

Troubling Questions and Beyond-naive answers

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Preface

Traditional upbringing that I came through has had its positive points - devotion to scholastics and being respectful of the scriptures that led me to trust broad understanding that filtered into me from various sources till I was 21. Upsetting of several thoughts took place with Sri. Poornananda tirtha swami who gave lectures on Vedānta, Bhagavadgita and Yoga Vāsishṭa over several years at Bangalore between 1965 - 1969. His more-than incisive statements led to intensive discussion amongst colleagues and self-examination of the truth of scriptural writings. Professional demands over the next thirty-four years led to setting aside the intensity of pursuit to seek answers to the questions. Tradition held its sway over the mind - issues of miracles, their authenticity, and their importance to life were not dismissed easily. Travel to select places over a time (including Rishikesh, Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Advaita Ashram, Mayavathi, Dharmasaala, Jwalamukhi and other places in the Himalayas, staying at odd places for reasonable periods of time over three years),

particularly after 2003 took place extensively. Talking to some people described as very advanced in spiritual pursuit, and reviewing these in the light of scientific thought and progress led to a well defined position that using the mind more and more incisively, asking the awkward questions to one-self and seeking answers within the framework of duality could lead to progress in rationalization of ideas and thoughts much more than advocated by anybody else. It was not difficult to ask: Is what is stated in the vedantic texts internally consistent? Can we use results from modern physics and recent research into the functioning of the brain to clarify matters? And once the mind was opened up, it became easy to see stuff in a new light and obtain consistency and simple fits to observations! In fact, it became clear that one can reach say, the 95 % point of internal consistency through logic and logic alone. In some instances when logic cannot proceed further, the conclusion was that matter must be left at that stage.

During this journey several connected but distinct questions needing rationalization came up. What is written below in separate sections are the questions and answers that one always does not expect through traditional approach. The aim is not quite to provide a pathway to progress (and if it happens, it is desirable), but to bring out the nature of what I have deduced as final truth (section 7).

1. Troubling questions?

Life for any person who lives in India is intertwined with religion whether he/she wishes to be a part, directly/indirectly or even a distant observer (he and she can be interpreted interchangeably). Inescapably he is influenced directly or indirectly. Even if he walks on the road he may hear or rather overhear a loud exchange between two persons, one extolling the virtues of a pundit or priest in the correctness of the procedures in the rituals performed or another doing it in a superior way. They might lament that the demand for fast action has resulted in the priests skipping several steps.

During specific seasons the individual may need to take extraordinary measures to avoid being imposed upon with religious songs (and other classes of songs).

Being drained with the often repetitive processes of living along with insufficient engagement of the mind in exhilarating and often creative aspects, one engages in religion or spirituality or more sedate activities to seek ways to reconcile with existence. Persistent efforts to diversify the engagements do not always lead to relief from monotony. Mind often attempts to dig deeper, shake-off monotony and creates conditions that can easily be mistaken for depression.

The number of books on religion, science and religion, spirituality is very large and one might read from new interpretations or the life of "spiritual" leaders and saints past and present.

To effectively hear a current-day interpretation, based on advice from friends, one might attend lectures on religion, spirituality in various forms - lectures on Bhagavad-gita, Upanishads, or advanced spiritual texts like Yoga Vaasishta, Sanatsujatiya, and so on. If one is "retired", one can begin a serious study of Shankara Bhaashya, Upanishads or

Looking for role models to establish a certain approach for one-self, seeking out scientists would be one approach. Most scientists of the day have compartmentalized approach to religion and science. Science is practiced like the way it should be because the pathways have been laid very strongly in the west and following that track (and sometimes, the scientists themselves ending up doing second rate science) appears straightforward. What happens when faced with personal questions is the issue. When it comes to personal issues - health or wealth in various forms, approaching a personal "God" is vital even if not publicly. It could even be "Gods" - several Gods depending on the day of the week. If this dichotomy is reduced, one might avoid "Gods" but just leave religion aside - "not my job, not to do with me" attitude. This leads to mild expression of disappointment at finding role models in Science and hence, one turns towards new age Gurus.

Maharshi Mahesh Yogi (very popular in the seventies to nineties, now no more), Sri Sri Ravishankar, Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev and several others are those who intertwine science with spirituality. The usual tenor of these discourses would be to use science to justify aspects where needed, but suggest either subtly or openly that science is limited and science gets left behind if one wishes to explore one-self. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev makes very impressive, persuasive, logical arguments to convey new view points or shake up "old" ideas. Even so, the feature of describing science in less-than-charitable terms occurs nevertheless.

Sometimes, it is indicated that "Nivrutti" should replace "Pravrutti" in later life. One would imagine that these words are synonymous with "Antarvrutti" and "Bahyavrutti". Imagine one is doing a traditional puja that has elements of external actions and some "japa" and perhaps some that involves silence. Later say, one is engaged in professional work. At a deeper level, can we argue the "external actions" during puja and professional work belong to "Bahyavrutti" and silence and "japa (perhaps)" belong to "Nivrutti"? Except silence which itself is to be debated, others involve in many interacting interfaces - physical actions and it does not matter whether it is related to professional work or related to "God". Regarding "silence", one must ask as to what is meant by this word. One understands that it implies that one reduces the organs involved with external actions to the lowest level. Avoid physical movement, close the eyes and refuse to get actively involved in thinking.

These do not prevent sounds from reaching the ears and in a quiet environment one can hear one's own heart beat in a loud and clear manner and if there is total silence around like in an "anechoic chamber", the internal system will generate signals that could be interpreted as "sounds". Experiments on people who have been isolated for indefinite time without uniform lighting show that the participants exhibit a bizarre behavior after a while in isolation and at the end. Really stated, it is not clear whether the distinctions between pravrutti and nivrutti are very sharp. It is very important to recognize this uncertainty as it helps navigating through recipes that are laid out for progress in life.

2. The beginning of "God" in one's life

One might ask: when did any of us get the idea of the world? God, specifically?

It is now well established through a large number of studies and experiments that most human beings get the idea of themselves and the world through mother, father or those who have begun to bring them up from the time of birth onwards - firstly that they are somebody within a few months from birth and there are others different from themselves on whom they will naturally depend on during the early period - even up to seven to ten years. It is during this period, either through observation of what others do or participate in and copy what they are doing as a part of normal learning process that the ideas of religion and God creep into the mind in a hazy manner. These ideas get strengthened through adolescence significantly. Preserving tradition (as against giving freedom to practice desired pathways) is a much venerated approach in the society as an approach to glorified living. A smaller part of the society refrains from imposing any idea of religion or Godhead on growing children either at home or in an environment where the children move around. Even if the ideas of God or religion are not practiced at home, the larger part of the society that almost everybody has to interact with imposes these ideas subtly or openly. Contractual documents speak of "Act of God" to invoke actions outside normal human control to off-load penal clauses for non-completion of responsibilities under the contract.

No matter where children are born, conditions at home or in the environment near to living area get created wherein being beholden to "God" is systematically introduced. Thus by the time a person becomes adult, these ideas become legitimized in the mind.

Under these circumstances, it is only when life's experiences create a doubt about these ideas, questions as to whether God really exists or what the idea of Godhead is, Is God everywhere, etc just begin to crawl into the mind when lectures on religion and spirituality are heard and the questions raise their ugly head bothering a person at many awkward moments that one begins to consider these questions seriously.

There are people who wish to visit specific Gods on specific occasions before a major or minor function, or event is celebrated at home or at the office. When their wishes are broadly fulfilled over a period of time, their view of the importance of the God is strengthened to limits such that no argument will dissuade them from this pathway. There are others who also wish to go this way, but discover only limited fulfilment of their desires or expectations and begin to have doubts about the efficacy of dependence on "God" and usually suffer from doubt endlessly. They may move from God to God (temple to temple) depending on which advice is received at which difficult point of time and still remain in doubt as their desires remain unfulfilled or heave a sigh of relief when one specific God or set of devoted actions help achieve their desires. They then become messengers of this "God" or approach telling everybody they come across as to how powerful that specific "God" is. Also, similarly, if wishes do not get fulfilled no matter how many God's temples that a person or family visits, serious disbelief in the presence of God arises. They will speak with revulsion whenever God's doings are praised or appreciated. They usually will have nowhere to go in times of crisis. A select few amongst these bear through the turbulent times with grit and courage, taking things as they come by and manage to retain sanity in life without a murmur or reference to God.

Dependence on external agents - Gods, Godmen, Soothsayers and others who may want to offer advice on the drop of a hat, so to say, is somewhat like using crutches or walking support during times of deterioration in health or when one is convalescing from surgery of some sort, say. Surely, one needs the crutches these times. But, when health returns will one retain the crutches? If one were to still retain the crutches, it looks like an artificial action more psychological than actual. Thus, it is not difficult to appreciate the need of a person, family or a group to approach external agencies at times of distress but to make that a habit throughout the life appears thoughtless. It appears as though one wants to have a standby in support services from an external God even if one is able to handle on one's own. It is not as though one has treated oneself as an instrument of God and carrying out the wishes of the Lord - not in the least. It is simply a process of increasing the reliability of success by somehow wanting to succeed.

All these things happen because no serious attempt is made to examine within oneself what "God" is and in what precise ways they are depending on "God".

Thus, there are various categories of people - people with multiple God-security ideas and say so unhesitatingly and may even brand themselves as messengers of God, people who depend on Gods but wish not to acknowledge that covering up the issues with spiritual or religious jargon, people who are in genuine doubt about "Gods" and intend to seek answers, people who are not simply worried about Gods, but go about doing what they are doing and are not drawn into any conversation of God and of course, people with many shades in between. For a select few, shaking off ideas that have crawled into them over decades and

creating a minimum-conflict strategy for living becomes a serious intellectual effort.

a. Defining God?!

God is the Lord or director (or boss) who is inaccessible to the five senses, yet whose trace is there for those who care to see.

b. What is God's accessible residence?

"The unconscious part of the brain"

Prof. Benjamin Libet's work (see the list of references later in the text) showed that the unconscious part generates the input for actions executed by the conscious part, if not negated by it. Who can give orders other than a "boss"? However, the conscious part (also an aspect of "God" as everything else) can consider if it is to be executed. A question may come up. Who gives order to the unconscious? The suggestion here is that one should pose for oneself this question to the unconscious.

c. Is not "God" in all of the universe?

The universe is composed of fundamental particles (the classical five elements in Hindu tradition are not fundamental). All material stuff is composed of protons and electrons that have been examined for their structure. Ultimately, about 24 fundamental attributes have been detected amongst all existing matter. So one can expect that the elements of unconscious part of the brain are composed of these and hence these can be simply different expressions of the fundamental stuff.

3. Being contented good? Being ambitious bad?

It is a famous advice given by advocates of Vedanta - be contented with what you have. Do not hanker after possessions. Such an attempt brings in misery, etc, etc. If we examine the technological developments over the past hundred years, it appears being "ambitious" has done good indeed. All the new technological devices that make life interesting and comfortable would not have come without the ambition on the part of a scientist to find the way things behave, the developmental scientist or engineer creating a new device to make things simpler, better as seen from utilitarian view point, the entrepreneur or commercial guy aiming to make money by selling more goods, new goods, additional stuff in ways attractive for the user to see, perceive, be induced to buy or possess the devices. There are no exceptions in the basket of users - the common man, the person who hankers after new good things and the new age God-man alike. All of them appreciate a good car, access to a mobile telephone or a flight arrangement to another country. Therefore, suggesting to-be-content with what one has is a naïve expression and is stated only on platforms, but never practiced by the speaker or the listeners. Even those who manually

grind grains would be secretly happy if a mechanically or electrically operated grinding system is provided as the drudgery in the work is reduced. If one sees a contented man with limited support services, or some people content with less than minimum support services, such situations will inevitably be a part of the spectrum of existence, but progress in life is not determined by them, certainly if we see the progress in life over the last several hundred years.

Aspirations and ambitions are distinguished. Aspirations are considered good even if the word "good aspirations" is used often. Ambition is treated somewhat negatively for, being ambitious is usually thought to mean acquiring things that one may not really deserve or getting to the place one may deserve by means not all straight, not all above board. The classical way of making a disparaging statement is "He/She is too ambitious". Can we find a simple rule by which one can determine for oneself the features described above. This is defined in terms of a non-dimensional number called Gandhi number (G_a) as

$G_a = \text{What one does for beyond one-self} / \text{What one does for one-self}$

In the above expression, one-self can refer to an individual, a family, an institution, a state, a country or the planet itself. Increasing G_a much beyond 1 should be the objective of any living person. It is useful to examine the interpretation in each of the cases.

There are several individuals who keep themselves uppermost in their mind whenever some dispensation is to be made. They slowly wish to eliminate the benefits to others in their family or group quietly if not openly. For such individuals, $G_a \ll 1$. There are also others not sufficiently recognized outside of their small families or groups who work for almost everybody outside of themselves almost not caring for themselves. For these individuals, $G_a \gg 1$.

The presence of such individuals in the society makes the society worth living in for the community. One example of this is the much revered M. K. Gandhi who led the non-violent movement in freedom struggle of India. He not only did almost everything for everybody beyond himself but he did very little to himself. His life is an example of numerator being large and the denominator being very small. G_a for him is significantly large. Thus, there is nothing wrong in being ambitious and acquiring wealth for one-self. However, in doing so, one should attempt to increase the numerator by ensuring that benefits to all beyond one-self can be enhanced. In doing so, one would have increased G_a .

Can this mean that an industrialist who seems to enjoy a very good life has a low G_a . It need not be. Many such industrialists create commercial opportunities that serve a large community and in this process benefiting themselves as well. If they do not benefit, what is the commercial motivation? In such cases, both the numerator and denominator are not small. Depending on how large the numerator to the denominator is, the person can be considered worthwhile ($G_a \gg 1$).

a. What about **government funded institutions**?

Government funds institutions for research as well teaching and in the case of higher educational institutions for both. There is jostling amongst these institutions seeking more and more funds. There is often a claim by one institutional representative claiming success in drawing more funds for his/her institution. Such an act essentially increases the denominator. Such institutions should ask themselves as to what they are doing in return. Of course teaching and training are aspects that lead to important outputs. More importantly, one can ask if the research that is performed is truly outstanding bringing the institution international laurels. If so, it is nice indeed. Even more befitting would be to seek ways by which a significant part of the intellectual property that is commercializable is also generated. Such acts will enhance the numerator while the denominator is raised by funds drawn from Government.

b. What about the **state and the country**?

Every state or the country conducts governance such that its citizenry and the land are protected and sustained. However in doing so, one can ignore the environment with short term goals in mind or conduct themselves in international dealings in ways that present their country as too self-interested ignoring the interest of others or the environment in other countries. Such countries will get calibrated at low values of Ga . It is for instance generally known that Brazil developed gasohol as an alternate to gasoline (or better alcohol as alternate to gasoline) at times when there was shortage of fossil sources of energy. This showed pathways for others to follow. The Ga for Brazil is much larger than 1 for such an act.

c. How about **scientists**? Can they have high Ga ?

If a scientist asks himself questions of global importance and resolves them, it is clear that what has been done in terms of understanding has relevance to a very large community outside of himself/herself. The Ga of such a person will indeed be large (compared to 1). For instance, Albert Einstein is a very revered scientist whose findings about the nature of nature has had a profound influence on scientists and others all over the World. Obviously, his Ga is very large indeed. Other Nobel Laureates whose work has had profound influence on the life of people in specific countries and the whole world as well can be argued to have high Ga . If a young academic or scientist were to ask what he should do in science or technology, he should be striving to increase Ga .

d. Can **technologists** have high Ga ?

This is more evident than in the case of scientists. New technologies like cell phone, airplanes that are safer to travel, lower the cost of transport, cars that are affordable and safer to travel produced by technologists and industries qualify for high Ga .

e. Can a **trader** have a high G_a ?

Yes, of course - as long as the person practices the principle of procurement and sales that will allow him/her to make profit such that it is not seen fleecing the users. The person must be able to distinguish between storing and hoarding and not practice the latter.

f. Can a **retired person** and staying home have high G_a ?

It is not that a person should always be active, intensively interacting with the society to qualify for high G_a . Even if he is contemplative, limited in terms of interaction with the surrounding environment, but responsive on demand and be seen as an unusual person worthy of being around for consultation, and advice can qualify for high G_a . In this instance, the person is attempting to reduce the denominator - reducing his wants to the bare minimum and examining his own nature so that G_a is much larger (than 1).

4. **Is science below spirituality? Is spirituality beyond science?**

Spirituality is a subject concerned with deeper universal questions of one-self and life beyond the limits of religion that is tradition and rule bound. Science is concerned with questions of observable world in all the deepest possible sense and obviously far outside of religion. Science is practiced by people of all religious faiths and the conclusions they come to based on theory and experiments applies to people of all races and far more, all the species in the universe. The theory (or experiment) prescribes the limits of applicability over the species-space-time domain always wanting to look for generality in applicability. Since spirituality is concerned with matters within one's mind, it is often stated that where science ends, spirituality begins. This is playing with words and in reality whether you think of "science" or "spirituality" you have to use your mind. When examining nature outside of one-self common to all people in many ways, the contemplation is of the external world, in fact, the issues of the external world are modelled in the mind and examined. And this examination needs deep contemplation to resolve paradoxes and conflicts that nature presents. Many a time, this degree of contemplation can be no different from resolving internal human complexities of ideas: to aspire or not to aspire, be ambitious or be contented, imposed unhappiness and joy all of which are the stated concerns of spirituality supposedly outside of science. Whenever such observations are made, it appears that the meaning of "science" is misunderstood. Science when interpreted as a systematic approach to study of questions seeking validity of resolutions at as many stages as possible appears applicable to the study of external factors as much as internal. And mind usually treated as a single amorphous entity is now broken into simpler activities inside the brain and resulting perceptions. Each of these activities is examined through various new non-invasive tools. These have shown very many interesting aspects.

- a. The brain activity precedes the awareness of an action that is about 300 ms. Thus any claim to conscious decision making is to be understood to be "presumptuous". This is the contribution by Prof. Benjamin Libet (2006).
- b. There are other experiments in which the actual action that gets taken (by the brain) bypasses our conscious awareness completely (stick reaching experiments as well as Roelof's illusion, Chris Frith, 2007).
- c. Extensive brain imaging studies of meditators (Buddhist being the largest number) appear to show that there are large scale changes occur in the brain activity during meditation (Matthieu Ricard, TED talks; also see Antoine Lutz et al, 2004). This process is supposed to lead to people with much less stress and hence "happiness".
- d. The center of free-will is also examined by allowing people to make a range of choices and locating the part of the brain that lights up under these conditions (Chris Frith, *ibid*, p. 186).
- e. Francis Crick and Christoff Koch have examined the question of consciousness within the framework of brain function (through neuronal connections) and argued that many of these questions are within the ambit of scientific study at this time (Francis Crick and Christoff Koch, 1998).
- f. There have been a number of studies on the scientific foundations of consciousness by Roger Penrose and others. These studies and others are very intensively debated amongst the deepest thinkers in science and mathematics (R. Penrose, 1990).

It is very important that any new lectures (or more appropriately, discourses) on Vedanta and spirituality take into account these developments seriously than being dismissive. For instance, an oft quoted statement is that the developments in quantum mechanics along the lines of "theory of everything" and quantum vacuum (and other such concepts) lead nowhere; science has hit a wall and so one should turn to spirituality. Such arguments are very simplistic. If one examines the developments in science over the last hundred years, it has happened that some scientific efforts have reached stagnation for some time or reasonable time. Then, a breakthrough occurs because of a development in experimental tool or a theoretical framework when the course of scientific development takes a deep turn. What is more appropriate or relevant is to examine the scientific developments and whether the relationship of these to the ideas and thoughts in spirituality need a change or remain the same - because what is happening is the change in thinking whether it concerns external world or the internal world.

5. Is the state of Sanyāsa great? Is the state of Avadhūta better?

Sanyāsa is one of the four states of functioning in the society. A sanyāsin relinquishes all possessions of life at whichever stage he (could be "she" as well) is in and functions on a day-to-day basis without the thought of acquiring possessions and planning for a life. His relationships with others in the society are uniform as though he sees "self" in every other person or even an animal. He functions with simplicity in life with minimal most of the needs - food, clothing and shelter, does not demand anything and survives by what is offered at the minimal mode. He conducts himself as a person involved in contemplation seeking his "self". He is expected to wear ochre robes (kāshāya vastra) for him to be reminded of his serious role in the society and the society to respond to it. In the society, the state of Sanyāsa is considered an honor higher than of a king or a ruler for the person is expected to be at the highest moral state, wanting little from the society but giving all that he/she has - wisdom. Traditionally, responsibilities like the heads of a religious organization are held by Sanyāsins, as they function by holding the position as a trustee-manager in one role that they need to discharge. That serious distortions in the functioning of sanyāsin-led institutions have occurred at various times indicates the lack of demand of highest integrity from such offices by the interacting society. Also, it is not easy to maintain the path of contemplation and meditation until one has truly enjoyed the highest state since most people get swayed by the attractions of life. If, in addition, when one is positioned to receive the highest respect from a large number of distinguished people in the society, and these constitute a large amplification to even a subtle ego, it is even more difficult to withdraw oneself into solitude. There are however, select individuals who have discharged such responsibilities in a befitting and remarkable manner, like Chandrasekhara Bhārathi amongst the individuals identified earlier.

In this position they need to discharge roles beyond practicing towards inner evolution and maintaining a state of equipoise; they also have to help manage the principal aspects of the institution. And no specific rules are laid down as to the duration of being in the position as the head of the institution. This may have been ignored because it was expected to be occupied by such distinguished people that they could regulate their relative activities between the demands of the outer life and the inner life. This perhaps is a serious flaw in the system. Every head of an institution/organization with responsibilities to public life must have a time for retirement - not just government officers only. An upper limit for functioning as the head of the institution must be specified. It is possible that if the person concerned finds a next man to take control at an earlier stage can still remain in the office in an emeritus status exerting moral control and not formal one. This will enhance the moral authority even more than whatever it was earlier to that.

Avadhūta state, in a way, is one that is even more evolved compared to sanyāsa. In this state, the person concerned has evolved so much that even the rules of

sanyāsa do not apply. It is a state of bliss or post - nirvana in which the person conducts his life in a manner that he demands nothing from the environment - food, shelter or clothing. He might move around aimlessly and irrelevantly; but when he chooses to interact, it would be blissful to those who come into contact with such people. A sanyāsin could evolve into an Avadhūta. Even a non-sanyāsin could get to the stage of an Avadhūta. Sadāshiva Bramhendra is a well known Avadhūta having attained this state bypassing the formal sanyāsin's state. Anonymity is a principal property that the person chooses to enjoy because that gives the greatest freedom. It is the freedom of existence at all levels of thought and action that is valued the highest - that is all that is valued; rest of the existence is a "drama" executed such that it is not evident it is done with concern or no-concern. It is entirely possible that a Sanyāsin can elevate himself/herself to the state of Avadhūta. The dress code that is followed is done as an external need as a part of tradition. An example of this kind is Sri. Chandrasekhara Bhārati. Ramana Maharshi did not take sanyāsa at all but lived his life an Avadhūta.

6. Freedom and Anonymity

Nearly all people desire being famous, well known and hence, respected. This makes them the focus of attention of most and hence they lose anonymity. This implies certain loss of freedom.

To be influential, to help cause a desirable change on a large scale in a community, society or a country is a desirable attitude. This does not mean attempting to be "famous". Performing the act by attempting to be anonymous - merge with the crowd, so to say, would perhaps be a respectable attitude.

Anonymity is not recognized as a sign of freedom, but as a direction to getting freedom for one-self. In fact, anonymity is sometimes maligned in the society as an undesirable quality being possessed only by worthless people. It is true that worthless people are anonymous. It is also true that worthless people try a whole lot to do things to become "famous" and so "non-anonymous". Yet, what matters in the end is an inner power while practicing equality with the environment, a feature that enables one to be anonymous and enjoy the freedom of doing whatever one wishes without uncalled-for external scrutiny. This feature is stressed a whole lot by Don-Juan in his teachings to Carlos Castaneda (see the six books by Carlos Castaneda, 1970+)

7. Conscious and the unconscious parts of the mind

When we sleep, the conscious mind is largely shut down. The subconscious remains sub-conscious during the period when the conscious part is active. What we do during the period of keeping quiet during wakeful period (note, I do not use any other word that needs explanation) by keeping external inputs to a minimum possible is to help the conscious mind and the subconscious mind get

closer to each other while attempting to be aware once in a while. The last bit needs explanation. A thought unrelated to external input arises in the mind of which you become aware. This thought may largely be from the experience of earlier day (s) or an arbitrary thought. If there has been an intense emotional experience - like a fight or an unexpressed argument in a discussion the previous day or meeting somebody undesirable with unpleasant feelings, these will crop up soon enough in the mind. This is because the conscious part has to rationalize it with a mental image of oneself and others with a presumed value system of how one should have behaved. In the following days, the intensity of the thought will decrease slowly depending on how "intense" the person is.

Returning to the primary issue, if the conscious and the subconscious get close to each other, the conscious part becomes aware of the sub-conscious more and more. This eventually may cause the conscious and subconscious to merge into a state when it will be difficult to distinguish between the two. This, it is hypothesized as the state of Turiya described as the higher state in Mandukyopanishad. This Upanishad describes another state - Dream. This state is a projection of subconscious into a pseudo-conscious state and here again there can be varying states depending on the intensity of the projection. Day-dreaming is another state in between.

The observations above can be stated in other ways - the final state is one when you can enter consciously the state of sleep or become consciously unconscious. These versions indicate self-contradiction in the words used since deep sleep is a condition in which there is no conscious feeling of world awareness. Quite often, scriptural writings have phrases and terminology that appear contradictory and internally inconsistent due to this reason.

Clearly, brain has a range of identifiable states - deep sleep and wakefulness being at the two ends of the spectrum and a range of states in between. If a state is reached where all these are merged - awareness remains throughout. Whether this another "quantum" state in addition to the end states as well as intermediate ones is a subject of further exploration. This is the state of Nirvana, I think! Such a person left to oneself is sleepy or awake all the time. It requires external input to disturb the state of equilibrium. Analogy-wise, the state is somewhat like super-critical state of a liquid where the interface is missing. Many scientists when uncovering "great truths" clearly state that they got the answer at some odd moment not related to thinking on the problem at that moment even if they have done so for long hours and talked about it to colleagues over a time (see Roger Penrose), A quote by Richard Hamming on his widely read article "You and your research" is "It happens that someone wakes up in the morning and suddenly has the solution to a problem. The unconscious has done the work while sleeping. This only happens if the unconscious has nothing else to work on. So it is said, "keep your unconscious starved" as another form of drive or commitment.

How do we reach it? Can we facilitate reaching it is an important question?

From this direction of thinking, it is clear that reaching this state is not easy at all. Historical evidence suggests that **Ramana Maharshi** was in that state. The description of the **Chandrasekhara Bhārati's** life seems to indicate that he was in a state close to that.

Buddha must have reached that state (even though there is no strong historical evidence for that) because some of his responses to questions as documented in literature appear to be a person who has experienced that state.

Many new Godmen in recent times may have experienced that state briefly, but not quite there. While once there, one gets hooked on to it because of the experience of ecstasy and inner quietitude, the fact that one wishes to engage in activities not very different from CEO's of institutions implies that many of them are yet to be "there". Obviously short experiences may themselves become powerful sources for such actions. Being "there" may not occur for longer durations. This is the reason why it is not "easy" to be in that state. Any attempt to experience duality of the world becomes a burden and hence remaining in that state becomes natural. However, being in the state of duality, it may be interesting to read about the state of inner quietitude, but, can one attempt to reach that state somewhat like climbing Mount Himalayas and reaching the peak? The important and crucial point is that the attempt to reach that state itself draws one away from the state. "Attempts" should tend to zero as one approaches the state. One by oneself cannot reach. The system must evolve to that state. This leads naturally to the next question: Can really one achieve by "one-self" anything at all? If one can, then one has free-will. If not, it is all a matter of fate. Everything is predetermined and one has not options but to go along a path.

8. 20 minute meditation and other life afterwards?

Quite often, advice provided is to engage in a 20 minute meditational practice in the morning before getting to the work of the day that can be very long - eight to twelve hours with small breaks for lunch and tea and in the case of families with small children, child care itself occupying time. An argument is made that from the time one wakes up all the tasks occupy time to an extent that there is no time for meditation. This is sometimes countered by stating that so much time goes away for so many tasks that may be poorly organized that the claim of non-availability of time for meditation is incorrect. In this conflict of arguments, it is often forgotten that the day itself could be used to make inner progress and the degree of emphasis on the 20 minute meditation may be excessive. What is this that is being talked about? Inner development demands that external activities should become an engagement and not an entanglement. It is stated in the same discourses that the activities be conducted with dispassion and not passion.

Is this an easy task? If so, the world would have been vastly different. Conflict arises because one person, group, institution, state or country wants to possess more than what is seen as reasonable compared to the other (person, group, etc) and there is feeling of an unfair share. The conflict creates issues within oneself that causes a continued annoying state of mind. If one applies mind at each transaction whether one is fair to the others (sense of fairness to oneself is always embedded, only one should take care not being more than fair to oneself) and keeps correcting the actions towards the sense of fairness towards an ethically meaningful condition, this itself becomes a "meditation-of-sorts". The idea behind the 20 minute mediation is that it prepares the mind to manage the rest of the day better than otherwise. But if the rest of the day itself becomes the subject of attention in detail to be dispassionate and work with empathy, the progress that one achieves may truly be stupendous. Each person becomes more wanted in the community and society and can function with equilibrium stated to be the property of the most evolved. Thus, 20 minute meditation may be worthwhile for practice. If missed, it won't wholly matter, for the ten-hour meditation is waiting to happen! Also, one must remember that if the 20 minute meditation is missed, it induces a feeling of hollowness in the mind of having missed a duty - a duty towards one-self. Would this be the aim of the meditation? The absence seems to cause pain. This is not desirable. Hence, one must evolve sensitively such that the benefits that the 20 min-meditation is expected to give should not be lost because for some reason or the other, it is missed on a day or set of days.

9. **How long to meditate?**

One is often led to think that long periods of meditation lead to "greater" or "earlier" results. There are people who indeed spend time on this basis. After several years of such an effort, it does not appear that their normal skills have had any change whatever. In fact, it appears as though the common sense that should permeate normal life seems to have dwindled. One might argue that this indeed is a passing phenomenon. If the person concerned is living in an environment that has limited external contact, that needs limited interaction, then it is appropriate to let things the way they are. However, these are the people who need to work in normal life and if it is seen that meditative practices bring down the normal abilities, it is not clear what meditative practices are doing.

Meditation as a practice is to let the system connect with the source (the conscious with the sub-conscious) happen with minimum external noise. The external noise is dependent on the activities that one undertakes during the working period. As brought out earlier, if the activities are conducted in the working period such as not to cause an overload on the system, the system tries to go within. If on the other hand, there is intense external interaction that

may be unethical sometimes and strong reactions to the environment at other times, the residual stresses are brought up during the meditation. Increasing the period of meditation does not help at these times. The attempt should be to reduce the noise in the external interactions - managing the working life with little extra possessiveness, minimal anger and passion. This is in fact the key to using the working life to make inner progress not adequately stressed. A clean working life helps better meditation. Better meditational practice helps bettering the working life. The snowballing effect comes by employing dispassion in working life and longer practice. The length of the practice is linked to the approach in working life. Extending the duration in either direction will not yield results. It is stated that some Buddhist meditators have spent 40,000 hours in meditation - about twenty years (Antonio Lutz et al, 2004). If one were to listen to such meditators, it is not clear that the wisdom that emanates from such people is any more than from several others who may not have done any practice at all. It is crucial to attempt to reduce "Vāsanās" much more than doing meditational practices to progress inwards.

10. Music for entertainment or Nirvana?

Music as a route to entertainment or refreshing the mind is at one level. Music has also been thought of as a route to deeper inner evolution towards "Nirvana". That music can be strong emotional tonic for a disturbed mind and can create a very intoxicated internal state is generally well known. That music has very deep influence on the mind has been explored very extensively (Oliver Sacks, 2007). But a fundamental question has been raised - whether one can reach "God" through music? It is often exclaimed that Saint Tyagaraja had reached divinity and this has become a role model for budding musicians (though most are lost far ahead in money, fame and other acquisitions that music lets its expert exponent enjoy). The other distinguished musicians of his period - Muththuswami Bhāgavathar and Shāmā Shāstry are spoken in similar terms though not with the same intensity. A substantive discussion on music and arts in relationship to mind appears in the book "How the mind works" by Steven Pinker. The key point made there is that music and arts are creatures of the mind and let you get to a stage of advanced evolution, depending on the cultural ethos and upbringing.

Mistaking the state for the final one would be incorrect since the final state is one of silence - music must smoothly transition into silence and allow a person to be there. Music as understood by most - as tonal variations with time must sink into silence if it has to qualify for that. If silence is the final objective, it can be acquired by other means as well, though music to most in its variety is a good approach. Thus music can be claimed to help go towards silence and the intense

emotional state to which music may elevate a person must not be mistaken for the final state - for emotions are within the mental framework. That truly outstanding music can elevate the mind and create a state of ecstasy can be benefited from doubtlessly; very small part of the music that is heard around qualifies for it because mind is able to dissect the music into "excellent", "good" or "not-so-good" and music that takes one out of the current state of mind into ecstasy should be beyond analysis. The fact that history of musicians over the last five hundred years has not indicated to claims of Nirvana through music except for Saint Tyagaraja, it appears that this route is about as difficult as any other. It is useful to recognize this point because it is often stated that the pathway of emotion (or Bhakti) is often claimed as easier of the routes compared to that of analysis (Gñana). It appears in a way far more difficult. The reason is not far to find: Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev has correctly indicated that we as human beings are composed of various aspects - emotions, analytical skills, physical work. While any one or more of these can be combined into a pathway, to claim that one of these is simpler is simply untrue - why so? This needs more analysis.

Most people do analysis - but only when truly required. Otherwise, analysis is stated to be difficult (Gñana marga is considered difficult as stated usually). People go and pray to the God or the Lord things that they wish to be fulfilled. Every prayer, they know, is not fulfilled. They get a doubt therefore - will God truly fulfil their needs? Is this a question of the springboard of analysis or lack of Bhakti. Bhakti is often equated to falling at the feet of a God (or Godman many a time) seeking blessings - which is essentially aimed at the fulfilment of their wishes. Surely, Bhakti is not as trivial as this! Bhakti calls for unconditional love with intensity many times defying logic and analysis not found easily. The relationship between Sri. **Rāmakrishna Paramahansa** and Goddess he worshipped at the temple may be likened to a son-mother relationship where the son is giving unconditional love and devotion to the mother.

11. Vedic chantings, alternate to music? Japā an alternate route?

In a way Vedic chantings are stated to qualify as an approach though no such claims are made. However, even evolved souls seem to enjoy Vedic chantings, Ramana Maharshi being one example.

This then lands the subject into the role of Japā or repetitive chanting of specific words (or really, Mantra) towards inner evolution. Quite often there are depictions of a "yogi" involved in Japā acquiring supernatural powers. In fact a person performing the Japā under hot sun with fire burning all around, also involved in doing it in winter with snow all around provide inspiration to all that such routes are inevitable to obtain supernatural powers. I wish to assert that these aspects have received very little scientific investigations and what permeates the environment is folklore. Sometimes even a simple self-examination will reveal several aspects. Suppose one is doing Japā for reasonably

long durations. After some time, the conscious mind transfers the routine task of repetition to subconscious control. Japā will continue unhindered. But then, the conscious mind will continue its activities of thinking or mulling over other aspects of life. Occasionally there will arise a realization as to the duality of actions of the mind. It is really unclear what such japa is expected to achieve. In fact, at Rishikesh, I met once a person who had done six hundred thousand "Gayathri" japā over a period of 6 months, something very substantive. It is clear that there are changes that occur in the brain during this period. But what is important is to examine if there are substantive positive changes consequent upon the practice. On enquiry as to the changed status of his inner being after some years, it appears there was very little residual effect and he was just as "normal" as he thought he was. It is important that these aspects be researched scientifically before extolling the virtues of Japā.

12. Yagnas and burning firewood - clean combustion?

Yagnas are performed as a holy act supposedly for self-purification as well as well-being of the society. Tiny sticks from select trees and firewood are consigned to flames in an ordinary fire pot or a specially constructed one in accompaniment to invocation of Sanskrit mantras by one or several priests. These are considered so holy that there are grades of these yagnas the conduct of some of which is thought to require great understanding of the nuances of both the mantras and the offerings. The offerings range from clarified butter (ghee) cooked rice, to garments like silk cloth, coconuts and others.

I have had occasion to witness several of them including one at Sringeri in celebration of the birth day of the mutt head. The Yagna shaala had 18 sacred fire places dug into the earth about three-fourth meter deep into which the offerings and fire wood with ghee was offered by more than two priests for each of the fire places. The whole process went on for about four hours and after three hours or so the place had already become inhabitable with so much of smoke engulfing the people in the area including the priests. Towards the end of the Yagna most young men were carrying a wolf-blower from the fire place to fire place to try and reduce the smoke by driving the air into the fuel zone. This looked amazing since using wolf-blower to reduce the smoke would not have been prescribed in any ancient text, for sure. I have spent a long time in my life on examining the methods of creating clean combustion to minimize the emissions from biomass combustion. There were many things fundamentally wrong in the way they conducted the combustion process. Ancient texts seem to have given a prescription of the size of the fire places and their shapes. But they do not seem to have fixed the moisture in the fire wood nor specified the size in the original texts.

I was puzzled why people insist on such an unclean combustion process and an awkward way to make it cleaner at the end by the use of modern devices. I spoke to those I could there and other priests who are the leaders of the Yagna

and asked them as to whether they were seriously interested in clean combustion of firewood in Yagna. There is not one person I could pick who had the courage to say they would want some change. Engaging with the Jagadguru or his other senior assistants was clearly no answer since I could easily be brushed aside or even dismissed as a person with some aberration irrelevant to the mainstream thinking and activity. So be it, I thought. Clearly the same stagnation in the thinking process has permeated the deeper aspects of life and the ability to integrate the progress in understanding of the brain processes that has occurred in modern science seems completely missing. Unfortunately, tradition has only limited advantages. When the power of knowledge comes through science, tradition that is inconsistent with it will inevitably be kept aside in the beginning and the society moves away to newer ways of conduct of life as is already happening in the society.

13. Living on Beliefs - for how long?

In doing any new task, one starts with a belief that things will go along towards the intended goal when one traverses along the path. As one goes along, one may discover that the initial belief is perhaps not correct and some deviations need to be made to the pathway. One actually does so and moves in a different direction towards the goal. This is in fact the starting point of any research student. Once experiments are done or theory constructed, the question that is asked is: have you assessed if the experiments are repeatable? Have you compared your theory with the experiments? What do they show? Is there a new revelation that arises from the experiment? etc, etc. If no significant revelation occurs because of these efforts, one would go back to the initial thoughts, beliefs and expectations and make suitable course corrections. This is done because one needs to finally arrive at a validated conclusion about some aspect of nature for the research to have meaning.

One notices, however, that for a large segment of people who have belief in "God", the belief seems to continue throughout their life without a need for determining if they progressed in converting the belief to certainty. They would in fact extol the virtues in belief rather than questioning the beliefs at some point of the time or the other. Rather unfortunately, realization of this situation appears so late in life that there is not much time to do anything about one-self. It is not that most of such people have true devotion (bhakti) in their beliefs that they can carry on with life on the wings of devotion even though this is what they want to say. The reason that it is not true bhakti is because logical thinking permeates their other parts of life when it concerns acquisition of goods, treasure, name or fame. One sees that belief is invoked so partially that it appears clearly even to believers if they choose to examine themselves that this belief is also one of the items to be practiced to be successful in life. It is like going to a temple when told that the God is powerful. When the "power" does not express itself to the person concerned, it is rationalized that the person not being so well prepared to receive the "power" and moves on. Thus

one establishes many escape routes for one's own approach that directed action to move from belief to certainty does not occur at all. The answer clearly is that any seeker can start with belief but not end with belief only. It is only then that the person has succeeded in going along the pathway.

14. Fate or freewill?

This is a perennial question debated extensively, worried about as well. If one examines the circumstances of life, one can discover that on occasions, a small event has led to a significant change of one's own life's pathway. It would not be possible to connect the event to the subsequent happenings and one would be left to wonder how the "small" event caused that "large" change. It is when rationalizing these transient moments of importance that one infers that perhaps this was destined to happen; otherwise it would not be possible to explain it. But more often, one thinks: I have the freewill to do this or that. In fact, I can cancel going to the office today because I think so at this time. It is to explain this conflict that one needs to invoke Prof. Libet's result discussed earlier. What the study and its expanded version in several laboratories have shown clearly is that, when one asserts, one is not going to office at one time or the other, there would be a signal generated in the brain unconsciously even before this statement is heard. This implies that in simple words, the "boss" is inside the unconscious part of the brain deciding things. The conscious part is only to vocalize, be a speaker. Challenges to these ideas when examined with careful experiments are nullified and one needs to accept that all life is "fate" or "sealed". Can this be challenged by saying I will stop working, let me see what happens? One's normal activities are because of genetic bearings and the circumstances around and it appears frivolous to say, I will stop working because that itself is another work and one needs to examine what is not work. Even when we sit quiet can we say we are not working, just because we do not go to the laboratory, work place or class? Thoughts are going back and forth, planning a new strategy, winning a contract somehow, preparing in the mind a strategy for an important presentation at a conference, etc - are these not important tasks, more important than the actual event because it is here that it was planned. Can these belong to "no work" class? Fine, one might say, I will sleep without going to work. Can any person sleep endlessly, even with breaks for essentials - it is simply impossible. It is at least as impossible as working continuously for 24 or 36 hours. The system inside will throw itself out into the conscious state and one has little choice but to bear with it. It is only the "evolved" one who can stay in sleep as much as in wakeful state because "he/she" is always at the interface and shifting from one to the other is simply a gentle wish/push.

15. Great books needed? Watchful passage not adequate?

In the pathway to inner growth, it is often suggested that one should read Bhagavadgita, Upanishaths and other texts of this nature. For the new initiate, reading such books will bring together in the mind the essential ideas. There are so many treatises that contain simplified commentaries on the sacred works in many Indian languages that might enable the new initiate to understand the basic aspects. Often after retirement or at an age when other activities do not draw away the time, one reads these books again and again. More than reading, it is often repeating - almost like Japa, once in the morning and once towards the evening. In fact the life is thought well handled if one would do these regularly. Unfortunately, in this approach, the progress achieved is very little, because the repetitive action gets transferred to the subconscious as an action and the conscious mind is adrift as much as ever. But some wiser people read these books for contemplation. This is somewhat like literature study of a research student - go to the library, pick up recent journals and read the material close to the work one is engaged in. It looks well justified and is even promoted by supervisors as a good thing to do. Unfortunately, these add up to very little. The reason is that there is no burning issue in the mind. Unless and until the mind is beset with questions that need an answer, a conflict to be resolved, a paradox to be explained, the search and examination of the literature will be entirely superficial. So will it also be true with the study of scriptures. Unless the active mind searches for answers, literature will be unhelpful. If of course, somebody memorizes the scriptural passages as several do, they will become valuable in quoting from various sources like a parrot. This will not lead either the person who is quoting towards enlightenment or the audience who listen to it. They will all be happy that many correct things have been stated in the scriptures and continue the tradition as times move forward with no deeper inner progress.

On the other hand, performing meditation and watching the mind will throw up questions occasionally and it would not be easy to resolve them to satisfaction. It is then a study of the scriptures would provide some inputs towards resolution of the issues. This will not be simple either, because the scriptural writings are in Sanskrit written cryptically - short words carrying a load of meaning. Understanding them requires examination of the grammar in terms of the words and the context of specific meaning that is expected to be conveyed by the word and so on. This is so subtle that it has given rise to multiple interpretations of the same scriptural writings, the famous example being the interpretations of Brahma sutra, Principal Upanishads and Bhagavadgita by Adi Shankaracharya (Advaita), Madhwacharya (Dwaita) and Ramanjacharya (Visishtadwaita) with the three of them providing diverse interpretations of the same text. It is not the suggestion or intent here to settle the issue involved, but go past them and examine questions within one's mind on one's own efforts and then consider the appropriate sections of the original texts along with the interpretations, if need be, but attempt to draw conclusions for oneself independently.

16. What about ego? There is so much talked about.

Somebody being on an ego trip is a standard phrase. It has been analyzed a whole lot. Without it, one is a discarded vegetable. With even a slight inflation, one is most undesirable. Having a healthy ego within oneself is also termed "having self-esteem". Self-esteem is an important quality in every person. Any systemic feature that attempts to reduce the self-esteem will be self-destructive to the individuals and community. Staying on a balanced ego is an important aspect.

If one progresses in life with accomplishments that attract attention, appreciation and adulation, ego boosting is a natural phenomenon. How can this be battled? Most people will have possibilities of inputs to stay balanced. If one is successful, there will be examples of even more successful people either in the vicinity or in the range of compatriots elsewhere that should let people realize that there is more to accomplish and it is better to stay slim on ego. It is entirely possible that the accomplishments of some have no match anywhere around and adulation adds to it enormously. But life is very diverse. Even the most well known face can find environments where it is entirely possible there will be no recognition of who the person is. A student (of mine) was greeted by another in the campus of IISc and it came to his realization that the person who greeted him casually was the recently awarded Nobel Laureate. Such a realization can be very sobering. Seeking such an environment is a possible way to deal with one self. Going on pilgrimages into generally not well trodden places will provide people with little interest in the rest of the life and it will be entirely possible that even the prime minister of a country may go unrecognized. This preserves the anonymity that helps balance the ego. There are other aspects that can bring sobriety to one's life like - "The most popular people have a time span of attention; even kings and the most famous people have to die' etc. And after sufficient lapse of time very few of them get remembered except occasionally that too in select communities. Thus, the question crops up - what about oneself? Is there any guarantee that one will be remembered beyond one's existence for any meaningful period of time when the population is continually increasing and more and more people are clamouring for attention. What people think is all relevant when one is still living. Can one be bothered about what people think after one's death? This direction of thinking again is very healthy on trimming the ego. In summary, the much blamed ego is essential for meaningful existence as long its dance is limited. Many are the tools to limit it as long as it is realized that such an act is desirable.

17. Great men - who and why? Great tasks - what?

Great men are those whose $Ga \gg 1$. Another way of stating this is that their work and contributions are assessed by peer groups and society at large as being several standard deviations from the mean. This implies that such people are a

rare breed and must be treasured by the society. There are in some periods of time serious distortions in the perception of who is great. For instance, in the nineteen thirties, a large section of German people thought that Hitler was a great leader and revered him. At the current time, for instance, film actors are revered more than several other sections of the society whose contributions may be even more substantial and long lasting. This is the property of the society in totality and the benefits and problems associated with this will be reaped by the society. When times change, other sections of the society may assume the revered position. Beyond all these, the religious and the neo-spiritual leaders are the most revered sections. This is the final call for most, since, even the other revered sections of the society go to these leaders for advice on their personal wellbeing as well as professional aspects. While all of the spiritual leaders do provide valuable psychosomatic support to various segments of the society (note that the distinguished people are not any better than ordinary people in terms of psychological strength), the way things happen over a period of time seem to show that **their Ga comes down towards 1**.

Do we need to be concerned about great men at all? The answer is Yes, we need to be concerned. Quite often people extol the virtues of seven sages (Vasishṭa, Viśvāmithra, and others) and all that they represent. Most of the writing that is on these sages and others of olden times is shrouded in history (or mystery) that we do not have a record of them as historical figures. If somebody brings out the details of some of them, it turns out that others claim several persons with the same name but different periods of history. We should let historians bother about these matters and even touching the subject will get one entangled if one is seeking truth of the matter.

Hence we should look for historical great men. From this perspective if we list people who have sought truth for its sake to the exclusion of other aspects, we have Buddha, Sri. Rāmakrishna Paramahansa, Sri. Chandrasekhara Bharati, Ramana Maharshi, and several others. There are also others whose life history has been so distorted that it is difficult to decipher the truth from the writings even after filtering some excessively worded statements. If we take the life of any of these people after they have realized there are descriptions available of their life that I consider very instructive. All of them have conducted their daily lives in ways that are not special; yet, they were special. I shall address three of them here.

The way Siddhartha evolved into Buddha is very relevant to many (like me) because he went through the early part of the life as a very ordinary person with a family, however keen an observer or thinker he may have been. If his life had ended along a course similar to what it was till the time he made a radical departure in his youth, history would have forgotten him. The fact that he spent the next seven years in a single minded way to the complete exclusion of anything else to seek answers to fundamental questions of life distinguishes him

from most seekers. I suspect he was also basically very intelligent (the word used in the traditional sense), something that is not described in any detail in any well researched history on him. I infer this because, even though there were several practitioners of Vedanta in his period, there must have been too many involved in the practice of "isms" rather than the core of Vedanta and there was not any "core" stuff that he could be deeply respectful of. For him to pursue, ability was needed to turn away from the unsatisfactory, when really, the pathway to the satisfactory was not clear; this needed intelligence apart from strong instinctive feeling.

I am emphasizing the aspect of intelligence since the discriminative ability is not always instinctive unless a person has already grown internally and the noise in the mind is very small. Hence for the uninitiated, intelligence has a strong role. He spent the next seven years in a single minded way to the complete exclusion of anything else to seek answers to fundamental questions of life distinguishes him from most seekers. I suspect he was also basically very intelligent (the word used in the traditional sense), something that is not described in any detail in any well researched history on him. I infer this because, even though there were several practitioners of Vedanta in his period, there must have been too many involved in the practice of "isms" rather than the core of Vedanta and there was not any "core" stuff that he could be deeply respectful of. For him to pursue, ability was needed to turn away from the unsatisfactory, when really, the pathway to the satisfactory was not clear; this needed intelligence apart from strong instinctive feeling. I am emphasizing the aspect of intelligence since the discriminative ability is not always instinctive unless a person has already grown internally and the noise in the mind is very small. Hence for the uninitiated, intelligence has a strong role.

The principles of Buddhism evolved even in his life time quite substantially. Even later, there were several schools of Buddhism that evolved in India, Tibet and other parts of the World. Buddha had a large number of disciples, some of whom had evolved nearly as deeply as he had. His disciples went about preaching the Buddhist principles in India and various parts of the Eastern World - Tibet, Srilanka, China, Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, and other countries. In most of the east Asian countries, it has a strong foothold even today. It has also spread to the West and most large cities in Europe and America have Buddhist centers. Many people are moved when they read the Buddhist teachings. The principal teaching is to conduct a life in a manner that one is at equilibrium with oneself all through the life. There are several working rules and guidelines that provide input to day-to-day life.

Chandrasekhara Bhārathi grew up as a child (named Narasimha Sāstry) in a family that had lost thirteen children born earlier to him either at birth or at a very young age. The family depended much on him as the lone surviving child in their family and also an improved living standard that could be obtained by

modern education and the concomitant benefit of a secure job. He was into traditional modern education in the early stages and was into Sanskrit education later. At a young age of 20, he was drawn into the Sringeri mutt as its head with somewhat-reluctant parents accepting this situation. Coming from poverty, being shy in temperament and with demands of being beholden to others who took care of the daily needs of him and his family, it was difficult for him and the distinguished people around in the Mutt to reconcile to his elevation as the head of the Mutt. Surely, the wisdom and foresight that the earlier head of the Mutt, Ugranarasimha Bhārati is to be recognized because this choice of his was not the one anybody else had even dreamt of.

Even as the Sanyāsin-head of the prestigious mutt, he continued the learning of traditional Shāstrās under the tutelage of several scholars. Soon enough, he determined that his role would be more appropriately dealt with if he chose the path of contemplation and meditation. This he did even though as the head of the mutt, he had to discharge the religious role to secure greater strength of devotees and so, prosperity to the mutt. His life towards self-realization was tumultuous and he was suspected to have gone "insane" and efforts were made to send doctors from NIMHANS, Bangalore to have him treated. Such acts resulted in strange experiences to the doctors concerned who had to return without even examining the patient. During this period of tumultuous behaviour he was involved with himself and had no concern for the surroundings. Subsequent to this period, he is supposed to have achieved a state of inner poise noticed by most around him or those who visited him. Conversations during this period were brief, instructive and effective. There were many who benefited from his advice and directions in life. Some were blessed as well. There is an important message that can be derived from his life. He was not present on several occasions during the period of festivities even when an appeal was made to him that the people might feel blessed by a look at him and as to why he is denying them this simple gift. He responded to this appeal by saying that people come to him with many wishes to be fulfilled. How is it ever possible to conceive that all their desires be fulfilled? Each person carries along with his past and he has no desire to give false impressions to individuals. If somebody or some people have serious questions on the spiritual path, he would always be willing to speak to them and he is sure they would benefit by him. This must be compared with the impression created by several modern day Godmen who would not hesitate to indicate that they can change the lives of people and remove their sufferings. Also that they can change the society by mass training camps and some had gone even to the extent of advertising the possibilities of contracts to reduce the wrong-doings in the society significantly. This is truly surprising because over the last several thousand years, the average level of morality has not altered a whole lot, the man-created or nature-created sufferings have gone on unabated with several ups and downs and no Godman has ever changed the society. It is important to realize that changes can indeed be made; but the

scale in the area of spirituality will indeed be small or moderate, because the World was and will be about the same on the average.

A critical and deep appreciation of the character and his personality has been provided by Sri. S. K. Ramachandra Rao (see his book in Kannada language - Sri. Shāradā Peethada Manikya). It appears that the overall conduct of his life can be better described in terms of an Avadhūta. Clearly, intensity of pursuit has been the strongest visible feature of his personality.

Ramana maharshi was an ordinary student called Venkataramana until a strange experience overtook him at the age of 16. There was no indication whatever of this transformation in him prior to the event. The death experience that overtook him caused an immediate transformation. The next several years that he spent at Tiruvannamalai in various places - a cave in the Arunachala hills, a cave like temple in the main temple at the town seemed to have been aimed at establishing himself in the evolved state. Subsequently when he was established in the Ashram, he could switch himself into that state very quickly. Unless the circumstances around him seemed conducive for him to enter into a state of duality, he would prefer to stay in that state. As to whether it is Savikalpa Samadhi or Nirvikalpa Samadhi, as appears to be a subject of discussion, seems not as relevant as the state though very near, is very far for most. Hundreds of people met him, substantial number stayed at the Ashram and a large number has been influenced by him. He never moved out of the Ashram during his life despite entreaties by several devotees inviting him to come to their town, or their home. He seems to have communicated to many a devotee more in silence than in words. His single consistent answer for any question on the way world is, whether something should be done to improve it and any such related matter was that one should understand oneself first before embarking on doing such things in the world. His simple direction was to enquire "who am I" and delve deep in contemplation. Rest would follow. He did not emphasize yoga or other methods as necessary routes (he did not decry any either). There have been indirect criticisms of these by other modern day messiahs indicating that the simple approach of asking oneself "who am I" is inadequate, and conscious efforts are to be made to overcome the "Vāsanās" - the past attachments. In such matters, there is no reason to expect that the prescription of the kind provided by Ramana Maharshi is incorrect, since the intensity of the application to the suggested approach itself could cause changes in personality over a period of time and the actions to relinquish the past attachments could happen in an organic manner.

He displayed during his later life at the Ashram certain aspects that seem puzzling. His devotion to the Arunachala - the hill, was so intense that he thought many great beings lived here over times and on the planet a similar place must be present on the opposite side of the Globe. In fact he would ask Major Alan Chadwick to locate the map of the world and show him the location. He was

told that the opposite side of the globe was sea, he seemed dissatisfied. He ensured that a Samadhi was built for his mother and showed deep interest in its completion. The puzzling part is that when the core of the existence was reached, when the unity of the diverse world was what he was, when the entire world was his own, why should such strange likes appear in his mind is quite unclear.

There are a large number of other distinguished saints not discussed here. This is because of the lack of information that I have thought important to make crucial inner judgments. This should not imply others are any less. In all life we extract what we can and to the extent we can digest. There is always more than can be chewed. Ultimately what matters is how much we contemplate on and within ourselves.

18. Bibliography with comments

1. J. Gleick, *Genius, Richard Feynman and modern physics*, Rupa and Co, 1992; R. P. Feynman, *The meaning of it all*, Perseus Books, Reading, Ma, 1998.

Feynman is my most favorite scientist since he had few fixations of mind and explored nearly any facet that presented itself as a problem of interest. The book by Gleick is extraordinary and gives insight into what "human abilities" can extend to. The second book contains his lectures on many other aspects of life. Curiously, I picked several flaws in the logic he proposed; surely the precision of thinking in Physics did not extend to some other spheres. This is a great lesson. Greatness in some dimensions may be accompanied by flaws in others. This is much true of spiritual field as well; the lives of Ramana Maharshi and Chandrasekhara Bhārati have such features also. This message is explicitly stated by Don Yuan in his teachings to Carlos Castaneda.

2. R. Penrose, *The emperor's new mind*, Vintage Books, 1990; also *The large, the small and the human mind*, Cambridge Uni. Press, 1999.

The first book is truly challenging and engaging and has ideas that extend to consciousness. The last aspect is the one that impelled me to read it slowly over a year to absorb the crucial new features of "nature" and seek inner rationality and consistency. The second book sets in perspective the existence and is much helpful in internalizing the limitations, if not the meaninglessness of life in the cosmic order.

3. T. P. Singh (Ed). *Seven Nobel Laureates in Science and Spirituality*, Bhakti Vedanta Institute, Kolkata, 2004

This book contains articles by several distinguished scientists on this subject. The broad contention of a serious scientist is that science is progressing towards unraveling "nature's secrets" and is a work-in-progress with points of illumination on the way. The usual position of spiritualist is that everything is understood in terms of fundamentals and there is nothing more to be done - only to be realized.

4. Antoine Lutz, Lawrence L. Greischar, Nancy B. Rawlings, Matthieu Ricard, and Richard J. Davidson, Long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice, PNAS November 16, 2004 vol. 101 no. 46 16369-16373
5. Libet, Reflections on the interaction of mind and brain, Progress in Neurobiology, v. 78, pp. 322 - 326, 2006
6. Francis Crick and Christoff Koch, Cerebral cortex, v. 8, pp 97 - 107, 1998
7. Chris Frith, The making up of the mind, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 69

Scientific studies on meditators and fascinating and interesting studies on brain.

8. Oliver Sacks, Musicophilia, 2007 (see www.oliversacks.com); also see Annoying, the science of what bugs us, Joe Palca and Flora Lichtman, 2011

It contains a discussion of music related aspects of the functioning of the brain. Many aspects are profound and the deep role that music has played in evolution of the brain has been brought out. The second book has very interesting insights and one part has links to the evolution of musical abilities in human beings.

9. Thich Nhat Hanh, Old path white clouds, Walking in the footsteps of the Buddha, Full Circle, 2002

A very readable account of Buddha written with restraint and sobriety.

10. S. K. Ramachandra Rao, Sankara and Adhysa Bhashya, Abhijnana, 2002; Sri Shaaradaa Peethada Maanikya (in Kannada), Kalpatharu Research Academy, 1981; Avadhuta (in Kannada), Gayathri Book Co, 2002
11. R Krishnaswamy Iyer, Dialogues with the Guru (Sri. Chandrasekhara Bharati), Chetana Limited, 1998

Very authentic and sober writings on Swami. Chandrasekhara Bharathi, Pontiff of Sringeri Mutt, Sringeri, Karnataka, India

12. Sadhu Arunachala, (A.W. Chadwick), A sadghu's reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramanashramam, 1994; Talks with Ramana Maharshi, Ramana ashramam, 2003

Authentic writing on Ramana Maharshi (1st book), and revealing observations by Ramana Maharshi in the 2nd book

13. Carlos Castaneda, A separate reality, 1971; Tales of power, 1974; The second ring of power, 1977; The fire from within, 1984; The power of silence, 1987; Journey to Ixtlan, 1991

These books are a profound set having had deep influence on me. I may have read some of them several times. The books, Journey to Ixtlan and Tales of power contain wisdom that I find I can still reap by re-reading them. A mixture of mysticism and logical reasoning of human behavior, very non-intuitive in many parts has pushed me to moments of exhilaration having seen "round-the-corner", moments of self-doubt and depression of having not measured up to myself. The idea of "erasing personal history" is about the same as being a "sanyāsin" and the idea of stopping the internal dialogue is a different way of expressing a meditative state. Two concepts of "tonal" and "nagual" have been discussed extensively. While there are no direct links to such ideas in scriptural writings, these may be thought of as a way of getting inner poise. There are many statements in the books which appear original way of expressing ideas that are not vastly different from scriptural writings. For instance, he uses the analogy of a hunter to describe how a person should be "A hunter that is worth his salt does not catch game because he sets his traps, or because he knows the routines of his prey, but because he himself has no routines. This is his advantage. He is not at all like the animals he is after, fixed by heavy routines and predictable quirks; he is free, fluid, unpredictable." The state of Avadhuta is somewhat close to this.

14. Scott Peck, M., The Road less travelled, 1978

It is slated as the new psychology of love, traditional values and spiritual growth contains case histories of many patients deeply mentally disturbed. It is an extraordinarily good reading. Pertinent to the discussion in this document is a section called the miracle of the unconscious is (p. 231+). That the unconscious represents 95 % of your "mind" is emphasized here.

15. Jaggi Vasudev, Mystics musings 2003, Encounter the enlightened - conversations with the master, 2004

Has a vibrant discussion of many aspects in a bold manner. There are several other books by him as well. There is an unfortunate tendency to look down upon Science as being below spirituality.

16. There are other books and writings of Jiddu Krishnamurthy, Rajneesh (Osho) that can be catalytic in unraveling new viewpoints and approaches to thinking that are valuable.

I have learnt in this broad reading that the unconscious absorbs what should be, whether the conscious records it clearly or otherwise.