

Bhagavan and the Politics of his Day

The following questions were posed online by Cliff Shack, the administrator of the Facebook 'Teachings of Ramana Maharshi' group:

What was Ramana's attitude towards the totalitarian regimes of his day?

Did he maintain and promote a passive attitude?

Would Ramana advocate resistance or passivity to the emerging New World Order currently being foisted upon humanity today?

Also, did Ramana give Gandhi and Nehru practical advice on dealing with the British Indian occupation? Have his responses been preserved and if so...where?

I will respond to these queries in two separate sections. The first will explain why Bhagavan did not involve himself in politics or encourage others to do so; the second will be specifically about Gandhi and the fight for Independence that was going on during Bhagavan's lifetime.

Bhagavan's apolitical world view

Bhagavan's perspective on the events of the world that were unfolding around him in the first half of the twentieth century came from his abidance in the Self and the consequent knowledge that everything which was occurring was unfolding according to a pre-ordained script. He had no opinions on these scripted events, and no desire to change their course. The classic statement on this topic comes from the note he penned for his mother when she begged him, in 1898, to return to the family home in Madurai. Bhagavan wrote:

The ordainer [God] controls the fate of souls in accordance with their past deeds – their *prarabdha* karma. Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen – try how hard you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to stop it. This is certain. The best course, therefore, is for one to be silent.¹

Ideas such as 'I should do this', or 'this needs to be done', were entirely absent in Bhagavan since he had neither the desire to do anything nor the belief that events needed to be different from what they were. Bhagavan's position was elegantly summarised in a reply he gave to two devotees who, having had a disagreement, came to Bhagavan for a decision on which course of action they should follow. In response to the question, 'As we hold two different opinions, we are enquiring in order to find out what Bhagavan would like best', Bhagavan replied:

¹ *Self Realization*, p. 66.

What I like is to know who I am and to remain as I am with the knowledge that what is to happen will happen and what is not to happen will not happen. Is that not right? Do you now understand what Bhagavan likes best?²

His ‘preference’, if one can use such a word, was to abide in the Self with the secure knowledge that all events in the world were unfolding according to a divine ordinance:

No one can do anything that is opposed to the ordinance of the Supreme Lord who possesses unlimited power and who can do anything. Therefore, to end the illusory anxieties of the mind, which engender an evil discontent, the proper course is to remain under the spell of supreme consciousness, which arises from meditating on the divine feet, with the mischief of the ego subdued.³

Politics is the process by which people group together and engage in discussions or activities that promote their idea of how society should be run or changed. If such programmes were undertaken by people who regarded themselves as individual people with an agenda to fulfill, Bhagavan would regard such activities as a conscious turning away from God in order to pursue a self-centred agenda that ignored His plan and script. Change, according to Bhagavan, is only necessary or possible at the personal level.

Unless a person firmly adheres to the dictum ‘That which deserves to be reformed is my own mind,’ by turning Selfwards and correcting himself, his mind will get defiled more and more by paying attention exclusively to the defects of others.⁴

A desire for political change or action stems from a personal belief that one course of action, or one way of organising society, is somehow better or preferable to another. A natural outgrowth of this is a belief that one’s own ideas and proposals are intrinsically better than others’. Changing society then becomes a process of convincing others – an electorate, people who disagree with you – that your ideas are right whereas theirs are somehow defective. This is how Annamalai Swami described Bhagavan’s attitude to such posturing:

Bhagavan taught that one should reform oneself rather than find fault with others. In practical terms this means that one should find the source of one’s own mind rather than make complaints about other people’s minds and actions. I can remember a typical reply that Bhagavan gave on this subject.

A devotee, who was quite intimate with Bhagavan, asked him, ‘Some of the devotees who live with Bhagavan behave very strangely. They seem to do many things that Bhagavan does not approve of. Why does Bhagavan not correct them?’

² *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, 16th February, 1949.

³ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 1191.

⁴ *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, verse 788.

Bhagavan replied, 'Correcting oneself is correcting the whole world. The sun is simply bright. It does not correct anyone. Because it shines the whole world is full of light. Transforming yourself is a means of giving light to the whole world.'⁵

It follows from this that Self-realisation is the greatest help that one can give to the world. A mind that engages itself in political pursuits enmeshes itself in anxiety, suffering and desire; a mind that has extinguished itself in the Self allows that Self to shine and benefit the whole world:

Question: They say that there are many saints in Tibet who remain in solitude and are still very helpful to the world. How can it be?

Bhagavan: It can be so. Realisation of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity. Therefore, the saints are said to be helpful, though they remain in forests. But it should not be forgotten that solitude is not in forests only. It can be had even in towns, in the thick of worldly occupations.

Question: It is not necessary that the saints should mix with people and be helpful to them?

Bhagavan: The Self alone is the Reality; the world and the rest of it are not. The realised being does not see the world as different from himself.

Question: Thus then, the saint's realisation leads to the uplift of humanity without the latter being aware of it. Is it so?

Bhagavan: Yes. The help is imperceptible but is still there. A saint helps the whole of humanity, unknown to the latter.

Question: Would it not be better if he mixed with others?

Bhagavan: There are no others to mix with. The Self is the one and only Reality.⁶

When the 'I' rises, it separates itself from the Self by identifying with a body. As this process is taking place it simultaneously projects an illusory world that it lives in and interacts with. This world may appear to be populated by suffering people, but once forgetfulness of the Self has set in, there is no knowledge that the suffering one sees and experiences is a part of an illusory projection. The radical and definitive way to end self-projected suffering is to extinguish the self that projects it. The dreamer can choose to organise his dream and make it a better place for dream people to live, or he can wake up. If he elects to wake up and succeeds, he discovers that the dream people and their problems no longer need his intervention, his service or his politics.

Another visitor, who said that he was from Sri Aurobindo's Ashram, asked Bhagavan: 'But we see pain in the world. A man is hungry. It is a physical reality. It is very real to him. Are we to call it a dream and remain unmoved by his pain?'

⁵ *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, p. 108.

⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 20.

Bhagavan: From the point of view of *jnana* or the reality, the pain you speak of is certainly a dream, as is the world of which the pain is an infinitesimal part. In the dream also you yourself feel hunger. You see others suffering hunger. You feed yourself and, moved by pity, feed the others that you find suffering from hunger. So long as the dream lasted, all those pains were quite as real as you now think the pain you see in the world to be. It was only when you woke up that you discovered that the pain in the dream was unreal.

However, Bhagavan did not take this to the extreme of saying that people should completely ignore the suffering of those in their immediate vicinity. He encouraged devotees to stay with their families and look after their needs; his ashram gave out free food to *sadhus* and poor people every day; and Bhagavan himself frequently set an example by helping people who were in need. It was not the mitigation of need and suffering that Bhagavan objected to, it was the attitude 'I am the doer; I must perform this act' that he criticised. He said that one should serve others not out of a sense of personal responsibility, but from a feeling that each person is one's own Self. The quotation I have just given continues with Bhagavan saying:

Till you reach the state of *jnana* and thus wake out of this *maya*, you must do social service by relieving suffering whenever you see it. But even then you must do it, as we are told, without *ahamkara*, i.e., without the sense 'I am the doer,' but feeling. 'I am the Lord's tool'. Similarly one must not be conceited, 'I am helping a man below me. He needs help. I am in a position to help. I am superior and he inferior.' But you must help the man as a means of worshipping God in that man. All such service too is for the Self, not for anybody else. You are not helping anybody else, but only yourself.⁷

Those who feel themselves to be individual people identify with a particular body and feel 'There are things that I can do that need to be done'. These may be personal, such as getting an education or cleaning the kitchen, or they may involve attempts to organise and change society in some way. There is a Sanskrit word, *kartavya*, which denotes the idea that there is a feeling or a conviction that there are certain activities which have to be performed. *Kartavya* arises and co-exists with *kartrutva*, the feeling that one is the performer of the body's actions. Bhagavan taught that both *kartrutva* and *kartavya* were impediments that needed to be eliminated. Here is a sampling of his teachings on this topic:

The notion of duties that need to be done [*kartavya*] will not cease as long as the sense of doership [*kartrutva*] exists in the heart.

Why do you become mentally agitated, blindly believing there are things you have to do [*kartavya*]?

The bondage called 'duty' will cease [being known] as a delusion caused by the ego, when the firm knowledge of reality is attained.⁸

⁷ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 5th January 1946.

⁸ *Padamalai*, p. 175, v. 119, 120, 121.

Because the *kartavya* idea, that deluding conviction, is indeed the evil seed that produces in quick succession all of one's afflictions, only in those who have been freed from it will the authentic bliss of tranquillity spring forth from the Heart and shine.

Do not pointlessly perform deeds, as if they are worth doing, prompted by the resolve, 'I should do this; I should not do that', [ideas] which are invariably associated with unceasing anxiety of mind. The true secret of worshipping God, the soul of the soul, is to act in whatever way the divine grace of God dictates.

Because his connection to *kartrutva* has been cut off, the *jnani* will not be aware of any actions that he is duty-bound to do. Nor will any trace of doubt or wrong understanding arise for him since, in his *jnana* perspective, not even a minute particle will appear as an alien, inert object.⁹

A mind that has dissolved in the state of God, and ceased to exist, will not be aware of any activity that needs to be performed because, when the ego, which has the idea that it is the performer of actions, has been completely destroyed, the idea that something needs to be accomplished ends.¹⁰

In verse 1246 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Muruganar describes his own final experience in the following words:

I am neither the possessed nor the possessor. I am neither the master nor the slave. I have no *kartavya* – the feeling that there are duties that must be done. I have no *bhogyavya* – the feeling that I have to experience enjoyments. I am not the doer.

This is the state that Bhagavan encouraged all his devotees to aim for. He did not encourage them to embark on crusades to change the world; instead he encouraged them to arrive at the state where they would understand, from direct experience, that there was nothing that needed to be done or could be done. When the doer is eradicated, ideas of doing things and performing activities vanish as well.

In *Irai Pani Nitral*, one of the most moving poems of *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*, Muruganar begs Bhagavan for advice on what to do to solve various problems and reach particular goals. In response to each plea Bhagavan tells him 'Be still, be quiet'. Instead of advising him to 'do' something, Bhagavan tells him to abide as the Self and let all his actions be dictated by the grace of the Self:

Whichever way I went
I heard your praise, O happy one,
and to your feet surrendered
my body wealth and life.

⁹ *Guru Vachaka Kovai* verses 466, 467, and 1118.

¹⁰ *Padamalai*, p. 175, vv. 122, 123.

I cried:
'Ocean of virtue, mountain-high,
show me the way to happiness!'
Ramana, just, majestic, said:
'Stand still. Stay where you are.'

Digging and soaring, Vishnu and Brahma
could not find you at all. And I,
trudging, trudging, towards diverse goals
was worn thin.

I cried:
'Tell me how to merge in the Feet,
beyond the knowledge of life!'
Said Ramana, pure, secure:
'Be still, rest as you are.'

Passing, passing through various births,
Driven on and on through the force of deeds,
I cried: 'Show me the way, my friend, my Master!
Show me the way to reach you!'
Said Ramana, Lord of Wisdom and Welfare,
'Be not angry, be not glad.
Gather your mind to oneness
and be guided by the grace of the Lord.'

Like a picture sprawling on paper,
rootless I ramified
and cried:
'Tell me how to cut the surface!'
Ramana, Master of Wisdom, said:
'Steady and bright,
like the flame in a pitcher,
burn in the grace of the Lord.
Be still! Fulfill His will.'

I cried:
'Lord and Master, tell me how
to make good deeds prevail
against deluding evil deeds!'
My Father, dear, my Ramana said:
'Undesiring, unabhorning,
untroubled in the centre standing,
move only as you may be moved
by the grace of the Lord.'

I cried:
'Mighty Father of Works,
creating, preserving destroying,
tell me the means of salvation!'
Ramana, wise and virtuous, said:
'Watching word and thought,
walk as you are guided
by the grace of the Lord who dwells
in the lotus of your heart.'

I cried:
'Tell me how to end
the strong inveterate deeds
that torment and force me back
into the torrid current of births!'
Said Ramana, best and brightest of Teachers:
'Walking the straight path fixed of old,
join and be enjoined by
the grace of the Lord of Joyous Awareness.'

I cried:
O rain-cloud with compassion big!
Teach me truly the trick
of escaping alive from the flood of births!'
Said Ramana, Lord of Wisdom and Welfare:
'Loathe not, like not true nor false.
Stand in the centre and be
impelled by the grace of the Lord.'

I cried:
'All forms I see are forms of you,
yet none of the Gods know you aright!
Tell me firmly what to do.'
Said Ramana, Lord of Wisdom and Welfare:
'A way there is to escape
the hungry current of births,
to reach the shore and be safe:
join and be one with the grace of the Lord.'

I cried:
Best of Masters! You who shone
in the kurunda tree's cool shade
to teach your devotee of Vadavur,
full and clear, lay bare to me
the secret of Self-knowledge.'
Said Ramana, my Father and King:

‘Be as you are, your Self.’¹¹

If I may summarise this wonderful poem: Bhagavan did not advise devotees to ‘do’ anything to accomplish personal, spiritual or social goals; instead he advocated the removal of the false ‘I am the doer’ idea, thereby allowing the Self to shine in all its glory. There is a frequently quoted passage in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk 363, where Bhagavan gives out the essence of this key tenet of his teachings:

Your duty is *to be*: and not *to be this or that*. ‘I AM that I AM’ sums up the whole truth. The method is summed up in ‘BE STILL’. What does ‘stillness’ mean? It means ‘destroy yourself’. Because any form or shape is the cause of trouble. Give up the notion that ‘I am so and so’.

A devotee’s primary obligation is to abide as the Self. Engaging in activities aimed at changing the world or society covers up this Self by reinforcing the mistaken notion that there is a person in a body who needs to accomplish certain goals. One’s true duty, said Bhagavan is to abide in stillness as the Self:

Swadharma [one’s own duty] is abidance in the pure Self only. All other [perceived] duties are worthless.

The state of abiding as *swarupa*, which is the pure and vast true consciousness, is an obligation that should be firmly observed by all the beings in the world.¹²

Bhagavan: Destruction of mind alone is *tapas*. This alone is one’s duty.¹³

Bhagavan and Gandhi

The initial questions that prompted this essay on Bhagavan’s attitude to politics specifically asked about Gandhi and Bhagavan’s attitude to the Independence struggle that was the key political issue for the last few decades of Bhagavan’s life. Before I address this topic I shall recount how Gandhi’s efforts to see Bhagavan were thwarted. The following narrative comes from *Living by the Words of Bhagavan*, pages 96-98 of the current edition. The final five paragraphs only appeared on page 103 of the first edition. The text in roman is narrated by Annamalai Swami. The comments in italics, which appeared in the book, are mine:

In the 1930s Mahatma Gandhi came to Tiruvannamalai to make a political speech. Since the organisers had selected a piece of open ground about 400 yards from the ashram as the location for the event, many people in the ashram had hopes that the Mahatma would also pay a call on Bhagavan. When the day of the speech came, I, along with many other devotees, waited at the ashram gate in the hope of catching a glimpse of Gandhi as he drove past. When he

¹¹ *Homage to the Presence of Ramana*, pages 94-96, translated by Prof. K. Swaminathan.

¹² *Padamalai*, p. 299, verses 16 and 13.

¹³ *The Power of the Presence*, part one, p. 56.

finally passed us, he was very easy to spot because he was being driven to the meeting in an open car. Rajagopalachari, a leading Congress politician who had organised this South Indian speaking tour, was sitting next to Gandhi in the car. As the car was moving very slowly, I ran alongside it and saluted Gandhi by putting my palms together above my head. To my astonishment and delight Gandhi returned my greeting by making the same gesture. The car stopped for a few moments near the ashram gate but it started again when Rajagopalachari gestured to the driver that he should drive on and not enter the ashram.

Rajagopalachari later became chief minister of the Madras Presidency, a region that included most of South India. After independence he became the first Indian to hold the office of Governor-general.

One of the ashram's residents, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer, went to the meeting and presented Gandhi with two books: *Aksharamanamalai* and *Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai*. As he was presenting the books he quoted a verse from *Aksharamanamalai*: 'O Arunachala! Gem of awareness, shining in all creatures low or high, destroy the meanness in my heart.' Gandhi auctioned the books and gave the proceeds to a harijan welfare fund.

Aksharamanamalai is a long poem by Bhagavan in praise of Arunachala. Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai, written by Muruganar, is a collection of poems which praise Bhagavan.

After the meeting was over I went to the hall and told Bhagavan the story of how Gandhi had greeted me on the road. I also mentioned that Rajagopalachari had made the driver go straight to the meeting, thus denying Gandhi a chance to make a brief visit to the ashram. Bhagavan replied with a very interesting comment.

'Gandhi would like to come here but Rajagopalachari was worried about the consequences. Because he knows that Gandhi is an advanced soul, he fears that he might go into *samadhi* here and forget all about politics. That is why he gestured to the driver to drive on.'

A few days later, when Gandhi was in Madras, Krishnaswami went to see him and managed to get an interview with him. When he introduced himself to Gandhi as a resident of Sri Ramanasramam, Gandhi remarked, 'I would love to come and see Bhagavan but I don't know when the time will come'.

One or two of Bhagavan's devotees who attended Gandhi's meeting have reported that Gandhi did make a serious attempt to visit Bhagavan. He cut his speech, which was originally scheduled for ten minutes, to about five minutes in the hope of using the extra time to make a quick visit to the ashram. However, Rajagopalachari, who had a longstanding dislike of Bhagavan, dissuaded him from making the visit. After a few minutes' discussion, during which Rajagopalachari made it quite clear that he was completely opposed to the visit, Gandhi backed down and allowed himself to be driven to the next meeting.

Rajagopalachari openly expressed his disapproval of Bhagavan. When one of Bhagavan's devotees, Amritanatha Yatendra, once paid a call on Gandhi, Gandhi made a few polite enquiries about Bhagavan.

Rajagopalachari, who was also present, turned to Nehru, the future Prime Minister, and said, 'What is the point in sitting in a cave in a kaupina [loincloth] when the country has so many problems and Gandhi is being put in jail for struggling for independence?'

Gandhi turned to him and put his finger to his lips to indicate that he should not criticise in this way.

Although Gandhi continued to express an interest in seeing Bhagavan, he never came to Tiruvannamalai again.

In the 1980s I talked to Prof. K. Swaminathan about Gandhi's attempt to come to Ramanasramam. Prof. Swaminathan was a friend of both Bhagavan and Gandhi and for many years he was the chief editor of Gandhi's *Collected Works*. He said that several people had tried to get Gandhi to come to see Bhagavan, but all of them had failed. Prof. Swaminathan himself made his own attempt in 1947, a few months before India became independent.

When Prof. Swaminathan offered to take Gandhi to see Bhagavan, Gandhi said that he would be happy to come if Prof. Swaminathan could arrange for him to take the first batch of harijans (outcastes) into the Arunachaleswara Temple in Tiruvannamalai. In those days harijans were not allowed into the temple. The Congress Party had already committed itself to a law that would prevent temples from refusing entry to harijans, so it was only a matter of time before they were allowed in. Prof. Swaminathan spoke to a trustee of the temple and said that Gandhi would be willing to come for a visit if he could accompany the first batch of harijans into the temple.

The man Prof. Swaminathan spoke to said, 'We will not allow outcastes into the temple one day before we are legally compelled to do so'. The proposed visit was cancelled and Gandhi never had another opportunity to visit.

Other attempts to persuade Gandhi to come to Tiruvannamalai were mentioned in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 27th January, 1946:

K. also told Bhagavan, 'Some of our friends wished to suggest to Mahatma Gandhi that he should visit our Asramam. But when they consulted Mr. O. P. Ramaswami Reddi, he said; "Here none of us has any access to Mahatma Gandhi. Rajaji alone has influence".' [Rajaji was the politician who had already prevented Gandhi from entering Ramanasramam on his only visit to Tiruvannamalai.] Bhagavan thereupon said, 'He [Gandhi] won't be allowed to come to such places'. About a week ago, Bhagavan was mentioning that once the Mahatma came to this place, was near the cattle fair site (a furlong or less from our Asramam), finished his business there in less time than the time fixed for it, collected a purse and left the place. Dr T. N. K. also brought news that the Mahatma told people that he was frequently thinking of Bhagavan and had great reverence for him. Bhagavan said, 'Yes. Yes. That may be so. Whenever anybody tells him he has no peace of mind, he packs them off here, telling them, "Go and stay at Ramanasramam for a time".'

Although Bhagavan, for reasons I have already outlined, did not encourage devotees to get involved in goal-oriented political programmes, such as the campaign for Independence, he had great respect for Gandhi. He said on several occasions that Gandhi had surrendered to the Self, and that the Self was working through him. When Rajendra Prasad, a leading Congress politician came to Ramanasramam and asked Bhagavan for a message to take back to Gandhi, Bhagavan replied, ‘*Adhyatma sakti* [the primordial power of the Self] is working within him and leading him on. That is enough. What more is necessary?’ (*Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 505)

Those on the path of karma yoga – union with God through the performance of good deeds – have as their goal *nishkama* karma, the performance of selfless activities that are done in a spirit of surrender to the divine. In this state there are no motives for action and no specific goals being strived for. Work is done because the power of the Self is impelling one to do it, not because there is a preset target (such as Independence) to be attained. Bhagavan tried to explain this to some Congress workers who obviously had a more goal-oriented agenda:

Some Congressmen handed over the following questions to Maharshi:

1. How long is India destined to suffer bondage?
2. Have not the sons of India made enough sacrifice for her liberation?
3. Will India get freedom during Mahatma Gandhi’s lifetime?

The above questions were not answered categorically. Sri Bhagavan simply remarked:

Gandhiji has surrendered himself to the Divine and works accordingly with no self-interest. He does not concern himself with the results but accepts them as they turn up. That must be the attitude of national workers.

Question: Will the work be crowned with success?

Bhagavan: This question arises because the questioner has not surrendered himself.

Question: Should we not then think of and work for the welfare of the country?

Bhagavan: First take care of yourself and the rest will naturally follow.

Question: I am not speaking individually but for the country.

Bhagavan: First surrender and see. The doubts arise because of the absence of surrender. Acquire strength by surrender and then your surroundings will be found to have improved to the degree of strength acquired by you.

Question: Should we not know if our actions will be worthwhile?

Bhagavan: Follow the example of Gandhiji in the work for the national cause. ‘Surrender’ is the word.¹⁴

Similar answers were given to another group of Congress workers who quizzed him on the topic of independence from British rule:

Question: Is the desire for *swaraj* [self-rule, independence] right?

¹⁴ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no, 521.

Bhagavan: Such desire no doubt begins with self-interest. Yet practical work for the goal gradually widens the outlook so that the individual becomes merged in the country. Such merging of the individuality is desirable and the related *karma* is *nishkama* [unselfish].

Question: If *swaraj* is gained after a long struggle and terrible sacrifices, is not the person justified in being pleased with the result and elated by it?

Bhagavan: He must have in the course of his work surrendered himself to the Higher Power whose Might must be kept in mind and never lost sight of. How then can he be elated? He should not even care for the result of his actions. Then alone the *karma* becomes unselfish.

Question: How can unerring rectitude be ensured for the worker?

Bhagavan: If he has surrendered himself to God or to Guru the Power to which he had surrendered will take him on the right course. The worker need no longer concern himself about the rectitude or otherwise of the course. The doubt will arise only if he fails to obey the Master in all details.¹⁵

Bhagavan's approval of Gandhi's state and his consequent lack of 'motivation' was clearly brought out in his comments on two paragraphs that Gandhi had written in *The Harijan* about a trip he took to Rajkot:

'How mysterious are the ways of God! This journey to Rajkot is a wonder even to me. Why am I going, whither am I going? What for? I have thought nothing about these things. And if God guides me, what should I think, why should I think? Even thought may be an obstacle in the way of His guidance.

'The fact is, it takes no effort to stop thinking. The thoughts do *not* come. Indeed there is no vacuum - but I mean to say that there is no thought about the mission.'

Sri Bhagavan remarked how true the words were and emphasised each statement in the extract. Then he cited Thayumanavar in support of the state which is free from thoughts:

Bliss will arise if you remain still.
Why, little sir, this involvement still
with yoga, whose nature is delusion?
Will [this bliss] arise
through your own objective knowledge?
You need not reply, you who are addicted to 'doing'!
You little baby, you!

The state in which you are not,
that is *nishtha* [Self-abidance].
But, even in that state,
do you not remain?
You whose mouth is silent,

¹⁵ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 502.

do not be perplexed!
Although [in that state] you are gone,
you are no longer there,
yet you did not go.
You are eternally present.
Do not suffer in vain.
Experience bliss all the time!

Though I have listened unceasingly to the scriptures
that one and all declare,
'To be still is bliss, is very bliss,'
I lack, alas, true understanding,
and I failed even to heed
the teachings of my Lord, Mauna Guru.
Through this stupidity
I wandered in *maya's* cruel forest.
Woe is me, for this is my fated destiny.

Bhagavan's comments and the two paragraphs by Gandhi can be found in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 646. The three Thayumanavar verses (*Udal Poyyuravu*, verses 52 and 53, and *Payappuli*, verse 36) also appear there, but the translations I have used here are by T. V. Venkatasubramanian, Robert Butler and myself. They appear elsewhere on this site in the 'Bhagavan and Thayumanavar' article.

Two days later Gandhi's statements were again discussed in the hall:

Question: Is not what Gandhiji describes, the state in which thoughts themselves become foreign?

Bhagavan: Yes. It is only after the rise of the 'I' thought that all other thoughts arise. The world is seen after you have felt 'I am'. The 'I-thought' and all other thoughts had vanished for him.

Question: Then the body-sense must be absent in that state.

Bhagavan: The body-sense also is a thought whereas he describes the state in which 'thoughts do not come'.

Question: He also says, 'It takes no effort to stop thinking'.

Bhagavan: Of course no effort is necessary to stop thoughts whereas one is necessary for bringing about thoughts....

Question: Gandhiji adhered to *satya* [truth] so long and won realisation of the Self.

Bhagavan: What is *satya* except the Self? *Satya* is that which is made up of *sat*. Again *sat* is nothing but the Self. So Gandhiji's *satya* is only the Self.¹⁶

The path of selfless activity, aimed at the betterment of the world, is one that appeals to many spiritually inclined political activists. However, Bhagavan rarely encouraged it

¹⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no 647.

except in the cases of those who, for various reasons, found themselves unattracted to the other spiritual paths of *jnana*, *bhakti* and *yoga*.

Bhagavan: An examination of the ephemeral nature of external phenomena leads to *vairagya*. Hence enquiry (*vichara*) is the first and foremost step to be taken. When *vichara* continues automatically, it results in a contempt for wealth, fame, ease, pleasure, etc. The 'I' thought becomes clearer for inspection. The source of 'I' is the Heart – the final goal. If, however, the aspirant is not temperamentally suited to *Vichara Marga* (to the introspective analytical method), he must develop *bhakti* (devotion) to an ideal - may be God, Guru, humanity in general, ethical laws, or even the idea of beauty. When one of these takes possession of the individual, other attachments grow weaker, *i.e.*, dispassion (*vairagya*) develops. Attachment for the ideal simultaneously grows and finally holds the field. Thus *ekagrata* (concentration) grows simultaneously and imperceptibly - with or without visions and direct aids.

In the absence of enquiry and devotion, the natural sedative *pranayama* (breath regulation) may be tried. This is known as *Yoga Marga*. If life is imperilled the whole interest centres round the one point, the saving of life. If the breath is held the mind cannot afford to (and does not) jump at its pets - external objects. Thus there is rest for the mind so long as the breath is held. All attention being turned on breath or its regulation, other interests are lost. Again, passions are attended with irregular breathing, whereas calm and happiness are attended with slow and regular breathing. Paroxysm of joy is in fact as painful as one of pain, and both are accompanied by ruffled breaths. Real peace is happiness. Pleasures do not form happiness. The mind improves by practice and becomes finer just as the razor's edge is sharpened by stropping. The mind is then better able to tackle internal or external problems. If an aspirant be unsuited temperamentally for the first two methods and circumstantially (on account of age) for the third method, he must try the *Karma Marga* (doing good deeds, for example, social service). His nobler instincts become more evident and he derives impersonal pleasure. His smaller self is less assertive and has a chance of expanding its good side. The man becomes duly equipped for one of the three aforesaid paths. His intuition may also develop directly by this single method.¹⁷

A similar grading of *sadhanas* can be found in verses 4-8 of *Upadesa Undiyar*. It is worth noting that Bhagavan states here that karma yoga does not in itself lead to Self-realisation: it is merely a preliminary step that equips its practitioners to follow one of the other three paths. It is also worth noting that Gandhi did not reach his high spiritual state by karma yoga: as Bhagavan remarked several times, he attained it by surrender to the divine. Gandhi was an ardent Ram *bhakta* who spent his whole life chanting the name of Ram. After he had been shot, he instinctively chanted 'Ram Ram' with his final breath. Papaji, who was briefly an attendant of his in the 1940s, has recorded the following extraordinary story that shows the depth of Gandhi absorption in the divine:

¹⁷ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, talk no. 27.

He [Gandhi] was a great saint. I could see that just by looking at his body. I didn't need to look into his eyes. He had the most sattvic body I have ever seen. It was copper-coloured and on a subtle level it was glowing with the light of *Brahman*.

He had a beautiful body. The only body that I have seen that was as beautiful as his was the Maharshi's. Both of their bodies used to shine.

I was once sitting with Gandhi when I heard the sound of 'Ram Ram' coming from him. His lips were not moving so I looked to see where the sound was coming from. As I focused on the source of the sound, I realised that it was emanating from his body. The sound was coming out of the pores of his skin. He didn't need to repeat the name anymore. It was going on continuously inside him and flowing outwards through his skin.¹⁸

Gandhi attained his high state through surrender. Once he was established in that state, the power of the Self took charge of his life. In Bhagavan's case the power of the Self took him to Tiruvannamalai and a life of silence and relative inactivity; in Gandhi's case the power used him to bring about a relatively peaceful political revolution. As Bhagavan once remarked, with reference to himself and Gandhi:

Our business is to keep quiet. If we enter into all these [political activities], people will naturally ask, and justifiably, 'Why is he interfering in all these instead of keeping quiet?' Similarly if Mahatma Gandhi keeps quiet leaving aside all his activities, they will ask, 'Why is he keeping quiet instead of engaging in all these activities?' He must do what he has come for. We must do what we have come for.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Nothing Ever Happened*, volume two, pages 298-99.

¹⁹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2nd February, 1946.