

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

Between December 1977 to February 1980, I made rough notes of some explanations about Bhagavan's teachings which Sri Sadhu Om gave either to me or to other friends. Many years later these notes were found and friends urged me to share them with others, saying that they contain a wealth of ideas that would help those who are following the path of self-enquiry.

I cannot claim that I recorded exactly what Sadhu Om said, but only the impression that it made on my mind, so my notes reflect my own

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om from 1976 to 1985 in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*, and since then he has continued to write about Bhagavan's teachings. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

imperfect understanding of what I heard him say. Moreover, whatever he said was suited to the understanding and needs of whoever he was talking to, so he sometimes said things that, if taken out of context, would seem to conflict with the explanations that he usually gave about Bhagavan's teachings. Therefore when selecting and editing extracts from these notes for publication in this and the subsequent articles in this series, I have taken care to omit any portions that contain ideas which are irrelevant to the main thrust of Sadhu Om's talks.

I have also edited these notes, expanding and adapting them wherever necessary, in order to make the ideas suitably clear. What will be published in this series are neither the precise words of Sadhu Om nor the exact notes that I wrote, but I am confident that it conveys reasonably accurately the ideas he expressed.

The title of this series reflects the central message that Sadhu Om said or wrote, namely that practising Self-attention is of paramount importance, and that directing our attention towards Self is the sole aim of all that Bhagavan taught us. In order to experience what we really are we must attend to ourself keenly and vigilantly, to the exclusion of everything else.

Bhagavan used various Tamil and Sanskrit terms to mean 'self-attention', 'self-scrutiny' or 'self-investigation', but one that he often used is the Tamil term taṇṇāṭṭam, which is a compound of taṇ (the inflexional base and oblique case form of taṇ, which means 'self') and nāṭṭam (which in this context means investigation, examination, scrutiny, observation or attention), so whenever Sadhu Om uses the term 'self-attention', it should be understood to be a translation of taṇṇāṭṭam or any of the other terms that Bhagavan used in this sense, such as taṭ-gavaṇam (self-attention), ātma-vicāra (self-investigation), svarūpa-dhyāna (self-contemplation), svarūpa-smaraṇa (self-remembrance), ātma-cintana (self-meditation), ātmānusaṁdhāna (self-contemplation), ahamukham (facing inwards, towards I) or ahanōkku (looking inwards, at I).

— Michael James

3rd December 1977

Sadhu Om: The *guru* acts through our own discrimination (*viveka*). Reflection (*manana*) on the *guru*'s teachings is itself a spiritual practice (*sadhana*), because by our reflecting and discriminating the hold of our *vasanas* (mental inclinations or propensities) is weakened and our mind is kept in quietude – that is, in the quiescent state of self-attention.

4th December 1977

Sadhu Om: The various theories taught by Bhagavan (regarding *karma*, *prarabdha*, surrender, God, *guru* and so on) will often appear to contradict each other, but will never contradict the need for self-attention. All such theories are merely clues or aids that help us cling to self-attention. They are each suited to different moods of the mind.

Self-attention is the only watertight theory. All other theories are riddled with loopholes and contradictions. Therefore if instead of quietening the mind they give rise to doubts, set them aside by investigating who thinks about them.

Self-attention is the sole aim of all Bhagavan's teachings. He taught us that self alone exists and is real, and that all else is a dream, a figment of our imagination. He said, 'Attend to that for which you came'; we came for knowing self and not for learning many theories. However, a thorough understanding of his teachings and the theories he proposed will enable us to quieten our mind in any situation.

Bhagavan has given us a simple teaching: 'Your own self-awareness is the only thing that seems to be permanent. Therefore do research on it alone: attend to it, and cling to it firmly'. Though this teaching is simple, it is the greatest of all treasures.

Grace acts by persistently reminding us of self. To forget self (that is, to attend to anything else) is misery; to remember self is peace or bliss.

Whenever any doubts, questions or new ideas arise, reflect on whether they could arise in your sleep. Obviously they could not, so they are external to you. Therefore forget them and remain as you were in sleep.

The mind is controlled effectively by knowledge alone. Root out all disturbances by keen and sharp discrimination. Do not try to rely on forcible control.

Krishna said that he will attend to the needs of those who always meditate only on him without thinking of anything else (*Bhagavad Gita* 9.22; *Bhagavad Gita Saram* verse 31). What does this mean? He is our real self, and nothing is other than him, so he can only attend to himself. If we also attend only to self, without thinking of anything else, where are any 'needs'? Other than ourself, nothing is real, so we should attend only to self.

When Ramasami Pillai asked Bhagavan which thoughts should be rejected as bad and which should be accepted as good, he replied, 'Reject all thoughts, even the thought of Bhagavan'.

Never think you are a beginner in the early stages of *sadhana*. Always act as if the dawn of self-knowledge might come any moment.

We will be standing on our own feet only when we are able to reject all disturbances – come what may – by keen discrimination. Then all books, *satsang* and other outward aids will be unnecessary.

Whatever disturbances may come, remember that they are because 'I am'. As a result of our daily practice, the thought 'I am' will immediately pull us back to self-attention.

There are no straight routes to our goal. That is, a rigid or formal approach is impossible, because self-enquiry is an art, and each situation must be dealt with in an appropriate manner as it arises. Bhagavan has given us an armoury of weapons suited to each situation, so when the shield does not work use the sword. When the mind is agitated an attitude of surrender may help, but when the mind is quiet do not think, 'I should surrender; how to do so?' but instead use that quietness to abide as self.

There is no such thing as 'partial surrender'. Surrender is only real surrender when it is complete. What is called 'partial surrender' is only a practice aiming at complete surrender, and that practice is the correct discrimination in any given situation that will lead the mind back to self-attention.

5th December 1977

Sadhu Om: To dwell upon 'I am' in whatever way is possible is good contemplation (*manana*). It is the practice that will root out all interest in other things (second and third persons) and make self-abidance easy.

Good and bad are based on the limiting concept 'I am the body'. The experience of the *jnani* is simply 'I am'. Though it may seem that the *jnani* sees differences, he never actually experiences any distinctions such as good or bad. He is ever contented with the knowledge 'I am'. 'I am' is both the way and the goal (as Bhagavan teaches us in verse 579 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*).

Bhagavan is the greatest *siddha*. He knows well what work need be done on us and how to do it. Though we do not know it, he is doing his work all the time.

Erratic behaviour only occurs if a disciple has a profound change of outlook while still retaining some individuality. Bhagavan will always bring about the required change of outlook (the experience of true self-knowledge) together with the loss of individuality, so no outward changes will be seen in those whom he liberates, and no 'I' will rise in them to say 'I have had this change of outlook', nor will he say anything (that is, he will not say that they have been liberated).

He used to give the example of a hard-shelled fruit which an elephant swallows whole and excretes unbroken, but when the shell is broken open the contents are found to have been digested. Likewise, when Bhagavan consumes anyone's ego, they will outwardly appear unchanged. No one can say how many egos Bhagavan has thus consumed.¹

In one of his verses Muruganar sang to Bhagavan, 'You have given me *sabhaja* [my natural state] without letting me experience *nirvikalpa samadhi*, close my eyes, or do any *sadhana*'. Such is Bhagavan's guruship, but if he were asked how he does it, he would say, 'I don't know; I just know that I am'.

¹ Compare verse 89 of *Sri Aruuncala Aksaramanamalai*: 'Arunachala, who, unknown to anyone, enchanted and stole my mind?'

There is only a thin line between *jnana* and *ajnana*. At the right time, a shock may enable one to cross the line and have that small change of outlook.

‘I am’ is neither inside nor outside. Dwell on the fact that ‘I am’ is devoid of limitations. Dwell on the feeling of being. That is self, and it alone exists.

The *karma* theory is riddled with loopholes, ambiguities and dubious assumptions. Firstly it presupposes that the ever non-existent ego exists as a doer, and on top of this false assumption it piles up one false assumption over another: the existence of God, *agamyā*, *sañcita*, *prarabdha*, their functions and so on. Do not merely doubt the theory; doubt whether you exist as a doer.

6th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Initiation is only necessary for students in the first or second standard [in the school of *bhakti* described in *The Path of Sri Ramana*], because they need to be taught rituals or *mantras* before they can start such practices. For students in the fourth standard no initiation is necessary, because the fact that they have been drawn to the *sadguru* indicates that they have already passed beyond such preliminary practices.

The *guru* works directly through the matured mind of an aspirant, using the aspirant’s own discrimination to turn his attention towards self. If an aspirant does proper study (*sravana*) and reflection (*manana*) on the *guru*’s words, he will clearly understand that self-attention is the only practice that is necessary, and that all other practices are superfluous.

A true aspirant will understand that ‘I am’ is the *guru*. If the *guru* were merely a body, he would disappear as he appeared, and would therefore be useless. To search for a ‘living’ *guru* is absurd, because the ‘living’ *guru* will sooner or later become a dead *guru*. If an aspirant has understood the teachings of the *guru* correctly, he will no longer look for the *guru* outside, because he will have faith that the *guru* is ever present within himself as ‘I am’.

Bhagavan used to say that the body of the *guru* is a veil covering him in the view of his devotees, because it conceals from them his true form as self. What advantage do devotees who were blessed to be in his physical presence have now? All they now have is a memory, which is no better than a dream. If they think proudly, 'I have seen Bhagavan', that is just another opportunity for their ego to rise.

To have come to Bhagavan is a sign of our ignorance, but he removes that ignorance by enabling us to understand that his presence is not limited to any place here or there, because it alone exists. He does not allow us to cling to anything external, but makes us discriminate and understand that 'I am' alone is eternal, and that the *guru* therefore cannot be anything other than that.

I am now so well soaked in Bhagavan's teachings, so firmly convinced by them, that I cannot take serious interest in any other *guru* or teaching. But this is not a fault, because such a strong conviction is necessary.

When Bhagavan was ill with cancer, I composed ten verses saying, 'If you can form even a single resolution (*sankalpa*), think of this helpless creature, who can do nothing for himself' and so on. When he read those verses he smiled, and that smile showed me my foolishness. It said to me, 'If my thought, look or touch can help you, how much more so can my silence?'

Thinking, looking and touching are actions that require a body, but his silence requires no physical presence. Silence is the most effective weapon, so to ask the *guru* to use any other means is like asking a general to use a crowbar to open a fortress, even though he is already bombarding it with cannons, bombs and all the most powerful weapons. We have Bhagavan's words, which are sufficient to turn our mind selfwards, and his silence is sufficient to do whatever else is required.

We must be content with our *guru*, because even on the spiritual path chastity (fidelity to one's own *guru*) is necessary. If we chase after other *gurus*, that is a sign of a wandering mind and lack of discrimination, which will only obstruct the work being done by his grace.

If we do proper reflection (*manana*) on Bhagavan's teachings, we will find no room for discontent.

9th December 1977

Sadhu Om: We must be careful not to feed the 'I' in any way. That is an important part of spiritual practice (*sadhana*). At every twist and turn, we must be alert against the rising of this 'I'. To sit in the hall [Bhagavan's 'old hall' in Ramanasramam] is good, but it is also necessary to watch all the time that we do not feed 'I'.

We should not even think of becoming a *guru* or guiding others. Avoiding such ideas is good discipleship. We must always be humble and self-effacing. If we want fame or the good opinions of others, then we are no better than worldly people, because we are still thinking that happiness comes from things outside ourself.

How can an aspirant mix with worldly-minded people? Their thought-current is completely opposed to ours. If one feels increasingly out of place in this world, and if one has less and less liking to mix with worldly-minded people, that is a sign of progress.

True progress is not raising *kundalini* to here or there, but is just humility. To be constantly self-effacing in every way is a sure means to *samadhi*.

Bhagavan told us to be quiet, but nowadays so-called 'yogis' and 'maharishis' are shouting so much. Bhagavan lived as a perfect example of the state of *jnana*, but where can you see such an example among all the famous 'sages' today? Tinnai Swami² is the nearest I have seen to what Bhagavan taught us: complete non-interference. To keep quiet and not to interfere is the best way of living in the world.

When an old woman cursed Bhagavan for roaming about the hill in the heat of the sun among all the thorny plants, asking him why he did not just keep quiet, he did not reply arrogantly, 'But I am a

² Tinnai Swami was a devotee of Bhagavan, and an article that I wrote about him was published on pp. 75-83 of the Aradhana 2004 issue of *The Mountain Path*.

great *maharishi*', but merely thought, 'Yes, that is also good. Why not? To keep quiet is best'.

We should not want to have anything or to be anything. Great saints have prayed, 'Send me to heaven or hell. I do not even ask for liberation (*moksa*). Only let me always cling to you alone'.

What use is the good opinion of others? At most it will last only for the lifetime of this body.

10th December 1977

Sadhu Om: In verse 273 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai* Bhagavan says that the self-awareness (*sat-bodha* or being-consciousness) that exists and shines in all, as all, is the *guru*.

To be qualified for the fourth standard [in the school of *bhakti*] one must have wholehearted love for *guru*, and one must try to put his teachings into practice, at least insofar as one understands them. Unless one sincerely wants and tries to follow the *guru*'s teachings, one does not have the true *guru-bhakti* required to be in the fourth standard.³

For example, although Devaraja Mudaliar said he had no brain for self-enquiry, Bhagavan was everything to him, so he followed the path of self-surrender as he understood it. One may be bottom of the class, but unquestioning faith in the *guru* can overcome all obstacles in a moment. Even if we do not succeed now in our attempts to abide as self, we should at least sincerely want and try to abide thus.

Progress can never be judged. Bhagavan knows exactly the right medicine required to mature each one of us, so he knows which *vasana* (propensity) to release at each moment. Someone who is getting 5% today may get 100% tomorrow, whereas someone else who is getting 90% today may not seem to improve for years. A person may be always caught up in worldly affairs, but if he is always feeling, 'This

³ Compare the final clause of the twelfth paragraph of *Nanar?* (Who am I?): '... nevertheless, it is necessary to proceed [behave or act] unflinchingly according to the path that *guru* has shown'.

is all useless nonsense; when can I be quiet?” he may be doing better than someone who is always sitting in meditation.

A lady devotee who lived nearby complained to Bhagavan that she had not been able to come to his hall for fifteen days because she had to attend to relatives who had come to stay. He replied, ‘That is good. It is better that you were at home with your relatives and that your mind was here, than if you had been here and your mind had been thinking of them’.

Ramakrishna told the following story: A *sadhu* led a pure life and wanted to help a pious prostitute, so he counted the number of people who visited her house by placing stones in a pile, and after many years he told her that the pile of stones represented her sins, so in repentance she locked her door and starved to death. He also passed away, but she was taken to heaven because she was repentant, whereas he was taken to hell because his mind was always dwelling on her sins.

He also told a similar story of two friends, one of whom listened to the *Bhagavatam* while the other went to a brothel. The first regretted his decision and envied his friend, who he thought was enjoying himself in the brothel, while the second felt disgusted with himself and would have preferred to be listening to the holy book. The first went to hell and the second went to heaven.

The moral of these stories is that our outward actions are not as important as our inner thoughts and attitude. Likewise, intense longing for self-abidance is essential, even if we fail in our efforts to abide as self.

In order to be free, we only need to experience our being as it really is for just one moment. When an aspirant is sufficiently matured through the school of *bhakti*, the *guru* will give the final tap, and thus he will be promoted to the fifth standard, which is liberation (*moksa*). That may happen at any moment.

The love to abide as self is the real sign of *guru-bhakti*. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Two

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

10th December 1977 (continued)

Sadhu Om: People want to leave something for the world when they die, but when the body dies this world, which is our projection, ceases to exist. If we care about the world, we haven't understood Bhagavan properly.

In the English translation of *Who Am I?* in *Words of Grace* the world is said to appear or be perceived 'as an apparent objective reality' (which is a term that Bhagavan did not use in the Tamil original). What does 'objective reality' mean? Objects have the same degree of reality as the subject, but both are unreal. Reality is neither objective nor subjective.

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Even Krishna talks of the earnest enquirer passing on to enjoy celestial worlds and then returning to do *sadhana* in this world, as if all these worlds existed in our absence.

Bhagavan said that not only does self not know other things, but it does not even know itself. Knowing is part of a dyad (knowing or not knowing) and a triad (knower, knowing and what is known), but self is just being, and hence devoid of all forms of doing, including knowing. Being is knowing, but not in the ordinary sense of this word, which refers to an action. Therefore when Bhagavan said that self does not even know itself, he meant that its self-awareness is not an action but its natural state of just being. He did not mean that it does not know 'I am', but that it is devoid of knowing as we commonly conceive it.

This world is nothing but a projection of our own *vasanas* (dispositions), so anyone who reacts to it with feelings such as curiosity, desire, anger, fear or hatred is like a small child or monkey when it first confronts its own reflection in a mirror. At first it is curious, then it becomes angry, then it gives a blow, and finally it runs back to its mother in fear.

If we desire anything from God or *guru*, we do not have *deva-bhakti* or *guru-bhakti* [true love for God or *guru*] but only *visaya-bhakti* [love for objects or objective experiences]. Only when we desire nothing are we qualified for the third (b) or fourth standards [in the 'school of *bhakti*' described in *The Path of Sri Ramana*].

When they first come to the *guru* even sincere aspirants desire *moksa*, peace or whatever else they call it. *Mumukshutva* is necessary for the fourth standard [*guru-bhakti*], but what the *guru* makes the aspirant understand is that *moksa* (liberation) is not gaining anything but losing everything. To learn this is the purpose of the fourth standard, and when it has been learnt thoroughly we will be in the fifth standard [pure *svatma-bhakti* or love for self, which is the state of *moksa*].

Many like Muruganar and Natananandar came to Bhagavan for *moksa* alone and prayed accordingly. Their prayers purified their minds and gave them the discrimination to understand that complete loss of individuality is the only true *moksha*.

Bhagavan has taught us how to pray: in verse 30 of *Aksaramanamalai* he sang, 'Destroying [my worldly] greatness and making [me] naked [in the state of *nirvana*], give me the greatness of [your] grace'.

He said that even surrender (as it is usually understood) is not true *deva-bhakti*, because everything is already God's, so we can only return what was never ours, as he taught us in verse 486 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*: '[Imagining our self to be separate from God] our lovingly offering that self to God, who exists as [our real] clearly experienced self, is just like breaking [a piece from] a sweet sugar [idol of] Ganapati and offering [it back in worship] to that Ganpati'. True *deva-bhakti* is not to rise as a separate self in the first place, even to surrender that self to God.

In verse 29 of *Upadesa Undiyar* he sang, 'Abiding in this state [of self-knowledge], [which is] the way to experience supreme bliss devoid of [any thought of] bondage or liberation, is abiding in the service of God'. By abiding thus, without rising as a separate 'I', we are sparing God the trouble of having to save us from our own self-created ignorance. This is the best service we can do for him, and is therefore the only real *deva-bhakti*.

13th December 1977

Sadhu Om: The mind will always feel that self-attention is difficult, because it can never attend to self. Only self can attend to self.

When a French devotee told him that Swami Siddheswarananda [the founder and head of the Ramakrishna Mission centre in France] had said, 'Very few have known who Bhagavan is', Muruganar replied, 'That is true. Bhagavan's *ashram* is not confined within the four walls of this compound. The whole universe is his *ashram*. The whole universe is himself'. He later added, 'Bhagavan alone exists'.

During his final illness, when some devotees suggested that he pray to Bhagavan to relieve his suffering, Muruganar replied, 'You can pray to your God, but I cannot. My God doesn't answer. My God cannot answer'.

Sastra-vasana (the disposition to study numerous spiritual and philosophical texts) is created only if one does no more than *sravana* (reading) and superficial *manana* (reflection). If a learned *pandit* who seeks name and fame did a little deep *manana*, he would reflect thus: 'If *brahman*, the one self, alone exists, why do I want the appreciation of others? Where are any others? Who am I?'

If reflection on the *guru's* words is done only as an aid to practical *sadhana*, it will not create any *sastra-vasanas*. The *guru's* words will always turn the mind back to self-attention, because they all point only to self.

For a young and earnest aspirant whose mind is still fresh, only a little *manana* is needed. Whenever his mind strays outwards he will reflect, 'All that is perceived through the five senses is known by me, so knowledge of anything only indicates that I am', and thus he will easily restore his self-attention.

During *nididhyasana* (contemplation on self) a little *manana* (that is, just a few thoughts) can sometimes help to prevent the mind from straying away from self-attention, but ultimately all these aids must go. In *Who Am I?* Bhagavan says that a time will come when we will have to forget everything that we have learnt. To forget second and third persons (everything other than oneself) is peaceful; to remember them is troublesome.

When he was young, Natanananadar once said to an older devotee who was asking Bhagavan many questions about how to practise *atma-vicara*: 'When the infinite self-shining "I" is standing inside you like a rock, why do you have so many doubts?'

19th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Dispassion (*vairagya*) comes only through knowledge. It is cultivated by reflection (*manana*) and discrimination (*viveka*), and sustained by the clear conviction that everything is 'I', that nothing is independent of our own self-awareness, and that self alone exists.

Why to say that a mind or ego exists in sleep in order to know 'nothingness'? Why not understand instead that it is self that knows that 'nothingness', and that that 'nothingness' itself is nothing other

than self. If you can understand that, then you can understand that self also knows this 'everythingness', and that 'everythingness' is also nothing other than self.

In fact no ego or mind exists even now, so why to say it exists in sleep? There is only one 'I', so the 'I' that knows all this is only self. Why to admit the existence of an ego?

In Bhagavan's path we cannot admit the existence of any state of 'void' or 'nothingness', because in order to experience such a state we would have to exist in it, and hence it would not be devoid of ourself, but only of other things. Since nothing else exists in it, it would be full of ourself, and hence *purna*, not *sunya*. To anyone who imagined they have reached a void, Bhagavan would say, 'Investigate who experiences it'. However, even that would not be necessary if we firmly cling to self-attention.

In the *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* Bhagavan says that everything is self: self is that in which, of which, from which, for which, by which and which everything actually is. To tell the truth, even this (our everyday activity) is self-attention. Why then are Bhagavan's clues necessary? Only because we now mistake our natural state of self-awareness to be a state of awareness of many things other than ourself. It is only as a means to remove this mistaken experience of otherness and manyness that Bhagavan asked us to attend only to self.

An elderly devotee did not visit Bhagavan for a while because he thought he could become like Bhagavan on his own. After a long time he returned, just as Bhagavan was stitching some leaf-plates, and Bhagavan said to him, 'See, we take so much care to stitch these plates, but after eating from them we throw them away. Bhagavan is like a leaf-plate: only when he has served his purpose should you throw him away.' Therefore Bhagavan and the clues he has given us are necessary until we experience the dawn of self-knowledge, and after that we will see that we – the one self – alone exist, and that Bhagavan and his clues are also only ourself.

Our mind experiencing objects is like sunlight falling on a mirror and being reflected onto a wall. The reflection (which is like the objects we experience) is light, the reflecting mirror (which is like our

experiencing mind) is light – and when looked at directly it seems to be another sun – and the sun (which is like self, the source of our mind's light of consciousness) is light. Everything is light, and the light is one. Likewise, we and all that we experience are only the one light of consciousness, which is self.

Can the mind rise without the support of self? Can it exist without self-awareness? It is all so simple, but immature minds think, 'Then self-knowledge is only like the nothingness of sleep. It doesn't look very tasty in comparison with all the interesting things outside in the world'. What can we say to them? We cannot change them, so we just have to let them suffer a bit more until they understand that oneness is peace and manyness is pain.

In the shade it is pleasant, in the sun it is scorching. We always have the freedom to turn within to see the light and thus enjoy the shade. When by force of old habit we wander out again, we say to Bhagavan, 'That was only *laya*, I want *nasa*', and he replies, 'Turn again to the source and see if manyness exists there'. By repeatedly turning away consciously from the manyness in this way we come to see that it does not exist apart from us, and that it is therefore not something we need to fear. Some reach this realisation after just a few attempts, but for others it takes longer because their attention is not so sharp and clear.

Extracts from a tape-recording: 13th March 1977

Sadhu Om: Self-attention is ever going on. It needs no effort.

Here the whole philosophy is based on the principle that people are not contented by attending to second or third persons, so *vairagya* (freedom from desire to experience otherness) must be the base. One should know that attention to second or third persons brings misery.

When Bhagavan was asked, 'Why should we attend to the first person or *atman*?' he replied, 'If you do not attend to the first person, you attend to second or third persons instead. If you do not do *atma-vicara*, you do *anatma-vicara*. Neither is necessary. To be is not doing, not attending'. Until one comes to the conclusion that attending to second or third persons – or even to the first person – is ultimately unnecessary, one should attend to the first person. But if that is felt

to be tiresome, be free from that also, and just be happy with your mere being.

[Later Sadhu Om explained that this is like saying, 'If you do not like this coin with a head, you can have this one with a tail', knowing that both coins are one. Remaining with only our being is the state of attending to nothing other than self.]

There must be a first person to attend to second or third persons. Must not the first person exist before it can start to attend to any second or third person, and does it know that it is? After waking up from sleep as so-and-so, the first knowledge that comes to us is about our own existence. That itself is self-attention. Knowing that 'I am so-and-so' is knowledge of the first person. How does this knowledge come? Only by attending to the first person. So attention to the first person is always going on, even while we are attending to second or third persons. Without attention to the first person, attention to second or third persons cannot occur.

The knowledge of second or third persons indicates the presence of the first person. When the world is known, that shows that the first person is present. This is self-attention without effort. A *jnani* is always paying attention in this way. He is not actually *paying* attention, because he is self-attention. If he knows anything, he clearly knows, 'Because I am, these are known. Because I am, I hear this. Because I am, I smell this'. This 'I am' is a constant knowledge. This constant self-attention does not fade away when he seems to attend to second or third persons.

This is the difference between a *jnani* and an *ajnani*. The *ajnani* forgets that he is experiencing his being, whereas the *jnana* does not forget this. He is fully aware of this 'I am'. How can this awareness be there unless there is an attention? Since awareness and attention are one and the same, if we are aware that 'I am', we are attending to 'I am'. There will be no exertion in such self-attention, and there will be no forgetfulness of the first person even when attending to second or third persons.

Can we actually forget self? No, we cannot. We cannot but know self.

In deep sleep our self-attention is without second or third persons. In sleep we do not need any outside indicators, any second or third persons, to know that 'I am'. Self-attention is ever present in sleep. Though second and third persons, the outer signs, are absent, we do not doubt whether or not 'I am'. Our being is our attention; our *sat* is our *cit*; our mere being is knowing.

Now we want to know, so we have to attend. Attending is a verb, but though 'I am' is also a verb, it is not an action, a *kriya-rupa*, but is just being, a *sat-rupa*. So in 'I am', in just being, there is no exertion and hence no tiredness. Self-attention is our *svabhava*, our very nature, not our doing, not our making effort. It is constant, even in sleep.

When we once discover that we are fully aware of our being in sleep, we will know that we will be fully aware of it in death and in *pralaya* (the dissolution of the universe). We alone are; nothing is ever destroyed.

In sleep there is no fear. Bhagavan said, 'Where there are thoughts, there will be fear. When thoughts subside, there is no fear'. Fear, sorrow and desire are nothing but thoughts. Thought creates them. In sleep we remain alone, without thoughts. When we are alone there is no fear. Fear comes only due to thoughts, and thoughts are cheating us. We can be fearless only when we are perfectly alone, when we simply remain as we really are, devoid of thought. In sleep there is no fear because there is no thought.

The thinker is the first thought, the 'I'-thought. Who is thinking? The ego, the first person. This first person, the first thought, rises on waking from sleep. The knowledge of the first person is the first knowledge we get on waking from sleep. Therefore, self-attention is ever going on. Until we know that, we have to make effort to attend to self, and after knowing it, we never have to worry about it or anything else.

Knowing self happens in a split second. It makes everything, the entire universe, dissolve.

Both light and darkness are necessary to make a film show. In the projector there is light, but the film has darker portions that prevent the light passing through. Only through the less dark portions does

the light escape to the screen. If light alone were present, no film show would be seen. Likewise, if a uniformly dark film were present, nothing would be seen. Therefore both light and darkness are essential. To make the show of this world, both *vidya* (knowledge or self-awareness) and *avidya* (ignorance or self-forgetfulness) are necessary. But is it necessary to have this show? ▲

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Three

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

23rd December 1977

Sadhu Om: Once a PWD inspector asked Bhagavan, ‘How can we live a pure life in this world?’ and he replied, ‘You know the *nattan-kal* [a standing stone fixed at a road junction] we have in our villages [in the Madurai district]. See how many uses it has: villagers place their head-loads on it when they take rest, cows use it as a scratching-post, betel-chewers wipe their surplus *chunnambu* [lime-paste] on it, and others spit on it. We must live in this world like those *nattan-kals*.’

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan’s Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

It is only in our view that Bhagavan appears to be compassionate. He actually has no compassion, because compassion entails the existence of others, and in his view there are no others. However, it is also true to say that he has perfect compassion, because he loves us all as himself, so he truly suffers with each of our sufferings. See the paradoxical nature of self-knowledge. It reconciles irreconcilable opposites. It makes having no compassion the same as having perfect compassion. Who can understand the state of self-knowledge?

‘Love is our being, desire is our rising’. Love wants oneness, desire wants manyness. The movement of love is towards oneness, and of desire is towards manyness. Love is ever self-contented, desire is ever discontented. The fulfilment and perfect state of love is self-love (*svatma-bhakti*), which is the experience of absolute oneness, but desire can never be fulfilled.

Therefore all yogas or sadhanas aim towards oneness (which is sometimes called ‘union’ with God or the reality), and one-pointedness of mind is their vehicle. Sadhana is a growth from desire to love, and self-love is the driving force behind this growth. The development of this growth towards love leads the aspirant to love just one God or one guru, which is the highest form of dualistic love, and the most effective aid to develop perfect self-love.

The guru shows the aspirant that the only means to achieve perfect self-love is self-attention. The aspirant therefore eagerly practises self-attention, but until his practice blossoms into true self-love, he continues clinging to his guru as the object of his love. His *guru-bhakti* is the stay and support that steadies and strengthens his growth towards self-love. This is the state that Bhagavan describes in verse 72 of *Aksaramanamalai*:

Arunachala, protect [me] as a support to cling to so that I may not droop down like a tender creeper without support.

The aspirant’s love for and faith in his guru constantly drives him back to self-attention, which is the path taught by the guru, and as a result he comes to be increasingly convinced that his own self is the true form of his guru. Thus his dualistic *guru-bhakti* dissolves naturally

and smoothly into non-dualistic *svatma-bhakti* (love for self alone), which is his true nature. One-pointed fidelity to the guru and his teachings is therefore an essential ingredient in sadhana, and it alone will yield the much longed for fruit of self-knowledge.

In *Sri Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* Bhagavan teaches us the true nature of *guru-bhakti*. For example:

Arunachala, when I took refuge in you as [my only] God, you completely annihilated me. (*Aksaramanamalai* verse 48)

... Is there any deficiency [or grievance] for me? . . . Do whatever you wish, my beloved, only give me ever-increasing love for your two feet. (*Navamanimalai* verse 7)

... What to say? Your will is my will, [and] that [alone] is happiness for me, lord of my life. (*Patikam* verse 2)

It is necessary to attempt to practise self-attention before one can possibly write commentaries on or translate Bhagavan's works. Only by repeatedly trying and failing can one begin to understand his teachings.

Take for instance the first sentence of *Ulladu Narpadu*: 'Except what is, does consciousness that is exist?' To a mind that is unaccustomed to the practice of self-attention this will seem a very abstract idea, because the first word *ulladu* ('what is' or existence) will immediately suggest the existence of things, so such a mind will understand this sentence to mean, 'Unless things exist, can they be known?' But Bhagavan is always pointing to self, so by the word *ulladu* he means nothing other than 'I', which is the sole reality, that which alone actually exists.

However this will be immediately understood only by those who are well-soaked in the practice of self-attention. Such a person will understand this sentence to mean, 'Other than what is (namely 'I'), can there be any consciousness of being (any awareness 'am')?' which they will understand as implying, 'My self-awareness (*cit*) is not other than my being (*sat*)'. It is so simple, but to ordinary people it seems abstract.

All scriptures and gurus aim at drawing our attention to ourselves, but as I said in the first part of *The Path of Sri Ramana*, up till now they have all started by conceding to our ignorant outlook of taking the ego

to be real, and so they start their teaching from that perspective. But why not start from the source — from what is actually real? Bhagavan was a revolutionary, so he never conceded that our viewpoint was correct, but instead always pointed directly to the one self-evident reality, ‘I am’.

Nowadays people have so many strange ideas about yoga, but in *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan has given us a clear idea of what real yoga actually is.

It is to Muruganar that we owe the composition of *Ulladu Narpadu*. If it were not for him those twenty-one verses would have been ignored [a reference to the twenty-one stray verses composed by Bhagavan that Muruganar gathered together and asked him on 21st July 1928 to enlarge upon to form a work revealing the nature of reality and the means by which we can experience it, which prompted him to compose during the next three weeks *Ulladu Narpadu*, in which eventually only three of the original twenty-one verses were included (namely verses 16, 37 and 40), leaving the other eighteen to be relegated to the supplement (*anubandham*)]. Bhagavan was so confident of the power of his silence that he took no initiative to write or record his teachings, so it is to Muruganar that we owe the composition and compilation of the three principal *sastras* [scriptural texts] containing Bhagavan’s philosophy, namely *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu* and *Guruvachaka Kovai*.

24th December 1977

Sadhu Om (when asked why Bhagavan when he rewrote *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) as an essay omitted the first sentence of his reply to question 19 in the earlier thirty question-and-answer version: ‘God and guru will only show the way to attain *moksha* [liberation], but cannot¹ by

¹ In the more recent twenty-eight question-and-answer version, which was compiled and first published in 1932, about five years after Bhagavan had written his essay version, the editor (whose identity is not now known) changed the final verb in this sentence (the first sentence of the reply to question 20 in that version) from *serkka mudiyaadu*, which means ‘cannot join [or establish]’, to *serkkaar*, which means ‘will not join [or establish]’.

themselves [or of their own accord] establish individuals in *moksha*): What he said there is true, because unless we want *moksha*, God or guru will never give it to us. Wanting or desiring is love or *priya*, which is one of the three aspects of the reality, *sat-cit-ananda* (being-consciousness-happiness), which is also known as *asti-bhati-priya* (being-shining-love), so it is the nature of self, and hence a prerequisite for *moksha*. Perhaps he omitted this sentence so that people would not misunderstand it and be discouraged, because the grace of God or guru works in us by sowing the seed of desire for *moksha* and then cultivating it into its fully blossomed state of *svatma-bhakti* (love for self), which is itself the state of *moksha*.

26th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Thought, word and deed should always be in harmony, each consistent with the other two, because then only can grace flow in our heart. Grace will only flow freely when it has a clear and open passage. If thought, word, and deed contradict each other, each one following its own course, the flow of grace will be obstructed.

I don't know how people can live like that [referring to the behaviour of a confidence trickster], because their mind could never be at rest. For such people grace can never flow until they reform their deceitful attitude and behaviour.

28th December 1977

Sadhu Om: Wanting is *priya* (love, affection or joy), the *ananda* aspect of ourself. Unless we want *moksha*, guru can never give it to us. Now we want manyness, so using our original freedom to will and act [which is a reflection of the infinite freedom of *brahman*, our real nature] we see manyness. Guru teaches us to want and love only oneness. He wins us over by love, and we love him so much that we believe that what he teaches us is correct, so in accordance with his teachings we want to remain as we really are. He says, 'Just be', so we try to remain as self, and our love eventually drowns us (the ego) in self.

Who wants manyness? The Vedas say, 'You are that'. It must always come back to this 'I', so what is it? Guru's work is only to make us interested in investigating and knowing this 'I' — to make us want

to remain as self. People think that other factors such as meditation, *tapas* and so on are involved, but all that is actually required is to want just to be.

And who is guru? Truly God and guru are nowhere. You alone exist. When you wake up from this dream, you will find there is no God or guru, nor any ego striving for *mukti*.

Ramakrishna once said that God's *anugraha* (grace) is ready, and guru's *anugraha* is ready, but that one more person's *anugraha* is required. That is, your own *anugraha* is what is now essential.

Once we have come to guru, there is no need to worry. Everything else follows in its own time. Once, during the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1948, I was so confident of his grace that I composed ten enthusiastic verses saying, 'Who can die? Can death ever touch me again? Let Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva all turn their backs on me! Brahma has now truly lost one of his creatures', and so on. Bhagavan merely read it and put it aside. A few months later, however, I was again in a praying mood. I was depressed and felt helpless without his grace. I came before him in that mood, and found him reading my Jubilee verses. I felt ashamed of my mood. He didn't have to say anything. That was his way of teaching me that there is no need for dejection.

People want a 'living guru'. I suppose they expect him to show them the way to a 'living God'. Guru wants us to see ourself as *brahman*, but we want to see *brahman* as a human form. Bhagavan always said that self alone is guru, and that his body is unnecessary. He proved this by giving the flash of true knowledge only after he had left his body. Muruganar said that Bhagavan always said that his body was a veil over the reality, and so the light only became clear when his body passed away.

People say to me, 'It's alright for you to say a living guru is unnecessary, but you had a living guru'. To them I say that what I learnt from my living guru is that a living guru is unnecessary, and everyone else can learn the same if they study Bhagavan's works and do a little *manana* (reflection) on their import.

Unless you understand that self is guru, even a living guru cannot help you. Most people who were with Bhagavan didn't get *moksha* because they didn't want it. Bhagavan teaches us that sooner or later we must be satisfied with self, so why not be satisfied with it now?

People think that the guru must be a person, but guru is only the first person, the real 'I' within us. Not satisfied with this first person, they go seeking a second person to be their guru. Our aim, however, should only be to get rid of even the first person (our ego) — to drown our false personhood in self.

When our guru says that he cannot give us *moksha* unless we want it, we should think, 'What, am I really such an important factor?' and thus our attention should be drawn back to ourself. In fact, guru gives us *moksha* by making us want it, and therefore he always stresses the need for us to wish for it and to make effort for it.

Indeed, guru is all in all, so he is essential and he alone can give us *moksha*. He is however our own self, *sat-cit-ananda*, so he gives us *moksha*, which is our natural state of being (*sat*), by means of knowledge (*cit*) and love (*ananda*). He makes us know and love him as our own self.

29th December 1977

Sadhu Om (in reply to my question whether he was doing any sadhana in the years before he came to Bhagavan): I was longing for grace and always thinking of God. That is sadhana enough!

Some people say that the light seen at the time of Bhagavan's passing was him returning to *Skandaloka* [the world of Skanda, the younger son of Lord Siva]. First they try to limit him as a body, and then they try to limit him as a light. Their minds are so bound up in limitations that they have to limit even the illimitable. Bhagavan always said: 'Do not think this body is me. I am shining in each one of you as 'I'. Attend only to that'.

How often and for how many lives have we fooled ourselves thinking that our social service is selfless? We did it only for our own self-satisfaction or glory. It is natural for each one of us to love ourself. We are all naturally selfish, so we should first find out what

is self. When we know ourself as we really are, we will experience everything as not other than ourself, and thus our selfishness will then be the highest virtue. Only a jnani knows how to be truly selfish, because without knowing self we cannot know what real (unlimited) selfishness is.

In the path of surrender saints sing, ‘Send me to heaven or hell, but never let me forget you’, as if heaven and hell really exist. Their prayer only shows their total love for God alone. They teach us the right attitude, but they know that heaven and hell have no real existence. All these dualities — heaven and hell, good and bad, God and individual — exist only in the mind. So ultimately we must learn to make this mind subside.

When I first came to Bhagavan and heard him repeating constantly that everyone must eventually come to the path of self-enquiry, I wondered whether he was being partial to his own teaching, but I soon understood why he insisted that this is so. The final goal is only oneness, and to experience oneness our mind must subside, which will happen entirely only when we attend to nothing other than ourself.

So long as we attend to anything other than ourself, our mind cannot subside, because attention to other things sustains it, since that which experiences otherness is only this mind. When the mind subsides completely, only self-attention remains, and self-attention alone is the state of absolute oneness. Bhagavan used to repeat this teaching every day, maybe ten or twenty times, but still we didn’t change. He didn’t change his teaching either, because to him this truth was so clear.

The basic mistake we all make is to take a body to be ‘I’. This deeply entrenched feeling ‘I am this body called so-and-so’ is the root of all our trouble. If this tape-recorder is not working, we must attend to it and not to other things, because then only will we be able to repair it. Likewise, to rectify this mistaken identity, ‘I am so-and-so’, we must attend to it in order to know what it really is: what or who am I?

Only when we thus investigate ourself will the false adjunct ‘so-and-so’ drop off, and what will then remain is only the reality, ‘I am’. ‘I am so-and-so’ is the *naivedyam* [the food to be offered to

God], and when Bhagavan has consumed the adjunct 'so-and-so', what remains is only 'I am', which is his *prasadam* [the purified remnant of God's food, which is shared among devotees as a token of his grace].

'I am' alone really exists, so it is the true form of God and guru. To treat and cherish this filthy body as 'I' is therefore the worst kind of idol-worship. If we give up this idol-worship by knowing the truth of ourself, then we can worship anything as God, because we will know that nothing is other than him, our real self. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Four

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

31st December 1977

Sadhu Om: Devotion to God or guru as a second or third person can never give knowledge (*jnana*); devotion can only lead to devotion. Knowledge alone can give knowledge. 'I am' is the only true knowledge, so attention to that alone can lead to knowledge. Self-attention is the only true means, the ultimate means.

1st January 1978

Sadhu Om: When we awake from sleep we experience a new clarity of knowledge before we become aware of the body and world. The practice of sadhana is trying to cling to this clarity.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

Sitting in the Old Hall [where Bhagavan lived] is not essential if you are able to be aware of this clarity at other times. However, there is no harm in meditating in the Old Hall. If you should not be doing so, Bhagavan will prevent you from doing so; you need not worry about that. There is something special in the Old Hall that automatically reminds us of our own being, but of course we can be aware of our being anywhere else as well.

Effort is unnecessary for self, because self-attention is natural and effortless. Effort is only needed for the mind. It is the nature of self to attend to self, and it is the nature of the mind to attend to second and third persons. Sadhana is only for the mind, and the effort to attend to the feeling 'I' is only to keep the mind quiet — in its natural state of pure self-awareness.

It is not strictly true to say that self-enquiry begins with effort and ends with effortlessness, but for the sake of the *sadhaka* (practitioner) we may say so. Effort is required so long as the mind needs to be reminded of its true nature, 'I am', but when even awareness of second and third persons automatically reminds one of one's own existence, 'I am' [because what is aware of them is 'I'], then effort is no longer needed. When we can see only waves we must make some effort to notice the ocean underlying them, but when we know that the waves are nothing other than the ocean, effort is not needed.

All thoughts contain an element of the past or future in them. Can you make a thought about the present moment? If you seriously try to do so, all thoughts, including the thought 'I', will cease. This is another clue for self-attention. There are so many clues, you see.

Question: In practice we never actually attend to self. All the time we spend in the Old Hall we are only trying to do so. If we really attended to self for one moment, that would be liberation, would it not?

Sadhu Om: What, do you mean to say that even now you are not liberated? Are you not always attending to self? You know 'I am', and you only know something if you are attending to it. Even when you attend to second and third persons, it is 'I' that is attending, and that 'I' is always aware of itself.

Such *manana* [cogitation or deep reflection] is essential until you understand thoroughly that self-attention is natural and eternal and that all else shines by the light of that self-awareness. This *manana* will lead you right up to the boundary. *Nididhyasana* [contemplation, the practice of pure self-attention] is actually only for a moment. When you really practise what you have heard and understood, you cross the boundary, and that is *jnana*.

Ignore the mind, it needn't concern us. We are not the mind, so when we lose interest in it, it will die a natural death. This is why Bhagavan is always drawing our attention to self. He never allows us to become interested in the thinking mind or anything other than the feeling 'I'.

'What is this 'I'? What is the source from which it appears?' — All that is required is that our interest in this feeling 'I' should increase. That is *bhakti*.

Enquiry, faith and *bhakti* are not contradictory. They are all necessary. Enquiry begins with faith. Unless we have faith in the guru who tells us that self-attention is the means to true happiness, we would not be interested in attending to the first person. And when we practise self-attention, our experience of inner clarity confirms our faith, and thus our love for the guru increases.

Some people think that they can practise self-enquiry, so they do not need faith or *bhakti*. Such people know neither what *bhakti* nor what enquiry actually is.

The purpose of the outer guru is to make us understand the need for self-attention and to enkindle love for it in our heart. A living person is of course not needed for that. Bhagavan's books serve the same purpose, and he provides us with fellow devotees and other outer aids as and when necessary. The environment or circumstances in which we live are provided by the guru, who knows what the most suitable environment is for maturing us.

When we start trying to attend to the first person, the guru within, who is self, will start working. Whenever we attend to 'I', the guru's work is going on. Once we have been given a taste

for self-attention, our love for it naturally increases and matures, like the momentum of a rubber ball as it bounces down a flight of stairs.

To think of the real greatness of a *jnani* is a good means to quieten the mind. When Arjuna's grandson, King Parikshit, was cursed that he would die in seven days, he went to his guru, Suka Brahmarishi. Suka told him that he was fortunate, because he was assured seven days, and then he started to tell him the story of Krishna. Parikshit was so absorbed in hearing the greatness of Krishna that six days passed by unnoticed, and when Suka reminded him that he would die that day, he replied, 'Who will die, only this body!' Hearing about Krishna had given him *jnana*. Sometimes, when I used to think of Bhagavan and his real greatness, hours would pass without my noticing them. Great *janis* are such that even thinking of them can quieten our mind.

2nd January 1978

Sadhu Om: Once we have wholeheartedly taken Bhagavan to be our guru, we have no need to worry: we are like the child in its mother's lap. Of course, we cannot expect Bhagavan to choose us as his disciples, because in his view there are no others, so it is for us to decide that he is our only guru and protector.

Once we have wholeheartedly decided this, then we are truly having association or satsanga with him. This is really the satsanga that he refers to in the first five verses of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*. Once we enjoy this satsanga, he will be working from within and without. From outside he will shape our physical circumstances suitably, and from inside he will work deep within our *cittam*, where he will root out our *vasanas* by burning, drying, churning out or dealing with them in whatever other way is most appropriate. We may not see any changes, of course, because the mind is not a suitable instrument for gauging its own development.

The influence of his silence is of course dependent upon [the receptivity of] us, the receiver set. As he says in *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), we must unflinchingly follow the path shown by the guru. We must be sincere in our love for him. He says that he is self-shining in each

one of us as 'I', so if we really love him, we will naturally and happily attend to this 'I'. When we are thus in his hands, he will make us do whatever is necessary. When we should attend to self, he will make us do so, and when we need some other experiences, he will provide them also.

If Bhagavan was truly a fit guru (our real self) when he was appearing as a body, then he must also be a fit guru now. But then he was with all his (Brahman's) five aspects, *sat-cit-ananda-nama-rupa* [being-consciousness-bliss and name-and-form], whereas he is now without *nama-rupa*, his false aspects, and hence he shines unimpeded as pure *sat-cit-ananda*. Therefore his power is now infinite. He always used to say that his body was veiling his true nature, and that those that took that body to be guru would be disappointed. Now his body has gone, he has left us with no outward form to cling to, so we have no alternative but to accept that 'I am' alone is the guru. I have found that many disciples who have come to him after the passing of his body are more sincere and have clearer understanding than most of those who came earlier [because they were fixated just on his physical form].

He now saves us from mistaking him to be the body, so what advantage would we gain from going to other bodies who are reputed to be great *mahatmas*? He has said that the greatest *mahatma* is within, so why not forget those other *mahatmas* and abide peacefully as this *mahatma* (our real self)?

Using the yardstick given to us by Bhagavan, we can now see that any would-be guru who conducts classes and flies around the world, thinking that he is guiding others, is not a real guru, because the guru does not see any ignorant *jivas* to guide. Bhagavan never attempted to guide anyone, but just kept quiet, and it was always a great wonder to him when people came to him saying, 'Bhagavan, I do not know myself, so please show the way to self'. What could he reply? He could only counter question: 'Who does not know whose self? Who is this I?'

A mantra is a set of sacred syllables, and the word literally means 'that which protects when meditated on', coming from the same root

as *manas* (mind) and *manana* (meditation or cogitation)'. Who is to be protected? The ego! A name of God will at least lead us to God, but a *mantra* will only protect us (our ego, mind or individuality) from God. There has been so much talk in India about mantras that nowadays people are not satisfied unless they are given a mantra. However, *mantras* are only for worldly things, so Bhagavan and Ramakrishna never initiated anyone with mantras.

Bhagavan's instruction concerning *mantra-japa* was that we should watch the source from which the sound of the mantra rises. What did he mean? Since the sound rises only from oneself, who repeats the mantra, he meant that we should ignore the mantra and instead cling fast to self-attention.

The mind must be made one-pointed so that it will cling to one thing alone, but for that it is not necessary to practise concentration on any second or third person, such as our breathing, a mantra or a form of God. We can just as well start our concentration practice by attending to the first person, 'I'. If we wish to learn to cycle in order to cycle to Tirukoilur, it is not necessary to practise in some open space here. Why not start our practice on the road to Tirukoilur? Likewise, since self is our goal, why not start by attending to self?

Some people may say that attending to 'I' is more difficult than attending to other things, but how can they prove their claim? In part one of *The Path of Sri Ramana* I have explained what is difficult and what is easy. Whatever you try to attend to, whenever your attention wanders, you must draw it back to its target, and this is easy to do whether that target is 'I' or some object. Attending to the first person is the direct means, and attending to anything else is in no way any easier. Indeed, practising concentration on any object will only increase the outgoing tendency of the mind, and will thus hinder us when we turn towards self.

In *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says, '... when the body dies, the mind seizes and takes the *prana* away'. This simply means that when the mind subsides into its source, the tendency or habit of breathing also

subsides. Then as soon as the mind rises again, projecting a new body, the function of breathing restarts automatically and immediately. Whenever there is body-consciousness, there is breathing. Breathing is an ingrained habit of the mind, and if we try to see how breathing starts, the mind subsides. This is another clue for self-attention [because what breathing starts from is only oneself].

Scientists talk of an involuntary nervous system, but there is no such thing. If they looked to see how these ‘involuntary’ functions start, they would understand that all physical functions are volition-driven actions of the mind, so they can be controlled if they are scrutinized by a sharp and refined mind.

Bhagavan used to say that dream is the activity of a half-confused mind, and waking is the activity of a fully confused mind. In fact, the mind itself is confusion. We have so many confused beliefs — that we are born, that we have a past and a future, and so on — but if we really consider all such things, we will see that they are known only after we come into existence as this mind. If we carefully scrutinise the mind to see how and when all these thoughts arise, we will find that ‘I am’ alone is always shining. The past and future are only thoughts existing now, in the present moment.

Therefore I am a *pukka* atheist. I always say: don’t believe what you don’t know! The only thing we know directly and for certain is ‘I am’. We know of our birth only by hearing about it from others, but we know these ‘others’ only after knowing ourself. Our present knowledge of the past is only ideas obtained from memory or external sources, which are second or third persons, but we know second and third persons only after knowing the first person. Our belief in the future also relies upon a second or third person, namely the inferring faculty of our intellect. Even our experiences of the present moment are known only indirectly through our mind and senses. Hence, all knowledge is merely a reflection of our original knowledge, ‘I am’. It is all a flimsy reflection of our own self-awareness, and seems real and substantial only because of our mental confusion, which will disappear if we keenly scrutinise the first person or the present moment.

In *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says that those who earn the gracious glance of the guru will surely be saved, but the guru's glance is not just the glance of his physical eyes. If we wish to know if someone is looking at us, we must look at them, and since self is the guru, we must turn selfward to see if self is looking at us. Indeed the guru is always looking at us, so in order to be saved we only have to attend to him, who shines as 'I'.

Many people say to me, 'This self-enquiry is difficult, so please tell us what self-surrender is', but in *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says that self-attention alone is self-surrender:

Being completely absorbed in *atma-nishtha* [self-abidance], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any thought other than *atma-cintana* [self-contemplation], is giving ourself to God.

When people ask me what meditation Bhagavan taught, I reply that meditation means thinking, but Bhagavan instructed us not to think — to stop meditating. This is what he teaches us in the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

... Since the existing reality exists without thought in the heart, who can [or how to] meditate on [that] existing reality, which is called 'heart'? Being as it is in the heart alone is 'meditating'. Experience [thus].

The aim of all yogas is to make the mind one-pointed, so that it has the strength to abide firmly in its source. This is why I always recommend people to stick to one guru and wholeheartedly follow his teaching. Even if the guru is a bogus one, so long as your *guru-bhakti* is sincere, your one-pointedness of mind will soon give you the clarity to see that he is bogus. This is why Bhagavan criticised people going to many *mahatmas*. For example, in verse 121 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai* he says:

You who desire to see with wonder that *mahatma* and this *mahatma*! If you investigate and experience the nature of your own *mahatma* [great self] within you, [you will see that] every *mahatma* is only [that] one [your own self].

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

If you meet one real *mahatma*, he will teach you that the atma in you is the same as the atma in all *mahatmas*, and that it is therefore futile to go to any other *mahatmas*. One-pointed *guru-bhakti* is essential for the earnest practice of self-attention.

Another clue for self-attention is to try to see exactly when, how and from what thought arises. Such attention will automatically make the mind subside. Thought rises only when there is self-negligence (*pramada*), attention to anything other than self. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Five

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

3rd January 1978

Question: Is attention to the present moment the same as self-attention?

Sadhu Om: Yes, or rather it is a clue leading to self-attention. Attention to any second or third person is not possible in the precise present moment, because thoughts, which are attention paid to second or third persons, are always moving. Such wavering attention can never result in knowledge of what is real, because to know what is real attention must stand still [since stillness is the nature of reality].

If you look for the present moment among second and third persons, you will find no such thing, but will find only a constant

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

movement from past to future. However, if you attend to the first person, attention will stand still, and when attention is still it subsides into its source. You will then know that self is always present in the 'now', and that all else is non-existent.

When people are told to pay attention to the 'now', they find they cannot do so, because they are only attending to second and third persons. The clue of self-attention is essential, because then only can we understand what the present moment actually is.

In the first sentence of the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan asks: "Without [or except as] that which is, can there be consciousness of being?" That is, if there were not that which is, namely 'I', could there be the awareness 'am'? This awareness 'am', which is self-shining, shows clearly that something real does exist, and that real something cannot be other than this awareness [because the awareness 'am' is a first-person awareness – an awareness only of itself, not of anything else]. This sentence is clearly referring to the existence and awareness of 'I', and not to that of any object, because to be known objects depend upon 'I'.

Since this reality 'I' exists beyond thought, in the heart, and is therefore called 'heart', how to meditate upon it? This clearly shows the absurdity of meditation. All religions teach that we should think of or meditate upon the reality or God, but since it exists beyond thought, how can we think of or meditate upon it? Bhagavan therefore teaches us that subsiding in the heart as it is – that is, as 'I am' – is alone 'meditating' upon it correctly. That is, the only way we can truly 'meditate' upon what is real is to remain as we are, without thought. Since what is real is beyond thought, thought can never take us to it. To attain it, we must give up all thought [including the first thought, the 'I' that thinks] and just be as it is.

4th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Now, in the waking state, we say so many things about the [deep] sleep state, because we have no clear idea of what sleep is. If we make proper research into sleep, we will discover that there is no difference between sleep and jnana. We can now take sleep as

an example of the happiness that is enjoyed in the absence of the 'I', world and God. Our love of sleep proves our love of egolessness, as Bhagavan implies in verse three of *Ulladu Narpadu*: '[...] that state devoid of 'I' is agreeable to everyone'. What we now call sleep appears to be limited because on waking we rise again as 'I', but *jnana* has no such limitation, so the happiness of *jnana* is unlimited.

Nowadays people try to glorify Bhagavan by saying that he is great because he said something that Buddha said, something else that Christ said, and so on, as if his greatness could not stand by itself. Christ, Buddha, Sankara, Ramakrishna and others were all great examples of *jnanis*, but outwardly they roamed about arguing, teaching and founding religions, whereas Bhagavan is *jnana* itself, so he just kept quiet. It is absurd to try to show his greatness in the light of these *jnanis*, because his greatness is the self-shining source of all light. Doing so is like propping a bamboo at the foot of Arunachala and saying that we are helping the hill to stand, whereas in fact many such bamboos can grow on it.

We are told that we project the world, but this does not mean that the seer is the projector. We, the seer (the mind or ego), are part of the projection, as Bhagavan says in verse 160 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*:

The false person [or soul] who behaves as 'I' occurs as one among the shadow pictures [in this world picture, which is like a cinema show].

Who is this 'I' we say is the projector? By our investigating 'who am I?' the non-existence of both the projector and its projection will be exposed.

Arguments about world and God are futile, as Bhagavan teaches us in verses two and three of *Ulladu Narpadu*. The manyness of the world allows for dualities such as real or unreal, conscious or non-conscious, and happy or miserable. Where there is duality there will be doubt. Self is one, devoid of duality, so self-knowledge will allow no room for dualities or doubts. Therefore, we should avoid doing research on God or the world, and should instead do research only on 'I'. 'I' will then disappear along with both God and the world.

The resulting 'state of egolessness is agreeable to everyone' (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse three), as shown by our experience of sleep.

5th January 1978

Sadhu Om: If 'I' is taken to be a form, the world and God will also be experienced as forms (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse four). Even the conception of a 'formless' God is a mental form or image. *Nirguna dhyana* or formless worship of God is a futile effort, like a person chasing the horizon in order to touch the all-pervading space (*Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* verse three).

Reality cannot be found by meditation, which is attending to the mind and its images. It can only be found by non-meditation, which is self-attention. However, Bhagavan said we should not think that *saguna* worship [worship of God as a form] is useless. We should practise either *saguna* worship or self-attention.

In verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan asks: "Can what is seen be otherwise than the eye [that sees it]?" That is, the nature of what is experienced cannot be different to the nature of what experiences it. Therefore, the appearance of the world and God depends upon the appearance of the seer, 'I', and their forms depend upon the seer's form.

'Eye' is also used in Tamil to mean *jnana* [knowledge or consciousness], so the 'endless [limitless or infinite] eye' is self, which – being limitless and formless – can see only limitlessness and formlessness. Therefore, self can never see any name or form, nor anything other than itself. It experiences only formless self-awareness, 'I am'.

This is expressed by Bhagavan in verse twenty seven of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*: 'O Arunachala, sun of bright rays that swallows everything [the entire appearance of the universe] ...' (see also *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* verse 1). That is, in the light of pure self-awareness, which is Arunachala, the ego-'I', the world and God will all disappear.

When there is body-consciousness there is world-consciousness. If none of the five sheaths were experienced as 'I', neither the world nor

God could be seen (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse five). The world and God are therefore created by our misidentifying a body to be 'I'. Hence the creator of both the world and God is only the 'I' that mistakes itself to be a body, so we should investigate 'who is this I?' From this we can infer that the world and God are only as real as the idea 'I am this body', and since this body-identification is unreal, so too are this world and God.

How are *vasanas* [mental propensities or dispositions] to be erased? Now we take these *vasanas* to be 'I' or 'mine'. This gross body is itself an expansion of them. In sleep we do not experience any of them, so we assume that they remain then in seed form, and in order to explain the seeming ignorance of sleep (which exists only in the view of our waking mind), we postulate a causal body, whose form is conceived to be the sum total of all *vasanas*. This causal body seems to veil or obscure our pure self-awareness, and hence it is conscious only of a state of dark ignorance.

However, by practising self-attention in the waking state we will become more clearly conscious of our self-awareness in spite of the play of our *vasanas*, and thus we will be conscious of it even during sleep. The *vasanas* will then be seen as shadows created by the dim light of our mind, which is a reflection of the bright light of self-awareness.

So long as we attend to *vasanas* and their products (our thoughts and desires and the objects of the world), we will continue to take them to be 'I' or 'mine' and thus to be bound by them. However, if we ignore our *vasanas* and instead attend only to 'I', we will destroy them – that is, we will expose their non-existence.

We should not be put off by the strength of our *vasanas* and by their seemingly endless play. We should remember that they appear because I am, but they do not come to trouble us during sleep, even though we continue to exist then. Therefore I am real, and *vasanas* are unreal. With this strong conviction we should be courageous and remain disinterested in our *vasanas*, and thus we should carry on self-attention undisturbed.

Bhagavan gave us the following definition of reality: only that which is everlasting, unchanging and self-knowing is real. [Hence

nothing other than 'I' is real, because everything else is transient, mutable and known not by itself but only by 'I'.]

When we accept the existence of the world we see, we should accept the existence of a power – which we may call God – that is responsible for it and for ordaining our *prarabdha*, which is whatever we are to experience in this world. As Bhagavan says in verse one of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

Karma giving fruit is by the ordainment of God. Can karma be God, since karma is *jada* [devoid of consciousness]?

However, because God does not appear as an object perceived through the five senses, we say we do not believe in him. This is like saying that we see the pictures on the cinema screen, but do not see the light that illumines them. The world is those pictures, and God is the self-knowing light, 'I am', which makes the appearance of the world and the functioning of karma possible.

The world does not exist apart from the body or the mind, as Bhagavan says in verses five and six of *Ulladu Narpadu*. The world is merely an expansion of the mind projected through the five senses of the body. The world-picture is projected on the screen that is the mind; it is illuminated by the mind; and it is seen by the mind. Therefore, since this mind is nothing other than self, in verse one of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

[...] The picture of names and forms [the world], the one who sees [it], the screen on which [it] depends, and the pervading light [of consciousness that illumines it] – all these are he [the 'first thing' or base], which is self.

To mistake a body, which is one of the pictures, to be 'I', and thus to feel that the world, which is all the other pictures, is other than and outside of 'I', is a delusion (*maya*). Without this delusion, 'I am this body', no world-picture would be seen. Because we thus limit 'I', thinking it to be within a body, the concepts of 'inside' and 'outside' arise.

So long as the delusion 'I am this body' is experienced as real, the world will also be experienced as real. Therefore the only way to

experience the unreality and non-existence of the world is to investigate this feeling 'I am the body'. When we do so, it will disappear, and then we shall no longer be troubled by the false appearance of this world.

6th January 1978

Swami Natanananda: What is meditation? Who can meditate? Can the body meditate? Can self meditate? Meditation is just a means of feeding the non-existent 'I'. The true *sadhana* is to be vigilant, at all times, against the rising of this 'I'.

One way to prevent the rising of 'I' is to try to behave [inwardly as well as outwardly] in every situation as you think Bhagavan would behave. If you practise this, there will be less and less of 'I' and more and more of Bhagavan, until finally you will be swallowed by him.

Whenever peace is disturbed, it is due to the rising of 'I'. Peace cannot be enjoyed while 'I' is active. Therefore the only means to hold on to peace is to be self-vigilant, thus guarding against the intrusion of disturbing thoughts. Self-attention is not an activity, but a calm state of being vigilant, keenly watching 'I' and thereby preventing the intrusion of mental activity.

Meditation, which is a mental activity, is unreal, so it can never reveal what is real. Non-meditation, which is avoiding mental activity, alone can reveal the reality. In the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

[...] Since the reality ('I am') exists without thought in the heart, how to meditate upon that reality, which is called 'heart'? Being in the heart as it is [that is, as 'I am'] is alone meditating [correctly upon the reality].

Since thought is paying attention to second or third persons, the only effective means to avoid thought is self-attention. The rising of 'I' is attention to second and third persons, so attention to the first person alone can make 'I' subside.

The reason why Bhagavan emphasises that the appearance of the world is dependent upon the delusion 'I am this body' is to kindle *vairagya* [desirelessness] by making us understand that 'I am the body' is the root of all misery, and that it must therefore be eradicated.

Cutting the branches or even the trunk of the tree of delusion is futile, because its root, 'I am the body', must be destroyed. It is destroyed only by self-attention. This is why Bhagavan says in verse twenty six of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

If the ego, which is the embryo [or root], comes into existence, everything comes into existence. If the ego does not exist, everything does not exist. The ego itself is everything. Therefore, know that investigating 'what is this [ego]?' is alone giving up everything.

We must fly on the two wings of *viveka* [discrimination] and *vairagya* [desirelessness].

Sadhu Om: We all have a clear knowledge of our own existence, 'I am'. If we give importance only to that, and try to remain as it, that is self-attention, guarding against the rising of 'I', avoiding attention to second and third persons, and vigilance against the intrusion of thoughts.

In everything we do there is 'am'-ness: I am walking, I am thinking, and so on. If we attend to this 'am'-ness and try to abide as it that is sufficient. There is no need to be concerned about thoughts: let them come or go. Thoughts are only thoughts because we attend to them. If we ignore them, they do not exist. Our sense of 'am'-ness (*asmitva*) signifies our self-awareness or mere being. Mere being is the final goal. That is why Natananandar was saying that one day we will laugh at our present efforts. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Six

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

7th January 1978

Sadhu Om: When waves of passion such as desire, lust or fear arise, either try to duck beneath them by self-attention, or else reflect on their uselessness and avoid them by *viveka* (discrimination) and *vairagya* (dispassion). If the waves continue to come more strongly and none of these methods help, pray to Bhagavan. Prayer coming from an agonised heart has its own power. Whenever we feel helpless, prayer is our best weapon. He is always ready to help the helpless if their prayer is sincere.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

Meritorious actions (*punya karmas*) done with *kamyata* (desire for personal benefit) do not purify the mind. Actions done without such desire (*nishkamyata karmas*) purify the mind, but they are the least efficacious means.

Unless worship and prayer are done with an attitude of ego-abasement, they will not purify the mind. Worshipping with pride only feeds the ego. Better than worship is *sravana* (hearing or studying the guru's teachings) and *manana* (reflection on them). Reading about the lives of saints and reflecting on their behaviour and teachings will help us to subside our ego. Better than that is *satsanga*: in the company of real *sadhus* [*jnanis*], we cannot but act with humility. *Satsanga* (association with *sat*, truth) purifies the mind in many ways, but the best *satsanga* is to remain quietly as 'I am'. As Sankara says in *Vivekacudamani* [verse 364], a hundred times better than *sravana* is *manana*, but one *lakh* (a hundred thousand) times better than *manana* is *nididhyasana* (contemplation), which is just remaining attentively as 'I am'.

The reality of whatever is seen is the same as that of what sees it. The God you see is only as real as you who see him. If you worship God in a name and form, your mind will be purified, and when it is sufficiently purified, he will appear as guru to teach you the practice of self-attention. The guru is not just to be worshiped – he is to be obeyed. In verse 274 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Bhagavan says:

Those who do not have [the clarity of] mind to recognise that the *jnana-guru* – who appears as a human form [though he is actually] abiding firmly as the supreme space [of consciousness, 'I am'] – is formless, [thereby] bear the yoke of wicked conduct and sin.

This is not to say that *guru-bhakti* (devotion to the guru) is wrong, but that our devotion is not true *guru-bhakti* unless we also practise what he taught us. Though the outward form of the guru and his teachings are a projection of our own *vasanas* (tendencies), they will nevertheless wake us up, like a lion that an elephant sees in its dream.

Self-attention is the most effective means of purifying the mind. The more you try to attend to self and the more you thereby experience

the happiness of self-abidance, the more clearly you will understand and be firmly convinced that all happiness comes only from self, and that rising as 'I' is misery. Thus your *vairagya* (desirelessness) will increase and your attachments to things will become less.

Whenever you have some moments free, reflect: 'What is this ego-life? Now I take this body to be 'I' and this world to be real. I feel attachment to things, people and circumstances, but I have only experienced this life for a certain number of years, and some years from now I will cease experiencing it forever. Therefore why should I take interest in or be ambitious for this transient and futile life? All these things seem to exist only because I exist, so should I not try to find out the truth behind this 'I'?' The more you reflect in such a way, the more you will lose interest in your life and the more you will wish to remain just as 'I am'.

When people used to say to me, 'You are lucky because you were with Bhagavan', I would sometimes find some ego rising in me with pride. However, by Bhagavan's grace I thought of a good reply: 'In a hospital there is an outpatient department to treat minor cases, but the worst cases are admitted into the inpatient department to be treated under the personal supervision of the doctor. The same happens in this spiritual line, so I am such a helpless case that Bhagavan had to admit me into his inpatient department to treat me under his personal supervision'. Those who were not in Bhagavan's physical presence are lucky, because they are protected from the delusion of mistaking him to be his body.

Ignorance is of two types: 'I know' and 'I don't know'. Both depend upon the rising 'I', and both disappear when that rising 'I' is scrutinised. In verse 9 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

Dyads [pairs of opposites such as knowing and not knowing] and triads [the three factors of objective knowledge: the knower, the knowing and the known] exist [only by] clinging always to 'one' [namely our mind or ego, which alone experiences such knowledge or ignorance]. If [anyone] looks within the mind [to discover] what that 'one' is, they [the dyads and triads] will cease

to exist [because the ego on which they depend will be found to be non-existent]. Only those who have seen [this non-existence of the ego] are those who have seen the reality. See, they will not be confused.

In the state of *jnana* (knowledge) no 'I' can rise either to say 'I know myself' or 'I do not know myself'. This is the truth that Bhagavan teaches us in both verse 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu* and verse two of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*:

Saying 'I do not know myself' [or] 'I have known myself' is ground for ridicule. Why? To make oneself an object known, are there two selves? Because being one is the truth of everyone's experience.

When within [my] mind I investigated who the seer is, [and] when the seer [thereby] became non-existent, I saw that which remained [namely beginningless, endless and unbroken being-consciousness-bliss]. The mind does not [now] rise to say 'I saw', [so] in what way can the mind rise to say 'I did not see'? Who has the power to elucidate this [by] speaking, when in ancient times [even] you [as Dakshinamurti] elucidated [it] without speaking? Only to elucidate your state without speaking, you stood shining [from] earth [to] sky motionlessly [or as a hill].

To say 'I know myself' is as absurd as saying 'I do not know myself'. In verse twelve of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

That which is completely devoid of knowledge and ignorance is [true] knowledge. That which knows [anything other than itself] is not true knowledge. Since it shines without anything that is other [than itself] to know or to make known, self is [true] knowledge. Know it is not a void.

Bhagavan once told Muruganar: "It is not only that self does not know other things, it does not even know itself as 'I am this'." In verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar* he says: 'Being self alone is knowing self, because self is devoid of two. ...'. That is, there are not two selves so that one could be known by the other. Since

self is indivisibly single, it can know itself only by being itself. And since being conscious of itself is its very nature, its being itself is itself its knowing itself.

In verse 8 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

Whoever worships [it] in whatever form giving [it] whatever name, that is the way to see that [nameless and formless] substance [the absolute reality or God] in name and form. However, know [that] knowing the reality of oneself [by] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is seeing [it] in reality.

Here ‘knowing the reality [or truth] of oneself’ may mean either knowing the non-existence of the ego or knowing what we really are. However, ‘knowing the non-existence of the ego’ fits better in this context, considering the phrase ‘subsiding in the reality of that true substance’, though both meanings amount to the same thing. Whichever way it is taken, ‘the reality of oneself’ can be correctly known only by our subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance, which is our real self.

Worshiping that true substance (which is also called ‘the supreme reality’ or ‘God’) in any name or form may be a means to see visions of it in that name and form, but it cannot be a means to experience knowledge of the true nature of that reality, which is devoid of any name or form. In order to know the true nature of the reality one must know the true nature of oneself, the knower. Therefore in verse 1073 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Bhagavan says:

Since the many [forms of] God that are obtained [as visions or other such dualistic experiences] by clear [pure-hearted] worship undergo appearance and disappearance and [thus] perish, only one’s own [true] nature, which always exists with clarity [or certainty], is the true form of God that exists immutably.

If God is experienced or known as other than the knower, he becomes an object of knowledge and as such he depends for his existence upon the knower. Since the knower is unreal, so too is whatever it knows. Therefore, the absolute reality or God can only

be known truly by the knower being one with it. When the knower and the known are both resolved into the one reality, that is true knowledge.

8th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan begins verse thirteen of *Ulladu Narpadu* by saying: ‘Self, which is abundant knowledge (*jnana*), alone is real; knowledge that is manifold [that is, knowledge of multiplicity] is ignorance (*ajnana*)’. Self-knowledge shines as ‘am’. Multiplicity here includes the world, God and the ego. Since nothing exists unless it is known (experienced), our knowledge of multiplicity is itself the existence of that multiplicity.

He then continues the same verse by saying: ‘Even [this] ignorance, which is unreal, does not exist apart from self, which is knowledge. All the many ornaments are unreal; say, do they exist apart from the gold, which is real’. That is, even the knowledge and existence of multiplicity cannot exist apart from or independent of ‘I am’. Multiplicity is like the variety of gold ornaments, and ‘I am’ is like gold, their substance. Just as a goldsmith sees only the gold, so the jnani sees only ‘I am’, which is *jnana*. When a jnani says that the world is unreal, he means that multiplicity is ever non-existent, and when he says that the world is real, he means that ‘I am’ alone exists.

Religions try to make God, who is a third person, into a second person so that he may be known directly (*sakshat*), but even second persons are only known indirectly through the first person. When the light of ‘I am’ passes through the film of our *vasanas*, it appears in two forms: as both the seer (the first person) and the seen (the second and third persons). The first person, ‘I am so-and-so’, is one of the expansions of the *vasanas* – that is, it is one of the pictures (a name and form) projected on the screen of being by the light of consciousness. It is the first *vasana*, the root of all other *vasanas*.

In Tamil the first person is called *tanmai-y-idam*, which literally means the ‘selfness-place’, because each of the three grammatical persons is considered to be a ‘place’ (*idam*). The second person is called *munnilai-y-idam*, the ‘place that stands in front’, and the

third person is called *padarkkai-y-idam*, the ‘place that spreads out’. Therefore Bhagavan is discussing these three ‘places’ when he says in verse fourteen of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

If the first person (*tanmai*) exists, the second and third persons (*munnilai-padarkkaigal*) will exist. If the first person ceases to exist [because of] oneself investigating the truth of the first person, the second and third person, come to an end, and *tanmai* [the real ‘selfness’], which shines as one [undivided by the appearance of the three seemingly separate persons or ‘places’], alone is one’s [true] state, which is self.

Therefore ‘I am’ is the true *tanmai*, and ‘I am so-and-so’ is a thief, a second person posing as if it were the first person or *tanmai*. True knowledge (*jnana*) is attained only when the body and person that were taken to be ‘I’, the first person, are recognised to be second persons, things that are not ‘I’.

One important point to note here in this verse is that Bhagavan does not say that this false first person, the ego, actually exists, but only says conditionally: ‘If the first person exists ...’. He never actually accepted its existence.

Until they come to Bhagavan, people generally believe that self will be experienced if they get rid of all thoughts, which are second or third persons. They don’t understand that the first person, which is the root of all thoughts, must also go. That is why when some people come and ask me what my experience is, I say that I do not have any experience, because in the absence of an experiencer there can be no experience.

(To be continued)



The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Seven

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

9th January 1978

Sadhu Om [in reply to a question about celibacy]: Why seek happiness in anything but self?

In verse 14 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

If the first person ['I', the ego or subject] exists, second and third persons ['you', 'he', 'she', 'it', 'this', 'that' and so on] will exist. [Because of] oneself scrutinising the truth of the first person, if the first person ceases, second and third persons will come to an end, and the state [or 'selfness'] that [then] shines as one [not divided as these three persons] is indeed the [true] state of self.

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, happinessofbeing.com.

Verses 14, 15 and 16 of *Ulladu Narpadu* should be understood as a whole, because they discuss the reality of time and place. In Tamil the first person, second person and third person are called the 'three places' rather than 'three persons', so verse 14 considers these three divisions of 'place', whereas verse 15 considers the three divisions of time: present, past and future. Verse 16 concludes by re-emphasising the unreality of both time and place.

Throughout our waking and dream life, we generally ignore the first person and the present moment, and instead attend mostly to second and third persons and to past and future. All thoughts pertain to second and third persons and to past and future, but if we try to make a thought of the first person or of the present moment, the mind will subside, since 'I' and 'now' are not other than self. Hence, investigating 'what (when or where) is the present moment?' is the same as investigating 'who (or what) am I?'

We are like a person in a triangular prison. Because we attend to only two of the three walls (second and third persons, or past and future), we think that we are imprisoned, but if we try to turn our attention towards the third wall (the first person or present moment), we will discover that there is no such wall, and that our bondage is therefore ever non-existent.

When we first discover that the third wall does not exist, we will desire to run in that direction in order to escape from the prison. This is similar to the experience of *sphurana*, the fresh clarity of self-awareness that arises when we investigate the first person or present moment. But guru then makes us see that since the third wall is actually non-existent, our imprisonment (bondage) is also non-existent, and thus our desire to run away will subside, and we will be perfectly contented to remain where we are. This is similar to the subsidence of *sphurana*, the state in which perfect clarity of self-awareness is found to be our real nature rather than something new. This is our natural state (*sahaja sthiti*), in which we are perfectly content to be just as we are.

The perpetual wandering of our attention from one, second or third person to another, and to and fro between past and future, is

like the swinging of a pendulum, whose central vertical axis is 'I am' or 'now'. Just as a swinging pendulum is never out of contact with its vertical axis, yet never rests there, our attention is never out of contact with its centre, 'I am' or 'now', yet never rests there. The state in which our attention rests in 'I am' and in 'now' is known as *atmanistha* or *samadhi* (which means *sama-dhi*: even, balanced, equipoised or equanimous mind), and is similar to a steadily resting pendulum.

Because our attention never rests, time never rests, and so the present moment is never truly experienced. Time is an incessant flow from past to future. If we try to know the truth of the present moment by attending to second and third persons, we would be like a man trying to step on the head of his own shadow [because second and third persons are experienced in the illusory flow of time and not in the precise present moment]. If we try to measure something without knowing the value of a single unit of our measurement (whether that be dollars, kilos or whatever), we would not know the value of what we had measured. It is equally futile to try to know the truth of the past or future without knowing the true nature of the present, as Bhagavan says in verse 15 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Past and future stand depending on the present. While occurring, they are both only the present. [Therefore] the present is the only one [time that actually exists]. [Hence] without knowing the truth of the present, trying to know the past or future is like trying to count without [knowing the value of the unit] one.

The truth of the present is that it is non-existent. If we know that, then we can judge the true value of all other knowledge.

The present place and time, the 'here' and 'now', is 'I am'. No second or third person can truly exist in the here and now, because they are all objects known by the first person, which alone is 'here', and hence they occupy places other than 'here'. Second and third persons are subject to change, and hence to time, so they exist only in the constant flow of time from past to future, never stopping in the present. Therefore they can never be experienced in the precise

present moment, the 'now'. Hence, 'being in the here and now' can only mean being in self, which is our natural state of self-attention. The 'here and now' is not an object; it is the subject, 'I', and hence it can only be known by non-objective attention.

10th January 1978

Sadhu Om: *Nistha* means 'standing in'. A pendulum can stand only in its own centre; it cannot stand either to the right or to the left. Likewise the mind cannot stand by attending to second or third persons [because attention to anything other than itself draws it away from its centre]; it can stand only in its own centre, by attending only to itself. When it stands in its centre, it is no longer the mind, but is only self itself.

Presence implies knowledge. If we say that self is present, that implies that we know self. Bhagavan frequently reminded us that self is here and now, ever known or 'realised'. Self-knowledge is the base of all other knowledge, as he says in verse 13 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Self, which is knowledge (*jnana*), alone is real. Manifold knowledge [knowledge of multiplicity] is ignorance (*ajnana*). Even [such] ignorance, which is unreal, does not exist apart from self, which is knowledge. All the many ornaments are unreal; say, do they exist apart from gold [their substance], which is real?

Other things can be known only if self is known. Knowing any object is knowing self. That does not mean that the object is experienced as 'I', but only that the object can be known only if 'I' is known, because in order to experience 'I know this object', 'I' must experience itself.

When people ask me if I know self, I always reply: 'I know nothing that you do not know. I don't know any wonderful and glorious self. I just know that I am.'

In *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) Bhagavan says that unless perception of the world-appearance ceases, self cannot be known as it really is. However, even if the world is perceived, it shows that self is known, because it is

perceived only because 'I am'. This is why Bhagavan says in verse six of *Arunachala Astakam*: '[...] O Hill of Grace, let them appear or not appear [what does it matter?] Apart from you, they do not exist!'

It is the nature of the mind to wander and know many things, but why does that worry you? Because you identify this mind as 'I', you feel your attention is wandering. But are you this mind? You are that which knows the mind.

Bhagavan often used the term *udasina bhava*, which means an attitude of indifference, and it is necessary for us to have such an attitude towards the mind. What is required is a change of identification: instead of taking the mind to be 'I', take that which knows the mind to be 'I'. I jokingly call this change of identity a 'forgery', though the actual forgery is our present false identification with the mind.

The mind's attention is always knowing something, but what you must understand is that the mind has no power of attention of its own. The mind's power of attention exists only because we attend to the mind. If instead you attend to that which knows the mind, how can the wandering of the mind affect you?

JK [J Krishnamurti] says, 'Observe; observe and let the mind take its own course', as if it wouldn't do so anyway, even without our permission. In a way what he says is right, though I don't know whether he means it in the right way or not. What he should mean is: remain just as the observer. If you do so the observing will immediately cease, because if you attend to the observer, the observing will not be attended to – it will not be known – and hence it will not exist. I have not heard him myself, and all those who tell me what he says seem to have a very poor understanding of what he means.

Most religions say that God created the world and that you are a small something in the world, but this only adds to our confusion. Bhagavan says, 'You are, and the world appears only because you are'. This should not be taken to mean that the world really appears; it only seems to appear. That is, its appearance is not like the appearance of something that actually exists, such as the water that appears when we open a tap, but is on the contrary like the

appearance of something that just seems to exist, such as the water that appears in a mirage.

Therefore cease identifying yourself with either the world or the knower of the world. Just try to remain as 'I am', without identifying 'I am' as anything else, such as the body or mind. You know other things only because 'I am' is identified as something else. This is how the false 'I' or mind arises. If 'I am' is not identified with anything at all, all thoughts and perceptions will cease.

There is truly no difficulty in turning your attention towards that third wall, but so long as you identify your mind as 'I' it will appear that you are not succeeding.

11th January 1978

Sadhu Om: In Tamil Bhagavan often used *nam*, the inclusive¹ first person plural pronoun, 'we', to denote self, as in verse 16 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Except we, on scrutiny where is time and where is place? If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place. [But] are we a body? Since we are one, now, then and always, one, here, there and everywhere in space, there is [only] we, the timeless and placeless we.

The first sentence of this verse should not be interpreted to mean 'where are time and place apart from us?' because this could imply that time and place are real. What Bhagavan means by asking this rhetorical question is that on scrutiny nothing exists except us: we alone are, and there is neither time nor place. This implied meaning is reiterated in the final sentence, which can mean either 'there is [only] we, we who are devoid of time and place' or 'there is [only] we, we; time and place do not exist'.

When Bhagavan first wrote this verse he referred only to time, but then he modified it to refer to place also. In the original version,

¹ In Tamil there are two distinct first person plural pronouns: *nam*, which includes whoever is addressed, and *nangal*, which excludes whoever is addressed. When referring to self, Bhagavan always used the inclusive *nam* rather than the exclusive *nangal*.

which is now verse 13 of *Upadesa Tanippakkal* (Individual Verses of Instruction), he wrote:

Except we, where is time? Without scrutinising ourself, if we think we are a body, time will swallow us. [But] are we a body? We are always one, now, in time past and [in time] to come. Therefore, there is [only] we, we who have swallowed time.

Time and place (or space) are the first manifestation of mind or *maya*, and without this conception of time and place the mind could not arise. Therefore to escape from this prison of time and place, we should attend to the first person or the present moment. Attention is the power which allows for the manifestation of everything. By turning it selfward, the same power of attention can be used to merge everything back into its source. We, that power of attention, alone are. Why identify yourself as a person? We are, but why add the adjunct 'a person'? Simply find out what this 'I am' is.

There are two processes in spiritual practice (*sadhana*), one is ascending and the other descending. The ascending process is negating everything as 'not I' by refining our mere awareness 'I am', disentangling it from all its superfluous adjuncts, and this leads to the rising of *sphurana*, a fresh and intense clarity of self-awareness. The descending process is embracing everything as 'I', by recognising that 'I' alone exists and all else seems to exist only because I am. This descending process leads to the subsidence of *sphurana*, which is our natural state (*sahaja sthiti*).

12th January 1978

Sadhu Om: In *Upadesa Undiyar*, the second and third of the three lines of each verse ends with the word *undipara*, which is a compound of two verbs, *undi*, which means 'rise', and *para*, which means 'fly', so it can mean 'rise and fly', but also means 'play *undi*', an ancient game played by children, which probably involved jumping and singing. *Undiyar* is thus an ancient style of song composed in a particular metre, and such songs were originally composed to accompany that game. In this playful style of song Bhagavan expressed the highest

truth, because such truth can be grasped only by a child-like mind.² The mind of a child is like a clean slate, whereas the mind of an older person is like a well-scribbled slate, burdened with many deep-rooted beliefs and preconceived ideas.

(*To be continued*)



² In *Crumbs from His Table*, Chapter 13, 'Some Surprising Incidents', Ramanananda Swarnagiri recalls: "Sri Bhagavan was correcting and aiding some youngsters of not more than ten years of age in memorising His Sanskrit work *Upadesa Saram* and the writer was laughing, so to say, up his sleeve, at the futility of coaching these youngsters who could not understand the A, B, C of this highly metaphysical poetry. Without the utterance of a single word, Sri Bhagavan turned to him and remarked that though these children might not understand the meaning of these poems then, yet they would be of immense help to them, and would be recalled with great relief and pleasure, when they came of age and were in difficulties."

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Eight

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

13th January 1978

Sadhu Om: There are no outward signs distinguishing someone in the fifth standard [the state of non-dual self-love (*svatma-bhakti*), which is the highest stage in the school of bhakti described in chapter 2 of the second part of *The Path of Sri Ramana*]. They will usually appear to behave like *pukka* devotees in the fourth standard [the stage of *guru-bhakti*].

The four gurus of Saiva Siddhanta, Appar, Jnanasambandhar, Manickavachagar and Sundaramurthi, were all jnanis from the time they started composing verses, but they spent all their lives like second

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standard students [devotees who worship or pray to many different names and forms of God], visiting so many temples and writing verses in praise of the temple deities.

Even Bhagavan behaved like a good devotee of Arunachala. He did *giri-pradakshina* (circumambulation around the hill) and encouraged others to do so. He never allowed anyone to walk round him, garland him, or do puja to him. Instead, he always pointed to Arunachala as the form of the guru, saying that it is the true 'Ramana Sadguru', and he was often moved to tears on reading or hearing stotras [devotional songs]. On his last evening he hadn't opened his eyes for two hours, but at about 8 pm when we started to sing *Aksharamanamalai* with its refrain, 'Arunachala Siva', he opened his eyes for a few moments, and from then till 8.47 tears of devotion were pouring down his cheeks. He left his body as we were singing verse 72:

Protect me, Arunachala, being the support for me to cling to,
so that I may not droop down like a tender creeper without
anything to cling to.

Once, while walking round the hill, Bhagavan did pradakshina of Durvasa's shrine as an example to others, saying jokingly, 'Even if we ignore other shrines, we should not ignore Durvasa' [because Durvasa was an ancient sage who was noted for his hot temper]. However he never prostrated to any deity or person.

Muruganar also exemplified fourth standard bhakti. He always showed great reverence for Bhagavan in every possible way, such as keeping his picture at a high level, and never wearing shoes near any picture of him. At the mere mention of Bhagavan's name he would shed tears. In doing so, he exemplified the teaching that Bhagavan gave in verse 39 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*:

Always experience advaita [non-duality] in [your] heart, [but]
do not ever put advaita in action. O son, advaita is appropriate
in the three worlds, but know that with the guru advaita is not
appropriate [that is, even if one can claim a non-dual status in
the presence of any of the three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and
Siva, one should never claim a non-dual status with the guru].

When people ask me why I do pradakshina and prostrate to Arunachala, I reply: 'If you see me as an ego, then it is right that I do so, or if you see me as self, then it is not I but only this body that does so.' Advaita cannot be put into action, because it is the state that is completely devoid of action, since any action implies duality. However, no action can alter the fact that non-duality is the truth.

Someone once said to Bhagavan, "Bhagavan, this self-enquiry is very difficult. Can I instead practise such-and-such a yoga or meditation?" to which he nodded in assent. After that person left, some of the devotees were wondering why Bhagavan seemed to give his consent to such practices, so he explained:

"He says, 'Self-enquiry is difficult', which means that he does not want to practise it, so what can I do? Even if I tell him not to practise this other yoga or meditation, he still won't practise self-enquiry. In a few months he will return and say that meditation is difficult, and ask whether he can do *japa* instead. And after practising *japa* for some time, he will find his mind still wanders, so he will then come and ask if he can sing *stotras*. All this will mean that he is unfit to do anything. If one is able to make even a little effort to sing *stotras* or do *japa* or any other *sadhana*, one can make the same amount of effort to attend to the feeling 'I am'."

On another occasion, someone told Bhagavan that they were afraid that they would be wasting their time if they practised self-enquiry, because though they had tried to practise it, they found that they always became inattentive, and so asked whether it would not therefore be better if they practised some *japa* instead. Bhagavan replied, "You have nothing to fear. You are like a person who is afraid to let go of a branch even though he is standing on the ground. Do you suppose that even when you lose your hold on self, self can ever lose its hold on you?"

14th January 1978

Sadhu Om: When Muruganar was once asked about other gurus, he replied, 'I have been blinded by the sun, so I cannot see anything else'.

As Bhagavan explains in verses 17 and 18 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, an ajnani limits 'I' to the extent (the form) of the body, and limits reality to the extent of the world. As a result, ajnanis do not take 'I' and the reality to be one and the same. The jnani, on the other hand, sees that 'I' shines as the limitless self and that reality shines as the formless substratum of the world, and therefore knows that the reality is 'I'.

Because the jnani knows that self alone really exists,¹ he does not see anything as non-self, and hence he knows that even the body is 'I' and even the world is real. However, we should take care not to misunderstand the jnani's statement that the world is real. What the jnani sees as real is just the 'is'-ness of the world. Both a jnani and an ajnani will say, 'This is a table', but the ajnani sees only its form and therefore mistakes its 'is'-ness to be a property of that form, whereas in the view of the jnani only 'is'-ness [being or sat] is real, so the table is nothing other than that infinite, indivisible and hence formless 'is'-ness.

Therefore, because the jnani experiences the body as 'I' and the world as real, he seems to behave just like ajnanis, but the difference between them lies in their understanding of 'I' and of reality. Though this difference in their perspectives is very subtle, it is actually vast, like the difference between a mountain top and a valley.

¹ Though in this context the word 'self' obviously denotes only what we actually are and not the ego that we now seem to be, as in all other contexts I deliberately avoid the prevalent custom of capitalising the initial 's' in 'self', because there is something intrinsically dualistic about attempting to distinguish between a capitalised 'Self' and a lesser 'self' when Bhagavan has taught us that there are in fact no two selves. Whether we experience ourselves as we really are or as something else (such as a body, mind or person), we are always the same one self. In some contexts 'self' may refer clearly to what we actually are and in other contexts it may refer clearly to what we now seem to be, but in many contexts drawing this distinction is not helpful and can in fact be an impediment. In Tamil, Bhagavan sometimes used the word *tan*, which means self, to denote our real self in one part of a sentence and to denote our false self (the ego) in another part of the same sentence, and since there are no capitals in Tamil he left it to us to understand from the context what he meant. (MJ).

During sadhana, we have to reject everything other than 'I' as *anatma* [non-self or 'not myself'], but when we experience 'I' as it really is, we will discover that nothing is other than it. The practice of rejecting everything other than 'I' by not attending to any such thing is sometimes described as an ascending process, whereas the state of true self-knowledge, in which everything is experienced as not other than 'I' is sometimes described as a descending process, though it is not actually a 'process' but our natural state of being.

Therefore, what Bhagavan describes in verses 17 and 18 of *Ulladu Narpadu* is this 'descending process', the state of '*sahaja samadhi*', in which everything is embraced as 'I'. This state is what is indicated in *sastras* by statements such as 'All this is brahman', but since pandits think of brahman as if it were a third person, they fail to grasp the true meaning of such hints.

Brahman should always be regarded as the first person, 'I', because it is our natural state of pure non-dual self-awareness. Only when one thus understands brahman to be only 'I' can one have the correct outlook (*dristi*) that such scriptural statements were intended to inculcate, which is the outlook required for the practice of *sahaja samadhi*. This outlook is the attitude: 'All this is only because I am' – that is, the firm conviction that everything that I experience, namely the mind, body and world, and all that happens in them, could not exist if I did not exist to experience them, so they are entirely dependent upon my being-consciousness, 'I am'. By clinging firmly to this attitude, one can practise self-attention even while engaged in outward activities.

18th January 1978

Sadhu Om: The self-attention we practise in the midst of other activities will not be very deep or intense, so we should also set aside time to practise it more intensely. When we do so, our aim should be to turn our attention 180° away from other things towards self. If we once succeed in turning our attention 180° towards self, we will experience perfect clarity of self-awareness, unsullied by even the slightest awareness of any other thing. This is the state of true

self-knowledge, which will completely destroy the illusion that we are this mind, so after this, the illusion of experiencing anything other than 'I' can never return.

While trying to turn your attention 180° towards self, whenever you feel your self-attention is becoming slack, do not try to keep up the pressure. It is better to allow your attention to return to 0° for a while, and then to make a fresh attempt. If you wish to punch something, it is best to draw your fist right back, because then your punch will have maximum impact. Likewise, if you start your attempt to turn your attention selfwards from 0°, your effort will have maximum force.

By incessantly repeating such fresh attempts, you will gradually be able to turn your attention further and further towards self: 40°, 60°, 75° and more. In between each fresh attempt, you can usefully spend the time you are resting at 0° (that is, attending to second and third persons) by doing *manana* (thinking about Bhagavan's teachings) or *sravana* (reading his teachings). At all times between such attempts you should also take care to be indifferent to whatever experiences may come, because you can then build a strong foundation of *vairagya* (freedom from desire to attend to anything other than 'I') and *bhakti* (love to attend only to 'I'), from which you will sooner or later be able to make your final leap, turning the full 180° towards self.

Some ripe aspirants do not need even to make such incessant efforts to turn selfwards, because they always remain vigilantly aware of self, waiting for the moment when they can take their final leap, the complete 180° turn towards self. Their practice is like the swinging of a shot-putter preparing to throw his shot.

When I was first taught by Janaki Matha to practise dualistic forms of meditation such as *murti-dhyana* [meditation upon a form of God], I found that continuous practice of such meditation caused me to have visions and other such divine experiences, but I soon understood that that was not the way to experience self. Only *svarupa-dhyana* [meditation upon self, which is another term Bhagavan used to describe the practice of *atma-vichara*] can enable one to experience self as it really is.

19th January 1978

Sadhu Om: It is difficult for us to mix with *sadhakas* who have other thought-currents. Hearing their ideas and their views about other gurus, we naturally feel lonely, since we love Bhagavan and like to think only of him and his teachings. But we should be careful not to preach. We should not express Bhagavan's view to anyone unless we are asked.

Other gurus like Buddha and Sankara went to the world to teach their ideas, but Bhagavan has shown us that that is not necessary. The world is like your shadow, so if you go out towards it to teach it, it will recede from your grasp, but if you withdraw within yourself, it will follow you and subside there. If you quietly keep the fire of devotion to 'I', which Bhagavan has kindled within you, burning within your own heart by repeated *sravana*, *manana* and *nidhidhyasana* (studying, reflecting upon and practising his teachings), that is the best way to teach the world to follow him.

'Act without desire for the fruit,' says the *Bhagavad Gita*. Self-attention is not actually an action or karma, because it is a state of just being, not doing anything, but so long as we consider it to be something that we must do, it is the only 'doing' that will give no fruit or *karma-phala*. Therefore self-attention is the only true karma-yoga. This is why Bhagavan says in verse ten of *Upadesa Undiyar* and verse fourteen of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*:

Being, having subsided in the place from which [we] rose – that is karma and bhakti, that is yoga and jnana.

Investigating to whom are these, karma, *vibhakti*, *viyoga* and *ajnana*, alone is karma, bhakti, yoga and jnana. When one investigates, without 'I' those [defects] do not ever exist. Remaining permanently as self is the reality.

If we rise as 'I', we will feel that we are entangled in action (karma) and in a state of *vibhakti* (non-devotion) or lack of true love for God, *viyoga* (separation) from God, and *ajnana* (ignorance) of our real nature. Therefore, subsiding back in self, the source from which we

rose, by investigating who am I who experience such karma, vibhakti, viyoga and ajnana, is the correct practice of the four yogas or means of reunion: *nishkamya karma* (desireless action), bhakti (devotion), raja yoga and jnana (self-knowledge). When we investigate thus, the false 'I' will subside and disappear, and in its absence there will be no one to experience any karma, vibhakti, viyoga or ajnana. What will then remain is only the reality, which is the state in which we abide permanently as self without ever rising to be or to experience anything else.

Kunju Swami: In his later years, after all the court cases that he brought against the ashram, Perumal Swami came to Bhagavan and complained, 'When I was a young man I came to you for *moksha* [liberation], but you allowed me to be led astray by my weak buddhi [mind or intellect]. Now I shall surely go to hell,' to which Bhagavan replied, 'Do you think I am not there also?' ²

On another occasion, having read Bhagavan's biography, a new devotee angrily asked him, 'Who is this fellow Perumal Swami?' but Bhagavan replied affectionately, 'That is *namma* [our] Perumal,' and continued to praise him, describing all the good service he had done. Not only did Bhagavan not feel any enmity towards anyone, but he also did not allow us to feel enmity towards anyone. ▲

(To be continued)

² On another occasion Kunju Swami told me a similar story: After the ashram had won a case that Perumal Swami had brought against it and Bhagavan in a local court, he came to Bhagavan and declared angrily, 'Though you won this case, I will not leave you. I will take it to a higher court, and continue fighting until I win. If you are God, as they claim, you can put me in hell, but even then I will not leave you,' to which Bhagavan gently replied, 'Even if you go to hell, I will not leave you.' Whether or not Perumal Swami understood what Bhagavan meant, these words of his were a gracious assurance that he would never forsake him but would certainly save him. I heard this story from other sources also, so I believe it is reliable. (MJ)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Nine

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

20th January 1978

Sadhu Om: During the waking state, whenever you do not feel love to attend to self, you cannot but attend to second and third persons [things that are other than oneself, the first person], so at such times it is best to resort to *sravana* (studying Bhagavan's teachings) and *manana* (reflecting on them).

Making intermittent attempts to attend to self is the most effective way to proceed. It is useless to struggle constantly to attend to self, because that would be like standing deep in mud and trying to lift something out: the more you try to do so, the deeper you sink. A firm foothold is necessary, and it is provided by *sravana* and *manana*.

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The foothold is *vairagya* [dispassion], which is freedom from desire to attend to any second or third person object, and *bhakti* [devotion], which is love to attend only to the first person.

Our whole life should go on in this way, with our mind kept occupied in *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* [contemplation on self]. *Sravana* and *manana* may take a long time, depending on the individual mind, but the correct *nididhyasana* takes just a split second. We may be able to turn 179° away from everything else towards self, but even that is not perfect *nididhyasana*: it is just an attempt at perfect *nididhyasana*, and is like jumping nine-and-a-half feet across a ten-foot well. To land safely on the other side, we must jump the full ten feet. Likewise, to experience ourselves as we really are, we must turn the full 180°.

One must also know what type of *sravana* will be effective. To be most effective, *sravana* must be focused and directed unswervingly in just one direction, so reading this and that from numerous different gurus is not proper *sravana*. You must first find a guru with whose thought-current you can agree, then discover what his real teachings are, and then practise them alone. Though there are various books in which Bhagavan's answers to visitor's questions are recorded, and though they contain many useful ideas, reading them alone is not adequate *sadhana*, because many ideas in them are answers that Bhagavan gave to questions that various types of people asked him from a wide variety of perspectives, so such answers often do not represent his core writings, since he always tailored his answers to suit the needs, concerns and aspirations of each questioner and their ability or willingness to understand whatever he might say to them.

Therefore to understand such answers in a proper perspective, we need to view them in the clear light of his actual teachings, so anyone who does not already have a clear and thorough understanding of his essential teachings will be liable to misunderstand or be confused by some of the answers recorded in such books. Therefore if we wish to do *sravana* correctly and effectively, we must carefully and repeatedly study and reflect upon Bhagavan's own original writings such as *Nan*

Yar? (Who am I?), *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu*, *Anma Viddai* and *Ekatma Panchakam*.

Except these few short texts, no other books are really necessary to enable a sincere aspirant to understand Bhagavan's essential teachings correctly. *The Path of Sri Ramana* too should not be necessary, and it became necessary only because people made clear to me the extent to which they had failed to understand his teachings correctly, partly because they had not studied his original writings carefully enough, but also due to confusion caused either by other books that they had read or by their reliance on inadequate translations and interpretations of his teachings.

For example, some writers imagine *sphurana* to be some sort of 'pulsation', 'throbbing' or 'vibration' in the heart, so they have written that this is what we should hold on to. However, anything that pulsates, throbs or vibrates is obviously something other than the 'I' who experiences it, so it is only a second person. The experience of 'I', the first person, is such that it cannot be described in any way. When Bhagavan used the term *sphurana*, he meant only *aham-sphurana* (the clear shining of 'I'), which is not a new knowledge of anything other than 'I', but only a new knowledge of 'I', our own self. That is, it is a fresh clarity of our self-awareness. It is awareness of the same 'I' that we always experience, but it is experienced with a fresh degree of clarity. Because it is such a clarity, when it is experienced no doubts will rise about it, just as when you are fully satisfied after eating a sumptuous meal no doubt can rise in your mind about whether or not you are still hungry. Once experienced, the clarity called *sphurana* can never be forgotten, and if we hold on to it firmly, it will automatically lead us to our *sahaja sthiti* (natural state).

Though we need to make intermittent attempts to attend to self, between such attempts we must also be vigilant at all times to avoid attending to any unnecessary thoughts. Most of the thoughts that we think each day are not actually necessary, and they serve only to distract our attention away from self, so we must gradually cultivate the habit of taking interest only in self-attention instead

of in anything else that we may think about. If every moment that we spend attending to unnecessary thoughts were spent attending to self, most of our time each day would be spent in self-attention. Therefore indifference towards thoughts of anything other than self is a powerful aid in our practice of self-attention.

Bhagavan was so unconcerned about everything that he did not experience even the actions of his mind, speech or body as his own, so he never felt 'I am thinking', 'I am talking' or 'I am doing'. Because of his complete lack of doership, on behalf of Perumal Swami he wrote a verse in praise of himself as Lord Subrahmanya but signed it 'Perumal',¹ and on behalf of Jagadiswara Sastri he wrote the verse *hridaya kuhara madhye ...* (in the centre of the heart-cave ...),² which he likewise signed 'Jagadisa'.

In a quiet mind many truths about past and future events may be known, but this is not a *siddhi* (an attainment of a desired supernatural power) because it happens only in the absence of any volition or desire for such an experience. It is likewise only in a calm and quiet mind that Bhagavan's silent teachings can be received. They are not received in words but only as an inner clarity of understanding, and they give us such a strong conviction that no one can ever shake our trust in what we discover through them. However much we may struggle to do so, we cannot find words to express the clarity we discover through the power of his silence.

21st January 1978

Sadhu Om: By allowing falsehood and injustice to thrive in this world, and truth and justice to be suppressed, Bhagavan is testing us. If we allow an 'I' to rise and object, he will laugh at us from within: 'So you

¹ This verse is referred to towards the end of section 291 of *Talks*, in which it is recorded that Bhagavan said that the handwriting of the verse was his own whereas the ideas in it were Perumal Swami's, and when asked whether he agreed with the statement made in it, he replied, 'In the same way as an idol is praised as Subrahmanya'. (MJ)

² Bhagavan's Tamil translation of this verse is included in *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* as verse 8. (MJ)

still believe this world to be real.’ Therefore our duty is to keep quiet. If we are actually attacked, we must respond as if we were brushing away a wasp, but having taken whatever action is necessary, we should keep quiet, both inwardly and outwardly. We should not brood over the matter or bear a grudge towards anyone who does wrong to us.

26th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Like Bhagavan, Sri Ramakrishna also taught that we can know God only by trying to know who is this ‘I’ who wants to know God.³

What is important in surrender is that we should desire only what Bhagavan desires for us. If our desires are contrary to what he wants for us, how can he give us *moksha* (liberation)? What he wants is to give us moksha, but moksha entails freedom from desire, so unless we are willing to give up all our desires, he will not give us moksha, because he will not force us to accept what we do not want.

If we only want whatever he gives us, then from this very moment we can live free from all cares and worries, because nothing can ever happen that is not his will, so we will happily accept whatever may happen. Thus there is no difference between self-abidance and complete self-surrender. If we abide as self, we will experience nothing other than self and hence there will be no identification with a body, so how can we then desire or pray for the removal of pain or for anything else? Likewise, if we surrender to him, we will have no desires or concerns, so how can we then pray for anything?

If our will and desires are perfectly attuned with his will, what can our *vasanas* (inclinations or propensities) do to obstruct his work? A genuine willingness to surrender to his will will effectively neutralise the power of all our other *vasanas*.

Therefore without the least hesitation we should sign over to him a blank cheque – that is, we should completely surrender to him our

³ Near the end of chapter 7 of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* it is recorded that on Monday 1st January 1883, Sri Ramakrishna said: “One ultimately discovers God by trying to know who this ‘I’ is.” (1942 American edition, p.180). (MJ)

original freedom to will and act – because there is no one who loves us or cares for us more than he does. He loves us as his own self, so his love for us is even greater than our love for ourself, because he loves us as we really are, whereas we love ourself as a person, which is not what we really are.

The stronger our faith in his love and power is, the quieter our mind will be, and hence the more peaceful and pleasant our life will be. To save us from the bondage created by our own ego, he is working equally hard and effectively in each and every one of us. I am so confident about this that I do not worry myself about anyone. As our essential self, he is working in all of us, and he knows what is the best way to save each of us.

30th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan has a peculiar way of leading his devotees: he will never let us know how advanced we are in our practice of self-abidance. He is such a masterful guru that he will never allow any 'I' to rise in pride within us by knowing 'I am making progress in this path'. Though we may be very advanced, we will feel ourself to be the most worthless of all, as Bhagavan expresses in verse 39 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*: 'O Arunachala, by what power can I, who am worse than a dog, seek and reach you!'

Though we may often succeed in turning 130° or 140° away from all other things towards self, we will still feel that our attempts are woefully inadequate. We are like small children, whose growth seems imperceptible to themselves or even to their parents, who see them daily, but we are growing nonetheless. Though we do not know what is best for us, Bhagavan does, and he is therefore maturing us in whatever way is best suited to our present stage of development.

When we first come to the path of Sri Ramana, a certain amount of reasoning is necessary to give us firm faith in the truth of what he has taught us, but once our faith is firmly established, we can entrust ourself blindly to him. Once we know that we are on a broad trunk road with strong barriers on either side preventing us from going astray, we can close our eyes and run blindly ahead! This is

why I emphasise in the second part of *The Path of Sri Ramana* that one cannot become a *yoga-bhrasta* (a person fallen from the path of yoga) after entering the third (b) or fourth standards in the school of bhakti [the stages at which one has acquired one-pointed devotion to God or guru respectively]. We are now prey in the jaws of a powerful tiger, so we will never be forsaken.

Though we cannot by any means gauge our progress in the practice of self-abidance, by considering our own desires in an unbiased manner we can gauge in which standard we are in the school of bhakti. Relatively few people are actually in the third (b) or fourth standards, because to qualify to be in them one must be wholly devoted to either God or guru for their own sake and not for the sake of any personal benefit that one may gain from them. Even among the devotees of Bhagavan, many are at best in the third (a) standard, because though their devotion to him may be one-pointed (which is the basic requirement for the third standard), they still expect him to grant the fulfilment of their personal desires and pray to him accordingly. Thus their love for Bhagavan is not pure, because it is mixed with their love for whatever they desire to gain from him.

Even though many of our vasanas may be hidden from our view, so long as our greatest desire is only for the annihilation of 'I', we are in the fourth standard. Then only have we been truly caught in the guru's glance of grace. Having thus been caught by him, we need not worry about our hidden vasanas, because if hidden desires rise in our mind, his hidden grace will certainly come to protect us.

Sravaṇa, *manana* and *nididhyasana* (study, reflection and self-contemplation) should all go on hand-in-hand. Only by practising an art do you experience whatever difficulties it entails, and such experience enables you to understand more clearly and deeply the instructions you have been given. Therefore each time you slip down from an attempt at *nididhyasana*, having failed to turn the full 180°, you can return to your *sravana* and *manana*, and then you will find that you are able to grasp more clearly what Bhagavan has taught us.

To emphasise the importance of sravana and manana, in some ancient advaitic texts it is said that even after the disciple has finally realised the truth, when he asks the guru how he should spend the rest of his life, the guru replies that he should continue in the same way as before, studying and reflecting upon the guru's teachings. Because the guru tells us not to think, some people wrongly conclude that sravana and manana are unnecessary, but this is like someone who tries to eat without using his hands because he has been told that we cannot eat except with our mouth. If you can keep quiet without thinking for twenty-four hours every day, that is good, but if you cannot always avoid thinking, it is best to think only of Bhagavan's teachings. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Ten

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

1st February 1978

Sadhu Om: We must understand that Bhagavan does not use the word *ulladu* [which means 'what is' or 'that which is'] to denote some abstract concept of being or reality, as some philosophers do. He uses it simply to mean the one self-existing and self-evident reality, 'I am', which is always clearly known by everyone.

When 'I' remains as it is, without any adjuncts, it is the sole reality, but when it seems to rise as 'I am this body', it is as such unreal. That is, in the compound experience 'I am this body', 'I am' alone is real, and the adjunct 'this body' is unreal. Thus as a compound of the real and the unreal, the 'I' that feels 'I am this body' is itself unreal.

Since this 'I' is unreal, why should we worry about its defects: *karma* [action], *vibhakti* [lack of devotion], *viyoga* [separation] and *ajnana* [ignorance of self]? If we investigate the 'I' that seems to have

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these defects, we will find it to be unreal, and hence all its defects are likewise unreal. Therefore in verse fourteen of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* Bhagavan says:

Investigating to whom are these, karma, vibhakti, viyoga and ajnana, is itself karma, bhakti, yoga and jnana. [This is because] when [one] investigates [oneself], [it will be clear that] they [karma, vibhakti, viyoga and ajnana] never exist without 'I' [which is itself not real]. Only being permanently as self is true.

The first and only duty we have is to find out the truth of this 'I'. Bhagavan says in *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) that even if one is the worst sinner, if one would cling firmly to self-attention (*svarupa-dhyana*), one would certainly be reformed and saved.

All the so-called 'other paths' are only intended to purify the mind, because they cannot actually annihilate the ego. This is why Bhagavan says in verse three of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

Desireless action (*niskamya karma*) done [with love] for God purifies the mind and [thereby] it shows the path to liberation.

The 'path to liberation' is only *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry], but only a mind that is to some extent purified will be able to recognise that this is the only means to annihilate the ego. If we have recognised this, we do not need to follow any other path, because vicara will not only annihilate our ego eventually, but will also in the meanwhile purify our mind far more effectively and efficiently than any other path could.

Therefore paths other than atma-vicara are only for those who do not understand that eradication of one's individuality is the goal, and that vicara is the only means by which we can achieve this goal. Such people are not true aspirants, because we only become aspirants when we have genuine love to make this 'I' subside, for which atma-vicara is the only means. The only benefit to be gained from other paths is sufficient mental purity to be able to grasp that atma-vicara alone is the path by which we can reach our final destination, the state of liberation or true self-knowledge.

Atma-vicara appears to be 'intellectual self-analysis' only in the view of those who do not have sufficient mental purity to understand that

we can know ourself only by attending to ourself, and consequently to have true love for self-attention, which alone is the correct practice of vicara.

2nd February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan repeatedly emphasised that atma-vicara is the only path, the direct path for everyone, and also the easiest path. For example, in *Nan Yar?* he says:

Only by [means of] the vicara [investigation] who am I will the mind subside [or cease to be]; [...]

To make the mind subside [permanently], there are no adequate means other than vicara. If restrained by other means, the mind will remain as if subsided, [but] will emerge again. [...] Therefore *pranayama* [breath-restraint] is just an aid to restrain the mind, but will not bring about *manonasa* [the annihilation of the mind]. Just like pranayama, *murti-dhyana* [meditation upon a form of God], *mantra-japa* [repetition of sacred words such as a name of God] and *ahara-niyama* [restriction of diet] are only aids that restrain the mind [but will not bring about its annihilation]. [...]

In verse 885 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai* he says:

Except [by] the path of investigating the vital awareness ['I am'], whatever effort is made by other means beginning with karma, one will not attain and enjoy self, the treasure shining in the heart.

In verse 17 of *Upadesa Undiyar* he says:

When [anyone] scrutinises the form of the mind without forgetting, [it will become clear that] there is no such thing as 'mind'. For everyone this is the direct path.

Likewise, in *Maharshi's Gospel* (Book 2, chapter 1) it is recorded that he said:

Whatever form your enquiry may take, you must finally come to the one I, the Self. [...]

Self-enquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realise the unconditioned, Absolute Being that you really are. [...]

every kind of sadhana [spiritual practice] except that of atma-vichara presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the sadhana, and without the mind it cannot be practised. The ego may take different and subtler forms at the different stages of one's practice, but is itself never destroyed. [...] The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through sadhanas other than atma-vichara is just like the thief assuming the guise of a policeman to catch the thief, that is himself. Atma-vichara alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists, and enables one to realise the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute.

[...] To be the Self that you really are is the only means to realise the bliss that is ever yours.

Since self is aware of nothing other than itself, 'I am', 'to be the self' simply means to be aware of nothing but 'I' alone, which is all that the practice of atma-vicara entails. As Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar*: 'Being self alone is knowing self, because self is not two. [...]'

Because of our desire to be constantly experiencing something other than just 'I', it may seem difficult for us to experience only 'I', but Bhagavan assures us that this is actually very easy – much easier than any other means by which we may try to attain liberation. This is emphatically affirmed by him in verse 4 of *Atma-Vidya Kirtanam*:

To untie the bonds beginning with karma, [and] to rise above the ruin beginning with birth, rather than whatever [other] path, this path [atma-vicara] is exceedingly easy. When [one] just is, having settled down without even the least action of mind, speech or body, ah, in [one's] heart the light of self [will shine forth]. [This is our] eternal experience. Fear will not exist. The ocean of bliss alone [will remain]. ([Therefore] ah, the science of self is extremely easy, ah, extremely easy!)

Every other sadhana entails doing some action (karma) by mind, speech or body, whereas atma-vicara entails the mind subsiding without the least action by focusing its entire attention on its source,

‘I am’. Therefore, whereas any other sadhana is a practice of ‘doing’, atma-vicara is the practice of just being as we really are – with perfect clarity of self-awareness. Hence, since being is easier than doing, atma-vicara is the easiest of all paths.

The purpose of *niskamya puja*, *japa* and *dhyana*, and of all *sadhanas* other than atma-vicara, is only to purify the mind. Purification of mind is the sole benefit that can be gained from any such *sadhanas*, because none of them can ever by itself destroy the ego. The benefit of a purified mind is that ‘it shows the path to liberation’, as Bhagavan says in verse three of *Upadesa Undiyar*. That is, it enables the mind to discriminate, understand and be firmly convinced that atma-vicara alone is the path to liberation.

Thus, when Sri Bhagavan says in *Maharshi’s Gospel* (Bk.2, ch.1), ‘Atma-vichara alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists’, he is not being partial, nor is he criticising other *sadhanas*. He is merely asserting the truth that though other *sadhanas* can purify the mind, they cannot destroy it. Therefore, we should not confuse these paths for mental purification with ‘the path to liberation’, which is the ‘one path’ taught by Bhagavan – the path he describes as or *vazhi* [the ‘one path’ or the ‘path of investigation’] in verse 14 of *Upadesa Undiyar*.

A true aspirant is one whose mind is sufficiently purified to understand that atma-vicara alone can be ‘the path to liberation’, and therefore to love to practise it. Those who cannot understand this are at best just devotees of God.

Bhagavan says that atma-vicara is the direct path, not because he expects us to attack the mind directly, but because he expects us to turn directly towards self, ‘I am’, and by thus remaining in self to ignore the mind. Thus atma-vicara is, so to speak, avoiding and hiding from the mind instead of fighting it face to face. This is what is signified by Rama’s method of killing Vali.

Vali had a boon that he would receive half of the strength of anyone he faced in battle, so he was automatically more powerful than any opponent he had to face. Therefore even Rama could not have killed him in face-to-face combat, so he had to hide behind a

tree and shoot him from behind. Just as Vali gained half the strength of his opponent, if we try to fight the mind in direct combat, we will be giving it half of our strength, because our attention is what sustains and nourishes it, so the more we attend to it (that is, to its constant flow of thoughts), the more we are giving it strength. Therefore the only way to destroy the mind is by attending only to 'I' and thereby ignoring all the other thoughts that constitute the mind.

All other sadhanas, which are only actions performed by 'I', attempt to destroy the mind using it as the means or instrument, and hence Bhagavan likens them to someone confronting Vali, or to a thief pretending to be a policeman trying to catch the thief, or to a person trying to get rid of his own shadow. Therefore Bhagavan advises us to ignore our shadow, the mind or ego, by turning our attention towards the sun, 'I am'. ▲