

Ann Shaw is interviewed by Valeria Teles on the Quest for Well-Being podcast (September 2022) www.fitforjoy/podcast



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Q. In your own words, who am I speaking with today?

Namaste! My name is Ann Shaw and I am the author of a new book entitled *Who Am I?* I am also the editor of several books on the Teachings of Shri Ramakant Maharaj. He was my Final Teacher. Shri Ramakant Maharaj spent nearly twenty years with Shri Nisargadatta Maharaj, the world-famous, Self-Realized Master and Teacher. I had the great fortune and blessing to spend quality time with Ramakant Maharaj, who was also a Self-Realized Master, in Nashik, Maharashtra, India. In fact, my late husband and myself discovered this rare Jnani in 2013. On our first trip to Nashik, we spent almost six months with him. We were so blown away by the power of his simple, direct non-duality teachings that very soon after, we felt compelled to spread the word, thus enabling countless seekers from across the world to visit Shri Ramakant. His book, *Selfless Self*, was published in 2015. It has since gained the status of a spiritual classic and has been translated into 7 languages, including Japanese and Greek.

Some months before Shri Ramakant Maharaj left the body in 2018, he instructed me to continue to spread the teachings, guide seekers, write books and teach meditation.

One month before self-publishing “Who Am I?”, I also published another book entitled *Timeless Years With Shri Ramakant Maharaj 2012-2022* (this time by Ann & my husband, Charles Shaw). This book documents our amazing time with Maharaj, detailing the process we went through, the guidance we received and the extraordinary experiences we had, as well as the powerful teachings we encountered.

Q. What is the purpose of the human experience?

The purpose of the human experience is for us to see that, who we think we are, and the life we are living is an illusion, a dream. Our purpose is to wake up from this dream and realize our true, eternal nature which is happiness, love and peace. In other words, we are here to Self-Realize and that is what *Who Am I?* sets out to achieve. This book will help readers wake up from the dream and be free from the ego, from who they think they are. In this book, you are shown how to stop being controlled by the ego, the mind and the intellect and are guided to Self-knowledge and Self-mastery. If you follow the practices, you will be free from suffering, and all your concepts, including those of fear and death, all of which have had a stranglehold over you. If you absorb the knowledge and undergo the suggested practices, through this alchemical process, you will eventually find the answer to the perennial question “Who am I?” and realize your immortality.

The purpose of the human experience – whether we know it or not - is “Self-Realization” or put simply, waking up from the long dream of life. *Who Am I?* is aimed at a mainstream audience. It is a roadmap for everyone, irrespective of one’s particular stance, belief, religion or brand of spirituality. The fact is we have all been conditioned, programmed or brainwashed by society’s norms and pressures and therefore, we all need to be deconditioned and deprogrammed. This book reminds us of our true identity that is formless, eternal and unchanging. We are not separate individuals, persons or body-mind complexes who were born and will die one day. We are unborn and eternal. We are all one, connected in the one Essence, one Energy, one Spirit.

Q. At this time what is the purpose of your life?

The purpose at present is to disseminate the pure teachings of Advaita Vedanta or Non-duality and present various practices to demolish the ego. If seekers follow the process laid

out in *Who Am I?* their search will come to an end, guaranteed! I wish to let seekers know that Self-Realization is possible and not just for the few. And, it does not need to take a lifetime either!

Who Am I? differs from other “non-duality” books as it does not contain theory or diluted knowledge, like so many other books do today. The teachings it contains are the highest, as they originate from great sages who have shared them from their own direct experience – and not from books. Therefore, it is not just opinions or theoretical knowledge that you will find here, but Self-Knowledge! *Who Am I?* is a blueprint that shows you who you really are. It is a practical guide that clearly explains how you can be free and live happily in peace. You will find out that you are not a separate individual as you once thought, but realize instead, that we are all part of the same essence, interconnected in eternal Oneness.

These teachings differ from those offered by many contemporary teachers, who basically expound endless, often half-baked, theoretical knowledge, while at the same time, failing to guide their students to undergo the essential purification process that will dissolve the ego. Neo-Advaitins, in particular, omit to mention the importance and necessity of undergoing this clearing out process. They will often say that there is nothing to do because we are already free. And while it is true that we are free, and have always been free, the fact remains that we need to hammer the ego and dissolve all the illusory layers that are obscuring our true nature. These obstacles prevent us from knowing and experiencing the truth that we are, in fact, free. In a sense, they are starting at the end, instead of the beginning. The beginning means employing a method or practice that will hammer the ego in order to establish a solid foundation. If there is no cleansing process then any knowledge imparted from the teacher to the student will be ineffective. It will just sit on top of the ego, ready to be blown away by the slightest breeze. Knowledge can only be established if it is absorbed, and for it to be absorbed, the ground must be cleared first, so that the foundation stones of Reality can be laid, ready to withstand anything. If we still perceive the ground of our existence as the false ego or “I”, then, our foundations will shake with every calamity the world throws at us.

Another way in which this book differs from others is that if you, the reader or seeker, absorb the knowledge and follow the practice you will finish your search and be truly free and independent. You will become your own Teacher and Master. The role of a *bona fide* Teacher or authentic Master is to share the teachings and guide the student, by shining a light on the ego’s apparent and hidden presence. The teacher assists the student to become aware

of the illusory obstacles and then enables her to remove them, so that she can then uncover her true, eternal presence and be established in that Truth. Once this process has taken place, there is no further need for the teacher because the student becomes her own teacher. In other words, the outer Master who is Self-Realized guides the disciple to her Inner Master, and then, she is liberated, which means fully independent.

In today's world, those teachers who are not Self-Realized, but who claim that they are - sometimes make their students dependent on them, basically because they need followers to massage an ego that has not yet fully dissolved. It is not easy for young seekers to discriminate between authentic and fake teachers. It is even challenging for mature seekers, as some Teachers put on a very convincing show. It is not surprising, therefore, that seekers can easily fall into another trap, suddenly finding themselves caught up in another dream and becoming dependent on a teacher, master or guru! "Satsang" means "meeting in truth". However, the Satsang culture seems to have turned into something of a never ending circus which exploits genuine seekers. It has become more about entertainment and social gatherings rather than Truth.

The point I am making is that Satsang with an authentic Teacher is valuable for a period of time, however, it is not necessary to continue attending Satsang, *ad infinitum*, as many are doing. If the student has been thoroughly cooked then she has no further need of attending Satsangs or reading books. Now her work is about concentration and going deeper within to finally be established in Ultimate Reality. For this to happen, she needs to spend time alone, without distractions. At this stage, she should be listening to her Self only! As my Teacher says: "Have Satsang with yourself. That is the best Satsang".

Another important point which I have mentioned in the book is that in times of old, people would pray for guidance, now they are willing to pay, and sometimes large sums, too. All the great sages never charged money for sharing the knowledge as they knew it contaminated it. Again, my Teacher says: "Why charge money for knowledge that is your knowledge. It is innate; it is yours!"

So, to answer your question re: "What is my purpose now?" *Who Am I?* empowers seekers to become Masters. In other words, seekers must reach a conclusion, a full stop. As Nisargadatta Maharaj says: "We are not making you disciples, we are making you Masters. The problem is that many teachers or Gurus have turned "Satsangs" into lucrative careers, thus making themselves the focus of attention, instead of the teachings. The role of the Guru

or teacher is to be a medium or vehicle for the teachings. When the work is done – he or she should let the seeker go! My wish is to guide seekers to end their search and to help them be free and independent.

Q. What are some of the greatest misconceptions about happiness in your opinion?

As I say in *Who Am I?* We look for happiness in the world, from love, relationships, sex, marriage, family, work, money, status, prestige, entertainment, food, alcohol, drugs, music, travel, fast cars, big houses, clothes, possessions, sports, books, art, religion. The list is endless. None of these things can bring us permanent happiness. They can only offer us transient pleasures and temporary relief because they are all external sources.

Who Am I? shows you how to find permanent happiness from within. What you are looking for can only be found in you because you are the Ultimate Reality, the Source of happiness, peace and love.

The world and everything in it are impermanent, but you are permanent. You are immortal. When this Truth is realized, you can live without cares, anxieties, worries and fears. Imagine being happy and at peace all the time! It is yours for the taking! Imagine not having to keep searching because at long last, you know who you are! The beauty of this knowledge is that it is yours. You will fill the empty space you may feel now, with your innate Knowledge, Wisdom and Truth, and not someone else's. If you follow the Practice, you will be guided by your Inner Teacher, the one and only True Teacher, that is your Source.

Why not embark on this beautiful journey back to Reality? Hop on the direct line to Self-Knowledge. It's free of charge! You have nothing to lose, except all you imagine yourself to be, and that is an illusion. You have plenty to gain: causeless, permanent happiness and peace!

Q. What do you love most about being in a human body?

To be in a human body, yet knowing at the same time that we are not, is amazing! To know that we are unborn, timeless, eternal and that there is no such thing as death is a definite Wow! (Clap hands) The body is the medium through which we can know ourselves. The body is the sacred temple of the Spirit. Our bodies are separate but Spirit is One. There is only oneness and interconnectedness. All of this enables life to be lived spontaneously filled

with gratitude, happiness, peace and love. And best of all, our bodies enable us to worship
That through which we know ourselves!

Q. What is the meaning of freedom to you? What is it to be free?

As my Teacher used to say: “You are free as a bird. You were never in bondage” meaning we are free now, and we have always been free. But if you think you are a separate person, a body-mind you will remain in your mental prison not knowing that you are already free.

So, how can you experience freedom now? This is where the useful tool of Self-enquiry comes in. What is Self-Enquiry and why is it important? Self-Enquiry basically means questioning all the ideas you have about yourself and discriminating between what is transient and what is permanent, what is illusion and what is reality. It is important because as long as you believe you are a separate individual or person, you will continue to suffer because your needs and desires will never be satisfied. Self-Enquiry frees you from your illusory, mental limitations, disempowers and reduces your thoughts and brings about the disappearance of the illusory thinker. The pseudo-ego only survives because you give so much attention and interest to the thoughts without any discrimination. All thought is unreal and all thought is fleeting. We are prior to thought, prior to words.

Through the practice of Self-Enquiry you will realize your true nature by eliminating everything you are not and eventually, you will find out that freedom, happiness and peace are all within you. This will bring your search to an end.

We can only be free with the death of the ego, when the dream or spell we have all been under is shattered.

Q. What is inner peace to you?

Inner Peace reveals itself once all the clutter that has been taking up space has been removed. Part Four of *Who Am I?* is called “Bootcamp”. This section contains the practices that will remove all the illusory layers that are covering up your Presence, your Inner Peace. At Bootcamp we are introduced to 4 practices, namely, Self-Enquiry, Mantra, Meditation and Kirtan.

These tools are designed to remove all the baggage that is causing dispeace. It is a purification process that will dismantle all the ideas and notions you have about yourself. It will hammer the ego! You will begin to experience inner peace as you practice Self-

attentiveness, staying with the True Self that you are while getting into the habit of standing guard and intercepting the thoughts as they arise. Stop them in their tracks, before they have had a chance to leave their impressions or begin to multiply and disturb the peace. The practice gets easier the more you do it. We are training ourselves to stop our attention going outwards so that we can keep it focussed on the Self.

Once the cleansing process has taken place and you are established in your true nature, nothing at all will be able to disturb that peace that you are.

Q. What is it to be spiritual and what is spirituality?

We are formless, energy, power, spirit. To be spiritual just means to know that we are not the body-mind complex but Spirit. My Teacher, Shri Ramakant has a beautiful, pragmatic answer to the second part of this question that you ask – “What is spirituality?” He says: “The purpose of spirituality is to remove the illusion and to remind you of your real identity. Once that has been done, then throw spirituality away”.

Q. So, why did you choose to do what you do?

I did not choose anything. It chose me. Whatever has unfolded in life is the way it was meant to happen. Relatively speaking, everything happens spontaneously while in the absolute sense nothing happens at all because our essence, nature or reality is immutable.

If we look at the bigger picture, we are all seekers whether we are aware of it or not. We are all searching for self-fulfilment, for that something that is missing, that something that will make us feel complete and whole. When we manifested in the form, we were disconnected from the Source. And as the veil of Maya, illusion appeared, we forgot about our real identity, saw ourselves as separate individuals and started taking the world to be real. Believing ourselves to be somebody, an “I” amongst many other “I’s”, we set out to carve a life out for ourselves. However, contrary to all the choices we may think we have made to find our niche in the world, our path was already set out, our alignment in place. We have been searching for love, happiness, peace, truth and fulfilment, in and from, the material world. Yet all the time, the divine spark that is within us all has been propelling us forward to keep seeking, sometimes pushing us to our limits, forcing the hamster to fall off its wheel – if only for a short pause, a moment’s reflection, so that we can take a look at ourselves and ask the question: “Who Am I?” And then we may realize that all our busyness is an escape from beingness! And when the time comes and we are ripe, we get a glimpse, an understanding

that everything we have been searching for is within us. As Nisargadatta Maharaj said, “We are searching for the home we never left.”

Q. How did you become a writer?

In the Preface to my book *Who Am I?* I mention a little bit about that. I was fascinated with the question “Who am I?” for as long as I can remember. I felt like a misfit in the world and therefore it seemed natural to spend a lot of time in solitude and reflection, trying to work out who I was, and why I was here. I enjoyed scribbling some of my musings in diaries, and then as I grew up, I kept a journal. I also began writing spiritual poetry.

As a child I felt especially at peace when I attended the Latin church service of “Benediction” which somehow mysteriously touched and transported me. Even though I did not understand a word of Latin, I felt at home in this beautiful, mystical atmosphere, filled with incense, bell ringing and gentle chanting. I remember that when I returned home, I would try and jot something down in my diary that had touched me, something indescribable I had felt. Even at that young age I knew I was in the presence of something sacred.

I kept a diary recording various spiritual experiences – and the highs and lows of my journey for years, as well as poetry which came naturally.

Finding the meaning of life became for me the most crucial topic. Driven by a fiery determination, and in hot pursuit of answers I devoured as many spiritual books as I could and also pursued my search academically. The more I read and studied, the more I could relate to various teachings, east and west, and learn from fellow pilgrims who had also been searching for truth. I found writing to be an enjoyable means of expression, and a great help in trying to clarify for myself where I had come from, where I was going, and what it was all about. Some years later, I took a course in journalism.

Fast forward to 2013! When we met Shri Ramakant Maharaj, he instructed me to put together a book on his Teachings. Having a background which combined an extensive grounding in spirituality as well as editing/writing skills, I was equipped for the task of producing *Selfless Self* and subsequent books for my Teacher, such as *Be With You*, *Ultimate Truth*, etc.

Fast forward again to 2022, I finished two books this year, namely, *Timeless Years With Shri Ramakant Maharaj 2012-2022* written in a journalistic style, and the book we have been talking about today *Who Am I?*

Q. What was the inspiration, intention, and purpose of writing your book?

I wrote *Who Am I?* first and foremost because I was instructed to do so by my Teacher. Such was Ramakant Maharaj's infinite compassion that he has always been keen to spread the teachings to as many seekers as possible, so that they can be free from suffering, fear and death, know their true nature and be happy.

So, after the publication of *Selfless Self*, which Maharaj was extremely pleased with, he expressed his wish for me to write a book entitled "*Who Am I?*" only, this time presented in layman's language so that anyone would be able to understand it and wake up from the dream. He also wanted me to integrate the teachings with references to contemporary culture, to enable readers to easily relate to the book and digest the teachings.

Ramakant Maharaj often said that we cannot force spiritual knowledge or these teachings on anyone, but we can present them as an alternative to the usual perspective on life and its linear narrative such as growing up, education, work, marriage, family, illness, old age, death. So, this is what I have tried to do with *Who Am I?*

My intention was to present the teachings in a simplistic way so that everyone who is satisfied or unsatisfied with life as it is, knows there is another perspective from which to view life. Granted, many people are happy with what they have in the worldly sense. The world may provide them with happiness and satisfaction. They may not wish to know about an alternative while they are steeped in the dream and really enjoying it. But as we know, nothing remains permanently idyllic. The alternative view will speak to them, too, when their once, happy, flourishing bubble bursts and things no longer continue to work out as planned!

For those of you who are convinced that there must be something more... for those who are currently caught up in the treadmill of life and have seen through the falsehood and monotony of it all, this book, *Who Am I?* is definitely for you.

Seeking ends here! *Who am I?* will finish your search once and for all. This book is unlike any other book as it takes you beyond knowledge. It contains the highest Teachings, which, combined with various Practices, will uproot all the illusion and establish you, in, and as, your true nature. You will be liberated from the mistaken notion you have of being a separate individual who was born one day, and will die some other day. When you realize your true, eternal nature, that you are not the body-mind, that it is only the body that dies, and not

“you”, the fear of death will spontaneously vanish, along with every other fear. You are unborn!

This book shows you how to find permanent happiness from within. What you are looking for can only be found in you because you are the Ultimate Reality, the Source of happiness, peace and love.

The simple and powerful non-dual Teachings and Practices explained in this book freed me from the illusory “I”. My search was finally over! Yours can be over, too! You can put an end to your suffering and enjoy permanent happiness. All your fears will subside when you realize for yourself that you are unborn and therefore immortal.

The purpose of *Who Am I?* was to put together a short, practical book, a step-by-step guide to liberation. *Who Am I?* is clearly structured into 6 parts and broken down into short paragraphs to make it an easy read. Part One is called “Who am I?” and questions whether who we think we are is in fact true, or is it a dream, an illusion? It is a short intro to Self-Enquiry. Part 2 “Be all ears” explains how we became caught up in the illusion through conditioning, programming, etc. Part 3 “I am unborn” elucidates on our true nature that is happiness, peace, love and eternal. That if we uncover our true nature, then our search for meaning, happiness, peace and love will come to an end. When we realize our true nature, the conviction arises that there is no death, that we are immortal. We will be free from anxiety and fear and find permanent happiness. Part 4 is entitled “Bootcamp” Having been presented with the truth of your existence, the knowledge of your essential nature, we now move onto the practice.

Parts 5 & 6 unite the head with the heart and knowledge with devotion. The process ends with “Wedded Bliss”, the “True Yoga”, where the longing for Transcendent Truth and the longing for Transcendent Love, converge and unite in One Truth, One Love.

If you absorb the knowledge and follow the practices, you will be liberated from the small self or ego-mind. And that means you will be free from suffering, fear and death. When you know that you are not the body-mind and your loved ones are not either, if one of them falls sick and expires, you will not experience a sense of loss and grieve. You will know that all that has taken place is a transition from the form back to the formless that we are. There will not be any place for suffering and grief. Energy cannot be lost, it can only be transmuted. And when it is time for your body to expire, you will not be fearful, anxious or sad because you will have already woken up from the dream and died to the ego that creates these illusory

concepts or ghosts which are designed to frighten you. If you prepare yourself well, the transition will be a happy event. All these things that I have mentioned, further explain the purpose behind writing *Who Am I?*

Q. Where can we find more information about you, your work, products, services, and your future projects?

Who Am I? is available from amazon and other bookstores.

I have two Websites: www.whoamibook.co.uk and www.annshaw.space

I also have social media pages and accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter.

Please see video extracts of my book on my YouTube channel and TikTok account.

I also manage the official website and Facebook for my Teacher Shri Ramakant Maharaj – www.ramakantmaharaj.net

Namaste! Thank you for listening.