

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty One

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**29th November 1978**

Sadhu Om: In verse 31 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan says:

For those who are [blissfully immersed in and as] *tanmayānanda* [happiness composed of that, namely *brahman*, one's real nature], which rose [as 'I am I'] destroying themselves [ego], what one [action] exists for doing? They do not know [or are not aware of] anything other than themselves [their real nature]; [so] who can [or how to] conceive their state as '[it is] like this'?

However, people imagine that they can understand Bhagavan and the actions he seemed to do, and that he would have acted only as they would expect him to do. In many cases, however, he acted in

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](http://happinessoofbeing.com).

a way that most people would not expect and that few if any could understand. An example of this is the story of the fictitious Malayalam biography that Kunju Swami often narrates.

Before B.V. Narasimha Swami wrote *Self-Realisation*, the only published biography of Bhagavan was a Tamil poem by Sivaprakasam Pillai called *Śrī Ramaṇa Carita Ahaval*, so when a Malayali hagiographer visited the ashram and said he had written biographies of many saints and wanted to write one of Bhagavan, some devotees were eager to tell him all that they knew about Bhagavan's life. However, his main interest was in stories about miracles, so the stories he heard from close devotees did not seem to him to be sufficiently interesting, and hence he went to the town to ask local people for stories about Bhagavan, which he hoped would be more interesting. Having gathered stories of the kind he wanted to hear, he wrote a biography in Malayalam in a notebook, and when he finished it, he gave it to Bhagavan, who read it and corrected all the spelling and grammatical errors that he noticed in it.

Since the devotees who were there at that time saw him reading and correcting it, they assumed that he approved all that was written in it, so they wanted to read it, but Kunju Swami was away for a while and none of the rest of them knew Malayalam. However, after a few days he returned, so they told him about the biography and asked him to read it and tell them what was written in it. When he read it, however, he was horrified to see that most of it was entirely fictitious. For example, it said that Bhagavan was a lawyer in Madurai, married with three children, but that by doing intense *tapas* he gained supernatural powers, by means of which he flew from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, and then went on to describe many miracles that he had supposedly done after coming here.

Kunju Swami could not understand how Bhagavan could have read all of this and corrected only the spelling and grammatical errors without pointing out that the stories were not true, so he approached him, pointed to his corrections and asked, 'Bhagavan, were these corrections not made by you?', to which he answered, 'Yes'. 'But is all this true?' asked Kunju Swami, to which Bhagavan replied, 'Is all this true?' pointing to the surroundings, 'And is this alone false?' pointing to the notebook.

Seeing that Kunju Swami was puzzled by his reply, he explained further by asking, ‘If someone were to write that Ramana was the son of a lawyer, that he attained self-knowledge at the age sixteen and then travelled by train from Madurai to Tiruvannamalai, would you say that that is true?’, to which Kunju Swami replied ‘Yes’. ‘No’, said Bhagavan, ‘even that would be false. So long as you mistake that body to be yourself and this body to be Ramana, whatever you think, see, hear, read or know about Ramana, or about anything else, is false. Because you mistake yourself to be a body, you mistake me to be this body and you mistake this world to be real, but none of these are real. What is real is only yourself. Know yourself, and you will see that nothing else is true.’

When they hear this story, some people say that it makes it seem that Bhagavan was showing a disregard for the truth, but if we think like that, it is we who are showing a disregard for the truth, because we are unwilling to accept the truth of his teachings. He is the truth itself, and he can never disregard himself. This world is just a mental fabrication, like whatever world we see in a dream, so if we take this world to be real, we are disregarding the truth.

Some people think a *jñāni* is someone who will always fight for what is right and against what is wrong, but the *jñāni* sees neither right nor wrong. He sees only himself, so he sees everything as himself. For him there are no others. People want Bhagavan to fit neatly into their limited conception of him. They want a Bhagavan they can understand, but who can truly understand him? He alone can understand himself, so only by losing oneself in him can we understand him.

When I first came to Bhagavan I received many shocks and disappointments. I saw that he often did not support what seemed to me to be right, and sometimes he even seemed to condone what I considered to be wrong. In this way he taught me that he is beyond our comprehension. He is unfathomable. He is beyond the mind. He sees only himself both in what seems to us to be right and in what seems to us to be wrong.

Lakshmana Sarma told me that Bhagavan pointed out to him many errors in both *Sat-Darśana* and *Sat-Darśana Bhāṣya*, but that whenever a dispute arose because he (Lakshmana Sarma) disagreed with the followers of Kavyakantha and Kapali Sastri about their interpretation of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* and other teachings, Bhagavan

looked on passively without interfering or supporting either side. Even when people asked him whose interpretation of his teachings was correct, Kavyakantha's or Lakshmana Sarma's, he would not take sides, but would reply: 'Each of them says what he believes. You may believe whatever you like'.

Bhagavan is the very embodiment of grace, and grace always shines equally on all, both the good and the bad alike, but each of us makes use of grace in our own way. Grace is his very nature, because it is the infinite love that he has for himself, and since he sees us all as himself, he loves each one of us as himself. How can we understand such love so long as we see multiplicity and otherness? His view is so completely different to ours that we can never understand him until we merge within and become one with him, after which we will see no multiplicity or otherness.

We use his grace according to our own likes and dislikes, so as long as we have even the slightest likes or dislikes we are misusing his grace. This is why he says in *Nān Ār?* (Who am I?): 'Likes and dislikes are both fit to be disliked'. To use his grace correctly, as he wants us to, we must surrender our will entirely to his will, which means that we must have no likes or dislikes of our own. However, so long as we rise as ego, we cannot completely avoid having any likes or dislikes, so to surrender our will entirely to his will we must surrender ourselves entirely to him. Since he has infinite love for us as himself, his will is that we should merge in him forever, because only when we are one with him can we experience infinite happiness, which is our real nature.

Not only did he teach us that we must be free of likes and dislikes, but he showed us by his own example how it is to live without likes or dislikes. One particularly notable way in which he emphasised the need for us to give up all our likes and dislikes was that whenever anyone complained to him about the behaviour of some other person, he would always pass judgement against the person who raised the complaint, and would never say anything against the person they complained about, thereby indicating that the fault lies not in whatever we may complain about but only in the likes and dislikes that cause us to complain about it.

Once Devaraja Mudaliar raised an objection saying that sacred texts are not always fair and impartial, because they say, for example,

that *mukti* [liberation] cannot be attained without great dedication and effort, but they also say that anyone who looks at Arunachala or even thinks of it from afar will attain *mukti*. There are many bad people in Tiruvannamalai, he said, criminals and even murderers, and they must all have looked at and thought of Arunachala. ‘How can such people attain *mukti*?’ he asked, in reply to which Bhagavan smiled and said: ‘What is the loss for you? If you receive the Lord’s grace and attain *mukti*, what do you lose if others also attain it? It is *Śiva-vākya*m [a statement or command of Lord Siva]. He himself says that he will give *mukti* to all who think of Arunachala, so if he bestows *mukti* even upon bad people, will he not also bestow it on you?’

People say that Bhagavan was equal to all. It is true that he sees only himself in everyone, so he loves all equally as himself. However, he never said that the mind is equal in all, and he did not say that we should expect to see equality in the world. So long as there are minds and there is a world, there will always be inequality, because such is the nature of multiplicity. This is why he once said to someone who argued that there should be equality in the world: ‘Then go to sleep. In sleep all are equal’.<sup>1</sup>

In *ātma-svarūpa* [our real nature] there are no differences, but in mind there are. In terms of purity, some minds are superior, and others are inferior. To the extent that impurities are removed from the mind, to that extent it is elevated.

Sadhu Om [in reply to someone who asked what Bhagavan meant when he said in reply to a devotee who remarked that the world is like an ocean and that a salt-doll diving into the ocean will not be protected by a waterproof coat, ‘The mind is the waterproof coat’, as recorded on the first page of *Maharshi’s Gospel*]: He meant that the mind cannot save us from being lost in *saṃsāra* [the state of ceaseless activity and cycle of rebirth]. However, if we take *ātma-svarūpa* [our real nature] to be our waterproof coat and therefore cling firmly to *sva-rūpa-dhyāna* [self-attention], it will save us. It alone is our real refuge.

[On an earlier occasion Sadhu Om had said in this regard: Grace is the real waterproof coat that can alone save us from *saṃsāra*.] ▲

(To be continued)

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be a reference to a conversation recorded in section 507 of *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*.

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Two

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**5th December 1978**

**Sadhu Om:** If we worry about other people or what is happening in this world, even if our concern is motivated by the *sāttvika* qualities of love and compassion, that shows that we still have a *satya-buddhi* [sense of reality] regarding the world. So long as we take this world to be real, we will be concerned about it and the people we see in it, and our concern will prompt us to face outwards, away from ourself. This is why Bhagavan taught us that whatever world we see is no more real than any world we see in a dream. It is just a mental fabrication, so it seems to exist only when we are aware of it.

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

Only if we are willing to accept this will we have sufficient *vairāgya* [freedom from desire, attachment and so on] to be able to dive within deep enough to obtain the *ātma-muttu* [the pearl of self-knowledge]. Therefore ultimately we must be willing to give up even the *sāttvika* feelings of love and compassion for others.

When Bhagavan said [in the nineteenth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?)], ‘Likes and dislikes are both fit [for one] to dislike [spurn or renounce]’, he implied that we need to give up all concern about anything other than ourself. Only when we do so will we be willing to turn within and surrender ourself entirely.

**Sadhu Om** [while discussing intense yearning for Bhagavan’s grace and the prayers that come welling up out of one’s heart as a result of such yearning]: Ignore the one who complains, lamenting the state of separation from him. There is a great power that is working within us rectifying our defects. The more we come to know of its working, the more ego will yield itself to that, thereby withdrawing from activity and subsiding. Finally peace alone will remain. It was in such a state of yearning and complaining that *Ramaṇa Sahasram* [a thousand verses that Sadhu Om wrote praying for *jñāna*] came out. The mind will complain and complain about its state of separation until finally it no longer remains to complain about anything.

**Sadhu Om:** When I first came to Bhagavan and thought deeply about his teachings, I came to three important conclusions.

The first of these conclusions is that of the three characteristics that he said define reality, namely eternal, unchanging and self-shining; self-shining (*svayamprakāśa*) is the one essential characteristic.

Neither eternal nor unchanging on their own, nor both of them together, can be sufficient to define what is real, because if we try to decide what is real without considering whether or not it is self-shining, we could conclude that something insentient is real. For example, we could argue that physical space is eternal and unchanging, so it is real. But how do we know that it is eternal or unchanging? How do we know that it even exists? It seems to exist only because we are aware of it, so its seeming existence is dependent upon our awareness of it. How can anything that depends for its seeming existence upon some other thing be real? Therefore

nothing that is insentient and hence not aware of its own existence can be real.

In order to be real, a thing must be aware of its own existence, and this is what Bhagavan means by being self-shining. Whatever is not self-shining cannot be real, even if it seems to be eternal and unchanging.

If we carefully consider the meaning of self-shining, it will be clear that whatever is self-shining must also be eternal and unchanging, so the characteristic of being self-shining includes within itself these other two characteristics of reality. We can understand this by considering some examples.

Some people may consider the sun to be self-shining, for instance, but we can repudiate such an idea by pointing out that the sun is not aware of its own existence, so to make its existence known it must depend upon another light, namely the light of the mind that perceives it. Therefore whatever is insentient (*jaḍa*) is not truly self-shining in the sense that Bhagavan uses this term.

Since the seeming existence of all insentient things is illumined by the mind, is the mind self-shining? No, it cannot be, because if it were self-shining it would shine even in sleep. Since it does not shine in sleep, it does not exist then, because existence and shining are one and the same thing. Existence is *uḷḷadu* or *sat*, and shining is *uṅarvu* or *cit*, and as Bhagavan explained in verse 23 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, *uḷḷadu* [what exists] is *uṅarvu* [awareness]:

Because of the non-existence of [any] awareness other [than what exists] to be aware of what exists, what exists (*uḷḷadu*) is awareness (*uṅarvu*). Awareness alone exists as we.

Whatever seems to exist at one time but not at another time does not actually exist even when it seems to exist. Therefore, since the mind seems to exist only in waking and dream but not in sleep, it does not actually exist at all. Its existence is just a seeming existence, so its awareness (shining) is just a seeming awareness and not real awareness.

Since the mind does not shine in sleep, the property of shining (awareness) is not natural to it. In other words, shining is not the *svabhāva* [own nature] of the mind. The light by which it shines is one that it borrows from some other source, namely *ātma-svarūpa* [the real nature of ourself], which is the light of pure awareness.

What actually shines by its own light, therefore, is only our real nature, because we alone exist and shine in sleep, and we do so without the aid of any other light, because nothing other than ourself exists then. Everything else appears and disappears, but we exist and shine by our own light of pure awareness at all times and in all states without ever undergoing any change, so we alone are eternal, unchanging and self-shining. Therefore what is real is only ourself, as Bhagavan says in the first sentence of the seventh paragraph of *Nān Ār?*, ‘*yathārthamāy uḷḷadu ātma-sorūpam onḍrē*’, ‘What actually exists is only *ātma-svarūpa* [the real nature of oneself]’, and in verse 13 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, ‘*nāṇam ām tāṇē mey*’, ‘Oneself, who is *jñāna* [awareness], alone is real’.

By considering thus, we can see that unless a thing is eternal, it cannot be self-shining, because though it sometimes seems to exist and shine, it does not always exist and shine, so even when it does shine it must do so by whatever light illumines both its appearance and its disappearance. Likewise, unless it is unchanging, it cannot be eternal, because it is one thing before each change and another thing afterwards, and since it is not eternal, it cannot be self-shining. Whatever is truly self-shining, therefore, must necessarily be eternal and unchanging.

The light of pure awareness, which is our real nature, is what illumines both the mind in waking and dream and its absence in sleep. However, what the word ‘illumines’ means in this context is not ‘knows’ but ‘makes known’, and it is important to understand this distinction, because what knows the seeming existence of the mind in waking and dream is not pure awareness but only the mind itself. Without the background light of pure awareness, the mind could not know anything, either itself or anything else, but in the clear view of pure awareness there is no mind at all. The mind as such is a shadow, and light can never know a shadow.

However, though the mind is a shadow, it is not only a shadow, but a mixture of light and shadow, because it is *cit-jada-granthi*, a knot (*granthi*) formed by the seeming entanglement of awareness (*cit*) with a body, which is insentient (*jada*). The *cit* element of the mind is pure awareness, which is never aware of anything other than itself, but it is what illumines the mind, enabling it to know both itself [the subject

or perceiver] and everything else [the objects or phenomena]. All the phenomena known by the mind are just shadows, because they are *jaḍa*, so they are not known by the clear light of pure awareness, but they are known by the mind, because the mind is not a pure light but a mixture of light and shadow, *cit* and *jaḍa*.

Therefore, though the light of pure awareness makes the mind known, it does not make it known to itself [pure awareness] but only to the mind. The mind exists only in its own view and not in the view of our real nature. Hence, our real nature is not aware of the presence of mind in waking and dream, so it is not aware of its absence in sleep. In its view it alone exists, so it is not aware of any changes, nor is it aware of any state other than its own eternal and unchanging state of pure awareness.

Who then is aware of the absence of the mind in sleep? In sleep no one is aware of its absence, because the fact that it is absent in sleep is just an idea that exists in its view in waking and dream. Therefore when it is said that the light of pure awareness illumines the presence of the mind in waking and dream and its absence in sleep, what that means is that it lends its light to the mind, thereby enabling the mind to know both that it [the mind] is present in waking and dream and that it was absent in sleep.

The mind borrows its light of awareness from our real nature, but it misuses this light to know things other than itself. This is like directing the beam of sunlight reflected from a mirror into a dark cave and thereby using it to know whatever objects are in that cave. If instead that reflected beam of light were directed back to its source, the sun, it would merge and be lost in the bright light of the sun. Likewise, instead of using the light of the mind to know anything other than ourself, if we were to direct it back to its source, ourself, it would merge and be lost in the bright light of pure awareness, as Bhagavan implies in verse 22 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

Consider, except by, turning the mind back within, completely immersing it in God, who shines within that mind giving light to the mind, how to fathom God by the mind?

What he refers to here as *pati*, the Lord or God, is our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), which is the light of pure awareness. If in this way we turn our entire mind or attention away from all phenomena back

to face the light of pure awareness, which is its essential *cit* element, what will remain shining is only real awareness, which is what we actually are, as Bhagavan implies in verse 16 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

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

The second and most important of the three conclusions I reached after reflecting carefully on Bhagavan's teachings is that ego will be destroyed only when it attends to itself alone, because as he says in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, ego is a formless phantom that comes into existence, stands and nourishes itself by grasping form, which means by attending to anything other than itself, so if it tries to grasp itself alone, it will dissolve back into the source from which it arose, which is what he means by saying, '*tēḍiṇāl oṭṭam piḍikkum*', 'If sought, it will take flight'. This is why he implies in so many other places, such as in verses 22 and 27 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, that we cannot know our real nature and thereby eradicate ego by any means other than turning our attention back within to investigate the source from which we have risen.

The third conclusion I reached, which logically follows on from the second one, is that the more we attend to ego the more it will subside. In other words, in order to keep ego in check we must watch it vigilantly, and in order to surrender ourselves entirely we must persevere in our attempts to attend to ourselves as keenly and as constantly as possible. ▲

*(To be continued)*

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Three

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**6th December 1978**

Question: If this waking state is a dream, how to explain the fact that each time we wake up we are in the same surroundings that we were in when we fell asleep, whereas in each dream we are in different surroundings?

Sadhu Om: We should not consider each period of waking to be a separate dream. The whole of our present waking-life, from birth to death, is one long dream, not many short ones. In this one dream we dream that we are now awake, but that this waking state is regularly interrupted by periods of sleep, and that sleep is sometimes interrupted by dreams. Those dreams are subsidiary to the one long dream of our present waking like. They are dreams occurring within a dream.

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

The fact that dreams occur within a dream is illustrated by what many of us have experienced, namely waking up from one dream into another. That is, sometimes a dream comes to an end and we find ourself lying in our bed, so we think we have woken up and begin to go about our daily activities, but then we wake up again and realise that the first ‘waking’ was from one dream into another dream. Within a dream we can dream any number of subsidiary dreams, and within each subsidiary dream we can dream other dreams. Therefore whatever dreams we may dream during our present life are just dreams within a dream.

Question: A friend told me that you had once explained to him that in a dream it is not the seer of the dream who projected it but the one who is sleeping, because the seer of the dream is part of the projection, but this does not seem to me to be correct, because we are both the dreamer and the seer. Is this what you actually said?

Sadhu Om: He misunderstood what I said. I did not say that the seer of a dream has not projected it but that the person we seem to be in a dream has not projected it. That person is not the seer but an object seen by us, so it is part of the projection. However, because we mistake ourself to be that person so long as we are dreaming, it seems to us that that person is seeing the dream world.

The same is the case in our present dream. We who are seeing this dream now seem to be a person in it, so this person seems to us to be the seer, even though it is actually an object seen by us. This is why we need to distinguish the seer from everything that is seen. Whatever person we seem to be is just a body and mind, which are objects seen by us, so as the seer of these objects we are distinct from them.

The dreamer of any dream is only ego. As ego we project each dream and see it. Projection and seeing are actually one and the same thing. This is why Bhagavan taught us *dr̥ṣṭi-sṛṣṭi-vāda*, according to which seeing (*dr̥ṣṭi*) is itself creation (*sṛṣṭi*). Whatever we see is just our own thoughts, which we create and see simultaneously, because we create or project a dream merely by seeing it in our own mind.

However, this explanation is not agreeable to everyone, because if we are strongly attached to the person we seem to be, we will not be willing to accept that this person and the world of which it is a

part are all just thoughts projected by us. Therefore different levels of explanation need to be given to suit different levels of spiritual maturity. For the more immature it is said that this world is created by God, and we are just a part of this creation, so it exists whether we see it or not. This is *sr̥ṣṭi-dr̥ṣṭi-vāda*, the contention that the world is first created and subsequently seen by us.

Many advaita texts and commentaries seem to support this view, and sometimes even Bhagavan gave replies that seem to support it, but they did so only to suit the needs of less mature minds. This is why many who claim to be advaitins do not accept that our present waking life is just a dream, and they can find plenty of support for their beliefs in ancient texts and commentaries.

For example, in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* it is said that this *ātman* is *brahman*, but that it has four quarters. The first quarter is called *vaiśvānara*, whose domain is waking and who is aware of external objects, whereas the second quarter is called *taijasa*, whose domain is dream and who is aware of internal objects. This implies that waking is not just a dream, and that what experiences waking and what experiences dream are in some way different, even though they are said to be two quarters of the same *ātman*.

If we consider our experience carefully, it will be clear to us that we who are now experiencing this present state, which seems to us to be waking, are the same 'I' who experienced all the dreams that we now remember, so why does the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* imply that the experiencer of this state is different to the experiencer of dream? Though we are the experiencer of both these states, we are now aware of ourself as if we were this body, whereas in any other dream we were aware of ourself as if we were some other body. Therefore, for those who are very strongly identified with their body and who consequently believe that what is perceiving this world is this body, the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* says that what perceives a dream is something other than the person we now seem to be. However, to indicate that the experiencers of each of these two states are not entirely different, it says metaphorically that what experiences waking is one quarter of ourself and what experiences dream is another quarter of ourself. This is therefore a preliminary teaching, intended to prepare people to accept deeper and subtler teachings in due course.

Unlike the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, which distinguishes the experiencer of dream from the experiencer of waking, when I explained to that friend that the person we seem to be in a dream has not projected it, I did not imply that the experiencer of dream is in any way different to the experiencer of waking, firstly because what we now take to be waking is actually just a dream, and secondly because we who experience all dreams are one and the same ego. This one ego is the dreamer of all dreams, and dreaming entails both projecting and perceiving a dream. The point I was making is that we, the dreamer, are not whatever person we dream ourself to be. The person we seem to be in a dream is a part of our dream, so it is not the dreamer but something dreamt by us.

This is what Bhagavan implies in verse 160 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai*:

The spurious being who roams about as ‘I’ is just something that occurs as one among the shadows [images or pictures].

The term he uses here to mean ‘spurious being’ is ‘*pōli uyir*’, in which *pōli* means spurious, false, imitation or seeming, and *uyir* means more or less the same as the Sanskrit term *jīva*, namely life, living being or soul, but here it is not used in the sense of ego but in the sense of a living being or person, because ego is the formless seer whereas the person it mistakes to be ‘I’ is an object seen by it, so Bhagavan says here that this person is ‘one among the shadows’, thereby comparing it to one among the shadow pictures on a cinema screen.

It is necessary for several reasons to clearly understand this distinction between ourself, the dreamer, and whatever person we dream ourself to be. Firstly, it explains why, though we are the creator of all that we see, we seem to have no control over what we are creating, because as soon as we begin to dream any dream, we mistake ourself to be a person in our dream, and thus we seem to be just a small part of our creation. In other words, instead of experiencing ourself as the creator, we now experience ourself as a creature, and as such we have no control over our own creation.

Secondly and most importantly, we need to distinguish ourself, the seer, from everything we see, including the person we seem to be, because unless we do so, we will not be able to effectively investigate

what we actually are. In order to investigate ourself, we need to focus our entire attention on ourself, thereby withdrawing it from everything else, so to do so we need to understand clearly that we are just the seer and not anything seen by us.

By attending to anything that is seen, we are nourishing and sustaining ego, whereas if we attend to ourself, the seer, ego will subside and dissolve back into its source. Then we will see that we are not even the seer, but only the pure awareness from which the seer and everything seen by it appear and into which they disappear.

Sadhu Om: Someone once asked Bhagavan whether devotees who had spent time with him but later left him or even turned against him, such as Perumal Swami, who put a court case against him, had wasted the precious opportunity they had been given. He replied that their association with him cannot go in vain. Even the worst of people will be benefitted by such association, because the seed of *bhakti* and *vairāgya* will thereby be sown in their heart, so though it may not sprout immediately, in due course it will certainly sprout, grow and bear fruit. It may take more time, but it can never fail.

Sadhu Om [talking to a devotee of Bhagavan who understood very little about his teachings]: We all read about Bhagavan's teachings in various books, and thereby we understand something, but mere casual reading is not sufficient. We need to think about them very carefully and deeply. This is called *manana*, which is a necessary prerequisite for effectively practising what he taught us. The more deeply we immerse ourself in his teachings, the more we will learn from them. What he has taught us is very simple but nevertheless extremely deep and subtle, so we can understand them only to the extent that we think deeply about them and put them into practice.

The more we think about his teachings and try to practise them, the more clarity he will give us from within, and thus we will gradually come to understand from our own experience that his silent teaching is always going on in our heart, but that we need to turn within to experience it. Even though he has left his body, he is still guiding us as effectively as he did during his bodily lifetime. We come to understand this clearly as a result of his silent presence in our heart.

If we spend our whole life studying and thinking about his teachings, our life will not have been wasted. Even if we are unable

to go sufficiently deep in the practice of self-investigation and self-surrender, if we go deep in contemplating his teachings, that will be a worthwhile and fruitful way to spend our life. Meditating on his teachings is a good practice of *guru-bhakti*, second only to actually practising them, because the more deeply we think about them, the more clearly we will understand them, and the more we understand them, the more our love to put them into practice will grow.

If we truly love Bhagavan, we will love his teachings. From love comes knowledge. The more we love him and his teachings, the more we will dwell on them; the more we dwell on them, the more we will understand them; the more we understand them, the more effectively we will be able to practise self-investigation and self-surrender; and the more effectively we practise them, the more clarity of true knowledge will shine brightly in our heart. This is why he said that *bhakti* [love] is the mother of *jñāna* [true knowledge]. ▲

*(To be continued)*

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Four

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**6th December 1978 (continued)**

**Sadhu Om:** Why do we have desire? Once when someone asked me this question, I replied, ‘Because desire is our real nature’, and I explained this as follows:

Suppose there is a table whose surface is perfectly flat and horizontal, and onto a point at the centre of that table water is falling drop by drop. When the first drop falls it will spread out a little to form a small circular pool, and then with each subsequent drop the pool will spread out further. If we are able to see the whole pool, we will see that what is happening is that as each drop falls in the centre of the pool it settles down, and its settling is what causes the spreading.

However, if we cannot see the whole pool but can view it only through a narrow slit cut in a sheet of metal fixed horizontally a few

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

inches above it, and if the slit enables us to watch a line of water from near the centre of the pool to its outer edge and beyond, what we will see is what seems to be a steady stream of water flowing in one direction. Whereas the water is actually just settling (being), our limited view of it makes it seem to us to be flowing (moving).

Likewise, when our view is limited by our rising as ego, the false awareness 'I am this body', love, which is our real nature, is experienced by us as desire for things that seem to be other than ourself, namely objects of the world or God. Love is the *priya* or *ānanda* aspect of *brahman*, so it is one and indivisible, but when it shines through the prism of the mind it is seemingly dispersed into multiple desires and all the progeny of desires, namely likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, attachment, aversion, love, hatred, greed, envy, anger and so on. That is, when we rise as ego, we see ourself, the one infinite and indivisible whole, as 'I' and others, and consequently we experience love flowing from 'I' towards others in the form of desire or aversion. When we remain as we actually are, love is experienced as our being, but when we rise as ego and thereby limit ourself within the confines of a body, love is experienced as flowing in the form of desire or aversion towards other things.

Thus the root cause of desire is our rising as ego and thereby limiting ourself as the extent of a body, as a result of which we see the appearance of others. Love takes the form of desire only when it is directed away from ourself towards something else. Since its nature is being, true love needs no expression and does not involve any action or movement, whereas desire is expressed through action or movement, because it is always for something that seems to be other than oneself. For example, a mother expresses her love for her baby by cuddling and rocking it, because her love for it is a form of desire, being for something other than herself, but she does not express her love for her hand in such a way, because she does not experience her hand as something other than herself. Therefore to overcome desire, aversion, fear and so on, all we need do is to eradicate ego, the false awareness 'I am this body', which we can do only by investigating and finding out who am I.

Such is the greatness of Bhagavan's teachings. Like a skilful mechanic, he has located precisely where the fault in the whole machine of life lies. All that is required is to tighten one small screw

and the machine will run perfectly. The loose screw is our false awareness 'I am this body', and we can tighten it simply by being aware of ourself as we actually are. Since all other problems in the machine are caused by this loose screw, once it is tightened all other problems will cease.

So long as we rise as ego, we cannot avoid having desire, because our real nature is both infinite happiness and love for such happiness, so we can never be satisfied by any means other than knowing our real nature. The driving force behind every desire is love for happiness, but happiness does not exist in any of the things that we desire but only in ourself, so desire always leads to dissatisfaction. Even when a desire is satisfied, that satisfaction is only temporary, because it is not complete and hence dissatisfaction quickly follows in its wake. Only complete satisfaction can be permanent, and complete satisfaction is only the satisfaction of self-knowledge.

Until we know ourself as we actually are, we will always be dissatisfied to a greater or lesser extent, and dissatisfaction gives rise to desire. Desire for happiness is not wrong, because it is our real nature, as Bhagavan implies in the first sentence of *Nāṇ Ār?*:

Since all living beings want to be always happy without what is called misery, since for everyone the greatest love is only for oneself, and since happiness alone is the cause for love, [in order] to obtain that happiness, which is one's own nature, which one experiences daily in [dreamless] sleep, which is devoid of mind, oneself knowing oneself is necessary.

What is wrong is not our love or desire for happiness but only our seeking it in anything other than ourself, because happiness is our real nature and can therefore be found only within ourself, not in anything else. What is required, therefore, is not that we give up all desire, which we cannot do, but only that we redirect our desire away from all other things back towards ourself. The more we desire to know and to be what we actually are, the more our desires for anything else will wither and fade away.

**7th December 1978**

**Sadhu Om:** Why is it that men are attracted to women and women are attracted to men? When a friend asked me this question, at first the

only answer I could think of was the one that Bhagavan would usually have given, namely: “Why do you think you are a man? Because you mistake yourself to be a body, you feel either ‘I am a man’ or ‘I am a woman’. But is this body what you actually are? Investigate yourself and find out”.

This is the most useful and practical answer that can be given to such questions. However, since the friend who had asked this question had asked it sincerely, I felt that some further explanation would be appropriate. For a few days I could not think of any suitable explanation, because it is hard for me to imagine the attraction that most people feel. After about four days, however, a suitable explanation came to me while I was having a bath:

In every magnet there are two opposite poles, north and south. Likewise, in every *jīva* there are two opposite genders, male and female. However, each body that we identify as ‘I’ is generally either male or female, so if we identify a male body as ‘I’ we feel ‘I am a man’ and consequently feel attracted to female bodies, and if we identify a female body as ‘I’ we feel ‘I am a woman’ and consequently feel attracted to male bodies. That is, just as each pole of a magnet is attracted to the opposite pole of another magnet, even though both magnets contain both poles, each gender that we identify as ourself causes us to be attracted to people of the opposite gender, even though all people contain the seeds of both genders.

As we learnt in physics class at school, if iron filings are spread evenly on a card under which a magnetic bar has been placed, the filings will form a pattern showing where the magnetic attraction is strongest, where it is weaker and where it is non-existent. It is strongest around each of the two poles, but in the exact centre between them it is non-existent. A little to either side of the centre there is a slight attraction to the nearest pole, and that attraction increases as the distance from the centre increases.

Likewise, in the centre of every *jīva* there is a point at which sexual attraction is non-existent. What is that centre? It is the point that is common to both men and women, namely ‘I am’. Whether we are aware of ourself as either ‘I am a man’ or ‘I am a woman’, we are all aware of ourself as ‘I am’, so ‘I am’ is devoid of gender. ‘I am’ is the centre of all that we experience, and everything else is just an adjunct and therefore peripheral. So long as we identify ourself with

adjuncts, we experience pairs of opposites such as male and female, attraction and repulsion, desire and aversion, pleasure and pain. If we cling firmly to 'I am', on the other hand, we thereby free ourselves from all such pairs.

Therefore if we want to be free of sexual attraction and craving, all we need do is remain in the centre by clinging to 'I am'. This is why Bhagavan teaches us: "Come to the centre. Come to the heart. Remain only as 'I am'. Then only can you be free from sexual attraction and all other desires".

When we remain in the centre, we are aware of nothing other than 'I am', but as soon as we move away from the centre even to the slightest extent, we become aware of ourselves as 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman' and thus we become a prey to sexual desire. Therefore we cannot overcome sexual attraction by any means other than remaining in the centre. If we try to forcibly overcome sexual desire by fighting against it whenever it arises, we will thereby only strengthen it, because by fighting it we are attending to it, and attention is what nourishes and sustains any desire. We can overcome it only by ignoring it, but however much we try to ignore it, it will continue rising intermittently, so the only way to ignore it permanently is by clinging firmly to 'I am'.

Fighting against sexual desire is like cutting a magnet in two. As soon as a magnet is cut in the centre, what was the centre becomes two opposite poles. This is why celibacy is suitable only for those who are sufficiently mature. Others may struggle to be celibate, but they will be overwhelmed by powerful sexual desires. If someone who is not yet sufficiently mature tries to be celibate, it would be like forcibly plucking an unripe fruit from a tree. Such a fruit will dry up and wither away without ever ripening.

The root cause of sexual desire is the mistaken identification 'I am a man' or 'I am a woman', so the correct way to treat the disease of sexual desire is to rectify its cause, which we can do only by investigating who am I. Sexual desire is just a symptom of the disease, and we cannot cure any disease by treating only its symptoms. Only by treating its root cause can we get rid of the disease along with its symptoms. This is why Bhagavan did not recommend celibacy but only self-investigation and self-surrender.

**Question:** What exactly do you mean when you say that in each individual there are the two opposite poles, male and female? Do you mean that we each have the capacity to project and identify ourself as either a man or a woman?

**Sadhu Om:** Yes.

[Then after some further discussion, Sadhu Om remarked:] This is an explanation I have given on several occasions to male friends who have asked me about this subject, but I would not normally discuss this subject in the company of ladies, because unless they are able to see me as one who is neither male nor female, they may misunderstand me and think ‘How does he know about such things?’ The truth is that whatever clarity has been given to me about any subject has been given only by Bhagavan. ▲

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Five

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**7th December 1978 (continued)**

**Sadhu Om:** When we follow the spiritual path, *māyā*, which is nothing but our own mind, tries to distract us in so many ways in order to divert our attention away from ourself. Even in the case of such a great soul as Buddha it is said that shortly before he attained *nirvāṇa*, *māyā* appeared before him in the personified form of the demon Māra and tried to entice him by offering him various sense pleasures and even lordship over the whole world in order to distract him from his effort to turn deeper within. However, despite all the efforts of Māra to divert him from the path, Buddha used his keen

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

power of *vivēka* [discrimination, discernment or clear judgement] and his steadfast *vairāgya* [desirelessness] to avoid being swayed by any of Māra's temptations or threats.

That is, because of his keen *vivēka* he clearly recognised that true happiness lies only within and that we can therefore experience it only by just being, without rising to experience anything else, so as a result of this clarity he had steadfast *vairāgya*, which enabled him to cling unwaveringly to self-attentiveness and thereby avoid being distracted by anything else.

What this story signifies is that though Buddha had cultivated a strong *sat-vāsanā* or liking just to be, so long as ego survives its *viṣaya-vāsanās* will persist to a greater or lesser extent, so he still had a residual liking to rise and experience things other than himself. However, instead of allowing himself to be swayed by his *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s, he clung firmly to self-attentiveness and thereby eventually merged back forever in the source from which he had risen.

That is, until ego is eradicated, at every moment we are faced with the choice either to just be by remaining keenly and steadily self-attentive or to rise and be aware of things other than ourself. The more persistently we cling to being self-attentive, the more forcibly our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s will sprout in the form of thoughts, but to the extent that we persevere in being steadfastly self-attentive, thereby not allowing ourself to be distracted by anything else, our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s will be weakened and our *sat-vāsanā* will be strengthened. However, like a wounded tiger trapped in a corner, our weakened *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s will make a final desperate attempt to fight back by forcibly drawing our attention outwards, as is graphically depicted by the story of Māra attempting to distract Buddha from his efforts to turn within so deeply that he would merge forever in *nirvāṇa*, the state in which ego is extinguished along with all its *vāsanā*-s.

When even at the final stage of his spiritual practice Buddha had to ward off the attempts of *māyā* to distract him from turning within, it is natural that other spiritual aspirants find themselves being dragged this way and that by their *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s, and therefore have to learn to ward them off as he did by clinging firmly to self-attentiveness with the aid of *vivēka* and *vairāgya*.

**8th December 1978**

**Sadhu Om** [in reply to someone who asked ‘Why are some people able to sit for hours together in meditation, whereas others are not able to do so?’]: The term ‘meditation’ is used in various senses, but generally it means trying to fix the mind on one thing. That one thing can be either oneself or something else. If one tries to meditate on anything other than oneself, it may be possible to train the mind to remain fixed on that one thing for a prolonged period of time, because the existence of the mind is not threatened so long as it is grasping anything other than itself.

However, if one tries to meditate on oneself, the mind begins to dissolve back into its source, which is the pure awareness ‘I am’, and if one meditates on oneself so keenly that one thereby ceases to be aware of anything else whatsoever, the mind will die, because its dissolution in pure awareness will be complete and permanent. Therefore, until we are willing to surrender ourselves completely, whenever we try to attend to ourselves alone an internal conflict will arise between our liking to subside back into our source and our liking to rise and experience other things. The more we try to attend to ourselves, the more forcibly our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s [likings or inclinations to be aware of other things] will rise to divert our attention away from ourselves.

Therefore in order to succeed in the practice of self-attentiveness a gentle but persistent approach is required. We cannot force ourselves to be keenly self-attentive for a prolonged period of time, so rather than trying to do so, we need to try as frequently as possible to turn our attention back to ourselves. Every time we try, we will be able to hold on to self-attentiveness for a short while before our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s again draw our attention away from ourselves towards other things. However, every attempt we make to be self-attentive will gradually strengthen our *sat-vāsanā* [liking just to be as we are] and weaken our *viṣaya-vāsanā*-s, so it is only by gentle and patient perseverance that we can succeed in this path of self-investigation.

Therefore if we are following this path taught by Bhagavan, sitting for prolonged periods of meditation is not necessary. Even if we are able to sit for a long time, we will not be able to keep our attention fixed firmly on ourselves, and the longer we struggle to do so, the

weaker our attempts will become. Rather than struggling for a long time, therefore, trying frequently in the midst of other activities will be more effective. If we have a busy life, setting aside brief periods to try to go deeper within may be beneficial, but we should try to take advantage of every opportunity we have to be self-attentive, no matter how brief each opportunity may be.

When practising self-investigation, our aim is to be so keenly self-attentive that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else, because when we succeed in being aware of ourself alone, we will be aware of ourself as we actually are, and thereby our mind will be annihilated. However, if one practises meditating on anything other than oneself, one cannot thereby achieve *manōnāśa* [annihilation of mind], so those who practise such meditation generally seek to achieve only a relative calmness of mind.

That is, the mind becomes tired by wandering about in ceaseless activity, so if it is trained to meditate on just one thing, it can thereby rest in a state of relative calmness, and eventually it may become so calm that even its activity of meditating on one thing ceases, whereupon it will subside in a sleep-like state of *manōlaya* [temporary dissolution of mind]. However, the amount of time that the mind is active and the amount of time that it can rest is determined by *prārabdha*, so no one can sit calmly in meditation or remain in *manōlaya* any longer than is allotted in their *prārabdha*.

Moreover, no matter how long one may sit calmly meditating on anything other than oneself or even remain in *manōlaya*, one cannot thereby attain *mey-jñāna* [true knowledge or real awareness]. To understand why this is so, we need to understand what is meant by the term *mey-jñāna*. When used on its own, in some contexts the term *jñāna* may refer to *mey-jñāna*, but in other contexts it can refer to other kinds of knowledge, such as *bhautika-jñāna* [knowledge of the physical world], *saṅgīta-jñāna* [knowledge of music] and *auśadha-jñāna* [knowledge of herbs and medicine]. However knowing anything other than oneself cannot be *mey-jñāna*. Knowing oneself as the one ever-existing reality alone is *mey-jñāna*, whereas knowing anything else is only *ajñāna* [ignorance]. Therefore to attain *mey-jñāna* we must attend only to ourself and thereby cease knowing anything else, as Bhagavan implies in verse 16 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

Leaving external phenomena, the mind knowing its own form of light [the light of pure awareness, 'I am'] is alone real awareness [true knowledge or knowledge of reality].

According to your *prārabdha* you now have to engage in the hard work of running a business, and you may not be able to free your mind immediately from all its attachments, so until your mind is given rest by *prārabdha* you should try to practise self-attention whenever you can in the midst of your busy life. You cannot avoid doing whatever work you are destined to do, but you should not for that reason forsake the practice of self-attention. No matter how much work you are destined to do, if you are sufficiently interested in knowing your real nature you will be able to find enough time to practise self-attention, even if it is only for brief moments here and there. Until and unless you are relieved of the burden of responsibility for business and family, your mind will come and go in and out of self-attentiveness, but so long as you are trying to be self-attentive as much as you can, you need not be concerned about how much time you spend in meditation.

The *prārabdha* we experience in each life is a selection of the fruits of the countless actions that we have done in previous lives, and it is selected by Bhagavan for our own spiritual benefit. That is, Bhagavan is our real nature, and as such he just is and does not do anything, but in his role as God and guru he allots whatever *prārabdha* will be most conducive to our spiritual development.

He is always guiding us from within, but so long as we allow our attention to go outwards we are ignoring his guidance, so to the extent that we follow his path of self-investigation and self-surrender we are thereby yielding ourself to his guidance. This is all that is required on our part, because by yielding ourself to him we are allowing his grace to work unhampered, and it will do all that is necessary to loosen the bonds of our attachments.

Therefore the more we surrender to him, the more our mind will be purified, and in a purified mind peace will naturally prevail, so there will be no need to sit in meditation in order to be inwardly at peace. Whatever activities your mind and body may be engaged in, your peace will remain undisturbed. When your surrender is complete, what will remain is only your own real nature, which is infinite and

eternal *sat-cit* [existence-awareness]. This is the state of *mey-jñāna* [true knowledge].

It is said that the activities of the body and mind of the *jñāni* will continue until the *prārabdha* of that body comes to an end, but that the *jñāni* is not affected by such activities, because the identification with the body and mind has ceased. Just as a fruit remains attached to the tree so long as it is unripe and falls down only when it ripens, the body and mind will remain attached to the *jñāni* until the *prārabdha* that brought the body into existence at birth comes to an end at death, whereupon they will drop off. However, this seems to be the case only in the view of the *ajñāni*, because in the clear view of the *jñāni* there is no body or mind at all, so even when the body and mind seem to be attached to the *jñāni*, the *jñāni* is not attached to them. For the *jñāni* there is neither any *prārabdha* nor any activity but only the eternal peace of *sat-cit-ānanda*.

Therefore if you want to experience peace and be free from activity, sitting for a long time meditating on anything other than yourself is at best only a temporary solution. In order to experience eternal peace and freedom from activity, even in the midst of worldly activities you need to surrender yourself by turning your attention within as much as possible. ▲

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Six

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**8th December 1978 (continued)**

**Sadhu Om** [in reply to a friend who had written about his intense longing to return to Tiruvannamalai]: ‘Absence makes the heart grow fonder’. This is perhaps why Bhagavan often sends you back to Hawaii, so that your homesickness for Arunachala, our original home, may increase all the more.

**Sadhu Om** [in reply to some friends who were talking about someone who had very vivid likes and dislikes]: We cannot say anything to such a person, because we would thereby hurt their feelings to no avail, but if we want to follow Bhagavan’s path we need to avoid likes and dislikes as much as possible. We should try to be indifferent to

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

everything: to whatever is happening in our life, to the good and bad qualities of other people, and to everything other than our own self-awareness, 'I am'. Let anything happen as it is to happen, let anyone have any good or bad qualities, what is it to us?

To the extent that we cling firmly to 'I am' and thereby surrender ourself to Bhagavan we will be indifferent to all other things. Such indifference (*udāsīna*) is the hallmark of his grace, and it will unfailingly protect us and lead us to our goal.

### 10th December 1978

A friend called Ramanachalam told Sadhu Om and me about an answer he once heard Bhagavan giving. Someone had asked him, 'What is the *lakṣaṇa* [indicative quality, mark, sign or characteristic] of a *jñāni*?', to which he replied:

The *jñāni* is like a fan or a veena. If a fan or veena is left untouched, it will remain still and silent, but if anyone waves a fan, it will give a cool and pleasant breeze, and if anyone plays a veena, it will make beautiful music. Likewise, if no one asks the *jñāni* anything or disturbs him in any other way, he will remain quiet, but if anyone kindles him in an appropriate manner, he will reveal many wonderful truths.

Hearing this, Sadhu Om composed a Tamil verse expressing this idea, and then remarked:

The *jñāni* is like a calm pool of water. Left undisturbed, the pool remains still, but if a stone is thrown in it, ripples will begin radiating from the point the stone touches the surface. Likewise, of his own accord the *jñāni* will not say anything, but if he is asked any questions, apt answers will emerge from him.

On a previous occasion Sadhu Om told me that Bhagavan sometimes compared the *jñāni* to a radio. We hear a radio talking or singing, but if we open it we will find no one inside.

Once when Bhagavan used this analogy, a devotee asked him, 'If there is no one inside, then from where do your answers come?', to which he replied: The answer comes from the same source as the question.

**Sadhu Om** [referring to a story in the *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam* and *Aruṇācala Purāṇam*]: King Vajrangada Pandiyan walked barefoot around Arunachala three times a day for three years, and by doing so

he achieved *citta-śuddhi* [purification of mind]. Therefore, though he started to do so in order to regain his former position as Indra, when his mind was purified he thereby gained *vivēka* [discrimination, discernment or judgement] and *vairāgya* [freedom from desire], so he lost all desire to become Indra and longed only to surrender himself completely to Arunachala. Thus his ego was eradicated and thereby he attained *śiva-sāyujya* [union with Lord Siva].

This story illustrates that *citta-śuddhi* is the benefit to be gained by doing *Aruṇagiri-pradakṣiṇa* [circumambulation of Arunachala].

### 21st December 1978

**Sadhu Om** [when asked to explain what Bhagavan meant when he said ‘The answer comes from the same source as the question’]: Bhagavan sometimes used the analogy of a radio to explain the actions of the mind, speech and body of the *jñāni*. We hear sounds such as singing and talking coming from the radio, even though there is no one inside it singing or talking. Likewise, we see the mind, speech and body of the *jñāni* answering questions or writing verses, even though there is no ego inside that mind or body doing anything.

On one occasion when he said this, a devotee asked him, ‘If there is no one inside, then from where do your answers come?’, and it was in this context that he replied, ‘The answer comes from the same source as the question’. That is, even though sounds such as singing and talking seem to be coming from a radio, the source from which those sounds originate is elsewhere. It cannot be found inside the radio but only in the transmitting station. Likewise, even though answers and verses seem to come from the mind, speech and body of the *jñāni*, the source from which those answers and verses originate can be found only in the heart of each one of us.

Though in our view Bhagavan seemed to be a person existing outside ourself, what he actually is is only the bright light of pure awareness, which is always shining clearly in our heart as ‘I am’. That light is the original light, the light that illumines all other lights, because physical light is illumined only by the mind-light, which is itself just a reflection of the original light of pure awareness, which is the *svarūpa* [real nature] of Bhagavan.

He is the original source of all clarity and love. Therefore the clarity and love we saw shining through the person whom he seemed to be originated only from within ourself, and this is why he was constantly turning our attention back towards ourself, telling us that the real guru and God is what is always shining in our heart as 'I am'.

Therefore what he implied when he said 'The answer comes from the same source as the question' is not only that the source of whatever answers he has given us through his written or spoken words lies deep within our own heart, but also that we can find whatever answers we may need just by turning back within and thereby sinking deep inside. The more we turn our attention within to face the original light of awareness, which is always shining brightly in our heart, the more that light will clarify our mind, and in that clarity the answers to all questions will become clear, so much so that the intervening media of thoughts and words will no longer be necessary.

The real answer to all questions can be found only in silence, and that silence can be found only deep within our own heart. This is what Bhagavan meant when he said that the real teaching is only silence. The teachings he gave us in words are only to turn our attention back within, where his real teaching is always shining clearly as the profound silence of pure awareness. Only by looking deep within and thereby knowing what we ourself actually are will we know the one true import of all the answers that he ever gave in written or spoken words.

**Sadhu Om** [when asked to explain what Bhagavan meant when he asked rhetorically, 'Who can say that the dream passed off of its own accord?', as recorded in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 8-9-45 Morning]: Our present life is one long dream, and in the midst of this long dream we experience many other shorter dreams. Just as a certain *prārabdha* [fate or destiny] has been allotted to us for the duration of this life, a *prārabdha* is allotted to us for each of our other dreams.

Normally a dream will come to an end only when the *prārabdha* allotted for it comes to an end, and when it ends we either fall asleep or begin to dream another dream, whether that other dream be either a continuation of our present life or some other shorter dream within it. Likewise, the dream of our present life will normally come to an end only when the *prārabdha* allotted for it comes to an end, and when it ends we will either fall asleep or begin to dream another dream.

If we fall asleep at the end of this dream or any other dream, that sleep will last only for a limited duration before we rise and begin to dream again, because the dreamer of all dreams is ourself as ego, so we will continue dreaming one dream after another until ego is eradicated, and in the midst of all our dreams we will intermittently find respite in brief periods of sleep, because dreaming is a tiring activity, so we cannot continue dreaming for long without needing rest, which we can find only in sleep or some other such state of *manōlaya* [temporary dissolution of mind].

However, though a dream normally comes to an end only when the *prārabdha* allotted for it comes to an end, we can bring any dream to a premature end at any time simply by turning our attention back within to face ourself alone. How keenly we need to attend to ourself in order to bring our current dream to an end depends upon the strength of our *dēhābhimāna*, our attachment to our current body as ‘I’. Except when we are very sleepy, our attachment to our body in this dream we call our life is generally very strong, so in order to bring this dream to an end we need to attend to ourself very keenly, whereas our attachment to whatever body we experience as ‘I’ in most other dreams is relatively weak, so even a slight degree of self-attentiveness will be sufficient to bring such dreams to an end.

If we bring any dream to an end by means of self-attentiveness, it has obviously not come to an end of its own accord, but when Bhagavan asked rhetorically, ‘Who can say that the dream passed off of its own accord?’, he was referring not only to dreams that come to an end as a result of self-attentiveness but also to those that come to an end in accordance with *prārabdha*. Whatever is to happen according to *prārabdha* will certainly happen until and unless ego is eradicated, but that does not mean that it happens without any effort on our part, firstly because *prārabdha* is a selection of the fruits of actions that we have done in previous lives by our own will and effort, but more importantly because we cannot experience anything happening unless we attend to it, and attending to anything requires effort. Therefore effort on our part is entailed both in the production of the fruit that we experience as *prārabdha* and in our experiencing those fruit, so nothing actually happens without our making effort. If we did not rise as ego, we would not be able to do any *āgāmya* [action done in

accordance with our will] or to experience the fruit of any *āgāmya* that we had done in past lives, and even our rising as ego requires effort, so whatever happens, including the ending of any dream, happens as a direct or indirect result of our effort.

However, it is not sufficient just to bring a dream to an end. What we need to bring to an end is the fundamental sleep of self-ignorance in which all dreams appear, and we can bring self-ignorance to an end only by being aware of ourselves as we actually are. In order to be aware of ourselves as we actually are we need to attend to ourselves so keenly that we thereby cease to be aware of anything else at all.

Self-ignorance is the very nature of ego, so bringing self-ignorance to an end means eradicating ego. Since ego is the dreamer of all dreams, so long as it survives it will continue dreaming one dream after another, and when it is eradicated there will be no one to dream anything. Therefore, since we cannot eradicate ego without attending to ourselves so keenly that we thereby see what we actually are, effort is certainly required in order for us to eradicate ego and thereby put an end to the sleep of self-ignorance in which all dreams appear. However, what needs to make the effort to be keenly self-attentive is only ourselves as ego, but when we attend to ourselves keenly enough we will see that no such thing as ego has ever existed, so there never was anyone making any effort, as Bhagavan implied in his previous answer recorded in *Day by Day*:

Your thinking that you have to make an effort to get rid of this dream of the waking state and your making efforts to attain *jñāna* or real awakening are all parts of the dream. When you attain *jñāna* you will see there was neither the dream during sleep, nor the waking state, but only yourself and your real state.

Therefore effort is necessary only from the perspective of ego and not from the perspective of our real nature, which is immutable and therefore always remains as it is, without ever being aware of anything other than itself. When we know our real nature, therefore, we will see that there never was any ego, so it never dreamed any dreams or made any effort. Until then, effort is certainly needed to eradicate ego and thereby put an end to all its dreams. ▲

*(To be continued)*

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Seven

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

**21st December 1978 (continued)**

**Sadhu Om:** What are called the first person, second person and third person in English are respectively called *tanmai*, *munñilai* and *paḍarkkai* in Tamil. *Tanmai* literally means ‘selfness’, so though in some contexts it means the first person, in other contexts it can mean nature, essence, inherent quality, character, condition or reality. *Munñilai* literally means ‘what stands in front’, and *paḍarkkai* literally means ‘what spreads out’, so one way in which we can interpret these two terms in the context of Bhagavan’s teachings is that ‘second person’ (*munñilai*) refers to whatever we directly perceive by our senses at this present moment whereas ‘third person’ (*paḍarkkai*) refers to anything else we may think of.

In the fifth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?* (Who am I?) Bhagavan says:

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

Of all the thoughts that appear in the mind, **the thought called ‘I’ alone is the first thought** [the primal, basic, original or causal thought]. Only after this arises do other thoughts arise. Only after the first person [ego, the primal thought called ‘I’] appears do second and third persons [all other things] appear; without the first person, second and third persons do not exist.

Likewise in verse 14 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu* he says:

If the first person [ego] exists, second and third persons [everything else] will exist. If the first person ceases to exist [by] oneself investigating the reality of the first person, second and third persons will come to an end, and [what then remains alone, namely] the nature [selfness, essence or reality] that shines as one [undivided by the appearance of these three persons] alone is oneself, the [real] state [or nature] of oneself.

When I first read these two passages, I thought deeply about the implications of what Bhagavan teaches us in them, and I was struck by how he explains in such a simple and logical manner not only the entire appearance of multiplicity but also the means to get rid of it, and how apt is his use of these three terms, *tanmai*, *muṇṇilai* and *paḍarkkai*, to explain this. The first person is ‘I’, the ego or subject, which is the knower or perceiver, whereas second and third persons are all other things, which are objects, things that are known or perceived by the first person. Since second and third persons appear only in the view of the first person, they cannot exist without it.

When he says ‘If the first person exists, second and third persons will exist’, and ‘without the first person, second and third persons do not exist’, he implies not only that second and third persons depend for their seeming existence upon the seeming existence of the first person, but also *vice versa*. That is, the first person cannot stand without clinging to the appearance of second and third persons, so the first person is no more real than second and third persons, and they are no more real than it. However, though they are mutually dependent, and therefore arise and subside simultaneously, logically what must arise first is the first person, because the first person is the cause whereas second and third persons are its effects. As soon as we rise as the first person, we bring second and third persons into existence along with

us. Therefore the first person is the root, whereas second and third persons are what instantly sprout from it.

That is, the first person is the subject or knower whereas second and third persons are objects or things known by it, so only when we rise as ego do other things come into existence. We can understand this from our own experience. In sleep we do not rise as ego, and consequently nothing else appears, but as soon as we rise from sleep, whether in waking or in dream, other things appear, and they seem to exist until we subside again in sleep. However, though this is what we experience every day, we generally overlook the significance of it until Bhagavan points it out to us.

We overlook its significance because we assume that the things we perceive in our current state continue to exist even when we do not perceive them, but Bhagavan teaches us that this assumption is incorrect. When we are dreaming we assume that the world we then perceive exists whether we perceive it or not, but as soon as we wake up we recognise that the dream world was just a creation of our mind and therefore does not exist now that we do not perceive it. Our assumption that this present world exists whether we perceive it or not is just like the assumption we had about the dream world so long as we were dreaming. Just as our experience in dream did not support what we assumed then, our experience in this state does not support what we assume now.

Why do we not perceive the dream world now? Because it does not actually exist, and therefore seemed to exist only so long as we perceived it. Likewise, we do not perceive this present world while we are dreaming any other dream, because our present state is just a dream, so this world seems to exist only so long as we perceive it. In sleep we do not perceive any world at all, even though we are aware of our own existence then, because no world exists then for us to perceive.

Why do we perceive a world in waking and dream but not in sleep? What is the fundamental mistake that we make in waking and dream but do not make in sleep? In what way are we different in sleep to how we are now or in dream? In sleep we are aware of ourself just as 'I am', and consequently we are aware of nothing other than 'I am', whereas in waking and dream we are aware of ourself as 'I am this body', and consequently we are aware of numerous other forms, so

it is only when we are aware of ourself as 'I am this body' that we are aware of any world or anything other than ourself, as Bhagavan implies in verse 4 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can what is seen be otherwise [or of a different nature] than the eye [the awareness that sees or perceives it]? The [real] eye is oneself [one's real nature, which is pure awareness], the infinite [and hence formless] eye [so it can never see any forms or phenomena, which are all finite].

What we call the world is nothing but a collection of forms of various kinds, and we perceive such forms only when we mistake ourself to be the form of a body consisting of five sheaths. What we actually are is just pure awareness, which is infinite and hence formless, so as pure awareness we are never aware of any forms. How then do we mistake ourself to be the form of a body? What is aware of itself as 'I am this body' is not ourself as we actually are but only ourself as ego, which is what Bhagavan refers to as *tanmai*: the first person. Only when we rise as ego and thereby mistake ourself to be a body do other forms seem to exist, so as he says in the fifth paragraph of *Nāṇ Ār?*: 'Only after the first person appears do second and third persons appear; without the first person, second and third persons do not exist'.

Therefore the root cause for the entire appearance of multiplicity is only our rising as ego and consequently mistaking ourself to be a body. How then can we avoid rising as ego? As ego we are always aware of ourself as 'I am this body', which is not what we actually are, so ego is a false awareness of ourself, and hence it can be eradicated only by correct awareness of ourself: that is, by our being aware of ourself as we actually are.

Since the nature of ego is to be aware of itself as the form of a body and consequently to be aware of other forms, so long as our attention is directed towards forms of any kind whatsoever we are thereby nourishing and sustaining the ego, as Bhagavan implies in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

Grasping form it comes into existence; grasping form it stands;  
grasping and feeding on form it grows abundantly; leaving form,

it grasps form. If sought, it will take flight. [Such is the nature of] the formless phantom-ego. Investigate.

Ego is a formless phantom because it has no form of its own, so it seems to exist only when it grasps the form of a body as itself, and having grasped the form of a body as itself, it stands and flourishes by constantly grasping other forms. Since grasping form is the very nature of ego, and since it has no form of its own, if it tries to grasp only itself, it will subside and dissolve back into the source from which it rose. This is what he implies when he says: ‘*tēḍināl oṭṭam piḍikkum*’, ‘If sought, it will take flight’.

That is, since ego is formless, ‘grasping form’ means directing our attention away from ourself towards other things, so in order to eradicate ego we need to turn our entire attention back within to face ourself alone. Turning our attention back within to see what we actually are is what Bhagavan means when he says ‘if sought’ (*tēḍināl*), and it is also what he refers to as ‘investigating what this is’ (*yādu idu eṇḍru nāḍal*) in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If ego comes into existence, everything comes into existence; if ego does not exist, everything does not exist. Ego itself is everything. Therefore, know that investigating what this is alone is giving up everything.

That is, since ego ‘takes flight’ and ceases to exist when it investigates itself keenly enough, and since ‘if ego does not exist, everything does not exist’, we can give up everything only by investigating what this ego actually is. This is why he says in the second sentence of verse 14 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*: ‘If the first person ceases to exist [by] oneself investigating the reality of the first person, second and third persons will come to an end, and the nature that shines as one alone is oneself, the state of oneself’.

What he refers to here as ‘the nature that shines as one’ (*oṇḍrāy oḷirum taṇmai*) is our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), which is pure awareness, because when we investigate ourself keenly enough, we will see that what we actually are is just pure awareness, which is one and indivisible, and it is only when we see ourself as such that ego will be eradicated, whereupon everything else will cease to exist along with it. ▲

(To be continued)

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Eight

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

18<sup>th</sup> December 1978

**Sadhu Om:** Just as there are certain fundamental principles on which the practice of self-investigation is based, there are also certain fundamental principles on which the practice of self-surrender is based. The fundamental principles on which the practice of self-investigation is based are that the nature of ego is to rise, stand and flourish to the extent that it ‘grasps form’ or attends to anything other than itself, but to subside and dissolve back into its source to the extent that it attends to itself, as Bhagavan points out in verse 25 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, and that it will therefore die only when it attends to itself so keenly that it thereby ceases to be aware of anything else whatsoever.

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

Likewise, the fundamental principles on which the practice of self-surrender is based are that God or *guru* is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving. Since he is all-knowing, nothing can happen without his knowledge, and since he is all-powerful, nothing can happen without his consent, so whatever happens is according to his will, and since he is all-loving, whatever happens is what is best for oneself and all concerned. Only when we are able to recognise clearly and without doubt that such is the nature of God will we be willing to let go of everything else and entrust oneself wholly to his care.

**4<sup>th</sup> January 1979**

**Sadhu Om:** In the first verse of *Ēkāṇma Pañcakam* Bhagavan says:

[After] forgetting oneself, considering a body alone to be oneself, and taking innumerable births, finally knowing oneself and being oneself is just [like] waking up from a dream of wandering about the world. See.

When reading this verse we need to consider carefully to what extent knowing oneself and being oneself is like waking up from a dream. Our present state and any other state in which we are aware of oneself as a body and are consequently aware of other forms is a dream, so when we know and remain as our real nature (*ātma-svarūpa*), this and all other dreams will come to an end. It is in this sense that knowing oneself and being oneself is like waking up from a dream of wandering about the world.

However, there is an important difference between knowing oneself as we actually are and waking up from a dream. When we wake up from a dream we are often able to remember what we dreamt, because we are waking up from one dream to another dream, and the dreamer of both these dreams is the same, namely ego, whereas when we know oneself as we actually are, ego is thereby eradicated, so since it was only as ego that we experienced this or any other dream, there will be no one remaining to remember what ego experienced.

When we wake up from the state of ego into the state of pure awareness, which is what we always actually are, we will know nothing other than oneself, because there is nothing other than oneself for us to know, as Bhagavan says in verse 27 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

Only knowledge [in the sense of awareness] that is devoid of knowledge and ignorance [of anything other than oneself] is [real] knowledge [or awareness]. This [alone] is [what is] real [or true], [because in one's real state of pure awareness] there is not anything to know [that is, there is nothing other than oneself for one either to know or to not know].

Therefore as pure awareness we will have no memory of having once dreamt, because as pure awareness we have never dreamt. What dreams any dream is only ego, not pure awareness, so when ego is eradicated, all its memories of its dreams will be eradicated along with it. This is why Bhagavan once said, 'Everyone who comes here says they have come only for *mōkṣa* [liberation], but if I show even a small sample of *mōkṣa*, all the crows will fly away and I will be left sitting here alone'.

When people come here and say they want to know about Bhagavan's path, I sometimes wonder whether they would still want to know about it if they understood that in order to follow it to its conclusion we must be willing to give up everything other than the mere awareness 'I am'. If we truly embrace his path, we are stepping straight into the jaws of a tiger, a tiger who will never rest till he has swallowed us entirely. By the death of the body we do not really lose anything, because we are sure to project another body and world and thereby dream other lives like this one after another, whereas by the death of ego we lose everything completely and forever.

Therefore in order to console people and avoid frightening them off, Bhagavan sometimes said things that implied that the *jñāni* knows names and forms and experiences dyads and triads just as an *ajñāni* does. However, the truth is that the *jñāni* is nothing other than *jñāna* [pure awareness], and *jñāna* does not know anything other than itself. It is the state of perfect happiness, but this does not mean that it experiences happiness as something other than itself, because it is itself infinite happiness.

6<sup>th</sup> January 1979

**Sadhu Om:** A true devotee of Bhagavan will never think 'I must be an instrument of his grace' or 'His grace must work through me for the benefit of others', because as ego we ourself are the primary obstacle

to his grace. If we want his grace to flow without any obstruction, we need to subside, because to the extent that we subside we are thereby removing all obstacles that obstruct the working of his grace.

This is why he always recommended the simple practice of attending to the first person, 'I', because the more we attend to the first person, the more we will thereby subside; the more we subside, the more freely his grace will flow; and the more his grace flows, the more love and strength we will gain to attend only to the first person. On the other hand, if we rise thinking 'His grace must work through me and my actions', we would thereby be obstructing the flow of his grace.

This can be illustrated by a popular story about Alexander meeting a sage in north India. Having heard that a wise man lived in a cave in some nearby hills, Alexander went to meet him early one morning. When he arrived he saw an old man crouching outside the mouth of a cave, so he approached him and said, 'I have conquered half the world, so I am the most powerful emperor the world has ever seen. I can give you whatever you want, so just ask and I will give it'. The old man ignored him and just kept quiet, so he repeated his offer twice, and after the third time the old man simply waved his hand indicating that Alexander should step aside. Alexander then said, 'What is this? I offered you anything you want to ask for, and you just ask me to step aside', to which the old man replied, 'I don't want anything you could give me, but I am an old man and it is cold sleeping in this cave at night, so when the sun rises I crouch here to warm myself in its light. But you came here and stood between me and the sun, so all I can ask you to do is to step aside and thereby stop obstructing the sunlight'.

Just as Alexander was obstructing the sunlight by standing in front of the old man, thinking he could help him, we obstruct Bhagavan's grace by rising as ego, so all that we need do is to subside back within. Doing anything else whatsoever is not aiding grace but obstructing it.

**Sadhu Om** [when asked some questions regarding the portion of chapter 8 of *The Path of Sri Ramana* in which he discussed how the awareness 'I' that is spread throughout the body through the *nāḍīs* is withdrawn back to the heart when we attend to ourself]: Though it is described there how the awareness 'I' is withdrawn through the

*nāḍīs*, we should not try to see how this happens, because if we allow ourself to attend to anything other than ourself, the awareness 'I' will again spread out through the *nāḍīs*. Its withdrawal will occur only to the extent that our attention is fixed firmly only on ourself.

If we walk towards the sun, our shadow will follow us, but if we turn round to see it following us, it will stop. Likewise, so long as we are keenly self-attentive, the awareness 'I' will be withdrawing through the *nāḍīs*, but if we try to verify that this is happening, our attention will thereby be diverted away from ourself towards the body, and hence the withdrawal will be interrupted.

In order to investigate ourself, we need to attend only to ourself, the first person, and so long as we are attending to ourself we will not notice whatever may be happening in the body. If we try to see what is happening, our attention will thereby be diverted away from the first person towards second and third persons, so we will end up knowing neither our real nature nor what happens in the body as a result of our being self-attentive.

You ask how it can be known that this withdrawal is actually happening. It cannot and need not be known by most of us, but to a few sages like Bhagavan and Patanjali such things are revealed even without their seeking to know them, because they have a divine mission to guide others.

Moreover, it is important for us to understand that all such explanations are only as true as the body, and if we want to know what is real, we need to give up the idea that there is actually any such thing as a body at all. The body seems to exist only in the view of ego, so all explanations about *nāḍīs*, *cakras*, *kuṇḍalinī* and what happens in the body as a result of self-investigation or any other form of spiritual practice need not concern us if our only aim is to know what we actually are and thereby eradicate ego. The body is just a mental fabrication, like all other objects, so we should not be concerned with knowing anything about it at all. In order to know what we actually are, we need to withdraw our attention entirely from the body and all other phenomena by focusing it only on ourself, the first person.

**Question:** Why then did you write about this subject in *The Path of Sri Ramana*?

**Sadhu Om:** Different levels of explanation need to be given to suit people of different levels of spiritual maturity, and also to suit those who have come to Bhagavan's path from different backgrounds. Some who come to his path have previously practised *yōga*, so they ask questions about such matters, and this explanation about the withdrawal of the awareness 'I' through the *nāḍīs* needs to be given to satisfy them that whatever can be achieved by *yōga* practices is achieved more effectively and easily by means of the simple practice of self-investigation. It was therefore in answer to questions asked by such people that I gave these explanations, which later came to be included in *The Path of Sri Ramana*.

Bhagavan also sometimes gave such explanations when questioned by people who were interested in such matters, as has been recorded, for example, in chapter 9 of *Śrī Ramaṇa Gītā*, in his answers to questions 12 and 16 of the second chapter of *Upadēśa Mañjari*, in some portions of *Vicāra Saṅgraham* and in *Day by Day* 14-9-45. ▲

*(To be continued)*

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Thirty Nine

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6<sup>th</sup> January 1979

**Sadhu Om:** In verse 15 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* Bhagavan says:  
Past and future stand holding the present. While occurring, they too are actually the present. The present is the only one. Not knowing the reality of now, trying to know the past or future is trying to count without one.

Though a dividing line seems to separate the edge of table from the empty space beyond it, if we try to find whether any such line actually exists, we will find no such thing, because where the table ends the empty space begins, so there is no gap between them. Likewise, though something called the present seems to separate the past from the future, if we try to find whether any such thing actually exists, we

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

will find no such thing, because if we consider it carefully enough, we will see that where it is supposed to be, one moment before is past and one moment after is future. Where the most recent past moment ends, the most immediate future moment begins, so between them there is no room for any such thing as the present to exist.

Though there is no time that could be called the precise present moment, the entire appearance of time is built upon the appearance of such a moment, because without its appearance no such thing as the past or future would seem to exist. That is, it is only from the perspective of what seems to be the present moment that the past and future seem to exist, as Bhagavan points out by saying in the first sentence of this verse, ‘Past and future stand holding the present’, thereby implying that the past and future depend upon the present for their seeming existence.

Each moment, both past and future, seems to be present while it is occurring, as he says in the second sentence, but it is only so long as we are caught up in the flow of time from past to future that there seems to be a present moment, because if instead of attending to anything that occurs in the flow of time we try to attend to the precise present, we will find no gap at all between the moment that has just past and the next future moment. That is, the precise present is so fleeting and infinitesimally brief that it has no duration whatsoever, so since any moment must have some duration, even to call it a moment in time is not correct.

What then is the present, and why does he say in the third sentence, ‘*niharvu ondrē*’, which means ‘The present alone [exists]’ or ‘The present is the only one’? To understand this, we need to consider what is actually present. What is always actually present is only our own existence, ‘I am’, so it is only the presence of ourself as ‘I am’ that makes any time or place seem to be present. So long as we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’, our presence seems to be limited to a particular place, ‘here’, and a particular time, ‘now’, but if we were aware of ourself as just ‘I am’, we would be aware of no such limitation in either place or time.

Time and place both seem to exist only when we are aware of ourself as ‘I am this body’, and it is only from the standpoint of the time and place in which we now seem to be present that all other times

and places seem to exist. However, so long as time seems to exist, we never stand still in it, because we seem to be constantly moving from past to future, and hence time itself seems to be a ceaseless flow from past to future.

Everything other than 'I am' appears and disappears, so all such things seem to exist only in the flow of time. Therefore, since the precise present has no duration, there is no room in it for anything to appear, so what exists in it is only the presence of ourself, not as 'I am this body' but just as 'I am'. Therefore we can attend to the precise present only by attending to 'I am', which is always standing still and immutable, and is therefore never touched or affected in any way by the seeming flow of time.

What Bhagavan means, therefore, when he says that the present alone exists is that it exists not as a moment in time but as the one ever-present reality, 'I am', from which the appearance of a present moment derives its seeming existence. Without the eternal presence of 'I am', the present moment would not seem to exist, and without the present moment no other time would seem to exist, so the entire appearance of time derives its seeming existence from the seeming existence of the present moment, which in turn is derived from the seeming existence of ego, the false awareness 'I am this body', which is derived only from what alone actually exists, namely 'I am'.

Time seems to exist only in the view of ourself as ego, so in order to know the reality of time we need to know the reality of ego, and in order to know the reality of ego we need to investigate ourself, who is what now seems to be ego. If we investigate ourself keenly enough, we will find that we are just the one fundamental awareness 'I am', so 'I am' alone is the reality of ego and hence of the entire appearance of time. In other words, what actually exists is only 'I am' and not either ego or time.

Since ego does not actually exist, neither does time nor anything else other than 'I am', but until we investigate ourself keenly enough, we will continue to be aware of ourself as 'I am this body' and will consequently be aware of the seeming existence of time and whatever appears in time. However, not knowing the unreality of time and hence of whatever appears or happens in time, we try to know things other than ourself, including what happened in the past and will happen

in the future, but trying to do so is futile, as Bhagavan implies in the final sentence of this verse:

‘Not knowing the reality of now, trying to know the past or future is [like] trying to count [calculate or evaluate] without [the number] one’.

If we are asked to count how many measures of rice a sack can hold, we cannot do so without knowing the size or weight of one measure. Likewise, we cannot know the reality of the past or future, or of anything that appeared or happened in the past and will appear or happen in the future, without knowing the reality of the present. As a moment in time, the present is unreal, so the reality of the present is only ‘I am’, which is the one real presence that underlies the appearance of the present moment and makes it seem to be present. Therefore, since the appearance of past and future depends on the appearance of the present, ‘I am’ alone is the reality not only of the present but also of the past and future, and of anything that appears or happens in time.

All thoughts, phenomena, actions and events appear and disappear only in the flow of time, but none of them can occur in the precise present, because the precise present is too fleeting to have any duration, so nothing can ever happen in it. Therefore, if we try to attend to the precise present, the mind will come to a standstill and all thoughts, including the first thought, namely the false awareness ‘I am this body’, will cease to exist. What will then remain is only the one eternal, immutable and self-shining presence, ‘I am’. ▲

*(To be continued)*

# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Forty

SADHU OM  
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6<sup>th</sup> January 1979 (continued)

**Sadhu Om** [in continuation of the discussion about verse 15 of *Suḷḷadu Nārpadu* recorded in the previous instalment]: When Bhagavan says in the third sentence of this verse, ‘*niharvu ondrē*’, which means ‘The present alone [exists]’ or ‘The present is the only one’, this can be interpreted in two senses: Either we can take it in a relative sense to mean that among the three times, past, present and future, the present is the only time that has at least some degree of reality, because it is the time in which the one reality, ‘I am’, is always existing and shining; or we can take it in a deeper sense to mean that what is ever present, namely ‘I am’, is the only thing that actually exists, so none of the three times are real even to the slightest extent.

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](http://happinessofbeing.com).

The latter is what he goes on to imply in verse 16 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*:

When we investigate, except we, where is time, where is place?  
 If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place. Are we  
 a body? Since we are the one, now, then and always, the one in  
 place, here, there and everywhere, there is we, we. Time and  
 place do not exist.

In this verse he reveals the ultimate truth that neither time (past, present or future) nor place (the first, second and third persons) actually exists, because what actually exists is only we, the one reality that always exists and shines as ‘I am’.

The first sentence of this verse, ‘*nām anḍri nāḷ ēdu, nāḍu ēdu, nāḍum kāḷ?*’, is a rhetorical question that means ‘When we investigate, except we, where is time, where is place?’, which implies that when we investigate ourself, we will find that there is neither time nor place but only ourself. The key to understanding that this is the implication is the word *anḍri*, which is an adversative conjunction for which there is no single equivalent in English, but which depending on the context can be translated either as ‘except’ or ‘besides’ or as ‘but only’.

For example, in English one could say ‘There is no furniture in the room except a table’ or ‘There are no chairs in the room but only a table’, whereas in Tamil *anḍri* would be used in both cases, in the first case to mean ‘except’ and in the second case to mean ‘but only’. In English ‘except’ is used in the first case, because a table is a piece of furniture, but could not be used in the second case, because a table is not a chair. This is why ‘but only’ is used in the second case but could not be used in the first case.

In the first sentence of this verse *anḍri* is used in the sense of ‘but only’, because we are neither time nor place, but in English we cannot say ‘Where is time, where is place, but only we?’, so we have to use ‘except’ in such a question, even though the implied meaning is that there is neither time nor place but only ourself. As Bhagavan says in the seventh paragraph of *Nāṅ Ār?*, ‘What actually exists is only *ātma-svarūpa* [the real nature of oneself]’, so all other things, including time and place, are just mental fabrications, like silver seen in a shell.

## THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

Time and place seem to exist only when we rise as ego and consequently mistake ourself to be a body, which is bound within the limitations of time and place, so in the second sentence he says, 'If we are a body, we will be ensnared in time and place', but then he asks, 'Are we a body?', thereby implying that we are not a body. What we actually are is not a body, which is confined within a certain time and a certain place, but only the one fundamental, immutable and unlimited *sat-cit* (existence-awareness), 'I am', in which time, place and all other things appear and disappear, and which therefore remains unchanged and equally present in all times and all places, so he concludes this verse by saying in the last two lines: 'Since we are the one, now, then and always, the one in place, here, there and everywhere, there is we, [only] we. Time and place do not exist'. Thus in these last two lines he reiterates what he implied in the first sentence, namely that what actually exists is neither time nor place but only ourself.

Though he implies in this verse that we are not a body, as he repeatedly taught us either explicitly or implicitly in so many other passages of his teachings, on superficial observation it may seem that he contradicts this fundamental principle of his teachings in the next verse (verse 17), in which he seems to answer the second rhetorical question he asked in this verse, namely 'Are we a body?', by saying that the body is only 'I' not only for those who do not know what they actually are but even for those who do know:

For those who do not know themselves [their real nature] and for those who have known themselves, the body is actually 'I' [or only 'I']. For those who do not know themselves, 'I' is [limited to] only the extent of the body, [whereas] for those who have known themselves within the body, oneself, 'I', shines without limit. Consider that the difference between them is only this.

There is a deliberate touch of humour in Bhagavan's decision to place this verse immediately after verse 16, because what he says in the first sentence of this verse seems to fly in the face of what he said in that verse. If time and place do not actually exist, no body or any other phenomenon can exist, so why does he say that the body is

actually ‘I’ and only ‘I’ for those who know what they actually are? In what sense is the body only ‘I’ for them?

As Bhagavan often explained, ‘*jñānamē jñāni*’ (*jñāna* alone is the *jñāni*), and *jñāna* alone is what actually exists, so in the clear view of the *jñāni* nothing other than *jñāna* exists, as he implies in verse 31 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*: ‘*taṅṅai alādu aṅṅiyam oṅḍrum ariyār*’ (They do not know anything other than themselves). Therefore in the clear view of the *jñāni* there is no time, space, world or body, but in the body-bound view of the *ajñāni* all these things seem to exist.

Since nothing other than *jñāna* actually exists, whatever else seems to exist cannot be anything other than *jñāna*, which is what the *jñāni* experiences as ‘I’. Therefore what the *ajñāni* sees as time, space, world, body and all other phenomena is what the *jñāni* experiences as ‘I’, so in this verse Bhagavan explains that whereas for the *ajñāni*, ‘I’ is limited to the extent of one particular body, for the *jñāni* ‘I’ shines without limit, and hence it includes within itself not only the body but also everything else that seems to exist in the view of others.

In other words, the experience of the *ajñāni* is ‘I am only this body’ whereas the experience of the *jñāni* is ‘I am also this body’. It was from this perspective that Bhagavan replied when he was asked whether he was not experiencing pain as a result of his cancer: ‘Yes, there is pain, but it is not other than me’.

Therefore the difference between the *jñāni* and the *ajñāni* is that for the former ‘I’ is not limited in anyway whatsoever, so no other limitations of any kind exist, whereas for the latter, ‘I’ is limited to the extent of a body, so countless other limitations of all kinds seem to exist. Thus if we understand this verse correctly, we will see that in it Bhagavan is encouraging us by pointing out that the difference between the *jñāni* and the *ajñāni* is actually only a very slight difference of perspective, and that all that we need to do, therefore, is to give up the fundamental limitation, ‘I am just this body’, because when we give up this limitation all other limitations will cease to exist along with it, and what will then remain is only the one unlimited ‘I’, other than which nothing exists.

Likewise in the next verse (verse 18) he says:

For those who do not have knowledge [of their real nature]  
and for those who have, the world is real. For those who do

not know [their real nature], reality is [limited to] the extent of [the forms that constitute] the world, [whereas] for those who have known [their real nature], reality pervades devoid of form as the *ādhāra* [support, foundation or container] for [the appearance of the forms that constitute] the world. This is the difference between them. Consider.

What the *ajñāni* sees as a world consisting of numerous names and forms is what the *jñāni* sees as the one formless and hence indivisible reality, which is what he described in the previous verse as the ‘I’ that shines without limit. All forms are limited in various ways, so what is unlimited is formless. What is unlimited and therefore formless alone is real, and hence that alone is what we actually are.

Why then do we see ourselves as this world of names and forms? Only because we have limited ourselves as the extent of a body, as Bhagavan says in verse 4 of *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*:

If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can what is seen be otherwise [or of a different nature] than the eye [the awareness that sees or perceives it]? The [real] eye is oneself, the infinite [and hence formless] eye.

If we see a rope and mistake it to be a snake, the rope is the *ādhāra* (support or foundation) and the snake is just an illusory superimposition. Likewise, we are the *ādhāra* and all names and forms are just an illusory superimposition. Just as the snake is actually nothing other than a rope, the world of names and forms is actually nothing other than ourselves, the one and only reality.

The snake is unreal as a snake but real as a rope. Likewise, the world is unreal as the world but real as ourselves, so this is why Bhagavan says that the world is real not only for the *ajñāni* but also for the *jñāni*. However, whereas for the *ajñāni* the world is real as the world, for the *jñāni* the world is real as ourselves, the one unlimited and therefore formless reality, so this is what he means when he says: ‘For those who do not know, reality is the extent of the world, [whereas] for those who have known, reality pervades devoid of form as the *ādhāra* for the world’ . ▲

(To be continued)