

Facets of Self-enquiry

Part One: Meaning and Method of the 'I-feeling'

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A grasp of Self-enquiry is usually best obtained by studying some of the classic books on Bhagavan's teachings.¹ A consolidated understanding so arrived at has been outlined in the article, 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Parts 1 & 2, *Mountain Path*, July and October, 2010. The present article extends that discussion further.

We had noted that 'I-feeling' is the key element in the practice of Self-enquiry. The intuitive meaning of this term is usually considered self-evident,² yet a good number of seekers express serious difficulty

¹ Notable examples include: doctrinal works by Bhagavan, like *Who am I?*, *Self-enquiry*, and *Upadesa Saram*; chronicles like *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, and *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*; and expository works like Godman's *Be as You Are*, and *Maharshi's Gospel*.

² For instance, Sadhu Om and David Godman use this term in their *The Path of Sri Ramana* (Part 1, Ch.7, last para), and *Be As You Are* (Ch.5, para 2) respectively, without finding it necessary to explain it.

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in comprehending it. We shall therefore, at first, attempt a full-length explanation of the term in the following pages. We shall then examine the methods for practice of the 'I-feeling'. In Parts Two and Three of subsequent issues of the journal, we shall see how *sadhana* along these lines might draw to a conclusion.

The gist of the previous article is given at the outset to refresh the reader's memory. There is a minor modification in the nomenclature (as at footnote 3), which simplifies the presentation of the concept. Any further clarifications may be sought by reference to that article.

A Recap on 'Understanding Self-enquiry'

Self-enquiry proceeds in three steps. At first, we put a halt to the existing stream of thoughts and arrive at their root, the 'I-thought'. The second step calls for investigation of the source of this I-thought. This leads us to a state of abidance in 'I', which is the sentient part of the I-thought in its form as 'I-am-the-body', etc. During this 'I-abidance', some thoughts may occur without disrupting it. They are classed as 'non-intrusive'. The *experience* of I-abidance, in the presence or absence of these thoughts, is what comes to be known as the 'I-feeling'.³ Our *sadhana* now consists in holding on to the I-abidance that is fundamental to this 'I-feeling', without concern for the presence or absence of the said thoughts. If, during this practice, distractive (i.e., intrusive) thoughts intervene, the I-abidance is lost, and we revert once again to the investigation of the I-thought to regain I-abidance.⁴

As we keep holding to the I-abidance, the weaker and the medium-strength *vasanas* are eliminated, resulting in a gradual transformation

³ In the earlier article, 'I-feeling' was meant to refer to abidance in subject-I alone. We now extend it to include abidance in particularised-I and undifferentiated-I as well. (This, incidentally, accords with Sadhu Om's usage of the term in *The Practice of Sri Ramana*). And, we shall not ordinarily label 'I-feeling' as 'impure' or 'pure', since either can change into the other any time during the practice.

⁴ 'I' is *aham* (or pure-I). 'I-thought' is *aham-vritti*. 'I-abidance' is, idiomatically, *aham-sphurana* (or *sphurana*); and 'I-feeling' is *aham-anubhuti* (experience of 'I'). Bhagavan regards 'I' as the energy (*Sakti*) of the Self. Vide 'Spiritual Instruction' (*Upadesa Manjari*), Ch. III, §5, *Collected Works*, p.67 (2002).

of 'I'— from subject-I to particularized-I to undifferentiated-I.⁵ From the point of view of *sadhana*, it is immaterial to us what these different forms of 'I' are. Our concern needs only be to hold onto the I-abidance, whatever be the form the 'I' takes at the time. We continue thus until we attain Self-abidance. The Self-abidance being non-dual, there is no further scope for us to expend any effort.⁶ These proceedings of step-2 can be summarised graphically thus:

I-thought → I-abidance [*subject-I* → *particularized-I* → *undifferentiated-I*] → Self-abidance⁷

The third step of Self-enquiry consists in remaining in Self-abidance as long and as often as possible, till all residual *vasanas* are extinguished. Thus, while step-2 leads to Self-abidance, step-3 obtains Liberation.

We may look upon 'I-abidance' as the actual happening within and 'I-feeling' as the outer experience of it (like an item unpacked and packed respectively). So, when we say 'I-feeling', we indirectly refer to I-abidance. In the following, we shall be using such indirect reference to I-abidance wherever it seems to better register with our mind.

Getting to Know the 'I-feeling'

There is often an inadequate appreciation of the nature of 'I-thought' and 'I-feeling' among many seekers. On account of this, they mistake the 'I-thought' to be very well known, and 'I-feeling' to be unknown. Actually, it ought to be the other way round.

Let us first take a look at the 'I-thought'. When a boy answers his teacher's roll call saying "(I am) present, madam", by 'I' what he means primarily is his body. Apart from this 'I-am-the-body' idea, he might also

⁵ See 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part 2, *MP*, October 2010, p.15 for the meaning of these terms. The exact manner of occurrence of these transformations could be a little different from the simple scheme presented here. We shall consider those particulars in Part Three.

⁶ *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §295, p.257, (9/ed.), 1994.

⁷ Alternatively, these transformations may be looked upon as:

Thought → Feeling → Being
 Duality → Non-duality/Duality → Non-duality
 Contaminated-I (ego) → Pure-I ('I') → True-I (Self)

have other ideas such as ‘I-am-so-and-so (by name)’, ‘I-am-a-student-(of-this-class)’ etc. Such multiple identities occur routinely in our everyday life. During the course of a day, a man might think himself to be his body, mind, a husband, a father, a commuter, a colleague, a diner, a citizen, etc. A plurality of such identities, changing from moment to moment,⁸ lie in a jumble and make up his I-thought, which falsely operates as his ‘I’, whereas his sense of ‘I’ actually belongs to the sentient part *common* to all those identities,⁹ and is relatively changeless. Thus the ‘I-thought’ is like an imposter, and a ‘black box’, the contents of which the person has no clear knowledge of.

Let us now consider the ‘I-feeling’. For comparison’s sake, let us first take the *feeling* of anger. Anger may usually manifest externally in the form of harsh words, irritability, minor acts of violence, etc. The manifestations themselves are not anger, since a person could be sitting outwardly calmly in a chair, and yet be seething with anger inside. The question is how do we describe the anger occurring in such a person, so that another who, hypothetically, never knew anger, could understand it? There is perhaps no way. Similar is the case with ‘I-feeling’. If one has, hypothetically speaking, never experienced it, there would be no way to convey its meaning to him.¹⁰ Fortunately, we all have experience of ‘I-feeling’ on many occasions,¹¹ and so, the best way to understand it is to recollect *vividly* one of those experiences.

The *implicit* ‘I-feeling’¹² occurs briefly at times during a day, but mostly in a weak form, which passes our notice. So, we need to pick an example

⁸ Even the I-thought of the form ‘I-am-this-body’ does not represent the same entity all the time, because the body changes from moment to moment, and over the years.

⁹ See the preliminary discussion of ‘I-thought’ in ‘Understanding Self-enquiry’, Part 2, *op. cit.*, pp.10-13.

¹⁰ “Experience cannot be conveyed through words.” Sri Nisargadatta, *I am That*, (Tr. Maurice Frydman), Ch. 98, p.514, The Acorn Press, (1973). See also ‘Understanding Self-enquiry’ Part 2, footnote 9.

¹¹ See ‘Understanding Self-enquiry’, Part 2, paragraph 2 on p.20.

¹² We say ‘I-feeling’ is implicit if it occurs in subordination to a thought. It is explicit if it sustains by itself irrespective of any co-existing thoughts. The explicit kind alone counts in Self-enquiry. *Ibid*, p.12.

where the 'I-feeling' is relatively strong. A typical case occurs in 'brooding', which practically all of us are familiar with. When a great misfortune befalls us, especially due to our own folly, we brood over it for a long time. Thoughts come endlessly, and we find too they are accompanied by a strong feeling of 'I' which we experience as our immediate presence, then and there. We cannot fail to notice it. That experience of 'I' is the 'I-feeling'.

A striking example of *explicit* 'I-feeling' occurs in devotion. Most of us, seekers in *jnana-marga*, are known to practise daily *puja* (or prayer), seeking the Guru's blessings on our *sadhana*.¹³ If we are sincere and regular in our *puja*, we reach quite high levels of devotion at such times,¹⁴ even if the *puja* be a short one. When we do *namaskara* to the Guru with a *pure* heart, it is implied that we had left behind all contaminants (predicates) of the ego beforehand. Our *pure-I* then comes to the fore and stands in a one-to-one relation with the Guru. In that 'bipolar' state (which represents the state of intense *bhakti*), all that we need to do to sight our 'I' is turn our gaze internally to 'where we are' at that juncture.¹⁵ Instantly, we experience the 'I-feeling', which is immediate and distinct,¹⁶ in sharp contrast to the I-thought that is distant and non-specific.

¹³ On the imperative of such prayer to the Guru, see *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, N.R. Narayana Aiyer, Ch. I.15, p.33, (1996). Since we, as *sadhakas* in *jnana-marga*, subscribe to the idea that the world is unreal, we will be deemed to work at cross-purposes if we ask for worldly boons from the Guru.

¹⁴ "Prayer when daily offered for spiritual advancement, by itself, becomes *tapas*." Ibid, Ch. I-17, p.37.

¹⁵ Alternatively we may view it thus: the *feeling* 'I-am-the-devotee', a form of the ego that occurs at such times, is highly *sattvic* (spiritually charged) as compared to a *thought* like 'I-am-a-person' etc. prevailing in normal times. The space between its predicate and subject is therefore transparent to the intellect, and it suffices for the intellect to merely look in the direction of 'I' for instant I-abidance to result.

¹⁶ Several devotees who routinely do *puja* or conventional meditation for long periods report that they go into some kind of a trance, in which they do not know what is happening, and that they become conscious of themselves only after they come out of it. (Bhagavan calls it 'latent state' or *laya* in *Talks*, §138, p.122). If, such people can, by prior design, break their trance to find within themselves 'where they are' at that moment (of breaking), they will be able to realize an intense and intimate kind of 'I-feeling' briefly, such as the one described in 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part 2, p.12. See also *Talks*, §63, p.69.

The novelty of experience of *explicit* I-feeling at first rouses our curiosity to such an extent that we try to observe it more and more, but this mental activity disrupts and dissipates it. So, our experience lasts only briefly at first. With repetitive practice, the novelty wears down and the experience begins to linger.

Once we come to know the 'I-feeling' clearly, we realize that it occurs within us at times during a day in the implicit form. The 'I-feeling' is thus within the ambit of experience of all of us without exception. Academically, we might describe it as a *feeling or experiencing of our own immediate presence* (existence, or being) *as ourselves* ('I-am'), *here and now*. The 'presence' is not of any predicative adjunct like the body, but of our innermost sense of 'I'. It is the 'I-in-itself', the so-called *noumenon*, as discerned by our mind.¹⁷ It is not the Self, but an early manifestation of It, termed 'pure-I' by Bhagavan. It is the only thing about us that has not been acquired by us from the outside world, and is ever inherent in us. Elsewhere, the 'I-feeling' is referred to variously as 'I-consciousness', 'I-awareness', 'I-am-feeling', 'I-am-ness', 'self-awareness', 'being still',¹⁸ 'witness consciousness', etc. It is introversion (*antar-mukhata*) in the truest sense.

Methods of Approach for the Practice of 'I-feeling'

The method a person chooses for practice of the 'I-feeling' would depend on his/her intuitive abilities. Seekers with 'normal' levels of intuition are likely to find the term 'I-feeling' self-explanatory, or would at most require a little verbal explanation to be able to intuit it *directly*.¹⁹ When Bhagavan urged us to 'investigate the source of

¹⁷ It is a contradiction in terms to consider the 'noumenon' (subject) as an *object* of the mind. But it is inevitable, since I-abidance combines the characteristics of both duality and non-duality.

¹⁸ See 'Spiritual Instruction', op. cit., Chapter II, p.55, where Bhagavan states that the state of 'being still' is not an effortless state. It means it is only I-abidance, and not Self-abidance. The term 'silence' is at times taken to mean the same as I-abidance (ibid), but more often as Self-abidance. See *Talks*, §122, p.111.

¹⁹ One of the main objectives of *sravana*, the first step in *advaitic* practice, may be said to be to bring the student to this level. Cf. *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, Sadhu Natanananda, Scene 1, §3, p.10, (2005).

the I-thought' in Self-enquiry, he invariably meant that we use this method of *direct* intuition.²⁰

Seekers who do not feel sure of their intuitive abilities can resort to certain *indirect* methods. These methods rely on taking them into a spiritually charged state in which they can capture the 'I-feeling' from close range. If these too, do not suit their preference, they may use what we shall call the '*mechanical* methods'. These methods permit them to experience the 'I-feeling' even before they know what it is for sure. They come to identify their experience as 'I-feeling' by and by. The *indirect* and the *mechanical* methods, too, have Bhagavan's sanction, as we shall note later.

Method of *Direct* Intuition

This method is so called because, when we investigate the source of the I-thought, we instinctively leave the thought-plane, and directly plunge into the causal in search of our 'I'. For this purpose, we use a query like "Whence am I?" which is equivalent to asking ourselves, "How do I know that 'I am', without using any reasoning that rests on the premise 'I am'?" Our mind then turns inward, cognizes our 'I' within, and abides in it.

When we enter the causal domain, we may not initially, be able to avoid coming up against one or other of the (unseen) *vasanas*. A *vasana*, by its very nature, generates a thought.²¹ It means we are ricocheted back into the thought-plane. We then repeat our effort to re-enter the causal plane. With practice, we learn to instinctively avoid the *vasanas* and reach our 'I', whereupon our intellect finds instant abidance in it. The experience of this I-abidance is inferred by us as 'I-feeling'.

During our search for 'I' in the causal domain, there is no point at which our intellect can take a perch and obtain a glimpse of the 'I' before reaching it. The 'I' comes to be cognized suddenly, when the intellect reaches it and finds abidance in it. The appearance

²⁰ Vide *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 8-10-1946, p.281, (1989), where Bhagavan, while describing this method, refers to it as the 'direct method'. See also, *Upadesa Saram*, v.17.

²¹ Vide 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part 1, *MP*, July 2010, p.14.

(*sphurana*) of 'I' (*aham*) is thus always 'spontaneous', as noted in the former article.²²

Bhagavan expects the followers of Self-enquiry to have a prior comprehension of its underlying principles through *sravana* or self-study.²³ Such seekers are expected to be capable of *direct* intuition. This might explain why Bhagavan never undertook to elaborate on the manner of pursuing the query 'Whence am I?' except in very general terms. He takes the stand that the seeker cannot deny that 'he *is*', and so he ought to know where to look within for his 'I'.

Whatever be the method initially followed for 'I-feeling', when we gain proficiency in it, we find ourselves switching to *direct* intuition, since the latter works fastest and comes to us naturally.

Indirect Methods: Conventional Japa

Bhagavan has observed, "Those who cannot reach the source of 'I' along the path of *jnana* may reach it by the inward watching of the source of the subtle *japa*-sound."²⁴

Japa is often practised as repetitive utterance of a *mantra* with concentration. It is best if we have a Guru-given *mantra*. In its absence, we may adopt one based preferably on the name of our deemed Guru.²⁵ When we practise the *japa* regularly for, say, a couple of months, it will tend to go on within us, by itself, almost all the time.²⁶ We may then use it for practice of the 'I-feeling' in the manner taught by Bhagavan to Nayana: "If a *mantra* is repeated, and attention directed to the source whence the *mantra*-sound is produced, the

²² 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part 2, pp.13-14, 18. *Sphurana* is literally 'flashing', 'throbbing'.

²³ "Unless intellectually known how to practise it? Learn it intellectually first ..."
Talks, §40, p.44.

²⁴ Bhagavan's verse 12 in *The Garland of Guru's Sayings* (at v.706). See also *Talks*, §606, p.559.

²⁵ A typical *mantra* that might appeal to Bhagavan's followers is '[Om] *Namo Ramanaya*', mentioned by Sri Muruganar in his *Ramana Puranam* (Tr. Robert Butler et al), v.1-2, p.15, (2008).

²⁶ See, for instance, *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, op. cit., Ch. I.7, p.21.

mind will be absorbed in that.”²⁷ In our present context, we may take the term ‘that’ to mean ‘I’. The ego-feeling ‘I-am-the-doer-of-*japa*-(of-the-Guru)’ that reigns when the *japa* runs deep, is very *sattvic* (spiritually charged), and hence, as in the case of *puja* mentioned at footnote 15, it becomes possible for our intellect to sight the ‘I’ at the far end of the causal space, resulting in ‘I-feeling’.²⁸ If, after a time, the ‘I-feeling’ is lost due to intrusive thoughts, the *japa* starts *automatically*,²⁹ which saves us from roving distraction. We are thus assured of an efficacious method for regaining the ‘I-feeling’ every time it is lost.³⁰ With ‘I-feeling’ thus retrieved repetitively, the problem of ‘novelty of experience’ is got over quickly, and the ‘I-feeling’ tends to linger longer each time.

Even when we are actually using *direct* intuition, when thoughts prove particularly troublesome on a day, we can consider temporarily switching to the method of *japa*.

Mechanical Methods

Two of these methods may be identified, namely, *japa* of ‘I’ and proximity of a *jnani*.

1. *Japa* of ‘I’

When we dwell on the ‘I’-thought continuously with concentration, it soon leads us to the ‘I-feeling’. This forms the basis of the method of the *japa* of ‘I’. Bhagavan advises this method to anyone who is capable

²⁷ Vide *Self-Realization*, B.V. Narasimha Swami, Ch. XV, p.90, (1996). Nayana was an adept in the use of *mantras* (he was called *mantresvara* for this reason), and that is probably why Bhagavan chose to teach him this method in addition to *direct* intuition.

²⁸ It is often said that *bhakti* is *jnana-mata* (mother of *jnana*), since its prior practice in this or past lives is essential for entry into the *jnana* path. See, for instance, Bhagavan’s reference to *upasana* (*puja*) and *japa* in *Talks*, §374, p.341. The underlying logic may be gleaned from the present examples of *puja* and *japa*.

²⁹ After some practice, the *japa* may at times go on even while we hold the ‘I-feeling’. It will then appear as if we (our ‘I’) have become indistinguishable from the *japa*. See *Talks*, §31, p.39.

³⁰ When a kite flown by a boy is lost behind clouds, he tugs at its string to get it back into view. In the same way, when ‘I’ is lost behind the ‘clouds’ of thoughts, the ‘string’ of *japa* serves to bring it back.

of doing ‘nothing more’.³¹ The logic here would seem to be that since the mind is constantly driven to the idea ‘I’, and since an unvarying, intimate ‘I’ that is sought is not furnished by the I-thought (which is like a ‘black box’), the mind is instinctively led to look inside it for the actual ‘I’.

The method consists in doing vocal or mental *japa* of ‘I’ incessantly.³² Depending on the seeker’s maturity, it may take a few seconds to several minutes for the ‘I-feeling’ to appear. Even if the seeker is unable to *identify* it immediately, it will dawn on him in due course that he is actually holding the ‘I-feeling’, and that it has actually been with him for some time. Thereafter he can revert to the *japa* to regain the ‘I-feeling’ when it is lost.

Bhagavan has said that ‘I’ is the *first* name of God, and is the greatest of all *mantras*, even greater than *Om*.³³ So, the *japa* of ‘I’ must be the greatest of all *jas*. An alternative to the *japa* of ‘I’ is the *japa* of “Who am I?”.³⁴ It is understood here that in either case, the seeker utters the *japa* in the language that he feels most comfortable in.

2. Proximity of a *Jnani*

A *jnani*’s presence benefits all people,³⁵ but the greatest benefit perhaps accrues to the sincere seeker who faces an uphill task in correctly comprehending the meaning of ‘I’ and obtaining I-abidance. Both the problems are instantly solved when the *jnani* bestows his Grace on him by a look or through silence. The intuitive *understanding* so gained remains with the seeker, whether or not he continues to be near the sage thereafter.

³¹ “If you can do nothing more ... continue saying ‘I, I’ to yourself mentally all the time, ... whatever work you may be doing ...” *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 28.6.1946, p.229. See also Entries of 8.5.1946, p.193 and 24.11.1946, p.296.

³² “Think ‘I’ ‘I’ ‘I’ and hold to that one thought to the exclusion of all others.” *Talks*, §266, p.222. For a preliminary outline of the method, see ‘Understanding Self-enquiry’, Part 2, p.14.

³³ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entries of 28.6.1946, p.229; 8.5.1946, p.193; 22.11.1945 Afternoon, p.42.

³⁴ *Talks*, §72, p.77. See also, *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch. I.7, p.22.

³⁵ See, for instance, *Talks*, §20, p.16; §210, p.177.

For the *practice* of ‘I-feeling’, however, the continued proximity of the sage confers an unparalleled advantage. The mind, which resists introversion at other places, comes within easy control in the environs of a sage, and gets fixed in the Heart.³⁶ Many devotees of Bhagavan vouchsafe for this fact.³⁷ As regards seekers who are separated from him by time and space, Bhagavan says that what is important is not the physical proximity of the sage, but mental proximity which transcends time and space. He has given ample testimony to this fact during his time and after.³⁸

The proximity to a *jnani* is undoubtedly the most efficacious of all the methods for attaining I-abidance (or Self-abidance). If we do not find it accessible to us, it can only be because we are unable to believe sufficiently that he is very much with us ‘*now, here*’.

Identifying the ‘I-feeling’: Some Practical Situations

Ups and downs are common in *sadhana*. So, at times it may so happen that the ‘I-feeling’ is rather weak. There can then be a little confusion as to whether what we are holding is really ‘I-feeling’ or I-thought. One possible course in such a situation is to merely continue holding what we are holding, *with concentration*. If it happens to be I-thought, it will give rise to the ‘I-feeling’ after a little time, as noted under *japa* of ‘I’.³⁹

‘I-feeling’ is such a common occurrence in our life, that it is unthinkable that anyone should be ignorant of it. The real problem with at least some of those who profess their ignorance of ‘I-feeling’ could be lack of understanding, due to which even when they hold the ‘I-feeling’, they confuse it with the I-thought, and try to investigate

³⁶ Advanced *sadhakas* can even experience Self-abidance. Vide *Talks*, §141, p.123; §54, p.58; *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, op. cit., Scene 6, §21, p.36.

³⁷ Typical examples may be found in *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, op. cit., pp.5-6.

³⁸ *Talks*, §503, p.485; *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, pp.7-8.

³⁹ The *japa* of ‘I’ involves no deliberate attempt at *enquiry* into the source of the I-thought, and so perhaps deserves to be called ‘self-attention’ rather than ‘Self-enquiry’. In practice, however, ‘self-attention’ is taken to be synonymous with Self-enquiry. The *japa* method appears to be simpler than Self-enquiry, but it is far less efficacious, since the entire time spent on *concentration* on ‘I’ passes unproductively, without the *vasanas* being destroyed. Bhagavan’s constant refrain on Self-enquiry may be understood in this light.

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its source. Naturally, it will lead them nowhere. A little understanding sets right their problem.

In ultimate analysis, what is important is not which method we use to attain the 'I-feeling', but to attain it by whatever means, and hold on to it till we attain Self-abidance. ▲

(To be continued)

Facets of Self-enquiry

Part Two: The Practice of the I-feeling

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The essence of Self-enquiry consists in turning the mind inward and holding on to the sense of 'I' that we feel within.¹ This is what we call 'I-abidance'. As we practise it, some of the *vasanas* are eliminated. We transcend the rest of the *vasanas*, and attain Self-abidance.² During Self-abidance, these remaining *vasanas* too are obliterated. Self-abidance is then rendered permanent, and that is Liberation.

¹ "It is enough that a person becomes *antarmukhi* (inward-bent)." *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, §513, p.498, (1994).

² "It [Self-abidance] will dawn on you suddenly, when the obstacles are removed to some extent." Sri Nisargadatta in *I am That*, (Tr.) Maurice Frydman, Ch.97, p.502, The Acorn Press, (1999).

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Our practice thus proceeds at two levels, namely, 'I-abidance' ('I-feeling'³) and Self-abidance. We shall study them broadly in Parts Two and Three respectively. For the sake of generality, we shall assume that the seeker is one who follows the method of *direct* intuition⁴ for obtaining the 'I-feeling'.

Practice of I-feeling: the Sitting-mode Enquiry

A seeker would normally start his practice of Self-enquiry in a sitting posture, preferably an *asana*. We may call it 'sitting-mode enquiry',⁵ to distinguish it from another kind that mixes with activity, seen later. For practising it, the seeker would select a congenial location with the least possible disturbance and reputedly strong spiritual vibrations. If the second condition cannot be met, he would carry on in the belief that the available location will itself start manifesting spiritual vibrations when it is used long enough.

At first, the *sadhaka's* major preoccupation will be the control of thoughts, without which 'I-abidance' will not be possible.⁶ An ongoing practice of daily *puja* or prayer, and a prior practice of *japa* or meditation help bolster the *sadhaka's* ability to control thoughts.⁷ He can then turn to the 'I-thought', and seek its source to obtain 'I-abidance'. It is usually desirable to start each session of *sadhana* with a brief *japa* of the Guru. Besides fulfilling the 'mandatory' requirement of doing *pranam* to the Guru at the start of *sadhana*, the *japa* serves to soften up the ego and so brighten the prospects of 'I-abidance'.

³ 'I-feeling' stands for experience of I-abidance, and so is sometimes used to indirectly refer to I-abidance.

⁴ For details of this method, see Part One of the article in *Mountain Path*, July, 2011.

⁵ For the desirability of an *asana*, vide 'The practice of Self-enquiry', *Mountain Path*, pp.9-19, April, 2008, wherein the sitting-mode enquiry was referred to as 'meditational enquiry'.

⁶ "It is impossible to fix the mind on the Heart to start with." *Talks*, §40, p.45. See also §213, p.179.

⁷ "*Dhyana, bhakti, japa*, etc., are aids to keep out the multiplicity of thoughts." *Talks*, §485, p.464. "If (*upasana* or *japa*) is pursued in all sincerity ... it will automatically lead to the investigation of the Self." §374, p.341. On the imperative of *japa* in *sadhana*, see *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, N.R. Narayana Aiyer, Ch.I.7, pp.20 & 21, (1996).

Early Hurdles in I-feeling Practice: A *sadhaka* is at first prone to over-exert while attempting to control his thoughts. It can lead to minor problems like pain in different parts of the body, disturbances in breathing rhythm, strain in and around the eyes, weakness, palpitation of the heart, etc.⁸ The problems are thought to be due to reaction from the *prana* and mind, which resist his efforts at controlling them. Some of these may extend even beyond the *sadhana* session. If the symptoms happen to be severe, the *sadhaka* may be obliged to suspend his *sadhana* for a few days for return of normality. Generally, though, he will have to put up with such discomforts,⁹ till he learns the art of managing his effort, be it days, weeks, months or more.

Even when the *sadhaka* is at the stage of grappling with his thoughts, it can so happen that the *pranic* forces are excited, and create peculiar, pleasant sensations in the body. He is usually tempted to think that they have something to do with the spiritual states he is after, and take keen interest in them. It is a mistake to be avoided. From about the same time, the seeker starts receiving encouragement in his *sadhana* in many subtle ways¹⁰ — such as by occasional prognoses, pleasant co-incidences etc.

Since the *sadhaka* is presumed to use *direct* intuition, he must already know what is ‘I-feeling’. Yet, it can at first be inexplicably difficult for him to intuit his ‘I’ *during practice*. It is as though the new context requires him to experiment afresh to find his way through the dark causal domain to the ‘I’ at its rear. He repeatedly finds himself up against a wall, and may have to alternate his attempts with *japa* for the sake of respite. Even so, it can be difficult for him to sit in

⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of obstacles to *sadhana*, see *Concentration and Meditation*, Ch. VI, VII, VIII, Swami Sivananda, Divine Life Society, Shivanandanagar, (1964, 3/ed.). It may be accessed online at <http://www.dlshq.org/books/es27.htm>. As for weakness encountered in *sadhana*, Bhagavan prescribes *pranayama* “properly performed”. *Talks*, §30, p.37. See also *Talks*, §462, pp.435-6.

⁹ Bhagavan assures, “All these would go, if you would but continue your meditation ... on ... Self.” And again, “All diseases will be effectively annihilated by continuous Self-enquiry.” *Crumbs from His Table*, R. Swarnagiri, Ch.10, pp.33-4, (2006).

¹⁰ *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, N.R. Narayana Aiyer, Ch.I.22, p.51, (1996).

practice for even 10 or 15 minutes. It is unnecessary and unavailing to try to prolong the session at this juncture.¹¹

With steady practice, the *sadhaka* succeeds in obtaining I-abidance. The experience, being of the explicit kind, will be so novel that he becomes all too curious to observe it, and so disrupts it. The 'I-feeling' therefore lasts only momentarily. The curiosity can be all the greater with intellectuals, who tend to follow academically every new development. It usually takes a long time to cross this hurdle. When the I-abidance occurs recurrently, even if infrequently, the duration of the session can be increased to 20-25 minutes.

Bhagavan considers sleep as the first obstacle to *sadhana*.¹² Sleep is particularly relevant in the early stages when distractions are longer and more frequent, and so the possibility of dozing off, often momentarily, is greater. Sleep, like *vasanas*, belongs to the causal zone, which we attempt to cross to reach our 'I'. So, if we fail midway, we can be caught by either by sleep or *vasanas* (which project thoughts). In the former case, there is the possibility of a bodily fall and injury, unless we have adopted an *asana* for the practice, or taken other precautions.¹³

Like sleep, visions and other miscellaneous experiences,¹⁴ too, are possible only when we let go of our hold on 'I'.¹⁵ They may include *sakshatkaras* (visions of gods). Such experiences are caused by our own

¹¹In fact, at no stage of *sadhana* is it desired to force the pace. Steadiness of effort, backed by strong faith, is what is needed. Vide *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, op. cit., Ch.I.22, p.51.

¹²*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 25-4-1946, p.182, (1989). In classical Vedanta, the obstacles to *sadhana* are said to be *laya*, *vikshepa*, *kashaya* and *rasasvada* (or *ananda*). They stand respectively for sleep- or trance-like states yielding a subtle kind of enjoyment, tossing of the mind among sense-objects, reminiscing on past enjoyments, and savouring of the bliss of *anandamaya kosa*.

¹³"If the 'I' is ... let go, ... meditation will end in sleep." *Talks*, §139, p.122. For Bhagavan's prescriptions for dealing with sleep, see *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, op. cit., Entry of 21-7-1946, pp.241-2.

¹⁴For a detailed account of experiences in *sadhana*, see *Concentration and Meditation*, op. cit., Ch. IX.

¹⁵'Spiritual Instruction' (*Upadesa Manjari*), Ch. II, §16, *Collected Works*, p.61, (2002).

mental make-up, and have no spiritual significance.¹⁶ We are not to pay any attention to them, and instead remain focussed on our quest.

Ups and downs are very common in early phases of *sadhana*. We may have a good abidance one day, and then have a poor run for several days on end. The alternating rich and lean phases are due to the play of the *gunas*. We are to make the best use of our *sadhana* when the *sattva-guna* is in the ascendant,¹⁷ and be patient when *tamas* or *rajas* is predominant. The important point is not to let the aspiration sag, but persist with the practice without regard to the quality of outcome on a given day.¹⁸

Breaks in *sadhana*, even up to several weeks, can occur due to miscellaneous causes. Resumption would then appear exceedingly difficult. A positive mind-set is important to make at least a tentative re-start. It may appear like a slow climb, but a pleasant surprise awaits us when we not only catch up with the former level but even exceed it.¹⁹

In the early stages of practice, when we are in deep contemplation trying to attain 'I-abidance' or holding it, certain kinds of noises can cause us great bodily shock. A telephone ring, a buzzer, or a car horn in the neighbourhood, etc. can sound unbearably shrill and be received on the heart with a shudder. In certain states, even a pin-drop noise can cause a severe shock.²⁰ Paul Brunton reports of a case when he was admonished by a *yogi* for having disturbed the latter in his meditation by shooting with a camera.²¹ The *yogi* tells him such intrusions can prove dangerous to the meditator.

¹⁶ "Visions, etc., are no signs of progress." *Talks*, §103, p.99.

¹⁷ *Talks*, §52, p.55; §73, p.78.

¹⁸ "Mere performance of *tapas* is its progress also." *Talks*, §103, p.99.

¹⁹ "There is the steady impulse of your determination that sets you on your feet again after every downfall and breakdown. Gradually the obstacles are all overcome and your current becomes stronger. Everything comes right in the end. Steady determination is what is required." *Talks*, §29, p.34.

²⁰ *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch. II, p.58; Ch. I.18, p.40.

²¹ *A Search in Secret India*, op. cit., Ch. 7, p.112.

Progress of the I-feeling: In due course, we will be able to attain the I-feeling more frequently and in longer spells. The clarity of the experience too grows.²² We become so intimately familiar with our 'I' that we feel no disappointment when we lose sight of it for a while. We feel certain that it is always there within, and is ours 'for the asking'. Our inner calm is thus preserved, whether or not with the I-abidance. We can then extend the duration of *sadhana* to 1-2 hours,²³ spread over two or three sessions a day.

Our effort in the practice of 'I-feeling' is at first expended in two ways: for the onset of the 'I-feeling', and for retaining it. When our practice steadies a bit, we find, to our pleasant surprise, that the 'I-feeling' now and then pops up on its own. With further practice, we find it coming in non-stop, wave after wave. There is then no more need for effort for purposes of the onset. Even for retaining the 'I-feeling', very little effort is found to suffice. Our *sadhana* may be said to have taken a most fortunate turn at this juncture.

About this time, none of the outside noises or other disturbances including our thoughts seem to affect our abidance. We find ourselves singularly capable to adapt any situation as a means to attain I-abidance. If we get a thought, our awareness that 'this thought is occurring to *me*' instantly lands us at our 'I'. If we hear a sound, our awareness that 'this sound is being heard by *me*' does the same. It marks the time when we can carry our *sadhana* into the buzz of everyday life, as we shall see shortly.

With continued practice, we reach a stage when the moment we sit for *sadhana*, the experience of 'I' arises within us by itself, and stays on and on, with but a little of our effort. Any number of thoughts can now come and go, and they don't disturb our state of quiet.²⁴ In due course, the thoughts themselves recede, and I-abidance becomes correspondingly more intense.

²² *Talks*, §91, p.87; §73, p.78.

²³ *A Search in Secret India*, op. cit., Ch. IX, p.156.

²⁴ In other words, all thoughts now become non-intrusive.

Concurrent Enquiry

Our practice of ‘I-feeling’ is meant to reduce our *vasanas* to such an extent as to allow our transcendence to Self-abidance. It is a high goal, not attained by anything but a total commitment of our personality to it. If we pursue ‘I-abidance’ for just a couple of hours a day, and indulge in worldliness the rest of the time, it does not speak for total commitment. What is needed is to maintain the ‘I-abidance’ literally every moment of our waking time.²⁵ This may look humanly impossible, but Bhagavan counsels thus:

*“The life of action need not be renounced. If you will meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner, then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed by your activities.”*²⁶

And again, *“The current induced during meditation can be kept up by habit, by practising to do so. Then one can perform his work and activities in that very current itself; there will be no break.”*²⁷

In the first quote, what Bhagavan means to say is that if we pursue Self-enquiry — which in our present context means I-abidance — for about one to two hours daily in the sitting mode, the awareness of ‘I’ (i.e., ‘I-abidance’) so generated will continue in the rest of the day when we attend to other activities. The second quote, however, qualifies it by saying that although the current carries into the rest of the day, it does so only sparsely and sporadically. So, we have *at first* to put in some effort, or *practise*, to make that current last in our activities. The maintenance of I-awareness then becomes a *habit* with us,²⁸ and remains unbroken through our waking life.

²⁵ “Persist in the enquiry throughout your waking hours.” *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 2-1-1946, p.73. “... simply remain fixed in the Self ... every moment of your waking life” Ibid, Entry of 21-7-1946, p.242. See also *Talks*, §17, p.11; §434, p.404; ‘Self-enquiry’, §12, *Collected Works*, p.13, (2002); *Who am I?* §15.

²⁶ *A Search in Secret India*, op. cit., p.156.

²⁷ Ibid, p.160.

²⁸ “The mind ... train it to look inward; make this a habit.” *Talks*, §26, pp.25-6.

The *practice* referred to above has been termed ‘concurrent enquiry’²⁹ since it involves the holding of ‘I-abidance’ concurrently with other activity. It can be started fruitfully only after we reach a certain stage in sitting-mode enquiry, as stated in the previous section (penultimate para). At first, we may practise concurrent enquiry with relatively passive activities like waiting, walking, bathing, taking food, cooking, travelling (without own driving), going to sleep, etc. Slowly, we can try to extend it to other, less passive activities like watching TV, reading, speaking, writing etc.³⁰ When the ‘I-abidance’ eventually covers our entire waking period, it might seem like a changeless screen, over which is projected the entire changing panorama of the world.³¹

It is held in science that our mind cannot attend to two things at a time.³² This would seem to controvert the feasibility of concurrent enquiry, wherein our mind is said to attend to both ‘I-feeling’ and outer activity simultaneously. The anomaly is explained thus: our mind actually attends to only one of these things at a time, but alternates between the two so rapidly that we *feel* the two experiences to be *simultaneous*.³³

Preliminary Outcomes of I-feeling Practice

When we practise ‘I-feeling’ for a few years, we begin noticing three kinds of outcomes. Firstly, whenever our mind strays from ‘I-abidance’ during the day, we become conscious of it. An urge keeps developing in us that we ought to arrest such straying, and it prepares us to take up concurrent enquiry in due course. We also become alert to any rise of negative feelings like anger, desire, malice, conceit, etc. in our

²⁹ ‘The Practice of Self-enquiry’, *Mountain Path*, pp.14-16, April 2008.

³⁰ “Hold the Self even during mental activities.” *Talks*, §407, p.382.

³¹ It is like being a witness to whatever happens around us. Vide *The Garland of Guru’s Sayings*, v.674.

³² See, for instance, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_multitasking

³³ In everyday life we come across numerous instances of our mind attending to two or more things seemingly at the same time. They are all explained by the same logic, called ‘multi-tasking’. Modern high-speed computers use this principle when they serve a number of terminals ‘simultaneously.’

mind, and thus get an opportunity to check them and shelve them, before they overcome us completely.

Secondly, we notice a profound increase in our capacity to understand spiritual teachings,³⁴ whether from the scriptures or given by latter-day sages. The precise context and meaning of the statements strike our mind at once, irrespective of the phraseology and nomenclature used.³⁵ Teachings, which had earlier seemed mutually contradictory, now stand resolved to their respective levels. The logical inter-connections among different *sadhana*s become apparent to the mind with little effort.³⁶ Occasionally, a casual talk on spiritual matters with someone grows, to our surprise, into a long, impromptu, learned discourse, with the words streaming out as if from a fount.³⁷

Some of the clarifications to our spiritual knowledge may be received in the form of thoughts during or outside the 'I-feeling' practice. Some of these may be so exquisitely phrased, that we will be led to suspect that they are from a 'higher source' (later identified with our Guru). We would do well to jot them down immediately, as else we may later rue for not being able to recollect them.³⁸ Thus, not all thoughts that come at the time of our practice can be castigated as obstacles.

The third outcome of our 'I-feeling' practice is that we get constant guidance in all matters of our *sadhana* from the inner Guru, in the form of our 'I',³⁹ directly or indirectly. Bhagavan had often stated that

³⁴ *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch.I Conclusion, p.53; Ch. I.15, p.33.

³⁵ "Sometimes the knowledge contained therein has already been experienced by the seeker, and serves only to verify his experience." Ibid, Ch.I.15, p.33.

³⁶ While doubts relevant to the seeker's needs are readily cleared (*The Ultimate Medicine*, Ch. 3, p.24), it cannot be expected that *all* doubts whatsoever will be cleared (*Talks*, §618, p.583).

³⁷ Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa has said that he feels as though someone unseen continuously feeds him all that is spoken by him when he addresses his devotees. Cf. *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch. I.22, p.46.

³⁸ Ibid, Ch. I.19, p.41.

³⁹ "The beingness ["I am"] itself is the guru." Sri Nisargadatta in *The Ultimate Medicine*, Ch.4. p.54.

the Self is our real guru. But since the Self, being absolute, cannot be expected to enter into relations, that must be taken to mean 'I', which is the first manifestation of the Self.⁴⁰ The practice of 'I-feeling' thus opens up a channel of communication with the Guru. We are never left in doubt as to what our next step should be.⁴¹ We feel convinced that the Guru is constantly with us, and will see us through our *sadhana*, without our having to turn to any external help.⁴²

The guidance and clarifications may sometimes come to us in unexpected ways. For instance, we may be inspired to refer to a particular book or passage that precisely answers our requirement.⁴³ Else, the answer may strike our mind at some odd moment during the day. Sometimes what appears like a chance meeting with someone or reading may happen to provide the answer needed. A feeling takes root in us that, even in matters mundane, we are guided imperceptibly by the inner Guru.⁴⁴

Tanumanasi: Thinning of the Mind

According to *Yoga-vasishta*, *jnana-yoga* proceeds in seven stages, of which *tanumanasi* is the third stage.⁴⁵ The next four stages are states of *jnana*. Since 'I-feeling' too is a state preceding *jnana*, it follows that *tanumanasi* corresponds to the practice of 'I-feeling'. *Tanumanasi* is usually interpreted as 'thinning (or attenuation) of the mind'.⁴⁶ It stands for a steady loss of the capacity of the mind to project thoughts

⁴⁰ 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part 2, *MP*, October 2010, p.15.

⁴¹ Sri Nisargadatta in *I am That*, Ch. 98, p.510. See also *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch. I.22, p.51.

⁴² "When you abide sufficiently long in this [knowledge 'I am'] ... everything will become clear. No external [source of] knowledge will be necessary." Sri Nisargadatta, *The Ultimate Medicine*, Ch. 3, p.24. See also Ch.8, p.138.

⁴³ *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch.I, Conclusion, p.53. This small book contains many practical details on *sadhana*, and a practising *sadhaka* can find much that interests him/her in it.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, Ch. I.4, p.18. See also, Ch. I.3 Guru, and Ch. I.4 Grace, pp.14-18.

⁴⁵ 'Spiritual Instruction', Ch. IV, §3, *Collected Works*, p.70; *Talks*, §256, p.214; §95, p.91.

⁴⁶ *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Ch.I.2, pp.13-14.

due to partial elimination of the *vasanas* during the ‘I-feeling’ practice. At first there will be elimination of the onrush of minor passing thoughts. Later on, the gap between thoughts lengthens. Towards the end, thoughts become altogether rare.⁴⁷ As Bhagavan says, it is this degree of absence of thoughts that is the *real* measure of our progress in *sadhana*.⁴⁸

Use of *Pranayama* in Self-enquiry

Self-enquiry is ordinarily to be followed after gaining some mental strength, which means one-pointedness of mind, through preliminary disciplines like devotion, meditation etc. A *sadhaka*, if he is mature, can then attain instant *kumbhaka* while attempting to dive into the heart,⁴⁹ and attain the Self. Others may follow the slower route of the ‘I-feeling’. In either case, there is no *deliberate* application of *pranayama*.

If Self-enquiry is taken up without at first undergoing the aforesaid disciplines, then *pranayama* is needed as an aid to control of mind.⁵⁰ It may be carried out by way of regulation of the inhalation-exhalation cycles, or by merely watching the breath. In either case, it should be discontinued once the control of breath (and so of thoughts) is achieved,⁵¹ and Self-enquiry taken up.

Option between ‘Life’ and ‘Death’

In Self-enquiry, we seem faced with a choice between ‘I-thought’ and ‘I-feeling’. If we choose the former, we are condemned to a life of predestination — becoming a cog in the wheel of creation with its cycles of birth and death. If we choose the ‘I-feeling’, we are given

⁴⁷ Ibid, Ch. I-16, p.34. “One has to experience this to believe it.”

⁴⁸ *Talks*, §618, p.582.

⁴⁹ This is how Sadhu Om interprets Bhagavan’s reference to *pranayama* in verse 28 of ‘Reality in Forty Verses’. Cf. *The Path of Sri Ramana*, Part One, Ch. 8, pp.148, 149, (2005). In this, he differs with N.R. Narayana Aiyer, who takes the verse literally, and calls for a deliberate use of *pranayama* while diving. Cf. *The Technique of Maha Yoga*, Preface, p.vi; Ch. I.15, p.31; Ch. II, pp.56-58.

⁵⁰ ‘Self-enquiry’, §20, *Collected Works*, pp.19-20.

⁵¹ *Talks*, §54, pp.59-60.

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a passing respite from the shackles of *karma*,⁵² and in time gain the ‘*life eternal*’. Other than this single freedom, we have really no other freedom,⁵³ the so-called free-will that we seem to employ in our daily life being a mere myth. In Self-enquiry practice, we are privileged to exercise this precious freedom of ours recurrently. ▲

⁵²“*Prarabdha* concerns only the out-turned, not the in-turned mind.” Cf. ‘Spiritual Instruction’, Ch. II, §21, *Collected Works*, p.62.

⁵³*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, Entry of 1-6-1946, pp.211-2.

Facets of Self-enquiry

Part Three: From Self-Abidance to Fulfilment

N. A. MOHAN RAO

In much of the literature on Self-enquiry, the concept of 'I' as an Entity intermediate to the ego and the Self is not taken into consideration.¹ Hence, often, where 'I' ought to be used, the term 'Self' is used instead. I-abidance thus comes to be represented as Self-abidance, and I-feeling as Self-attention. This leads to serious anomalies in the presentation of Self-enquiry, with the Self repeatedly spoken of as accessible to the *mind* and amenable to *effort*, confounding its non-dual nature.²

¹ Bhagavan introduces us to this concept of 'I', as cited in 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part Two, p.15, *Mountain Path*, October, 2010, but otherwise does not weave it into his mainstream teaching of Self-enquiry, apparently to keep the teaching simple in those early days of revival of this mode of *sadhana*.

² Sadhu Om takes the interpretation of Bhagavan's teachings a step forward by introducing the term *feeling 'I'* (I-feeling), and regarding it as different from 'thought' (ego). Cf. *The Path of Sri Ramana*, Part One, Ch. 7, pp.131 & 138 and Appendix One, pp.190 & 194, Sri Ramana Kshetra, Tiruvannamalai, (2005).

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When we take the concept of 'I' into account, *sadhana* by Self-enquiry presents itself principally in two phases, namely, I-abidance and Self-abidance. Of the two, I-abidance alone involves *mind* and *effort*, and was dealt with in Part Two of this article. The transition from I-abidance to the non-dual state of Self-abidance, and its subsequent culmination in Liberation, is considered hereunder.

Kinds of *Samadhi*; *Savikalpa Samadhi*

The term '*samadhi*' may be taken to mean an intense state of inner absorption by way of I-abidance or Self-abidance depending on the kind of *samadhi*. Three kinds of *samadhi* are relevant in Self-enquiry, namely, *savikalpa*, *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samadhi*, coming in that order. *Savikalpa samadhi* is a state of I-abidance, while the *nirvikalpa* and *sahaja samadhis* are states of temporary and permanent Self-abidance respectively.

Savikalpa means '(sa-) with (*vikalpa*) difference'. The term 'difference' refers to that between the experiencer and the experienced. The experiencer is taken to be the intellect (considered as a modification of the ego³). The experienced entity is 'I' (or pure-I).⁴

Savikalpa samadhi has a semblance of non-duality by way of its abidance, but is otherwise to be regarded as dualistic since the abidance is cognized by the *mind*.⁵ Being a state of I-abidance, it involves application of *effort*⁶ to keep away intrusive thoughts. Its high intensity of abidance may be ascribed to the facile control exercised on these thoughts following removal of much of the *vasanas*, and the subsidence of non-intrusive thoughts as well to a large extent. This

³ Vide Bhagavan's translation of *Vivekachudamani* in *Collected Works*, p.229, (2002). The same mind is spoken of differently as mind, intellect, ego, memory etc., depending on the function it discharges at a given time. Cf. 'Self-enquiry', §6, *Collected Works*, p.8, (2002).

⁴ This is patterned after Bhagavan's interpretation of sleep experience in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, (*Talks*) §314, p.276, (1994); See also Bhagavan's translation of *Vivekachudamani*, op. cit., p.247.

⁵ See under *sphurana* in 'Understanding Self-enquiry', Part Two, op. cit., p.19.

⁶ *Talks*, op. cit., §391, p.357; *Guru Ramana*, S.S. Cohen, Ch. XII, p.90, (2009).

would mean a few non-intrusive thoughts (and some external sounds etc.) can yet impinge on the *samadhi*, without disrupting it.⁷

The presence of the mind in *savikalpa samadhi* implies that breath too is present, since mind and breath arise from the same source. However, since the thoughts are largely curtailed, the breath too will be very light, just adequate to sustain life.⁸

It is sometimes held that *savikalpa samadhi* is characterised by experience of bliss (*ananda*). There does not appear any support for this view in Bhagavan's teachings. According to Bhagavan, bliss is actually experienced in *raja yoga*, when the mind is fixed on the *sahasrara-chakra* (crown of the head).⁹ It is the last obstacle to be crossed by the yogi if he were to attain Realization.¹⁰ It has no direct relevance in *savikalpa samadhi*, which is essentially an un-intermittent current of I-awareness (or I-abidance).

Since *savikalpa samadhi* is a state of I-abidance, the *vasanas* continue to be eliminated even during the *samadhi*. So, the *samadhi* gets more and more intense with continuing practice. A stage comes when events will unfold that are beyond our effort.

From *Savikalpa* to *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*

As the practice of *savikalpa samadhi* proceeds, our intellect becomes subtler and subtler due to continued removal of the *vasanas*. At some stage, suddenly, it is caused to transcend the remaining *vasanas*. The state of Self-abidance that then results¹¹ is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

The term *nirvikalpa* is derived from *nih-* (without) and *vikalpa* (difference). *Nirvikalpa samadhi* thus represents a non-dual state,

⁷ *Guru Ramana*, Ibid, p.89.

⁸ "... respiration is slowed down ... to the lowest level compatible with life." *Talks*, §28, p.28.

⁹ *Talks*, §616, p.575. There is obviously no scope for elimination of *vasanas* in this state.

¹⁰ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, A. Devaraja Mudaliar, 25-4-1946, p.182, (1989).

¹¹ "The experience ... will dawn on you suddenly, when the obstacles are removed to some extent." *I am That*, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, (Tr. Maurice Frydman), Ch.97, p.502, The Acorn Press, (1999). What is actually transcended is the causal plane. It includes the residual *vasanas* and *ananda* of *anandamaya-kosa*.

which permits no differentiation between the experiencer and the experienced. The intellect that has hitherto been the experiencer, and the 'I' that was being experienced, lie 'merged' in the Self.

The transition from *savikalpa* to *nirvikalpa samadhi* is attended with a sharp discontinuity. Thus far, the intellect had been with us as the 'search party' for finding the Self.¹² When the Self is to appear, the intellect cannot stay around anymore, since the Self is non-dual. So, it makes as if to depart the scene. But the intellect has all along been our sole instrument of cognition, and we depend on it even to infer our own existence. So, its imminent departure would seem like our own extinction. An indescribable fear grips us,¹³ and we involuntarily step back from the perceived self-destruction, in a state of shock, and return to our former dualistic state.

Our further attempts to continue with practice of I-abidance prove no different. After a few such experiences of shock, we become emboldened enough to take that seemingly inevitable, ultimate plunge.¹⁴ We desist from resisting the course of events at the point of crisis, and instantly experience something of an implosion¹⁵ that lands us in the *self-shining*, non-dual state of Self-abidance. The entire non-Self that has been left behind by us in successive stages of renunciation earlier, becomes one with the final Reality that is now experienced.¹⁶

Nature of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*

Nirvikalpa samadhi being non-dual, the intellect is no more available as an instrument of dualistic knowledge, and so the *samadhi* is

¹² The intellect is transcended only when the causal body is transcended. Cf. *Maha Yoga*, K. Lakshmana Sarma, Ch. 8, p.105, (1996). "The intellect is co-extensive with individuality." *Talks*, §502, p.484.

¹³ A vivid description of this state of fear may be found in *Life as Yoga*, Vimala Thakar, (Tr. Devendra Singh), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, Book II, Discourse 4, pp.214-6, (1982).

¹⁴ *Talks*, §96, p.92; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, op. cit., 24-12-1945 Evening, p.64.

¹⁵ "The mind cannot go beyond itself by itself. It must explode." *I am That*, op. cit., Ch.99, p.52.

¹⁶ *Talks*, §33, p.41.

characterised by total absence of body- and world-consciousness.¹⁷ The *sadhaka* remains still without any interaction with the world.

Since the mind is merged, there can be neither effort¹⁸ nor thoughts in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, unlike in *savikalpa*. The absence of mind also implies the absence of breath as we know it. In its place, a subtle form of breath, known as *maha-prana* ('great *prana*') is said to be operative to sustain life.¹⁹

Nirvikalpa samadhi is experienced as pure *sat-chit-ananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss).²⁰ The capitalization of these terms is meant to indicate that they are beyond the pairs of opposites of being and non-being, consciousness and unconsciousness, and happiness and unhappiness.²¹ It is also understood that Being, Consciousness and Bliss are not three separate attributes, but occur together as the one Reality.

The experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi* may at first last about thirty minutes.²² When the *sadhaka* exits from the *samadhi*, it may at first seem to him that he had merely come out of a swoon or trance. After a few such experiences, he will be able to infer the non-dual state correctly.²³ He cannot, however, be considered a true *jnani*, since he is now once again under the influence of the *vasanas*.

The sense of 'I' that continued till the end of *savikalpa samadhi*, disappears with the advent of the non-dual state. Thus there is no 'I'

¹⁷ *Talks*, §391, p.358. Such a *samadhi* is called 'internal *nirvikalpa samadhi*', as will be seen later.

¹⁸ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.90. See also *Talks*, § 187, p.154; §391, p.357.

¹⁹ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2-2-1946 Morning, p.116.

²⁰ *Who am I?* §3. See, however, footnote 44 under 'Concepts of *Jnani*'. The *ananda* that is associated with the *anandamaya-kosa* is only a reflection of the *ananda* inherent in the Self. Cf. *Vivekachudamani*, v.207, (Tr.) Swami Madhavananda, Kolkata (1989).

²¹ *Talks*, §433, p.403. See also 'Spiritual Instruction', Ch. III, §10, *Collected Works*, p.68, (2002).

²² *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi*, Sadhu Arunachala (A.W. Chadwick), p.50, (2005). When we speak of experience in a non-dual state such as *nirvikalpa samadhi*, we have to understand that it is an experience in which the experiencer is not different from the experience.

²³ *Talks*, §138, p.122.

in *nirvikalpa samadhi*.²⁴ The Self is often interpreted as ‘true-I’. This is not to be taken literally, but only as an indication that the Self is the ultimate source from which our sense of ‘I’ is derived.

Nirvikalpa samadhi is an important milestone in our *sadhana*, because it is here that for the first time we pass from the mire of dualistic existence into the pristine non-dual state. Sri Nisargadatta describes it as “a state infinitely more real, aware and happy than you can possibly think of.”²⁵ It is an *experience*, we ‘will repeatedly try to regain’.²⁶

Nirvikalpa samadhi is not to be confused with *jada-samadhi*, in which the breath is restrained by a yogic technique known as *khechari-mudra*. The latter is a state of hibernation in which the person can survive without food or external consciousness even for decades. Meanwhile, the *vasanas* remain as they are, and so when the person comes out of the *samadhi*, he will be in the same state of ignorance as he was before.²⁷

Transition from *Nirvikalpa* to *Sahaja Samadhi*

The kind of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, wherein the *sadhaka* remains still without external consciousness, is called ‘internal *nirvikalpa samadhi*’. While it is practised, the *vasanas* continue to be eliminated as they come under the ‘glance’ of the Sel,²⁸ and the *samadhi* tends to become more intense and last longer. After a stage, even when the *sadhaka* rises from the *samadhi*, Self-abidance continues to be held for some time. Such a state is called ‘external *nirvikalpa samadhi*’. The *sadhaka*

²⁴Vide Bhagavan’s teaching on the evolution of ‘I’ in ‘Understanding Self-enquiry’, Part Two, *Mountain Path*, Oct. (2010), p.15. “The Self ... has no sense of ‘I.’” ‘Spiritual Instruction’, Ch. I, §12, op. cit., p.52.

²⁵*I am That*, op. cit., Ch.73, p.362.

²⁶*Talks*, §141, p.124.

²⁷<http://www.astrojyoti.com/ybleson10samadhi.htm>; *Crumbs from His Table*, R. Swarnagiri, Ch.8, p.22, (2006).

²⁸*The Garland of Guru’s Sayings*, op. cit., v.920, p.175; *Talks*, §219, p.182. *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is therefore reckoned as continuation of *sadhana*, and is included in the *jnana-bhoomika* of *tanumanasi*. Cf. *Talks*, §256, p.213.



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is seen to partake in external activity, but ‘without a reaction from within’. The practice is to be continued till the external *samadhi* covers the rest of the waking period (and dream). All the *vasanas* would by then be eliminated, and the *samadhi* will persist in deep sleep also.²⁹ The internal and external *samadhis* are then realized to be identical, and one is said to be in *sahaja samadhi*.³⁰ Self-abidance never ceases henceforth. The seeker’s individuality, along with all his *karmas*, is destroyed never to return. He has become ‘liberated’ from the cycle of births and deaths. He is reckoned as a *jivan-mukta* and a true *jnani*.

Bhagavan distinguishes between *nirvikalpa samadhi* and *sahaja samadhi* thus: In *nirvikalpa samadhi*, “the activities (vital and mental), waking, dream and sleep are only merged, ready to emerge” when the *samadhi* ends. “In *sahaja samadhi*, the activities, vital and mental, and the three states are destroyed, never to reappear. However, others notice the *jnani* active e.g., eating, talking, moving etc. He is not himself aware of these activities ... They pertain to his body and not to his real Self.”³¹ They are like the feeding undergone by a sleeping baby, or the travel of a driver sleeping in his cart hauled by bullocks accustomed to the route. Yet, the *jnani* remains internally fully aware, and so his state is said to be one of *jagrat-sushupti* (waking sleep, or ‘sleep with awareness’).³²

Nirvikalpa samadhi, being impermanent, takes turns with waking, dream and sleep. The state of Self-abidance in it is therefore reckoned as *turiya*, ‘the fourth’. The same in *sahaja samadhi*, being beyond such four-fold cyclical change, is then termed *turiyatita* (transcendent to *turiya*). But, since both are states of Self-abidance, the difference

²⁹ *The Garland of Guru’s Sayings*, Bhagavan’s verse 19 (at v.958), p.184; and Talks, §136, p.121.

³⁰ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.90; Talks, §391, p.359. Bhagavan is said to have attained *nirvikalpa samadhi* while he was yet in Madurai, and practised it in his early years at Arunachala to attain *sahaja samadhi*. Cf. *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, Sadhu Natanananda, (Ed. David Godman), §55, footnote 42, p.98, (2005).

³¹ *Talks*, §82, p.84.

³² *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21.11.45 Afternoon, p.36.

between *turiya* and *turiyatita* is only one of context, and not of substance.³³

Like *nirvikalpa samadhi*, *savikalpa samadhi* too can be of two kinds, internal and external.³⁴ The external *savikalpa samadhi* may be looked upon as a culmination of 'concurrent enquiry', just as the internal one is that of 'sitting enquiry'.³⁵

Sahaja Samadhi vis-à-vis Nirvikalpa Samadhi

Sahaja samadhi, being essentially a perpetuation of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, partakes of the *nirvikalpa* (non-difference) nature of the *nirvikalpa samadhi*. It is therefore designated sometimes as *sahaja nirvikalpa samadhi*. The ordinary *nirvikalpa samadhi* is then referred to as *kevala nirvikalpa samadhi* (or *kevala samadhi*).

Nirvikalpa samadhi (internal) is more intense than *sahaja samadhi*³⁶ due to the absence of bodily activity. The breath that was arrested in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, resumes normal operation in *sahaja*, as there is no more any mind to be held in harness.

Numerous analogies are given to differentiate between the two *samadhis*. *Nirvikalpa samadhi* is compared to a steady flame in a windless room; *sahaja* to a waveless ocean. *Nirvikalpa* is said to be like a bucket dropped into a well, but with a rope tied to it. It can be fetched out, if required, with the help of the rope. *Sahaja* is like a river discharged into the sea, and so is irreversible.

Concepts of *Jnani*: *Jivan-mukta* and *Videha-mukta*

Vasanas are of two kinds, *bandha-hetuh* (causative of bondage) and *bhoga-hetuh* (causative of enjoyment). To attain *jnana*, it is enough that the binding kind of *vasanas* are eliminated.³⁷ One who attains to *jnana* thus is called a *jivan-mukta* (liberated while yet in the body).

³³ Cf. *Mandukya Upanishad*, v.12; *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, Bhagavan's v.18 (at v.939), p.180.

³⁴ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.91; Talks, §391, p.359.

³⁵ See Part Two of this article for the meanings of 'sitting enquiry' and 'concurrent enquiry'.

³⁶ *Guru Ramana*, op. cit., p.90.

³⁷ Talks, §317, p.280; §515, p.499.

The *bhoga-vasanas* that may have been left in him are to be spent by enjoying the respective pleasures without getting attached to them. The *jnani* is said to have a remnant of a mind, and ego, to enable such enjoyment.³⁸ Since he is without attachment, this ego cannot bind him, just as a burnt rope, though looking like a rope, cannot be of service to bind. The *jnani* is also credited with an intellect of an extremely subtle kind by which he experiences the 'Self-bliss' and knows that he is ever the Self.³⁹

When the enjoyment of the *bhoga-vasanas* is completed, the body of the *jivan-mukta* falls,⁴⁰ and he becomes a *videha-mukta* (liberated having left the body). His subtle mind gets resolved, and the experience of Self-bliss too ceases: he becomes one with the Self-bliss 'without any differentiated existence.'⁴¹

Jivan-muktas may be of four kinds, namely, *brahma-vid*, *brahma-vidvara*, *brahma-vidvarya* and *brahma-vidvarishta*. They correspond to the last four *jnana-bhoomikas* respectively.⁴² They all mean 'knower of Brahman' on an increasing scale of greatness. The differences in greatness arise apparently due to the kinds of *bhoga-vasanas* left in them.⁴³ The *brahma-vidvarishta* is thus the greatest of the four *jivan-muktas* and is alone said to experience Bliss.⁴⁴ Bhagavan's teaching that a *jivan-mukta* ripens from moment to moment,⁴⁵ may therefore perhaps be taken to apply to the three lower levels.

³⁸ *Talks*, §513, p.497.

³⁹ 'Self-enquiry', §11, op. cit., p.12. See also Bhagavan's reference to sleep in *Talks*, §314, p.276.

⁴⁰ *Talks*, §515, p.499.

⁴¹ 'Self-enquiry', §40, op. cit., pp.34-5. This is a little analogous to *krama-mukti*, in which the *sadbaka's* soul travels (after his death) to *Brahma-loka* to enjoy the balance of pleasures to his credit, and then attains *mukti*. Bhagavan does not approve of *krama-mukti*. Vide *Talks*, §513, pp.497-8.

⁴² *Talks*, §256, p.214; 'Spiritual Instruction', Ch. IV, §2, op. cit., p.69 footnote.

⁴³ *Talks*, §385, p.352.

⁴⁴ "Spiritual Instruction', Ch. IV, §4-5, op. cit., p.70. It seems therefore possible that in *nirvikalpa samadhi* too, there would be four different kinds of experience, of which only the highest one involves Bliss.

⁴⁵ *Sri Ramana Gita*, Ch. 11, §19, p.65, (1992). A *jivan-mukta* is hence said to be in incessant *tapas*.

If a movie theatre is flooded with light to a certain level, one may not readily notice the picture on the screen. But if he bestows careful attention, he might see it faintly. In the same way, the *jnani* does not ordinarily see the world due to the illumination of *jnana*, but can see it faintly if he makes an effort. Even so, he sees it as not apart from his Self. Bhagavan has said that his awareness of his cancer was similar in nature.⁴⁶

True Nature of a *Jnani*

All the above concepts of *jnani* are meant only for the ignorant, who are unable to reconcile the *jnani*'s actions with his non-dual state. As Bhagavan points out, the *ajnani* would normally try to infer the *jnani*'s state from the perceived actions of the latter's body, and in doing so, commits a gross mistake.⁴⁷ Says Bhagavan, "The spiritual men are not bodies."⁴⁸

The *jivan-mukta* has neither any enjoyership ego nor doership ego. He has no will, and so the actions of his body are not his. His body is operated by *Ivara*⁴⁹ the same way as the entire universe is operated by Him. The onlookers, out of ignorance, associate these actions of his body with an individual acting under the influence of a mind. Nonetheless, when they regard him as their Guru, they find it possible to draw spiritual inspiration and guidance from him as suited to their capacity. The same situation obtains even after the *jivan-mukta* drops his body,⁵⁰ since there is essentially no difference in his state before and after the death of the body.⁵¹

The simple truth is that the *jnani*'s state transcends mind and speech, and hence can never be expressed in terms intelligible to the *ajnani*.⁵² The nearest that can be said of it is that it is a state of pure Awareness, an Awareness that is Being, and Bliss too.

⁴⁶ *Sri Ramanasrama Lekhalu* (Telugu original of *Letters*), Suri Nagamma, Part 5, Letter 41 (undated), p.719, (1995). The relevant paragraph is missing from the English version: vide *Letters*, p.658, (2008).

⁴⁷ *Talks*, §499, p.479-80; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 5-5-1946, p.189.

⁴⁸ *Talks*, §363, p.329.

⁴⁹ *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, v.1139, p.217.

⁵⁰ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 9-3-1946 Morning, p.145.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 9-1-1946 Afternoon, pp.86 & 88.

⁵² *Talks*, §110, p.105; *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-1945 Morning, p.34.

Who is the Tenth Man?

Bhagavan often tells us how incongruous it is that being ourselves the Self, we embark on long investigation and *sadhana* to realize our Self. He narrates the story of the 'tenth man' to illustrate this.⁵³ Ten foolish people start on a journey. They come across a river, and swim to the other bank. They check if all ten have arrived, but find only nine, as each person who counts misses to count himself. They start grieving the death of the 'missing' tenth man. A passer-by, noticing their folly, gives each person a pat and asks them to count as he pats. When he pats the last man, they count ten, and are satisfied. So also, we search long for our 'lost' Self, and finally notice that we ourselves are the Self.

The Self 'dreams' (by the *Maya* mode), and in the dream finds itself to be the intellect, shrouded in ignorance. As intellect, this dream-Self infers that it is not its true identity, and embarks on *sadhana* to trace it. It finds its own reflection ('I') in the dream causal zone, and thinks it has now a vague identity of itself. When, through *sadhana*, the *vasanas* (reflecting medium) are eliminated, the image 'I' too disappears. At this instant, the intellect passes through a shock, and the dream is broken.⁵⁴ The intellect (dream-Self) disappears, and the real Self alone remains. It is thus that the Self, as the dream-Self, lost 'itself', and in the end found itself. In reality, it never lost itself, nor found.

The entire *sadhana* (by the intellect) thus takes place in dream or *Maya* mode, and has no reality. Both bondage and liberation are unreal, as the *ajata-vada* proclaims.⁵⁵

The Nature of the Heart

The term 'Heart' may be understood as the 'address' at which we look for our 'I' or the Self. In Self-enquiry, we transcend the physical,

⁵³ *Talks*, §63, pp.70-1.

⁵⁴ Realization is 'like the ending of a dream'. Bhagavan's translation of Vivekachudamani, op. cit., p.231. See also Five Verses on the Self (*Ekatma-panchakam*), verse 1.

⁵⁵ *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 15-3-1946 Afternoon, pp.149-50.

subtle and the causal planes to reach our 'I'. Hence, the Heart must belong beyond these three planes.⁵⁶ Any explanation of the Heart lying somewhere in the body may therefore be considered provisional⁵⁷ and an interim help to those who lack the necessary intuition to reach their 'I'. The Heart is not the *anahata-chakra* (heart-centre) of *raja yoga*, either.⁵⁸

Since 'I' is our real Guru, the Guru may be said to reside in our Heart,⁵⁹ and the Heart may be deemed to be the place where we offer our prostrations to the Guru within.

Knowledge of Higher *Sadhana*

Knowledge of *sadhana* at the level of Self-abidance can never be free of uncertainties and contradictions, since the interactions between duality and non-duality can never be logically explained. Any attempt to question a given account would necessitate a more complicated explanation, which only raises the mantle of uncertainty to a yet higher level. Fortunately, *sadhana* at these levels mostly proceeds by itself, and so it suffices for us to accept its basic outline, and treat the finer details as mere embellishments.

Our spiritual transformation really starts from the time the *vasanas* start to be eliminated through practice of I-abidance. Once we are established in this practice, we are verily in the proverbial tiger's jaws, and there is no chance of our missing the goal.

Life is like a solo ride in a roller coaster, which is designed to end in a fatal crash. Wisdom dictates that we should get out of it when there is still time, and never enter another like it. Self-enquiry offers a very pleasant and efficacious way of effecting this by leading us to an Empyrean that is beyond life and death. ▲

⁵⁶“In the heart-lotus ... the light of that Self in the form of 'I' shines.” ‘Self-enquiry’, §9, op. cit., p.10; “... clinging to the Self within the heart.” *The Garland of Guru's Sayings*, v.1193, p.228.

⁵⁷*Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 23-5-1946, p.202.

⁵⁸*Talks*, §398, p.367.

⁵⁹“You [the Guru] ... shine within my Heart.” *Ramana Puranam*, v.343-50 (by Bhagavan), (Tr. R. Butler et al), p.61, (2008).