



CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	ix
Journeys at the Office Desk	1
Forms of the Formless	39
The Road as a Guide	55
Aspects of the Mind and the Arrows of Destiny	63
Maharaj and the Trojan Horse of Conscious Presence	79
Patterns: The Cry of the Ego	93
Song of the Unborn	107
Reversing into the Future (The flow of life)	113
The Heresy of True Love	125
The World's Best Astrologer	139
Questions & Answers	145
<i>Afterword</i>	173
<i>Appendix</i>	177
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	181

INTRODUCTION

What a human being desires most is happiness. With the passage of time, he realises that happiness which depends on the pleasures of life is a fleeting happiness, as pleasures themselves are momentary. What he actually desires is a true, more permanent happiness – one that is not dependent on pleasures.

What is this true happiness that one is seeking? To put it simply, it is nothing but peace of mind.

If true happiness cannot be found in the flow of life that alternates between pleasure and pain, then where is it to be found?

It is to be found in one's *attitude* to life. And one's attitude to life means one's attitude towards the 'other'. For daily living means 'my' relationship with the 'other', whoever the 'other' may be – parent, child, colleague, friend, or even a stranger. So what gives me peace of mind? I have peace of mind when my relationship with the 'other' is harmonious. And when is my relationship with others harmonious? It is when I am comfortable with myself and with others. And when am I comfortable with myself and others? It is when I know that we are, as my spiritual teacher Ramesh Balsekar would say, all 'instruments' through whom the

same energy functions; just as it is the same electricity that functions through various gadgets in the kitchen, enabling each gadget to perform what it is programmed to do.

When there is a deep understanding that nobody truly ‘does’ anything but it is the same Divine energy i.e. Consciousness, which functions through each one of us and brings about what it does through each human being – a sense of relaxation starts setting in. For the view is no longer a split one where each one thinks he is solely responsible for his output.

This sense of relaxation annihilates the venomous sting of hatred towards others, for they are now seen in light of who they truly are. Hatred, condemnation and blame start diminishing as it is seen that everyone (including oneself) is a product of their genes and conditioning. More importantly, pride, arrogance, guilt and shame also start diminishing. No feeling of pride and arrogance for my good actions, or guilt and shame for my so-called bad actions. No hatred towards others for their actions. Absence of pride, arrogance, guilt, shame and so on, means peace of mind.

The self, deluded by egoism,
thinketh: ‘I am the doer’.

– *The Bhagavad Gita* (III-27, 28)

The juicer does not ‘do’ anything, nor does the toaster. The electricity is the only doer as such. The same Consciousness functions through each of us. With this understanding, the true meaning of ‘universal brotherhood’ is realised; not one where only those belonging to our religion are considered our brothers.

Rnanubandhana is a core concept of Indian karmic thought that literally translates as ‘bondage of debt’ (of relationships). It refers to the ‘cosmic debt based on a former relationship’.

According to this concept, a relationship can ‘happen’ between two individuals through the mechanism of *Rnanubandhana*. Karma (action and reaction) is due to this debt and can occur only if there exists a past bondage of debt between them. Whether or not we believe in past births and *Rnanubandhana*, the fact is that daily living means one’s relationship with others, unless one is an ascetic sitting in a cave in the mountains.

On *Rnanubandhana*, the revered and much venerated Indian mystic Sai Baba of Shirdi has said:

*‘Unless there is some relationship or connection, nobody goes anywhere. If any men or creatures come to you, do not discourteously drive them away but receive them well... if anybody wants money from you and you are not inclined to give, do not give but do not bark like a dog. Let anybody speak hundreds of things against you, do not resent by giving any bitter reply. If you tolerate such things you will certainly be happy. Let the world go topsy-turvy, you remain where you are. Standing in your own place, look on calmly at the show of all things passing before you. Demolish the wall of difference that separates you from Me, and then the road for our meeting will be clear and open... God is the sole Proprietor... His Will be done and He will show us the way... It is on account of rnanubandhana that we have come together, let us love and serve each other and be happy.’**

* *Shri Sai Satcharitra* – G. R. Dabholkar, Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, Shirdi.
English translation by N. V. Gunaji.

While I had no idea there was such a word defining this concept, it dawned on me that what Ramesh Balsekar spoke about was exactly what Sai Baba was saying – except that he did not use the word ‘Rnanubandhana’. What’s more, his teaching did not take into consideration the existence of a ‘former relationship’ preceding this birth. After all, the ego in a particular birth dies with the death of the body. The ego is not reborn. Therefore, if nobody does anything and all there is, is the will of God, then there was no question of a ‘personal’ action/reaction loop of karma.

As the sage Vimalananda* said: ‘Self-identification with one’s actions converts them into karma by binding the ego down more tightly to the limited, temporary personality.’

So practical was the teaching and its approach to relationships as presented by Ramesh, that it ultimately delivered peace of mind in daily living.

This book is comprised of essays, plus some questions and answers, that touch upon different aspects of relationships – relationships with others, our relationship with ourselves, and our relationship with ‘what is’ – all pointing back to who we *truly* are, and not what we *appear* to be.

When this inherent interconnectedness is seen in the light of total clarity, we are free of all the shackles that bind us down to relationships where we consider ourselves as separate from others, and heap judgement after judgement upon them. The *bandhas* (bonds) are then snapped as swiftly as Alexander the Great cut through the ‘impossible to untie’ Gordian Knot with a single stroke of his sword.

* *Aghora: At the Left Hand of God* – Robert E. Svoboda. There is a detailed chapter on Rnanubandhana, as explained by Vimalananda.

Karma is now pure action, without the taint of ownership and self-identification with the action. 'Not my will, but Thine, be done,' as Jesus said. What shines forth is true Love – unfettered and unconditional. There is no 'other' to hate. When there is no 'other' to hate, it truly means that there is no 'other'. And when there is no 'other', there is no 'me' as separate from the 'other'.

There is no 'other' to love as well, as a separate individual, for all boundaries have been annihilated. Everything is now one cohesive, harmonious Whole.

Consciousness is all there truly is.



JOURNEYS AT THE OFFICE DESK

My spiritual teacher, Ramesh Balsekar, would often say that peace of mind cannot be found in the flow of life but rather in our attitude to life and towards the 'other'. Because in daily living, our relationship with others plays an important role.

An office or similar work environment is an ideal ground from which to witness the interplay of various kinds of relationships. In retrospect, I can clearly see that I learnt a lot about people and inter-human relationships through my years at work. Little wonder then that Ramesh, himself a banker for 37 years, was always curious to know how things were at work, whenever we would meet.

We all have our stories to tell, and here's mine as far as my work life is concerned. The intention is to share how I now view all that happened at and through work, in light of the teaching of non-duality. I can clearly see that the conditioning I received during my working years provided a fertile ground on which the seeds of non-duality were planted. Besides the share of life's experiences that we all face, work for me provided the additional facet of being exposed to a multitude of relationships. In my professional life I had already experienced what I heard Ramesh speak

of, when I visited him years later. It was hardly a surprise that I took to the teaching like a fish takes to water.

It is famously said that ‘there are more authors than readers’ and adding to the heap was easy. As I ran a spiritual publishing house, it was not difficult to find a publisher!

The early years

I started going to the office during my third year in higher college, when I was 20. Although my father had passed away when I was 14, the advertising agency that he founded was still functioning. It was being run by the team who were present at the time of his passing. My mother, who had until then been a typical Indian housewife, had also been visiting the office during those six years. Although not knowledgeable about advertising, she played the role of being present to handle whatever challenges the company would face to the best of her ability, while the team was busy handling the clients and work at hand. Bringing up three teenaged children as well as going to work must have been a challenging task, to say the least.

When I turned 24, it seemed that all hell had broken loose on the work front. One fine evening, the management informed my mother that they were leaving to start their own advertising venture. They said they would hire someone in their place to run the show. It was all so sudden and unexpected – a bolt from the blue! However, I was given a hint of this a few days earlier when I went to make a presentation to a client. He was someone close to the management. When he mentioned their plans to me

(I still can't fathom why!), I thought it was such an outlandish idea that I actually went and blurted it out to them. I got no response so it seemed clear to me that it was just the client's fantasy running wild. But from that point on, the only thing I was clear on was that one should be aware that anything is possible. And quite often, that 'anything' was the polaric opposite of the current situation at hand – something one could hardly imagine. Life has a habit of giving you exactly that which you *think* you don't need. Or perhaps, that which would never cross your mind in your wildest dreams.

My mother and I were all shook up, as we knew it would most likely spell the end of the business and therefore the family's income. Nobody knew the clients besides the management – there were no other relationships in place.

Worse things were in store over the coming days. Close on the heels of this development came another big surprise – they sent out invites to all our clients stating that they were starting their own advertising agency and invited them for the opening of their new office. And, we only found this out when one of our clients forwarded me an invite asking what was going on! It did seem quite cheeky of them at first, but then it was perhaps the most logical thing for them to do, in hindsight. After all, they were the ones who had built up the relationships with the clients over the years. However, at that time, it felt unethical as they had been with the agency for so many years, through thick and thin. If they had at least informed us that they would be sending out the invites, we would have been better prepared, as until then we had not informed the clients that they were leaving.

We feared that all the clients would shift their accounts as there was no one else left in the agency whom they had confidence in. Don't ask me why and how it happened, but we were fortunate that only one of the big clients chose to shift their account.

It was then that my recently married brother-in-law, who had an advertising background, was roped in to helm the ship. However, this too provided relief only in the short term as it was to last only for a few months. After the initial few months, he was clear that as he was in charge of affairs he deserved a stake in the company, else he would quit. Asking for a stake was fair, but he wanted the majority share. We almost agreed as no other option was available to us. However, our auditor strongly advised us against this option no matter what the cost, as it would mean losing control over the family business. He said something which gave me much strength in those days: 'Nobody is indispensable. People come and go. Organisations tend to carry on, no matter who leaves. After all, it did continue even after your father.' However, this was more of an intellectual strength. When your income is tied tightly to others, then you certainly think they are indispensable – more so when you are 24 and have not really been exposed to running a business – even if it's a small family business.

We were in a dilemma: *How would we run the show if he left? Whom would the clients have faith in now? After the turbulence in the agency a few months ago, what could we tell them now? What were we to do?* In this situation, my mother turned to her guru for advice. He told her to leave the problem at his doorstep, and let the Source take care of the rest.

We shored up the courage and decided not to budge, thanks largely to his encouragement as well as the auditor's advice. This new position taken by us must have surprised my then brother-in-law. For, we had even agreed to a 50:50 stake in our naivete, without consulting the auditors. Fortunately (as usual in hindsight, of course), he insisted on getting not just half of the stake but a majority, and so stopped coming to work.

Here we were. The luxury of choices was no longer available. Either we would have to shut shop, or I would have to try my hand at running the business for whatever it was worth.

Suddenly, I found myself heading a staff of about 30 people, all of them older than me. When I look back I can see that it turned out to be a fertile ground to 'practice the teaching' as far as human relationships were concerned, as Ramesh would later say. Up until then I had not been exposed to Ramesh's teaching. That's why I realised, when I started visiting Ramesh and attending his talks, that his teaching was a validation of my life's experiences thus far.

I remember an incident when a new client had come over for a meeting and walked into my cabin. He kept waiting without speaking much. After talking shop, I asked him if I could help him with his requirements, and what services was he looking for from our agency. He said it was quite alright, and continued to sit silently in his chair. This was a bit odd, I thought. Both of us were quiet as we had run out of conversation, and I was at my wit's end as to how to take this forward. After 10 minutes passed, he asked me, 'Why is your boss taking so long to come?' He was quite flabbergasted when I told him that I was indeed the boss.

The situation I found myself in at work was a daunting one. I was intimidated and fearful about retaining the business. On top of that, the entire working world around me including my colleagues, suppliers, and clients, were older than me. Some by four decades! To add to that, I was more of an introvert. My shyness was often misconstrued as snobbishness. Being chubby in my school days had not helped my self-esteem either. I was not comfortable with the slightest amount of attention. I even remember dashing from my building elevator to the car, lest I be seen in my boy scouts uniform that we had to wear once a week. And so, I found myself between a rock and a hard place. I was hardly the young lad brimming with confidence eager to meet the challenges of business as a CEO. Just what I thought I did not need was forced my way. Yet, things gradually tilted in my favour, by the grace of God.

At first, the hardest part for me was to deal with the clients. That was where our bread and butter came from, and if they were not happy and decided to leave, that would mean the end of the show. The survival issue had raised its ugly head once again in my life, as it did when my father had passed away. There was no question of running away from this lion; there never is. As the Buddhists say, all fears are nothing but the fear of death. This was a very real fear. And the clients were rolling the dice! Unhappy clients meant departing clients, which meant departing money, and no money ultimately meant no food, shelter and clothing, which basically meant the game was over. This was the thought-process my 24-year old brain was configured with.

At my first meeting, I remember walking into a client's office. It was an impressive conference room, but my jaw dropped when I saw a table that could perhaps seat 16 people, with him sitting at the end of it. God does have a sense of humour I thought – no table of a lesser size would do for my first meeting. I was quite nervous and wondered whether I would end up making a fool of myself. Finally, the meeting got over and I silently breathed a sigh of relief. When I was at the door, the client turned around and said to me: 'Gautam, as long as I get what I need from you and your team, I am happy.' And that relationship endured right through my advertising career. In fact, it became our biggest account for quite a number of years.

As time rolled by, I began to realise that I was generally likeable. In fact, I got along with practically everyone, and it wasn't that I was expending any effort to do so. I got invited to clients' homes to have dinner with their families, and I got invited to suppliers' homes to have lunch with theirs. I think the main reason was that I did not really get in anyone's way. I was, by and large, an amiable chap. Everyone in the office was allowed to express their views. I also had an open-door policy, in the sense that my cabin-door was never closed and they could walk in anytime. I even recall having pasted a quotation on my cabin door that said: 'Are you part of the problem or have you come here with a solution?' The staff made me remove it as they felt it put them under tremendous pressure before entering my cabin. But, at least the mystery of their stopping short of the cabin and returning to their desks was solved.

My colleagues did not perceive me as a threat, and that really helped as otherwise they might have had a hard time taking this kid being their boss seriously! I rarely raised my voice or screamed and shouted. This reminds me of a recent situation at work.

Two colleagues were at loggerheads; one much senior than the other. There was a lot of screaming and shouting, and tempers flared. The senior was handling the situation roughly, and it was uncalled for. It was the junior's last day, and he hadn't done a proper handover. This had riled the senior, and he got aggressive. The situation got out of hand and the junior stormed out of the office without looking back, and that was the end of things. I felt bad as it was not good to leave the organisation in this manner. The same evening, I called the senior in, heard him out, and expressed to him that while he was acting in the best interests of the company, being the senior, he could have handled the situation with more tact. Perhaps the junior who left might yet be needed in case the new recruit got stuck in some work aspects. It's always good to have a healthy parting. Now, that option was a dead-end. Besides, that aggression had rattled the women in the office. What struck me was the senior's response. His eyes momentarily went moist. He said that in his earlier job, work would get done only when his senior would kick the cabin door open, and scream and shout expletives. He said he had absorbed that conditioning and thought that was the only way to deal with subordinates. And, he also wondered aloud why I never did the same. I said I couldn't, because it simply wasn't my nature or my conditioning.

Over the months, work drew me out and I started getting comfortable with people from diverse backgrounds, age groups, income groups, and nationalities. I recently came across a word that perhaps best describes the change. The conditioning at work morphed me into an ‘ambivert’ – a cross between an introvert and extrovert. But at heart I was an introvert. In fact, I even won a white card in school for being ‘the most well-behaved boy in class’. That was strange, I thought. All I did was keep quiet, and that too I did not expend any effort in order to keep quiet; yet I got rewarded. The Lord works in mysterious ways!

The days in advertising turned out to be quite exciting. I used to be in the office till about midnight twice a week. The reason for this was that our Creative Director was from one of India’s leading ad agencies, and he would moonlight for us after finishing his work. He spearheaded the creative team, and we all learnt a lot from him in those formative years. While I found it easier over time to handle clients, my interest was more in the creative side of the business. So, I really didn’t mind the long hours at work when the creative brainstorming would take place in the late evenings.

Our Creative Director used to insist that the client servicing team fight tooth and nail to hold up the creatives that the agency was presenting, and it held us in good stead. We were assigned a lot of below-the-line work for some of India’s leading brands, and business started pouring in. At the same time, our egos were reined in by the Source, for we were not really able to break through to become the agency for their mainline advertising. We earned the reputation of being a small but quality-conscious firm.

I remember an incident regarding the creatives that was quite impactful. We had pitched for an account and the client had loved our work. The artworks were ready to go to print. The contract was signed. Everyone was thrilled. And then, at the final hour, the client called up and said his wife was of the opinion that the colour scheme of the campaign be changed from a black/yellow combination to a black/red one. Suddenly, there was trouble in paradise. My Creative Director felt that, for very valid reasons, it would destroy the sanctity of the entire creative strategy, and said we had no option but to insist we adhere to the original scheme. And, as he rightly said, ‘We don’t teach them how to create their product, so why should they (especially their wives) teach us how to create ours?’ Then, of course, he expected me to go and tell the client that!

Anyway, such one-sided battles are lost long before they are even fought. All gentle reasoning and persuasion on my part went out the window. The client told me to get off my high horse as he was paying the bills, and he wanted his wife to be happy. Else, he would take his business elsewhere. So this is the message I relayed back to the creative team, who of course said that perhaps I was not convincing enough! It was like being caught in the crossfire. We gave in. There was no point digging our heels in – especially when what we dug our heels into was quicksand.

This was nothing really – the clients could get quite unreasonable. One of them had scheduled an ad to be released in a magazine. However, he changed his mind at the last minute, and called our Media Manager to tell him to cancel the ad. My manager replied that it was too late

as the issue was already printed and would hit the stands in a day or two. On hearing this, he flared up and said, 'Do you know who I am? The ad has to be cancelled at any cost!' and hung up the phone. The manager was flummoxed. If it was Ramana Maharshi – the grand sage of Advaita – at the other end of the line instead of the manager, he would perhaps have replied, 'I do know who *you* are, but more importantly, do you?'

Over time, many incidents like this revealed to me how egoic the profession could be. And there were egos of all shapes and sizes to deal with – something that the advertising industry is notorious for. The creative team were of the opinion that the client servicing team had bigger egos, and the client servicing team felt the creative team could not put a lid on theirs. Of course, they both agreed that the clients had the biggest egos – especially the clients' wives!

It was quite amusing to witness the frustrations that would arise among staff members and with clients. It was a service-driven, deadline oriented profession, and hence a breeding ground for frustration. Everyone was on the edge all the time, and that's even when they weren't. As one of my former colleagues mentioned in a joking yet sombre tone at a recently held reunion that we had, '...and Gautam, on top of dealing with everyone's quirks, whims and fancies, and all the deadlines and late nights, we were selling products to people that they most likely did not need! How could we go to our deaths with that? How could we go to our deaths trying to convince someone to buy the brand of toothpaste advertised by us, and not the others?!' Now he's the Creative Director

in one of the largest ad agencies – a tremendous growth curve not only in his career but also his spiritual evolution, I am sure.

Another downer was when we had clients who would not pay up on time, and we had to work up a sweat to collect money that was rightfully ours. I remember one particular instance when a client owed us a lot of money. Repeated calls by our accounts department as well as the senior executives were to no avail, and their pleas fell on deaf ears. The client would even dodge my calls. So, one day, I decided to visit their office. When I reached there, I told the secretary that the purpose of my visit was to collect what was rightfully our due, and I would sit there in their reception till I received the cheque. To show that I was serious, I took along the fattest Robert Ludlum book I could lay my hands on. Till then, I had not been exposed to Nisargadatta Maharaj's teachings else I would have taken my copy of *I Am That*, and then they would have realised I meant it very seriously.

The strategy of a silent protest worked. After cooling my heels for about three hours each over two trips, someone approached me and said there was no need for me to keep sitting there, and my cheque would be given in a week's time, which it thankfully was. Mahatma Gandhi would have been proud. And, perhaps, Ludlum!

And so, while advertising was giving an adrenaline rush, the charm of it gradually started fading away. One does not realise how far away one has drifted, until one has reached the deep end. And then, one realises that one can't go back even if one wanted to. Sometimes, the tide just doesn't turn. It is now clear to me that whatever

I needed to learn during my time in advertising was coming to a completion, and the events that were to follow proved that.

The waters of publishing

Amidst this scenario came the decision to publish my mother's first book. It was about her experiences in meditation. She was not really interested in the subject. One day, a friend of hers insisted that she visit a guru who was giving talks in the neighbourhood. She was reluctant to attend but went along anyway.

It was as if a dam had burst forth. Back home, she would sit in meditations and get visions of the entire process of Kundalini* awakening, which she would then sketch immediately upon coming out of the meditation, lest she forget them. She is not a trained artist, and yet the results were quite surprising with their consistency in form.

What took shape was a diary with illustrations in colour. She had no intention to get it published, but some friends who were familiar with the subject of Kundalini meditation said that her drawings would be of tremendous value to aspirants on the path. For, it was the first time that the process of Kundalini unfoldment was illustrated so thoroughly, though there were many books that were written on the subject. In fact, in his review of the book, Baba Gagangiri – a revered sage of Maharashtra, referred to it as a 'rarest of rare' occurrence in the physical world.**

* The manifestation of the Dynamic Female Cosmic Energy within the individual body, lying nascent in a coiled form at the base of the spine.

** *Conscious Flight Into The Empyrean* – Santosh Sachdeva, Yogi Impressions.