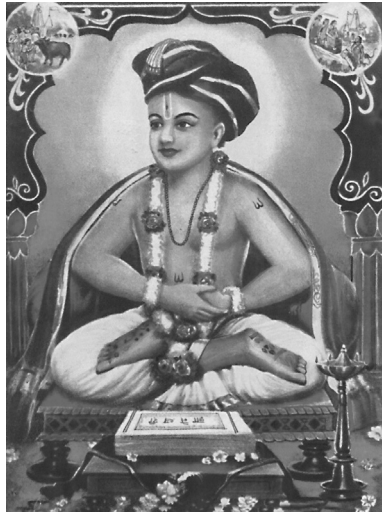


*Dedicated to all the spiritual masters  
who have impacted my life*



Sant Dnyaneshwar<sup>1</sup>  
(1275–1296)

Work or karma  
Come to happen  
The fool avers  
'I' made it happen

Such insolent fools  
Must never be shown  
Karma's rules  
And its tools

The wise watch karma  
Notch upon notch  
They witness karma's  
Ticking watch

They are like the sun  
Not touched by the earth  
Like a witness to their bodies  
They watch it run

Nature in its course  
And man with his traits  
Work comes to happen  
By way of these traits

But those who think  
It's they who work and act  
Have twisted the facts  
And are riddled with their acts



# INTRODUCTION



*The self, deluded by egoism, thinketh: 'I am the doer.'*<sup>3</sup>

– *The Bhagavad Gita*

“Nobody truly ‘does’ anything. We are all instruments through whom the Divine Will functions. This is according to me the true meaning of ‘universal brotherhood’; we are a brotherhood of instruments through whom God’s Will functions.”

This is what my spiritual guide and contemporary Advaita sage Ramesh Balsekar (1917-2009), spoke about at the daily talks that were held at his home in South Mumbai. He would explain in a step-by-step manner how he not only reached this conclusion based on his personal experience in daily living, but also how the same message was echoed in the Indian scriptures, as well as the teachings of the Buddha, Jesus, and 20th century masters like Sri Ramana Maharshi.

*The deeds are, but no doer of the deeds is there...<sup>4</sup>*

– Gautama Buddha

*Actions form no bondage. Bondage is only the false notion, 'I am the doer.' Leave off such thoughts and let the body and senses play their role, unimpeded by your interference.<sup>5</sup>*

– Sri Ramana Maharshi

*Mysterious is the path of action. Though I do nothing, they hold Me responsible for the actions which take place on account of prarabdha (destiny). I am only their witness. The Lord is the sole doer and inspirer.<sup>6</sup>*

– Shirdi Sai Baba

Ramesh would explain this ancient truth in simple terms with reference to one's daily living. At the outset, he would ask us to investigate the matter and state that upon doing so, we would inevitably reach the conclusion that our actions (what we 'did' or decided to 'do'), depend on our thoughts, and nobody could know what the next thought was going to be. If such was the case, then how could we call it 'our' action?

He would also explain how our actions were based on something we saw, heard, tasted, touched, or smelt. And none of these were in our control. For example, we saw something because we were present at a certain place at a certain time, and therefore happened to see it. This in turn led to our action. If we were not there at a certain time and place, our action could or would not have happened. More importantly, something had to happen while we were there, else our action would not have happened.



When Ramana Maharshi said words to the effect that there was truly no free will, someone put up his hand and said, “My putting up my hand is indeed my free will to do so.” To this, Sri Ramana replied that if he had not said there was no free will, the individual concerned would not have put up his hand.

Our decisions, Ramesh would go on to say, are based on our genes and conditioning – neither of which were made by us or were in our control. We did not choose our genes, nor did we choose our environment – geographic, social, economic and so on – that formed the basis of our conditioning. We have been bombarded with conditioning from day one – at home, in the relevant society, in school and college, as well as conditioning in the church, mosque, or temple.

Therefore, is it really our ‘doing’ when there are so many factors involved that are beyond our control, which shape all our decisions – all that ‘we’ think we ‘do’? Or, are we a part of the functioning of Totality, which causes to bring about exactly that what is supposed to be brought about in a given situation, at a particular moment in time?

Sathya Sai Baba had something pertinent to say on this subject, as can be seen from the extract below:

“Now you might say, ‘But I have free will. How can I just accept God’s Will?’ There are two ways of looking at that. One is, if you have been considering this whole problem for some time, you may understand that this world in which we live, is similar to a dream.

Swami (referring to Sathya Sai Baba) says so, the great sages of old say so. Do you remember what we said about your nighttime dream? You can ask yourself, suppose in the nighttime dream, you said that you have free will to do this or that? In the dream, free will has no meaning whatsoever, because when you awake, the dream disappears. Similarly, in this waking world, Swami says you *seem* to have free will, and you should act on that premise. You come to a decision, and then you engage in action – and you may feel that you are acting according to your will.

“After the action has taken place, you look back and say, ‘Oh, I could have done it this way or that way instead and exercised my free will.’ But the fact is that you acted in a certain way.

“What were the influences that caused you to act in that way? Were these influences your free will? No. Undoubtedly not. From the time you were born, you have been filled with influences and ideas from every direction...

“Now, when we decide on any course of action, we plan what we are going to do, but we cannot count on our plans being successful, can we? Very often it does not turn out the way we planned. So the factor that makes the result vary from our plans is the presence of the Lord in every action that we take. Swami says it is best to conclude that everything that happens is God’s Will, and not struggle against it. Just accept it as God’s Will and ask for God’s Grace. He says that is the height, the summit of devotion.”<sup>7</sup>

Coming back to Ramesh's talks, there were some seekers for whom what Ramesh said was an eye opener, while others took to it like a fish takes to water, and there were those who were rather aghast at the concept. After all, what would happen to one's free will and responsibility, if one did not 'do' anything? Of course, this was the natural defence of the ego as its most prized possession – its sense of doership – was under assault. The immediate response that would come up would be: 'Then what prevents me from picking up a machine gun and gunning down people?'

Ramesh would explain that that would not happen if it was not in one's nature to do so in the first place. And, more importantly, the concept of non-doership did not absolve individuals of their responsibility to society, which would certainly consider it as 'their' action and punish or reward them accordingly.

I found a certain peace in this teaching. If no one truly 'did' anything, then blame, condemnation, hate, malice, etc. went out of the window, as far as the actions of others were concerned. And so did pride, arrogance, guilt, and shame for one's own actions. An absence of all these meant – peace of mind. And this is precisely what enlightenment would give 'me' that I did not have before. Ramesh would make it clear that this was 'enlightened living'. He would say, "What would enlightenment give me that I didn't have before? It would certainly not enable me to walk on water, to be in two places at the same time, or find a parking spot whenever I needed it. All it would give me is peace of mind."

This is best summed up by Narendra (Swami Vivekananda) in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

“Realization depends on God’s grace. Sri Krishna says in the *Gītā*: The Lord, O Arjuna, dwells in the hearts of all beings, causing them, by His māyā, to revolve as if mounted on a machine. Take refuge in Him with all thy heart, O Bhārata. By His grace wilt thou attain Supreme Peace and the Eternal Abode.”<sup>8</sup>

Over the years that I spent with Ramesh, as a disciple as well as the publisher of some of his books, I got to understand his fondness for certain masters. Among them were contemporary Indian Advaita sages like Sri Ramana Maharshi and Ramesh’s own guru Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. He was also fond of the writings of the Irish mystic Terrence Gray, popularly known as ‘Wei Wu Wei’. But what was more often than not missed by many was Ramesh’s deep regard for Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In fact, Ramesh would utter the names ‘...Jesus, Buddha, Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna Paramahansa’ in the same breath.

Working with him while editing some of his books, I would unexpectedly find references to the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. This was a departure as Ramakrishna was mostly considered a master of Bhakti Yoga, while Ramesh and his lineage and leanings were all centered on the Jnana Yoga path. Yet, the references to Ramakrishna and his sayings kept cropping up.

It was in January 2016 that I picked up *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to read. I had purchased this book at the Ramakrishna Ashram at Bellur Math, when I visited it some years back on an impromptu trip with my good friend Gabriel. As I went through the thick book, it dawned on me as to why Ramesh was so fond of the Paramahansa's teachings. For there was so much that he said on non-doership, which echoed what Ramesh would say in his daily talks, or write about in his books. I kept underlining the references to non-doership as I read through the book.

It was after I finished reading it that I felt that, perhaps, the light this master has thrown on the subject could be collated into a small book, which would especially help today's seekers grasp the essence of his message on non-doership.

Of course, Ramesh's teaching was in a more modern idiom and he took the trouble to explain this lofty concept to seekers who were prone to questioning everything. Ramesh would welcome questions and dialogue on the subject as he knew the seekers visiting him had their cups already full with many concepts. Ramakrishna saying it, on the other hand, was readily accepted by his disciples as he was regarded as a 'divine incarnation'. At least this is what I observed upon reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, wherein there was very little questioning of the Avatar's words of wisdom.

Ramakrishna would repeatedly mention, "I am a machine and God is its operator." When I kept coming across this statement while I read the book, it reminded me of what Ramesh had mentioned in the Foreword of my first book *Pointers from Ramesh Balsekar*:

“To be told that he (Gautam) was more a machine than a man did not surprise him at all. And that reminds me of a story that I read a long time ago. A large multinational company had to engage a number of people at a fairly high level, and they wanted to be sure that there would not be the slightest prejudice in the selection and that the selection would be totally objective. So, they used a very expensive robot especially designed for the purpose.

“One particular candidate soon forgot that he was being interviewed by a robot and, while arguing a certain point, burst out saying, ‘You are a fool!’ The robot quietly replied, ‘Maybe so, my friend, but it is you who is being interviewed for the job.’”<sup>9</sup>

The ultimate takeaway of the priceless gift of non-doership was that if nobody truly did anything then it could be clearly seen that, as Ramesh was famous for saying, “Consciousness is all there is... Consciousness is you, me, he and she.”

Just as it is the same electricity that functions through all the gadgets in the kitchen, enabling each gadget to produce what it is designed to (and without which each gadget would be inoperative), in the same way we are all instruments through whom the same energy – Consciousness – functions. Each one of us is ‘designed’ (genes and conditioning) to think the way we think, feel the way we feel, and do the things we do. If that is so, then whom can one possibly hate? Consciousness? Can Consciousness hate Itself?

Inversely, whom can one possibly love if there is no ‘other’ to love? For, Consciousness by Its very nature is Love – not the dualistic love between two individuals, but the deeply intimate Love where there is no one as separate from the ‘other’ to love.

Readers of this book may find some of the extracts to be repetitive. These have been retained as, after all, Sri Ramakrishna kept repeating the same message to those who came to him. Ramesh would also repeat the same message in his daily talks. He would say, “The phenomenal conditioning of maya is so powerful that it needs the pounding to be done continuously by the guru in order to break it.”

However, it is pertinent to note that although some quotes may appear repetitive, one can detect a subtle yet noticeable difference in their nuance. This can be observed in cases of certain other words or examples used by the master.

On a lighter note, I came across this dialogue by Ramakrishna towards the end of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which sheds light on his thoughts on repetition:

“Hriday used to say to me: ‘Uncle, please don’t give out your stock of instructions all at once. Why should you repeat the same things over and over again?’ I would reply: ‘You fool, what’s that to you? These are my words and if I like I shall repeat them a hundred thousand times. You keep quiet!’”<sup>10</sup>

If one accepts the concept of non-doership, the question

that arises is: ‘I know that I am not the doer of my actions. But, how do I live my life knowing that I am not the doer?’ As Ramesh would reply, “Act *as if* you’re the doer, knowing that you are not.”

Finally, when masters like Ramakrishna Paramahansa consistently point to non-doership, it would help to listen to their words with an open mind, instead of the habituated mode of listening of the individual ‘me’, which is already equipped with an arsenal of questions, quick to refute, discard or disagree with what has just been heard or read. Rather, one should approach what is said with an openness that would allow the seeds of non-doership that have been planted to sprout in due course, enabling one to flow through life’s brief journey with equanimity and peace of mind.

This is the spirit in which this book is offered to you.

Gautam Sachdeva  
November 2016