

The Natural State - III

The hundred years from about 1850 to 1950 saw a great flowering of saints in India, and one of those who specially stood out was Ramaṇa Maharṣi.

What Ramaṇa Maharṣi has left behind him, which was almost entirely recorded by others, reduced itself to great simplicity. For example, he even dismissed the experience of Arjuna in the 11th chapter of the Gītā as simply being in Arjuna's mind. Ramaṇa Maharṣi was more interested in pointing to our natural state, something that is so natural to us that it cannot be described. It is not an experience in the normal way.

He wanted us to enquire into who we are, not that we will ever have an answer to that question, but rather so that we can discover all the false ideas we have of ourselves. When all the falseness has been exposed, and, even more important, dealt with, what is left is our natural state that has always been there. It is not something that we can find by looking for it. Rather it becomes obvious after we have, one by one, eliminated all the things that we wrongly think we are.

We not only think we are the body and the mind, but we identify with a legion of other things including family, country and, above all, ideas, especially ideas of right and wrong. That is why Lord Kṛṣṇa, in his final teaching to Arjuna, wants him to abandon all *dharma*-s and take refuge in Him alone. But Him alone is not an object. He alone remains a mystery. Therefore, Lord Kṛṣṇa wants us to abandon all our ideas and to take refuge in something that we cannot grasp. That is our natural state. That is where we find the peace that passeth understanding. That is where there are no more questions. It is absolutely natural to us.

The life we lead is unnatural. We keep piling one thing on top of another. Nothing satisfies us. Indeed, the more we get, the more we learn, the more complicated we become—and the more lost we feel. It is because we continue to move away from our natural self that is always there.

Therefore, the spiritual life is not so much a life of attainment as it is a life of shedding. One by one we shed those things that we are not us until gradually the simplicity that we are becomes obvious to us.