

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty One

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

22nd August 1978

Sadhu Om: Arunachala works by kindling clarity of discrimination (*vivēka*) in our hearts. Therefore even though some people do *giri-pradakṣiṇa* for the fulfilment of worldly desires, the more they do it the more clarity will dawn in their hearts, and hence they will begin to reflect on their desires and ask themselves whether happiness can actually be gained from the fulfilment of any such desires. However, the speed at which such clarity dawns depends on how strong their desires are, because desires for anything other than self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) are what cloud our mind and thereby obstruct the clarity that naturally shines deep within each one of us.

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

Even though many people came to Bhagavan, very few had really intense love to attain *ātma-jñāna*, because their ability to discriminate and recognise that true happiness lies in nothing else was hampered by their other desires and attachments. Therefore the speed at which each devotee developed true love for *ātma-jñāna* was inversely proportional to the intensity of their desires and attachments. However, anyone who has come into contact with Bhagavan and his teachings, whether in his bodily lifetime or since then, will thereby certainly gain a steadily increasing clarity of discrimination, even if it does not manifest immediately or even in their present lifetime.

Bhagavan's teachings and the power of his presence in our life are like a seed sown by a diligent gardener. Having sown the seed in our heart, Bhagavan will water it, fertilise it, protect it and nurture it until it grows into the mighty tree that bears the precious fruit of *jñāna*. If the soil he plants it in is already rich, fertile and deep, it will grow and bear fruit relatively quickly, whereas if the soil is dry, barren, stony and shallow, more time will be required to enrich, fertilise and deepen it in order to allow the seed to germinate, grow and develop strong and deep roots.

However, whatever may have been the condition of our heart when Bhagavan sowed his seed in it, we should not think in terms of the time it might take for his seed to grow into a tree and eventually bear fruit, because time is just an illusion created by our deceptive mind. What seems to be a hundred years in one state may seem like ten minutes in another state. This is why it is said that *brahman* is neither near nor far. As Bhagavan says in verse 781 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

“Thinking ‘When will I become one with *yōgānanda* [the happiness of union], which is the state of self-abidance?’ do not be distressed [or disheartened]. There in the real state of self-knowledge, which is always one [single, non-dual and unchanging], any place [or time] that is far or near does not ever exist.”

Like everything else, time and space are a creation of our mind, and the very nature of our mind is to deceive us. In its ability to do so, the mind is indeed an *atiśaya śakti* (an extraordinary and wonderful power), as Bhagavan says in *Nāṅ Yār?*, but it is not real, so if we diligently investigate what it is by vigilantly observing the ego, the thought called ‘I’, which is its fundamental and essential form, we

will find that there is actually no such thing, as Bhagavan teaches us in verse 17 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

When one investigates the form of the mind without forgetting, [it will be found that] there is not anything called ‘mind’. This is the direct path for everyone.

25th August 1978

Sadhu Om: Real *sādhus* are very rare. Once there was a *sādhu* called Buddha, and after a few hundred years one called Jesus, and then another one called Sankara, and more recently one called Ramakrishna, but in this century the one real *sādhu* came and told us: “I am not this body. I am the one real awareness that shines blissfully as ‘I’ in the hearts of all living beings, beginning with God.” In this unique embodiment of his, Bhagavan revealed many subtle truths like this in a fresh and refined manner.

Previously we used to believe that *sādhus* such as Buddha, Jesus and Sankara each lived in a limited time and place in the distant past, so they are no longer with us. Since we believed that *sādhu-saṅga* (association with a *sādhu*) meant being in the bodily presence of a *sādhu*, we thought that we could not have *saṅga* with any *sādhu* whose body was no longer alive. But now we have no reason to believe this, because Bhagavan has explained to us that he is not a body but is always present within each one of us, so to have his *sat-saṅga* all we need do is to turn within and see that he is always shining clearly in us as ‘I’. Since he is not limited to any time or place, his *sat-saṅga* is available to us always and everywhere.

Question: Is that the significance of saying that *jñāna* can be attained just by thinking of Arunachala from afar? Does it mean that wherever we may be, just by our attending to Bhagavan shining in our heart as ‘I’ he will root out our ego?

Sadhu Om: Yes, in the first verse of *ŚrīAruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* he indicates that Arunachala is ‘I’, and whatever he says about Arunachala applies to him also, because he himself is Arunachala, so at any time wherever one may be, the best way to have *sat-saṅga* with him is to attend only to ‘I’. Therefore what he implies in that verse is that if one meditates deeply on ‘I’ alone, he will root out one’s ego. This is his assurance to us.

Question: But what if we think of Arunachala or Bhagavan as other than ourself, as they seem to be? Is such *anya-bhāva* (meditation on God or guru as other than oneself) also *sat-saṅga*?

Sadhu Om: Yes, that is also *sat-saṅga*, and it is more effective than merely being in the physical presence of Bhagavan yet thinking of other things. Being in his physical presence is physical *sat-saṅga*, whereas thinking of him with love is mental *sat-saṅga*, and as he says in verse 4 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, what is done by mind is more effective in purifying one's mind than what is done by speech, which in turn is more effective than what is done by body.

People whose attention is habitually turned outwards tend to attach undue importance to outward *sat-saṅga*, because they are unable to see what is happening within. The most important work being done by the guru does not lie in any outward forms, actions or events, but only deep within the heart of each one of us. Shining within us as the clarity of self-awareness, the guru is moulding and preparing us so that we can derive the greatest benefit from his outward *sat-saṅga*, whether in the form of being in his bodily presence, which is still available to us in the form of Arunachala, or in the form of associating with his teachings.

The nature and importance of the vital work that he is constantly doing within us is beyond all human comprehension, but without it no one would ever be fit to obtain any benefit from outward *sat-saṅga*, because it alone can purify and clarify our mind, thereby making us fit to yield to the subtle influence of his physical presence and to absorb and assimilate his outward teachings. If one is not inwardly prepared and ripe, one will not gain so much benefit from any form of outward *sat-saṅga*, but if one's mind is already to a large extent purified and hence clear, one will very quickly gain the full benefit of outward *sat-saṅga*, namely the blossoming of intense love to turn back within and drown forever in Bhagavan, who is the clear light of awareness that illumines our mind.

* * * * *

Sadhu Om: Free will is our real nature. Since we alone exist, what can ever limit our freedom? It is only when we limit ourself as a body that we seem to have only limited freedom, and when our freedom

seems to be limited, we also seem to be bound by its opposite: fate. However, even when our freedom seems to be limited, there is actually nothing other than ourself, so there is nothing that could ever limit our freedom in anyway. Therefore we are always free either to see ourself as one and indivisible, as we always actually are, or to see ourself as many, as we seem to be whenever we rise as the ego.

Therefore neither karmas nor *vāsanās* can actually ever prevent us from experiencing self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*), because self-knowledge is our real nature, whereas karmas and *vāsanās* are just illusory appearances that seem to exist only in the view of the ego that we now seem to be and not in the view of ourself as we actually are. They seem to exist only because having risen as this ego we are now looking outwards, but if we turn back and look within to see what we actually are, the ego will disappear along with all its *karmas* and *vāsanās*, because it is not what we actually are. Since it rises and stands only by grasping outward appearances, it will subside and disappear if it lets go of all appearances by trying to see itself alone, as Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

“Grasping form, the formless phantom-ego rises into being; grasping form it stands; grasping and feeding on form it grows abundantly; leaving [one] form, it grasps [another] form. If sought, it will take flight. Know [thus].”

If we lack discrimination (*vivēka*), we will continue to rise and stand as this ego in waking and dream, and whenever we do so we will project the threefold appearance of soul, world and God. However, since we seem to be this ego and therefore project such appearances only in waking and dream but not in sleep, we are like a foolish person who instead of sheltering from the intense heat of the sun by resting under the shade of a tree, wanders out into the scorching sunshine until he can bear it no longer, then retreats to the cool shade for a while before again wandering out into the sunshine.

However, we have now been drawn to Bhagavan, so if we follow the path that he has shown us, our mind will gradually be purified and thereby we will gain a steadily increasing clarity of discrimination, as a result of which we will become increasingly disgusted with this habit of rising as the ego and projecting this appearance of soul, world and God, and hence we will reflect: ‘Why should I repeatedly wander

MOUNTAIN PATH

out into the scorching sunshine by rising as this ego in waking and dream and then return temporarily to the shade of the tree by subsiding in sleep? Why should I not just remain peacefully in the cool and comfort of the shade?’

When our discrimination thereby becomes clear and deeply rooted, we will turn back within and merge forever in our source, and thus we will discover that we have always been free just be as we are and thereby to stop projecting any illusory appearances. Our infinite freedom was only seemingly limited, and what seemingly limited it was our foolish liking to wander in the sunshine by projecting the appearance of soul, world and God. That is, it was seemingly limited only due to our misusing it to see ourself as many instead of as the one infinite whole that we actually are, so we are always free to stop misusing it and to remain just as we always are. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Two

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

29th August 1978

Mey-t-Tava Viḷakkam, the first volume of *Śrī Ramaṇa Jñāna Bōdham*, a compilation of all of Muruganar's previously unpublished verses, which had been painstakingly collected, preserved, arranged and edited by Sadhu Om, was due to be released at a function in front of Bhagavan's shrine on 3rd September, so the ashram president asked K. Natesan to go and invite Sadhu Om to attend the function as a guest of honour. However, since Sadhu Om preferred to avoid the limelight he politely declined, saying that all credit for the book should go only to Muruganar, as the author, and to Bhagavan, as the sole source of his inspiration, but Natesan persisted,

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

saying ‘You must come, because you are the *mūlam* (root) of this project’, to which Sadhu Om replied:

“Yes, but the root should never be exposed. What should be exposed and seen by people is only the trunk, branches, leaves and flowers of a tree, because if you expose the root, the whole tree will die. Therefore it is appropriate that this function should be attended by all the important people in the ashram, but you should not endanger all of us by inviting me and exposing me to the world. It is good to paint a building in order to make it look nice in the eyes of people, but you should not dig out the foundations in order to paint them, because the whole building would then collapse. What should be exposed alone should be exposed, and what should be kept hidden should always be kept hidden.

“Instead of exposing the roots of a tree, one should pack more mud on top of them in order to keep them buried deep out of sight, so that they can spread and do the work that they are intended to do, nourishing, sustaining and strengthening the whole tree. Likewise, instead of exposing me to the world, you should help me do my work by packing mud in my mouth [an allusion to an idiom used by Bhagavan in verse 88 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*] and keeping me well hidden from the eyes of the world. In this way we will all flourish, and each of us will do the work for which we have come here.”

For a while Natesan continued trying to persuade him that he should attend the function, and finally he said, ‘You should come, and you can bring all your friends with you’, to which Sadhu Om replied:

“Everyone is free to do as they like, so whichever friends wish to attend will do so. And who are my friends? All are friends in my eyes, but no one is mine. As is said in verse 49 of *Jñānācāravicārapaṭalam* [the chapter of *Dēvikālōttaram* that Bhagavan translated into Tamil], no one belongs to me, and I belong to no one.”

Later that day, in reply to another friend who asked him, “How is the life of a *sādhu*?” Sadhu Om said: “A *sādhu* is like a cloud that rains its waters directly into the ocean [implying that the attention of a real *sādhu* is always flowing back to its source and is never diverted away towards the world.]”

30th August 1978

Sadhu Om: In the *purāṇas* it is said that those who do *aṅga-pradakṣiṇa* [rolling around a deity or temple] around Arunachala will gain the siddhi of *vajra-kāya* [a body as hard or resilient as diamond]. We can see examples of this today in people such as Esaki Doctor, who once did *aṅga-pradakṣiṇa* around Arunachala and is now able to do *pradakṣiṇa* every day in the hot sun, leaving at nine in the morning and returning at noon. But we have come here for something different, because Bhagavan has taught us that such *siddhis* are transient and worthless, and that the only real *siddhi* (accomplishment) is *ātma-siddhi* (the accomplishment of self-knowledge).

Sooner or later Arunachala will remove all other siddhis from his devotees, but in most cases he will not give any such siddhis at all, and to all of us he will gradually give *buddhi* (clarity of mind) to understand that all *siddhis* other than *ātma-siddhi* are worthless. See what happened in the case of Esaki Doctor: at first he had a liking for name and fame, but after being given a taste of it for a while, he gained the *buddhi* to see that it was worthless, so now that it has been removed he continues to do *pradakṣiṇa* quietly and humbly without attracting any undue attention.

Therefore even if we begin to do *pradakṣiṇa* around Arunachala for any reason other than the ultimate annihilation of our ego, Arunachala will gradually purify our mind and thereby give us the clarity to see that eradicating our ego is the only worthwhile goal. He will never abandon any of his devotees, particularly those who do *pradakṣiṇa*, because in the end he will make each one of us see what needs to be seen by turning our attention inwards, as Bhagavan implies in verse 44 of *Śrī Aruṅācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*:

Arunachala, [in silence] you said: ‘Turning back inside, see yourself daily with the inner eye [or an inward look]; [thereby] it will be known’. What [a wonder]!

31st August 1978

Sadhu Om: After coming to Bhagavan and taking him as our guru, we have to be ready to give up many of our previous beliefs, and to modify and refine other ones. He has given so many correction slips to

our old ways of thinking. That is, like a teacher correcting the errors in a student's essay, he has corrected errors in the way that people have interpreted ancient texts, and he has also expressed in a more refined yet clearer manner many of the truths that were formerly concealed within the often obscure or indirect wording of such texts.

For example, by asking questions such as 'How can meditation on any name or form enable one to reach that which is beyond all name and form?' and 'How can meditation on anything confined within time or space enable one to transcend time and space?' he has pointed out the limitation of many practices that we were formerly led to believe would take us directly to our ultimate goal.

Every name and form is confined at each moment within a particular place in space, and whatever is confined within a place is also confined within a period of time. Therefore meditation on a particular place or on something located in a particular place can only be done in one state, because time and place differ from one state to another, since the time and space of our present state do not exist in dream, and the time and space of a dream do not exist in this state, and in sleep no time and space exist at all. Therefore how can any meditation on something that is restricted within time and place and that can be done in only one or two states of the three states enable us to go beyond time and place or the three states?

This is why he said in verse 8 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

Whoever worships [the nameless and formless substance, namely *brahman*, the ultimate reality] in whatever form giving [it] whatever name, that is the way to see that substance in name and form. However, knowing the reality of oneself and [thereby] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is alone seeing [it] in reality. Know.

The Tamil word meaning 'substance' that he uses in each of the two main sentences of this verse is *poruḷ*, which like the Sanskrit term *vastu* means substance, essence, what is real or what actually exists, and the nature of this *poruḷ* was explained by him in the previous verse:

Though the world and mind arise and subside simultaneously, the world shines by the mind. Only that which shines without

appearing or disappearing as the base for the appearing and disappearing of the world and mind is *poru!* [the real substance], which is *pūṇḍram* [the infinite whole or *pūrṇa*].

Since the *poru!* is the infinite whole that shines without ever appearing or disappearing, it is the base or foundation from which and in which the mind and everything perceived by it, namely all names and forms, appear in waking and dream and disappear in sleep. Though the *poru!* is therefore what appears as all names and forms, it itself is nameless and formless, so in order to see it as it is we must see it stripped of all names and forms.

However, though it is nameless and formless, the mind can attribute any name or form to it and worship it accordingly, and by doing so it is possible for the mind to see it in name and form, as he says in the first sentence of verse 8. However, since it is not actually any name or form, seeing it in name and form is not seeing it as it really is but is only seeing it as a '*maṇḍōmayam-ām kāṭci*', a mental vision or mind-constituted image, as he says later in verse 20 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*.

Therefore in the second sentence of verse 8 he explains how we can see it 'in reality' or as it actually is. Since the mind can rise and stand only by grasping form, as he says in verse 25, so long as it exists it will always see the one real substance as the multitude of names and forms that constitute this or any other world, so we cannot see the one real substance or *poru!* as it is so long as we mistake ourself to be this form-perceiving mind.

Therefore in order to see the *poru!* as it actually is we must see ourself as we actually are, and hence in the second sentence he says:

'However, knowing the reality of oneself and [thereby] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is alone seeing [it] in reality.'

What we actually are is only the nameless and formless *poru!*, so when we see the reality of ourself, the mind that we now seem to be will subside and merge forever in and as the *poru!*, and this alone is seeing it as it really is.

It was previously believed that the term 'heart' refers to a place in the body where the Lord or *ātman* dwells, and since the heart is also referred to metaphorically as *guhā* (the cave or hiding-place), one of

the names of Lord Subrahmanya is Guhēśa (the Lord of the cave or the cave-dwelling Lord). However Bhagavan pointed out that ‘heart’ means the core, centre, interior or innermost part of ourself, as implied by the Sanskrit term *hṛdaya* [which in some cases becomes *hṛd* or in compound *hṛt*], and therefore refers not to any physical place but only to our real self.

For example, in verse 2 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam* he explained clearly that what is called ‘heart’ or *hṛdaya* is actually just Arunachala, the infinite space of pure awareness, in which this entire world appears and disappears like a picture on a cinema screen, and which shines eternally within each one of us as ‘I’.

Red Hill [Arunachala], all this [world-appearance], which is a [mental] picture, arises, stands and subsides only in you. Since you dance eternally in the heart as ‘I’, they say your name itself is heart.

Likewise Bhagavan pointed out that whereas various other hills, holy places and temples are said to be abodes of Lord Siva, Arunachala is not merely his abode but he himself. That is, just as the heart is not just the dwelling-place of *ātma-svarūpa* [our own real self] but *ātma-svarūpa* itself, so Arunachala is not just the dwelling-place of Siva but Siva himself. This is an important clue for those who seek to go beyond time and place and name and form: though Arunachala seems to be a hill, a name and form located in a finite place, it is actually what dances eternally in our heart as ‘I’, the one infinite and hence formless space of pure self-awareness, which is the real import of the term ‘heart’.

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Three

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

1st September 1978

Sadhu Om: So long as we ask for a path to follow, the guru can only point us to the path of awareness (*cit*), ‘Attend to yourself’, or the path of happiness (*ānanda*) or love (*priya*), ‘Love God or guru, who is yourself’. What all *jñānis* have taught through words is only these two paths, *jñāna* and *bhakti*, self-enquiry and self-surrender.

Even Dakshinamurti taught only these two paths so long as he was answering the questions of the four Sanakadi sages, but finally he had to merge back into himself in order to teach them how to merge within and just be, which is the path of being (*sat*), and which can be taught only through silence and not through words. This is why Bhagavan

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

often said that silence is the highest teaching, and it is ever going on in our heart, because it is our real nature.

To learn what silence is always teaching us, we must turn our entire attention within, for which intense and all-consuming love is required. That is, without love (*bhakti*) we cannot follow the path of *jñāna*, which is the practice of attending only to oneself, and without attending keenly and persistently to oneself, we cannot learn what silence is always teaching us in our heart, which is just to be. Therefore the path of love (*priya* or *ānanda*) culminates in self-attention, which is the path of *cit*, and self-attention results in just silently being, which is the path of *sat*.

It is only through silence that our real nature can be made known to us, as Bhagavan implies in verse five of *Ēkāṇṇma Pañcakam* (*kalivenbā* version):

What always exists by its own light is only that *ēkāṭma-vastu* [one self-substance]. If at that time the *ādi-guru* [the original guru, Dakshinamurti] made that *vastu* known [by] speaking without speaking, say, who can make it known [by] speaking?

Likewise, it is only to reveal itself through silence that our real nature is manifested outwardly in the motionless form of Arunachala, as Bhagavan explains in verse two of *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*:

When [the seer] investigated within the mind who the seer is, I saw what remained when the seer [thereby] became non-existent. The mind did not rise to say ‘I saw’, [so] in what way could 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 as a hill [or motionlessly] shining [from] earth [to] sky.

And what Arunachala teaches us through silence is just to be — to stand still without rising as an ego to do anything by mind, speech or body — as Bhagavan says in verse 36 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*:

Arunachala, saying without saying, ‘Stand [stop, stay or remain] without speech’, you just were [without doing anything].

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

The path of being (*sat*) cannot be taught in words, because the nature of this path is no different to the nature of its goal, and since the goal is absolute silence, untainted by the rising of the ego, it can be made known only by silence. In other words, in this path there is nothing to be done, so there are no exercises that can be prescribed. In order just to be, the ego does not need to do anything, and must not do anything. All that is required of it is just to die: that is, to subside and disappear forever.

In verse 27 of *Tiruttellēṇam* (*Śrī Ramaṇa Sannidhimurai*, 3rd edn., 1974, verse 1578) Muruganar sings that as soon as he came to the presence of Bhagavan, who is *sat-tattva* (that which actually exists), he died without dying. That is what we must do in order to just be.

How then are we to die without dying? Since we rise and stand as this ego only by attending to things other than ourself, we can forever cease rising only by attending to ourself alone, and for that we must have all-consuming love to surrender ourself completely to him. Therefore the only means to achieve our natural state of just being (*sat-bhāva*) is to follow the twin paths of *cit* and *ānanda*: *jñāna* and *bhakti*, self-enquiry and self-surrender.

This is what Bhagavan implied in verses eight and nine of *Upadēsa Undiyār*, in which he says that *ananya-bhāva* (attending to nothing other than oneself) is the best of all practices of *bhakti*, and that by the intensity of such self-attention we will be established in *sat-bhāva* (the state of being), which is beyond all mental activity:

Rather than *anya-bhāva* [meditation in which God is considered to be other than I], *ananya-bhāva*, in which he is [considered to be none other than] I, is certainly the best among all [practices of bhakti and varieties of meditation].

By the strength [intensity, firmness or stability] of [such] meditation [*ananya-bhāva* or self-attention], being in *sat-bhāva* [one's 'state of being' or 'real being'], which transcends [all] *bhāvana* [thinking, imagination or meditation], alone is *para-bhakti tattva* [the real essence or true state of supreme devotion].

Through words the ego can be instructed to attend, look, seek, investigate, see, know, be aware, love, surrender and so on, but it is only through silence that it can effectively be taught just to be.

* * * * *

Sadhu Om: All that is required is to find out how any world-picture comes into existence and is dissolved. In waking and dream we have the power to see ourself as many, whereas in sleep we lose this power and therefore see nothing other than ourself. This power is what we call mind, and it is what produces the appearance of multiplicity in waking and dream. Trying to find out what this power is and how it arises to produce one dream world after another is what is called *ātma-vicāra* (self-investigation or self-enquiry), because we can find out what it is and how it rises only by keenly attending to ourself, who now seems to be this mind, the one who sees all this multiplicity.

This practice of self-attention is so simple, and it is the only means to find how any world or anything other than oneself seems to exist, but in the name of *sādhana* or spiritual practice so many other exercises are taught. All other spiritual practices entail attending to something other than oneself, whereas *ātma-vicāra* entails attending to oneself alone, so by definition it is the simplest of all spiritual practices, and hence it does not require any aid. In fact any aid would be something other than ourself, so it would distract our attention away from ourself, thereby defeating its very purpose. Therefore what Bhagavan has taught us is the simple, direct and only effective means for us to know ourself as we really are and thereby eradicate our ego or mind, which is just a false knowledge of ourself.

6th September 1978

Sadhu Om [in reply to someone who referred to section 49 of *Talks*, in which it is recorded that Bhagavan said, ‘An ‘I’ rises forth with every thought and with its disappearance that ‘I’ disappears too. Many ‘I’s are born and die every moment’, and also to Chadwick’s statement that ‘the egos with which we associate ourselves change’, and asked whether there are actually many egos or just one]: The ‘I’ that rises is the ego, and there is only one ego. When Bhagavan said that it rises and subsides with each other thought, he did not mean that a different ego rises with each thought, but only that the same ego rises and subsides along with each of its thoughts.

When Chadwick wrote that ‘the egos with which we associate ourselves change’ (*A Sadhu’s Reminiscences*, 3rd edn, 1976, p.9), what he should have said is that the adjuncts with which the ego

associates itself change, because whatever we associate or identify ourselves with is an adjunct (*upādhi*), and the ‘we’ who associate ourselves with any adjunct is the ego, because our real self (*ātma-svarūpa*) never associates or identifies itself with anything other than itself, since in its clear view nothing other than itself exists.

That is, as Bhagavan often explained, *ātma-svarūpa* is always aware of itself only as ‘I am’, whereas the ego is what is always aware of itself as ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’, in which ‘this’ and ‘that’ refer to whatever adjuncts the ego currently takes itself to be. In other words, the pure self-awareness ‘I am’ is what we really are, which is what is called *ātma-svarūpa* (the ‘own form’ or real nature of oneself), whereas the adjunct-mixed self-awareness ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’ is the ego.

This is why the ego is described as *cit-jāḍa-granthi*, the knot (*granthi*) formed by the entanglement of awareness (*cit*) with adjuncts, which are all insentient (*jāḍa*). The ego is the false ‘I’ that is always aware of itself as ‘I am this body’, which is a mixture that consists of a real element and an unreal element. The real element is ‘I’ or ‘I am’, which is pure self-awareness (*cit*), and the unreal element is ‘this body’, which is non-aware (*jāḍa*).

The fact that the ego is one and not many is made clear by Bhagavan in verses 23 and 24 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* by his referring to it as ‘நான் ஒன்று’ (*nān onḍru*), which means ‘the one [called] I’ or ‘one [that rises as] I’:

This body does not say ‘I’ [that is, it is not aware of itself as ‘I’]. No one says ‘In sleep I do not exist’ [even though one was not aware of any body then]. After the one [called] ‘I’ rises, everything rises. Investigate [consider, determine or find out] with a subtle mind where this ‘I’ rises.

The *jāḍa* body does not say ‘I’; *sat-cit* does not rise; [but] in between [these two] one [spurious entity] rises [as] ‘I’ [limited] as the extent of the body. Know that this [one limited self-awareness that rises as ‘I am this body’] is *cit-jāḍa-granthi* [the knot that binds the conscious and the non-conscious together as if they were one], *bandha* [bondage], *jīva* [life or soul], the subtle body, the ego, this *samsāra* [wandering, perpetual movement, restless

MOUNTAIN PATH

activity, worldly existence or the cycle of birth and death] and *manam* [the mind].

As he says in verse 33 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*: ‘Being one is the truth, [as is known by] the experience of everyone’. Therefore, since we are always one, there can only ever be one ‘I’, so the ego is always the same ego, even though the adjuncts with which it identifies itself are constantly changing.

If the ego were not always one and the same ego, but was instead a different ego at each moment, the karma theory would not be valid, because the ego that experiences the fruit of a past action would not be the same ego that did that action. However this is not the case, as Bhagavan clearly implies in verse 38 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*:

If we are the doer of action, we will experience the resulting fruit. [However] when one knows oneself by investigating who is the doer of action, doership will depart and all the three karmas [*āgāmya*, *sañcita* and *prārabdha*] will slip off. [This is] the state of liberation, which is eternal.

The ‘we’ who does action and the ‘we’ who experiences the resulting fruit are one and the same ego. Though the karma theory is not the ultimate truth, it holds true so long as we appear to be the ego, the one who experiences both the sense of doership (*karṭṛtva*), ‘I am doing this’, and the sense of experiencership (*bhōkṭṛtva*), ‘I am experiencing this’. Therefore, since the ego is not what we really are but only what we appear to be, if we investigate ourselves, who now seem to be this one ego, and thereby know what we really are, this ego along with its *karṭṛtva*, its *bhōkṭṛtva* and all its karmas will cease to exist, and what will then remain is only our natural state, which is eternally free from the bondage of karma. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Four

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6th September 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om [in continuation of the discussion in the previous installment about the ego being only one and not many]: Though it is sometimes said that the ego in dream is different from the ego in waking, what is actually meant is that the body that the ego identifies as itself in each of these two states is a different body. If our body is injured in a dream, when we wake up we find that our waking body is uninjured, but neither of these bodies is ourself, because they are each just a temporary adjunct. However we are what was aware of ourself in dream as ‘I am injured’, and this same we are now aware of ourself as ‘I am not injured’, so though the bodies are different,

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

we, the experiencer of both of them, are undoubtedly the same. This experiencing 'we' is the ego or mind.

The rising (birth) and subsiding (death) of this ego happens too fast to be cognised by it, and that is why our life in each state of waking or dream seems to be an unbroken series of experiences, just as a movie appearing on a cinema screen seems to be an unbroken series of activities and events because the rate at which each individual picture appears and disappears on the screen is too fast for our eyes to cognise them as separate pictures with a brief gap between each. We can understand this more clearly by considering thus:

Suppose someone were to ask us 'Do you remember your birth?' We would reply 'No', and then the conversation may continue as follows:

'Then how do you know you were born at a particular time and in a particular place?'

'Because my parents told me.'

'Do you need your parents to tell you that you exist now?'

'No, I myself know that I am.'

'Then why must you rely on your parents' testimony to know that you were born? If the knowledge 'I was born' were as clear as the knowledge 'I am', would you need anyone else to tell you that you were born?'

'Though I cannot remember my birth, I know I was born. I need others to tell me when and where I was born, but I don't need anyone to tell me I was born, because if I wasn't born I wouldn't be here now.'

'How far back in your life can you remember?'

'My earliest memories may be from my third year or so.'

'If you were asked the same question in a dream, would you not give the same answer?'

'Yes, I suppose I would, because when I am dreaming I think I am awake, so I remember the events of my waking life as if they were events that had occurred in that dream life.'

'So while dreaming you experience yourself as a dream body, and even though you cannot remember the birth of that dream body, you believe that you (that body) were born, don't you?'

'Yes, but obviously that was a mistaken belief, because my dream had only lasted for a short while.'

‘Now in this present state you say that the dream lasted only a short while, but while dreaming you had memories going back as far as your third year or so, so at that time your dream life seemed to have lasted for so many years. Now you know that your memories in dream deceived you, because what you remembered then about your childhood had never occurred in that dream, yet while dreaming both your memories and all that you experienced in that dream seemed to be true. Based on what you remember your parents telling you, in dream you believed not only that you were born but also that you were born at a particular time and in a particular place, didn’t you? But after leaving that dream you now know that those beliefs were all mistaken, because your dream body was just a mental projection, so how can you be sure that your beliefs about your birth in this state are not equally mistaken? Can you be sure that this body is not likewise just a mental projection? Now you have memories of your childhood and of subsequent years, but can you be sure that any of those events actually happened?’

‘No, I can’t be sure of anything but the present moment.’

This is why Bhagavan wrote in verse 15 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* that the present is the only one, meaning that the present moment is that only moment that actually exists. The past and the future are just ideas that occur in the present moment, but like all other ideas or thoughts, they can occur only because of the illusion of a continuously passing time. Without such an illusion, nothing would seem to happen, because happenings entail change, and change can seem to occur only in the passing of time.

If time did not seem to pass, nothing could appear or disappear, so what would exist and shine is only what always exists and shines, namely ‘I am’. Everything else appears and disappears, including the ego, so its appearance and disappearance entails the illusion of passing time. In the actual present moment – that is, in the infinitesimally small and ever unchanging space between the moment just past and the immediate future moment – nothing can appear or disappear, so what shines is only ‘I am’, our awareness of our own existence.

Returning to our imaginary conversation, the person questioning us may then ask:

‘Then how can you be sure that you were born or that you will die? In the present moment you exist, so neither your birth nor your death is happening now. Therefore your ideas that you were born and that you will die are both just blind beliefs, are they not?’

‘I cannot deny that they are both beliefs, but it is not clear to me where this is leading.’

‘That will become clear at the end. In the meanwhile, let us consider a bit further about death. You do not remember your birth, but will you at least know your death?’

‘I don’t know, because I haven’t yet died, so I have no experience of dying.’

‘Consider what happens when a dream comes to an end: you leave your dream body, but are you aware of that body’s death? Do you wake up only after it has died? Do you suppose that the people in your dream have now buried or cremated it?’

‘No, of course not. It just disappears and I find myself in this body.’

‘Yes, either you wake up and find yourself in this body or in some other dream body, or you fall asleep and cease to be aware of any body at all. The same will happen when your present dream comes to an end. Either you will fall asleep for a while, or another dream will begin, in which you will find yourself in some other body, from the perspective of which the life of this body will seem to be a dream. You will never be aware of yourself as ‘I am dead’, because all thoughts, including one such as ‘I am dead’, can arise only when you are aware of yourself as a body. In sleep you are not aware of yourself as a body, so you are not aware of any thoughts, whereas in waking and dream you are aware of yourself as a body, and consequently you are aware of thoughts.’

If we consider along these lines, it is clear that we cannot experience either our birth or our death, so why do we fear birth and death? We fear death because we do not want to be separated from this body, since we mistake it to be ourself, but we are separated from it every time we fall asleep, yet we do not fear to fall asleep. We welcome sleep as peaceful respite from all the ceaseless mental activity of waking and dream, and we do not fear it because we believe that we will wake up again as this same body.

Bhagavan often used to say, ‘Do not believe what you do not know’. We believe that we were born and that we will die, but we never experience either our own birth or our own death. All we know for certain is that we exist now, so why should we believe anything else? Birth, death and all other things may seem to exist, but do any of them actually exist? Since the only existence we can be sure of is our own, why should we believe in the existence of anything else? Before we can know whether anything else is real, we must first know the reality of ourself: who am I? Investigating anything else is futile until we have investigated and known what we ourself actually are.

Since we cannot experience either the birth or the death of this body, which is a gross object, how can we experience either the birth (rising or coming into existence) or the death (subsiding or cessation) of this ego or mind, which is the subtle subject?

Until we rise as the ego, we are not aware of anything else, because as Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, everything else comes into existence only when the ego comes into existence, and nothing else exists when the ego does not exist. Our real nature is not aware of either the appearance or the disappearance of the ego – in fact it is not aware of the ego at all, because the ego is just a wrong awareness of ourself, whereas our real nature is clear self-awareness undefiled by the appearance of anything else. Therefore what is aware of the ego is only the ego itself.

However, the ego can never be aware of its non-existence, because it must exist in order to be aware of anything. Since it was not aware of itself before it came into existence, it becomes aware of itself only when it comes into existence, but by the time it has become aware of itself it has already come into existence, so it can never be aware of its actually coming into existence. Either it does not exist, in which case it is not aware of itself, or it is aware of itself, in which case it already exists, so it can be aware of the change from being non-existent to being seemingly existent only after that change has taken place. Likewise it can never be aware of its ceasing to exist, because by the time it has ceased to exist it is aware of nothing.

Therefore the ego can never be aware either of its coming into existence or of its ceasing to exist, and this is why we can never

MOUNTAIN PATH

cognise the exact moment when we wake up or the exact moment when we fall asleep. However Bhagavan asks us to try to find out how the ego comes into existence, even though we can never see it actually coming into existence. In order to see when or how it comes into existence, or when or how it ceases to exist, we must attend to it very keenly, and when we look at it carefully enough we will see that no such thing actually exists, because what actually exists is only our own real nature, which is pure self-awareness.

Therefore we should not imagine that if we practise self-attention keenly enough our power of attention will become so sharp and subtle that we will be able to cognise the rising and the subsiding of our ego every fraction of a moment, because if we attend to ourself keenly enough it will not rise at all. That is, if we fix our attention very keenly on ourself, the source from which the ego rises, what will become clear to us is: I alone exist, so no such thing as the ego has ever come into existence. ▲

(To be continued)

KEYWORD

Svapna

JOHN GRIMES

“We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on; and our little life/
Is rounded with a sleep.” — W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Bhagavan Sri Ramana said: “There are different methods of approach to prove the unreality of the universe. The example of the dream (svapna) is one among them.”¹ The world from the perspective of an ordinary human being, acknowledges that there are three states of consciousness or awareness: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Sri Ramana also spoke of a fourth state or pure Consciousness that underlies and permeates these three. “There is only one state, that of consciousness or awareness or existence. The three states of waking, dream, and sleep cannot be real. They simply come and go. The real will always exist.”²

In the dream state, the following facts are obvious. The individual is there in the dream; the mind is the light of all one perceives; the mind creates the entire experienced dream universe; and whatever one perceives is internal to oneself. As well, a little reflection will reveal that an individual may learn much more from the dream state. The dream state points to the possibility that the waking state may be but a dream. Why? Because while a dream lasts, everything appears real

¹ Venkataramiah, M. (compl.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§399.

² Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11-1-46 Afternoon.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

enough. But upon waking, one realizes that nothing of the sort really happened even though the dreamer seemingly experienced it as such. A gift of the dreaming state is that it reveals that the world may quite possibly and logically neither be real nor external to oneself and that it just may be the case that nothing ever really happens. The dream state also points to the possibility that the waking state may be but a dream. For instance, last night you may have dreamt that you went to Los Angeles. While the dream lasted, everything seemed real enough. But upon waking, did you really go to Los Angeles? Nothing of the sort really happened even though you experienced it as such. Dreams are taken to be real only so long as the dream lasts.

It is interesting to reflect that in the entire history of philosophy, both East and West, no philosopher has been able to satisfactorily prove that the waking state is ontologically different from the dream state.³ The Chinese sage, Chuang-Tzu, dreamt he was a butterfly and on waking wondered whether he was the man dreaming he was a butterfly, or whether he was a butterfly dreaming it was a man.

So what other things can we learn from the dream state?

Dreams are inscrutable phenomena and dreams can illustrate what the nature of Reality is not: Bhagavan Ramana said, “All that we see is a dream, whether we see it in the dream state or in the waking state. On account of some arbitrary standards about the duration of the experience and so on, we call one experience a dream experience and another waking experience. With reference to Reality, both the experiences are unreal.”⁴

In a dream, note that every dream-object, inert or living, human or demonic, pleasurable or painful, including oneself and anything else in any shape or form, all enjoy exactly the same ontological status. The reality of the most expensive dream diamond is exactly the same as a speck of dream dirt. This aspect of dreams helps to convey some understanding of the state of a Sage. Sri Ramana remarked: “Does a man who sees many individuals in his dream persist in believing

³ In advaita, both the waking state and the dream state are equated ontologically. Both are *vyavaharika* and neither real nor unreal, *maya*. As per the waking state no philosopher, east or west has been able to *logically* prove that one is awake. Logic cannot give certainty, only probability. Proofs belong to the *vyavaharika* realm and thus can never reach certainty.

⁴ Op.cit., Mudaliar, 26-2-46 Morning.

them to be real and enquire after them when he wakes up?”⁵ “When a man dreams, he creates himself (i.e., the *ahamkar*, the seer) and the surroundings. All of them are later withdrawn into himself.”⁶ Again Sri Ramana asks if on waking up the dreamer asks if the dream individuals also wakened? “It is ridiculous,” he comments.⁷

Dreams are said to be a helpful aid to a seeker’s spiritual practices. Sri Ramana remarked, “A dreamer dreams a dream. He sees the dream world with pleasures, pains, etc. But he wakes up and then loses all interest in the dream world. So it is with the waking world also. Just as the dream world, being only a part of yourself and not different from you, ceases to interest you, so also the present world would cease to interest you, if you awake from this waking dream (samsara) and realize that it is a part of yourself and not an objective reality.”⁸

The dream world is thus very useful but all the dream world can inform us of is that the Reality is ‘not-this’, ‘not-this.’ If the world is but an extended dream, this tells us that it is not real, but it can’t tell us what is Real. We live in this seemingly real world and never doubt its veracity. Even if we learn that this world is a dream, all that this informs us of is that all this is not real. It doesn’t tell us what is real.

The dream analogy has many facets to it. The dream analogy clarifies the rather incredible claim that one is not, as is generally believed, in the universe, but rather the universe is in oneself. Dreams and everything contained within them are within the dreamer. Lord Ramana said: “You dream of finding yourself in another town. Can another town enter your room? Could you have left and gone there?”⁹ In dreams, the dreamer is the light of that world, the dreamer creates the entire dream universe, experiences various things, and then withdraws them.

The objection that dream objects are not similar to waking objects cannot be supported on the contention that while objects experienced in the waking state are practically efficient, those seen in a dream are not. When confronted with this objection, Bhagavan Ramana replied: “You are not right. There are thirst and hunger in dream also. You might have had your fill and kept over the remaining food for the next

⁵ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§471.

⁶ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§474.

⁷ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§498.

⁸ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§625.

⁹ Brunton. P., *Conscious Immortality*, Chapter 13, ‘Avashtatraya’ p.94.

day. Nevertheless you feel hungry in a dream. This food does not help you. Your dream-hunger can be satisfied only by eating dream-food. Dream-wants are satisfied by dream-creations only.”¹⁰ Objects of the waking state only have efficiency in the waking state. Dream objects are useful in their own way in the dream state. Dream water cannot quench a waking thirst, but it does quench a dream thirst; and it is equally true that waking water cannot quench a dream thirst even though it does quench a waking thirst. Again, listen to Sri Ramana:

“A phenomenon cannot be a reality simply because it serves a purpose or purposes. Take a dream for example. The dream creations are purposeful; they serve the dream-purpose. The dream water quenches dream thirst.”¹¹

Thus it cannot be said that waking objects alone are useful, fruitful, or practically efficient. Dream objects work in dreams just as waking objects work in the waking state. Thus, it isn’t the case that an illusory something cannot produce real effects. A dream that causes a nightmare has the effect of waking one up. Thus, the jury is still out on whether the waking state can be proven to be different from the dream state.

Sri Ramana remarked: “Again, consider it from another point of view: You create a dream-body for yourself in the dream and act with that dream-body. The same is falsified in the waking state. At present you think that you are this body and not the dream-body. In your dream this body is falsified by the dream-body. So you see, neither of these bodies is real. Because each of them is true for a time and false at other times. That which is real must be real for ever.”¹²

All activities performed in the dream state are non-volitional. While dreaming, there is no possibility of asking ‘why’ one is dreaming what one is dreaming. Not only is it impossible to ask why there should be dreaming at all, but also why there should be this particular dream. The content of a dream is analyzable only after one ‘wakes’ up. May not this imply the same may hold good for the waking state? Perhaps, both are equally but a play, a sport (*lila*). There is a Hindu theory that creation is but God’s sport, with neither a reason nor a season. ▲

¹⁰ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§399.

¹¹ Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§315.

¹² Op.cit., Venkataramiah, *Talks*, Talk§328.

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Five

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6th September 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om [in continuation of the discussion in the previous instalment about the *ego being found to be non-existent* if we attend to it keenly enough]: *Vivarta vāda* [the contention that the ego and everything perceived by it is just a false appearance] can hold true only so long as the ego seems to exist, but when we see the reality of the ego, namely our true nature, we will see that no ego has ever existed, so *ajāta* [the fact that nothing has ever been born or come into existence, even as a false appearance] will then shine as the only truth, because since the ego has never existed, nothing else has ever actually existed, since according to *vivarta vāda* everything else depends for its seeming existence upon the seeming existence of the ego.

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

In some books that record Bhagavan's answers to questions he seems to accept the existence of the causal body in sleep, but in *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* he makes it clear that in the absence of the ego there is no body or anything else at all. For example in verse 26 he says that if the ego comes into existence everything comes into existence, and if the ego does not exist nothing exists. Moreover in verse 5 he clarifies that the body is a form of five sheaths, so all five together are included in the term 'body', and that no world exists without such a body. These five sheaths are usually divided into three bodies, the gross, subtle and causal, and a prevalent view in advaita texts is that the body we experience as ourself in the waking state is the gross body, the body we experience as ourself in dream is the subtle body, and what we experience in sleep is the causal body, but Bhagavan has pointed out that this view is not correct.

Firstly he says that there is no actual difference between waking and dream, and that while dreaming we seem to be awake, so the body we experience as ourself in dream seems to be as gross or physical as the body in waking. Therefore whatever body that we experience as ourself, whether in waking or in dream, is a form composed of all the five sheaths.

Secondly he says that sleep is not a state of ignorance but one of pure self-awareness. Only from the perspective of the ego in waking or dream does sleep seem to be a state of darkness or ignorance, but in sleep the ego does not exist, and in its absence what remains is only pure self-awareness. Therefore the causal body is said to exist in sleep only as a concession to the self-ignorant view of the ego.

The ego is the wrong awareness 'I am this body', so it seems to exist only when we are aware of ourself as a body, as we are in waking and dream. Therefore it does not exist in sleep, because we are then aware of ourself only as 'I am' without any adjuncts. As Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, the ego comes into existence, stands and flourishes only by grasping forms, and the first form it grasps is whatever body it currently experiences as 'I', so since no forms seem to exist in sleep, the ego does not exist then.

In the same verse he says that when the ego leaves one form, it grasps another form, and an analogy he sometimes gave for this is a worm, leech or caterpillar, which leaves one hold only after grasping

another one [as recorded, for example, in *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1, Chapter 5, *Day by Day* 21-11-45 Night, and *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§286]. However we should not take this analogy to mean that that the ego leaves one body only after grasping another one, but rather that as soon as it leaves one body it grasps another one, because at any given moment it experiences itself as only one body.

Moreover, by saying this he does not mean that the ego grasps a form even in sleep, firstly because it does not exist then to grasp anything, and secondly because there are therefore no forms in sleep to be grasped, since as he says in the next verse, everything else comes into existence only when the ego comes into existence. Therefore it is only when the ego seems to exist, namely in waking or dream, that whenever it leaves one form it grasps another one. When it subsides in sleep it leaves all forms, and it begins to grasp them again only when it rises from sleep in either waking or dream.

When Bhagavan says in verse 5 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* that the body is a form of five sheaths (*pañca kōśa*), he means that whenever we experience ourself as a body, we are experiencing all five sheaths as ourself. This is because whatever body we experience as ourself is always a living body and always seems to be awake, so it consists not only of the physical form (*annamaya kōśa*) but also of the life that animates it (*prāṇamaya kōśa*), the thinking mind (*manōmaya kōśa*) and the discerning intellect (*vijñānamaya kōśa*), and it seems to be ourself only because of our self-ignorance, which is what is called the *ānandamaya kōśa* or causal body. Therefore we never experience ourself as any of these five sheaths without experiencing ourself as all of them.

The ego itself is not any of these five sheaths, but it cannot come into existence or stand without grasping all five of them as itself. Though they are described as five 'sheaths' or 'coverings' and are compared to the layers of an onion, which if peeled off leave nothing inside, they are not actually five distinct layers, but are closely interwoven and in our experience of them they are inseparable from one another. Just as we peel off all five of them whenever we fall asleep, if we investigate the ego, the 'I' that experiences them as itself, and thereby experience our real nature, we will peel off all of them simultaneously and forever.

The grossest of these five sheaths is the physical body, and each of the other sheaths is progressively more subtle, so since all five of them form one body, we can say that the subtlest form of this body is the darkness of self-ignorance (*ānandamaya kōśa*), and that a grosser form of that darkness is the intellect, a grosser form of the intellect is the mind, a grosser form of the mind is the life or *prāṇa*, and a grosser form of the life is the physical body. This is why Bhagavan says in *Nāṇ Yār?* [eighth paragraph]: ‘The *prāṇa* is said to be the gross form of the mind’.

None of these five sheaths are ‘I’, but that which experiences them all as ‘I’ is the ego, so to investigate what we really are we need to separate ourselves from all of them, including the subtle darkness of self-ignorance, and we can separate ourselves from them only *by attending to nothing other than ‘I’*. Since the ego cannot stand without grasping these five sheaths as itself, when it tries to grasp itself alone, it will subside and disappear. This is why Bhagavan concludes verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* by saying that if one searches for it, the formless phantom-ego will take flight.

The darkness of self-ignorance is called the causal body because none of the other four sheaths can appear without it, so we can permanently separate ourselves from all the five sheaths only by eradicating this fundamental darkness. Just as darkness can be removed only by light, the darkness of self-ignorance can be removed only by the clear light of pure self-awareness (*ātma-jñāna*), and we can see that light only by keenly attending to the ego, the one to whom self-ignorance and the other four sheaths appear.

That is, what is enveloped in the darkness of self-ignorance is only the ego, and since the ego is just a false awareness of ourselves as ‘I am this body’, we can free ourselves from the darkness of self-ignorance only by eradicating the ego, and we can eradicate the ego only by seeing ourselves as we really are. Therefore from whichever angle we may consider the matter, we can eradicate the ego and thereby separate ourselves permanently from all the five sheaths only by keenly attending to ourselves alone.

So long as the ego is in contact with anything other than itself, its real nature is concealed from it, so in order to find its real nature it must attend to itself alone. This is why Bhagavan said: ‘Its true

nature is known when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts' and 'The ego in its purity is experienced in the intervals between two states or between two thoughts' (*Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1, Chapter 5). Therefore we should withdraw our attention completely from everything else by fixing it firmly on ourself alone, as he implies in verse 16 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

“Leaving aside external *viśayas* [phenomena], the mind knowing its own form of light is alone real awareness [or knowledge].”

That is, when we attend to ourself alone, awareness of everything else will recede and disappear, and, in the bright light of pure self-awareness the ego will dissolve and be consumed entirely, as Bhagavan says in verse 193 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

“If the ego-mind, which wanders about attending to other things, begins to attend to its own nature, then [all] other things departing, ‘I’, the limited awareness, will be annihilated by the real awareness of oneself, which shines without limit as the nature of the heart.” ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Six

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

9th September 1978

Sadhu Om: In verse 803 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* Bhagavan says: The *mey-jñāni* [knower of reality], who, ‘I’ [the ego] being annihilated, abides firmly in the state of self, which is *jñāna* [knowledge or awareness], giving *ātmānubhava* [direct awareness of self], the power in which the delusion of flesh [the false awareness ‘I am this body’] is annihilated, to devotees [those with intense yearning and trust] who, suffering distress [and hence seeking salvation], take refuge [in him], is *jīva-karuṇā* [compassion for and kindness to living beings]. Other [acts of compassion and kindness] are defective.

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

The only act of true *jīva-kāruṇya* (kindness to living beings) is to give them self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna*) and thereby annihilate their ego or sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*), which is the root cause of all suffering. All other acts of kindness, including even giving heavenly pleasures to all living beings or ‘heavenising’ this world, are not real kindness, because they do not solve the root problem, the ego, so they are just burying it deeper in its own ignorance, the delusion of *jīva-bhōda*.

What all living beings actually want is just happiness, but no one can ever be satisfied with partial happiness, so knowingly or unknowingly all are seeking infinite happiness, untainted by even the least sorrow or dissatisfaction. However the finite ego can never enjoy infinite happiness, so it is doomed to perpetual dissatisfaction. Indeed, since the ego or individuality (*jīvatva*) is the cause of all dissatisfaction and consequent misery, it is itself misery, so to bestow *śivatva* (the beneficent state of being *śiva*, the infinite whole) by annihilating *jīvatva* is alone true *jīva-kāruṇya*.

And who can give *śivatva*? Only one who is dissolved in *śiva* as *śiva*, as Bhagavan implies in the previous verse, verse 815 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* (verse 10 of *Upadēśa Taṇippākkaḷ*):

Only one who is saved can save living beings in the world; whereas anyone else is like a blind person who is [trying to be] a guide to [another] blind person.

11th September 1978

Sadhu Om: *Sphuraṇa* is not something that we do not already know, because it is always shining in us as ‘I’. It is the simple awareness ‘I am’, so it is never unknown to us, because even when we attend to other things we do not cease to be aware that I am.

However, because we are so accustomed to attending to other things whenever we are either awake or dreaming, when we try to attend only to the awareness ‘I am’ it seems to shine with a fresh clarity, and this fresh clarity of self-awareness is what is generally called *sphuraṇa*. When we attend to other things the awareness ‘I am’ is mixed up and confused with awareness of a body and other such adjuncts, so instead of shining just as ‘I am’ it shines as ‘I am this body’, but when we try to attend only to our basic self-awareness,

‘I am’, the adjuncts recede into the background and self-awareness begins to shine more clearly and prominently. The more keenly we attend to ‘I am’, the more awareness of all other things fade away, until eventually we remain shining as ‘I am’ alone.

Whenever we attend to anything other than ‘I’ we seem to be a body, but when we try to attend only to ‘I’ we begin to recognise that ‘I’ is actually something quite distinct from whatever body I seem to be. We can make this more clear by considering an example. Suppose we hear that a close friend of ours has just died. We go to his house and see his corpse lying there. Yesterday we were talking with him, but today we see his body lying lifeless. What is the difference between this lifeless body and the person we were talking with yesterday? Surely that person who was talking and laughing with us was something other than just this body, which is now a corpse. So who was it who was talking to us through the medium of this body? Who was seeing us and hearing our jokes? Who was recollecting the good times we had together in the past? Since the one who was talking, seeing, hearing and remembering is something other than this corpse, who am I who now talks, sees, hears and remembers through this corpse-like body that now seems to be myself?

To know this ‘I’ as it really is we must attend only to the awareness that always shines as ‘I’, thereby ignoring all other things, including the corpse-like body that we now mistake to be ‘I’. This is why in the *kalivenbā* version of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* Bhagavan extended verse 29 by adding before it the clause ‘*uḍalam piṇam pōl tīrndu*’, which means ‘leaving the body like a corpse’, so with this clause the first sentence of that verse means: ‘Leaving the body like a corpse, not saying ‘I’ by mouth, investigating by an inward sinking mind where one rises as ‘I’ alone is the path of knowledge’.

Likewise in the first sub-section of section 1 of *Vicāra Saṅgraham* he says:

If one asks how to investigate [this impure self-awareness that rises as ‘I am this body’], [the reply is:] can this body, which is *jaḍa* [non-conscious] like a block of wood, shine and behave as ‘I’? It cannot. Therefore, setting down the corpse-body as a corpse, and remaining without uttering ‘I’ even by [physical or mental] voice, if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as ‘I’, then in [one’s] heart a

kind of *spurippu* [a fresh clarity] alone will itself appear to itself [or to oneself] without sound as ‘I am I’. Without leaving that [fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate *ahaṅkāra-rūpa jīva-bhōda* [the sense of individuality in the form of ego], which is called [that is, which experiences itself as] ‘body is I’, and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished. This itself is said by sages and sacred texts to be *mōkṣa* [liberation].

The term *spurippu*, which means shining or clarity, is a Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit term *sphurana*, and they are both verbal nouns derived from the Sanskrit verb *sphur* (*spuri* or *puri* in Tamil), which means to shine, be clear, shine forth, appear clearly or make itself known; so when Bhagavan says, ‘if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as I, then in the heart a kind of *spurippu* alone will itself appear to itself without sound as I am I’, what he means by *spurippu* is a fresh clarity of self-awareness. That is, if we keenly attend to ‘I’, a fresh clarity of self-awareness will shine forth within us.

So long as we attend to anything other than ‘I’, we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’, and this adjunct-mixed self-awareness is what is called ego (*ahaṅkāra*) or the sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*). However, if we attend to ‘I’ keenly enough, we will thereby separate ourself from all adjuncts, and hence instead of shining as ‘I am this body’ our self-awareness will shine clearly as ‘I am just I’.

If we cling fast to this fresh clarity of self-awareness, without leaving or letting go of it, that steady state of unwavering self-attention is what is called ‘just being’ (*summā iruppadu*), because it is the state in which the ego does not rise to attend to anything else, and hence it is the state of absolute silence, stillness or inactivity. By remaining unswervingly in this state of just being, in which we do not let go of self-attention even to the slightest extent, the last remaining traces of the ego will be consumed by the clarity of self-awareness, and then the freshness of that clarity will subside, after which pure self-awareness will shine forever as our natural, eternal and immutable state.

This is what Bhagavan refers to when he says: ‘Without leaving that [*spurippu* or fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate the sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*) in the form of ego (*ahaṅkāra*), which is called [that is, which experiences

itself as] ‘body is I’, and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished’. What is extinguished when the ego is annihilated is not the clarity of self-awareness but only the freshness of it, because it will then be experienced as the real nature of oneself (*ātma-svarūpa*), which is eternal and immutable.

However, unless we have all-consuming love to attend to ourself alone, and unless our *viṣaya-vāsanās* or outward-going tendencies are consequently greatly diminished, we will not be able to cling to the fresh clarity of self-awareness without ever leaving it, so during the course of our practice this fresh clarity (*spurippu* or *sphurana*) will fade whenever we attend to other things and will shine again only when we renew our effort to attend only to ourself. That is, to the extent that we attend to other things, our self-awareness will again become clouded by being mixed with adjuncts, and to the extent that we attend only to ourself, the adjuncts will fade and self-awareness will shine clearly. In other words, the more keenly we attend to ourself, the more the appearance of adjuncts will subside, and consequently the more clearly the *sphurana* will shine, until finally the ego and all its adjuncts will be dissolved forever in the absolute clarity of pure self-awareness.

Therefore once we have ignited the *sphurana* or fresh clarity of self-awareness by trying to attend only to ourself, we should then try to cling as firmly as possible to this *sphurana* until it consumes our ego entirely like a flame that catches and consumes a piece of camphor.

(To be continued) ▲

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Seven

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

12th September 1978

Sadhu Om: The first question that Sivaprakasam Pillai asked Bhagavan was ‘*nāṇ yār?*’, which means ‘Who am I?’, to which he replied ‘*aṛivē nāṇ*’, which means ‘Awareness alone is I’, so Sivaprakasam Pillai then asked, ‘*aṛiviṇ sorūpam eṇṇa?*’, ‘What is the nature of [such] awareness?’, to which Bhagavan replied ‘*saccidāṇandam*’, ‘Being-awareness-bliss’. From this we should understand that what ‘I’ really is is neither the ego nor any of the five sheaths [the physical body, life, mind, intellect and will, or the darkness of self-ignorance in which the will resides] that constitute the body or person that the ego takes to be itself.

This is why Bhagavan advised us to investigate ‘who am I’ in order to experience what we really are, namely pure awareness or *sat-cit-ānanda* [being-awareness-bliss]. However, not understanding that

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

what 'I' really is is nothing but pure awareness, people often asked him, 'When you ask us to investigate who am I, which is the I we are to investigate?', to which he would generally reply, 'It is the ego' [as recorded, for example, in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-45 Night and 3-1-46 Afternoon]. Why did he answer in this way?

After being told that what 'I' really is is just *sat-cit-ānanda*, no matter whatever else it may seem to be, asking this question, 'Which 'I' am I to investigate?', is like after being told that what seems to be a snake is actually just a rope and advised to look at it carefully to see for oneself, asking, 'Which 'it' am I to look at, the snake or the rope?' The appropriate answer to give anyone who asks this question is 'the snake', because they obviously have not understood clearly enough that there are not two different things there, a snake and a rope, but just one thing, a rope that seems to be a snake. Likewise there are not two different 'I's, a real 'I' and an ego, but just one real 'I' that seems to be the ego.

Those who ask which 'I' is to be investigated have not understood that there is only one 'I', so they imagine that the real 'I' is some other thing that is now unknown. Therefore whenever anyone asked this question, Bhagavan generally replied that the 'I' they should investigate is the ego, because they believed that that is the only 'I' they know.

There is also a deeper reason why he often described *ātma-vicāra* [self-investigation or self-enquiry] as investigating the ego. We need to investigate ourselves only because we have risen as ego, so it is only as this ego that we are to investigate who or what we actually are. Our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*) does not need to investigate itself, because as our real nature we are always aware of ourselves as we actually are. Therefore *ātma-vicāra* is the ego investigating itself.

Though our aim is to know our real nature, we are now aware of ourselves as the ego, so we cannot attend to our real nature as it is but only as the ego that it seems to be. However, this does not mean that we cannot attend to our real nature, which is what is always shining within us as 'I', but only that we cannot attend to it except as the ego, because that is what 'I' now seems to be.

However, since there is only one 'I', if one investigates this one 'I', which is what now seems to be the ego, its real nature will be revealed,

just as if one looks carefully enough at what seems to be a snake one will see that it is just a rope. When one sees that it is actually just a rope, the snake in effect disappears or takes flight. Likewise when one investigates oneself keenly enough to see what one actually is, the ego will disappear or take flight. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and elsewhere that if one seeks or scrutinises the ego, it will take flight.

What remains when the ego takes flight is just our real nature, which as he says in verse 21 of *Upadēśa Undiyār* is always the true import of the word ‘I’, because we do not cease to exist in sleep, even though there is then no ego. This true import of the word ‘I’ is not something new that we did not know before, but is just the one ‘I’ that we have always known clearly, because whether the ego appears, as in waking and dream, or does not appear, as in sleep, we are always aware of ourself, our own existence, ‘I am’. However, though we have never been not aware of this one real ‘I’, we were previously aware of it as ego, the spurious ‘I’ that rises as ‘I am this body’, so when this imposter takes flight, we know only what we have always known, namely the one real ‘I’, but instead of knowing it as ego, we know it as it really is.

The ‘I’ that we are to know is not anything other than ourself, so when we know what we really are we will know that we have always known ourself. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 33 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*: ‘To make oneself an object, are there two selves? Because being one is the truth, the experience of everyone’.

The ego is just a wrong knowledge or awareness of ourself, which is superimposed on our awareness of our real nature, just as the snake is just a misperception, which is superimposed on our perception of the rope. Therefore when the wrong awareness called ‘ego’ is removed, what remains is the real awareness that we actually are, unobscured by the appearance of the ego, just as when the misperception called ‘snake’ is removed, what remains is our perception of the rope, unobscured by the appearance of the snake.

Just as the snake is nothing other than a rope, the ego is nothing other than our real nature. Therefore to see our real nature we just have to look at the ego very carefully. So long as we mistake ourself to be this ego, we need to investigate it, but our aim is not to know the

ego but only to know what we actually are. If we clearly understand the oneness of the ego and our real nature, we will understand that looking at the ego is nothing other than looking at our real nature.

However, if someone is unable to doubt the reality of their *jīva-bhāva* or sense of individuality, the false awareness ‘I am this body’, they will not be able to understand even at an intellectual level that what seems to be the ego is nothing other than their real nature. For such people it is necessary to say that the ‘I’ that should be investigated is only the ego, because they believe the real ‘I’ is something other than that, whereas for those who can understand that the ego is just a false appearance, like an illusory snake, it will be clear that there is actually no difference between investigating the ego and investigating one’s real nature.

In the question ‘Whence am I?’ what ‘I’ refers to is only the ego, because the ego alone is the rising ‘I’, the ‘I’ that appears and therefore just seems to exist, so investigating whence am I means investigating the source from which the ego has risen or appeared, namely one’s own real nature. In the question ‘Who am I?’, however, though what ‘I’ refers to may seem to be the ego, if one has a more mature and therefore a clearer and more subtle understanding it will be clear that from a deeper perspective what ‘I’ refers to is actually one’s real nature, because one’s real nature alone is the being ‘I’, the ‘I’ that actually exists, so it alone is what seems to be the ego, and hence though investigating who am I may seem to mean investigating the ego, what it actually means is investigating one’s own real nature.

This is what I explained in *The Path of Sri Ramana*, but one person came to me recently and argued that what I had written there is wrong because Bhagavan said that the ‘I’ in the question ‘Who am I?’ is only the ego. Even when I explained to him why Bhagavan said so and that the ego and our real nature are not two different things, just as the snake and the rope are not two different things, he could not understand or would not accept my explanation.

What this person argued is like arguing that we should not look at the rope because Bhagavan said that we should look only at the snake. But how can we look at what seems to be a snake without looking at the rope? We may not recognise that it is a rope, but even when we look at it thinking it is a snake, what we are actually looking at is

only a rope. Likewise, even when we do not recognise it as our real nature, when we attend to the ego what we are actually attending to is only our real nature, because what seems to be this ego is nothing other than that.

No such thing as ego actually exists. We seem to be this ego only because we do not look at ourself carefully enough, so the ego seems to exist only when we do not attend to it keenly enough. This is why Bhagavan asks us to investigate ourself by keenly attending to the ego, which is what we now seem to be. Therefore understanding clearly that what seems to be this ego is nothing other than our real nature is necessary for us to go deep within.

How can we see what we actually are so long as we cling to the belief that the 'I' we are investigating is only the ego? The very purpose of investigating ourself is for us to see that we are not actually this ego, which we seemed to be till now, but are only the beginningless, endless (limitless or infinite) and unbroken (undivided or unfragmented) *sat-cit-ānanda*, as Bhagavan says in verse 28 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*. So when we attend to ourself we need to give up all ideas about two different 'I's, one of which we know, namely the ego, and the other of which we do not know, namely our real nature.

There is only ever one 'I', which is our real nature, but because we have not investigated it keenly enough, it seems to be this ego. This is why investigating this ego with eagerness to know what it is is the only means to know what we actually are. We cannot know what we actually are so long as we continue to believe that the real import of the word 'I' (what this word actually refers to) is the ego, so the sooner we give up this wrong idea the better.

Therefore we should think carefully and deeply about Bhagavan's teachings in order to understand why he said whatever he said, and we should not assume that every answer he gave in reply to the wide variety of questions he was asked, often by people who were far from being able to grasp his teachings in a deep and subtle manner, was the final word he had to say on that subject. He answered at many different levels to suit the needs of those who asked him questions, so not everything he said represents the real depth and subtlety of his teachings. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Eight

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

26th September 1978

Sadhu Om: Among the various *bhāva*-s or devotional attitudes towards God, one is to take him as our faithful friend and servant who is willing to do everything for us. This is why I often say: ‘Why should you think that you should serve God? Who are you to serve him? He is always serving you, fulfilling every need of yours, so why should you do anything? He is all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful, so he knows all your needs and fulfils them far better than you could for yourself. So when he is doing everything for you, why should you plan anything or even think of anything? Why don’t you just keep quiet, resting with full faith in him? Leave it all to him and be calm. This is the only way you can truly serve him’.

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

This is what Bhagavan implies when he says in *Nāṇ Yār?*:

Even though one places whatever amount of burden upon God, that entire amount he will bear. Since one *paramēśvara śakti* [supreme ruling power or power of God] is driving all *kārya*-s [whatever needs or ought to be done or to happen], instead of we also yielding to it, why to be perpetually thinking, ‘it is necessary to do like this; it is necessary to do like that’? Though we know that the train is bearing all the burdens, why should we who go travelling in it, instead of remaining happily leaving our small luggage placed on it [the train], suffer bearing it [our luggage] on our head?

If we train ourself to cling fast to this attitude, giving up all our cares and concerns by trusting him entirely to provide whatever we need, that will save us the trouble of thinking so many countless thoughts that we would otherwise believe are necessary for us to think. Only when we are firmly established in this attitude will it be possible for us to surrender ourself entirely, because self-surrender is not complete until we give up thinking of or attending to anything other than ourself, as Bhagavan says in the first sentence of the same paragraph of *Nāṇ Yār?*: ‘Being *ātma-niṣṭhāparan* [one who is steadily fixed in and as oneself], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any *cintana* [thought] other than *ātma-cintana* [‘thought of oneself’, self-contemplation or self-attentiveness], alone is giving oneself to God’.

This is the *bhāva* that Sundaramurthi [a renowned Tamil poet and one of the sixty-three saints whose stories are recounted in the *Periya Purānam*] had towards God, whom he considered to be his friend and servant, believing that he would take care of all his needs. This is a very safe and sure *bhāva* to have towards God. Other *bhāvas*, such as the *nāyaka-nāyakī bhāva* [the attitude that God is one’s bridegroom or husband and that one is his bride], are not suitable for everyone. Only the very purest devotees like Bhagavan are fit to take God to be their lover and bridegroom. That is why he sang *Aruṅācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* [the ‘Garland of Imperishable Marriage to Arunachala’] whereas I sang only *Ramaṇākṣara Malar Mālai* [the ‘Flower Garland of Letters for Ramana’], because for most of us it is better to consider Bhagavan to be our beloved father and *guru* rather than our bridegroom.

2nd October 1978

Sadhu Om: In one verse in *Śrī Ramaṇa Varuhai* [a poem of 361 verses that he composed in July 1955 pouring out all his anguish and praying to Bhagavan to come to him once again in name and form] I sang that though I know that all Gods such as Rama, Krishna, Siva, Devi and Subrahmanya are none other than Bhagavan, I do not want to see any of them; the only divine form I wish to see is that grey-haired old man with a walking-stick. That is the only form that is dear to my heart and that I will always revere.

18th October 1978

Sadhu Om: Mind has three powers, the powers of *icchā* [liking], *kriyā* [doing] and *jñāna* [knowing]. Of these, *kriyā-śakti* [the power of doing] is a distortion of *sat* [being] and is the function of *manas* [mind], *jñāna-śakti* [the power of knowing, which in this context means the power to know things other than oneself] is a distortion of *cit* [awareness] and is the function of *buddhi* [intellect], and *icchā-śakti* [the power of liking] is a distortion of *ānanda* [happiness] and is the function of *cittam* [will]. In essence these three powers are one and inseparable, just as *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda* are one.

If we truly know that something is good, we will like it and do it. If, however, we say that we know it is good but do not like it or will not do it, we are not really convinced that it is good. In other words, we lack the strength of conviction, which is *jñāna-śakti* [the power of knowing, understanding, discernment, discrimination or judgement]. For example, if we say that we know that touching fire is harmful, yet we like to touch it or do not avoid touching it, we have not truly understood how harmful it is.

Likewise, if we were deeply and firmly convinced that our real nature is happiness and that everything else is misery, we would not like to attend to anything other than ourself, and we would have the power to do nothing but attending only to ourself. If, on the other hand, we find that we are unable to attend only to ourself, that means that we do not yet have sufficient liking to do so, and the reason why we do not have sufficient liking is that we are not truly convinced that happiness is our real nature and therefore cannot be found in anything other than ourself.

However, even if we lack the ability to cling to self-attention firmly and steadily, we should not be disheartened, because what is more important than our ability is our liking to do so. If we truly like to do so, the ability will certainly follow in the tracks of our liking. Therefore we should pray to Bhagavan with all our heart to give us unshakeably firm conviction that happiness is our real nature, because the more we are convinced of this, the more we will like to attend only to ourself, and the more we like to do so, the more we will be able to do so. To succeed in this path, therefore, *bhakti* [liking or love], *vivēka* [discernment, discrimination or judgement] and the practice of self-attention must all go hand in hand. If we truly like to follow this path and thereby surrender ourself entirely to Bhagavan, who is God, *guru* and our own real nature, he will do everything else for us.

19th October 1978

Sadhu Om: As Bhagavan said, the mere presence of a *jñāni* on earth benefits all people. However, very few *jñānis* have what Ramakrishna called the ‘badge of authority’ to be *guru*, as Bhagavan had. Of course, there are no differences in *jñāna*, but since *jñānis* appear to be individuals, outwardly there seem to be differences between them, so they each have their own role to play, and some seem to play no particular role at all.

However, acting as a *guru* is not the only way in which a *jñāni* can help others. Even if a *jñāni* acts just as a simple disciple, the full power of grace will flow through him. There is so much we can learn from a true disciple.

Though Bhagavan never considered himself to be a *guru*, because in his view there were no others, his outward role was clearly to be a *guru*, but he nevertheless also exemplified the role of a humble devotee and disciple of Arunachala. Because he is the *guru* of all who are attracted to his teachings and aspire to follow the path he has shown us, there is no need for any disciple of his to act as *guru*, and anyone who does act as *guru* is not a true disciple of his.

This was exemplified by Muruganar, who was his foremost disciple, yet who never accepted for himself the role of a *guru*. Whenever anyone told him that they considered him to be their *guru*,

he would respond passionately: ‘Who am I to be a *guru*? Bhagavan alone is fit to be a *guru* for all of us. He alone can save us, so take him alone to be your *guru*’.

20th October 1978

Sadhu Om: Though Seshadri Swami was a *jñāni*, it was not his role to be a *guru*. This is illustrated by the following story. He had one devotee who often begged him to give him *brahma-jñāna*, and though he told that devotee that he was not yet ripe enough, the devotee persisted saying, ‘I may not be fit enough, but I know that you can nevertheless give it to me’. One day, perhaps to make him understand his unripeness, Seshadri touched him, but though his touch induced in him a blissful experience of detachment from his body, it toppled his balance of mind, so he ran out of the temple, tearing off his clothes and behaving like a lunatic.

Hearing about this, his friends and family were very upset, because he was a rich man and widely respected, so they caught him and brought him back to Seshadri Swami, asking him to cure him of his madness. He explained that he had been asking for *jñāna*, and by coming too close to the fire of *jñāna* he had eventually caught fire, but since he was not ripe enough, it had resulted in this seeming madness. He said he could not do anything to cure him, but assured them that within a few days he would return to normal. After returning to normal, the devotee told Seshadri Swami that he now understood that he was not mature enough to receive *brahma-jñāna*, but prayed to him to first give him the necessary maturity and then give him *brahma-jñāna*.

Such an experience and loss of mental balance will never happen to those who take refuge in Bhagavan and his teachings, because he is the perfect *guru*, so he is working within us, rectifying our *vāsanās* and preparing us to be willing to surrender ourselves entirely. Since he knows us so well, he will not give us anything until he knows we are ready for it, so if we rely entirely on him, he will lead us gently, smoothly and as quickly as possible to our final destination without ever letting us lose our balance of mind.

When he finally reveals himself within our Heart as the light of pure awareness, he will have prepared us perfectly, so it will happen

so smoothly and naturally that it will seem as if nothing has happened, and instead we will see that we are just as we have always been.

Question: Since Bhagavan has always been the one *guru* in the Heart of everyone, now that he has appeared in the name and form of Ramana, what special benefit do we get by taking this name and form to be our *guru*?

Sadhu Om: Ramakrishna used to say that though milk pervades throughout the body of a cow, in order to obtain it we need to take it from the udder. Likewise, though grace is shining in all places, at all times and in the Heart of each one of us, so long as we are looking outwards we can obtain it only from appropriate outlets. From some outlets, such as Seshadri Swami, the flow is not so strong or well regulated, because they have a different purpose, but because the sole purpose of the name and form of Ramana is the eradication of ego, he is the perfect outlet from which grace flows eternally, steadily, with full power and perfect control. If we rely entirely on this one outlet, we will be consumed by him in the quickest possible manner and without undergoing more than the least amount of trouble. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty Nine

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

24th October 1978

Sadhu Om: If *japa* [repetition of a name of God or some other mantra] or *mūrti-dhyāna* [meditation upon a form of God] is done just to gain one-pointedness of mind, there is not much spiritual benefit to be gained thereby, because name and form are *mithyā aṁśa*, the false aspects of *brahman*. For *japa* or *mūrti-dhyāna* to be spiritually efficacious, a *satya aṁśa* [one of the three real aspects of *brahman*, namely *sat-cit-ānanda*, existence-awareness-bliss, also known as *asti-bhāti-priya*, being-illumination-love] must be combined with them, and that *satya aṁśa* is love, which is the *ānanda* or *priya* aspect. To the extent that they are done with heart-melting love, *japa* and *mūrti-dhyāna* are powerful aids on the path of self-surrender, because they are each a means by which love can be focused and directed back to God

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

or guru, who is its source, and the more our love is focused on God or guru, the more willing we will become to give ourselves entirely to him.

If *japa* of a name of God or meditation on a form of God is done to gain one-pointedness of mind, it would be spiritually beneficial only to the extent that it helps to enkindle love for God in one's heart, but if it does not enkindle such love, it can become more of a hindrance than a help on the path of self-surrender, because it would strengthen the mind's outgoing power, its ability to focus its attention on second and third person objects. The more one does *japa* or *dhyāna* with true heart-melting love, the less one will have interest in other things, and thereby desire for and attachment to anything other than God will gradually drop off. Thus as one's love for God grows, so surrender blossoms in one's heart. Hence the love with which we do *japa* or *dhyāna* will eventually enable us to merge in the reality of the object of our love.

Even though initially we may consider God or *guru* to be a second or third person, the more our love for him grows, the more our love for ourselves as a person, whom we consider to be the first person, will diminish, and consequently the more we will yield ourselves to him. When our love and surrender thus grow sufficiently, it will be easy for God in the form of *guru* to turn our mind back within to face ourselves alone, thereby eradicating our ego.

Of all the names and forms of God, the names and forms of Arunachala and Ramana have a unique power to enkindle love for self-attention in our heart. The only second person that will automatically turn our attention back to the first person is Arunachala-Ramana, as Bhagavan himself indicates in verse 10 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Padigam*:

I have seen a wonder, the magnetic hill that seizes [or forcibly attracts] the soul. Subduing the mischievous activity of the soul who thinks of it once, pulling [dragging or attracting] [that soul] to face towards itself, the one [or peerless] [infinite self-awareness that shines within the heart as 'I'], and [thereby] making it *acala* [motionless] like itself, it accepts [and consumes] that sweet [spiritually ripened and pure] soul as *bali* [food offered in sacrifice]. What [a wonder] this is! O souls, be saved [by] thinking of the great Aruna Hill, this killer of the soul, who shines in the heart [as 'I'].

2nd November 1978

Sadhu Om: Egolessness is perfect humility, so the more humble we are, the closer we are to eradicating the ego. This is why Bhagavan strongly emphasised the need for us to be humble, as he did, for example, in the final paragraph of *Nāṇ Yār?*:

If oneself rises [or appears] [as ego or mind], everything rises [or appears]; if oneself subsides [disappears or ceases], everything subsides [disappears or ceases]. To whatever extent sinking low [subsiding or being humble] we proceed [or conduct ourself], to that extent there is goodness [benefit or virtue]. If one is [continuously] restraining [curbing, subduing or reducing] the mind, wherever one may be one can be.

When he says, ‘To whatever extent sinking low we proceed, to that extent there is goodness’, he uses the term *tārndu*, [an adverbial participle] which means sinking low, subsiding, declining, bending, bowing or worshipping, so it implies being humble and submissive. The lower the ego sinks or subsides, the more do humility and surrender take over.

Humility is divinity. In verses 494, 496 and 497 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* Bhagavan says that one becomes great to the extent that one becomes humble, and that the reason why God is so great that he is worthy to be worshipped by all living beings is that he is so humble and free of ego that he considers himself to be the servant of even the lowliest of creatures. He is supreme because he is humbler than even the most humble.

3rd November 1978

Sadhu Om: What we are seeking is always present and has never been lost, because it is our own real nature. To illustrate this Bhagavan often used the analogy of a woman who was searching everywhere for her necklace without noticing that she was already wearing it. Seeing her frantic search, a friend of hers pointed out that it was around her own neck and had therefore never been lost. The friend who thus points out to us that the happiness we are seeking is ourself is *guru*.

We can elaborate on this analogy by saying that instead of pointing out that the necklace is around her neck, her friend gives her a mirror

and suggests that if she looks in it that may help her to find her necklace. She then has a choice whether to look in the mirror or not. If she looks in it, it will enable her to see where she should look to find her necklace, namely on her own neck. The mirror is like Bhagavan's teachings. If we study them carefully, they will show us where to look to find the happiness we are seeking.

Having looked in the mirror and seen where the necklace is to be found, the woman gives up searching for it in other places and feels her own neck, where she finds it was all along. Likewise, having studied Bhagavan's teachings, we should give up seeking happiness outside ourself, and should instead look within to see that it is our own real nature.

When the woman feels her own neck and finds her necklace there, she no longer needs the help of the mirror, because she is now clearly aware that she has all along been wearing it. Likewise, when we look within and thereby see that we ourself are infinite happiness, we will no longer need the help of Bhagavan's teachings, because we will be clearly aware that the happiness we are seeking is what we always actually are and can therefore never have been lost.

Sadhu Om [in reply to a lady who asked whether the *mantra-japa* she had been doing was an obstacle to following Bhagavan's path]: Suppose that you start to ride a cycle in order to reach a certain destination, but after riding a short distance you find that the ground beneath you is moving, and when you look to see why, you find that you are on the deck of a ship that is carrying you to your destination. Your *japa* is just like your riding a cycle on the deck of that ship. It seemed to be necessary before you knew you were already on a ship carrying you faster to your destination than your cycle ever could, but once you know you are travelling on that ship, you will understand that there is no need for you to cycle anymore.

The only thing you need to be sure of is that you want to reach the destination towards which the ship is carrying you. If that is the destination you want to reach, all you need do is relax and enjoy the journey. However, if you want to reach some other destination, you are free to get off the ship and row a small boat towards wherever you want to go.

The ship is Bhagavan's grace, which is carrying us along the path of self-enquiry and self-surrender towards the eradication of ego. Relaxing and enjoying the journey is surrendering oneself to his grace.

In order to surrender oneself we must avoid rising as ego, which we can do most effectively and completely by vigilantly attending to oneself, thereby giving no room to the rising of any other thought, as Bhagavan teaches us in the thirteenth paragraph of *Nāṇ Yār?*:

Being *ātma-niṣṭhāparaṇ* [one who is completely fixed in and as oneself], giving not even the slightest room to the rising of any *cintana* [thought] other than *ātma-cintana* ['thought of oneself', self-contemplation or self-attentiveness], alone is giving oneself to God. Even though one places whatever amount of burden upon God, that entire amount he will bear. Since one *paramēśvara śakti* [supreme ruling power or power of God] is driving all *kāryas* [whatever needs or ought to be done or to happen], instead of we also yielding to it, why to be perpetually thinking, 'it is necessary to do like this; it is necessary to do like that'? Though we know that the train is going bearing all the burdens, why should we who go travelling in it, instead of remaining happily leaving our small luggage placed on it [the train], suffer, bearing it [our luggage] on our head?

Doing any *sādhana* other than self-enquiry and self-surrender, is either like cycling on the deck of the ship, which is an unnecessary effort, or like rowing a small boat in order to go to some other destination. Like a passenger on a train or a ship, we should surrender to the power of Bhagavan's infinite love, which will unfailingly carry us to our destination, unlimited happiness. To the extent that we are willing to surrender oneself to Bhagavan all other *sādhanas* will naturally drop off. ▲

(to be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirty

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

4th November 1978

Sadhu Om [in answer to someone who asked whether one's *sat-vāsanā* (inclination to just be) will be strengthened by one's cultivating love for God as a second person]: Yes, it will, by the power of association (*saṅga*). That is, God is *sat* (what is real), so even when one thinks of him in a particular name and form, provided one does so with heart-melting love, one is thereby associating with what is real, so that association is what is called *sat-saṅga*, and *sat-saṅga* strengthens *sat-vāsanā*.

An effective practice in the path of bhakti is to think constantly and lovingly of God, his greatness, his incarnations, his *līla*-s and so on. For example, when Parikshit was cursed to die within a week, he asked Suka for guidance, so Suka narrated to him the life of Krishna,

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

and while doing so he also taught him the path of *jñāna*. Parikshit listened to Suka's narration (which later became the *Bhāgavatam*) with so much devotion that after seven days his mind had been purified sufficiently for him to surrender himself entirely, thereby crossing the ocean of *samsāra* and attaining liberation. Such is the efficacy of listening to and contemplating on the life of a great sage or incarnation of God, and this is why I have written several songs narrating the life of Bhagavan.

If the second person we think of is truly a *jñāni* or an incarnation of God, like Bhagavan or Krishna, our thinking of them with love will certainly sow and nurture the seed of *sat-vāsanā* in our heart. By thinking repeatedly of that one second person, we will exclude thoughts of other more worldly second and third persons from our mind, thereby reducing the strength of our other outward-going *vāsanā*-s, and thus our mind will be progressively purified.

Moreover, by thinking often of Bhagavan we will naturally come to think of his teachings. How long can we think of Ramana without thinking of 'who am I'? Can one think of Rama without thinking of his bow? 'Who am I?' is the bow of Ramana, the supreme weapon he has given us to conquer ego and all its progeny.

17th November 1978

Sadhu Om [while suffering from typhoid]: When I was explaining the meaning of each verse of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*, I was not satisfied with my explanation of verse 558 [in which Bhagavan says, "If it is asked, '[When the dream-body and the waking-body are thus different,] how does the semen in the waking-body drip out when one sees in dream that the dream-body has contacted a woman?', the answer will be that it is due to the speed of attachment with which one springs from the dream-body to the waking-body"], because I had never had such an experience, and I do not like to explain what I have not actually experienced. However, last night Bhagavan gave me a similar experience, showing me how an experience in a dream-body can be carried over into the waking-body, so I am now confident that I can explain the meaning of that verse correctly.

I was dreaming that some friends had bought a piece of land and were cultivating it to grow paddy. They had a powerful pump that was

pumping a large quantity of water from the well, and while working to divert the flow of water from one trench to another I was drenched by the jet of cold water. Since I was working hard in the hot sun, the sudden shower of cold water made me shiver so violently that the shock woke me up, whereupon I found my waking body shivering violently with a high fever. The force with which the shivering of the dream body was carried over into this body caused a feverish fit of shivering that lasted two hours.

With our way of life we are not given to have certain experiences that are usual for other people, so when Bhagavan refers to such experiences in his teachings we are not able to understand such teachings from our own experience. However, as in this case, if he wants us to understand any such teaching, he will give us some other experience that illustrates it equally well.

21st November 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan explained that in the story of Arunachala appearing as a column of fire in order to subdue the pride of Brahma and Vishnu, Brahma represents intellect (*buddhi*) and Vishnu represents ego (*ahankāram*). That is, Vishnu taking the form of a boar and burrowing deep down to find the foot of the mysterious column of fire represents ego diving deep within to find the source from which it had arisen, whereas Brahma taking the form of a swan and flying high to find the top of the column represents intellect going outwards in order to know and understand things other than itself.

Neither ego nor intellect can ever know what is real, so both Vishnu and Brahma failed in their attempts to find the lower or upper limits of the column of fire. However, because Vishnu was humbly going downwards in search of its foot, when he failed he readily acknowledged his defeat, whereas because Brahma was proudly flying upwards in search of its top, when he failed he was not willing to accept defeat, so he foolishly thought that it would be wise to tell a lie by claiming success, believing that there was no one who could expose his lie.

Scientists, philosophers, theologians and others who believe that they can know what is real by directing their intellects outwards, towards anything other than themselves, are like Brahma flying upwards

to reach the top of the column. They will surely fail, because they are looking in the wrong direction. What is real is only oneself, so we can know it only by looking within and thereby subsiding back into the source from which we have risen. Therefore, though such people believe that whatever they seem to know as a result of their research on second and third persons is the truth, it is actually a lie, because it is all entirely unreal.

However, all knowledge about anything other than ourself can be exposed as a lie only by true knowledge of ourself, which will shine forth from within, swallowing the ego and everything else, when the ego turns inwards and thereby subsides deep into the Heart, the source from which it arose. This shining forth of true knowledge is represented in that story by Lord Siva appearing out of the column of fire to bestow his own state on Vishnu and to shame Brahma for telling a lie.

28th November 1978

Sadhu Om: Complete self-denial is self-realisation. That is, what is called 'self-realisation' or *ātma-sākṣātkāra* is nothing but annihilation of ego, so the mark or *lakṣaṇa* of one who has attained that state is that they will never give even the slightest importance to themselves as a person.

Bhagavan said that there is nothing worth learning that we do not already know, so of his own accord he did not teach anything. In his view there is never anyone who is ignorant, because we already know ourself, and there is nothing else that needs to be known. What is required is not to know anything that we do not always know, but only to remove the wrong knowledge that seemingly obscures our knowledge of ourself as we actually are. This is why he often used to say that in this path what is needed is not to learn anything but to unlearn everything.

All learning is only for the ego, because our real nature need not and cannot learn anything. Therefore so long as there is any learning or anything learnt, there is ego, so in order to surrender ego we must be willing to give up all that has been learnt. That is, we need to give up all our beliefs, opinions, ideas, memories, hopes, aims, aspirations, desires, fears, likes, dislikes and so on, because all these have been

learnt in waking and dream, and none of them exist in sleep, so they are alien to our real nature, and we can exist, be aware and be happy without any of them. In sleep there is no ego, and therefore no awareness of anything other than ourself. This is why he says in *Nān Yār?* [in the final sentence of the sixteenth paragraph]: ‘At one time it will become necessary to forget all that one has learnt’.

He also said there is no need to give anyone initiation, because to initiate means to start, and each and every one of us has already started, because we are all seeking happiness, which is the sole aim and purpose of all spiritual practice. What we all want is ‘*duḥkha nivṛtti, sukha prāpti*’, ‘removal of misery and achievement of happiness’, but we cannot find that outside ourself. We are all looking for the right thing, but in the wrong direction. To find it we must look within ourself, so the ultimate purpose of all spiritual teachings is to redirect our seeking from outside to inside.

Therefore, though he did not outwardly give any initiation or formally accept anyone as his disciple, he is always giving true initiation and teaching within our Heart, silently drawing our attention back within and thereby gradually weakening the impetus with which we rise as ego. His true teaching is only silence, which is always shining as pure awareness in our Heart, so the sole aim of all that he taught us by words is to turn our mind back within to subside in and become one with that silence.

He is fulfilling his role as guru in a very silent, secretive and stealthy manner. He is always teaching us in the truest, deepest and most effective way, but so long as we are looking outwards we are not aware of his silent teaching, which is ceaselessly going on in our Heart, so to become aware of it and to listen to it deeply and attentively we must turn back within and subside into the source from which we arose. ▲

(To be continued)