

Who am I?

Notes of personal experiences, studies, and reflections (2018-2021)¹

What a long way we have come, you and I! Before, I did not know you. At times, you would appear almost unnoticed inside or around me. You were little more than a suspicion. At other times, you stirred everything up, confused everything... you tore down the seemingly impenetrable walls of reality, but only for a flash of a moment. Or you gilded everything with your soft, quiet presence, and I marveled at how this unknown substance flowed through everything and everyone, washing away the previously rock-solid outlines of my world. But then, like fine sand, you slipped through my fingers, and your faint memory turned into a dreamlike doubt. I forgot you. Long millennia passed between your appearances, and I wandered lost among the shadows and visions, longing desperately for something I did not even know. Nothing was enough. Nothing could bring peace. I now know that you were guiding me, unnoticed. I have recognized you. I can see now that nothing is more familiar or more real than you are. My ignorant insensitivity has been the only reason for your apparent absence. I now know that I must turn to you in a different way than to the rough world of senses and memories, that I must grasp your presence through a different sense. I now know that you flee from the strident, heavy reveries of this world and are more drawn to the deep, quiet anticipation of the soul. You don't care for the tension of the muscles which the body uses to constantly keep itself together, protectively. You don't like the restlessness of thought as it incessantly stretches its tentacles out towards its victims to drag them down into an absurd emptiness. You do not care for either pursuit or resignation, either false hope or despair. Lately, I have often recognized you. Slowly, gradually, I am learning to "see" you. You are there in every asking and in every thanks, in every great silence, in every falling in love and in every death. In every inspiration, awakening, reconciliation and giving. In every profound emotion, in every poetic opening. In every rebellion against suffering. I now know that you are my life and everything else is a dream...
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¹ The original text is in Hungarian. Annex III and IV are not included in the English version.

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Introduction

My aim with writing this short study is to summarize a crucial period in my life between 2018 and 2021. I associate the beginning of this period with an outstanding experience, which I have stored as one of the most important experiences of my life, and which has become a milestone for me. I wanted to better understand, integrate and deepen this experience, and this endeavour led to new inspirations, interests and insights, and of course and most of all new questions.

Thanks to this experience, the question "Who am I?", as proposed by Silo in the Commentaries to his Message, gained more significance and new form:

Don't let your life go by without asking yourself: "Who am I?". In the sense of what it means to be oneself, which distorts what we call "ourselves".

And later, this "research" sparked my interest in the writings of Sri Ramana Maharshi and some other Advaita texts, which have had a powerful impact on me, deeply inspiring me, resonated with some of my experiences, intuitions and discoveries. This approach and language, new to me, helped me to reflect more deeply and from a new angle on my experiences, to ask myself new questions, while discovering more and more connections between these descriptions from Hindu culture and the steps of the mental discipline and my Ascesis based on them. I have found strong parallels with some of Silo's descriptions, especially with what he writes about the "inner look" in his Commentaries:

The inner look is an active direction of the consciousness. It is a direction that seeks significance and meaning in the apparently confusing and chaotic inner world. This direction is previous to that look; it impels it. It is this direction that permits the activity of looking internally. And if you manage to grasp that the inner look is necessary to reveal the meaning that impels it, you will understand that in some moment the one who looks will have to see oneself. This "yourself" or "oneself" is not the look or even the consciousness. This "self" is what gives meaning to the look and the operations of the consciousness. It is previous and transcendent to the consciousness itself. In a very broad fashion we will call this "self," "Mind," in order to not confuse it with the operations of the consciousness, nor with the consciousness itself.

The experience (2018)

It happened in March 2018. I had just arrived home from Punta de Vacas, which, as always, had brought important experiences and comprehensions. The trip had been preceded by a difficult period of many failures, and after much hesitation, I decided to make a pilgrimage to "the source" in the hope of finding or at least getting closer to what I "really needed". The most important comprehensions I gained on this journey came from a deep and patient study of the text of *The Healing of Suffering*. I understood parts of the text in a way I had not before. *Suffering originates from violence within the mind, and this originates from desire. It is necessary to observe how desire entraps us. I observe how desire and with it violence, is present in my consciousness. I observe how it is almost constantly present in the form of "pursuing". In various kinds of anxieties and fears. To keep something, to achieve something, to avoid something. If I observe it, I can see it almost constantly. To observe. That is the first step. The way out is meditation. It is possible to get out of suffering, it is possible to elevate and purify desire. It is really possible. For me it is possible too!* What was new in this meditation was that I believed it, took it seriously, referred it to myself, did not place this possibility to some distant, almost unattainable future, and did not see this real and not merely theoretical possibility of overcoming suffering as the privilege of wiser than average, extraordinary people. Until that moment, I had not realized that I was actually thinking of it that way.

Shortly after I got home, I discovered a lump in my breast and was immediately sure it was a malignant tumor. This conviction lasted for about two days until I went to see the doctor. At certain moments I would panic, at others I would feel anxious, and only for short periods was I able to distance myself from the situation and more or less calm down. My mind was overwhelmed with fear. I booked an appointment for an ultrasound scan and the night before the scan I set down to do an asking to my inner guide. In a way, it seemed obvious what I should ask for: that the scan does not find anything and that it turns out I am healthy. But when I started to ask, I immediately sensed that there was violence in this asking. Fear of illness, fear of death. It didn't fit, it did not feel coherent, I couldn't ask for that. I was surprised that something in me was protesting against asking for this. I began to search for an asking that did not feel "violent", that was not fueled by fear but by necessity and by meaning. What is it that I really need? In the end, I formulated my question like this: whatever I find out tomorrow, let it serve the strengthening of my Purpose, let the Purpose direct my life, not fear. This asking had great force because it felt deeply fitting, coherent and it calmed me.

The next day, on my way to the doctor's office, I repeated this asking. I became calmer and calmer, and for some reason I began to imagine and accept in a new way that maybe I really was terminally ill, maybe I really was going to die soon. Of course, it wasn't the first time I had thought about death, and my own death, but it had never happened to me before that I could represent it in such a "real" way. It was as if a protective shield of my consciousness, which usually makes it impossible to face this otherwise certain future event, had been for some reason temporarily out of function. It is difficult to articulate the difference between thinking about one's own death and actually facing it without trying to escape it. The latter happened to me this time.

From one moment to the next, this became my reality, and not just a part of reality, but reality *itself*. So the fact of physical death was not just one thing among other things in life, but the thing that "fundamentally determines everything else". Suddenly I found myself in a "different landscape". As if the whole "world" had become "empty" or everything had become transparent. As if there was nothing left to "hold on to". My senses were working, I could see, hear and perceive in all sorts of ways, but everything seemed unreal and dreamlike. Not only did I realise that one day I would disappear from this world, that "I would not be here", that everything would "go on without me", but it was as if it had happened right there and then. Suddenly "I was not present in the landscape" that I was contemplating, at least not in the way I was used to. I looked at the cars, the lights, the city, the buildings, the people, but I couldn't see anything the same way I had before. The things that used to occupy my mind, worry

me, give me pleasure or cause me suffering, suddenly meant nothing to me. I felt as if I no longer had any interests, because nothing had any relevance anymore, only death, that is, the total "disappearance", "emptiness" that I was just experiencing. Nothing else seemed real. It became obvious that whatever I was thinking, imagining, remembering, perceiving, projecting into the future, would one day simply not exist. So, it already doesn't exist right now. So what is the meaning of life? It was not indifference what I felt, but a complete shift of interest.

At the same time, an unusual calm and inner silence invaded me. I honestly felt that it didn't matter what diagnosis I got, because it was already clear to me that I was going to die, if not now, sooner or later, and it didn't really matter when it happened, because it was already "my reality". I was interested in only one question and that filled me completely: what is the meaning of life if everything I can think about now will disappear? What is the meaning of life in the face of death? But I guess I didn't want to answer that question. Rather, it was the question itself that was interesting, this state itself, this "clarity" of contemplation, where I was honestly not interested in anything but this deep "meaninglessness" in which all meaning vanished. Only the question about meaning seemed "true", or this state from which it could be really asked. This question was like a prolonged act of consciousness, not directed towards any object. What I was experiencing seemed more real than anything I had ever experienced in my life. My life up to that point seemed more like a dream. I wanted to stay in that "truth" that I was experiencing. I realized that if there was meaning in life, it could only manifest itself in relation to this truth.

Then, as the landscape slowly began to unravel, "there I was" again, the familiar sensations of "my reality" began to reappear. I tried again and again to mentally represent "my own death", and I think I managed to get back "there" a few more times. This "there" was a certain point of observation, "a place to look from". When I began to suspect the significance of what was happening to me, I immediately wanted to share it with others, I felt I had to tell everyone. But I also knew immediately that it would not be easy. I understood that it was not an intellectual understanding, but an experience that I had arrived to "by chance". I understood that the "ordinary" level of consciousness is almost incapable of representing its own death, it never lets itself get close to it, perhaps only in extreme situations. Perhaps in the occasions of deep and great failures, when it is almost forced to. Or perhaps not even then. Still, I felt I had to tell everyone that there is no more important theme in life than death, that it is the only one worth reflecting about, because it "empties" everything, and after that there is nothing left of what we usually believe in. At that moment, that was the only way I could verbalize what I was experiencing, and of course, if you look at the words alone, it's not entirely clear why this would be something worth sharing with others, unless I wanted to scare them.

It was also part of the experience that I was no longer afraid, my senses were sharpened, I was very aware, very present. By the time I arrived at the doctor's office, I felt an unusual softness internally, I felt very close to people because the "death experience" had put me completely on the same page with everyone. I knew that this was the most important theme in our lives and that in the face of death there was nothing that would really separate us from each other.

All this had a profound effect on me. After I left the doctor's office, where I found out that I most probably was not going to die in the near future, my thoughts were naturally focused on what had happened. Something I couldn't intellectually explain to myself: if I don't have any answers as to what has meaning in the face of death, and I only know what does not, how is it that I feel that this was one of the most important, liberating, perhaps even one of the most inspiring experiences I have ever had, not one that closed, but one that opened up the future? In retrospect, I interpreted it this way: what I could tell myself verbally and rationally about what was happening did not quite coincide with what I was experiencing (my registers) and what shook my consciousness so deeply.

Later I reflected on this a lot, and I was able to formulate the following: all along there was a silent observer or a kind of presence. There was something that "saw" this process, as the world that I have

known, who I “was” disintegrated together with its own interests, desires, memories, hopes, interpretations, etc. And it seemed to me that this observer was not part of this “emptying landscape”, it was devoid of the things that had collapsed, ceased, became meaningless in the experience of death, and to this observer the world of temporary things seemed dreamlike. This something remained untouched by this apparently total collapse. I also sensed that if I could remain “there”, if this state, this “observer”, which was not sustainable, could somehow be sustainable, then sooner or later the question of meaning would be clarified.

In the end, I came to these conclusions:

This was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

I cannot “grasp” it or keep it, but I can place it in a special place in my inner world and be grateful for it.

The deeply coherent asking of the previous day, fueled by my comprehensions of the Healing of Suffering, was probably a precondition of what happened. In that asking, there was a willingness, an openness, that made this experience possible. I believe that, among other things that I did not yet comprehend, it was because of this that I did not escape from the thought of death. Fear (and suffering) is always an opportunity, because through rebelling against it, one can reach new experiences, which of course raise new questions and destabilize life.

Although throughout this experience I have interpreted what happens to me as an experience of the meaninglessness of life in the face of death, this has in no way led me to see life as meaningless, quite the contrary!

One question remains to be clarified: this experience gained importance in a very different way from other significant experiences of my life related to the “Profound”, which I had in the course of the discipline, ceremonies and ascesis practices, and which were also deeply “transformative experiences”. However, this happened to me with my eyes open, in a state of ordinary vigil, at least not in an “altered state of consciousness” through intentional process, and its significance was different from intentional experiences.

Identifying and solidifying "registers", reflecting on experience, new insights - 2019

A year passed, and the experience of "my own death" seemed to remain in the past, but I never doubted its significance, I was grateful for it and it never disappeared from my co-presence, on the contrary! Occasionally, especially before the ascetic exercises and in morning meditations, I tried to find my way back to these registers, and I began to connect the exercises of **Who am I? and Where am I going?** I wanted to remind myself daily that I was going to die.

This year, from March 2018 to May 2019, was marked by a great intensity in different areas of my life, important and significant events, and a lot of work on resentment and reconciliation. Looking back, I see that there was a lot of pending issues in my life that demanded energy from me, certain life situations needed to be sorted out so that the experience I had previously lived could start to integrate.

In May 2019, I travelled again to Punta de Vacas for the 50th anniversary of the "harangue" on the Healing for Suffering. And, as it happens, this pilgrimage turned out to be an important milestone. Of course, the event was characterized by a lot of inspirational conversations, encounters and experiences. I was surprised that my experience of the year before seemed to emerge one way or another in almost every personal conversation. It seemed as if it had remained a central theme for me, unnoticed; it was what preoccupied me the most, and it was strange to observe how alive it was in me, if not as a structured understanding, but at the level of strong registers. It was as if for a year it had been operating more in the background, in co-presence.

The conversations and my subsequent reflections shed new light on what had happened to me. I came to new comprehensions, as if I had begun to deepen and integrate the experience. The theme of "registers" was very much in the air in those days. Slowly, I realized that what I had experienced a year earlier was still working in me with great force as a strong imprint, which I could not "rationally" access, what I could say about it was not at all clear, not structured, but I had a very concrete register of it, and when I recalled this register I felt a great internal commotion and inspiration. And as such, it became an important source for me.

In those days, and after I got home, I arrived to the following conclusions:

I cannot rationally grasp the experience, because its most important element is precisely something that is not accessible to my "ordinary consciousness". If I focus on and pay attention to the registers, not the verbal translations, I come to the opposite conclusion about the meaning of the experience of what I had formulated at the moment it happened. Although "meaninglessness" was the central recognition of that account of a year earlier, that "there is no meaning in life if everything ends with death", in reality the register that accompanied it was precisely that of meaning. The register of meaning is linked to that "something" that allowed me to "see" meaninglessness and that goes beyond it. It allowed me to "see" that which was dying, and of which it was not part. This is why the experience was so inspiring, so extraordinary and so meaningful. I discovered this something 'inside' me that I couldn't name, but at the level of registers, I could conserve and recognize. Recognizing, identifying this "something" and by solidifying it (as a register) was of great importance!

I started to come to the conclusion that the register of "meaning" I was experiencing was created by the presence or location of an "observer" rather than by what was being observed. It was this "certain observer" that could "see" "me" as I "die", that could see the experience of total meaninglessness. It was the register of this particular observer – that witnessed the emptying the world, the emptying of the ordinary "I" – which shook my consciousness profoundly. Because at the level of representations I could not find anything that "survived" death. The "observer", however, was not representable, yet very present. In fact, as I progressed in my reflections I got the impression that these registers were familiar

to me. This recognition set off an avalanche, as I began to discover the presence of this "something" in various moments of my life from childhood onwards. Several significant experiences from my life came to mind, which I was now able to bring together in the context of this new recognition, mainly through the recollection of registers. I understood that, although I had experienced similar things before (albeit not with such intensity), I had not yet been able to define or identify them in my mind because I either did not give enough importance to them, or simply did not have the experience and context that I had gained over time thanks to the Message, asceticism, and Silo's doctrine in general. In addition, sharing experiences with other people who are interested in similar themes has been a key to deepening my understanding.

These insights and realizations continued to grow and deepen after I returned home from Punta de Vacas, and I became almost obsessed with deepening and understanding them. I felt I was discovering something crucial. What is this particular "look" or "observer" that sees something quite different from the ordinary, that can see "me" completely, that lives "in me", that I now find in my registers, that is unaffected by changes in me, seemingly unaffected by death, and even that has shown itself with such force in connection with death? I am beginning to have the feeling that this thing, which I recognize in myself at the level of registers, and which I cannot grasp intellectually, is the seed of something in me, which is being born by me recognizing it, is strengthened by me being able to talk about it, to connect it with my past experiences, to return to it and be grateful for it. Does it have to do with the spirit? I've often thought of this phrase: "Spirit is born when the double awakens to itself and becomes conscious."

This pilgrimage also awakened a strong need in me: to sort out the things in my life that were still pending. It was not a thought, but a need that awakened. This sorting out involved making decisions, clarifying future plans in areas of life, sorting out relationships and reconciling in order to organize my life around what I really care about. I was a bit afraid of these changes, but I also felt an unusual determination. I think it was because the Purpose had taken on a new strength.

Ramana Maharshi: Who am I?

It was after these comprehensions, and in this inspired state, that I got hold of the small booklet titled "Who am I?" from Ramana Maharshi, which resonated in me deeply, as I recognized in his teaching and descriptions a lot of my experiences and registers. I threw myself with great enthusiasm into studying further texts from him (and from his followers), as well as some other Advaita texts. What follows is a summary of what I found the most significant in this teaching. As is often the case with inspired moments, there is also an anecdote, which I find extraordinary, and which I think is worthwhile to include in this summary in the form of an appendix (Appendix I: Anna).

The little book titled "Who am I?" is a collection of questions and answers. The conversation takes place between Ramana Maharshi and others who address him, and these answers actually contain the essence of Ramana's teaching. Everything else I have subsequently read is an expanded exposition of this short text.

I only got as far as the first two points in the reading, when I felt the tremendous thrill of excitement that one feels when confronted with something that one recognizes in oneself, in one's experience, and which is deeply connected to what one most deeply longs for, but which, paradoxically, already knows from somewhere.

1. Who am I?

The gross body which is composed of the seven humours (dhatus), I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz. the senses of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell, which apprehend their respective objects, viz. sound, touch, colour, taste, and odour, I am not; the five cognitive sense organs, viz. the organs of speech, locomotion, grasping, excretion, and procreation, which have as their respective functions speaking, moving, grasping, excreting, and enjoying, I am not; the five vital airs, prana, etc., which perform respectively the five functions of in-breathing, etc., I am not; even the mind which thinks, I am not; the nescience too, which is endowed only with the residual impressions of objects, and in which there are no objects and no functioning's, I am not.

2. If I am none of these, then who am I?

After negating all of the above-mentioned as 'not this', 'not this', that Awareness which alone remains - that I am.

These two little paragraphs were enough to draw me into the rest of Ramana's writings. "That Awareness which alone remains - that I am", this sentence later repeated itself in me almost automatically as a kind of aphorism, because it connected me with the register that interested me most deeply and that was now more accessible to me than ever.

Briefly about Ramana Maharshi

Ramana Maharshi, originally called Venkataraman, was born in Tamil Nadu, South India, in the late 19th century into a Hindu religious family. His childhood is reported to have been quite ordinary. But at the age of sixteen he had what he calls an awakening experience that changed his life once and for all. But shortly before this experience, there were already signs of this "inner call". A relative had told him about Mount Arunachala in Tirunnamalai, which is considered by Hindus to be a sacred mountain, the incarnation of Siva, the deity, and connected with many Hindu legends and religious events. When Ramana heard his relative talk about this place, which he had not known about before, he was deeply intrigued. Later, he read about Hindu saints, about self-surrender, and by then he was determined to

follow this path himself. It was then that he had an experience which according to the sources he himself described in this way:

"It was about six weeks before I left Madurai for good that the great change in my life took place. It was quite sudden. I was sitting alone in a room on the first floor of my uncle's house. I seldom had any sickness and on that day there was nothing wrong with my health, but a sudden violent fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it, and I did not try to account for it or to find out whether there was any reason for the fear. I just felt "I am going to die" and began thinking what to do about it. It did not occur to me to consult a doctor or my elders or friends; I felt that I had to solve the problem myself, there and then.

The shock of the fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, without actually framing the words: "Now death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? "This body dies," and at once dramatized the occurrence of death. I lay with my limbs stretched out stiff as though rigor mortis had set in and imitated a corpse so as to give greater reality to the enquiry. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed so that no sound could escape, so that neither the word "I" nor any other word could be uttered.

"Well then," I said to myself, "this body is dead. It will be carried stiff to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body I? It is silent and inert but I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the "I" within me, apart from it. So I am Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means that I am a deathless Spirit."

All this was not dull thought; it flashed through me vividly as living truth which I perceived directly, almost without thought-process. "I" was something very real, the only real thing about my present state, and all the conscious activity connected with my body was centered on that "I".

From that moment onwards the "I" or Self focused attention on itself by a powerful fascination. Fear or death had vanished once and for all. Absorption in the Self continued unbroken from that time on. Other thoughts might come and go like the various notes of music, but the "I" continued like the fundamental sruti note that underlies and blends with all the other notes. Whether the body was engaged in talking, reading or anything else, I was still centered on "I". Previous to that crisis I had no clear perception of my Self and was not consciously attracted to it. I felt no perceptible or direct interest in it, much less any inclination to dwell permanently in it.."

Ramana left his home soon after the experience and went to Mount Arunachala in Tirunnamalaj. He spent long years, decades in silence, alone in temples, groves, shrines and later in the caves of Mount Arunachala, where he hardly ever met others, immersed in deep meditation, eating only when he was given food, almost forced to eat. Gradually, people began to gather around him, sitting and meditating in his presence, and during these years he rarely answered questions. Gradually, the young swami became known as a teacher who teaches in silence and through silence, and more and more people came to him. For the sake of his devotees, he later moved to the ashram at the foot of Mount Arunachala, to be permanently available to the growing number of local devotees and, gradually, to those from all over the world.

The Self and Self-Inquiry

Ramana continued to "teach" mostly in silence. He rarely spoke. Personal testimonies indicate that many people have come to deep comprehensions and transformative experiences in his presence. When he did speak, he mostly answered questions. His answers were usually different explanations of the same proposal, the same process. It all came down to one thing: *Who am I? Who is it that is asking this question? Who is the one who thinks this and that? Who is the one who doubts? Who is the one who experiences it? Ask yourself!* Self-inquiry is what he suggested to questioners, and although he considered many other paths valid, for him the most purposeful and direct process to awakening was Self-inquiry,

which is the continuous reflection on the question "Who am I?". It is through this inquiry that one can stop identifying oneself with the body and the consciousness (in his vocabulary: the mind), and finally identify oneself with the Self, that which is constant, that which is ever-present everywhere and in everything, which is the true "I", the Brahman, the one, our true nature.

As I progressed in reading the various texts, which were mostly descriptions of conversations, accounts of seekers who came to Ramana, and only rarely his own writings (of which there are few, and mostly poems), I found myself discovering parallels with some of the steps and registers of the mental discipline, and of Silo's Message, and I began to wonder whether the method of Self-inquiry was a process that could be followed, whether Ramana offered handholds, precise steps, explanations that a determined seeker could follow, indicators by which the self-inquirer could measure where they stood in the process. In other words, is it a kind of asceticism, with steps to enter the Profound?

The Purpose of Self-inquiry

The ultimate revelation, liberation.

The Preconditions of Self-inquiry

The path of self-inquiry is difficult for those who do not have some "previous training" in meditation, in making the mind "single-pointed", so Ramana always adapted his suggestions to the one who asks. He considered yoga, breathing exercises, the practice of self-surrender, invocation of the gods, mantras, and many other practices known in Hindu religion and tradition as viable, rather approximate paths, but ultimately, as he said, every seeker must come to the point of self-inquiry, for them to recognize the Self and remain in it forever. This is how he answers when asked about the path of self-surrender:

"Without a complete surrender of thought there is no self-surrender. When there are no thoughts, there is only the Self. Thus, self-surrender is really a surrender to our own Self. If self-surrender is done in the spirit of bhakti, then all burdens must be surrendered to God, but if it is done in the spirit of karma, then one must perform the tasks until one realizes one's Self. The result is the same in both cases. Self-surrender means to seek and know one's Self, and then to remain in it forever."

Another condition is disillusionment, in my reading it is failure: "People having varied experiences in the world, at one stage develop disgust or repulsion (*vairagya*) towards sense attractions or, at any rate, an indifference to such attractions, and feel forcibly the miserable transient nature of this body through which these attractions and enjoyments are had. This may be the result mainly of a practice of devotion or other *upasana* in life or of such devotion or other good works performed in previous lives. People with minds thus purified and strengthened are the *adhikaris*, the men competent to launch on Atma Vichara or enquiry into the Self;"

"If the mantra *japa* is unbroken and performed with undeflected current of attention and with due faith, equal success is achieved. Even the mere Pranava (OM) Japa would suffice. You see that by such a *japa* (of either the Pranava or other mantras) the mind is deflected from its operations regarding the objective world; and then, by identifying oneself with the mantra, one attains the (nature of) Atman."²

"And one more thing: if one does not see death as something imminent that can happen at any time, one is not able to recognize the Self. This means that the ego must die, must disappear with its inherent tendencies (*vasanas*). If the ego thus disappears, the light of the self will shine forth."³

The Practice of Self-inquiry

Self-Inquiry is based on the idea that the "I-thought" is the first thought of all, and all other thoughts flow from it. So the first step is to trace all thoughts (feelings etc.) back to this one. "I think", "I feel" etc.

² Sri Ramana Ghata of B.V. Narasimha Swami. It is not clear to me whether these are really Ramana's words.

³ Suri Nagamma: Letters from Sri Ramanasramam

Then to ask who is it that thinks this or that, feels this or that? Does this thought exist independently of the one who thinks it? In whom does this thought arise? So the "I-thought" must be seen as the root of all other thoughts. Then it is necessary to examine where this basic thought comes from. Who is this "I"? This is the question to delve deep into and to find its source. Nothing will be found that can be perceived or grasped by the senses. The senses, rational interpretations, will not provide any support in this search. But if we work with the right intuition, says Ramana, we will immediately feel the Centre, and the former "I" that asked the question will gradually disappear into that Centre. This Centre is sometimes called the Heart Centre, and it is the source of the "I-thought" and everything else. Thoughts are a form of energy, and this is what manifests as world. When the mind (in Silo's words this would be consciousness) is immersed in the Self, the Self is realized; when the mind leaves the Self, the world appears, and at such times we are not conscious of the Self. Although the question "Who am I?" is a thought of the mind, it can destroy all other thoughts, and eventually itself is destroyed too, like the driftwood used in a funeral pyre, which eventually also burns after the body and pyre have burnt. When this happens, the Self is recognized.

For Ramana (and for Hindus in general), the "real I" is the Self, and the "ordinary I" is the ego. The ego is identified with the body, and the most important thing for liberation is to overcome the delusion that "I" am one with the body. When this identification is removed, the Self shines forth. So the Self cannot actually be sought, the Self pervades everything as the one being, as Brahman. One can only remove the illusions that cover it, namely by asking the question "Who am I?".

B.V. Narasimha Swami writes in Sri Ramana Gita: First, the inner workings of the mind must be stopped. Secondly, the mind must thereby become characterless (*nirupadhika*) and remain firmly characterless; finally, it must rest in pure Vichara, in contemplation or realization of its nature, that is, the Self. This is *pratyagdrishti* or *darsana*, also known as *antarmukham*, the means of inner look or inquiry.

Ramana always made the same suggestion to the people who approached him, and there are countless accounts of such dialogues. (Sri Bhagavan is Ramana)

Sri Bhagavan: "Who are you?"

D: I am Narayanaswami.

B: Is it the body, the mouth or the hands that represent the "I" you are talking about?

D: The mouth, the tongue, the body, all together constitute the "I."

B: (Pointing to the disciple) Whose body is this?

D: My body.

B: So, you are different from the body? You are the possessor and the body is your possession?

D: I now realize I am different from my body, but I cannot however clearly see the line of demarcation between my body and my "Self." I cannot see Who I am.

B: Go and put the question to your "Self" and you will know who you are.⁴

When someone explains to Ramana what they are experiencing during meditation, for example that they hear some kind of a sound, the answer is always the same: ask who is hearing the sound, and repeat the question over and over again.

In another conversation, the same person talks about how, when he is practicing self-inquiry, i.e. looking for the source of the "I", he reaches a "state of stillness of mind", but cannot go on from there. He has no thoughts, only emptiness. He perceives a subtle light and feels that this is him, without a body. He is not aware of his body, he does not perceive it. This experience is pleasant and lasts for half an hour. He asks Ramana if it is correct to assume that if he could stay in this state for a longer period of time, hours, days, even months, it would lead to infinite bliss, to liberation.

⁴ Ramananda Swarnagiri: Crumbs from his table

The answer is that it is merely a temporary quieting of thought, and even if it lasted for a thousand years, it would not mean the complete destruction of thought, which is the true liberation from the cycle of birth and death. As soon as concentration ends, thoughts again overwhelm the mind. The practitioner must always be alert and search within himself to see who is experiencing this, to whom is it pleasant. If he does not do this, he falls into a long trance or deep sleep.

Although the temporary quieting of thoughts is a sign of progress, it is an important point where the path to liberation and yoga nidra, or deep sleep, bifurcates. At this point, the easy path, the direct path, is the inquiry. It is to revive awareness and bring the thought power deeper to its source. Then the answer comes from within and the thought is destroyed once and for all.

Do the same with any doubts that arise. To whom do these doubts arise?

In meditation, attention must be directed not to the act of seeing, not to what is seen, but steadfastly to what sees.

In the end, all that remains is existence, which is both being and non-being, inexplicable in words and concepts. The master is in this state, even if he is able to use his mind and body in ways we cannot comprehend, he does not fall back into the delusion of having a separate consciousness. This the knowledge without duality, the Advaita.

One month experiment with daily practice (Who am I?)

Although I have been working regularly with the question "Who am I?" for two years now, it has always been mixed with other procedures, my ascesis (discipline). Now I have proposed to myself that I will work exclusively with the question every day for a month, preferably for about 20 minutes every morning (as was suggested by one of Ramana's disciples). I have also decided to take notes every day in order to observe if there are recurring elements, a process that can be described. Is the question "Who am I?" a procedure to get to the "Profound", to suspend the I, or a procedure to reach a higher level of consciousness, of awareness, or what is it?

I only missed three days in the whole month, but I didn't take notes every day. (Detailed notes are in Annex II.)

Summary of the one-month experiment

Almost every exercise brought with it a great inspiration. Many times there are minor or more significant recognitions and comprehensions during the process. Because I suggested to myself, as Ramana suggests in all cases, that whatever was happening I should ask myself who experiences it, these occurrences also became obstacles because I wanted to grasp what I was experiencing, I wanted to remember them, so they distracted me.

I think in this respect, in terms of letting go, there was a progress, a kind of getting used to this kind of "noise". Learning not to be distracted.

Working with the Purpose was important. (Although there is no such suggestion in Ramana, I assume that for all practitioners there is the purpose of "liberation" in co-presence, to realize the Self and remain in it.) I observed that at times the Purpose is very present. What happens then is that I sit down and almost immediately feel the "call", a kind of presence of what I am seeking. But other times I start from far away, and then it's especially important to take time to think about what the Purpose of the process is, where I want to go. This of course has to do with the emotional charge, which is not about repeating sentences or images, but about finding a register. If that's not there, it's very hard to leave the noise behind.

The following were important and recurrent phenomena, sensations, registers:

1. Destabilization and alienation of the "everyday self". This is at the beginning of the exercise, when for the first time I can really put the question "who am I", and when a distance appears from what I am usually "immersed" in and what covers a rather large portion of what I call the I. This destabilization corresponds to a stepping out of the "ordinary", it is a kind of an "entrance".
2. The question is a very intense concentration that is very difficult to maintain, and the majority of the time is spent returning to the question over and over again, not just mechanically repeating it, but really "meaning it". There is a shift in this process from time to time. It's hard to describe it, for now it's not a clear observation. It's as if up to a point there was a kind of concentration, and after that point the attention widens, the questioning or the attention becomes "more ample". This shift in the kind of focusing is not yet clear and I don't know whether or not it is related to the next point. I think it is.
3. A point of observation, which is a kind of resting point. This is very significant. Here something calms down, the huge and intense effort that has characterised the process so far ceases, and I come to a "place". It also has a physical point in the head, behind the eyes. Here one can stop, here one can contemplate. But asking the question here is not the same as before. The "I" that I have been asking about no longer fully exists. And in the meantime, it is still possible to remain conscious here. Here everything changes. The feeling is that from here I can look anywhere without being distracted, "absorbed" in what I am looking at, without identifying with it. It is harder to get distracted here. After that, a more wakeful state persists for a while, from which one can see how consciousness is structuring.
4. The overwhelming experience of an encounter (maybe merging) of that which sees and which is seen, which I have called *mysterium tremendum* (after Rudolf Otto: The Sacred), because of the

astonishing power of the recognition, and perhaps because of the intuition that derives from it. Is this what we could, should, dwell on? And what does it mean to remain here?

All these were important experiences. For me, they confirmed that Self-inquiry is a path that can be followed. Although no doubt because of its similarity to some of the procedures of the mental discipline it is questionable whether it would be an effective procedure without the knowledge of our disciplinary steps. I often feel that the Inquiry is a simplification, a summation of what I have already learned in the discipline in a much more detailed, specialized, element-by-element, structured way.

But the experience has raised many new questions. Where does this path lead? It is unclear to me what is the relation between the "Profound" or the suspension of the I, this specific place in the head I discovered and the very high level of attention and consciousness of self. It's not clear what it means to "remain" in the "deep self" and no longer identify with the body, with consciousness, with anything related to the ordinary self. Is this really a possibility? The process follows a very similar path to the mental discipline, but is not as structured, certainly without any precise intermediate indicators (at least to my knowledge). The question is an act which refers to an increasingly "internal" object, different aspects of the "I", until it finally turns exclusively towards a kind of "centre" from which the question arises, and so appears the register which I called the "encounter".

In my view, there is only one step here, and that one step leads to different stages. But this is probably because I am already working with a form of ascesis, and someone who starts a deep inner work with the "self-inquiry" method would have a very different process. I would say it takes me straight to step 10. When I ask the question about who is experiencing this or that, what is the basis of the experience, I am actually looking for that which is not representation, not form, not consciousness-world, but that which can "see" all of this, that is, is outside of it all.

But the final conclusion that I have drawn for myself, and what is perhaps the most important discovery of this process, has to do with the fact that there is no "short cut", because the main obstacles are not in the process of the practice itself, but in the everyday contradictions and noises. I was able to observe very clearly in this very concentrated work that when the body is tense, it is harder to move away from the ordinary I, when there are anxieties, it is harder to move away from the ordinary I. I cannot articulate precisely what was different in this recognition from the general, maybe more "intellectual" understanding of the same thing. It was also different from the comprehensions that I have otherwise experienced countless times, according to which the register of inner unity is liberating and somehow connected to the register of that which is "eternal and permanent". But now I was beginning to feel a kind of inclination within myself, a willingness to overcome contradictions, to work on this in my everyday life. Not because of morality, not because of a vague intellectual understanding, not even because of a desire to escape from everyday suffering, but because of a real need that the Purpose, through the practice, has revealed. It was projected into the future as an ongoing work that is part of the ascesis. A daily effort to move away from contradictions. This realization was accompanied by a register that it is free of illusions and noise, and projected in front of me as pure necessity, as something obvious. Every valid action, every overcoming of contradiction, is like one less chain that "binds" me. This sense of disposition I felt inside me was very interesting. Like a willingness to give up "pursuing" an end, and to take every action as if it were an end in itself. But the distant or sometimes not so distant Purpose that drives it all, when it is there in the co-presence, is powerful and gives everything a very deep meaning. It can provide sufficient motivation and energy. And this kind of "creation of something in the moment" "filled me with joyful meaning". This is what it means to me to organize life around the Profound and the ascesis, when the presence of a powerful Purpose almost "forces you" towards achieving a life of inner unity.

Thanks to this one-month experiment, I decided to do a revision of the discipline: on the one hand, to compare certain steps and registers with the "who am I" process, and on the other hand, to refresh and deepen them.

Revision of the mental discipline

I worked for a month and a half with a daily routine, dedicating three days for each step, having a two-day break after each quatern, and with interchanges within the ambit of 2 or 3 people.

My experience is summarised below (detailed notes in Annex III.):

In the first quatern I begin with learning to attend (becoming aware of the reveries, perceptions, illusions and memory), and by the end of the first quatern it feels like I am out of the "world" and "inside" the consciousness. "Reality" becomes destabilized. From this point on, the look observes the consciousness-world structure, the act-object structure that is the mental form, and the inevitability of this frame within which everything is "given". At the end of the second quatern, consciousness and world become one. Identical with themselves and with each other. The world has the "form of the consciousness" and the consciousness has "the form of the world" and they are one. The look now observes this permanent, inescapable quality behind the changeable and diverse phenomena. Then, in the third quatern, it steps out into the "unknown". At first, it only steps out of consciousness-world to look back from the limi of what "is" and what, while maintaining its fundamental structure, is in constant movement. In step 10, the look turns from this limit in the "other direction", towards what "is not". Moving further "inwards", and then "seeing" these two qualities as one, it also overcomes the last separation and sees itself. In step 12, having identified with itself, the look "returns to the world differently", to the world that is no longer different from itself. There is only "it", and "it" is everything. Along the way, the look, the observer, moves "deeper and deeper", away from the consciousness-world and the I, until finally it comes home and rests in its source, where it includes everything. This look is neither the I nor the consciousness. The naive look, which identifies with the "I" (first with the sensations, then with the consciousness, the mental form), moves away gradually, step by step. The steps force this separation until finally everything is reduced to a single centre, which is at once one and all. This is EXISTENCE itself, the "be-ing", which is immobile, totalizing and eternal, the Sacred itself, infinite kindness, the absolute. If there is a god, this must be it.

General observations on the overview of the discipline:

The review was inspired primarily by the study of "who am I?" and the need to better understand the relationship between the two "procedures". This "search" was clearly in the co-presence all along, although I was exclusively concerned with the steps of our mental discipline. But the final synthesis, and the new understandings I have come to, are clearly related to the "who am I" meditation, and my recent studies. I feel my experiences lead me to make new connections, to gain new insights, especially on the themes of "the shifting of the look", about "I", the "self" (si mismo), the "inner look". The new understandings have an ongoing impact and they reorganise and restructure many other themes. It was very important to solidify a good entrance, which is really an exit from the ordinary space. This included a good relax, connecting and "fusing" with the qualities of the Guide, clarifying the step (the purpose) for myself.

Interchanging with others is very meaningful, constructive, inspiring and helps the integration. It also helps not to think of one's translations of the experience as if they were the "absolute truth", since they are in all cases merely interpretations. Talking attentively about such deep experiences reinforces the understanding that when we "go deeper within ourselves", beyond the diversity of phenomena, we meet. In this way, I understand the importance of the interchange among those who are knocking on similar doors.

Conclusions

The experience which I called "own death", the question "who am I?" as a procedure and the mental discipline are connected by the altered position of the "observer", i.e. the point of observation. The change in the point of observation and the associated registers. The question in each case is: who is looking and what is being looked at. The change occurs in this relationship.

In the experience of 2018, which was about facing my own death, the change of the point of observation from its ordinary location came about "spontaneously". From a state of ordinary vigil, this alteration occurred suddenly and persisted for an extended period of time. It was as suggestive an experience as the one described in the chapter about "The Intimation of Meaning" from Silo's Message. It was not clear how I arrived to it, but it was conserved in my registers, and this, and the fact that I gave huge importance to it, enabled me to reflect on it later, to interpret it further and to integrate it. The observer, who usually identifies with the everyday I, that is, with what dies (body, senses, memories, representations, etc.), was in this moment distanced from all of this. It moved to a place from which the totality of all those things that I usually call "I" was visible. This "observer" was not part of this "I" that dies.

All this was not clear at the time of the experience, as I had not deliberately arrived at this particular "observation point". I did, however, keep a rather clear register, which carried a tremendous emotional charge, and which I was able to recall later, and this sense of meaning remained so clear that I recognized it as something that had manifested itself in different moments in my life. The recognition of this "familiarity" was also an anchor, a recognition of this something in different memories and experiences, a confirmation, and therefore it gained a kind of permanence, which gives me the feeling that something is evolving, is being preserved, is becoming more permanently available.

In the process of asking "who am I", as one asks about the "I", one is also moving away from it, that is, the "observer" is detached from whatever he or she is representing as the "I" at that moment. I have found that by this constant distancing, by this constant questioning, by this intense focusing of the attention, one can become quiet and arrive at a "moment" characterized by a kind of totality, the translation of which corresponds with what Silo writes about the inner look in his Commentaries: "the one who looks will have to see oneself". The procedure of self-inquiry is clearly close to the mental path, to the meditation (since implicitly it works with the observation of the acts of the consciousness), and now I have doubts that I could have arrived at this experience of the "collision" by the "who am I" path alone had I not already known the steps of the mental discipline, through which I had learned the control of attention in a much more systematic way, and which is the basis of my Ascesis.

Nevertheless, it has been very useful for me to experiment and to recognize the similarities between these two paths, which have reinforced each other.

In the revision of the discipline, with the so far mentioned observations and experiences already in the co-presence (and of course after ten years of Ascesis), I was able to deepen the registers of some of the steps, and a new synthesis was born that restructured my comprehensions.

ANNEX

Annex I.: Anna

I cannot remember when was the first time in my adult life that I recalled this memory. I may never have forgotten it. But I do know that on the rare occasions I remembered it, the images were always pervaded by a very interesting, “other-worldly” atmosphere, the kind that accompanies certain dreams and that stays with you for a long time, maybe forever, even if the visual images and the events themselves fade or disappear completely. In fact, for a long time I wasn't even sure that it had all happened, thinking that perhaps it was a strange creation of my fragile memory, in which images and registers that didn't originally belong together were juxtaposed. Until I finally could verify it in 2019, this is more or less how the memory lived in me:

I was about ten years old, sitting in the school canteen with a girl the same age as me, Anna, who was in the same year as me, but we weren't close friends. I don't know if there were others at the table or if it was just the two of us talking, but I have a clear memory of where I sat and where she sat. Anna told me about someone who had died. I don't know what kind of relation she had with the person, but I think was someone close to her, who died maybe by a falling tree, but I'm definitely not sure about this. I don't remember her words at all, I don't know what was said. As I recall the canteen, I can see the windows at the top of the wall of the semi-basement room, with sunlight coming through them. Around us tables, children eating lunch. The whole scene is filled with light, and I experience something uplifting, mystical, out of the ordinary, which awakens in me a kind of longing. The conversation was about the death of a loved one, yet there is no sadness, pain or darkness in the memory. From that moment on, I remember thinking of Anna as someone much more adult and much wiser than the rest of us, as someone who possessed some kind of knowledge of great significance of which the rest of us knew nothing, and which I longed for. In my memory she is surrounded by a kind of nimbus.

So I don't know how many times and when I recalled this memory, but for a long time I was in doubt whether it had happened at all, if the characters, the setting or any of the details were correct in my memory. I can recall only one specific incident related to it from the year 2000 (about fifteen years later), which happened during the time of Silo's visit to Budapest. At that time, I was in a very deep crisis in my life, with a permanent and deep anxiety. I remember going home to my flat very upset after a meeting, throwing myself on the bed and trying to calm down. Suddenly I recalled - I don't know if intentionally or “accidentally” - the memory of Anna, the canteen, the light coming through the windows, and at that moment I was overcome by an “unearthly” peace and quiet, and a feeling that everything was fine.

Years had passed, and I don't think I intentionally engaged with these memories again, but perhaps they came up sometimes as one of those rare extraordinary, strange experiences, which are connected by some invisible thread. Years later, when after a long time I reconnected with another of my childhood girlfriends, who was my classmate too, I mentioned this memory to her in case she could confirm or disprove it. She remembered Anna, and from her I learned her surname, but she could not confirm any other details about my story. I decided to try to find Anna, but I couldn't on Facebook until a few years later when I started looking again.

I first wrote to her in November 2017. I didn't receive a reply for about a year and a half, until finally, on 20 March 2019, I received a message from her apologising for the delay in responding, explaining that unfortunately she rarely checks her messages. Of course she remembers me, she wrote, and also

which class I was in. I checked my messages often, but this time I too was a month late in replying because her letter had escaped my attention. So we got in touch some thirty years after we last met. After a bit of touching base, I got to the point and explained to her the reason I contacted her: I had a memory of her that was important to me, but I didn't know if it was true at all. She was very interested, she said she was particularly happy for me to recall events from a period of her life that she herself found difficult to access. So I briefly shared this somewhat incomplete memory I had. When I received her reply in May 2019, I was in Punta de Vacas for the 50th anniversary of the Healing Suffering speech. Anna's letter revealed that it was her older sister, two years older than she, who had died at the time, and that our conversation must have taken place in 1985, when she had transferred from her previous school to ours after the death of her sister. But beyond the facts and figures, what she wrote revealed much more... Here is an excerpt from her response:

"I don't remember this conversation, but I do remember that the tragic loss of my sister caused an incredible maturation of my "childish" faith in God, which was a great support, or rather, I experienced it as a support that I could give to my parents with the "good news" of faith, supporting them in their grief, and this gave me, myself, great strength (how much connected we are to each other, how much we can help each other, we to them and they to us from 'up there'), it is mystical, or rather, faith itself is a mystery, a secret, a gift - I received it then... and now again that I am writing... thank you for keeping it and 'giving it back to me! With love, Anna"

The letter was like a bolt of lightning to me. Exactly at this moment of my life a new kind of comprehension was forming in me (that what I had lived at the time of the so called "own death" experience was something very concrete in the level of registers, albeit impossible to represent otherwise, it was something connected to the meaning of life, and thanks to this recognition I could discover it being present in earlier moments of my life as well) this letter was another confirmation. The accidentally good 'timing' and the coincidence of the things only added to the suggestive, slightly chilling yet welcome feeling that tends to accompany experiences related to the 'suspicion of meaning'. What Anna wrote confirmed my suspicion that, at the age of ten, through her or because of her, I had experienced something that has stayed with me ever since as a vague memory, but also as a clear inner register that I now recognize more consciously. What she wrote meant to me that at the time she must have had some kind of an extraordinary (maybe transcendental) experience through the death of a loved one (as it turned out, she was present at the death of her sister, who had indeed been hit by a tree on which they were swinging), which she had conveyed to me in one way or another. (And it also turned out that, in some way, I now, through recalling this memory, "gave" it back to her. This kind of "transference" of registers, by the way, is a very fascinating theme too, and one worth exploring.) Anna grew up in a religious family, so it was the Christian landscape that influenced the description of her experiences. I grew up in a non-religious family, but that was no obstacle to her having a deep impact on me, and even awakening something in me, by recounting her own experience.

Of course after this we immediately arranged to meet. And even though Anna lives in Germany, she was planning to visit Budapest shortly after I returned from Punta de Vacas. As I described it above, after my return, I picked up Ramana Maharsi's little book "Who am I?" in a very inspired state. I read this short piece of writing in one evening and it had a profound effect on me. The next day I was accompanied by the inspiring presence of all that I had come in contact with as a result of reading it, and the desire to seek out Ramana's other writings, to immerse myself in the study of these questions that most interested me.

The following day I met Anna. As expected, it was a moving encounter with an almost complete stranger I had known as a child. But, as is often the case with such encounters, we talked as if it had been a few weeks since we last met. We told each other about our lives, of course, and Anna recalled again the death of her sister and what she had experienced at the time. I also told her about myself,

about Siloism and about the Message. She said that she had been searching in many places since then and, although she still considers herself a Christian, she realised that in other cultures certain themes were approached in a more apt and accessible way. There is, for example, an Indian guru who she considers he master (she may not have put it quite like that) and she told me his name. There is that moment when you already know that something quite strange is happening to you, but rationally you don't want to believe it. As soon as she said the guru's name, I had another lightning bolt experience. These Indian names are so similar to me, and I had only got to know Ramana Maharshi's name two days before, plus I don't have a good memory for names, but I think as soon as Anna said it, I knew she was talking about him. Who else could she have been talking about, in the end she was Anna, this girl with whom my relationship is made up of very special moments, even if they are thirty years apart. Right away, I googled the name of the guru, and the picture the kindly-looking Ramana Maharshi I had known for two days, appeared on my phone screen.

ANNEX II.: Detailed personal notes of the one-month experiment with the question “Who am I?”

“It is inspiring. Whatever phenomenon, thought, feeling, physical sensation I was experiencing, I tried to ask who was experiencing it, and return to the search for the root of the I. I did the same with the accompanying phenomena (light, emotional charge, inspirational thoughts). There are two types of significant sensations: one is the destabilization of the I when I look there where the I is the “most dense” (although it's hard to articulate well what I'm looking at) and where suddenly this kind of “alienation” from what I normally identify with arises. It is, of course, a paradox. The permanent questioning is a very intense unification of the mind. And there's another, for now, vague register that's more expansive, something all-encompassing is developing... That's it for now.

I finished inspired.”

“Things start happening very quickly. I feel powerful energies in different parts of my body, and most of all I feel a great emotion, as if I could immediately sense the presence of something. I try to return to the question with each phenomenon. Sometimes the one who questions dissolves into something. Sometimes I come to comprehensions, rather intuitions, that I cannot grasp what I am, I can only become it. These inspirations, lights, comprehensions, great silences are all translations and noises, and keep trying to return to the root of them. Who or what experiences them?

Again I end emotionally overwhelmed. It is a strange feeling, how close I sometimes feel to the presence of this unnamable sacredness that I know and of which I can say nothing. Today I felt I could go on for a long time, maybe I could stay immersed in it. But I secretly hope that it will have an impact on my life outside of meditation... that is, that it will continue to move me towards consciousness of self.”

Unfortunately, I didn't take notes right away. There's a lot going on, that's the biggest difficulty.

Comprehension, registers, recognitions... and I want to capture them.

The most significant experience was this: at a moment when I was again asking who was experiencing all this, already well into the experience, suddenly something in my head went to a whole new place. It was as if the energy had rushed into a previously unknown place and stayed there. All registers changed then. There was a stillness here, a still point of rest. There was nothing else than this place. The register of my body and everything else has changed. I didn't perceive or feel my body as I had before. I could no longer ask about myself in the same way, because the I was no longer present in the same way. The place was “physically” behind my eyes, close by, but towards the center of my head. And it was effortless. A kind of “indifference” accompanied it. It was a resting point from where everything was different and where it was easy to stay. My breathing slowed down completely, almost stopped. Once I opened my eyes, I could “see” how my thoughts start to appear, how my mind start to structure.

“Asking who is experiencing it is the same as deepening step 10: that what is not, not movement-form, not consciousness-world, but also not nothing. It deepens and deepens.

Then there is the emotional rapture when encountering something deeper, more timeless, accompanied by the register of love. And just like before I ask again who experiences this... there are so many little comprehensions that accompany the process, which is inspiring but also distracting because I want to remember them after the experience.”

“I only did it briefly, tired after a difficult day. I can't talk about many new phenomena, but the usual phenomena started to happen anyway.

After a while I asked who was looking, and there was such a strong concentration in the eye, or behind the eye, that something opened up there. I continue to have the feeling that there are so many small recognitions during the process that I am forced to set them aside to be able to go on with the process.

Before the exercise, I charge the purpose and make an asking and a thanking in the end. Today both had great clarity. I asked for recognition. I feel like I am approaching something very directly with this practice, but the path is full of paradox."

"Yesterday was the first day that I didn't do the exercise at all.

But today I got back to it and it was very difficult to start, I thought I wouldn't even be able to ask the question with meaning, just to repeat it mechanically. Then there was a shift when a cow bellowed next door and I asked who was the one who heard it. From there, though, things seemed to happen a lot faster. The truth is, once it kicks in, everything is very inspiring and it's hard to stay focused because of the strong emotions.

On the one hand there is this great silence that is in a "specific place" in the head behind the eye, not deeply immersed, but on a limit. This is what I called the resting point, it's easier to stay here, and it's not as much effort as it is when trying to come back here again and again. This place is accompanied by wonderful registers.

And now I understood that the "I" returns, like ripples on the surface of a smooth lake, begins to structure, to represent things, but otherwise, from time to time, the questioning reveals something that is unchanging, what is eternal, what is most familiar... and for a moment I sense that these two do not contradict each other. Nothing contradicts anything. And it raises the question, deep and real, what is the purpose of humanity. What is the purpose of the consciousness?"

"Oh, be my world. Fill my world completely. That is what I want more than anything. I want to see you in every person, in every look, in every color and shape, every movement and sound.

It was harder to quiet my mind today, it keeps searching for new objects, what's the next step in my to-do list... it's just like it wants to possess, always to grab the next object. And yet, somehow, it seems a path is being paved more and more with the question. When I actually do manage to ask "who am I?", everything quiets down, my breathing expands, and familiar, inspiring registers emerge.

I'm getting more and more inklings as to why "being aware" is so important in this process (however there are many questions and apparent contradictions), to ask the question again and again, "who is experiencing it", not to get distracted. I almost always experience great inspirations. Landscapes that I know, a sense of spaciousness, a sense of liberation... and of course I always ask, who feels this?

This point in the head seems to be of great importance, which is the point of "being awake". It's not an immersion in the inner or outer world, but it has a precise place. Like it's on the border of the two. I suspect Silo might be talking about this in psychology, the location of the point of observation, the location of the I, etc. This needs to be studied. It's amazingly inspiring to me.

"I "massage" my mind for a long time, cleaning myself inside to get the necessary calm. I work for a short time only with the purpose. Then there is the difficult stage of focusing my attention in the right direction. It takes a lot of trying, a lot of going back again and again. Lately I have noticed that physical tension makes it difficult to 'detach' the I, from the body. In particular, facial tension gives a strong sense of identity. I observe this, and relax it.

Then again there is a point of rapture, which is now so powerful that I can't continue the work. I ask again who feels this, and the attention, which was very concentrated until then, suddenly expands, becomes more spread out, the "base of everything" appears, and in this expanded register I suddenly understand that what I am looking for is not an object... "that awareness which alone remains that I am". It's such a huge recognition now, that it distracts me. You have to get used to it. It brings immense happiness and gratitude."

"This morning I started with great energy. This means that there is an excitement, a lot of energy right from the beginning that needs to be "tamed", but somehow is available. (This was after a somewhat difficult anxious morning.) When I finally managed to get my mind focused on the question, that is, I found myself quite quickly in this big, quiet, bright space that is slowly becoming familiar, where there is a kind of resting point. And then there was one of those quite shocking, deeply shattering moments when I asked again the question, who is experiencing this?, who am I?... and something like this happened: it wasn't me asking who I was, it was "it", or rather it was me asking for a while, but then it wasn't me anymore, and there was "it", and I seemed to understand the "it" was it all along, but not only "it" was the one who asked this question, but every question and every act of consciousness ever, have come from "it". There was a deep shock and recognition that it was IT

all along. It looked back at me. It's that feeling when you look at something for a long time, try to focus, try to see something, but it's all blurry, and then suddenly you see someone or something looking back at you up close and you realize you've been looking at them all along, you just didn't recognize them. "I am who I am"... came immediately to my mind, and what I felt was perhaps akin to what Rudolf Otto calls "mysterium tremendum", a sense of a terrible mystery, because there really is something terrible about it."