

Nan Yar? (Who am I?)

From the original Tamil prose of
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PARAGRAPH ONE

Since all living beings desire to be always happy [and] devoid of misery, since all [of them] have greatest love only for their own self, and since happiness alone is the cause of love, [in order] to attain that happiness, which is their own [true] nature that they experience daily in [dreamless] sleep, which is devoid of the mind, knowing [their own real] self is necessary. For that, *jñana-vichara* [scrutinising our consciousness to know] **'who am I?' alone is the principal means.**¹

PARAGRAPH TWO

Who am I? The *sthula deha* [the 'gross' or physical body], which is [composed] of the *sapta dhatus* [the seven constituents, namely chyle, blood, flesh, fat, marrow, bone and semen], is not 'I'. The five *jñanendriyas* [sense organs], namely the ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose, which individually [and respectively] know the five *vishayas* [sense 'domains' or types of sense perception], namely sound, touch [texture and other qualities perceived by touch], form [shape, colour and other qualities perceived by sight], taste and smell, are also not 'I'. The five *karmendriyas* [organs of action], namely the vocal cords, feet [or legs], hands [or arms], anus and genitals, which [respectively] do the five actions, namely speaking, walking, holding [or giving], defecation and [sexual] enjoyment, are also not 'I'. The *pancha vayus* [the five 'winds', 'vital airs' or metabolic forces], beginning with *prana* [breath], which perform the five [metabolic] functions, beginning with respiration, are also not 'I'. The mind, which thinks, is also not 'I'. The ignorance [the absence of all dualistic knowledge] that is combined with only *vishaya-vasanas* [latent inclinations, impulsions, desires, liking or taste for sense perceptions or sense enjoyments] when all sense perceptions and all actions have been severed [as in sleep], is also not 'I'. Having done *neti* [negation, elimination or denial of whatever is not ourself by thinking] that all the abovesaid things are not 'I', not 'I', the **knowledge** that [then] stands detached **alone is 'I'**. **The nature of [this] knowledge [I am] is *sat-chit-ananda*** [being-consciousness-bliss].²

PARAGRAPH THREE

If [our] mind, which is the cause of all [dualistic, relative or objective] knowledge and of all activity, subsides [becomes still, disappears or ceases to exist], [our] perception of the world will cease. Just as knowledge of the rope, which is the base [that underlies and supports the appearance of the snake], will not arise unless knowledge of the imaginary snake ceases, *svarupa-darsana* [true experiential knowledge of our own essential nature or real self], which is the base [that underlies and supports the appearance of the world], will not arise unless [our] perception of the world, which is an imagination [or fabrication], ceases.³

PARAGRAPH FOUR

That which is called 'mind' is an *atisaya sakti* [an extraordinary or wonderful power] that exists in *atma-svarupa* [our essential self]. It projects all thoughts [or causes all thoughts to appear]. When [we] see [what remains] having removed [relinquished, discarded, dispelled, erased or destroyed] all [our] thoughts, [we will discover that] solitarily [separate from or independent of thoughts] there is no such thing as 'mind'; therefore thought alone is the *svarupa* [the 'own form' or basic nature] of [our] mind. Having removed [all our] thoughts, [we will discover that] there is no such thing as

¹ The meaning of paragraph one is discussed on pages 91, 157-58 and 612 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

² The meaning of paragraph two is discussed on pages 158-60 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

³ The meaning of paragraph three is discussed on pages 200-2 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

'world' [existing separately or independently] as other [than our thoughts]. In sleep there are no thoughts, [and consequently] there is also no world; in waking and dream there are thoughts, [and consequently] there is also a world. Just as a spider spins out [a] thread from within itself and again draws [it back] into itself, so [our] mind projects [this or some other] world from within itself and again dissolves [it back] into itself. When [our] mind comes out from *atma-svarupa* [our essential self], the world appears. Therefore when the world appears, *svarupa* [our 'own form' or essential self] does not appear [as it really is, that is, as the absolute and infinite non-dual consciousness of just being]; when *svarupa* appears (shines) [as it really is], the world does not appear. If [we] go on investigating the nature of [our] mind, '*tan*' alone will finally appear as [the one underlying reality that we now mistake to be our] mind. That which is [here] called '*tan*' [a Tamil reflexive pronoun meaning 'oneself' or 'ourself'] is only *atma-svarupa* [our own essential self]. [Our] mind stands only by always following [conforming or attaching itself to] a gross object [a physical body]; solitarily it does not stand. [Our] mind alone is spoken of as *sukshma sarira* [our 'subtle body', that is, the subtle form or seed of all the imaginary physical bodies that our mind creates and mistakes to be itself] and as *jiva* [our 'soul' or individual self].⁴

PARAGRAPH FIVE

What rises in this body as 'I', that alone is [our] mind. If [we] investigate in what place the thought 'I' rises first in [our] body, [we] will come to know that [it rises first] in [our] heart [the innermost core of our being]. That alone is the birthplace of [our] mind. Even if [we] remain thinking 'I, I', it will take [us] and leave [us] in that place. Of all the thoughts that appear [or arise] in [our] mind, **the thought 'I' alone is the first thought**. Only after this rises do other thoughts rise. Only after the first person appears do the second and third persons appear; without the first person the second and third persons do not exist.⁵

PARAGRAPH SIX

Only by [means of] the investigation 'who am I?' will [our] mind subside [shrink, settle down, become still, disappear or cease to be]; the thought 'who am I?' [that is, the effort we make to attend to our essential being], having destroyed all other thoughts, will itself in the end be destroyed like a corpse-burning stick [that is, a stick that is used to stir a funeral pyre to ensure that the corpse is burnt entirely]. If other thoughts rise, without trying to complete them [we] must investigate to whom they have occurred. However many thoughts rise, what [does it matter]? As soon as each thought appears, if [we] vigilantly investigate to whom it has occurred, 'to me' will be clear [that is, we will be clearly reminded of ourself, to whom each thought occurs]. If [we thus] investigate 'who am I?' [that is, if we turn our attention back towards ourself and keep it fixed firmly, keenly and vigilantly upon our own essential self-conscious being in order to discover what this 'me' really is], [our] mind will return to its birthplace [the innermost core of our being, which is the source from which it arose]; [and since we thereby refrain from attending to it] the thought which had risen will also subside. When [we] practise and practise in this manner, to [our] mind the power to stand firmly established in its birthplace will increase [that is, by repeatedly practising turning our attention towards our mere being, which is the birthplace of our mind, our mind's ability to remain as mere being will increase]. When [our] subtle mind goes out through the portal of [our] brain and sense organs, gross names and forms [the thoughts or mental images that constitute our mind, and the objects that constitute this world] appear; when it remains in [our] heart [the core of our being], names and forms disappear. Only to [this state of] retaining [our] mind in [our] heart without letting [it] go outwards [is] the name '*ahamukham*' ['I-facing' or self-attention] or '*antarmukham*' ['inward-facing' or introversion] [truly applicable]. Only to [the state of] letting [it] go outwards [is] the name '*bahirmukham*' ['outward-facing' or extroversion] [truly applicable]. Only when [our] mind remains firmly established in [our] heart in this manner, will [our primal thought] 'I', which is the root [base, foundation or origin] of all thoughts, go [leave, disappear or cease to be], and will [our] ever-

⁴ The meaning of paragraph four is discussed on pages 202-5 and 371 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

⁵ The meaning of paragraph five is discussed on pages 213-26 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

existing [real] **self** alone shine. The place [that is, the state or reality] devoid of even a little [trace] of [our primal] thought 'I' is *svarupa* [our 'own form' or essential self]. That alone is called '*mauna*' [silence]. Only to [this state of] just being [is] the name '*jñana-drishti*' ['knowledge-seeing', that is, the experience of true knowledge] [truly applicable]. That [state] which is just being is only [the state of] making [our] mind to subside [settle down, melt, dissolve, disappear, be absorbed or perish] in *atma-svarupa* [our own essential self]. Besides [this state of non-dual being], these [states of dualistic knowledge] which are knowing the thoughts of others, knowing the three times [what happened in the past, what is happening now, and what will happen in future], and knowing what is happening in a distant place cannot be *jñana-drishti* [the experience of true knowledge].⁶

PARAGRAPH SEVEN

That which actually exists is only *atma-svarupa* [our own essential self]. The world, soul and God are *kalpanaigal* [imagination, mental creations or fabrications] in it [our essential self], like [the imaginary] silver [that we see] in a shell. These three [basic elements of relativity or duality] appear at the same time and disappear at the same time. [Our] *svarupa* [our 'own form' or essential self] alone is the world; [our] *svarupa* alone is 'I' [our mind or individual self]; [our] *svarupa* alone is God; everything is *siva-svarupa* [our essential self, which is *siva*, the absolute and only truly existing reality].⁷

PARAGRAPH EIGHT

To make the mind subside [permanently], there are no adequate means other than *vichara* [investigation, that is, the art of self-attentive being]. If restrained by other means, the mind will remain as if subsided, [but] will emerge again. Even by *pranayama* [breath-restraint], the mind will subside; however, [though] the mind remains subsided so long as the breath remains subsided, when the breath emerges [or becomes manifest] it will also emerge and wander under the sway of [its] *vasanas* [inclinations, impulses or desires]. The birthplace both of the mind and of the *prana* [the breath or life-force] is one. Thought alone is the *svarupa* [the 'own form'] of the mind. The thought 'I' alone is the first [or basic] thought of the mind; it alone is the ego. From where the ego arises, from there alone the breath also arises. Therefore when the mind subsides the *prana* also [subsides], [and] when the *prana* subsides the mind also subsides. However in sleep, even though the mind has subsided, the breath does not subside. It is arranged thus by the ordinance of God for the purpose of protecting the body, and so that other people do not wonder whether that body has died. When the mind subsides in waking and in *samadhi* [any of the various types of mental absorption that result from *yogic* or other forms of spiritual practice], the *prana* subsides. The *prana* is said to be the gross form of the mind. Until the time of death the mind keeps the *prana* in the body, and at the moment the body dies it [the mind] grabs and takes it [the *prana*] away. Therefore *pranayama* is just an aid to restrain the mind, but will not bring about *mano-nasa* [the annihilation of the mind].⁸

PARAGRAPH NINE

Just like *pranayama*, *murti-dhyana* [meditation upon a form of God], *mantra-japa* [repetition of sacred words such as a name of God] and *ahara-niyama* [restriction of diet, particularly the restriction of consuming only vegetarian food] are [just] aids that restrain the mind [but will not bring about its annihilation]. By both *murti-dhyana* and *mantra-japa* the mind gains one-pointedness [or concentration]. Just as, if [someone] gives a chain in the trunk of an elephant, which is always moving [swinging about trying to catch hold of something or other], that elephant will proceed holding it fast without [grabbing and] holding fast anything else, so indeed the mind, which is always moving [wandering about thinking of something or other], will, if trained in [the practice of thinking of] any one [particular] name or form [of God], remain holding it fast [without thinking

⁶ The meaning of paragraph six is discussed on pages 182-200, 216, 218, 444-5, 451-3, 505, 506-8 and 512 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

⁷ The meaning of paragraph seven is discussed on pages 201-2 and 274 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

⁸ The meaning of paragraph eight is discussed on pages 491-4 and 496-8 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

unnecessary thoughts about anything else]. Because the mind spreads out [scattering its energy] as innumerable thoughts, each thought becomes extremely weak. For the mind which has gained one-pointedness when thoughts shrink and shrink [that is, which has gained one-pointedness due to the progressive reduction of its thoughts] and which has thereby gained strength, *atma-vichara* [self-investigation, which is the art of self-attentive being] will be easily accomplished. By *mita sattvika ahara-niyama* [the restraint of consuming only a moderate quantity of pure or *sattvika* food], which is the best among all restrictions, the *sattva-guna* [the quality of calmness, clarity or 'being-ness'] of the mind will increase and [thereby] help will arise for self-investigation.⁹

PARAGRAPH TEN

Even though *vishaya-vasanas* [our latent impulses or desires to attend to things other than ourself], which come from time immemorial, rise [as thoughts] in countless numbers like ocean-waves, they will all be destroyed when *svarupa-dhyana* [self-attentiveness] increases and increases. Without giving room to the doubting thought, 'Is it possible to dissolve so many *vasanas* and be [or remain] only as self?', [we] should cling tenaciously to self-attentiveness. However great a sinner a person may be, if instead of lamenting and weeping, 'I am a sinner! How am I going to be saved?', [he] completely rejects the thought that he is a sinner and is zealous [or steadfast] in self-attentiveness, he will certainly be reformed [or transformed into the true 'form' of thought-free self-conscious being].¹⁰

PARAGRAPH ELEVEN

As long as *vishaya-vasanas* [latent impulses or desires to attend to anything other than ourself] exist in [our] mind, so long the investigation 'who am I?' is necessary. As and when thoughts arise, then and there it is necessary [for us] to annihilate them all by investigation [keen and vigilant self-attentiveness] in the very place from which they arise. Being [abiding or remaining] without attending to [anything] other [than ourself] is *vairagya* [dispassion] or *nirasa* [desirelessness]; being [abiding or remaining] without leaving [separating from or letting go of our real] self is *jñana* [knowledge]. In truth [these] two [desirelessness and true knowledge] are only one. Just as a pearl-diver, tying a stone to his waist and submerging, picks up a pearl which lies in the ocean, so each person, submerging [beneath the surface activity of their mind] and sinking [deep] within themselves with *vairagya* [freedom from desire or passion for anything other than being], can attain the pearl of self. If one clings fast to uninterrupted *svarupa-smarana* [self-remembrance] until one attains *svarupa* [one's own essential self], that alone [will be] sufficient. So long as enemies are within the fort, they will continue coming out from it. If [we] continue destroying [or cutting down] all of them as and when they come, the fort will [eventually] come into [our] possession.¹¹

PARAGRAPH TWELVE

God and *guru* are in truth not different. Just as that [prey] which has been caught in the jaws of a tiger will not return, so those who have been caught in the glance of *guru*'s grace will surely be saved by him and will never instead be forsaken; nevertheless, it is necessary [for them] to proceed [behave or act] unflinchingly according to the path that *guru* has shown.¹²

PARAGRAPH THIRTEEN

Being completely absorbed in *atma-nishtha* [self-abidance, the state of just being as we really are], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any thought other than *atma-chintana* [self-contemplation, the 'thought' of our own real self], is giving oneself to God. Even though we place whatever amount of burden upon God, that entire amount he will bear. Since one *paramesvara sakti* [supreme power of God] is driving all activities [that is, since it is causing and controlling

⁹ The meaning of paragraph nine is discussed on pages 493-502 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹⁰ The meaning of paragraph ten is discussed on pages 510-5, 526 and 554-5 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹¹ The meaning of paragraph eleven is discussed on pages 155-6, 222, 510 and 514-30 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹² The meaning of paragraph twelve is discussed on pages 473-6 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

everything that happens in this world], why should we always think, 'it is necessary [for me] to act in this way; it is necessary [for me] to act in that way', instead of being [calm, peaceful and happy] having yielded [ourselves together with our entire burden] to that [supreme controlling power]? Though we know that the train is carrying all the burdens, why should we who travel in it suffer by carrying our small luggage on our head instead of leaving it placed on that [train]?¹³

PARAGRAPH FOURTEEN

What is called happiness is only *svarupa* [the 'own form' or essential nature] of *atma* [self]; happiness and *atma-svarupa* [our own essential self] are not different. *Atma-sukha* [the happiness of self] alone exists; that alone is real. Happiness is not obtained from any of the objects of the world. We think that happiness is obtained from them because of our lack of discrimination. When [our] mind comes out, it experiences unhappiness. In truth, whenever our thoughts [or wishes] are fulfilled, it [our mind] turns back to its proper place [the core of our being, our real self, which is the source from which it arose] and experiences only the happiness of [our real] self. In the same way, at times of sleep, *samadhi* [a state of intense contemplation or absorption of mind] and fainting, and when a desired thing is obtained, and when termination occurs to a disliked thing [that is, when our mind avoids or is relieved from some experience that it dislikes], [our] mind becomes introverted and experiences only the happiness of self. In this way [our] mind wavers about without rest, going outwards leaving [our essential] self, and [then] turning [back] inwards. At the foot of a tree the shade is delightful. Outside the heat of the sun is severe. A person who is wandering outside is cooled by going into the shade. Emerging outside after a short while, he is unable to bear the heat, so he again comes to the foot of the tree. In this way he continues, going from the shade into the sunshine, and going [back] from the sunshine into the shade. A person who acts in this manner is someone lacking in discrimination. But a person of discrimination will not leave the shade. Similarly, the mind of a *jñani* [a person of true self-knowledge] does not leave *brahman* [the fundamental and absolute reality, which is our own essential being or self]. But the mind of an *ajñani* [a person lacking true self-knowledge] continues to undergo misery by roaming about in the world, and to obtain happiness by returning to *brahman* for a short while. What is called the world is only thought [because all that we know as the world is nothing but a series of mental images or thoughts that we have formed in our mind by our power of imagination]. When the world disappears, that is, when thought ceases, [our] mind experiences happiness; when the world appears, it experiences unhappiness.¹⁴

PARAGRAPH FIFTEEN

Just as in the mere presence of the sun, which rose without *iccha* [wish, desire or liking], *samkalpa* [volition or intention], [or] *yatna* [effort or exertion], a crystal stone [or magnifying lens] will emit fire, a lotus will blossom, water will evaporate, and people of the world will engage in [or begin] their respective activities, do [those activities] and subside [or cease being active], and [just as] in front of a magnet a needle will move, [so] *jivas* [living beings], who are caught in [the finite state governed by] *muttozhil* [the threefold function of God, namely the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the world] or *panchakrityas* [the five functions of God, namely creation, sustenance, dissolution, concealment and grace], which happen due to nothing but the special nature of the presence of God, move [busy themselves, perform activities, make effort or strive] and subside [cease being active, become still or sleep] in accordance with their respective *karmas* [that is, in accordance not only with their *prarabdha karma* or destiny, which impels them to do whatever actions are necessary in order for them to experience all the pleasant and unpleasant things that they are destined to experience, but also with their *karma vasanas*, their inclinations or impulses to desire, think and act in particular ways, which impel them to make effort to experience certain pleasant things that they are not destined to experience, and to avoid certain unpleasant things that they are destined to experience]. Nevertheless, he [God] is not *samkalpa sahitar* [a person

¹³ The meaning of paragraph thirteen is discussed on pages 24, 223-4, 460-1, 465-8, 471-2, 512-3 and 526 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹⁴ The meaning of paragraph fourteen is discussed on pages 92-4 and 203 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

connected with or possessing volition or intention]. Even one *karma* does not adhere to him [that is, he is not bound or affected by any *karma* or action whatsoever]. That is like world-actions [the actions happening here on earth] not adhering to [or affecting] the sun, and [like] the qualities and defects of the other four elements [earth, water, air and fire] not adhering to the all-pervading space.¹⁵

PARAGRAPH SIXTEEN

Since in every [true spiritual] treatise it is said that for attaining *mukti* [spiritual emancipation, liberation or salvation] it is necessary [for us] to restrain [our] mind, after knowing that *mano-nigraha* [holding down, holding within, restraining, subduing, suppressing or destroying our mind] is the ultimate intention [or purpose] of [such] treatises, there is no benefit [to be gained] by studying without limit [a countless number of] treatises. For restraining [our] mind it is necessary [for us] to investigate ourself [in order to know] who [we really are], [but] instead [of doing so] how [can we know ourself by] investigating in treatises? It is necessary [for us] to know ourself only by our own eye of *jñana* [true knowledge, that is, by our own selfward-turned consciousness]. Does [a person called] Raman need a mirror to know himself as Raman? [Our] 'self' is within the *pancha-kosas* [the 'five sheaths' with which we seem to have covered and obscured our true being, namely our physical body, our *prana* or life force, our mind, our intellect and the seeming darkness or ignorance of sleep], whereas treatises are outside them. Therefore investigating in treatises [hoping to be able thereby to know] ourself, whom we should investigate [with an inward-turned attention] having removed [set aside, abandoned or separated] all the *pancha-kosas*, is useless [or unprofitable]. Knowing our *yathartha svarupa* [our own real self or essential being] having investigated who is [our false individual] self, who is in bondage [being bound within the imaginary confines of our mind], is *mukti* [emancipation]. The name '*atma-vichara*' [is truly applicable] only to [the practice of] always being [abiding or remaining] having put [placed, kept, seated, deposited, detained, fixed or established our] mind in *atma* [our own real self], whereas *dhyana* [meditation] is imagining ourself to be *sat-chit-ananda brahman* [the absolute reality, which is being-consciousness-bliss]. At one time it will become necessary [for us] to forget all that [we] have learnt.¹⁶

PARAGRAPH SEVENTEEN

Just as no benefit [is to be gained] by a person, who should sweep up and throw away rubbish, scrutinising it, so no benefit [is to be gained] by a person, who should know [his or her real] self, calculating that the *tattvas*, which are concealing [our real] self, are this many, and scrutinising their qualities, instead of gathering up and rejecting all of them. It is necessary [for us] to consider the world [which is composed of these *tattvas*] like a dream.¹⁷

PARAGRAPH EIGHTEEN

Except that waking is *dirgha* [long lasting] and dream is *kshanika* [momentary or lasting for only a short while], there is no other difference [between these two imaginary states of mental activity]. To the extent to which all the *vyavaharas* [doings, activities, affairs or occurrences] that happen in waking appear [at this present moment] to be real, to that [same] extent even the *vyavaharas* that happen in dream appear at that time to be real. In dream [our] mind takes another body [to be itself]. In both waking and dream thoughts and names-and-forms [the objects of the seemingly external world] occur in one time [that is, simultaneously].¹⁸

PARAGRAPH NINETEEN

There are not two [classes of] minds, namely a good [class of] mind and a bad [class of] mind. Only

¹⁵ The meaning of paragraph fifteen is discussed on pages 281-4 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹⁶ The meaning of paragraph sixteen is discussed on pages 439-40, 526-7 and 533-54 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹⁷ The meaning of paragraph seventeen is discussed on pages 160-3 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

¹⁸ The meaning of paragraph eighteen is discussed on pages 129-36 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

vasanas [impulsions or latent desires] are of two kinds, namely *subha* [good or agreeable] and *asubha* [bad or disagreeable]. When [a person's] mind is under the sway of *subha-vasanas* [agreeable impulses] it is said to be a good mind, and when it is under the sway of *asubha-vasanas* [disagreeable impulses] a bad mind. However bad other people may appear to be, disliking them is not proper [or appropriate]. Likes and dislikes are both fit [for us] to dislike [or to renounce]. It is not proper [for us] to let [our] mind [dwell] much on worldly matters. It is not proper [for us] to enter in the affairs of other people [an idiomatic way of saying that we should mind our own business and not interfere in other people's affairs]. All that one gives to others one is giving only to oneself. If [everyone] knew this truth, who indeed would refrain from giving?¹⁹

PARAGRAPH TWENTY

If [our individual] self rises, everything rises; if [our individual] self subsides [or ceases], everything subsides [or ceases]. To whatever extent we behave humbly, to that extent there is goodness [or virtue]. If [we] are restraining [curbing, subduing, condensing, contracting or reducing our] mind, wherever [we] may be [we] can be [or wherever we may be let us be].²⁰

This document is a PDF copy of www.happinessofbeing.com/nan_yar.html.

¹⁹ The meaning of paragraph nineteen is discussed on pages 588-609 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).

²⁰ The meaning of paragraph twenty is discussed on pages 588 and 609-10 of [Happiness and the Art of Being](#).