

## DESTINY AND FREE WILL

The following sections covers some of the conversations Sage Ramana had with spiritual aspirants in relation to destiny and free will as recorded by Sri S S Cohen.

### 1. Devotee – ‘Can destiny (karma) ever come to an end?’

**Sage Ramana – ‘Karmas carry in themselves the seeds of their own destruction.’**

{Note - Karma is the concept of ‘action’ or ‘deed’, understood as that which causes the entire cycle of **cause and effect** i.e., the cycle of birth and death.}

*Reflection* - The above concise word ‘Karma’ is the destiny created for oneself by one’s free actions. In actions are included thoughts and sensations, motives, good or bad emotions and so on. While working out an old prarabdha karma (consequences of past actions presenting themselves as circumstances in the present) one is generally bound to create a seed for a new one by the manner in which one reacts to its operation. Herein lies the notion of free-will. We are not free to alter the trend of an old karma, for example, in the choice of our parents, country, the circumstances of our birth and environments, of our physical and mental fitness and abilities. These are forced on us, we cannot change them. What we can change is the manner in which we receive and work them out. We all agree that there are many related aspects of life for which the decision lies in our hands, the decision is ours, the action is ours, the motive behind the action is ours, the mental attitude with which we do the action is ours too. This then is the field in which we are allowed freedom of will, and it contains the seeds of our future destiny. We can shape that destiny as we will, and if, like most people, we are not aware of this truth, we allow ourselves to be carried away by our impulses and eventually land in worse trouble than we are in already. Most often the new karma does not follow on the heel of the one which is being worked out now, so that we drag the chain of our slavery through several lives.

Here the salutary precepts of the scriptures come to our rescue to make us rectify our views on life and our attitude towards others. These and the persistent knocks of destiny gradually soften our impulses, modify our outlook, sharpen our intellect, and slowly but surely turn us into seekers; then into *yogis* (aspirants who have achieved a high level of spiritual insight); and finally into one who has realised the Self. When karma ceases; knowledge of Self totally annihilates the concept of karma. Let us not forget that all these improved changes or notional evolution take place not in the individual, but in the faculties which are superimposed on oneself, that is, in one’s views and actions.

Knowledge of Self is thus brought about by a good karma, generated by a good free-will, which is the result of persistent suffering from a bad karma, generated by a bad free-will. Karma is like an inanimate machine, which yields up what you put into it. That is why the master begins his *Upadesa Saram* (A thirty verse Sanskrit poem composed by Sage Ramana) with the statement that karma is insentient, unintelligent. What makes it move and act as stern destiny is the energy generated by the exercise of our free will.

It may be asked that if a persistently bad free-will caused by the embitterment resulting from a

persistently bad karma brings about a worse karma, which drags us down further and further, where is the chance of our ever coming up to the surface again? We must not forget the saving grace of suffering and the inherent purity of our nature, which will not permit us to remain forever insensible to degradation and misery. We cannot forever remain sunk in bottomless ignorance without attempting to climb up to freedom. Suffering and the intense urge to return to ourselves act as floats and buoy us up from the depths of this vast ocean of the cycle of births and deaths. Thus the action of karma through suffering gives the impetus to knowledge of Self which destroys karma. This is what Sage Ramana means by 'karma carries in itself the seeds of its own destruction.'

It goes without saying that karma takes effect only in a physical body; for a debt incurred in a physical body has to be paid also in such a body, either in this very body or in a future one. Vedanta does not believe in an after-death payment; hence rebirth is necessary. Vedanta is a philosophy taught by the Vedas, the most ancient scriptures of India. Its basic teaching is that our real nature is divine. God is our innermost Self, an underlying reality that exists in every being. Religion is therefore a search for Self, a search for God within. We don't need to be 'saved.' At worst, we are unaware of our true nature.

The above perspective is based on the concept and notion of an individual 'I'-thought working out its destiny to transcend the bonds of limitation as a body-mind entity.

We have to take the hint from Sage Ramana's statement that 'Karmas carry in themselves the seeds of their own destruction', which indicates that karmas exist as long as the notion of 'I'-thought and doership exist. Let us be of the firm understanding that the 'I'-thought and the working of destiny (karma) will continue to exist until the 'I'-thought subsides. Initially this starts off as a concept, leading on to a conviction at the intellectual level, which will subsequently filter down to the very core of our being.

When the flower and the thread are brought together, a third entity is formed which is termed as a garland. For all practical purposes, when the flowers are damaged or the thread is broken, it is said that the garland is broken. This entity called a garland is essentially only a name provided for the combination of constituents namely the thread and flowers. Similarly, this body is essentially a combination of the elements and consciousness. The moment that totality of pure awareness is notionally compartmentalised as an individual entity and the notion of 'I'-thought arises, the final crystallisation down to 'I am so and so' follows suit, which starts off the chain reaction of a notional cause and effect.

The word notional is used, primarily because, so long as one is caught up in the wheel of 'I am this and that' the flywheel of desire keeps spinning, leading on to the notion of cause and effect. The moment there is complete understanding and when one is free of the notion that 'I am the doer', the state of total freedom is experienced. Until then, knowledge has to be acquired and actions are to be undertaken in accordance with the understanding of the concept of karma. There is a fear among many an aspirant, that if the doership is not there, how will actions take place efficiently? This fear is a result of the notional 'I'-thought trying to maintain its imaginary hold on the unwary body-mind entity, fearful of losing its hold and its so-called 'Life'. In fact when the 'I'-thought subsides and doership is absent, actions will be carried out far more

efficiently, as these actions are anyway being carried out as part of Awareness playing through its manifested consciousness.

The exploring and gathering of more knowledge is definitely a part of the process, but in the final analysis, all knowledge has to be discarded, for one to be established in one's true state of pure Self-awareness.

The succinct and beautifully crisp answer provided by Sage Ramana that, 'Karmas carry in themselves the seeds of their own destruction', clearly indicates that when Self-realisation is experienced, karma ceases to exist for that aspirant. This is the ultimate truth, but until the concept of 'I'- thought is overcome by gaining the understanding that karma in its essence is a notion, one continues to traverse through the notional cycles of birth and death.

**2. Devotee – 'Even without any initial desires there are some strange experiences for us. Wherefrom do they arise?'**

**Sage Ramana – 'The desires may not be there now. But they were once there. Though forgotten they are now bearing fruit. That is how the *Jnani* (sage) is said to have *prarabdha* (part of one's karma to be worked out in this life). Of course this is so from the point of view of others who observe the *Jnani* (sage).'**

*Reflection* - The questioner seems to think that people are or should be always conscious of their moral delinquencies, of their sins of omission and commission, of the effect of their actions upon others, as well as of their own desires. Excessive greed and lack of consideration for the feeling and interest of others, are unfortunately a common malady, as we can witness politics, competition in business, and a hundred-and-one other deliberate and otherwise daily lapses in people's conduct towards their neighbours. So to play the injured innocent for the troubles one accrues due to one's own doing, can possibly lead one into a delusion of self-righteousness, which unfortunately does not fool providence. Unconsciousness or oblivion of old desires, old sins and actions which affected oneself and others in this life or in previous lives, do not cancel the poetic justice that is necessary to restore the disturbed balance. Even the sage brings his destiny from another life, but this works itself out without creating new karma for him, or a new birth, or causing him anguish, as do the same troubles to others. His mind, having totally sunk in the Self, has become, under all circumstances, as fresh and cool as summer moonlight. Others, seeing the suffering of his body, imagine the sage himself to be suffering.

*Prarabdha karma* (consequences of past actions presenting themselves as circumstances in the present) is that portion of the past karma (action) which is responsible for the present body. That portion of the *sanchita karma* (the store of karmic debts accumulated from previous births) which influences human life in the present incarnation is called '*prarabdha*'. It is ripe for reaping. It cannot be avoided or changed. It is only exhausted by being experienced. One pays for one's past debts. '*Prarabdha karma*' is that which has begun and is actually bearing fruit. It is selected out of the mass of the '*sanchita karmas*'.

Each 'karma' (action) and each thought leaves a residual impression or '*vasana*' (subconscious

inclination) in our mind, similar to the fragrance of food that is left in the cooking vessel even after it is washed. These residual impressions or *vasanas* of our actions become tendencies of our personality, impelling us to repeat the same action again and again, thus forming habits that become the typical characteristics of our personality.

Latent mental tendencies and impressions, which are the root cause of all the desires and resultant actions, accumulated over many births form the stock of our karmas, both good and bad (and mixed) are the '*sanchita*' karmas. Mental tendencies or *vasanas* are like the seeds that have to fructify or manifest according to favourable circumstances at the appropriate time. Each mental tendency and habit has to fructify itself, even if that requires a new body in some next birth.

This is how the concept of reincarnation, the 'cycle of birth and death' and rebirth continues to flow. All mental tendencies and habits have to manifest themselves based on presentation of suitable opportunities. These tendencies are worked out in a particular birth from a given stock of karma (*prarabdha karma*) out of the total *sanchita karma* (the store of karmic debts accumulated from previous births).

According to Sage Ramana karma is only applicable as long as one imagines oneself to be a separate entity from the Self. As long as one is associated with the 'I'- thought one will pass through a series of pre-ordained activities and experiences, all of which are the consequences of previous acts and thoughts. He has also said that every act and experience in a person's life is determined at birth and that the only freedom one has is to realise that there is no one acting and no one experiencing. However, when the 'I'- thought subsides permanently and one realises one's true nature of pure Self-awareness, then there is no one left to experience the consequences of actions and so the whole structure of personal karma becomes redundant. In relation to this Sage Ramana states, "If the agent, upon whom the karma depends, namely the ego ('I'-thought), which has come into existence between the body and the Self, merges in its source and loses its form, how can the karma, which depends upon it, survive? When there is no 'I' there is no karma."

The last line in Sage Ramana's answer is, "That is how the *Jnani* (sage) is said to have *prarabdha* (part of one's karma to be worked out in this life). Of course this is so from the point of view of others who observe the *Jnani* (sage)". This is a pointer towards the truth indicating that the karma to be worked out in the present life, which is apparently attributed to the sage is only from the limited viewpoint of the questioner, such aspirants currently consider themselves as 'limited' entities. When this limitation is accepted, the consequential pendulum of likes and dislikes swings into action, the notional 'I' – thought continues to sustain itself and the consequential cycle of death and rebirth continues to flow. However, as explained by Sage Ramana when the 'I'- thought subsides and one's true nature of pure Self-awareness is realised, then past impressions, mental tendencies and karmic residue do not play a role in the life of such an aspirant, as the 'I'-thought and doership are now absent.

- 3. Sage Ramana – 'As long as you feel yourself the doer of action so long you are bound to enjoy its fruits. But if you find out whose karma it is, you will see that**

**you are not the doer. Then you will be free. This requires the Grace of God, for which you should pray to Him and meditate on Him.'**

*Reflection* - Desires lie at the root of destiny. We desire and move to acquire an object of our desire. However, we never think of the identity of the actor, our whole attention being centred on the object till we secure it. The question of doership in the light of truth and untruth does not occur to us at the moment. Enjoyment of the object preoccupies us most, enjoyment which we tacitly accept as the reward for our action, for our endeavour to gain it. This is karma done with a sense of doership, the doer being the empirical 'I', even if the sense of doership is not actively in the mind, it is implied in the act itself, and thus binds us.

Now, if we investigate into the cause and motive of the action and into the nature of the actor, we will find that one who has acted with the motive of enjoyment is not the real 'I', but an imitator, a false 'I', then we shall be automatically released from the responsibility of the action, and thus from the bondage of karma. Although we henceforth act, the sense that it is we who are acting drops from us, and with it also drops the power of karma to grip us; for the empirical 'I' will no longer be there to be gripped.

But this discovery or realisation, does not come without the help of God or Self. Sage Ramana asserts that for this Self-realisation to fructify one requires to do intense worship and meditation, which culminates in and brings forth the grace of God.

- 4. Sage Ramana – 'Action without motive does not bind. Even a sage acts and there can be no action without effort and without *sankalpas* (motives). Therefore there are *sankalpas* (motives) for everyone. But these are of two kinds, the binding (*bandha-hetu*) and the liberating (*mukti-hetu*). The former must be given up and the latter cultivated.'**

*Reflection* - Here is a way out of the karmic stream. Sage Ramana postulates action for all spiritual aspirants, and results for all action, yet repudiates the binding residue of action to apply equally to all actors. Action binds only to the extent that its motive element is of the binding type, and never if it is of the liberating type, where the material, selfish motive, is totally absent. Therefore, those who wish to jump out of the stream of bondage into that of liberation have to curb their binding motives and cultivate those that liberate.

The question may now be asked — How are they to distinguish between the two, which is admittedly difficult to do? This text is mainly meant for the spiritual aspirant, who constantly worries whether a certain action is consistent with one's method of spiritual practice or not. The sage dissipates this doubt by admitting action for all persons, and a motivated action too. For example, in olden days Sage Ramana himself used to work in the kitchen, and even once built a mud wall to his cave on the hill. He knew then why he did that work, and certainly aimed at the utility element in it, or else he would not have done it. But when the sage worked he was all along aware of his true being as the doer of the action, which is desireless. The motive of this action is thus not of the binding type. Hence, a spiritual aspirant should not worry about one's

actions, as long as they are not of the binding type (having desires in the background).

Hence, giving up of motives that are the cause of bondage and cultivation of motives that are a cause of liberation is recommended by Sage Ramana. But, as observed in the previous discussion the sage has also advised praying to God and meditation. The cultivation of motives leading to liberation under the steam of doership is possible in a limited sense, as a finite amount of limited self effort is put in. This needs the benign and spontaneous grace of God to shower the boon of one-pointedness and the ability to cultivate the motiveless motives (mukti-hetu sankalpas), which are the causeless cause for liberation.

As the intensity of the one-pointedness grows, the cultivation of ‘motiveless motives’ grows. This leads to the showering of more and more grace, as one basks under the loving shelter of sages like Sage Ramana or God, and one is synchronistically attuned to the frequency of His grace. When the storehouse of karmic debts accumulated from previous births (sanchita karmas) and that part of one’s sanchita karma which must be worked out in the present life (prarabdha karmas) get depleted and close to exhaustion, and when the binding motives (bandha-hetu sankalpas) die into oblivion, the doership vanishes to transform the spiritual aspirant into a sage.

The ‘so called’ actions of the sage are now non-binding and only liberating motives and actionless actions (mukti-hetu sankalpas) are in play, as the liberated body-mind entity of the sage until it is discarded at the time of death, still has to function and act within the earthly gross physical manifestation.

5. **Sage Ramana – ‘Free-will and destiny are ever existent. Destiny is the result of past action; it concerns the body. Let the body act as may suit it: why are you concerned with it? Why do you pay attention to it? Free-will and destiny last as long as the body lasts. But *jnana* (knowledge of Self) transcends them both.’**

*Reflection* - ‘Free-will and destiny are ever existent’ is a significant statement which belies the belief by some who attribute to Sage Ramana the self-contradictory theory that no free will exists, but only karma which predetermines every action and every experience through which we pass. It goes without saying that karma cannot exist without free-will. It is only free action which attracts rewards or punishments, i.e. karma, so that free-will and karma rise and fall together. That karma concerns the body and that we should therefore let the body act as it chooses, requires some explanation.

Karma and free-will are, like the body, insentient, and can affect only the body, and never the intelligent being who operates it and who transcends them both. Therefore, so long as the body-‘I’ sense prevails, they continue to function and the individual continues to take one body after

another for the working out of karma; but as soon as the knowledge of Self dawns they cease to bear fruit. Karma will end with the last body (of the sage) and free-will will no longer be the will of the individual (who usually decides on the body-'I' basis) but that of *Brahman* (the Universal Self or the Absolute) into which the individual has now completely merged.

Therefore, Sage Ramana advises the seeker to pay no attention to the working of karma on the limiting adjuncts or limitations imposed from outside due to space time or objects, but to dissociate oneself from them, when one will be free from the obligation of taking new bodies, and consequently from bondage.

One has to understand that 'Free will and destiny are ever existent' is to be seen in conjunction with sage Ramana's statement that 'Free-will and destiny last as long as the body last', i.e. as long as the sense of 'body' or 'individuality' lasts. Further, Sage Ramana mentions that though a realised person has removed all personal intentions, tendencies and attachments; however, the liberating motives (*mukti-hetu sankalpas*) continue to function as long as the body housed-as-the-sage lasts.

It can also be observed and inferred that 'Free will and destiny are ever existent' is in reference to the body and all corresponding bodies prevalent within the manifestation and 'ever existent' is in reference to the world (manifestation) only. Once the notion that 'I am so and so' is overcome, 'Self-knowledge' dawns, which transcends both free will and destiny, but the body continues to function and act.

In the scriptures, reference is made to a cow tethered to a pole and tied with a rope enabling the cow to travel within a nominated radius in a circular motion. The cycle of birth and death is a similar cycle, allowing limited movement within a particular radius, as long as the 'I'-thought and free will to act in a limited manner are present, based on circumstances presented to the individuals. The obsession and identification with the body as the 'I'-thought is so strong, that despite being told and reiterated again and again, the old habits compel one to move in the grooves of self-gratification.

So the direction from Sage Ramana is to allow the free will to let the body act as may suit it, which essentially means to transcend the limited feeling of 'I'-thought and overcome doership. The body is subject to its vagaries (destiny) as determined by a power, which one cannot fathom, when under the notional influence of the limitations of 'I'-thought or the feeling 'I am so and so'. Even when the sublimation has taken place to the extent where the sage has realized his true identity as all pervading awareness, the vagaries of the body continue to function in their own way, but the sage now experiences a freedom where he is no longer bound or disturbed by the happenings to the body.

- 6. Sage Ramana- 'So long as there is individuality, one is the enjoyer and doer. But if it is lost, the Divine Will prevails and guides the course of events. 'Free-will is implied in the scriptural injunctions to be good. It implies overcoming fate through wisdom. The fire of wisdom consumes all actions and wisdom is acquired through *sat sanga* - the company of sages and its mental atmosphere.'**

*Reflection* - All the Scriptures recommend good action, admitting by implication the freedom of the will; for if the will is not free, where is the point of asking us to be good? Man would then be like a machine or an animal which is not responsible for its action and thus cannot be punished. The fire of wisdom here means the power of discrimination which is stimulated by the company of the wise. Discrimination between good and evil, as a necessity induces us to choose good and shun evil, the ultimate results of which will be the cessation of doership and not the action itself, meaning the sense of 'I' - thought being the doers of the actions subsides, which implies the merging of the individual will in the Divine Will, and the merging of individuality or 'I' - thought itself in the Divine. From there on 'the Divine Will will guide the course of action.'

The entire concept of free will and fate is based on the mental modifications of the mind that comprise the human individual. Free Will provides the capacity to experience Divine Will. This is so, because if free will is used to guide us to lose the sense of individuality, then the 'I'-thought ceases to exist and only the Divine Will prevails and guides the course of events. That is how all the karmic debts (karmas) are exhausted by the unceasing use of free will to liberate us from the 'I'- thought. Hence, free will is used by an aspirant to strive conscientiously on one's spiritual path.

Sage Ramana confirms that one will continue to function as the enjoyer and the doer, so long as the feeling of 'I'-thought prevails. Human beings have been provided with an intellect, which is a tool to be used as a means to discriminate (*viveka*). The practices of prayer and meditation carried out with pure love (*bhava*) will forge a path that is bound to culminate in the showering grace of discrimination (*viveka*). If acts are thus carried out in accordance and with the use of this discrimination (*viveka*), there will be a further showering of the grace of the sage or God. This grace will be accompanied with the blessings of dispassion (*vairagya*) and sustained relentless practice (*abhyasa*). Based upon the foundations of discrimination (*viveka*), dispassion (*vairagya*) and sustained relentless practice (*abhyasa*), there will be a resultant dawning of wisdom and knowledge of Self-awareness, which will overcome one's personally motivated selfish actions. As Sage Ramana has stated, 'The Divine Will will then guide the course of action.'

Free-will is limited to either the acceptance of doership as an individual body mind entity or it allows for the freedom of recognising ones true nature as being unbounded, free, resplendent, complete and full in the state of pure awareness. That is why free will implies overcoming the so called fate through wisdom, discrimination (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairagya*). When this is fully recognised in complete wisdom, the totality of awareness as Divine Will functions in consciousness through the individual body; and events occur spontaneously as 'happenings or events'.

Sage Ramana advises us that this wisdom can be gained by the company of sages and their associated mental atmosphere (*satsang*). The word 'mental atmosphere' is used, because although truth is beyond the capacity of the five senses, as long as the feeling 'I am so and so' persists, one continues to function within the confines and limitations of the five senses. In this condition, utilising the option of free will, it is advisable to wean the mind away from sense gratification by using the weapons of strong resolve, spiritual inner purity, correct direction, firm determination, continuous and sustained practice, proper discrimination, deep dispassion,

unwavering faith, unrelenting perseverance and continued association with seekers of truth and spiritually advanced individuals on one's journey to Self-realisation. If this is not undertaken, functioning within the five senses as the limited individual is reinforced and further enhances the projected limited feeling and sense of 'I'-thought as real. Hence, the recourse of association with spiritually advanced individuals along with their divine auras raises the mind and its associated mental atmosphere into the divine realms of pure awareness. This thins the association with the notion of the limited 'I'-thought and establishes the truth of one's true original nature, which is that of sublime, pure, unadulterated existence, consciousness and bliss. Once this occurs, the functioning takes place as a 'happening' through the divine will of pure awareness. Although the divine will is functioning at all times, it is only the limited feeling of 'I'-thought which brings forth the notion of free will and destiny, which is prevalent only until the confines of the 'I'-thought or the feeling 'I am so and so' are exhausted and one's true nature is seen in all its true glory.

7. Sage Ramana – **“When *prarabdha karma* (part of one's karma to be worked out in this life) gets exhausted, the ego ('I'-thought) completely dissolves without leaving any trace behind. This is final Liberation. Until then the ego ('I'-thought) continues to rise up in its pure form even in the *Jivanmukta* (One who is liberated while living in a body).”**

*Reflection* - Liberation is a state in which one has direct experience of the Self where no differences are perceived. Sage Ramana advises that until the store house of *prarabdha karmas* (part of one's karma to be worked out in this life) are exhausted, the body continues to function and it appears as an ego ('I' - thought) function in its purest form. This means that the storehouse of karmic debts (*sanchita karma*) is essentially empty, no new karmas are being generated (*agami karma*) and the final pending karmas are being exhausted in the present body. After these have been exhausted a new body cannot be generated as there are no karmas to live in another body.

We also know that in many cases it lasted forty, fifty, or even more years after the attainment of natural state of absorption in the Self with no concepts. Sage Ramana's own case is a shining example of it. He entered 'liberation at the moment of death' (*videhamukti*), the final disembodied liberation, after having attained 'liberation while in the body' (*jivanmukti*) and having remained for fifty-four years after that in unremitting *nirvikalpa* (a state in which no differences are perceived). Till then, Sage Ramana tells us, the ego ('I' - thought) continues to pop up, even for the one who is liberated while living in a body, but in its purest form, that is, without causing the sage ignorance of the reality and the suffering associated with such ignorance.

{Note – This perspective has been further clarified in the section 'Practice of Self-enquiry' in chapter 6}

8. Sage Ramana – **‘It is not enough that one thinks of God while doing karma (service, or worship), but one must continually and unceasingly think of Him. Only then will the mind become pure.’ Sage Ramana's attendant then**

**remarked: ‘Is it then not enough that I serve Bhagavan physically, but must also remember him constantly?’ To which the sage remarked: ‘I-am-the-body’ idea must vanish through Self-enquiry (vichara).’**

*Reflection* - The attendant is right in interpreting Sage Ramana’s remark. The physical appearance of the sage is incomparable to the mental contemplation of him. Yet, service to the sage has its great utility, the very close proximity to the sage has tremendous potentialities for the purification of the attendant’s *vasanas* (predispositions and tendencies of the mind due to experiences of former lives), due to the utter purity of the sage’s mind. But that is not sufficient to attain *mukti* (liberation). Purificatory processes are only a stage on the path, to make one fall in the line with the mental practices of *dhyana* and *vichara* (meditation and Self enquiry), which alone can prepare the mind to experience Self in the last stages of the long journey. ‘I-am-the-body’ idea must vanish through *vichara* (Self enquiry),’ Sage Ramana asserts.

The path of service is the path of surrender, which is not limited to time and space. The physical service to the guru (spiritual guide) or sage has to reach a stage where the service is a complete and a total offering of the individual limited self. In this offering, the individual free will is transcended to incorporate the sage’s will, which is effectively and in any case the divine will. When one’s practice continues in this manner for many years, the individual ego (‘I – thought) is replaced and the ‘I am the body’ idea starts vanishing upon the practice of Self-enquiry (*vichara*).

While serving the sage, the purpose of repetition of a sacred word or syllable or a name of God either mentally or verbally, or devotion and love to God or the sage, is for the individual to lose oneself completely from the clutches of sense gratification. Sage Ramana advises that one should remember one’s spiritual guide or Self not only during the carrying out of karmas (service, worship), but unceasingly and continually, until the feeling and sense of ‘I’-thought subsides. Such practice will assist in the ‘I am the body’ idea to gradually dissolve and disappear through Self-enquiry (*vichara*).

- 9. Sage Ramana – ‘Your idea of will-power is success insured, whereas will-power should be understood as the strength of mind which meets success and failure with equanimity. It is not synonymous with certain success. Why should one’s attempts be always attended with success? Success develops arrogance and one’s spiritual progress is there by arrested. Failures on the other hand are beneficial, inasmuch as they open one’s eyes to one’s limitations and prepare him to surrender himself. Therefore one should try to gain equipoise of mind under all circumstances. That is will-power. Again success and failure are the results of *prarabdha* (part of one’s karma to be worked out in this life) and not of will-power. One man may be doing only good and yet prove a failure. Another may do otherwise and yet be uniformly successful. This does not mean that the will-power is absent in one and present in the other.’**

*Reflection* - The context is the case of a man, who because of repeated failures in business, has

lost confidence in himself, and is now trying to find a way of reversing it to success. He is confusing confidence with will-power. One may have abundant confidence in oneself and conducts one's work to the best of one's ability, yet the work may result in either success or failure. That depends on one's destiny or *prarabdha* (part of one's karma to be worked out in this life) as explained by Sage Ramana.

Sage Ramana advises the questioner to develop an equal attitude to both success and failure, which after all depend on one's destiny, at the same time he praises failure as more spiritually fruitful in the long run, rather than success, as it kills arrogance and promotes an attitude of non-attachment and absence of worldly desire (*vairagya*), which hastens one's approach to the supreme goal. Most people live in ignorance of their glorious destiny; and are absorbed in their own weak points; of their dull, lazy (*tamasic*) and restless (*rajasic*) cravings and behaviour. Many people take the strongest objection or avoid the issues, sweeping them under the carpet of ignorance, when situations present themselves. How, then, can God open their eyes and save them from this self-intoxication? He gives them disasters and calamities to shake their airy castles and crack the thick crusts of their arrogance. Pride of wealth, position, fame, power, learning and lineage eventually destroy themselves on the platform of relentless spiritual practice (*abhyasa*) and divine, benign grace.

The case of the swinging pendulum is a classic example of the vagaries of the mind. Success and failure, likes and dislikes, love and hate, joy and sorrow are the opposite ends of this swinging pendulum of life. When one is caught up in the senses and considers oneself as the doer, the mental conditioning is such that the mental swinging to and fro between the pair of opposites like love and hate, joy and sorrow, likes and dislikes and so on continues in an endless manner.

Through various practices such as prayer, meditation and Self-enquiry the mind becomes calm and composed with the consequential reduction in the distances of swings of the mind between the two extremes of the pair of opposites like success and failure, joy and sorrow. As the spiritual aspirant dissociates or lets go of the results i.e. success and failure, and when the mental swinging reduces, it brings about a certain equanimity and one gets a glimpse of that equanimity every time the swinging goes past the centredness (pictured as the centre of the pendulum's swing).

As the swinging of the mind reduces, the centredness becomes more frequent, independent of the results between success or failure, until the mental swinging stops completely and the aspirant is centred at all times, whether in success or failure. This development of equanimity is 'will power' as explained by Sage Ramana and not the one sided gain of success, which is considered by many as will power. Success and failure are caused due to '*prarabdha karma*' (part of one's karma to be worked out in this life) and will power is independent of that, being essentially based in 'spontaneous equanimity'.

Sage Ramana has said that equality is the true sign of *jnana* (knowledge of the Self). The very term equality implies the existence of differences. It is a unity that the sage perceives in all differences, which he calls as equality. Equality does not mean ignorance of distinctions. When you have the realisation you can see that these differences are very superficial, that they are not at all substantial or permanent, and what is essential in all these appearances is the one truth, the

real. That is what Sage Ramana terms as 'unity' or 'spontaneous equanimity'. The sage (*jnani*) appreciates the distinctions between sound, taste, form, smell and so on, but he always perceives and experiences the one reality in all of them. That is why he has no preferences. Whether he moves about, or talks, or acts, it is all the one reality in which he acts or moves or talks. He is nothing apart from the one supreme truth of Self-awareness.