

The Significance of Ramana Maharshi's Self-Enquiry for Meditation

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Abstract

Seeking happiness has become a crucial part of human beings due to a consistent rise in anxiety and stress over the passing years. As a result, the importance of Indian meditation practices has risen worldwide. Especially, Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry is one of the significant meditation practices found in India. The purpose of this paper is to show that *Mokṣa* (liberation), where one is free from suffering, can be attained by the practice of Self-enquiry, which is simple but powerful because it immediately pierces to the core, the Self. Ramana is the ancient traditional master in India, and he is also known for using silence in the instruction of his disciples. The essence of Self-enquiry is that it is not to realize something anew but to abide as the Self, in the here and now with aware affirmation "I am already Thou." Ramana's life, the experience of his great awakening, the Self, 'I'-thought, the body, the theoretical aspect of Self-enquiry as meditation by Ramana and the practical aspect of Self-enquiry as meditation by Prof. Kim Kyeongmin are presented to illustrate the significance of this method. It is pointed out that Maharshi's Self-enquiry is more valuable and productive than other meditation techniques.

Key words : Ramana Maharshi, Self, I-thought, Self-enquiry, *Advaita-Vedānta* and Meditation

Seeking happiness has been an important part of the Indian philosophy for several centuries. Meditation is considered a form of its solution. Nowadays, the significance of meditation has increased because people have suffered from the mental and emotional impact of stress. The major reason of this phenomenon is that they have been overwhelmed by the external world and become attached to it. As a result, Indian authentic meditation practices get extraordinary attention worldwide.

The interest level in meditation and Yoga has increased, and further, the interest in Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry of meditators all over the world has noticeably become greater, with an active academic research and practice of his specific teachings. However, it has not been revealed to the meditators as expected. This is because he, most of his life, kept in silence with

less verbal teachings, and this resulted in the meditation practitioners facing some difficulties to follow this practice. Also, it directly influences practitioners to modify this practice according to their own ways of understanding and preferences. It, thus, is crucial to investigate Ramana's original teachings and to practice accordingly. When his practice is appropriately taught, it may allow practitioners to enhance their happiness where one is free from suffering.

The aim of this paper is to introduce Ramana's Self-enquiry overall and to emphasize the significance of this practice with the help of the specific clarification. It, further, may aid the practitioners to be here and now as the Self. This paper contains Ramana's life and the descriptions of the Self, 'I'-thought and the body. It includes the theoretical aspect of Self-enquiry as meditation by Ramana (McMartin, 2005) and the practical aspect

of Self-enquiry as meditation by Prof. Kim (2006) as well. It is expected that this study can become helpful to the practitioners who are seeking liberation, *Mokṣa*.

Ramana Maharshi's Life

Ramana Maharshi was born on December 30, 1879 in the village of Tiruchuli in Tamilnadu, and his name was noted as Venkataraman (Subbaramayya, 2010, p.2). In 1892, his father passed away and he took this event to understand and realize that there was the 'I' which makes the body do all kinds of activities, and his father's 'I' just had left the body (Grimes, 2010, p.18-20).

When he was seventeen years old, he suddenly had an unexpected experience of the 'Great Awakening'. He was sitting alone in a room of his uncle's house. Without any health problem, a fear of death was suddenly upon him. Instead of figuring out the reason of the fear, he started thinking what to do about the feeling "I am going to die." He felt that there is no one but himself who can solve this problem (Osborne, 2002, p.7-8). Ramana himself had well described that moment as follows:

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 I at once dramatised 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 I am the deathless Spirit' (Osborne, 2002, p.8).

For him, this process was a very direct and vivid truth. This 'I' was the only real thing at that state, and all sorts of 'conscious' activity linked with his body were strongly centered on that 'I'. From that experience onwards his fear of death had absolutely been eliminated, and the state of 'Absorption in the Self' wholly continued. He was only focused on 'I' and always dwelled in the Self whether his body does any activity or his mind comes and goes (Osborne, 2002, p.8-9). After this awakening experience, his life had been completely changed. His interest was only focused on nothing, but the Self (Osborne, 2016, p.xi-xii).

Venkataraman, on August 29, 1896, left for Arunachala, known to be the mountain that is a manifestation of *Śiva* in Tamilnadu, and arrived at Arunachaleswarar Temple in Thiruvannamalai, where he immersed in the state of *samādhi* (Kim & Kim, 1999, p.119). Although the place was a wet, dark pit, where all kinds of injurious insects chewed away the lower part of his thighs, he had no movement at all because the feeling of his 'physical being' was absent. He was completely immersed in the state of 'Self-absorption' and he maintained this state without eating for several days (Subbaramayya, 2010, p.26-27).

He, in February 1899, moved to Arunachala Mountain. He lived in Virupaksa cave for 17 years (1899- 1916) and he shifted to Skandasramam in 1916 and lived with his mother until 1922 (Grimes, 2010, p.15). Finally, he came down and established his last ashram, Ramanasramam was built in 1922. He lived there until his *Mahāsamādhi*, 1940 April, 14 (Mlecko, 1975, p.95).

The impressive aspect of his life, in the period of ashram life (1925-1950), was that he used to radiate his silent power and his disciples had the direct experiences of the Self through his silence. He only gave out verbal instructions when the people were not able to understand his silence (Godman, 1992, p.3). Also, he did not give *Upadeśa* (teaching) in the 'ceremonial manner' such as worshipping *pūjā* and giving *mantra* to the people. He did not even consider himself as a guru and anyone as his disciple because he considered that all beings were the same as the Self (Brunton & Venkataramiah, 2015, p.141).

Ramana did not support those who abandoned their family and followed a lifestyle of 'celibate asceticism'. According to him, Self-realization is accessible to everyone in any circumstances. He emphasized that it is more significant to have an appropriate mental attitude rather than having a physical renunciation of his life for realization (Godman, 1992, p.127-128).

The Self

The word 'Self' is very often used in Indian philosophy and the Self is described in many different words and forms. But it is not easy to grasp the exact meaning of Self because it is something which is indescribable and beyond language. Ramana noted that the best definition is "I am that I am" (McMartin, 2005, p.57).

Although it is limited to define the Self in language, he tried to illustrate what the Self is with the implications of different terms used as follows: the 'supreme being', 'Pure consciousness', 'Pure awareness', 'the only existence', 'immortality', 'immutability', 'perfection', 'the only reality', 'the source of all kinds of illumination', 'God', 'grace', 'bliss', 'the infinite 'I'', 'the silence', etc. (McMartin, 2005). There are some synonyms which need to be explained more in details.

Maharshi defined the term 'Self' as the real Self or real 'I' which is a 'non-personal' and 'all-inclusive' awareness. It is necessary to be distinguished with the individual self which is the 'non-existent' obstacle that disturbs the one to be as the real Self. He used to describe the Self and Self-awareness as a screen. On the screen, some pictures temporarily appear and then disappear. But the empty screen is always there like the Self (Godman, 1992, p.8, 13-14).

Self is also known as silence. "For those who live in Self as the beauty devoid of thought, there is nothing which should be thought of. That which should be adhered to is only the experience of silence, because in that supreme state nothing exists to be attained other than oneself" (Godman, 1992, p.12).

Ramana sometimes indicated the experience of the Self as *jñāna* (knowledge). It is not to be confused that a person has the knowledge of the Self because in this state, there is no 'localized' knower who is apart from the Self (Godman, 1992, p.9).

The Self is equally understood as the 'inherent reality' and it has no names and forms because it is boundless. The reality underlies 'unrealities' and in this state, it is meaningless to differentiate 'existence' and 'non-existence'. The reality is the only consciousness and real form (*nija-svarūpa*) which shines alone and it is free from all misery (Godman, 1992, p.10).

There is no single moment for human being to exist without the Self, and there is no one who does not experience the Self. Maharshi also highlighted that seeking the Self is the only thing to do because without the Self nothing exists (McMartin, 2005, p.57). The Self is only being, but it is beyond the distinction between the real and the unreal; it is knowledge, but it is beyond the distinction between knowledge and ignorance;

it is pure consciousness, but it is beyond the distinction between the seer and seen (Godman, 1992, p.11).

Human being is eager to know the way to attain the Self even though he is already that, because of misunderstanding himself as the ego or 'I'-thought. To avoid this ignorance, he should get rid of the thought 'I' and the false notion "I am the body" which is the 'primary source' of all subsequent incorrect identifications and its cessation is the major purpose of Self-enquiry (McMartin, 2005, p.55-57, 154-156).

Ramana taught the Self with a link to *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* (being-consciousness-bliss). The Self is 'pure being' (*sat*) and here, there is no place of subjects or objects but only awareness of being exists. The reason is that this awareness is same as 'consciousness' (*chit*). By the experience of this consciousness, a state of 'unbroken happiness or bliss' (*ānanda*) can be experienced. These three aspects are not experienced separately, but as a 'unitary' whole (Godman, 1992, p.8-9).

The Self is not something new to realize or a goal to achieve. In the state of Self-realization, it is simply being that which the one always is and which the one always has been. The Self will only remain when one gives up one's attention to the 'not-Self' (Godman, 1992, p.11), and this 'not-Self' is from the knowledge of variety, ignorance. This wrong knowledge is the 'false identification' of the Self with the mind, the body, etc. (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.217).

However, one desires to understand the way of attaining the Self. One, in actual fact, cannot be ignorant about the Self as the real existence, because the absolute knowledge alone exists. The ignorance is simply from the imaginary delusion and 'non-existence' (McMartin, 2005, p.55).

Ramana, further, emphasized that this ignorance is not apart from the Self as well. In the

same manner, there are several concepts which seem to look like the opposite of the Self, but they are ultimately the same such as 'I' and the world, and individual soul and God. These temporarily appear and disappear, but are from one source that is Self (McMartin, 2005, p.55).

Similarly, he indicated that there is no difference between the mind and the Self. "The mind turned inwards is the Self; turned outwards, it becomes the ego and the entire world... The one is real, the many are mere names and forms. But the mind does not exist apart from the Self, that is, it has no independent existence. The Self exists without the mind, never the mind without the Self" (Godman, 1992, p.15).

'I'-thought

In one's life, there are so many innumerable different thoughts which are arising and passing. These thoughts seem to look different, but when one carefully observes them, one will realize that these are derived from the same root, 'I'-thought, the root of all other thoughts. Ramana specified that 'I'-thought comes first, and after that all other thoughts like ego, mind, etc. will appear. 'I'-thought is the very first of everything, and thus other things will not appear without 'I'-thought. This thought 'I' is like a spirit which appears and disappears with it, and it is basically the same as the feeling of "I am the body" (McMartin, 2005, p.155, 162).

The practitioner is only required to focus on the root thought 'I', the first thought. If he constantly focuses on this thought "I-I" or "I am I," it will lead him to the place where the mind's origin is (McMartin, 2005, p.169). It is significant to observe to 'whom the thoughts arise' which means discovering the source of the 'I'-thought, the Self (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.231). When he persistently investigates and holds on to this particular thought, he will not be able to think

other thoughts and that is Self-enquiry (McMartin, 2005, p.162). It will be explained more in details later, as a separate topic.

He should clearly distinguish the difference between the pure Self and the 'I'-thought. First, the pure-'I' is infinite "I-I," and this state is free from the 'I'-thought, ignorance, and hallucination. "In the place where "I" (the mind or ego) merges, the one (existence-consciousness) appears spontaneously as "I-I" (or "I am I"). That itself is the whole" (McMartin, 2005, p.164).

'I'-thought, on the other hand, is impure, finite, impermanent and imperfect. Maharshi noted that it is "being merely a thought, sees subject and object, sleeps, wakes up, eats and thinks, dies and is reborn" (McMartin, 2005, p.164) and joy, anger, etc. The ignorance is there when one wrongly identifies oneself with 'I'-thought.

The Body

Natarajan (2009) explained how one generates the illusion that the body is 'self-luminous', and it is because consciousness flows through '*nadis*', consciousness-channels, and it finally comes to the mind and from there it extends all over the body (p.50).

Ramana viewed that there are five-fold sheaths (*pancha kośas*) in the body. According to this concept, 'I' is not same as the body (*annamaya kośa*) and its functions, and the mind can be understood in the same way (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.23). He did not strongly appeal to the concept of the body, because it is just one of the illusions for him.

The scriptures declare that the body is not one's true identity. Considering the body as the possessor of consciousness is an illusion of the mind. The body does not exist as the real Self but only when the mind is looking outwards (Godman, 1992, p.12-13). Maharshi also stated that "everyone is the Self, indeed infinite. Yet each one

mistakes the body for the Self" (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.478). He strongly emphasized that one erroneously identifies the body with the Self and the suffering begins from this misidentification (McMartin, 2005, p.154).

When one identifies oneself with the body, then only forms and shapes will appear. But when one transcends one's body the other things will disappear as well as 'body-consciousness' (McMartin, 2005, p.154). Due to misidentification, unfortunately, one finds it difficult to overcome 'body-consciousness', but it is also 'the false idea'. Ramana explained this false idea with an example of sleeping state. While in sleep, individuality does not exist because one does not respond to one's name in sleep. That is why the idea that one has a name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) is delusory. The only way to eliminate this illusion is to find one's true identity and it can be achieved by practicing Self-enquiry (Natarajan, 2009, p.50).

Maharshi mentioned that "The body itself is a thought" (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.454). When a practitioner incorrectly perceives that the Self is restricted to his body and mind, and has a thought "I am the body," then other thoughts will rise as follows. When he ceases his misperception, the incorrect idea falls down and is replaced by 'real' Self (Godman, 1992, p.18).

Ramana asked the question "Can one not exist without one's hands?" The thought that "without my body, I cannot exist" is a false thought. He, further, illustrated that if one is not the parts one is also not the whole body (Natarajan, 2009, p.51). In this false knowledge, the birth and death exist. Despite that, one should not confuse the truth with one's delusion, which is strong, because the body is closely connected to the being. It must be clear that he is the Self, not the body (McMartin, 2005, p.157).

To overcome this delusion, it is essential to focus on the gap between the 'I'-thought and the

body and to separate them. It eventually helps to attain the strength of observing oneself as one is.

According to Maharshi, the human entity consists of the body, the mind and the ego. However, at the same time, one has to remember that the body and mind eventually are the expression of the Self, because apart from the Self, nothing can exist. The reason of this is that something which appears anew, it will disappear as well, and the Self will remain forever (McMartin, 2005, pp.154-156).

The Theoretical Aspect of Self-Enquiry as Meditation

Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry is one of India's most ancient meditation practices. Carl Jung, a well-known psychiatrist, had described Ramana, "In India, Ramana is the whitest spot in a white space. What we find in the life and teachings of Sri Ramana is the purest of India" (Melvyn, 2012, foreword).

Self-enquiry is the 'inner quest' which is the direct path to the Self (McMartin, 2005, p.159). Maharshi first expressed this method in 1902 when he answered the questions from Sivapraksam Pillai. This teaching is derived from his own 'illumination' experience of death when he was seventeen. Later on, it was published as a small book "Who Am I?" which is the essence of his teaching, and it is also known as *ātmavicāra* (Mlecko, 1975, p.148).

Self-enquiry is somewhat similar to the Indian traditional practice that is mentioned in Upaniṣads. But, it has been brought to a new area of Hindu practice through very simple and common language (Jung, 2009, p.6). Mlecko (1975) explained that Self-enquiry, here, is beyond the boundary of all kinds of religions because it is only aimed to be the Self as it is by discriminating between the real Self and all 'not-Self' ideas that are unreal, such as an individual self, ego, body,

and mind. He simply illustrated that the whole instruction of Self-enquiry is to see 'who I am' (p.148).

Maharshi used to teach his disciples through silence, thus, many of them were in confusion with his teaching. To avoid distortion of his teaching, he suggested Self-enquiry practice (Godman, 1992, p.3-4). The mind, according to Ramana's view, does not exist and the nature of the mind has a persistent tendency to keep getting attracted outside, and the Self-enquiry is to bring the mind back to the Self which is the true nature of self. If the mind or body exists, that means there is an 'I' who is doing something. It again means 'I'-thought (*aham-vṛtti*) is there as the implicit assumption (Godman, 1992, p.44). In this assumption, "the first person 'I' exists, then the second person 'you' and the third person 'he' will exist. That alone is one's natural state, the absolute being, wherein the 'I' perishes on enquiry into its nature, and with it also perishes [*sic*] 'you' and 'he'" (McMartin, 2005, p.160).

Other meditation techniques usually hold and investigate the mind or the ego and these are suggested for beginners of the practice. But it is a 'projection' of the Self because it is just like the thief pretending to be a policeman to catch a thief who is himself (McMartin, 2005, p.159-161). It confirms that the Self is the only source of everything and there is "no thinker of thoughts, no performer of actions and no awareness of individual existence" (Godman, 1992, p.44-45).

Maharshi pointed out the 'I' from the question "Who am I?" refers to the ego, not the *Ātman* (Natarajan, 2009, p.62). It might be effective when a practitioner mentally concentrates on thinking and repeating 'I', but it is only for the preliminary stage because in this repetition of 'I' (the ego), duality exists as a subject (the 'I'-thought) who meditates an object and a 'perception of an object' (the thoughts 'I'). If the

duality does not completely disappear, he might be captured by 'I'-thought which considers himself as the individual existence. This ignorance could be ceased only when experiencing the subject instead of being aware of an object (Godman, 1992, p.46). It is the major difference between Self-enquiry and other meditation techniques.

Another difference between them is that most of the other techniques cannot be practiced without the mind. In *ātma vicāra*, on the contrary, the mind does not exist, but the Self (Godman, 1992, p.52). When the practice is at a deeper level, the practitioner should be aware that Self-enquiry is not a process of learning anything new; rather it is an unlearning (Venkataramiah, 2006, p.422). It means whatever he learned is actually something that was already there within him. What he has to do is to remove the thought "I have not realized" (Maharshi's gospel, 2002, p.30). It sounds paradoxical because it is explained according to the practitioner's depth of practice.

It seems Ramana's philosophical statements are similar to the philosophy of *Advaita-Vedānta* which is a part of main stream Indian traditional philosophy. But, the practical aspects of them are different because *Advaita-Vedānta* masters advocated a meditation with the mental affirmation which the Self is the only reality. For the query "Who am I?", most of the *advaita* practitioners will assume the answer of this question as "I am Brahman," but it makes their mind engaged in the repeated answers. Maharshi criticized this way because even if he was strongly occupied in this question, the mind would not merge into its source and not disappear. At the same time, "Who am I?" should not be practiced as a mantra because its purpose is not to analyze the mind, and it is a method to redirect his attention from the 'objects of thought and perception' to the 'thinker' and 'perceiver of them' (Godman, 1992, p.67). Another common

misapprehension of Self-enquiry is to consider it the same as *neti-neti* (neither this, nor that) which is a traditional *advaita vedāntic* expression. It is a mental rejection of all objects of thought and perception which are not the Self, with the verbal rejections such as "I am neither the body, nor the mind.", and it will eventually arrive at its 'uncontaminated form', the Self. It is also called as 'Self-enquiry' in Hinduism, and there is some confusion with Ramana's practice. However, *neti-neti* was criticized by Maharshi because he believed that it is just an 'intellectual activity' which could not go beyond the mind. The 'I'-thought will be sustained by this discrimination and 'not I' in *neti-neti* will never remove itself (Godman, 1992, p.67-68). Self-enquiry, oppositely, is to seek the origin of the ego, the 'I'-thought. By this seeking, all other thoughts apart from the Self will be removed.

Ramana's Self-enquiry is not the same as other meditation techniques that suggest practicing at certain hours with certain postures, and it should be maintained throughout one's life. He emphasized that the mind will sink only by the query "Who am I?" and this will eventually destroy itself like the stick that is used to stir the 'funeral pyre'. If any kind of thoughts arise, the practitioner should, without any delay, ask 'To whom did it rise?' and focus on the thought 'I' which is in charge of all activities of the body and the mind. The answer of the question will be raised as 'To me'. After that he again enquires "Who am I?", the mind will return to its origin, the Self, and the risen thought will automatically disappear. It does not matter how many thoughts and doubts rise because by persistent enquiry, the mind that has tendencies towards 'sense-objects [*viśaya-vāsanās*]' will be eliminated. The 'I'-thought, eventually, will be merged into his true nature and his strength of abiding in the Self will be increased (Godman, 1992, p.54-56).

In this stage, he becomes an effortless being and only presents as it is rather than an 'effort to be'. In the end, the Self realized as a result of 'doing' something, but just by 'being' (Godman, 1992, p.53-54). Maharshi states the following: "Do not meditate – be! Do not think that you are – be! Don't think about being – you are!" (Godman, 1992, p.54).

Overall, the word 'Self' is beyond its mere meaning from a language point of view, and it can be considered an element without a concrete name and a form (*nāma* and *rūpa*). However, 'I'-thought and body exists only within a language along with a name and a form.

Self is immortality, reality, existence, consciousness, knowledge (*jñāna*) and infinity. On the other hand, 'I'-thought and body are mortality, illusion, non-existence, subconsciousness and unconsciousness, ignorance (*avidyā*) and finiteness. Self is the pure being (*sat*) which is the opposite of 'I'-thought and body that are impure because these have a clear distinction between the seer and the seen, and the subject and the object. 'I'-thought and body do not exist without the Self, but the Self exists independently.

Self-enquiry is a method to differentiate between the Self and all 'not-Self' like 'I'-thought, body, mind, etc., and it eventually merge all 'not-Self' into the Self, known to be the root of everything. Although it is still a part of an illusion, which provides a distinction between the seer and the seen, it can be understood by comparing it to a 'funeral pyre' which will finally burn itself.

The Practical Aspect of Self-Enquiry as Meditation

As mentioned above, Ramana's Self-enquiry is simple because the practitioner only has to ask "Who am I?" from himself during the entire practice. However, many practitioners face difficulties during their practices of Ramana's Self-

enquiry due to their own *Samskāra* (the subtle tendency of memory). Thus, the author suggests Prof. Kim Kyeungmin's Self-enquiry practice, which is specifically systemized to that of Ramana's Self-enquiry, as an expedient means to achieve the fruitful results of the practice.

Prof. Kim is an influential psychotherapist and a Professor at 'Self counseling graduate school' in Korea. He has developed the program of Ramana's Self-enquiry practice for more than twenty years with a great number of participants in Korea. After many processes of trial and error, Prof. Kim has been able to design a more effective practice structure for practitioners.

Kim (2016), for the beginners of this practice, suggested that it is more productive when one trains through the four stages of Self-enquiry practice step by step in sequence (Table 1). The main purpose this practice is to be aware of whatever is happening to a practitioner, and to naturally witness them as they are in the present moment without any effort.

Most of all the references of Prof. Kim's practice as below are from his instructions of a group session of Self-enquiry that had been held in Korea (Kim, K. Practice of Self-enquiry, July 16-17, 2016). The author participated in this session as a practitioner, collected the data verbatim of the whole session, and translated this record from Korean to English.

The four stages of Self-enquiry practice by Prof. Kim

Stage	Screen	One's past self	Observer	With open eyes
1 stage	O	X	O	O
2 stage	O	O	O	O
3 stage	X	X	O	O
4 stage	X	X	X	X

The First Stage

As mentioned above, Self-enquiry, unlike other meditation techniques, is not something to achieve a goal or to realize anew because one is already that. In the first stage, a screen is considered as 'Self-awareness' and it is used to experience the state of "I am already Thou" without any artificial effort of practice but by experiencing that state. Thus, a practitioner as an observer only witnesses the screen without his past self (one's combination of thoughts, feelings and mind of the past that influences the present and future) in this stage.

In the first stage, as soon as the practitioner becomes aware of whatever rises from him, such as his ego, his thoughts, his mind, his feelings, his body sensations, etc., he puts it on a physical screen (or a white board) which is placed in front of him. He keeps open his eyes to avoid proceeding to another thought, remains as a seer without any change, and observes that risen thing as it is and lets it leave. He, after that, immediately comes back to the screen from his ego, and remains silently in the here and now without anything (East & West Psychotherapy Center, 2013, p.126-127; Kim, 2016).

Due to a tendency of ego to create new thoughts, having a thought rise during meditation is a very natural phenomenon, and the practitioner should allow it without any judgment. He, further, must be aware that he is not a doer but the seer even though the body of his past self still exists in this stage. The aim of this stage is to be completely relaxed without any effort because he is already that, and to experience the state of the Self, his true nature (Kim, 2016).

The Second Stage

In the second stage, the definition of the past self must be clearly understood. As soon as the practitioner becomes aware of whatever rises to him, it simultaneously becomes a part of the past

in there and then, and it is called 'the past self'. It includes everything raised from the past, the present, and the future, except the Self. Such as a thought which arose in the past, a sense that arises in the present, or a feeling that arises because of the future, comes under the category of the past self (Kim, 2016).

One's true nature is to become aware that "I am already That," the Self. But due to *Samskāra*, one is ignorant of one's nature and one misidentifies oneself as one's past self including one's body, one's thought, etc. The purpose of using a screen in the second stage is to be a seer, who witnesses risen things from one's past self by seeing the screen which represents 'Self-awareness'. The whole process of this stage should be practiced with open eyes, and it is divided into four sub-stages as the following (Kim, 2016):

2-1 stage is 'putting the thoughts' on the screen. The practitioner, whatever thought rises to him, separates it from himself, puts it on the screen and observes it as it is because he is not the one raising a thought, but he is the seer who witnesses that risen thought .

2-2 stage is 'putting the body' on the screen. He, here, separates his body and imagines his body is on the screen, sends whatever is happening within his body to his imaginary body that is placed on the screen, and observes that body on the screen as it is because he is not the body but the seer.

2-3 stage, further, is 'putting one's past self' on the screen. People often misidentify themselves as 'doers' who are thinking, feeling, sensing, etc., and this doer is the same as the past self. In this stage, however, a practitioner remains as a seer, not a doer. He, precisely, duplicates a being that is the same as him, puts it on the screen and considers it as the doer, and he himself remains as the seer who witnesses this being on the screen. The aim of this practice is to have a

distance the seer from his ego and to lose the power of ego, and to be here and now as it is (East & West Psychotherapy Center, 2013, p.128-129; Kim, 2016).

The process of 2-3 stage can be specified with an example as follows: (1) when a thought rises, one becomes aware of this thought, (2) one separates this thought from oneself, (3) one artificially sends this separated thought to one's past self who is on the screen, (4) one imagines that one's past self is the doer who raises this thought, and (5) one, as the seer, witnesses the doer who is on the screen, as it is.

2-4 stage is putting practitioner's past self who is the doer of everything on the screen which is the same as 2-3stage, and further he, as soon as he is aware of whatever has risen, immediately asks "Who (is raising this)?" and answers "The past self" without any delay because there should be no interval for creating another thought. He remains as the seer who witnesses his past self as it is in the present. At the very moment when something rises on him, it already becomes a part of the past in there and then, and nothing remains in here and now, except the seer on the screen (East & West Psychotherapy Center, 2013, p.128-129; Kim, 2016).

The Third Stage

In the third stage, there is no screen anymore because it was a device in the previous stages to become aware of the existence of 'Self-awareness'. Further, there is no 'I'-ness which includes the past self, thought, mind, body, senses, etc. The seer, in other words, only remains without the seen. Even if a thought arises, it simultaneously disappears as soon as one is aware of it (Kim, 2016).

The Fourth Stage

In the fourth stage, even the seer that was like a device for observing a distance between the Self

and the ego disappears because the Self here is in the state of emptiness, and it only exists; it is beyond both the seer and the seen. Things like the past self, thought, mind, body, senses, etc., disappear in this stage (Kim, 2016).

After participating in the Self-enquiry practice provided by Prof. Kim, the author analyzes several points of this practice as given below:

As mentioned before, Ramana emphasized that the 'I' from the question "Who am I?" refers to the ego and when one keeps tracing it, it will merge into the Self (Godman, 1992, p.75). But, some practitioners frequently misidentify this 'I' as themselves and it makes it difficult for them to separate themselves from their ego. To solve this problem, Kim suggested that one should use a physical screen for a clearer separation of one's past self. In this way, there will be lesser influence from one's tendency (*Samskāra*) during the meditation.

Similarly, asking "Who (is raising this)?" and answering "The past self" in the second stage of Self-enquiry practice aids him to easily distinguish himself from the ego and eventually to remain as the seer. Also, as soon as he raises this question, thoughts, feelings, etc., that will disturb his meditation flow will be immediately eliminated without creating any further thought. Practicing Prof. Kim's Self-enquiry is helpful to observe thoughts as they are present without any judgment and supports to concentrate in the meditation state. It leads him to be in the present instead of being neither in the past nor in the future, and when he stays in the here and now, he enables to abide as the Self.

Further, Kim focused on the fact that "I am already Thou" which is the uniqueness of Self-enquiry, and it leads the practitioner to have a powerful experience of the Self. The author, on the other hand, observed that when the practitioner

does not sufficiently deal with the distinction between his ego and the Self, it becomes hard for him to practice the first and the second stages of this practice because when he misunderstands that his 'I' is a 'doer', it will interrupt him to separately put his past self on the screen. Moreover, there are some possibilities that this practice could become mechanical and habitual repetitions that would prove to be pointless. This practice must be done from the bottom of his heart with a proper guide's instruction.

CONCLUSION

Self-enquiry, in simple words, is questioning "Who am I?" from the beginning till the end (Godman, 1992, p.52). For some people, it is necessary to have more specific explanations according to their spiritual condition. The aim of this paper was to introduce Ramana Maharshi's Self-enquiry and to re-illuminate the significance of this practice by presenting Prof. Kim Kyeongmin's systematic structure of Self-enquiry practice.

First, Ramana's life and his awakening experiences have been introduced. After that, the Self was defined and described through verbal instructions by him. Further, there were explanations of the 'I'-thought, the root of all other thoughts. It is considered the same as the ego or the mind, and it is identical with the thought "I am the body" which is a false identification. Also, Self-enquiry, the direct path to the Self, was illustrated according to Ramana's teaching. Self-enquiry is not to realize something anew, but to abide as the Self. Prof. Kim, furthermore, developed Self-enquiry in the systematic way into four stages. Its main aim is to have a distinction between the 'Self' and 'not-Self', such as the ego, the mind, the body, etc., and to observe them as they are. At a deeper level of this practice,

however, it is significant to understand that nothing is eventually apart from the Self.

In Self-enquiry practice, it is rare to immediately attain *Mokṣa* (liberation) through an experience of Self-awareness at the first sitting of Self-enquiry. The reason is that one's strength of Self-awareness has become weaker due to *Samṣkāra* that is a latent karmic tendency shaping one's present life. Therefore, when Self-enquiry is concomitant with an elimination of *Samṣkāra*, the Self-awareness can be effectively achieved. Hence a research on eliminating *Samṣkāra* can be suggested as a further study.

Through this paper, the author has attempted to present the significance of Self-enquiry. Ramana's Self-enquiry induces a much more effective and successful outcome of the practice of meditation. This practice may lead practitioners to the state of the Self which is liberated.

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