta (liberated while alive) as was Ramana, and as we believe, PB later in his life.

Ramana:

"Self can be without ego, but the ego cannot be without the Self. Egos are like bubbles in the ocean."

"The ego appears and disappears; it is transitory whereas the real Self always abides permanently.... The I AM is the ocean and the individual egos are bubbles in it. Bubbles pass away."

PB:

"The highest goal of the quest is not illumination gained by destruction of the ego but rather by perfection of the ego. It is the function of egoism, which is to be destroyed, not that which functions. The ego's rulership is to go, not the ego itself."

"The ego is not really killed--how without body and intellect, emotion and will, could anyone act in this world?--but the centre of being is moved out of it to the Overself."

"The ego self is the creature born out of man's own doing and thinking, slowly changing, and growing. The Overself is the image of God, perfect, finished, and changeless. What he has to do, if he is to fulfil himself, is to let the one shine through the other."

Back to Ramana:

"A Jnani (one who follows the path of Knowledge) crushes the ego at its source. It rises up again and again, for him too as for the ignorant, impelled by nature, i.e. prarabdha karma (the karma that produces the current body). Both in the ignorant and the Jnani the ego sprouts up but with a difference: the former's ego when it rises up is quite ignorant of its source or is not aware of its deep sleep in the dream and wakeful states, whereas the Jnani when his ego rises up, enjoys his transcendental experience along with his ego, keeping his lakshya (objective or focus) always on its source. His ego is not dangerous, it is only the ash skeleton of a burnt rope, and although it possesses a form it is subdued. By constantly keeping our lakshya on our source our ego is dissolved."

Ramana is clear, the Sage or Jnani has an ego. The difference is in the relationship of the ego to the Self. As PB says, he has 'to let one shine through the other' and when this happens the Jnani "enjoys his transcendental experience along with his ego" (Ramana).

We end our post for today with PB's description of the Jnani's (or Jivanmukta's) state of consciousness:

When duality is blended with, and within, unity it is the true jivanmukta realization. The One is then experienced as the Two but known to be really the One. (25-2.123)

The effects of enlightenment include: an imperturbable detachment from outer possessions, rank, honors, and persons; an overwhelming certainty about truth; a carefree, heavenly peace above all disturbances and vicissitudes; an acceptance of the general rightness of the universal situation, with each entity and each event playing its role; and impeccable sincerity which says what it means, means what it says.

Ramana and PB: More on Ego and Self

Ramana and PB have explained that the ego is not destroyed upon realization, rather what changes is the ego's relationship to the self and the disappearance of egoism. Accomplishing this shift is 'easier said than done.' The excerpts below further illustrate the ego's relationship to the Self and also the ego's resistance to change and the difficulties overcoming it.

Ramana was asked:

"How to get rid of egoism?" He replied: "If you see what the ego really is, that is enough to get rid of it. It is the ego itself which makes efforts to get rid of itself, so how can it die? If the ego is to go, then something else must slay it. Will it ever consent to commit suicide? So first realize what is the true nature of the ego and it will go of its own accord."

PB:

“Nothing that his own will can do brings about this displacement of the ego. The divine will must do it for him.”

Let us remember that by ‘slaying the ego’ we are not getting rid of it, but that we are slaying our attachment to it and slaying its illusory perception that it is the real ‘I’.

Ramana was asked:

“What is to be done to kill the ego?” “See for whom the doubts are. Who is the doubter? Who is the thinker? That is the ego, hold it. The other thoughts will die away. The ego is pure. See wherefrom the ego arises. That is pure consciousness.”

PB:

“All your thinking about the ego is necessarily incomplete for it does not include the ego-thought itself. Try and do so and it slips from your hold. Only something that transcends the ego can grasp it.”

Ramana:

“Ego is not an entity independent of the Self in order that it might be created or destroyed by itself. It functions as an instrument of the Self and periodically ceases to function; i.e. it appears and disappears as birth and death.”

PB:

“The ego is not really killed – how without body and intellect, emotion and will, could anyone act in this world? – but the centre of being is moved out of it to the Overself.”

*There is a revised fourth edition of *Conscious Immortality*, first published in 1983. It is a record of conversations and observations made by Paul Brunton and Mungala S. Veskaramiah, compiler of *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* during the second half of the 1930s.