21.

Don't Know

"Authentic consciousness sees only
a radiant infinity in the heart of all souls,
and breathes into its lungs only the
atmosphere of an eternity
too simple to believe."
- Ken Wilber

"The wise know nothing at all-
well, maybe one song."
- Ikkyu

This period of direct contact with Ramesh lasts a little
over two years; visits, letters, conversations. During
that time there is increasing clarity about what is known,
and the Brilliance outpouring widens and deepens. When
there is a shared seeing and shared understanding of That
which no one else sees or understands... this is quite hard
to put into words.

The experience of visiting Ramesh repeatedly during these
years is profoundly reassuring. In the early days especially,
his thinking is quite precise, and this is immeasurably helpful in distinguishing, conceptually, the elements that are inherent in the Understanding from those that remain as part of the body/mind conditioning, and both of these from the Babel of extraneous ideas and opinions on the subject.

'The body/mind organism,' 'conditioning and programming,' 'Consciousness' (as the basic concept for All-That-Is) and 'the Understanding' (as a defining term for the knowing, the inseeing): while not originally or exclusively Ramesh's, these concepts are received from him and become part of the underlying framework that emerges during this time to facilitate comprehending, and therefore a kind of easing into, the no-thing no-one no-where no-when that is here since the jungle.

Yet it is also true that from the time I first arrive at 10 Sindhula House, there is some dissonance. Although the recognition is there from him almost immediately, Ramesh by this time is no longer using the uncompromising nondual language of his earlier books, with which there had been such resonance that I had traveled across the globe to see him. He spends our first conversations going on about how 'you are not the doer' of any action. He talks about how what everyone wants is simply to be comfortable with oneself and others.

Oneself? Others? I am nonplussed, and it is some while before I can articulate to him that what he is talking about makes no sense in the context here. There is clearly no 'one' here, no one to either be a doer or not: the question does not even arise. How can it? This has nothing to do with being comfortable, as he himself wrote in his earlier books.
"...The total annihilation of the phenomenal object with which there is identification as a separate entity..." Phrases like this are about as quintessentially vintage Ramesh as you can get. Yet he no longer uses this language: instead, he asks visitors 'what it is they want most out of life,' and spends the time giving advice on relationships with 'others.'

What life, what relationship, what others? All is streaming Presence: any perceived 'other' is I! Only knowing this can remove suffering: all else is bondage. If this is known, how can there be a teaching of anything else?

You see, when the shift in perspective occurred that night in the jungle, without any training or background or terminology or concepts, when that Understanding first expressed itself in the thought, the concept, 'my god, there's nobody home;' in that instant, the center of experiencing and functioning and identity was displaced, and it was known, without labels, that the 'I' who is and who experiences and functions is not 'david', but experiences and functions through the instrument of 'david', as likewise through all others. This is the center, the irreducible essence, as far as it can be expressed, of the Understanding here, and it is utterly simple.

All there is, is Presence, Awareness, Consciousness; and within Consciousness this apparent body/mind instrument which in itself does not exist separately as a person or an entity or a thing but only as a thought, a dream, in Consciousness; through which and as which there is experiencing, but there is no 'one' here experiencing! There is mental and physical and psychological and emotional functioning here, to be sure. And this functioning is unique in this body/mind organism, as it is in all such. But this is impersonal functioning in, as,
by, impersonal Presence; it does not add up to a separate personal entity, of which there are none!

Ramesh, on the other hand, draws on an immense tradition of thought and discussion on this subject, and has spent a lifetime and many books developing and expounding on such ideas as noumenon and phenomenon; reality, doership, entity and ego; working mind and thinking mind, intellectual understanding and the complete Understanding. He also operates within the Indian tradition of the guru being responsible for the guidance, spiritual and otherwise, of those who come to him.

And what do I know? Gurus, after all, are known for their strange ways. Who is there to say? I have come here to hear 'the teaching coming through Ramesh,' and much of that teaching is extremely helpful. And so at first there is working with him during this time, to find the correspondences between the knowing that is here, and his sense of what this is all about, including his structure of concepts. There is immense gratitude here for the great benefit and clarity which he contributes. And there is the growth of what can only be called a tremendous love for Ramesh. And therefore also, there is giving him the benefit of the considerable doubt in all this when at times there seems to be significant divergence.

Nevertheless, as each of his new books comes out there is some discouragement as they trend further from the pure awareness of What Is and more toward simple stories and guides for everyday living. And the conversations with him become more frustrating as he insists more rigorously that awakening or the Understanding consists only of the awareness that the individual is not the doer of any action,
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and that the individual self always remains. This is not what is known here.

This idea that ‘you are not the doer of any action’ is central to Ramesh’s thought. It was there from the beginning, in the experience of awakening with Maharaj. Somewhere early on, he came across a quote attributed to the Buddha: “Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer thereof.” This became the basis of his teaching, and anyone who has heard him speak has heard this aphorism a thousand times. (Although it remains somewhat odd that when asked, he could never say where the quote was from; and in all my research, and that of others I know, a source for this has never been found, nor have I ever seen it quoted outside Ramesh’s own works or the works of those who heard it from him.)

At first, when pressed, Ramesh concedes that the idea of non-doership, along with the investigation he recommends to seekers so that they could discover this for themselves, is a teaching device. Its usefulness lies in the fact that once one is convinced that they are not the agent who does anything, the sense of self will itself begin to crumble. In his early books, he is quite clear that enlightenment consists of “a total disidentification with a body/mind organism as a separate entity;” and the “sense of doership” is, if not equated, at least closely linked with the “sense of a separate entity,” so that when one disappears the other does as well.

But during the time I know him, this idea that ‘you are not the doer’ seems to progress from a concept used as a teaching device to itself being the centerpoint. At first, Ramesh’s teaching is that when ‘you are not the doer’ is understood, the flash of awakening may then occur, and
what remains is a shadowy ego which only occasionally interrupts the unattached ‘working mind’ and the impersonal witnessing. But later, ‘you are not the doer’ becomes itself the awakening, and the ego remains; you always exist as a separate entity, albeit with the understanding that it is not you who are doing anything.

But in fact, the understanding that ‘you are not the doer’ is not the center. It’s useful as a step, as a way into: ‘you are not,’ and indeed it can be a valuable and helpful step. But it is nothing in itself. If it is the center, then the individual self is maintained. And that is what is not.

“Realization is of the fact that you are not a person... Personal entity and enlightenment cannot go together.” (Nisargadatta Maharaj)

After each visit to Bombay, there is the sense that it is finished; there is no reason or need to return. I dislike travel and dislike India and dislike Bombay; it is all unnecessary and difficult, and this body’s health fails each time I make the trip. And for what? Yet each time, a few months pass and there is traveling again. What do I know? Unfinished business, apparently.

It is no secret that Ramesh and I have a somewhat public falling-out at my last visit. He is by now teaching without qualification that each person always exists as a separate individual entity: pure dualism. And he dismisses accounts of the loss of any identification as a separate entity as inaccurate and confusing. When objections are raised that this contradicts all the teachers and masters of the perennial wisdom, including and especially his own teacher, he shouts it down: everyone else was wrong, they were not qualified to speak, what they said was just confusing.
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There are many ways these things could be interpreted, and each evening in the hotel room they are all weighed. I am acutely alert to the archetype of the student who loves his teacher until the student reaches a certain level of understanding; then if the teacher disagrees or tries to rein him in, the student says the teacher has lost it, and leaves. Also aware of the archetype in which the teacher creates this situation intentionally to kick the student out of the nest. Neither applies here; there simply has never been that relationship between ‘Ramesh’ and ‘david.’

And the ‘crazy wisdom’ prototype also does not fit. Ramesh has played that card before. Always there was a little glint in his eye that let you know (if you could read it) that something was afoot; and always when the joke had gone far enough and he had made his point, he would set things straight. There is nothing like that here now. Whatever else is going on, Ramesh is dead serious – which itself is unusual and raises concern.

And yes, all of this is concepts, and all teachings are only pointers and not themselves truth. Which is why the masters use the negative way, saying what the awareness is not. Ramesh’s repudiation of these masters and his aggressive insistence on your existence as an individual person as separate entity is hardly via negativa.

Finally, I can only repeat to him all that is known here; that there is nothing here, only the Presence which is all, streaming through these apparent forms; and I tell him that whatever purpose this teaching of his may have, I know he is talking nonsense. The presumption is that he knows this as well.
In the end, after investigating to see that there is clarity within, there can be only a smile and a shake of the head at the tricks that are played, at the complexity and the sometimes apparently odd ways that this totality unfolds in Consciousness. And as the days of this last visit wear on, there is growing sadness, and great love for the expression and the form in which Presence is perceived as Ramesh.

There can come a time, with any friend or teacher for whom there is love and respect, when it may become unavoidably clear that a change is occurring. Clear that in a subtle and uncanny sense there is some kind of 'slippage' in the body/mind system. There may be a sense that it is not only the outer speaking or teaching which has changed; that there is also not the single-pointed attention, not the sense of total presence; that arguments become full of an apparent struggle to assert, rather than a resting in what needs no asserting. It can sometimes be subtle, and if one had reason not to see this kind of thing, it could be easily dismissed. Other times it is more blatant and cannot be explained away or disregarded.

From a lesser teacher, off on a tangent, one might expect arguments that are confused and self-contradictory; a manner aggressive, abrupt and belligerent; and defensive and increasingly erratic behavior. Discussions then may easily get caught up in pointless opinions and arguments approving of certain experiences and ideas and ways of expression, vehemently disapproving of others. And always an insistence on the separate self; lacking, even repudiating, the essential basis, the inseeing of pure not-two-ness. All of this dream-bound and very little of it making much sense or having anything to do with the Understanding of What Is.
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In any case, none of it really matters. My time here is finished. Whatever the 'cause,' it is here necessarily that there is a parting of ways on the essence of the teaching. And who knows? Perhaps that in itself is Ramesh's gift, and explanation enough for all of this. Perhaps it is simply this certain coming-about that came about, nothing else; and that too is gift beyond reasoning.

Most who come to see Ramesh do so as seekers and students, and their concepts and comprehension come to reflect his teaching. For them he is the touchstone, the point to check back with for truth and accuracy. As well it should be; such is the guru/disciple relationship. There is a deep enduring wisdom in Ramesh. There will be many who will continue to find him and his teaching of great benefit. As did I.

But here, there is another Touchstone: always and forever that Understanding, that Seeing, that in-perceiving of What Is, which first exploded here in that shift of perspective, in that time out of time in the jungle, and since then has never not been. That is all that is known, and it simply cannot be compromised, diluted or revised for the sake of agreement.

All of this, whatever it may be, however it may unfold, is always part of the infinite expression of Presence. It is as it is. As long as it is seen as a matter of separate individuals, there will be a problem. The only reason, the only truth, the only explanation for mystifying events is that all there is, is Presence. There is no Ramesh, there is no david. What Ramesh is, I am. Which apparent instrument what event happens in, is insignificant. What do we know? The universe operates on a need-to-know basis, and the
dream characters don't need to know. They will play out their parts regardless.

More and more there is increasing awareness that, other than the complete certainty of what is known since the jungle, I know nothing. As david I am not; all this world is not; all there is is Presence streaming here in perfect Outpouring; and this Presence is what 'I' is. Yet even this is not something I know: It is what I Am. And other than this, everything is simply, "don't know."

And always, everywhere, this perfect Brilliance, this deep Stillness; it is no thing, it has no name. Outpouring constantly, in perfect beauty lacking nothing. And seen always; never not seen. But seen not as from this mind/body; there is no one here to see.

Nothing can contain this, nothing can hold this. Not the Catholicism of my youth, not the forays into Zen and Tao in later years. Not native shamanism, not the dogmatic and institutionalized Advaita of the first teachers I encountered, not even beloved Ramesh and his vicissitudes. No guru, no method, no teacher.

And once again I leave Bombay and return to Vermont: as if there is any place to be left, or any to return to; as if there is any one leaving or returning. And nothing comes to an end, because there is nothing separate. Only the Heart of Presence, outpouring; the only reality, the only truth.
"What did he mean?

At that time, I nearly misunderstood my former master's intent.

I wonder if the former master was actually enlightened.

If he was not enlightened, how could he have known to answer in such a way? If he was enlightened, why did he go to the trouble of answering in such a way?

What teaching did you receive when you were with him?

Although I was there, I didn't receive any teaching.

Since you didn't receive any teaching from him, why are you remembering him in this way?

Why should I turn my back on him?

Do you agree with him or not?

I agree with half and don't agree with half.

Why don't you agree completely?

If I agreed completely, then I would be ungrateful to my former master."

– from The Record of Tung-shan