

How I Discovered the Awareness Watching Awareness Method (the actual practice instructions are in *italics*)

by Michael Langford

By the year 2001, I had been studying the Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi for 27 years, from age 15 to age 42. I had read around 2,000 spiritual books from the various paths, etc. and I had seen many teachers. Reading those spiritual books, from so many different traditions, was a waste of time, because only Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Muruganar, Sri Sadhu Om and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj teach the Direct Path.

I had, during that 27-year period, placed emphasis on studying the books “Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi” and “The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi.” Since “Talks” came from notes taken in Sri Ramana’s presence, and since “The Collected Works” was written by Sri Ramana, I thought they would be the most accurate sources of the Teaching. I had the other Sri Ramana Maharshi books, but I did not place much attention on them. I did not want to read Sri Ramana’s teachings through what might be the distorted vision and opinions of a ‘sleeping’ aspirant.

In 2001, I was in Tiruvannamalai for the purpose of attending talks given by Sri V. Ganesan, who is the Grand Nephew of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In the guesthouse I was staying in, in Tiruvannamalai, I was thinking about paying attention only to the I AM, excluding all else, as is recommended by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, and feeling the sense of I or I AM as is recommended by Sri Ramana Maharshi.

I was in my room in the Sesa Bhavan guesthouse in Tiruvannamalai. I was thinking about all the possible meanings of I and I am and all the possible approaches to them that I had read over the years in the teachings of Sri Ramana and Sri Nisargadatta. Then I thought, the thought I-am, the I-feeling, the feeling I-am, the I-consciousness, the I-am consciousness, etc. And the different approaches to them, to think I or I-am, to feel I or I am, to focus the attention on I or I am. The number of different combinations of the approaches and the view of what I or I-am mean.

I was wondering if there was some way to solve these questions and to have clarity both in the meaning of I or I am and the meaning of what to do with it (focus the attention, feel, think, or?). So that there was nothing vague left, no more choices left. I really wanted to know the answer. I was not going to confine the answer to any previous understanding. It did not matter even if it shattered my previous understanding. It was a willingness to consider, maybe for the last two and a half decades I have not at all understood Sri Ramana Maharshi’s teachings. A willingness to allow all old views to be swept away if need be.

Sri Ramana Maharshi had said that self-inquiry is more like feeling than like thought. Asking ‘Who am I’ is an easy instruction to follow and asking ‘to whom do these thoughts arise?’ is an easy instruction to follow, as long as one stays in the realm of thought. But when it comes to feeling ‘Who am I’ or feeling ‘I am’, then for me, that had always been a bit vague, because what exactly is the feeling I am? How do I know I am? I wondered is ‘I am’ the ‘I-thought’ or is ‘I

am' just my present awareness? If 'I AM' is this present awareness, just the awareness that is now looking at this room, then paying attention to the I AM is just:

my awareness watching my awareness.

This was like a revelation to me! Instead of having some vague practice where I am told to pay attention to a feeling I AM, without ever being sure what exactly 'I AM' means and feels like, here I had an absolutely clear instruction:

My present awareness watching my present awareness. Awareness watching awareness.

Not some unknown awareness labeled the Infinite Self. *This awareness, my awareness, here and now watching itself, while ignoring thought, the body, the world, etc.*

So immediately I tried this practice:

Awareness watching awareness while ignoring thought.

I shut my eyes, because the point was also to ignore the world, to turn the attention that normally goes out to the world around 180 degrees and to look inward. However, it also means to ignore thought. So awareness watching awareness and ignoring thought etc. If I noticed that some thought had started, I just ignored the thought, and brought the attention back to awareness watching awareness. Awareness paying attention to awareness, to the exclusion of all else. Awareness paying attention only to itself.

The results were instant! From the very first moment one tries this practice, one is abiding as awareness! There is no waiting! It is so easy.

I do not mean to imply that from the beginning the ego is dead. It might take years of continuous practice before the ego is dead, and thought and the world are gone forever, never to reappear.

However, from the moment one tries this simple, easy to understand practice, one is abiding as awareness!

My first session of practice lasted around two hours and then I wanted to get some confirmation to see if there was any support for this practice in the teachings of Sri Ramana? Had I found something wonderful, the very heart of the practice of Self-inquiry and Self-abidance? Or was this some detour? So I looked to Sri Ramana's teachings to see.

I read the book "The Path of Sri Ramana, Part 1" by Sri Sadhu Om cover to cover. It is amazing that I searched this book first, because the premise of the whole book was the answer I was looking for. Throughout the book, Sri Sadhu Om focuses on Self-attention, instead of Self-inquiry. He points this out hundreds of times throughout the book, and this is the main point being made throughout the book. Self-inquiry is really just a way of inducing Self-attention, and only Self-attention is the true practice.

So immediately the confirmation was there, given by Sri Sadhu Om. However Sri Sadhu Om was still using the word 'Self,' when he wrote of Self-attention. So I looked further.

Next I read the Garland of Guru's Sayings by Sri Muruganar. Throughout the book Sri Muruganar uses the word Awareness. In 365 of the 1,254 sayings, Sri Muruganar uses the word awareness. I was thrilled to see Sri Muruganar use the word awareness so many times, it was clear I was on the right track.

Then I read saying #418:

'The only true and full awareness is *awareness of awareness*. Till *awareness is awareness of itself*, it knows no peace at all.'

There it was! The awareness of awareness method! There was my first confirmation that this indeed was the way and not some detour.

Then I read saying #432:

'Is it not because you are yourself awareness, that you now perceive this universe? If *you observe awareness steadily*, this awareness itself as Guru will reveal the Truth.'

There it was again! A second confirmation even more powerful!

First Sri Muruganar describes the exact practice:

'*you observe awareness steadily*'

then Sri Muruganar describes what the result will be of this practice:

'this awareness itself as Guru will reveal the Truth.'

Definitely not some side detour!

Just to add one more item of confirmation, I asked Sri Ganesan 'is my present awareness, just this awareness that is looking through these eyes at you, the same as the I AM that Sri Nisargadatta speaks of?'

Sri Ganesan answered yes.

I asked Sri Ganesan 'is awareness watching awareness, as described by Sri Muruganar, the same as practicing paying attention to the I AM, as Sri Nisargadatta taught?'

Sri Ganesan said yes. Sri Ganesan says he likes to call it 'attention attending to attention.'

One more confirmation, in a long line of confirmations, that I had discovered the true way to practice.

Sri Ganesan was a good choice to pose this question to, because it was Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who asked Sri Ganesan to give talks and Sri Ganesan has had a lifetime of exposure to the teachings of, and devotees to, Sri Ramana Maharshi.

The awareness watching awareness method takes the practice out of the realm of thought. The awareness watching awareness method is instant abidance! No waiting!

What an amazing couple of days this was! First to see, in crystal clear language, just what the I AM is:

just this awareness, my present awareness!

Then to see in crystal clear language the practice instructions: awareness watching awareness! All this arising in answer to the question I asked myself ‘what exactly is this I AM!’ Then out of all the books that could have been chosen to look in, to see if there was any confirmation, to choose “The Path of Sri Ramana, Part 1” and “Garland of Guru’s Sayings,” where the confirmation is found throughout both books, in great abundance and on almost every page! Then to also have the confirmation from Sri Ganesan!

An amazing couple of days of Grace!

From the moment of the shift of focus to awareness watching awareness, the meaning of Sri Ramana’s teachings became clear.

I wish I had discovered this as a teenager. The mistake I made was to focus on the book “Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi” and the “Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi.” If instead of placing such emphasis on books like those, I had right from the beginning, read books like “The Garland of Guru’s Sayings” and “Sri Ramana Experience” by Sri Muruganar, and “The Path of Sri Ramana, Part one” by Sri Sadhu Om, I could have had such a fruitful practice of instant abidance, instead of staying within the realm of thought asking ‘to whom do these thoughts arise,’ and trying to feel the sense of I AM, etc.

I did not realize that Sri Muruganar and Sri Sadhu Om were liberated sages. I discovered that later by reading books like “Sri Ramana Experience,” etc.

Since then, I have discovered many more quotes by Sri Muruganar on the Awareness watching Awareness method. From: Non-Dual Consciousness, The Flood Tide of Bliss, Sri Ramana Experience (Anubuti) by Sri Muruganar:

212. ‘Those who have sunk within their own inner selves to dwell as pure knowledge, so that their infatuation with worthless desires is abolished, will, through holy silence, establish the fulfillment of the real within their own selves. This *practice of meditation upon consciousness itself* is the true way.’

I feel so lucky to have discovered these buried treasure, hidden out in the open. Take the above quote for example. It is in a section of 242 verses entitled “Guru’s Gracious Bounty.” It is not a category about practice. The quotes, before and after verse #212, don’t give one any clue that the true way of practice is about to be described. Only a careful study of all 242 verses, will reveal it. If one does not recognize the awareness watching awareness method, and its value, Sri Muruganar gives you a second chance by writing ‘is the true way’ in verse #212 above.

The same applies to the following quotes from “The Garland of Guru’s Sayings.” They are not under the heading of practice. They come from all different sections of the book. To discover these buried treasures, a careful study of all of the 1254 sayings was required.

From “The Garland Of Guru’s Sayings” By Sri Muruganar: Awareness watching awareness:

52. ‘If with *mind turned towards Awareness and concentrating on Awareness*, one seeks the Self, the world made up of ether and other elements is real, as all things are Awareness, the one sole substance of true Being.’

638. ‘If *instead of looking outward at objects, you observe that looking, all things now shine as I, the seer. Perception of objects is mere illusion.*’

742. ‘In the Self, he stands firm fixed who *dwells and truly meditates on himself as pure awareness.*’

435. ‘True natural *Awareness, which does not go after alien objects*, is the Heart. Since actionless Awareness shines as real Being, *its joy consists in concentration on itself.*’

428. ‘Not like other things unreal, but always by its Being real, the Self as permanent *Awareness*, has no other *dwelling* place, than *in its own radiant Awareness.*’

862. ‘Losing the false ego in awareness, and *firm abidance as awareness*, is true clarity.’

1068. ‘In that flawless state of Being, the Self, without a sense of ‘I’ or ‘mine,’ the *still abidance in and as pure Awareness*, this is the noblest victory worth winning.’

1039. ‘That which unaided shines within as ‘*I AM, I AM*’ without a break, the strong, true Being free from all adjuncts, *this pure Awareness*, is our firm, authentic nature.’

1038. ‘Awareness is not a quality of the Self. The Self is without qualities. Awareness is not an action of the Self. The Self does nothing. *The Self, our Being, IS Awareness.*’

Ignoring thoughts:

921. ‘None can confront and overcome the *mind. Ignore it, then, as something false, unreal.* Know the Self as the real ground and stand firm-rooted in it.’

1192. ‘The ego image moves reflected in the *mind’s waves*. How to stop this movement, how to regain the state of stillness? *Don’t observe these movements, seek the Self, instead*. It is wisdom to gain and abide in silence.’

1193. ‘The seers declare that pure silence is firm abidance in egoless, true Awareness. For such thought free silence, the means is clinging to the Self within the Heart.’

917. ‘As in the sky covered with thick clouds no eye can see the glorious sun, one fails to see one’s own Self when the mind firmament is darkened by the dense cloud of thoughts.’

918. ‘Only He who has vanquished thought, sits like an emperor, on the neck of the majestic elephant Knowledge. Know for certain that the mind’s movements alone give rise to birth and every cruel pain and sorrow.’

Ignoring the body, the world, etc.:

Some of the quotes above have already dealt with this subject, such as #638 and 435. Here are some additional quotes:

647. ‘If you refrain from looking at this, that or any other object, then by that overpowering look into absolute Being, you become yourself the boundless space of pure Awareness, which alone is real Being.’

1194. ‘When one refrains from looking out and noting outward objects, and abides within the heart in Self-Awareness, the ego disappears. The silence pure, that then shines forth, is the goal of Knowledge.’

1103. ‘It is folly to waste one’s life running in all directions searching different goals. Learn to practice firm abidance, at the feet of the Self supreme, the eternal and auspicious silence, which alone can still the ego’s restlessness.’

1157. ‘Holding in their hands the mirror, the scripture which declares ‘The Self alone is to be known,’ many, alas, study the text and commentaries; only a few *seek the Self and gain true life*.’

The following quotes, on the subject of practice, effort, earnestness and zeal, are also important to note:

694. ‘Even in this worldly life, one’s labors bear no fruit, without abundant faith. Hence till one merges in the bliss Supreme and boundless, *one’s strong zeal in spiritual practice should never slacken*.’

1063. ‘Not knowing the value of this treasure, their own birthright, *people perish through mere laziness*. The great ones who have found the clue and traced and gained it, they enjoy eternal bliss.’

1066. 'True wealth is but the gracious silence of steady, unswerving Self-awareness. This bright rare treasure, can be gained only by those who *earnestly strive* for the extinction of all thoughts.'

1186. 'Uninterrupted and whole-minded concentration on the Self, our true, non-dual Being, this is silence, pure, supreme, the goal; *Not the lazy mind's inertia*, which is but a state of dark illusion.'

612. 'Undeluded by whatever else may come and go, *unwinking watch the Self*, because the little fault of *forgetting for one moment* ones true Being as Pure Awareness, *brings tremendous loss*.'

692. 'Since it was one's own past effort that has now ripened into fate, one can with *greater present effort* change one's fate.'

780. '*Do not swerve from your true state, thinking some thought. But if you do, do not commit the same mistake again. Do nothing that you may later regret. Even if you did it once, never repeat it.*'

790. 'To err is human. When those strong in virtue err, they do not hide it in their pride. Instead, *they own up to their lapse and quickly reform themselves.*'

826. 'A superstructure raised without a strong foundation soon collapses in disgrace. Therefore, *earnest seekers first ensure by every means their own stern self-discipline*, through devotion and detachment.'

Take care,
with Love, in:
Awareness watching Awareness,

Michael Langford

You can read a detailed description of the Awareness Watching Awareness practice instructions by visiting Michael's Web site at http://uarelove1.tripod.com/FIVE_SAGES.htm.