

Papaji Interview

"Who Am I ?"

An Interview with Sri Poonjaji by Shraddha

Introduction

Sri H.W.L. Poonjaji, endearingly known as Papaji, was a disciple of the greatest and most revered sage of India, Sri Ramana Maharshi. Papaji became enlightened through him almost 50 years ago. Ramana resided in Arunachala, The Holy Mountains and pilgrimage centre of South India. The essence of Sri Ramana's message was to find out who you are. The device he used was self enquiry - to look inside and ask the question "Who Am I ?", to find out where this "I" comes from.

Many people from all over the world are travelling to India to sit in satsang in front of Papaji to ask just that. Papaji shares the possibility of freedom now. "Let us cherish that Self, which is the reality, in the heart."

This interview was given at satsang (meaning meeting with the truth) in Lucknow, India 26th August 1994.

Guru

What is a Guru?

The literal meaning of guru is the one who dispels darkness.

What is the Master/Disciple connection? How does it work?

The Master is the one who shows that you are light itself and that darkness never existed. Through his Grace he removes the erroneous idea that there is a state of unenlightenment which has to be overcome.

When one is so asleep - full of doubts and fears and ruled by the mind - how to recognise a True Master?

A Master cannot be identified through his words or his actions, nothing he does or says proves or disproves his spiritual state or his qualifications to be a Master. If your mind automatically becomes quiet and peaceful in the proximity of someone else, then that may be taken to be an indication (not a proof) that this person is qualified to be a spiritual teacher. There are no other reliable signs.

What is the difference between you and me? If you say that there is no difference between us, why are you sitting up there, and why am I sitting down here? If I sat in your chair, nobody would listen to me, or believe me.

No differences. All differences are imaginary. If you imagine that there are differences, you belong on the floor. If you have no doubts or thoughts about imaginary differences, you belong on the chair.

Virtually all spiritual Masters have been male. Why? Is it more difficult for a woman to attain Enlightenment?

There is only one Master, and it is neither male nor female. It shines within you as your own Self. If you think that you are a woman, that thought will prevent you from being aware of It.

Do we have to come to India to find a Guru? Or can we become self - realised without a living teacher, using our own insight?

One cannot realise the Self without the grace of a living Guru. While you think that you have a body, only a Guru in the body can help you. You do not find a Guru by moving from one country to another. You find one by having an intense desire for freedom.

Death

What happens when a Self - Realised person leaves his body? If there is no need for them to reincarnate, where do they go?

There is no such thing as a Self-realised person. When there is no "person" the Self is realised. When there is no "person" the question of coming and going cannot arise. The body is an appearance in the Self. When the body disappears the Self remains as it always was and is. Realisation is the understanding "I am not this body which comes and goes, I am that permanent, unchanging reality in which the body and all else appears".

What is the Jiva or Soul which reincarnates in unenlightened people?

The jiva is that entity which claims all the activities of the body and the mind as its own. If you die without finding out who and what you really are, this jiva, along with all your accumulated desires and fears, will find another form to infest and trouble.

We are told that sometimes a soul does not find a suitable vehicle immediately: there may be a long time between leaving one body and entering another. What happens to the Jiva during that time? Are we conscious while being in that 'gap'?

A jiva may take a new form almost immediately or it may take several hundred years. What happens during that period? It enjoys or suffers, according to its karma, in just the same way that it does when it occupies a human body. In whatever form or world the jiva exists it will always alternate between pleasures and pains.

If our true nature is Sat-chit-ananda - Knowledge, Consciousness, Bliss - why did we leave that blissful state and assume bodily form, learning over many lives what we presumably knew in the first place? Sometimes I feel that I just want to go home. Where is my Home?

Why assume that you ever left that sat-chit-ananda? Such an assumption just gives you endless trouble. Why not have the conviction that you have always been "home", that you have always been blissful, and always will be? If you give up the idea that you ever took a bodily form, you will find that you have always been sat-chit-ananda.

Why do we not remember anything from our past lives?

Some people do, most people don't. Remembering the past keeps you in the past. The less of the past you remember, the better off you are.

What kind of reincarnation comes next if one commits suicide?

'Sui' means "self". The real suicide is to extinguish the life of this "self" that you think yourself to be. If you can manage to do this, there will be no more rebirths or deaths. If you just kill the body, you will soon find a new one to continue your suffering in.

Enlightenment

What is Enlightenment? In your book "Wake Up and Roar" it is said that a still mind is Enlightenment, would it not be more correct to say that the complete and permanent absence of the mind is Enlightenment?

When the "I" which rises to claim ownership of all thoughts and actions is permanently eradicated Enlightenment remains. A still mind is just an active mind that is having a temporary rest. Enlightenment is the substratum of both states.

Does Enlightenment change the body, in any way chemically? Is there a rush of energy that occurs at the moment of Enlightenment?

When you are one with your source you are plugged into an infinite supply of energy. When you no longer think "I am doing this", the Power of Self takes over, enabling all activities to be performed with an abundance of energy. Ramana Maharshi sometimes said that the power of the Self was surging through him so strongly he couldn't keep his head still. His head was always shaking except when he was in samadhi or when he was looking intently into a devotee's eyes.

Can an ordinary person become Enlightened, or do you have to be a spiritual seeker on the path?

If you don't want it, you don't get it.

How can I tell if I'm Enlightened or not?

Open your eyes and look around you. If you still see a world outside and apart from you, you are not enlightened. Why not? The world and the one who sees it are both projections of the mind, and while that mind is there, Enlightenment is covered up. When you experience and know directly, without needing the eyes, that the world is an uncaused appearance within your own Self, you will not need to ask whether you are Enlightened or not.

Do you foresee a time in the not too distant future when there will be many people on earth who are Enlightened?

There is no future, there are no people, there is no earth, there is no one seeking Enlightenment, and no one gaining it. This is the final and only Truth.

Does Enlightenment mean that you are always happy? When difficult and sad things occur in our lives, do they affect you? When you get angry and throw people out of satsang, are you peaceful, happy and blissful inside? Is the difference between you and us the fact that we identify with our emotions and allow them to control us, whereas you don't?

Happiness is permanent. It is always there. What comes and goes is unhappiness. If you identify with what comes and goes, you will be unhappy. If you identify with what is permanent and always there, you are happiness itself. Anger is one of my good friends. He is always there when I need him to transact some business. He is very useful. He does his work without disturbing me and then stays away till I need him again.

When is a person "ripe" for Enlightenment? Is there a gestation period that precedes Enlightenment in the way that nine months of preparation and growth precede the birth of a child?

You are ripe for Enlightenment when you want nothing else. In order to be born as a baby you have to spend nine months getting bigger and bigger. For Enlightenment you have to get smaller and smaller until you disappear completely.

You say that I must find the source of my thoughts and stay there. How do I do that ?

By looking inside yourself to see where they come from

Do you still have continuous thoughts or as a Master do you only have thoughts when they serve a particular purpose? Can you choose to be without thoughts?

Thoughts appear and disappear but they are not "mine" so they don't bother me. Let them come, let them go. What does it matter? They are nothing to do with me.

What is the lower Self? What is the higher Self?

There is no lower or higher in the Self.

Other teachers say that a long period of purification is necessary before Enlightenment can take place. You yourself have said that you have to make yourself beautiful before Truth will embrace you. How do we make ourselves pure and beautiful?

You cannot make yourself pure by any mental or physical activity. Purity is only there when thoughts are not. Truth is not very athletic. She cannot catch you if you are moving around. She can only catch you and embrace you if you stand absolutely still.

If freedom from bondage is our true nature, why is it that so few people realise it?

Because very few people care about it enough or want it enough.

Does Enlightenment imply Omniscience?

There is nothing apart from the Self which can be known and nothing in the Self which can know it. The idea of omniscience can only arise when there is a subject who has knowledge of an infinite number of objects. If there is no subject and no objects, what happens to omniscience?

Can Meditation lead to Enlightenment? If not, why not?

Meditation is a mental activity. There is a subject, the meditator, who is manipulating or organising objects which are thoughts. Both the subject and the objects have to disappear for Enlightenment to take place. Meditation just prolongs their existence.

When you are enlightened do you gain knowledge of your past lives?

When you are enlightened you have the knowledge that they never happened.

Mind

What is mind? What is no mind? Is no mind a temporary absence of mind or is it permanent?

Mind is just a bundle of thoughts along with the "I" that moves them around. When the "I" drops off there is no mind. When no-mind sinks into its source and stays there, reality shines, permanently and irrevocably.

Most people are afraid to give up their minds because they think they need them to function in the world. How do daily activities get done if there is no-one who decides what to do and how to do them?

Try it and see. You are like someone in an STD telephone exchange who thinks that he has to run around and make the connections himself. Relax, stop interfering, and you will see that the whole show runs by itself without any intervention from you.

Many people have spent years successfully making an effort to quieten their mind. Is this bringing them any nearer to Enlightenment or are they merely increasing their powers of concentration?

People who successfully make efforts to quieten their minds are concentrating intensively on a object of thought called 'silence'. This is not the silence of no thoughts. It is the experiencing of a mental state by intense effort, when both the effort and the thoughts cease, Enlightenment occurs.

Sometimes in Satsang you use the Buddha as an example. The Buddha attained freedom through meditation, yet you seem to imply that there are limitations to meditation. Could you speak on this?

The Buddha tried all kinds of meditation and tapas before he came to Bodhi Gaya but he didn't get any results. When he sat under the bodhi tree, all he had was a single-minded determination that he wasn't going to move until he got enlightened. It was his determination to be free that won him his freedom, not any of his previous practices.

Life

Who am I?

Whoever you imagine yourself to be. When you stop making up identities for yourself, you find out who you really are.

Who is God?

When you project a dream world for yourself and live in it, you also project a God who looks after it. When you stop the projection, both the world and God disappear.

After Self- Realisation, do we understand everything about life? Or will life at its heart, always remain a mystery, and not a riddle to be solved?

The Self will always be a mystery because there can never be anything apart from it to comprehend it, analyse it or understand it.

What is the meaning of life?

Why should it have any meaning? Any meaning you attribute to it is just an idea in your mind. Life is not affected or explained by any ideas you might have about it.

Can you please talk on learning how to live, to simply be here now. Sometimes being around you I feel you share with us the ordinariness of your daily activities. I think about the Zen saying "Before Enlightenment chop wood carry water, after Enlightenment, chop wood carry water."

Before Enlightenment you think, "I must chop wood, I must carry water". Afterwards wood gets chopped, water gets carried but it's nothing to do with you. It just happens.

When we are in the 'gap' between lives do we consciously choose the body we want to re-incarnate in, our parents, and so on? If so, how do we choose?

It's not a travel agency where you can pick up a nice spot for your next birth. Your thoughts and desires from this life will propel you into a new form and not necessarily a very nice one. It's all out of your control. Right now you can exercise control by finding out where your thoughts and desires come from. After your death it will be too late.

Why do we have so much fear in our lives? Why is trusting in each moment so difficult?

If you live in the ego, you automatically set up hostile situations of "me" and the rest of the world. To defend an ego you have to be selfish and you have to fear other people because they are all threats to your well being. How can you trust anyone in a situation like that?

Many people believe that there is such a thing as a "healthy ego". A person with a healthy ego may be self-confident, aware of his own abilities and limitations, likes and dislikes, have high self-worth, and so on... Is there such a thing as a "healthy ego"? Can it ever lead to freedom?

A person who has self-confidence and high self- esteem (what western psychologists would call a healthy ego) is no nearer to freedom than anyone else. Such a person may feel that he is happy and that he needs no fundamental changes in his life. A person who has understood that his ego is continually causing him mental trouble is more likely to look for a solution. There is no such thing as a healthy ego any more than there is a thing called a healthy disease. The ego cannot lead to freedom it can only obstruct it. Ego and freedom cannot co-exist. When ego vanishes, freedom replaces it.

Dreams

What are dreams? Why do we dream?

Dreams are mental projections, at night you project them inside your head, during the day you project them outside your head. You dream up these worlds because you have a strong desire to enjoy them.

You tell me "Wake Up!" that I am in a dream right now. When I go to sleep at night I don't remember anything until I wake up again the next morning, and sometimes I have dreams that feel as real as the waking state, as real as the feeling that I am sitting here right now. How do we know what is real and what is unreal?

All your dreams are unreal even the dream you call the waking state, the only reality is the screen on which they appear. When you identify with the screen and not the pictures, you will know what is real and what is unreal.

When I am dreaming I sometimes feel that I am all the characters in the dream simultaneously. At the same time, I feel that I am observing all these characters, and everything that is going on. Yet I don't have a sense of control over what I am dreaming. It is just happening, I am the dream, I am observing the dream, I cannot control it. What is really happening?

You are just dreaming. If you want to know what is really happening wake up.

You say there is no difference between the dreaming and the waking state. Right now, how can you tell that you are in the waking state and not dreaming that you're giving Satsang?

I'm not in either of the two states. Both states alternately appear in me. You are dreaming that I am giving satsang, but your dreams do not touch me or affect me.

Why do we have trouble remembering our dreams?

The brain is programmed to forget most of what we dream. That's just the way the body works.

Are our dreams messengers? Are they telling us something?

They are telling us that creation is a dream, and that there is a possibility to wake up out of the dream.

Are you conscious when you are sleeping? If so, what of?

The same consciousness prevails in all the states of waking, sleeping and dreaming. The appearance and disappearance of the alternating three states do not affect that consciousness, it is not conscious of the three states, they just appear and disappear within it.

Free Will versus Determination

Is everything in my life, for example the moment and method of my death, predetermined? What freedom of choice and action do I have in my life? Is the moment of Enlightenment predetermined, or could it happen at any time?

All the activities that the body performs are predetermined. The only freedom you have is to choose not to identify with the body that is performing the actions. Enlightenment does not happen in time. It happens when time stops.

Desire

We live in times of abundance. We can choose between many different objects and we may find ourselves caught up in never-ending desires for more, bigger, better. How can we live "in the market-place, but not of it"?

By not going shopping for sense-objects.

What is desire? What is the way to true happiness?

By discriminating between what is real and permanent and what is unreal and impermanent. And by then desiring the former, not the latter.

Sex

Does celibacy help us to realise the Self?

There is no sex in the Self. I have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and none of them held me up.

There are many paths to Enlightenment, including a path that uses union with a partner as a way to the Divine. Some people have experienced, when making love with their partner, a feeling of oneness with existence. Do you believe it is possible to achieve true liberation in such a way?

Physical activities can only produce physical results. Mental activities produce mental results. Sexual activity produces babies. Enlightenment is not produced by any of them.

Is there a correct way to practise sex and sexuality?

Go to Khajuraho and learn how to do it the Indian way.

Surrender

Is surrender to the Master the same as surrendering to the Divine within us all or is it, yet again, looking to an object outside ourselves?

The Master is not an object outside you, he is inside you as your own Self, surrender to him there.

How is true surrender accomplished?

By going back to your source and discovering that there is no one to surrender and nothing to surrender.

Love

What is the difference between love and compassion?

For the ego, love is an attachment generated by desire, while compassion is a feeling of pity towards 'others'. When the ego is absent both are the same.

We all desire to love and be loved and time and time again our search for the perfect partner ends in disappointment. Is it only possible to love another when both people are Self-Realised? And when we are Self-Realised, will we not love everyone in the same way - making monogamy impossible?

In the Self there are no others to love or to be monogamous with. The desire for a perfect partner will always end in disappointment because there is no such thing as a perfect partner. Partnerships are always imperfect.

Is unconditional love possible when we are still living the ego?

No

Is God Love?

You brought him into existence. Be creative, make him be whatever you want him to be.