

## **Jnana Yoga and the Breath of Life**

### **Introduction**

These writings may be better understood by readers who are familiar with the discipline of Jnana Yoga or who, at least, have a reasonable understanding of the main tenets of Transcendental Meditation or Buddhism. Still, anyone reading these words is kindly advised to also read some of the other writings included in the Writings section of this Website ([www.salaroche.com](http://www.salaroche.com)), namely: "About the Atma Vichara," "About the Atman" and "The Most Intimate Universality."

Those three writings elaborate further on some of the basic premises mentioned in this one and, for some readers, they may actually be essential readings. The writing "Jnana Yoga, Automatic Expression and Spiritism" may be also read as a vehicle for further clarification on the subject of Jnana Yoga. That writing is a short comparative analysis of the three practices alluded in its title.

By way of introduction, and given that the main concepts related to "Jnana Yoga and the Breath of Life" are subject to interpretation even from the part of some knowledgeable readers, I will first outline a brief description of those concepts.

The most important concept contemplated here is the concept of "Realization of the Self". In this context, the term Realization does not refer to any conceptualization, imagination or intellectual cogitation about the Self. There is a big difference between Realizing the Self and conceiving it, imagining it, or intellectualizing it. To Realize the Self is to Be the Self itself. Our imagination and our intellectual capabilities do not in any way give shape to the actual Realization of the Self.

When you come to the Realization of your Eternal Being, which is the "Self," you are totally aware that That Eternal Being is who you really are and have always been. There is not a shred of a doubt in your consciousness that that is the case. Realization, therefore, is the attainment of the unmistakable direct knowledge of That which your Eternal Essence really is.

The concept of "Liberation" is related to the concept of "Realization," but these two terms are not synonymous. There can be Realization without Liberation, but there cannot be Liberation without Realization. For example, some practitioners of Yoga can attain Realization at some point in their lives, but may attain Liberation only years later or only after making the final transition to the disembodied world. The term "Liberation" refers to the act of finally breaking free from the shackles of human passions and desires. Liberated individuals are no longer subject to the changing winds of any emotional, physical and intellectual egocentric needs and are thereby said to be exempt from the distracting internal disturbances usually generated when looking to satisfy those needs.

Very few people can spontaneously attain Liberation in their lifetimes, whereas a larger number can Realize the Self while incarnated. The difference between Realized non-Liberated individuals and Realized-Liberated ones is that the latter have basically burnt all their passions and desires, while the former still have a few earthly attachments and needs to burn away. Realized individuals who are not yet Liberated are still subject to the previously-generated winds of their remaining natural tendencies (the unavoidable aspect of their own Prarabdha), but are no longer accumulating Karma for any future lives.

A third concept worth clarifying here is the concept of "Self." To put it simply, the Self is the all-encompassing Eternal Consciousness where all imaginable and unimaginable possibilities of Being exist. It is the creative energy whence all past, present and future creation emanates. It is eternally conscious and it is eternally blissful in its consciousness. It has no beginning and it has no end.

The brief definition of the Self I outlined above may sound familiar to you, as you may have already read or heard other similar universal concepts in the past. In fact, the concept of the Self I am using here may be very similar to the concept of God that some religions propose, but I prefer to use the term "Self" to prevent the reader from falling into any possible erroneous pre-conceived notions.

About the discipline of Jnana Yoga there is also not much I can say that may not have been said many times before. Still, I will outline a brief description of it.

Jnana Yoga is one of the main four branches of Yoga. The philosophy of Yoga, as expounded in the Bhagavad Gita, consists of four interrelated disciplines or paths: Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga.

Karma Yoga is the path of action and of renunciation of the fruits of those actions. Bhakti Yoga is the path of devotion through which existence is offered and dedicated to a deity, cause or philosophical principles. Raja Yoga is the path of physical harmony and concentration and Jnana Yoga is the path of Philosophical Discrimination.

Among these four paths, Jnana Yoga is said to be the Direct Path, or the path through which Realization of the Self can be attained without the use of any parabolic means.

Each of these four paths is supposed to conform to one of the four basic natural tendencies innate in each individual. Those individuals who are inclined to action and service may select Karma Yoga as their path. Those who have devotional tendencies would by nature be better off taking the path of Bhakti Yoga. Individuals with a tendency to establish harmony in their bodies and minds would probably select Raja Yoga as their path, while those who are inclined to look at things with an inquisitive mind and from a philosophical perspective may feel attracted to the path of Jnana Yoga.

These four paths are interrelated and any individual practicing any discipline within any of those paths will also end up practicing some elements of the other three. But the degree to which the other three paths will influence the practice of any particular discipline will also depend on each individual's natural predisposition.

In my case, given my natural skeptical approach to most things I perceive, I was easily caught in the practice of Jnana Yoga from the moment I first read about it. There are basically two main exponent individuals within the Jnana Yoga discipline: Shankaracharya and [Ramana Maharshi](#). I first found out about Ramana's teachings and then I read about Shankara's. Ramana gave me the key to Realize the Self, the Atma Vichara, and Shankara sharpened my mind and my resolve to use that key.

The Atma Vichara is also known as "Self Inquiry" and, when it comes to the application of Ramana's teachings, I cannot think of a better term to define the method he prescribes. The Atma Vichara prescribes precisely a constant inquiry into our minds as to who or what is the real essence of our consciousness. In constantly asking the question "Who Am I," not as a Mantra, but with the fervent one-pointed desire to unveil our real " I ", seriously dedicated inquirers will sooner or later get beyond their day-to-day consciousness and will attain that consciousness which is always underlying everything we think, say, hear, do, or see (to read more about the Atma Vichara [please click here](#)).

In my case, it took me three years of intensive practice to Realize the Self.

To Realize the Self is to Realize that the core consciousness which is the basis of everything that exists in the Universe is of exactly the same nature as the underlying consciousness who constantly witnesses everything we think and perceive. This perennial witness is usually referred to as the Atman. The Atman is also the witness to everything we may dream while asleep. To realize the Self, therefore, is to Realize that we constantly ARE that Universal Consciousness known as the "Self." It is also when we attain the "Self" that we realize that our day-to-day consciousness is nothing but a spurious superimposition over the real Eternal Consciousness which we always are.

To Realize the Self is to Be the Eternal Universal Consciousness which is the Atman and to Be the Atman is to Be the Eternal Universal Consciousness which is the Self.

This brings me to explain the concept of the Atman or Ankh, which is also known as "The Breath of Life." The Atman is the "individual" Eternal Consciousness, or Samsarin, that travels from one body to another as it reincarnates according to its own cycle of evolution. This Atman, so often mentioned in Yoga literature, is the same Ankh found in Egyptian Symbolology and has its equivalent in Christian Theology in the idea of the Soul.

The Self and the Atman are one and the same, but, in some mystical way, they are somehow separated from each other, like a Father separated from the Son. The Eternal Consciousness which is the Substance of the Atman is exactly the same Eternal Consciousness which is the Substance of the Self, except that the Atman-Consciousness is mysteriously enveloped in a layer of individuality that somehow allows it to acquire particular clusters of characteristics within the Universality of the Self.

Those particular characteristics that the Atman acquires across time are what determines its own individual cycle of incarnation and evolution. These acquired characteristics are also the ones that manifest themselves as the innate tendencies that prompt all living beings to act in one way or another, thereby generating the different kinds of Karma that keep them reincarnating (For more details about the Atman [please click here](#))

In Realizing the Self, I melted my human consciousness into the Eternal Consciousness of the Atman which is exactly the same as the Eternal Consciousness of the Self, thereby Realizing what my true Universal Identity is. In so doing I completed the Cycle which first sends the Atman into a state of individual consciousness and finally allows it to consciously come back into Itself after myriad years of Karmic evolution.

It is worth noticing that for the Atman to complete its Karmic cycle it needs the aid of a human incarnation, as human beings are the only beings on this planet with the intellectual capability to reflect upon themselves. Without the help of this kind of introspective means from the part of an "external" consciousness, the Atman would be unable to Self-Realize Itself.

There comes a time, however, when the Atman is able or is entitled to choose a reincarnation that possesses the necessary kind of intellectual depth and the required level of introspective potential to attain direct knowledge of Itself. Having reincarnated in an individual possessing such characteristics, the Atman is able to Realize Itself, thereby eventually attaining Liberation from the recurring Karmic cycles.

To Realize the Self, therefore, is just the act of consciously going back to being that which we have always been.

Once the main concepts related to these writings have been clarified, I will now relate to you the short story of how I came into the Realization of The Self through the constant practice of the Atma Vichara. Before I do that, however, I would like to add that, in looking back at my humble existence, it is quite clear for me to see that all the steps I may have taken and all the roads I may have chosen across the span of my life, have all been merely part of the pre-designed script handed to me on the day I was born and that all that I have done, consciously or unconsciously, is to follow the path I was ordained to follow, which has thus far led me to the Realization of the Self and which, in less time than the blink of an eye, will inexorably lead me into Eternal Liberation.

## **Jnana Yoga and the Breath of Life**

The Ankh, or Breath of Life, is a fascinating corollary to the supreme transcendental finding that I came across in late 1992. As many other people who like to read about different subjects, I had been aware of the Ankh's existence for many years, but before coming into the finding I am about to relate, I had never paid any particular attention to it. I can, however, recall one instance in which, after someone placed a rather charming plastic representation of the Ankh in my hands, I was sort of magically drawn to it with a very unusual level of curiosity. That very short episode took place sometime in December of 1969, and lasted for only some 10 minutes or so, but I do remember that, at that moment, I was quite elated to hold such charming plastic shape in my hands.

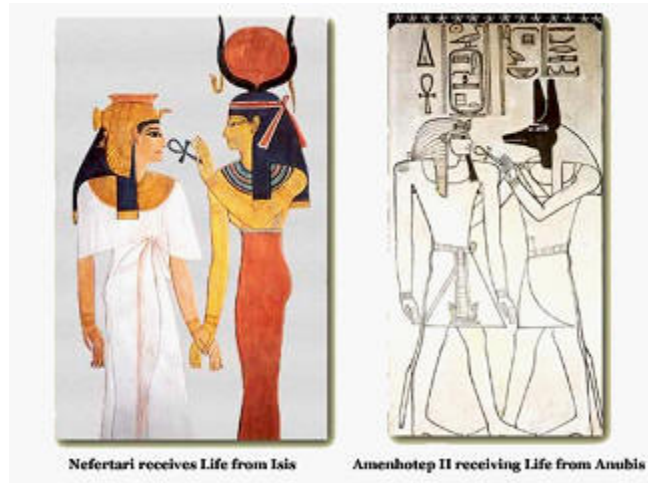
I also remember that after I handed back the object to its owner, my mind quickly went back to the customary state it used to adopt in those days. In consequence, that episode was relegated to the back corners of my memory for a couple of decades. Aside from that instance, the Ankh had always been completely out of my radius of interest, up until the moment when I was faced with a reality which was completely impossible for me to deny.

The ankh is a symbol that appears in many Egyptian hieroglyphics and is a very mysterious item in Egyptian Iconography. Without a doubt, the Ankh is intimately related to Egyptian history and Mythology, but my experience shows that it never pertained solely to the Egyptian people, but to everyone in this world. For a few reasons, it is not difficult for most common individuals like me to never even think of studying anything related to the Ankh. To begin with, the literature about it is very scarce, which tells us that not much has been previously known about it. Then there is the fact that the few existing interpretations of the Ankh's meaning sound like sheer speculation with not much solid archeological or philosophical evidence to support them. On top of this, some of those speculative explanations appear to be outright devoid of the least significant insight into the artifacts and representations in which the Ankh is found

For example, the painting of Nefertari receiving the Breath of Life (Ankh) from the God Isis and the engraving of Amenhotep II receiving the Ankh from the God Anubis (see Picture A below) have probably been the subject of archeological studies for well over a century now, yet no one has ever come up with a fairly plausible interpretation of the meaning behind such symbol. Nevertheless, the Ankh is some sort of sine qua non within Egyptian mythology, as it is basically too omnipresent to be overlooked.

In contemplating such abundant evidence of the Ankh symbol's existence, therefore, one cannot help but to ask why was the Ankh so important to the Egyptian elites and why is its meaning such a secret even

up to our days? To these questions I respond that the Ankh was so important to the Egyptian elites because of the otherworldly reality it represented and its meaning was kept so secret probably for the customary political reason that the elites always try to hide their most precious and vital information from the masses.



Picture A

Since my Realization, however, the hidden otherworldly meaning behind the Ankh is no longer hidden or otherworldly, but an intrinsic part of every human being's daily existence. This assertion is not something I am just speculating about, but a fact of which I have direct knowledge. When I realized my True Eternal Identity I first became aware of the "Shape" that the eternal consciousness appears to adopt when it illumines the human body. That shape has the unmistakable form of an Ankh.

As far as I am concerned, since the day of my Realization, the mystery of the Ankh is no longer a mystery: The Ankh is the Atman, the Breath of Life that animates this body whose fingers are pressing some keys on a computer keyboard to write these words. This Breath of Life is like an aperture into the eternal Sat-Chit-Ananda which is my True Identity, but it is much more than that, as it actually consists of the same Substance of which the Eternal Consciousness consists. In fact, the Ankh is the Eternal Consciousness Itself which adopts the Ankh's form when incarnated in the human body, thereby illumining it. The Ankh is my Eternal Self, just as it is everybody else's eternal self.

The Ankh is the Atman of the Hindus, the Soul of the Christians, the Samsarin, the wandering consciousness that keeps re-incarnating for as long as the person in whom it reincarnates does not attain the realization of Who he/she really is. To "merge" with the Ankh's consciousness is to become one with the all-pervading Eternal Consciousness, as the Ankh is the Eternal Consciousness Itself, the One Without a Second: Eternal Being, Wisdom and Bliss.

I am not an Egyptian and I have never been particularly interested in Egyptian Mythology. In fact, I never had any particular interest in anything Egyptian, not even in the famous Pyramids. Yet, for reasons that pertain only to fate, I came across this marvelous discovery while I was following the Yoga teachings of [Sri Ramana Maharshi](#), who never even hinted at the possibility of discovering the Ankh while practicing his Jnana Yoga method.

For this reason, I feel the need to emphasize that my relationship with the Ankh is, so to speak, coincidental, and that I do not belong now, nor have I belonged in the past, or intend to belong in the future to any association, club or sect with any devotional attachments to the Ankh. In fact, I am not even aware that any such association, club or sect even exists. I want to make it clear, therefore, that I did not have any preconceived notions regarding who or what I was going to find when I finally Realized my Eternal Self.

It is also worth clarifying that I do not see the Ankh as a talisman or good luck charm either, in the way that some new wave people might see some crystals and other similar objects. For all I care, the Ankh is just a transitory form that the Atman adopts whenever it incarnates in the human body and, as such form, it is just as ephemeral as the human body it illumines. The real importance of the Ankh resides in the Substance that constitutes it, which is one and the same with the all-pervading transcendental Universal Substance.

This Universal Substance, in turn, is of the nature of Pure Consciousness, which is generally known as Sat-Chit-Ananda (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). My Realization of the Self is basically the Realization of my Eternal Consciousness; my becoming aware of the Ankh's shape is just a corollary to the whole issue. As a result of that Realization, however, now I know I am not this body or any of its attributes, but that formless Eternal Silence that comprises all knowledge and is pure Bliss.

But when I am incarnated I am the Atman/Ankh, as the Ankh's form is the necessary shape required to illumine the human body. I am "IT," the Ankh, the Atman, the Samsarin, the Breath of Life, and since the Breath of Life is Eternal Existence Wisdom and Bliss, I am Eternal Existence Wisdom and Bliss. The Ankh does not need to say "I am," for it eternally is. In fact, the Ankh is the eternal "I AM." But now that I have realized the Ankh I can say that "I am THAT I am." I am not now nor have I ever been Sal or any other name or identity I might have thought I had in the past. I am now and I have always been THAT which creates and gives form to everything; THAT which, as the Breath of Life, illumines the existence of every living thing. THAT is who I am.

Before attaining Realization, however, I sort of thought I was this combination of body, mind and emotions I now call Salaroche. I say "I sort of thought" because I was never really sure of who I really was. I always wondered who I was and what was I doing in this world. These were the twin questions that perennially

troubled my mind and always affected my behavior in this world. Little did I know that eventually one of those two questions would be the one to lead me into the Knowledge of That which I really am.

The question "Who Am I" was all that I needed to ask myself, but that question was way too easy and simple for me to phrase it. I had always thought that to attain Realization I needed to practice some very complicated, intricate and convoluted prescriptions. I had to encounter [Ramana Maharshi](#) and his super pragmatic method to finally begin unveiling my true identity. The fact is Ramana had always been there waiting for Sal, even before either of us was born. Sal had always had that formless question in his mind; all that he needed was to have Ramana phrase it for him. Sal already had the nagging, burning desire to really know who he was, just as he also had a very pronounced disdain for such earthly things as possessions and fame.

All that he needed was to find someone to tell him he was right in not accepting his earthly identity and that he was right in not really caring about providing himself with too many earthly goods. Evidently, the path was traced for Sal since the day he was born. Everything that happened to him before he encountered Ramana was like a test that he needed to go through in order to earn his "spiritual degree." Once Sal successfully practiced Ramana's method he graduated into the knowledge of his Real Self, which is the knowledge of the Eternal One. Sal's Self, or Sal's Atman/Ankh, are one and the same with the Single, Eternal, All-Blissful, All-Knowing Universal Self.

Once Sal's earthly consciousness was overtaken by the Ankh/Atman's consciousness, he realized he was no longer Sal. Moreover, he realized he had NEVER been Sal. He had just been fooling himself into believing he was anything other than Pure and Eternal Bliss. Sal's TRUE Self had always existed everywhere, which is where it always exists, throughout the countless millennia. I Am that "I Am" which is the "I AM" of everything. When the whole of creation says "I AM" through each and every one of its possible expressions, I AM that I AM which they all are. I am that "I AM" that the whole Universe chants throughout its all-knowing, blissful eternity.

My true Self is the Ankh/Atman and the Ankh is one with the Whole, therefore I am the Whole. The consciousness which is the Ankh/Atman is the consciousness which is God. To reside in the Ankh's consciousness is to BE the Ankh and to be the Ankh is to be God. Therefore, I am God. And please do not get me wrong. I have not suddenly become a super megalomaniac guy who now believes he is the one who created the universe. No. When I say I am God I am not referring to myself as Sal, the guy who is writing these words on a computer. I am referring to the Real Eternal Consciousness which Sal really IS and which you and everybody else IS as well.

The Sal that you see, hear or read about is just one insignificant physical, mental and emotional ephemeral expression among the innumerable other ephemeral expressions that constantly emanate

from God. Sal's True Self, on the other hand, is none other than HIM, the One Without a Second, the Almighty, creator of all possible existing things. When God says "I AM," it is the Atman/Ankh who says I AM. When Sal's Ankh says "I AM," Sal says "I AM THAT I AM." This is the only absolute truth. Nothing else matters, only this. Everything else is relative and ephemeral.

The following paragraphs tell the story of how I came into the knowledge of my Real Self.

## **The Background**

Since I have memory of anything, I have memory of myself looking around like a stranger looks at the unknown environment that surrounds him. The feeling that I do not belong has always followed me wherever I go in this world. I grew accustomed to having this sense of alienation since I was a child. Mine is not like any of the typical childhood stories you might have read about in the past. Most childhood stories are usually about dreamlike worlds of fantasy and love or about traumatizing experiences that later make adults do terrible things. Not mine. I did not experience anything worth telling, good or bad, until I was already in my late teens, or thereabouts. My childhood was quite uneventful, yet that uneventfulness would turn out to be quite meaningful as far as my real purpose in life is concerned.

First of all, I do not recall ever getting much attention from my parents or brothers, although I was always aware of the way they got attention from each other. I do recall some instances in which I was the object of reprimands from the part of my parents or the object of contempt or outright aggression from the part of my sister or brothers. Whether the latter was something called-for or not, I do not remember; but for the purpose of my Realization, their past behavior is now totally irrelevant. The bottom line is that I never really got a sense of having any characteristics that could identify me among them, which is probably the reason that later in life I occasionally did some crazy things that would surely make them notice me. Still, regardless of whatever I might have thought I was at any particular moment during my childhood, some ensuing circumstances always made sure I would develop doubts about it. Consequently, I never really developed a sense of who I was and what I was doing in the midst of those people who called themselves my family. I never really thought I belonged with them.

As a result, because of that early sense of alienation, I never developed a full ego in the sense of the ego being that cluster of physical, emotional and intellectual characteristics that we all attribute to ourselves and that constitute the "I am" that we use when, for example, we introduce ourselves to others. I did develop a sense of being a separate entity from the rest of the world, but that strong sense of "I am" that pushes some people to prove themselves in sports, the sciences, the arts or any other field of human endeavor has always been very weak in me. I have never really felt the need to prove myself because I never had a very strong sense of who I was. How can you try to prove the value or the existence of something when you are not even sure of what that something really is?

I always marveled at some people and the way they so proudly assert themselves, so sure about their physical traits, their ancestry, their intellectual or physical or artistic abilities, or anything else that might prompt them to say "I am this" or "I am that." I always wondered: "How do they manage to do that?" Conversely, I was hardly ever able to accept any of the characteristics or abilities I might have as a defining trait of my identity, and whenever I have managed to claim any of those characteristics as my identity, something always comes around to make sure it does not stick for too long. Can anyone stick anything on something that does not really exist?

But I am not writing this to impress on anyone the idea of Sal as an egoless individual. I DO have an ego, everybody does. Someone devoid of an ego is someone who would not even move. Even the primitive hunter gatherers who inhabited the world thousands of years ago must have had an ego. They surely had a sense of individuality, of being separate from each other and from the rest of the world. Even the feeling of being hungry is a manifestation of the human ego, as each of us feels hungry by ourselves, thereby experiencing a sense of being a separate entity from the rest.

I do have an ego and one probably much bigger and developed than the one the hunter gatherers probably had. But, by the ongoing standards, I still think my ego is a small and very basic one. This does not mean that I am totally selfless or that I do not have a sense of privacy or that anyone can come around and take any of my few belongings away from me and I will just sit there and watch them do it. No. What this means is that when I think of myself as Sal I do not see much there by way of identity. There is not much there within Sal for me to hold on to and say "I am this" or "I am that."

Sal may have abilities as a guitarist, language teacher, computer programmer, songwriter, singer, and other similar things, but Sal hardly ever goes around parading any of that for all the world to see, except perhaps when he needs to get a job in any of those fields or when he decides to put together a personal website. And although any abilities and shortcomings that Sal may have do form a part of his identity, this is so only in a superficial manner. None of those qualities and defects has ever been internalized to the point of making Sal think of himself as this or that quality or defect.

For most of his life Sal has been void inside. Most things that Sal has done he did them while prompted either by the circumstances or by the need to survive. He has hardly ever done anything as part of a premeditated grand design for his life. And everything that has or has not happened to him happened because he does not have much of an ego to push him into action. This considerably egoless attitude, in turn, results from the fact that, because of the childhood background briefly outlined above, he was unable to develop a strong sense of identity for himself. In other words, Sal's "I" never developed to the extent that most "normal" individuals' "I" usually develops.

Thus, when I finally came into contact with Ramana and his self-inquiry method I was more than ready to follow it. At that point I did not have too many obstacles to surmount on my way to realizing that which I really am. The ego barriers standing between my weak earthly identity and my ever present universal identity were relatively thin and fragile. It took me only some three years of very intensive work to finally break them down and get through to the Atman/Ankh “ I,” which is one and the same with the universal “ I,” the One Without A Second.

From the moment I finally understood the simplicity of Ramana’s method and the high level of pragmatism involved in it I said to myself “this is a method I can practice. This is a path I can follow through to its end. This is something I can do.” And I did it. And I did not do it after desperately looking for it as part of Sal’s master plan. I did it because I was meant to do it, because I was born to do it, because the whole purpose of my life was to encounter Ramana and follow his Atma-Vichara.

## **The Beginning**

It all started very casually. I was driving down a wide avenue somewhere in Cupertino, California, on a regular January afternoon in 1989, when I noticed a small store that resembled some of those head shops that proliferated in the Haight-Ashbury area up in San Francisco during the late sixties and early seventies. I was hit by a small surge of nostalgia for those carefree hippie days and decided to stop and go take a look inside. The name of the shop was “East–West Bookstore.” When I got inside the store I realized that my first impression about it had been right.

There was a lot of grass and hash paraphernalia there; small hash pipes and roach-holders, along with amulets, rings and chains and, of course, lots of books about meditation, yoga, eastern religions, new wave stuff and other similar topics. I first walked around casually, often smiling at the memories that one object or another would bring back to my mind. Then I went into the book section and started browsing around, leafing through some books until I came across one written by a guy named [Mouni Sadhu](#). I leafed a bit through it and I liked it. Then I thought I should come back to buy it some other day and walked out of the shop.

But when I was about to get into my car I thought again about the cover of the book, which had a drawing on it that resembled an Escher drawing I had seen in the past, [“Bond of Union”](#) (Newer editions of the book have a different cover). Then I recalled that a friend of mine from my hippie days used to make very similar drawings too. At this point I thought that the coincidences had already piled up high enough and decided to go back and buy the book right there and then, which I did. A couple of days later I started reading the book and I was totally taken by it. I just could not get my hands off of it. It contained things that I had already heard many times in the past, but Mouni was phrasing them in a context that at the time I found very appealing. The name of the book is “Samadhi – The Superconsciousness Of The Future.”

I read the book attentively all the way to its end where I found out it was part of a trilogy written by the same author. I also found out what the source of the author's inspiration was: The Teachings of [Ramana Maharshi](#). I went ahead and bought the other two books, "In Days of Great Peace" and "Concentration" and read them as well, but I did not find either of them as interesting as "Samadhi." When I was done with the other two books I found myself wanting to read more on the same subject, so I thought I should delve a bit deeper into the source of Mouni Sadhu's inspiration: [Ramana Maharshi](#). With this in mind, one day I went straight to another East-West Bookstore I had recently discovered in Menlo Park, right on El Camino Real, very near Atherton.

To my surprise, they had plenty of books about Ramana there. Particularly interesting was a series of thin booklets consisting of no more than 25 to 50 pages each, with each of them addressing a different aspect of Ramana's teachings and of Ramana's life as well. So I began buying and reading one or two of them at the time until I had read them all. Then I began buying and reading thicker books written by [Arthur Osborne](#) and others until one day I found and bought the thickest of them all, a book called "The Ramana Gita."

By then I was deeply immersed in Ramana's teachings and I was practicing the Atma-Vichara on a daily basis and during most of the day. I was now waking up early every morning to sit up in a particular chair in a corner of my living room to practice the Vichara for half an hour or so before starting my day. Then I would continue practicing throughout the day, stopping only when I had to talk to someone or when I had to concentrate on other things like traffic or things related to my job.

Between six months to a year into my practice I was already experiencing very noticeable changes in me. My mind was much more clear and orderly than it had ever been before for any similar period of time and I was drinking a lot less than at any time during the previous ten years. At one point I also noticed that whenever I drank in the evening, even if it was in moderate quantities, I would have more difficulty concentrating during my practice the following day.

So I decided I should try dropping alcohol altogether and see how it worked. Since I was married at the time, I had to tell my then-wife about my plans to stop drinking. Knowing how much the French enjoy their wine I was a bit apprehensive about her reaction. To my relief, she just said that it was fine with her and that she would make an effort and would also try to avoid drinking as much as she could.

Sometime later I also proposed to stop eating red meat and poultry, to which she also agreed rather promptly. I proposed this to keep at least a certain measure of yoga orthodoxy in my practice and as a means to strengthen my disciplinary capability. But the benefits of this decision extended beyond my expectations, as the mind actually becomes at least a tad more ethereal when we ingest food that contains less toxins and that is less difficult for the body to digest. Thus, with the help of these small but

useful developments, the path to follow became clearer still. My next step would be to finally set foot into the sanctity of the [Vedanta Center in Olema](#).

## **The Vedanta Center in Olema**

Gaining admittance to the Vedanta Center was again something I had not planned in advance. I had first noticed the center's existence during my trips to Point Reyes, a state park located up in Drake's Bay, about one hour drive north of San Francisco on Highway 1. There are some oyster farms in that area and my ex-wife and I used to drive up there in our camper to spend the weekend having oysters and some local dishes such as oven-roasted duck with plums and other similar delicacies.

When driving by the tiny town of Olema I had always noticed a short dirt road on one side of the highway which lead to a wooden ranch-style gate that had a wooden sign standing beside it. The sign said "Vedanta Center. No Trespassing." But the road always looked open. Whenever we went to Point Reyes I would look at the road twice, once as we were going North towards Drake's Bay and once as we were going South back home. And each time I was left wondering about it.

The thing is that well over a year into my Yoga practice I went to bed one Sunday night seriously thinking about the Vedanta Center. The following morning I woke up with the clear intention to go up there that very same day and go right in past the "No Trespassing" sign. So I called a friend and asked him to join me on my little trip north of San Francisco, to which he responded affirmatively. After all, the drive from Palo Alto to Olema is a rather pleasant one, not only because of the part involving Hwy 280, which in my view is the most beautiful section of that freeway, but because of the beauty that surrounds the road that leads from Sausalito to Point Reyes as well.

We must have arrived at the Vedanta Center around high noon, right under a bright sunny blue sky. I turned left very slowly into the little dirt road only to find the wooden gate wide open. I liked the place as soon as I crossed the gate. Before me was a quarter-mile stretch of straight dirt road partially under the shade of two equally long lines of Oak trees, one line on each side of the road. It was a beautiful sight to see. The dirt on the road was even and dry, so the drive was rather smooth, particularly since we were moving at barely 5 miles an hour. When reaching the inner end of the road there appeared before us a big, white, two-storied Victorian house with a large L-shaped porch around its façade.

I just kept driving till I got a bit closer to it and parked my car. In front of the house, across a span of white dirt and green grass about one hundred meters wide, there stood a green structure that looked like a barn. Beside the structure there were some old-looking trucks and some other machinery that looked like for farming purposes. There were also some trees between the white house and the barn which gave the

white house a good level of privacy. It was a beautiful sunny Northern California winter day and there did not seem to be anybody on the premises, except my friend and me.

So we rather respectfully looked around, walked towards the house and walked around it a little bit, but did not go inside. We turned around and walked on the inbound part of the road towards the hills in the near distance. On our way to the hills I saw something I had never seen before: White Deer; some of them with quite large Antlers. We must have walked for about a half hour in those beautiful grounds and then headed back to the house and the car, where there was a bold, rather tall Caucasian man in his mid sixties, wearing work boots and spectacles, dressed in blue overalls over a worn-out reddish shirt, sort of waiting for us.

We said hello and I immediately told the man how impressed I was by the beauty of the place. He made some comments about it and then I mentioned I had never seen white deer in my life, to which he responded with explanations about the deer origins and how they had gotten there. I had not thus far detected any signs from the part of the man that would indicate he disagreed with our being there at all, so I asked him what was the Vedanta Center all about, to which he responded rather simply that that place in particular was a center for either guided or personal retreats.

All through the conversation I had been growing internally elated about the whole situation. The day was absolutely gorgeous, the place was undeniably beautiful, the gentleman before me was very kind and talkative and now it seemed like the Center was a place that I might be allowed to visit every once in a while. So I asked the man what was it that I had to do to gain admittance to the center, to which he answered that all I needed to do was to make an appointment with a certain Swami at the San Francisco Vedanta Center, go talk to him and ask him to grant me permission to come stay at the house.

I could feel the moisture accumulating in my eyes as he finished saying that. I felt like if I had been banned from a dearly beloved place for ages and now finally someone was granting me a safe passage back to it. I asked for his name and he said his name was Swami Azitananda. So we thanked him for his hospitality and for keeping that place as beautiful as it is, said goodbye and went our way back to the Bay Area. The following day I called the Vedanta Center in San Francisco and made an appointment with the Swami who oversees the [Vedanta Society of Northern California](#).

The admittance process was very simple. I first called the Center's number that I got from the phone book and asked the lady who answered to kindly put me through to the Swami in question, whose name I have forgotten. She put me through to the Swami's secretary and I told her exactly what Swami Azitananda said I should say. She said she could schedule an appointment with him for me and asked me whether the following Monday at around 2:00 PM would be OK, to which I said yes. The following week, on the

day and at the time convened, I was at the Vedanta Center in San Francisco sitting on a comfortable sofa of the Swami's secretary's office.

About five past two the door to the Swami's office opened and there appeared a medium-height Indian-looking man in his early fifties, dressed in a typical white and light-brown Indian robe, gesturing me to step inside in a rather business-like manner. I went in past by him and sat down in the chair where he gestured me to sit. His office was noticeably smaller than his secretary's and the furniture in there consisted of only one small desk and two chairs. I do not recall seeing anything else in there that particularly attracted my attention.

The Swami sat down across the desk from me and, looking at me straight in the eye, asked me with a gentle voice, but still in a business-like manner, "What can I do for you?" I just mentioned that I had talked to Swami Azitananda about my desire to visit the Olema Center every once in a while and that he had suggested I spoke to him about it. He asked me whether I followed any kind of teachings and I mentioned [Ramana Maharshi](#), emphasizing that I had been practicing Ramana's Atma-Vichara for over a year already. Then he asked me how I had managed to get in contact with Swami Azitananda and I told him that one day I had just driven into the Vedanta center in Olema where I had a short conversation with him.

He inquired whether I had seen the sign at the Center's entrance saying "No Trespassing," and I said yes. So he kindly asked me again, this time with a mildly inquisitive look in his eyes: "You mean you saw the sign saying 'No Trespassing' and you still went in?" To which I replied with a sincere and guiltless "Yes." So he very casually said: "OK. You can go stay at the center whenever you want. Just call my secretary a few days in advance so that she may double check on the availability of rooms." Then he unceremoniously stood up and kindly extended his right hand across the desk towards me, clearly meaning that our conversation was over. I gently shook his hand and, smiling into his eyes, I said something formal like "thank you very much Swami" and then walked out of his office.

Once facing the secretary again, I asked her whether I could call her later in the week to schedule my first visit to the Center and she said I could call her any working day between two and four in the afternoon. The Vedanta Center had just opened its doors to me. Now it was only a matter of months before I would consciously meet my Eternal Self again.

There are two retreat houses at the [Vedanta Center in Olema](#), one for men and one for women. The white house I mentioned above is the one for men. The one for women is located around the inbound road's first bend, hidden behind one of the small hills. That building is much more modern than the white house and it looks more like a mountain resort than like a retreat center. I have never been inside there, so I cannot describe its interiors. There are also other Vedanta Centers in the southern part of the state which are supervised by the [Vedanta Society of Southern California](#). The one in Santa Barbara, which

has a beautiful wooden Temple facing an outstanding view of the Santa Barbara Channel, became one of my favorite places once I moved to that area, but I have never been to any of the other sites.

As it happened, about two weeks after talking to the Swami in San Francisco, at around two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, I was again pulling my car onto the Olema Vedanta Center's parking grounds. This time, however, I was there to stay for the weekend.

As I was gathering my stuff from the back of my wagon, there came behind me a rather short blond man in his early fifties, dressed in blue working clothes and wearing rubber boots, extending his right hand to me and saying "Hi, you are here to stay until tomorrow, right?" I shook his hand, said yes and continued grabbing my stuff while he talked to me about the room I was getting and where I could find extra blankets if I wanted and other similar things. As we were walking towards the house he talked to me about the work they were doing in the garden and I think he also mentioned some things about the house itself. Once inside the house he took me to the second floor, where the bedrooms are located, and showed me into one of them. There were seven bedrooms in total.

The entire second floor was carpeted, including the bedrooms. The bedroom I had been assigned was very clean and orderly, decorated in a simple manner, but in earth colors that harmonized. It was like a modest version of those cozy rooms they have in some little bed and breakfast hotels in Mendocino and other similar charming towns in Northern California. There was a wash basin inside the room and a nice desk to one side of the bed with a lamp on it. The room was very well lighted, as it had two large windows overlooking the grounds outside. The windows had curtains and shutters you could close if you so wished. In a nutshell, the room was perfect, particularly for my purposes.

After I laid my small bags on the bed the man asked me to follow him to the kitchen, as he wanted to show me how everything worked down there. As we were walking down the stairs I noticed that the first floor was fully carpeted too. The first thing that impressed me when we entered the kitchen was its size. It was quite large and it had a correspondingly large rectangular table in the center with half a dozen chairs around it. The floor was covered with linoleum and, along with the laundry room, was the only section of the house that was not carpeted.

There were two large modern ovens and a large stove at one end of the L-shaped pantry above which hung all kinds of pots and pans, with utensils, silverware, plates and cups in the pantry's drawers and compartments. There was also a microwave oven, one refrigerator and one freezer, all of them in perfect working condition. He showed me how to turn everything on, gave me some instructions regarding the refrigerator and how to store my food in there and then told me that if I needed anything I should just come ring the doorbell by the barn door and someone would come out to help me. Having said all this, he just turned around and kindly wished me a good day as he walked out of the house.

The kitchen was well lighted and pleasant, but I hardly ever used it. I had not gone there to cook or to socialize with any of the few people I occasionally found in there. I had a job to do and I intended to dedicate as much time as possible doing it. And I did. I spent hours on end without leaving my bedroom, stepping out only when I thought I should better eat something, or when I considered that a walk around the grounds would do me good. Going for a walk, however, did not entail dropping my practice. At times I could feel the holiness of the house, as if it had been imbued with a saintly spirit, which is probably the case.

That first night I practiced until 2 or 3 in the morning, only to wake up at around 7 AM to start my practice all over again. Around ten I took a shower and then went down to the kitchen to have some of the orange juice I had brought with me. Walked up to my room, finished my daily clean up and went for a walk, all of this with the Atma Vichara in mind. As a whole, out of the 28 hours I spent at the center that first time, I must have practiced over 20. In time, the ratio of practice-time over hours spent at the center would grow higher.

I must have gone half a dozen times to the Vedanta Center in the span of the following year, sometimes staying for three or four days instead of just for two. My routine would vary according to my mood each time I went there. Sometimes I would go spend a couple of hours sitting under a particular tree I liked, which is located about a mile from the house. Other times I would walk for hours within the 2000-acre grounds. In general, however, I would always practice the most inside my room, which was not always the same one, but was always equally quiet and comfortable. I often spent some time in the main living room on the first floor, where there is a photo of Ramakrishna in the center of the main wall with a painting of Buddha on one side and a painting of Jesus on the other.

They usually burn incense in the living room and sometimes there were small groups of people practicing collective meditation there. I spent short periods of time at the library as well, where they have a few books on most of the major religions of the world. There are also some books on philosophy in those shelves. [Vedanta](#) is itself a philosophy that encompasses all the major religions and philosophical schools, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Taoism and Zoroastrianism. But my main purpose for being there was not to read. I was there because that is a holy place and I had a job to do there. I had to find out what my true identity was.

Otherwise, when I was not practicing at the Vedanta Center I was practicing wherever I went. I had developed such level of concentration by then that I was now able to practice even on the freeway while I was driving. There is no danger in doing this, as I can be perfectly conscious and aware of my surroundings while immersed in my practice; thus, I am able to drive perhaps even more responsibly than many of the other drivers around me, whose minds are probably immersed in their own thoughts, thereby

not being able to concentrate totally on the road. I got so accustomed to practicing on the freeway that sometimes I would suddenly realize I had not breathed for the previous two or three minutes.

My mind was already developing a relatively steady state of void, which was providing me with a fairly constant level of internal peace. I had, of course, to abandon such state of mind whenever I had to address things involving other people or matters regarding my job and other things of that sort. But my mind was quick to return there where it knew there was a sea of peace. And now it also knew it did not need much effort to get there.

At one point I started detecting some significant symptoms in me during my practice. I was now getting a gentle swaying movement in my spine during certain moments of particularly clear concentration. That swaying was quite similar to the way an enchanted serpent is supposed to sway when it moves. Along with the swaying there were also very satisfying feelings of joy, quite similar to those I have felt in the company of women during moments of intense sensuality. I was also getting some occasional but intense bursts of body vibration during moments in which I had to use unusual amounts of will to attain higher levels of concentration.

These symptoms have been mentioned by some Yoga teachers, and they are supposed to indicate to the practitioners that they are on the right track. Still, at times I had moments of impatience and doubt as to whether I would be able to attain my goal. I knew I was practicing Ramana's method the way he intended me to, but I could not visualize how long it would take me to get there. These sporadic moments of doubt, however, did not make me drop my practice or diminish the intensity of my search. This time, my determination was unbreakable.

I knew that if I did not relent in my efforts I would get precisely where Ramana said I would get. I had seen the path he traced up to the Self with absolute clarity. I knew this was a direct knowledge I could attain. My unbreakable determination to pursue this, however, had not sprung solely from the books I had read about Ramana's method. There is another master who gave me a few tips on how to go about this. That Master is Shankara and the tips he gave me are written in his magnificent masterpiece, ["Vivekachudamani."](#) I would have probably Realized the Self without Shankara's help anyway, but I do not know how much longer it would have taken me to do it. What helped me most about Shankara's teachings is his laser-focused attention on the importance of discarding our earthly identities.

He just does not have the smallest degree of sympathy for the body and proposes that it is in our identification with it where the roots of our ignorance reside. On top of this, he describes the desire for liberation almost as an obsession, without which the success of our efforts may be jeopardized. I read somewhere that once you are bitten by the desire for liberation there is no turning back, that the true desire for liberation is like the jaws of a tiger that never lets you go until it has devoured you, that is, until

you have attained Realization. Well, that is precisely how strong my desire for liberation was. I became obsessed with it, to the point of practicing the Atma-Vichara even while I ate.

The Atma Vichara caught my mind in its jaws and it would not let go off it. So I practiced always, non stop, day and night, anytime, anywhere, until I finally got there.

## **Realization**

It all downed on me quite unexpectedly, like a sudden wind that swept my mind up into some unknown realms which actually turned out to be quite known to me. Like when you are looking for your lost eye glasses and then suddenly you realize that you had them on your head all along. "Ah! Now I remember I put them there," you say. Similarly, when you finally realize who you really are you say "Ah! But this is what I have been all along!" I even asked myself: "But how could have I forgotten this?!" It is like struggling for ages to get to the top of a mountain looking for yourself only to find yourself already waiting for you up there when you get there. When you attain the knowledge of your Real Self you know without the slightest microscopic tinge of a doubt that THAT is who you are because THAT is what you have always been and THAT is what you will always be, since forever. No shred of a doubt about it.

The final phase of my journey towards Realization began one night at the Vedanta Center in Olema. I had gone up there on a Friday afternoon intending to stay until Sunday. As usual, I had brought my own food and beverages with me so that I would not have to leave the compound for the duration of my stay. I did not practice till late that Friday thinking that I should better rest well that night to wake up fresh and ready early the next morning. The following day was rather common by the standards I had already set for my visits there. Early morning practice in my room until 9 or 10, shower, Orange juice, short walk on the grounds and back to my room to continue my practice there.

Then I would go through a similar routine in the afternoon, to finally retire for the night at around 6 or 7 PM. This time I was staying in one of the rooms that give to the grassy grounds on the left of the house, which in turn give to the road that leads outside the center. There were deer pasturing there that morning and I had had a particularly entertaining time watching them when I woke up, contemplating how peaceful those creatures can usually be. So there I was around one o'clock in the morning practicing my Jnana Yoga, sitting at my desk, facing those grounds where the deer feed themselves, when I suddenly felt something like a knot in the lower portion of my spine. "That is unusual," I thought.

By then I was accustomed to throwing energy up and down my spine in synchronization with my breathing whenever the idea of doing so crossed my mind. I had felt that little knot there in the past, but it had never blocked the energy from flowing up and down my spine as much as it was blocking it that time.

So I decided to unblock that knot and concentrated in bringing energy up from the coccid, right through the knot, slowly up towards the cervix.

It must have taken me some time to achieve my purpose and for a tiny moment I even felt a little bit of pain in the area where the knot was, but I finally managed to pass the energy through the blocking knot, thereby feeling like I had dissolved it. As soon as the energy went freely upwards I felt a sense of relief all over my back followed by a sensation of weightlessness in the upper portion of my body. It was all very pleasant, almost amusing, like if I had liberated something that had wanted to be liberated for a long time. I still practiced a bit more that night and I probably went to bed at around 2 or 2:30 AM.

When I woke up Sunday morning I felt very light of weight and my mind was in a very pleasant sort of sedated state. My practice went rather smoothly all through the day and I left the center sometime around five o'clock. I must have arrived back home at around 7 PM or thereabouts only to find my ex-wife proposing to go have dinner at one of our favorite restaurants in Foster City called the Fish Market. I just put my things on the bed and we headed north on Hwy 101. Once we arrived we got a table in one of our favorite sections of the restaurant, the Green House, which is called that way precisely because it looks like a Green House, with glass ceilings, etc.

It must have been the month of September or thereabouts because the place was full of students and there was a particularly noisy bunch of them sitting at some tables near to us. It is unusual to have noisy crowds like that at the Green House, but, strangely so, I was completely unaffected by them. My mind was still in that sedated mood I mentioned before and it remained like that for the rest of the evening. We shared a nice Cioppino between my ex and I and then we went back home, where after my customary wash up I went straight to sleep.

The following morning began in the usual way, with my now-habitual early sitting in the living room to kick start my daily practice and then doing the rest of the little things that comprised my early-day routine. That day I had to deliver some things to Stanford University as part of my job and I went ahead with my task. As usual, I was practicing as I drove along. This time, however, the memory of the knot incident on Saturday night kept coming back to my mind.

Whenever that memory came back I would trace again the path up and down my spine like reliving the moment in which I dissolved the knot. I was a bit puzzled about this because I knew it was all related to what is widely known as the Kundalini, or the serpent of wisdom, which is supposed to lay dormant in our spine until we awaken it through the practice of yoga. I had already been reminded of the Kundalini when I first began feeling the swaying, serpent-like sensation in my spine that I mentioned above.

Because of that previous experience, however, I thought that the Kundalini issue had already been taken care of, but now, after my experience of the previous Saturday, I was no longer very sure about that. With

this in mind, while I was walking down some trails on Stanford Campus, heading back to my car, tracing the energy path up and down my spine again, I thought that there must be another energy path going from the spine towards the heart. When I traced both paths together I remembered that Ramana used to say that our REAL heart is not the one residing on our left side, but the one residing on our right. So I extended the heart path across my spine and into the right hand side of my chest and “BING” the Ankh lit up.

And there I was, in the middle of Stanford University having my eternal consciousness revealing itself to me. The Atman had “LIT” itself up so that I could perceive it with my own earthly consciousness. The revelation took me entirely by surprise, but along with it also came the unmistakable certainty that there was much more to come. I did not know what that entailed, but I knew I had to get out of the streets as soon as possible. Fortunately, my home was on Kipling Street, which is only some six or seven blocks away from Stanford, so I just got into my car, started it and drove home as slowly as the circumstances permitted.

On my way there I kept telling myself: “Hang in there, Sal. You can make it home.” The other people driving by were just bubbles of eternal consciousness behind the wheel, as their “auras” or Ankhs were perfectly lit, bright and clear. I just kept on driving as slowly as I could manage, trying not to disturb the traffic, but the Bubbles of consciousness kept driving by in their Hondas and BMWs. “Everyone is just the same as I am,” I thought, “their essence is the Eternal Self too.”

As I was approaching home I took the garage beeper out of the glove compartment and triggered the garage door open. Slowly drove the car into the garage, beeped the door closed, shut the engine down and Up I went, right into the full consciousness of My True Self. And there I was, right where I am now, where I have always been and where I will always be: Pure, Eternal Consciousness. But I still had retained part of my ephemeral consciousness, which was watching its Real consciousness in complete awe. This meant that my earthly consciousness was at that point Realizing what its Real essence really is. Sal was Realizing his True Self.

So my ephemeral consciousness said, “How could have I forgotten this?” And then it surrendered again to the Supreme Consciousness, where it realized the innumerable amount of years that it had been around, probably bouncing from one body to another, “waiting” for this specific moment of Self Realization to come. And this ephemeral consciousness became aware of how entire clusters of centuries fit inside a fraction of a second and of how a fraction of a second comprises entire clusters of centuries.

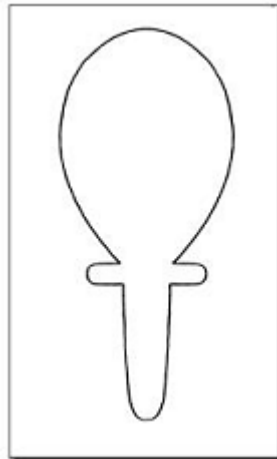
And it knew that it had always been aware of everything that has been, is and will ever be known. And stricken by the silence that emanates from a vast and incomprehensible eternity of existence, it felt the most overwhelming, absolute sense of humility it has ever felt, thereby making Sal’s hands firmly touch

each other in a spontaneous gesture of prayer, while Sal's body bent slightly forward in a spontaneous gesture of reverence.

When Sal's consciousness was for a while back into itself again, Sal's body was tenuously vibrating and tears were flowing from his eyes. Had he not been inside the car, he would have probably fallen on his knees on the floor. So he got himself out of the car and proceeded slowly out of the garage and into the living room, where he intuitively sat down on his yoga chair. At that point he felt the surge of Eternal consciousness overtaking him again and this time he was able to elucidate the exact shape that the Atman adopts when it incarnates into a person.

With his hands again spontaneously in the prayer position he contemplated himself in the shape of the Ankh for a few moments and then the rapture subsided again. Sort of knowing that he was "taking charge" of his earthly consciousness for a while again, he went to the living room table, grabbed the first piece of paper and the first pencil that he found and carefully drew the shape he had last perceived.

Picture B is a scanned copy of that drawing:



Picture B

After making the drawing I just sat in my yoga chair for a few moments, but soon after I stood up and slowly walked around the house for a while. Then I came back to my chair only to stand up shortly after to slowly walk out into the back garden again. There was a constant thought driving my restlessness, that there were perhaps many other people having a similar experience at the same time in many other parts of the world. I felt like I was part of a graduating class, a member of a large group whose time had come to transcend the earthly plane and move forever into the spiritual Realms. I felt like part of a wonderful grand design.

Some time later H el ene walked in through the door. She seemed so innocent that day. I looked at her and she looked back at me a bit startled and asked me if everything was OK, to which I replied that yes. Later on I told her that I had attained the direct knowledge of the Self that Ramana said was in store for everyone who practiced his method. She looked me in the eye and just told me she had noticed something slightly strange in my eyes when she walked in. She did not inquire any further, but that was not unusual of her.

As the day wore off I kept feeling like I was trapped in a bundle of raw flesh and found myself totally incapable of explaining to myself what on earth I was doing on this planet and attached to this body. During certain moments, the contrast between my awareness of the subtlety of my Real self and my awareness of the gross nature of my physical body made me feel somewhat disgusted. I was not feeling very physical at all and even when H el ene tried to kiss me on the lips I backed away from her. I cannot say that my Realization had frightened me, for that would not be the exact term to describe my state of mind, but I was in a mood that involved a good level of shock. Most of all, I did not have the slightest idea of what I was supposed to do with what I had realized that day.

In the course of the following few days I thought of telling my friends about this, about our shared eternal consciousness, about the Ankh, about the Atman. A couple of weeks down the line I even thought that perhaps I should try to organize a sect or a club, where people could come around to hear the good news: "The Eternal Self is here among us, it is within us and it is accessible to all." But in time I realized the enormity of that task and the small measure of my preparedness to tackle it. I did not think I had the wherewithal to confront the waves of apathy and mockery I would be faced with. "No way I can undertake this project and get out of it in one piece," I thought.

So I decided to go back to school to study philosophy with the idea of finding out about any western approaches to the Self and about the context in which those approaches might have been exposed. Eventually I also took some psychology classes, as I thought that the psychological aspects involved in Ramana's method were something worth contemplating under the light of the most salient western psychological theories. In the process I got very interested in mass psychology and later on in Political Psychology. As a result, a few years down the line I ended up getting a Master's in Political Science, which comprises philosophy, history and political economy as well.

In time I also came to corroborate the consistency of the Ankh's form with some well established mystical notions, such as the notion of the Aura that supposedly surrounds the head of the saints and the notion of the Kundalini, or serpent of wisdom, which is supposed to run from our head all the way down to our coccids. Now I know from first-hand experience that not only the saints are supposed to have Auras, but every existing human being too and, arguably, every other possible living being as well.

As I recounted above, when I was carefully driving from Stanford University to my house right after the Atman revealed itself to me, the bubbles of consciousness that I saw enveloping the heads of the people driving by were not just "Auras" around their heads, but the upper portion of their Ankhs, which was the only portion of their ankhs I was able to see through the windows of their cars. If you look at Picture C below you can see how the Ankh's upper portion envelops Sal's head in the shape of an Aura. That is exactly the same way in which the upper portion of the Ankh envelopes every human being's head.

In looking at Picture C below you can also see how the stem, or central portion of the Ankh, is perfectly consistent with the notion of the Kundalini, as it runs straight up to the head from the coccid, exactly as the Kundalini is supposed to run. Without a doubt, the Ankh's form is perfectly consistent with the relatively misconceived notions of the Aura and of the Kundalini, which are in fact one and the same single body of Consciousness known as Atman or Ankh, which in turn is the Universal Consciousness that illumines, or gives life to, the human body and mind.

As for the two short arms that spring from the Ankh's stem to each side of the thorax, the one which is easily explainable is the one projected towards the left of the stem. Obviously, that arm of Consciousness is the one that illumines the heart. The arm of consciousness projected to the right, on the other hand, is a bit more mysterious. Ramana Maharshi used to say that our real heart is not the one on the left, but the one on the right. He used to observe that whenever we point to ourselves by pressing our own index to our chests, we do it by touching the right side of our chest, not the left one. He also used to say that it is from the right-side Heart that the Self springs from, thereby asserting that that is the seat of the Self.

In my case, it was when I traced the path of consciousness from my spine to the right side of my chest that the Atman revealed itself to me, with the subsequent Realization of the Self that ensued a few minutes later. Obviously, the final crucial point in my attaining the Atman/Ankh Consciousness came when I focused my dedicated concentration on the right side of my chest, which would corroborate Ramana's assertion that that is the seat of the Self.

In all of this, however, what really matters is not my having gained direct knowledge of the form that the Atman adopts when incarnated, but my having Realized that the Eternal Consciousness which is the Atman is indeed my very own Identity and that that Identity is none other than the Eternal Consciousness which gives form and gives life to anything that has ever existed and will ever possibly exist.

Regarding the Egyptians and the pervasive representation of the Ankh found in their hieroglyphics, sarcophagi, temples, etc., in light of my Realization of the Self, the logical conclusion to which I arrive is that all those Pharaohs and characters who appear in those representations holding Ankhs in their hands were probably supposed to have attained knowledge of their Eternal Consciousness in their lifetimes.

The Egyptian Priests very likely had methods for inducing the Realization of the Self, probably by bringing the potential initiates to the brink of death, where they would attain direct knowledge of their Eternal Essence, or Ankh. Then they would probably bring the initiates back to life where they would be trained in retaining the consciousness of such Realization so that they could attain Liberation from the shackles of reincarnation whenever they finally passed into the disembodied world.

In my case, I am basically just waiting for that transitional moment to come again, as I have nothing left to do in this world but to burn away whatever Karma I have left to burn in this my final lifetime. This assertion is corroborated by the [Tibetan Book of the Dead](#), which is basically a guide on how to direct the recently-deceased individuals who are ignorant of their Real Identity into the Eternal Light which is the Self. Those individuals who have already attained direct knowledge of their True Identity, however, will immediately run into the Light of the Self as soon as they shed the mental envelope which kept them tied to this world.

Everyone will attain Eternal Liberation in their due time.

The Ankh is the Atman. The Atman is of the nature of Eternal Being-Consciousness-Bliss. I am the Atman; therefore I am Eternal Being-Consciousness-Bliss.



Picture C

The Atman-Ankh-Breath of Life illumining Sal's body and mind

## About the Atma Vichara

The Atma-Vichara, or self inquiry, is the direct way to rediscover our Eternal Self. In constantly searching within our minds for the ultimate source of our Consciousness, serious inquirers will sooner or later unveil their Eternal Identity.

There are a few things we need to know about the Atma Vichara before engaging in its practice.

- The Atma Vichara is not a Mantra. The Question “Who am I” is not an incantation that will produce magical results by chanting it. The Atma Vichara is a deliberate, direct inquiry into our minds as to who or what is the source of our consciousness.
- The Atma Vichara is not a devotional endeavor. There is no need to worship any particular deity, saint or guru in this discipline. The only devotion needed to practice the Atma Vichara is devotion to the practice itself.
- The basic implication in the question “Who am I” is that we don’t accept our earthly attributes as our legitimate identity. This implication is an essential, indispensable premise for the success of our practice, as our internal search has to be performed with an avid desire to rediscover who we really are.
- Once we are capable of inquiring within our minds with one-pointed eagerness and in a constant manner, our minds will eventually “step aside” and will let the light of our Eternal Being shine forth.
- What we ultimately want in practicing the Atma Vichara is to regain knowledge of our Real Self. To regain that knowledge, the immediate goal of the Atma Vichara is to arrest the mind’s activity, so that once any mental clutter is eliminated, our True Consciousness will reveal itself.
- The question “Who am I” is necessary basically only at the beginning. Once we have understood what it is that we’re looking for, the simple question “Who?” will suffice to produce the one-pointed concentration necessary to eventually obtain the desired results.
- When you effectively practice the Vichara with one-pointed concentration you will notice that your thought processes cease for the duration of your concentration. You will also notice that your breathing slows down or even stops altogether during the same period of time. This is because our mental activity and our breathing are intimately connected.
- As practice makes it easier to stop your mental activity you may feel complacent because of the level of success you have attained. Don’t allow complacency to settle in. The moment you realize that your thought processes have stopped is the moment you should inquire with increased eagerness as to who or what your True Consciousness really is.

- There are three basic points that we need to understand and accept in order to regain direct knowledge of our True Self:
  - A) We are not our physical, emotional and mental attributes.
  - B) Regaining direct knowledge of our Real Self is an endeavor well beyond the capability of even the finest functions of our minds.
  - C) The Atma Vichara is a powerful method that allows us to regain direct knowledge of our Eternal Self.

Once we have understood and accepted the three points listed above, all we have to do is practice the Atma Vichara with constant devotion.

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## About the Atman

There is an ongoing debate as to whether the Atman is really a separate entity from the Self or it is one and the same with the Self. This debate seems to run primarily between two clearly defined camps, that of Advaita Vedanta and that of Dvaita Vedanta.

Advaita Vedanta basically declares that there is no difference between the Atman and the Self, whereas Dvaita Vedanta declares that the Atman is a separate entity from the Self. Advaita is known as a Monistic philosophy, while Dvaita is known as a Dualistic one.

Both Ramana and Shankara belong to the Advaita Vedanta camp. I belong to the Advaita camp as well and in order to attain direct Knowledge of my True Self, I adhered hermetically fast to the idea of non-duality. However, in Realizing the Self I also realized that, strictly in as much as the Atman is concerned, Dvaita Vedanta can be said to be partially right, although it is Advaita Vedanta which contemplates the Essential Reality of it all.

In my humble view, the core of this debate resides in the inability of the human mind to elucidate the mystery involved in the Atman's so-called individuality. The notion that the Atman could be an individual consciousness whose substance bears no difference from the substance of the Universal Consciousness can be something difficult to grasp for many of us.

At first hand, the term "Individuality" and the term "Universality" seem to be mutually exclusive, so that to assert that the Atman is an Individual Consciousness but that, at the same time, it is one and the same with the Universal Consciousness, appears to be a contradiction in terms. The problem here resides in our inability to conceive as one, through the direct application of our capabilities for understanding, two concepts which by their own nature seem impossible to reconcile.

In an effort to grasp such apparent contradiction, we can try approaching the matter using indirect means, such as allegories and parables are. To this effect, please consider the following:

Imagine an Ocean of water that is indeed limitless in every sense. An Ocean that truly has no beginning and no end. Please also imagine that this Ocean is the only thing that exists in the entire Universe and that nothing else exists anywhere other than this Ocean. Now imagine that it were possible to freeze some small portions of that Ocean's water into extremely thin layers of ice. Then imagine that these thin layers of ice are so perfectly pure and polished that they are in fact the finest, most transparent kind of crystal you could ever conceive.

Now imagine that those layers of super pure and extremely thin crystallized ice mysteriously take the shape of small bubbles within the Ocean of water. Imagine also that when these crystal bubbles take shape they envelope within themselves portions of the ocean water in which they take shape. And, finally, imagine that those bubbles are allowed to travel within the Ocean waters, seemingly at random, carrying within them portions of exactly the same kind of water as that within which they travel.

If you were able to conceive these bubbles as I have outlined them above, you were able to conceive the individuality of something whose substance is in no way different from that of the totality in which it exists.

Now picture that the endless Ocean in my allegory is the Self. The Self has no beginning and no end. Then picture that, instead of water, the Self consists of Eternal Being-Consciousness-Bliss. Finally, picture the crystallized ice that envelops the bubbles in my allegory as the layer of Condensed Consciousness that forms the spurious individuality of the incarnating Atman, whose substance is actually one and the same with that of the Self. If you were able to picture this, then you already have a relatively good idea of the relationship between the Atman and the Self.

The Atman is the same as the Self and the Self is the same as the Atman, but through the mysterious intervention of the Self Itself (nothing else exists other than the Self), there are certain bubbles of Eternal Consciousness, i.e., the Atman, that, while remaining part of the totality of the Self, are also capable of acquiring certain clusters of characteristics that appear to separate them from the totality of the Self, but that, in essence, are one and the same with it.

In acquiring those characteristics, the Atman is required to incarnate and reincarnate in this world, over and over again, until it wears those characteristics off of itself, thereby no longer needing to give life to lesser kinds of consciousness such as are those that inhabit this Earthly plane. Once such clear mirroring of itself is attained through a human mind's Realization of the Self, the Atman is able to remain forever unattached within the totality of the Self where, in fact, it really always was since the beginningless, endless time.

One question here would be how come the Atman does not realize from the beginning that it is simply just a small part of the Whole? Here again, we may hit the wall of incomprehensibility involved whenever there is a mysterious intervention from the part of the Self. However, it would seem that the layer of crystallized thin ice in my allegory is not always as pure and transparent as we may have imagined. Apparently, that layer can become quite opaque, so that the more opaque it becomes, the more the Atman is bound to fall into the illusion of separateness from the Whole.

A subsequent question would be how can that pure layer of Condensed Consciousness that envelops the Atman's individuality ever become opaque to the point of blinding the Atman to the Reality of its True Nature? And the answer is: By accumulating residual lower-level characteristics. Each time that the

Atman incarnates it attaches itself with different degrees to its earthly attributes, thereby exposing itself to some very basic levels of consciousness such as are those involved in the practice of lower human tendencies, i.e., vanity, egotism, materialism, possessiveness, hate, jealousy, lust, etc. The more the incarnated Atman identifies with its earthly attributes, the more it will fall pray to those human tendencies, or lower-level kinds of consciousness and the more the Condensed layer of Consciousness that forms its individuality will become opaque.

On the other hand, the more the incarnated Atman is detached from its earthly attributes, the more it will expose itself to higher levels of consciousness, such as are those involved in the practice of higher tendencies, i.e., selflessness, universal love, meditation and philosophical discrimination, and the purer and more transparent its layer of individuality will become. The purer and more transparent such layer becomes, the better the chances the Atman stands of Realizing its sameness with the Whole.

Please note that the root factors contributing to the Atman's clarity or opacity of Consciousness are its attachment to, or detachment from its earthly attributes.

Please also note that both kinds of levels of consciousness mentioned here, the lower and the higher kinds, are also part of the Self. Nothing that may or may not happen or that may or may not exist anywhere in the Universe resides outside of the Self. Any kind of behavior that the Atman might engage in while incarnated, therefore, is also part of the infinite realm of possibilities that resides within the Self. In other words, the Atman is never drawing its opacity or clarity of Consciousness from any extraneous sources, but from the very possibility for doing so that exists among the myriad possibilities of Being that exist within the Self.

As for the reason that the Atman is set to wander across eternity in the first place, in search of the right incarnation through which it may again attain the Eternal Consciousness of Itself, no one has ever been able to explain it. All that we can say is that such is the nature of the Self: To continuously re-create Itself for the sheer Glory of Itself.

This debate about the "Individuality" of the Atman also exists between the different schools of Buddhism, although, here again, it has never met with a definitive conclusion. It would seem, however, that the branch of Buddhism that most approaches the conceptualization of the Atman I have outlined above would be Mahayana Buddhism, but this observation may also be subject to interpretation and debate.

In any case, it is worth emphasizing that in no way am I hereby implying that the Atman's Substance resides anywhere outside the Substance of the Self. No way. The same goes for whatever other reality that may ever be perceived on any plane, physical, mental or spiritual. Everything resides within the Self. Nothing exists outside of it. The Self is Itself everything that has existed in the past, exists in the present,

and will ever exist in the future. In fact, there is no past, present or future within the Self. Everything JUST IS.

The same goes for the Atman. The Atman's Substance is of the nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda, or Being-Consciousness-Bliss. The Atman exists since forever as the Eternal Being-Consciousness-Bliss which is the Self and it is one and the same with the Self.

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