

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Eleven

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

3rd February 1978

Sadhu Om: In 1949, when Bhagavan received a telegram from Manikkam Pillai informing him of the death of Sivaprakasam Pillai, he said with a twist of his hand, “Sivaprakasam has become *Siva-prakasam* [the light of Siva].”

4th February 1978

Sadhu Om: When the reality is the truth of our own being, how can training the mind to attend to any second or third person (anything other than ourself) help us to attain that reality? Someone whose mind is thus attached to any name or form will not be able to understand even intellectually what self-attention actually is. Even if he can enjoy

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

the company of the name and form of his beloved God, how does that help him? Ramakrishna once said that even if God wants to take us to self, he cannot unless we want him to. Only by our own liking and effort to practise self-attention can we attain true self-knowledge (*atma-jnana*).

The aim towards which the whole universe is striving is nothing but the subsidence of thought, because happiness is experienced only to the extent to which thought subsides. The complete subsidence of thought is experienced by all beings in sleep, and hence everyone is perfectly happy in that state, but because we attend only to second and third persons in the waking and dream states, we fail to discriminate properly and thereby to understand that what we are seeking is only the subsidence of thought. Bhagavan points out our mistake and tells us that we should try to experience in the waking state the happiness which we experienced in sleep. How can we do so? In sleep we did not attend to any second or third persons, but experienced only ourself, so we should try to do the same now.

Even scientists are only looking for happiness, but they wrongly discriminate and believe that happiness will be increased if the whole of mankind is able to enjoy more pleasures through the five senses. But once we are convinced that self alone is our goal, why should we attend to anything other than ourself? An independent and careful reflection on Bhagavan's teachings should convince anyone that self alone is our goal, and will thereby give them the love to attend only to self.

All other spiritual practices (*sadhana*s) require blind belief in something that we do not know, because they need us to believe that something other than ourself can lead us to ourself. The practice of self-attention is the only path which is clearly charted and scientific, because it is the only path in which the [causal] connection between the practice (attending to self) and the goal (knowing self) is self-evident.

All religions and philosophies tell us that sleep is a mean state, and they all expect us to believe something other than ourself, but one Sri Ramana alone stands to say that we shouldn't believe anything but self, 'I am', because we who exist unchanging in all the three

states are alone the real substance (*mey-porul* or *sat-vastu*). Once we have been convinced by Bhagavan, we should cease to be concerned whether this person or that person is a jnani. We should have faith in ourself, and should therefore press on towards our goal without being concerned about others.

If you doubt whether you can be one of the few who will reach the goal, remember that the *Vedas* assure us, 'You are that' (*tat tvam asi*), so you are the one who will succeed, because you are already that.

5th February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan does not ask us to believe anything new. He simply points out the obvious truth that we love only ourself, and that our love for other things (body, mind, God, and the things of the world) is a mere pretence, because we love them only for the sake of ourself. He says that if we want to be happy, we should stop pretending that we love anything other than self, and we should let our love for self be whole and not partial.

In the ninth paragraph of *Nan Yar?* ('Who am I?') Bhagavan says:

Just like breath-restraint (*pranayama*), meditation upon a form of God (*murti-dhyana*), repetition of sacred words (*mantra-japa*) and regulation of diet (*ahara-niyama*) are mere aids for controlling the mind [but can never by themselves bring about its destruction]. By *murti-dhyana* and *mantra-japa* the mind gains one-pointedness (*ekagra*). Just as when a chain is given to an elephant to hold in its trunk, which is always wandering [here and there trying to catch hold of things], that elephant will go along holding only the chain instead of trying to catch any other thing, so also when the mind, which is always wandering, is trained to hold on to any one name or form [of God], it will cling only to that. Because the mind branches out into innumerable thoughts, each thought becomes very weak. As thoughts subside more and more, one-pointedness is gained, and for the mind which has thereby gained strength, self-enquiry (*atma-vicara*) will easily be accomplished. [...]

There is a break here in the sequence of ideas between the sentence ending 'it will cling only to that' and the sentence beginning 'Because the mind branches out', because the first of these two sentences is specifically about the practices of murti-dhyana and mantra-japa, whereas the second is a general observation. If the meaning of this paragraph is carefully considered in comparison with what Bhagavan teaches us in *Upadesa Undiyar* and *Ulladu Narpadu*, it will be clear that he is not saying that if the mind becomes one-pointed through *nama-japa* or *rupa-dhyana*, it will thereby gain strength to abide in its source.

That is, in verse eight of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan says that rather than *anya-bhava* (meditation upon anything other than 'I'), *ananya-bhava* (meditation upon nothing other than 'I') is the best among all forms of meditation. What he means by *ananya-bhava* is only *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry], because *atma-vicara* is the practice of meditating only on 'I', whereas every other practice involves meditating on or attending to something other than 'I'. Therefore though he says, '*avan aham ahum ananya-bhava*', which means 'otherless meditation in which he [God] is I', he does not mean that meditating on the thought 'He is I' (*soham bhavana*) is *ananya-bhava*, because that thought is something other than 'I'. If we are really convinced that God is 'I', we should meditate only on 'I' and not on any thought about God. However, though *soham bhavana* is not *ananya-bhava*, it is at least based on the conviction that God is not other than 'I', so from this verse we can infer that it is superior to any meditation in which God is considered to be something other than 'I'.

However, in verse 32 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says that practising *soham bhavana* instead of *atma-vicara* is 'due to lack of strength' (*uran-inmaiyinal*). Therefore, since practising even *soham bhavana* is due to weakness, practising meditation on God as if he were other than 'I' must be due to even greater weakness, so how can any such meditation be said to give our mind the strength it requires to practise *atma-vicara* and thereby to abide in its source?

Even in the case of Ramakrishna, his attachment to the name and form of Kali proved a hindrance, and only because of his exceptional maturity and the grace of Kali was he able to cut that name and form with the sword of knowledge (*jnana*). If one meditates upon a name and form, the mind will gain strength to see God in that name and form, as Bhagavan teaches us in verse eight of *Ulladu Narpadu*, but that is not the mental strength that we require to abide in our source. If our mind becomes one-pointed in concentrating on any second or third person, that attachment will hinder us for many lives, preventing us from coming to the path of atma-vicara. Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri had trained his mind so well in attending to *mantras* and other second or third person objects that he was unable to practise self-attention, so Bhagavan remarked that he was like a racehorse that can gallop forwards at great speed but is unable to take even one step backwards.

However, if anyone practises nama-japa with genuine love for God, believing that it will take them to him, their effort will not be wasted, because after a number of lives the God whose name (*nama*) they have been repeating with love will appear to them in the form (*rupa*) of guru, who will tell them to leave such futile practices and to practise instead only self-attention. Therefore after we have come to Bhagavan, why should we train our minds in any practice other than self-attention? If anyone nevertheless wants to practise some sort of *japa* (repetition), Bhagavan suggested that the best japa is only to repeat 'I, I'. If you do japa of God's name, you will see God, whereas if you do japa of 'I', the name of yourself, you will know yourself alone.

12th February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan is performing a delicate operation which will radically change our long-accustomed outlook of mistaking a body to be 'I' and the world to be real, into the outlook that we alone are. If this change were to occur too fast, it would put too much pressure on our mind, upsetting our mental balance, and could either make us insane or even drive us to commit suicide. But Bhagavan is a very skilled surgeon, and so he knows the right speed at which to change our outlook. If we are going too fast, he sometimes has to disconnect

the current for a while, which he does by making us feel disinterested in practising self-attention. Therefore we should not be disheartened by such experiences, because they happen for our own good, and he can sometimes use such periods of apparent disinterest to push us right up to the boundary. Even Muruganar had a similar experience, feeling that he was a helpless case.

We should always have faith in Bhagavan's assurance that we are like the prey in the jaws of a tiger, and that we can never escape. If we strain too much, we might be obstructing Bhagavan in his work, so he sometimes even has to put an end to this life and make us take a new body. Death, suicide and insanity seem to be big things to us, but to him they are minor events which he uses for our own benefit.

The culture in India provides Hindus with many outlets when the pressure becomes too great. Even before I knew Bhagavan, I used to take days off work just to go to a lonely place to weep for God. To have *sat-sanga* with the right friends can also be a great help during rough periods. *Sravana* and *manana* (studying and reflecting on Bhagavan's teachings) are also very important at such times. They are like a protective fortress.

When I say that intermittent attempts at self-attention are important, remember that the rests in between are as important as the attempts. Even if you attend to self for only a few seconds at each attempt, these attempts will have their effect unknown to you. Because of these attempts, occasionally at other times – say in the middle of some work – you will feel that you are being automatically reminded of your mere being, 'I am', but it is not the mind that is reminding you. It is similar to pricking a banana with a pin: you do not know how close the pin has come to the other side until you prick your hand.

Doing japa of 'I' is helpful for those beginners who are not able to recognise that our awareness of 'I' (that is, our awareness that I am) is something that is distinct from our awareness of our body or any other mental image. By practising japa of 'I' they can begin to experience for one moment now and then the awareness of 'I' alone. Once they recognise this awareness of their mere existence, they can give up their japa of 'I' and instead practise simple self-attention.

‘*Summa iru*’, which means ‘just be’ or ‘be still’, is the correct way of describing self-attention, because self-attention is simply not attending to anything other than ‘I’, so it does not involve our attention moving anywhere away from its source, which is ‘I’. The Tamil adverb *summa* implies not doing anything, because any ‘doing’ or action always involves attending to something other than ‘I’. When we attend only to ‘I’, our attention remains in its source, as its source, ‘I am’, so self-attention is not an action but a state of just being. In one of his verses Arunagirinathar sings that when Lord Muruga told him ‘*summa iru*’, he ceased knowing anything, which means that he ceased attending to any second or third person.

When you correctly attend to self, then no doubts about it will arise, for your self-attention will then be as clear to you as is your present knowledge ‘I am’. On the other hand, we can also say that you will never know when you correctly attend to self, because from that moment all knowing will cease, and being alone will remain. Bhagavan once said that not only is self (*atman*) that which does not know other things, it is that which does not know even itself as ‘I am this’.

This idea was recorded by Sri Muruganar in verse 831 of *Meyttava Vilakkam*:

Self does not know not only its own nature but also anything else. Such a knowledge alone is the real ‘I’.

That is, self-knowledge is a knowledge quite unlike any other knowledge, because not only does self not know itself as an object of knowledge, but also its knowing itself is not an action or ‘doing’ but only being. Knowing anything else is an action, whereas self knows itself just by being itself. Therefore in verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan says:

Being self alone is knowing self, because self is that which is devoid of two [a knowing subject and a known object]. This is *tanmaya-nishtha* [abidance as ‘that’, the absolute reality called *brahman*].



(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twelve

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

14th February 1978

Sadhu Om: (In reply to someone who quoted and asked questions about some ideas of J. Krishnamurti). At times JK seems to be describing the state of a jnani, but what use is that to us unless we are told how to attain that state? He says we should observe suffering, conflict and so on in the actuality of the present moment, but that is not possible, because suffering and conflict, which are second and third persons (things other than 'I', the first person), are constantly changing in the flow of time from past to future, so in the actual present moment there is no room for them. The actual present moment is infinitesimally brief, because it is the fine boundary between past and future, so there is absolutely no room in it for any

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

movement or change, or even for the slightest rising the first person. Therefore in the actual present moment only the pure 'I am' can be observed. In effect he tells us to closely observe second and third persons, whereas Bhagavan tells us to have an attitude of indifference (*udasina bhava*) towards all second and third persons – to ignore them completely and to attend only to the first person.

The first sentence of the first mangalam verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* can be interpreted in several slightly different ways, but they all mean essentially the same thing. It can mean, 'If there were not something that really exists [which is called 'I'], could there be any awareness of being [which is called 'am']?' or it can mean, 'Can awareness of being ['am'] be other than what is ['I']?' The words *ulla unarvu* can mean either 'awareness of being' or 'awareness to meditate', so this sentence can also mean, 'Other than what is ['I'] can there be any awareness to meditate [on it]?'

Bhagavan wrote this verse to refute the popular myth in India that it is possible to meditate upon the reality. Initially he wrote only the last two lines, which mean: 'How to [or who can] meditate upon the thing that [really] exists? Know that being in the heart as it is alone is meditating [upon it]'. However, when Kavyakantha saw that this verse had just two lines and all the other verses had four lines, he suggested to Bhagavan that he should add two more lines to it, so Bhagavan then composed the first two lines. The resulting verse means:

If there were not what is, could there be any awareness of being? Since the thing that is, is in the heart devoid of thought, how to [or who can] meditate upon the thing that is, which is called 'heart'? Know that being in the heart as it is [that is, without any thought] alone is meditating [upon it].

The whole of *Ulladu Narpadu* is an expansion of this one basic idea. Self-attention is not meditation in the usual sense of the word, because it is not a mental activity. It may seem that trying to attend to self is an action, but in fact it is simply the effort to make the mind subside. When we attend to anything other than self, the mind rises and is active, but when we try to attend only to self, it subsides and ceases to be active.

We always know 'I am', so we are always aware of and therefore attending to self, but our self-awareness is usually mixed with awareness of other things, so Bhagavan tells us to try to attend only to self, because such an attempt is the only means to make the mind subside. In fact the mind that tries to attend only to self can never do so, because it is the nature of the mind to attend to second and third persons, which are non-self, but by trying to attend only to self it will merge in its source, our real self, and then self alone will remain to know itself, as it always does.

16th February 1978

Sadhu Om: In verse one of *Ulladu Narpadu* the term *ser padam*, which means the connecting, underlying or pervading screen, can be taken to mean time and space, which underlie, support and pervade the appearance of the world. The entire verse means:

Because we see the world, accepting one original thing that has a power that becomes many is certainly the one best option. The picture of names and forms [the world], the one who sees [it], the supporting screen [on which it appears], and the pervading light [of consciousness that illumines it] – all these are he [the one original thing], which is self.

18th February 1978

Sadhu Om: The verb *urupadu* usually means to form or reform, because the basic meaning of *uru* is form, but *uru* can also mean *svarupa*, our 'own form' or real self, so in verse 33 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharmanamalai* the term *urupadu viddai* means *atma-vidya*, the science and art of abiding as self. On the other hand *seppadi viddai* means a deceptive art or science, so it can mean any worldly skill. *Katru* can mean either 'learning' or 'one who is proficient', and *ippadi* can mean either 'this world' or 'in this way'. Thus this verse has two alternative meanings:

Arunachala, teach me the art of abiding as self, giving up this worldly delusion of learning deceptive skills.

Arunachala, giving up deluding me in this way [as] one who is proficient in the art of deception, teach me [instead] the art of self-abidance.

Sadhu Om: (In reply to a letter). To quote your letter, “I was not able to meditate in the way I had always become accustomed to. In the past, meditation has been an active process of intense effort whereby the ego sought out some elusive ‘I-I’. I now feel less and less able to concentrate within – by that I mean directing my mental gaze inwards towards some subtle centre. In fact, I don’t feel that I understand the term ‘self-enquiry’, which seemed so crystal clear when I started on this path. I recall that once when somebody brought up the subject of kriya yoga, you said something to the effect that you were mystified how ‘action’ could lead to a state of ‘inaction’. This seems to be the situation in which I now find myself. The old idea of meditation being an active process of seeking within seems to have fallen by the wayside – for who is to do the seeking, and for what?”

Self-attention is not to be done with any strain. Any other contemplation may need effort, but though this is called self-attention, it is nothing but a mental rest, relaxing the mind from attending to other things. Though it is said ‘turn your mind towards self’, it is not an action done by the mind. When the mind does not do anything but keeps itself at rest, it is truly attending to self. Since this is an effortless state, how can there be any strain? The mind will have a reaction of insanity or jumping in a topsy-turvy way only if it is strained – that is, if it is compelled to concentrate on any other thing, whether in the name of self-attention or any other meditation.

In our path of abiding in self, the mind returns to its home and takes rest from its adventures in yoga. Though this is called ‘self-attention’, it is nothing but a complete rest of the mind, and if practised, it will not be the cause of what you have complained about in your letter, namely ‘erupting into wild outbursts of anger and violence’. When, after a long period of effort and struggles to do sadhana, one gives up doing sadhana, then and only then does real sadhana – self-attention – begin.

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan once said, “They say it is very difficult to stop thoughts, and also that by tapas nothing is impossible, but however much tapas I do, I cannot think a single thought.” We think now that we must strain to withdraw our mind from second and third persons, but in fact we are straining ourselves to attend to them. To rest in our natural state of self-attention is effortless, but it seems to require effort because we prefer to attend to other things. Therefore we need to give up this liking to attend to anything else, because if we do so we will no more be troubled by thoughts. Through *sravaṇa* [studying Bhagavan’s teachings] and *manana* [reflecting on them] we gain dispassion or indifference towards anything other than self, and by *nididhyāsana* [contemplation on self] we gain love for self-abidance. Though these seem to be two different practices, they both lead in the same direction.

One of the many new ideas that Bhagavan has given us is that the real guru is a guru only in the view of the disciple. Though others may claim to be gurus, among Bhagavan and his real disciples you will find no one saying, ‘I am the guru’. Bhagavan always used to praise guru as God himself, but when asked who is guru, he pointed to Arunachala. He never accepted worship for his own form, but instead always encouraged people to direct their devotion (*bhakti*) towards Arunachala. When people praised him as the sadguru, he asked, “But who brought me here? It was Arunachala.”

Likewise his disciples will always point only to him as the guru, and not to themselves. Not only will they say that they are not the guru, but they will not even have the slightest feeling that they are the guru – that is the right sign of a true disciple. They will not allow any ‘I’ to rise as an obstacle between any other aspirant and Bhagavan.

When Alexander the Great invaded north India, he was told about a great sage who lived in a cave on the nearby mountain, so he went to visit him early one morning, and found an elderly man dressed in rags crouching at the entrance of a cave warming himself in the morning sunshine. When Alexander asked him what service he could do for him, the sage at first kept quiet, but when Alexander persisted,

saying that he was the most powerful emperor in the world and could therefore give him anything he wanted, he finally just waved his hand indicting to Alexander to step aside in order to stop obstructing the warmth of the sun. If we rise as an 'I' thinking 'I can guide others', we would be standing as an obstacle between those others and the shining of Bhagavan's grace, just as Alexander was standing as an obstacle between the old sage and the warm sunshine.

Bhagavan often said self is the guru, so the guru has always been and will always be with us. Therefore we need not seek the guru, because he is already doing his part, so we should concern ourselves only with seeking our own real self. As Bhagavan said in *Maharshi's Gospel* [Book 2, chapter 2]:

If you seek either [God or guru] – they are not really two but one and identical – rest assured that they are seeking you with a solicitude greater than you can ever imagine.

[...] God or the Guru is always in search of the earnest seeker. Were the coin a dud piece, the woman would not have made that long search. Do you see what it means? The seeker must qualify himself through devotion etc.

The mind can never imagine or understand what work the guru is doing within. If it tried, it would be like someone trying to remember where he was and what he was doing during his grandfather's wedding. Bhagavan was extremely subtle when he answered questions, but here we try to make it as plain and simple as possible. Since his answers were so subtle, we should be careful not to rush to hasty conclusions about what he meant. The answers he gave were not always recorded accurately, and even when they were, we can easily misunderstand the significance of what he said or the reason why he answered as he did.

19th February 1978

Sadhu Om: By clarifying that self is not the seer, perceiver or knower of anything, Bhagavan has given a correction slip to many of the sastras [ancient texts of vedanta]. If we had just read sastras, it would not have been sufficiently clear to us that self is not the seer, because

in this regard many contradictory ideas are expressed in *sastras*. For instance, the word *atman* [self] is often used to mean *jivatman* [the individual or personal self], and *paramatman* [remotest, ultimate or supreme self] is used to mean our real self. In Sanskrit dictionaries you will find that *atman* means self, oneself or 'I', but it is used to mean the thought 'I' as well as the real 'I'. The vague and ambiguous meaning of this word *atman* and the various senses in which it is used has created many controversies and became the main point of disagreement between Buddhists and Vedantins.

Bhagavan has avoided all this confusion and the resulting controversies by clarifying that in the sense in which he uses this term *atman* is the sole reality – the awareness of being (*sat-cit*) that shines as 'I am' in all the three states of waking, dream and sleep – and that the ego, mind or *jiva* [soul or individual self] is the thought 'I am the body', which rises and shines only in the waking and dream states. Moreover, he explained that what is seen cannot differ in nature from the eye that sees it, and that self therefore knows only *sat-cit-ananda* and can never know names and forms. As he says in verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

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 the sight be otherwise [in nature] than the eye [that sees it]? The [real] eye is self, the infinite eye.

Since self is formless, it cannot see any forms, and hence it can never be a knower of otherness. Otherness consists of forms, so it can only be known by a form, and hence the knower or seer of otherness can only be the ego, the thought 'I am the body'.

In this and in so many other ways Bhagavan has given us a spotlight that we can shine on other teachings to see what truth may be in them. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Thirteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

23rd February 1978

Sadhu Om: There is an old saying, ‘Think, think, until you can think no more’. It does not mean think of worldly things, but only think of the guru, his greatness and his teachings, until the mind can form no more thought.

When we first come to our guru, our love for him is so great that it occupies our whole mind, so we lose all interest in whatever else we previously desired. This is what Bhagavan referred to in verse 318 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai* when he said ‘the feet of *guru-natha*, who has taken us as his own by extinguishing the threefold fire [of desire for women, wealth and fame]’. However this peace and freedom from

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

desires is only temporary, because the guru knows that in order for us to hold this peace permanently we must master it ourself, so after giving us a foretaste of the happiness of desirelessness, he puts us into the battlefield to face all that is within us.

As Bhagavan said in the third chapter of *Maharshi's Gospel* in reply to a devotee who said that after he left his presence the peace he experienced there continued for a while as an undercurrent, but then faded away: 'If you strengthen the mind, that peace will continue for all time. Its duration is proportional to the strength of mind acquired by repeated practice [of self-attention], and such a mind is able to hold on to the current [of peace]'.

What is important is not our ability to abide as self, but our love to do so. Such love is true *bhakti*, and unless we have it God and guru can do nothing for us. They will not absorb us into self until we wholeheartedly love to subside and be absorbed forever.

It is said that guru is greater than God, because whereas God will fulfil all our desires, guru will not, because his duty is to make us desire only *moksha* (liberation). Once we have been caught in the jaws of the tiger (that is, once the guru 'has taken us as his own'), he will kindle within us the fire of love for self-abidance. He will make us experience all the outward-going tendencies (*vishaya-vasanas*) that are within us, and will give us the love to overcome them by clinging firmly to self-attention, as he taught us to do in *Nan Yar?*.

Even though *vishaya-vasanas* [inclinations or desires to experience things other than oneself], which come from time immemorial, rise [as thoughts] in countless numbers like ocean-waves, they will all be destroyed when *svarupa-dhyana* [self-attentiveness] increases and increases. Without giving room even to the doubting thought 'Is it possible to dissolve so many *vasanas* and remain only as self?' it is necessary to cling tenaciously to self-attentiveness. [...]

This battle between our love to be self-attentive and our outward-going tendencies is the combat or warfare of grace that he sang about in verse 74 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*:

Arunachala, show [me] the warfare of grace in the public space devoid of going and coming.

He will not let us hide from this battle, but he is always by our side, and by his grace we will surely win. Nothing is impossible for him, as he assured us in verse 215 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*:

There is no undertaking that is not possible by the power of self. What is called the power of self is the power of grace. [...].

There are times when he will (for our own benefit) allow our vasanas to get the better of us, and we will then feel abandoned and pray to him, ‘Arunachala, for whose sake did you take me as your own? If you now forsake me, the world will blame you’ (*Aksharamanamalai* verse 4), and, ‘[...] What wrong has this poor wretch done? What small obstacle now [prevents you killing me outright]? For what do you torture me in this way, keeping me partially alive [suspended between life and death]? [...].’ (*Patikam* verse 3). The verses of *Sri Arunachala Stuti Pancakam* are not just ordinary prayers or hymns for singing. They describe the actual experiences that every aspirant must go through. The more we progress in our sadhana, the more meaning we will find in them.

People complain that self-enquiry is difficult, but they would say the same about self-surrender or *guru-puja* (worship of the guru) if they knew the real meaning of these terms. But do we come here for something easy? The efforts people make to achieve worldly aims are nothing in comparison to the efforts that an aspirant must make to experience self-knowledge. As aspirants our whole life is a fight, a Mahabharata war, because we must always be on the alert, vigilantly guarding against the rising of the ego.

However, we need not worry about whether we will overcome our foes (our *vishaya-vasanas*), because as Krishna replied when Arjuna asked him how he could hope to defeat his own archery gurus, ‘They are already killed by me. Fight your fight, and if you die in the process, what is the loss?’ This is the real spiritual life, fighting to conquer our *vishaya-vasanas* by vigilantly watching their root, the ego, and thereby preventing it from rising. In comparison to this, posing as a great guru, getting up on platforms, giving beautiful lectures, blessings, *vibhuti* and so on, is all mere child’s play. We are not expected to serve

Bhagavan outwardly or to propagate his teachings, but only to keep the fire of our own bhakti burning in our heart by constantly trying to attend only to ourself, the first person.

We should not try to discourage others who are intent upon chasing after false gurus. Let them go and find out for themselves. Even if we were to try to discourage them, they would only think that we are prejudiced or fanatical. If they claim that some other guru is another Ramana or as great as him, we should not be perturbed, because that would only show that they have not understood who Ramana actually is – that he is not a separate person but only the sole reality that shines as ‘I am’ within each one of us.

As Sri Krishna said, a wise person should not create confusion in the minds of ignorant people who are attached to karma (*Bhagavad Gita* 3.26). This is why Bhagavan often seemed to give his approval to practices other than *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry] and why whenever he was asked about such practices by people who were attached to them, he would always encourage each person to follow whichever practice they had faith in. It is also the reason why I ended the Bhakti chapter [in the second part of *The Path of Sri Ramana*] saying that until a person is tired of whatever other sadhanas they have been practising and asks of their own accord whether there is any better way, we should not interfere and disturb their faith in such practices but should encourage each of them to pursue their own path.

26th February 1978

Sadhu Om: When we read any teaching of Bhagavan – such as verse 323 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*, in which he describes the guru as that which pervades everything, both ‘I’ and this, both inside and outside, both in this world and in the other world – we should reflect on its implications and try to understand what it means. All that is required is a simple change of outlook, and the appropriate *manana* [reflection on the guru’s teachings] at the appropriate time may be sufficient to trigger that change by turning our attention inwards.

28th February 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan has introduced revolutionary meanings for many old and traditional words. For example, he was the first to reveal that 'grace' (*arul*) is nothing but self, and that 'heart' (*hridayam*) also means only self. He has revolutionised literature, philosophy, sadhana, the description of the state of self-knowledge, and so on. That is why we should not give any of his books for review, because very few people, no matter how learned they may be, will be able to appreciate and adequately understand his ideas or the way he uses words. It would be like giving scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita* for review. The world is not yet ready to receive his teachings as they are. This is why I say we must simply keep the glow of his teachings burning within ourself. We do not have to propagate them, but we must preserve them as best as we can.

Actions (*karmas*) are generally classified as those of body, speech and mind, but this is only a superficial classification, because our body and speech and all their activities do not exist independent of our mind. Our mind alone is what functions through our body and speech.

We also talk of *triputi*, the three factors of objective knowledge, namely the knower, the known and the act of knowing, but if we consider them carefully, we will find that they are all only an expansion of the ego, the one 'I' that rises to know anything other than itself. But how to stop the rising of this 'I'? As Bhagavan explained to us, the only way to stop it rising is to watch it vigilantly.

When our understanding is sharpened by the resulting clarity of self-awareness, we will come to recognise that this 'watching' is merely being – that is, it is just being the pure self-awareness that we actually are. Bhagavan's path is actually just total relaxation – doing nothing but just being as we really are. This is the sum and substance of the entire spiritual science.

1st March 1978

Sadhu Om: Many other old classifications, such as the three bodies (the gross, the subtle and the causal), the five sheaths and the four

antahkaranas (the ‘inner faculties’ or mental components, namely the mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), will (*cittam*) and ego (*ahankaram*)), are not actually necessary. When our aim is only to know what we ourselves really are, such classifications tend to complicate matters and distract our attention away from what is essential, namely ourselves, the first person.

As Bhagavan said in *Nan Yar?*, enumerating the *tattvas* [the various ontological principles or fundamental categories of things that are supposed to exist but are other than ourselves], which are concealing ourselves, is like analysing rubbish instead of throwing it away. All we need to know is what we ourselves are, and when we know that, nothing else will remain to be known.

Bhagavan’s philosophy and the ideas he expresses in *Ulladu Narpadu* are all very simple. The purpose of *sravana* (hearing, reading or studying his teachings) and *manana* (reflecting on them) is not to increase our intellectual activity, but only to simplify and clarify our understanding of everything, and thereby to reduce the range of our thinking until we are left with nothing to think about. That is, when he teaches us that everything is just an expansion of our ego (verse 26), and that this ego will disappear if we attend to it (verse 25), there is nothing else that we need think about.

2nd March 1978

Sadhu Om: ‘Do not believe what you do not know’ is one of the fundamental principles of Bhagavan’s teachings. That is, he begins his teachings by asking us not to believe anything that we do not know by our own experience. The most self-evident experience and knowledge that we each have is only ‘I am’, so we should start by investigating what this ‘I’ actually is. As he says in verse 11 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

Not knowing oneself, who knows, knowing [instead] other things is [only] ignorance; except [that], can it be knowledge? When one knows oneself [the ego], the basis (*adhara*) of knowledge and the other [ignorance], knowledge and ignorance will cease.

Here ‘oneself’ (*tannai*) means the ego, which alone knows other things and which is therefore the sole basis or foundation of both knowledge and ignorance about them. Since this ego does not really exist, ‘knowing oneself’ means experiencing the non-existence of the ego, and when one experiences this, knowledge and ignorance will cease to exist, because their seeming existence is based entirely upon the seeming existence of the ego.

We know that all pleasures and pains are experienced only by ‘I’, the ego, and that they are not experienced in sleep, where this ego – the knower or experiencer – does not exist. However, we know that we exist even in sleep, and that we experience there a happy state, unaffected by any pain or multiplicity. Since we thus know from our own experience that we can exist happily without the ego, the knower of multiplicity, Bhagavan recommends that we should try to attain that egoless state even now.

The ego is now being nourished and sustained only by attending to and experiencing things that seem to be other than itself, because we know that whenever it ceases to attend to any other thing it subsides in sleep. In sleep we know nothing other than ourself, ‘I am’, so what we are attending to in sleep is only ‘I am’. Therefore we know from our daily experience that our ego subsides whenever we attend only to ourself. Hence Bhagavan is simply pointing out to us what we already know from our own experience.

There can be no disappointment in Bhagavan’s path. Other gurus may tell us to come to them to experience the guru’s presence, but Bhagavan says: ‘Do not take this body to be the guru. Do not come here expecting the guru’s presence. Go within. The guru shines within you as ‘I am’, so he is always present in you as your own self’.

If we want to seek or rely upon anything outside ourself, we will certainly be disappointed, because whatever appears outside will sooner or later disappear. Hence Bhagavan advises us to attend only to ‘I am’ – to rely only on ‘I am’. Therefore since ‘I am’ alone is ever present, if we follow his advice, how can we ever be disappointed? ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Fourteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

4th March 1978

Sadhu Om (in reply to someone who asked about a statement made by J Krishnamurti in chapter 10 of the third part of his *Commentaries on Living*: ‘Thought creates the thinker; it is the thinking process that brings the thinker into being. Thought comes first, and later the thinker; it is not the other way round’). The thinker and its thoughts arise simultaneously. They are mutually dependant. Therefore it is true to say that in a certain sense thought does bring the thinker into being, but it is equally true to say that the thinker brings thought into being. Neither can rise or stand without the other. Therefore it is absurd to say that thought comes first. To whom does

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

it come? Who knows it? The thinker of thoughts is also the knower of thoughts. Who else but I, the thinker, knows thoughts?

As Bhagavan says in *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?):

Of all the thoughts that appear in the mind, the thought called 'I' alone is the first [original, basic or principal] thought. Only after this rises do other thoughts rise. Only after the first person appears do the second and third persons appear; without the first person the second and third persons do not exist.

If the thinker subsides, so will its thoughts, and vice versa. Thoughts nourish and sustain the thinker, so the thinker (the first person, the thought called 'I') will never subside by attending to thoughts (second and third persons). However if the thinker attends to itself, other thoughts are thereby ignored and hence they subside. Along with them, the thinker also subsides, because in the absence of thought, the thinker loses its nature as thinker and remains merely as 'I am', which is neither a thinker nor a thought.

This is why Bhagavan says in verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

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

The thinker is the ego, the first thought called 'I', and the forms that it grasps are all other thoughts. Therefore when it stops grasping any thought by trying to grasp itself alone, it will take flight – that is, it will subside and disappear. This is the important secret that Bhagavan has revealed to us, because it is the only way to root out our ego, the root of all other thoughts.

To talk of 'witnessing thoughts' as if that were a sadhana (spiritual practice) is meaningless, because we are always witnessing our thoughts. It is the nature of the thinker to witness or be aware of its thoughts. No thought can arise unless it is experienced or witnessed by the thinker. Therefore the activity of 'witnessing' the mind is going on whenever there are any thoughts.

However, if we are told 'to remain as the witness', that means we should withdraw our attention from whatever is witnessed and from the act of witnessing it (both of which are second and third person thoughts) and should fix it only on the witness (the first person thought, 'I'). Then thinking and witnessing will both cease, and the thinker or witness will merge into its source.

There is a fundamental difference between Bhagavan and us. In our view 'knowing' is an action (kriya), whereas in his view knowing is just being. It was to emphasise this that he once said: Not only is self (atman) that which does not know other things, it is that which does not know even itself as 'I am this'.

Sri Muruganar expressed this in verse 831 of *Meyttava Vilakkam* (the first volume of *Sri Ramana Jnana Bodham*):

Self does not know not only its own nature but also anything else. Such a knowledge alone is the real 'I'.

And in verse 12 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan said:

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

What is implied by the sentence 'That which knows is not true knowledge' is not only that the mind, which knows things other than itself, is not true knowledge, but also that knowing as an action is not true knowing, because self knows itself just by being itself and not by any act of knowing, since its very nature or being is self-awareness. Knowing (as an action) is not the nature of self. Its nature is being, and only being is true knowing. This is why Bhagavan said (as recorded in *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1, chapter 7 [2002 edition, p.40], and in *Maha Yoga*, chapter 12 [2002 edition, p.191]) that even the jnani is ignorant, because there is nothing other than himself for him to know.

It is because we are accustomed to considering knowing to be an action that we feel that we know nothing in sleep, whereas in fact in sleep we know 'I am' just as clearly as we do in waking and dream.

Bhagavan expressed it aptly when he said that consciousness plus body and world is waking or dream, whereas consciousness plus nothing is sleep. Consciousness alone persists throughout all the three states, so it alone is real.

5th March 1978

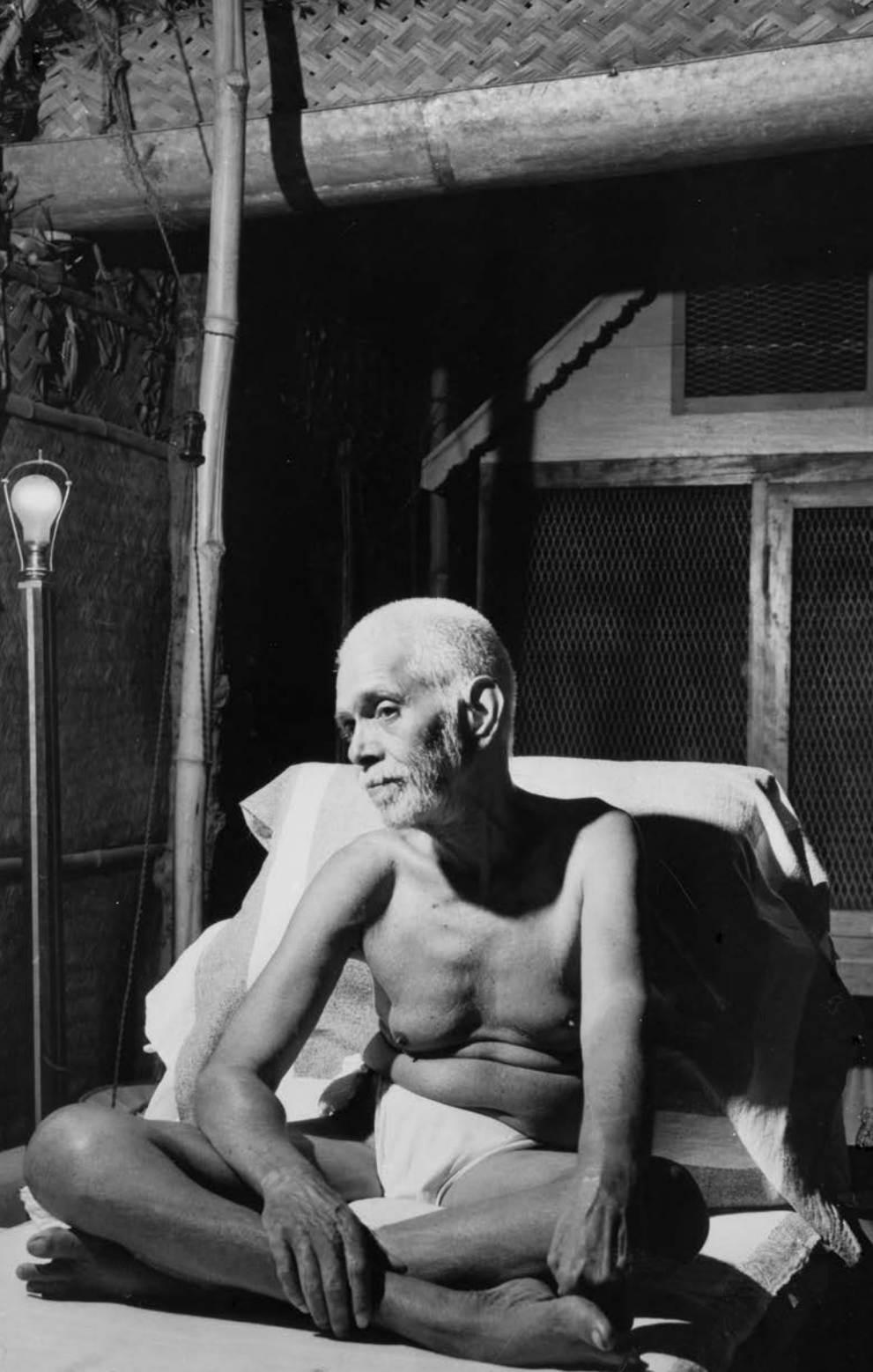
Sadhu Om: In *Who am I?* Bhagavan says:

Since in every [spiritual] text it is said that for attaining mukti [liberation] it is necessary to restrain the mind, after knowing that *manonigraha* [mind-restraint] is the ultimate intention of [such] texts, there is no benefit [to be gained] by studying texts without limit.

However, though we should not read too many books, we should not think we can throw away all books before we are able to restrain the mind. When we are able to abide as self, books are unnecessary, but if our minds are still drawn outwards due to the power of our *vishaya-vasanas* [inclinations or desires to experience things other than ourself], then Bhagavan's teachings are necessary. Reading his works is *sat-sanga* [associating with what is real]. There is a Tamil saying that Bhagavan, his teachings and his devotees are one.

Ramakrishna told a story of a poor woodcutter who earned one or two rupees a day by going to the edge of the forest to cut firewood. One day he met a sadhu who told him, 'Go further within', so he went further into the forest and found better quality wood to cut, so he was able to earn more. After a few weeks he met the sadhu again and thanked him profusely for his good advice, but the sadhu just replied, 'Go further within'. Each time he met the sadhu he repeated the same advice, 'Go further within', and every time he followed this advice he found something more valuable, such as sandalwood, until eventually he found a goldmine. Likewise, whenever our mind goes outwards, *sat-sanga*, *sravana* [hearing, reading or studying Bhagavan's teachings] and *manana* [reflecting on them] encourage us, 'Go further within'.

When a fisherman throws his net into the water, the net may feel, 'What can I do? I am doomed. My nature is to be weighed down by



stones, so I have to sink', but the fisherman will draw it out again with the single rope he has attached to it. Similarly, whenever our minds go outwards, Bhagavan draws us back to the shore by the single rope of his teachings, the study of which is *sat-sanga*, *sravana* and *manana*.

6th March 1978

Sadhu Om: We are not just told to seek self, but rather to seek the truth of the ego. The truth of the ego is that it does not exist, so if we try to attend to it, it will subside and disappear, and along with it all other thoughts will also cease. If we try to think of the first person (which is 'here') or the present moment (which is 'now'), the mind will certainly subside and eventually merge back into ourself, its source, because no such thing as the first person or present moment actually exists.

Time and place are each like a triangular prison. The three walls of the time prison are the past, present and future, whereas the three walls of the place prison are the first, second and third persons (which in Tamil are called *mu-v-idam*, the three places). We seem to be bound within these triangular prisons because we are always attending only to the past or future or to second or third persons, but never try to attend either to the precise present moment or to the first person alone. This is like trying to escape through the two solid walls of the prison without ever turning to see the third wall. If we turn to see the third wall, the first person or precise present moment, we will find that no such wall exists, and that we were therefore never actually imprisoned. Therefore to 'escape' from the triangular prison of time and place, all we need do is to turn our attention back towards the non-existent first person or present moment, because we will then find that we have always been only in the vast open space of pure self-awareness.

17th March 1978

Sadhu Om: When our *sravana* and *manana* are complete, then our *nididhyasana* [self-contemplation] or *atma-vicara* [self-investigation] will also be complete, and we will never again leave our natural state

of self-abidance. If one leaves the shade and goes out into the sun, then one has not yet adequately understood what heat is, so more *sravana* and *manana* on heat are required.

However, unlike other arts and sciences, which each require a vast amount of study (*sravana*), in the spiritual path the amount we need to study is very little. All we need to understand is that whatever we see outside is only our own being-consciousness projected through the lens of our mind and senses. But for us to grasp this, repeated *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are required. Those who are fortunate to come to Bhagavan and to study his teachings deeply will learn more from them than they could learn from studying all other sacred texts. What is important is not to attempt to practise *nididhyasana* for a long duration, but to make many short but frequent attempts. If we try for a long time our attempt will merely become feebler and feebler. What is required is strong and fresh attempts, and for that we need not sit continuously for a long time. We can make frequent attempts while doing *sravana* and *manana*.

When Bhagavan tells us repeatedly that the problem is our wrong outlook, our delusive experience 'I am the body', how is sitting all day going to change that outlook? The strength of conviction we gain from *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* is what gives us love for self-abidance. If our love for self-abidance is weak, that is because our love for other things is strong, and therefore we need more *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana*. *Sravana* must go on till the end – that is, until self-abidance becomes natural. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Fifteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

23rd March 1978

Sadhu Om: There was once a guru who had many disciples, most of whom were *grihasthas* (householders). When they came to him and asked him how to see God, he replied that what they were already doing was the right thing, and that to have a wife and children and to lead a good life was the best way. Among his younger disciples were three brothers, the eldest of whom once asked him, ‘You tell all your older devotees that the grihastha way of life is the best, so should I also get married?’ ‘Yes, certainly, that is the best thing you can do’, replied the guru. A year or two later the second brother asked him, ‘You advised my elder brother to get married, but I want you to tell me the truth: is it actually good to be married or not? Please give me the correct answer, and do not afterwards advise others to the

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

contrary'. 'Certainly, marriage is the best thing. I would not advise anyone differently', the guru replied.

After a few years the two elder brothers asked him, 'You advised us both to get married, so why is it that you have not yet given the same advice to our younger brother?', to which he replied, 'Because he has never asked me. You asked me and so I gave the appropriate answer for you, but he has never had any such doubt, so he seems to be fit to remain a *brahmachari* (celibate). He is contented just to be, so he has no inclination to get caught in the maya of family life'.

Such is the nature of a true guru. He never tells anyone to do anything unless he is asked, but nor does he ever discourage anyone from doing what they wish. That is why Bhagavan was never worried if people misunderstood or misinterpreted his teachings. He never corrected them unless they said that they did not understand. To him all this talk of ignorance and of not knowing self was like a game played by children. He could see clearly that all are only self, and that all therefore know self.

We can jokingly say that he was being hard-hearted, but it was actually his supreme grace. The greatest grace he can bestow on us is to see us as none other than himself, and his silence is the most powerful weapon he uses to remove the false ignorance of his devotees. Such blessing by *mouna diksha* (silence) is far more effective than blessing by *sankalpa diksha* (thought). In his view *sastras* (sacred texts) were just a game for children, because he knew that what is real can never be expressed in words, and that even his own *Ulladu Narpadu* could not express it adequately. This is why he often said that his real teaching is only silence.

If we can understand this, we can understand why he answered certain questions in the way he did. For example, as Swami Natananandar recorded in *Sri Ramana Darsanam*, a young boy once told Bhagavan that his father had asked him to repeat a certain '*sakti panchakshari*' mantra, and asked him whether he could attain liberation thereby, as his father had told him. Bhagavan replied, 'Yes', so the boy then asked him whether he was also repeating the same mantra, to which Bhagavan also replied, 'Yes'.

We should not worry ourselves about those devotees who were with Bhagavan for many years and yet failed to understand his teachings, nor about those who seem to have stagnated. If anyone is now stagnant, they were never really flowing. Everyone who comes to Bhagavan will typically say, 'I have come only for *moksha* [liberation]', but how many actually want to lose their individuality? In the spiritual battlefield, even if a thousand soldiers fall around us, we should not concern ourselves, but should rise up and go forwards. Such courage and faith are necessary. If we sincerely follow the path taught by Bhagavan, we will never be abandoned.

No one need tell us when we should give up *sravana* and *manana*. When we are able to abide permanently as self, then we will not even think of reading or reflecting, but as long as we feel unable to remain constantly as self, we must continue to do *sravana* and *manana*. If we give up *atma-vicara* [self-investigation], our mind will turn to *loka-vicara* [investigating the world], and thus we will bind ourselves still further.

Sri Ramakrishna illustrated this with a story about three thieves in a forest, called *Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Tamas* wanted to kill the lost wayfarer whom they had robbed, but *Rajas* persuaded him that they should just tie him securely and leave him there. However *Sattva* returned later to untie him, and took him to the edge of the forest [*maya*] near his village [liberation]. There the wayfarer thanked him profusely and invited him to come to his house and be his guest, but *Sattva* declined saying, "I am a thief, so I cannot leave the safety of this forest."

Bhagavan's teachings are like *Sattva*. They lead us safely to the edge of the forest, but there we must leave them. In the end, we must leave even our dearest friend behind, and must return home alone [stripped of all adjuncts and *gunas*].

For an extremely mature aspirant, written or spoken words are unnecessary, because they can receive Bhagavan's *upadesa* in silence. Many subtle truths can be learnt only in silence.

25th March 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan begins the second verse of *Ekatma Panchakam* with the words, 'Even though one always exists as self', so what he

says in that verse is intended primarily for those who are content with their natural awareness of their own existence, 'I am'. If we are perfectly happy with the simple knowledge 'I am' and therefore desire nothing else, we will not attend to anything other than 'I am', so what need would there be then for us to enquire 'who am I?' or 'whence am I?'. However, so long as we feel 'I am a body', 'I am a doer', 'I have desires' and so on, we will not be content with simply being aware that 'I am', so in such a condition it is necessary for us to enquire 'who is this I?' or 'from where does this I arise?'

The self-shining existence, 'I am', which is known by one and all, is the ultimate truth, so it is all that we need ever know. No sadhana is needed to know it anew. Therefore Bhagavan repeatedly said, 'You know that you exist, and that is all you need know', because he wanted us to be content with this knowledge. There is nothing we need do, so it was only to those who asked 'What can I do?' that he suggested, 'Find out who this 'I' is or from where it rises'.

Our outward behaviour and more importantly the behaviour of our mind can indicate how much strength we have to attend to self. If we are much concerned about what others think or say about us, we will not be able to free ourselves from the tyranny of thoughts even when we try to attend to ourselves. Courage is needed. If we are able to believe firmly, 'Other people are only my own mental projections, so what does it matter what they seem to think or say about me?', then we will have the faith and strength to abide as self, and hence we will be indifferent to praise and blame. Until then we must persevere in trying to attend to ourselves, because our concern for the world will thereby fade away naturally. Such indifference is called *udasina*.

We are never actually the doer, because all actions are done only by God. Therefore there is no need for us to give up the sense of doership. All we need do is avoid assuming any doership. This is the path of surrender, and so it is an attitude that accepts the existence of God and the world. However, if we sincerely try to follow this path, then from our own experience we will gain a type of knowledge and conviction that God is doing everything, and thus our thoughts and attachments will slowly drop off. Therefore even in this path of *bhakti*

marga (devotion), it is only knowledge that gives our mind peace and quiet. In verse two of *Atma Bodha* it is said that without knowledge one cannot gain peace, which is the state of liberation.

The one essential qualification is not the ability to subside and keep quiet, but only sincere love to do so. Such love is real bhakti, and bhakti is the mother of jnana. For guru it is not a problem to give us *mukti* (liberation), just as the ocean loses nothing when one bubble is burst.

31st March 1978

Sadhu Om: Shortly before he left his body, seeing that everyone was weeping Bhagavan remarked, 'It is said that the sole purpose of all that is taught in scriptures is removal of *dubkha nivritti* (misery) and attainment of *sukha prapti* (happiness), but how to remove misery, which never exists, or to attain happiness, which alone ever exists?' That is how much weight he gave to all our misery and our sadhanas to overcome it.

In the 'Guru's Grace' chapter of *Maharshi Vaymozhi* [the Tamil version of *Maharshi's Gospel*] it is recorded that someone asked Bhagavan whether he knew anything about a group of invisible rishis who are looking after the affairs of the world, to which he replied, 'If invisible, how to see them?', but the questioner answered, 'In *jnana-dristi*', so Bhagavan explained to him that in *jnana-dristi* (the view of self-knowledge) there are no others to see. If he had been asked how he was able to enlighten others through his silence, he would have answered in a similar way: 'In silence there are no others to be enlightened'.

Even in *Vivekacudamani* the guru's final instruction to the disciple is to go and teach what he had been taught to other ripe souls, so we are very fortunate to be born in Bhagavan's time and to learn from him that there are no others for us to teach. For a jnani, standing on a platform delivering a lecture is as meaningless as locking oneself in a room and repeating to oneself all that one has learnt. Even for an aspirant, it should seem absurd to want to inform anything to others. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Sixteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

5th April 1978

Sadhu Om: Why should we try to classify every action as either *prarabdha* or *agamyā*?¹ We cannot know which action is which, so we will surely go wrong. If we like to do something that we believe to be good, such as coming to live in Tiruvannamalai, we should try to do it, and should not worry ourselves thinking that it may not be in our *prarabdha*. We can do whatever we consider appropriate – the main thing is just not to allow anything to agitate our minds.

¹ *Prarabdha karma* is that which works itself out in this life while *agamyā karma* are the results of acts performed in this life which will mature in a future birth.

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

Once Niranjanananda Swami was facing a critical problem, so he asked Bhagavan what he should do, to which Bhagavan replied, “Do whatever you think is best, only remember that your principal duty (*dharma*) is to keep your mind at peace. Whatever you may decide or whatever may happen, don't let it disturb your mind.” Whatever may happen, we should regard it as being for what is ultimately best.

We should maintain *pravilapa dristi*, which means considering everything to be ourself, because it is all an expansion of our ego, like everything that we see in a dream. Whatever we experience is according to the divine plan, the sole aim of which is that we *should awaken* from this dream as soon as possible.

22nd April 1978

Sadhu Om: There is in us a power of knowing or attention, which is called *cit-sakti* and which is actually nothing other than *cit* [pure consciousness] itself, whose real nature is to be aware of itself alone. When this power is directed towards other things, we call it ‘mind’, whose function is to think, but when it is directed towards ourself, it remains as our real self, whose nature is just being. Therefore *nistha* [dwelling] on any second or third person is thinking, whereas thinking of ourself is *nistha* [being or abiding as we really are].

12th May 1978

Sadhu Om: I was once trying to puzzle out why every creature, whether human or non-human, makes the same mistake of identifying a body as ‘I’. In all of them we see the same defects, such as desire, greed, lust and anger, and all of these are rooted in this one mistaken notion, ‘I am this body’. Then I understood that if there were many creatures there would be many mistakes, but there is only one. Because I take my body to be ‘I’, I see this ‘I am the body’ identification in every creature I project. Because I have a desire for something, I see the same desire in others. It is just like in a dream, where we see our own desires and fears in all the dream-creatures. The defects we see in others are only our own defects. If we wish to remove the ‘I am the

body' idea in other creatures, we only have to remove it in ourself. Then we will see that no one has this mistaken notion.

Reflecting in this way, I remembered Bhagavan once saying (with reference to a certain devotee who had asked another devotee to seek Bhagavan's approval for the construction of a certain building in the ashram, saying that everyone wants it), "Who says that everyone wants it? It is only he who wants it."

When Bhagavan said that we should not carry on reading innumerable books, he was referring to those books that analyse and discuss the non-self. So long as we do not have sufficient *vairagya* (desirelessness) to attend constantly to ourself, we must continue to read books that encourage *vairagya*. For encouraging *vairagya*, which entails giving up attention to second and third persons, Bhagavan's own works are quite sufficient. Even just one of his works, such as *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), is sufficient. *Vairagya* is the only thing that is lacking, and when it becomes established in our heart all problems will be solved.

16th May 1978

Sadhu Om [parting advice to some new visitors]: Think carefully over the fact that self-knowledge is the basis of all other knowledge, and that therefore what is most necessary is to gain correct knowledge of what you yourself are. The more you reflect along these lines, the more you will love to know yourself. If you cultivate such love, you will certainly also attain self-knowledge. Love and knowledge are inseparable. In fact, they are one and the same thing.

22nd May 1978

Sadhu Om: Some people complain of a heated brain, emotional outbursts or such like as a result of practising *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry]. This shows that they are not practising it properly. If we practise self-attention correctly, we will find it to be a great relief and relaxation from our normal mental activities.

However, so long as our *vasanas* [outward-going propensities] are strong, our minds will be frequently drawn outwards, so our repeated

efforts to be introverted will create some friction and tension. This is why continuous *nididhyasana* [practice of self-attention] is not recommended, and why we are advised instead to intermittently rest for a while and do some *sravana* [reading] or *manana* [reflection]. Our *vasanas* are strong only because of our strong attachment to this life, but while doing *sravana* and *manana* we are constantly reminding ourselves of the worthlessness of this ego-life, which helps to weaken our *vasanas*, thereby making the practice of self-attention increasingly easy and habitual. This is why alternating *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* are recommended.

In his answer to question two of chapter two of *Upadesa Manjari* Bhagavan said that practising this path of *vicara* is possible only for *pakvis* [those who is spiritually ripe or mature], and that others should practise *sadhanas* that are suited to their own particular state of mind. In this context we should take *pakvi* to mean anyone who wants to give up their ego or separate individuality. The *sadhanas* that he says others should practise are not means to attain *manonasa* [annihilation of the mind or ego] but only to attain other aims, such as *citta-suddhi* [purification of mind], divine visions, heavenly experiences, worldly enjoyments or whatever else they may desire. *Atma-vicara* is only for those who want to close the chapter, being tired of repeatedly projecting pictures of ego, world and God. If one is not attracted to *atma-vicara*, one obviously does not want to close the chapter, so one should follow whichever other path appeals to one. In *Sadhanai Saram* I make it clear that *atma-vicara* is only for those who wish to lose their egos, and that only such people should read it.

26th May 1978

Sadhu Om: A quiet mind is not our aim. Our aim is to gain correct knowledge of 'I'. The mind is quiet in sleep, under general anaesthesia and in all other forms of *manolaya* [temporary subsidence of mind], but it again jumps into activity. Only by self-knowledge is it destroyed entirely. Therefore let us ignore the mind, not concerning ourselves with whether it is quiet or active, and instead direct all our attention only towards knowing 'I'. If we do that, the mind will eventually

merge within ourself forever, so there will then be no scope for it to be either quiet or active.

To learn the secret of the three states, which comprise the whole of our present life, we must learn to abide in a state between waking and sleep. The only practical way to achieve this is to attend exclusively to 'I'.

[In reply to someone who asked, "Should we try to attend to ourself while eating, talking, walking and so on?"] I cannot advise you to do so, because as I have learnt from discussing this with my friends, most aspirants generally do not like to do so. If you like, you can certainly try, because where there is a will, there is a way, but I suggest that you should try this practice at least when you are not engaged in other activities.

Begin by mentally saying 'I', and then try to cling to the self-awareness evoked by this word. You may be able to cling to it for only a few seconds at a time, but even that is beneficial. When you notice that your attention has become extroverted, you should try again, and should continue trying repeatedly until you find your interest in doing so is slackening, and then you should take a rest for a while.

The important thing is to begin trying, even if only for a few minutes a day. The efficacy of trying at least a little but persistently can be illustrated by the story of the camel and the tent. In Arabia a man was sleeping in his tent, and his camel was sleeping outside, but it was very cold. At first the camel put its nose in the tent, and the man allowed it, thinking 'Yes, poor creature, it is cold outside'. Then slowly the camel pushed its whole head inside, and still the man allowed it. Gradually it edged more of its body inside, until eventually it occupied the whole tent and the man found himself lying outside. Likewise, if we attempt to be self-attentive for at least a few moments here and there during each day, that will gradually push out our interest in everything else and thereby lead us eventually to our goal.

The important thing is to have a liking to practise self-attention. By *sat-sanga*, which means reading, discussing, reflecting on and practising Bhagavan's teachings and constantly remembering that

self-knowledge is the only worthy aim in life, we gain more and more liking for it. This liking will lead us to our goal.

[In reply to someone who asked, ‘So does that mean that we must develop will-power?’] Call it will-power, love, *bhakti* or whatever: it is there one hundred per cent in all creatures, so it need not be developed. Even an ant has will-power for achieving whatever it wants. What we must do is not develop our will-power but direct it in the proper direction, namely to experience what we ourselves actually are. We now want so many other things, but what we must learn to want is only to know who this ‘I’ is.

The problem is that although we all say we want to know ourselves, as soon as we begin attending to ourselves some other attraction pops up in our mind and our attention becomes extroverted. We must therefore learn to like self-attention more than we like anything else. Bhagavan once said, “Everyone who comes here says that they want *moksa* (liberation) and *moksa* alone, and that they have no other desires in this world or the next, yet if I were to show them a minute sample of *moksa*, all the crows would fly away and I would be left sitting here alone.”

No one need fear the death of the body. After all, we all know from experience that we can leave this body and take another one, as we do every day in dream. Indeed we are great *siddhas*, because in dreams we take so many different bodies, since the mind can function only when it experiences itself as a body. Many ordinary people are ready to give up their bodies for the sake of their family, country or language, because we all tend to identify ourselves with something more than whatever body we now experience as ourselves. Real death is the death of our ego, but intense fear of such death only comes to mature souls, as happened in the case of Bhagavan. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Seventeen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

3rd June 1978

Sadhu Om: People have many different types of attachments – to sense pleasures, wealth, family, nationality, caste, creed, social status, name, fame and so on – but Bhagavan has correctly diagnosed that the root of all attachments is our ego, which is our *dehabhimana* or fundamental attachment to a body as ‘I’. That is why he often advised us, ‘Investigate who it is who is longing and crying out for *moksa* (liberation)’, because if we investigate this, our ego will disappear along with both its body-attachment and its idea of liberation, which it was longing for so much.

[In answer to someone who remarked, ‘This *brahmastra* [supreme weapon] called ‘who am I?’ that Bhagavan has given us is so clearly the most powerful of all weapons, but because of our lack of *vairagya* [desirelessness] we don’t have the strength to wield it’, Sadhu Om

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

replied:] That may be true for the present, but he who has been so compassionate to give us this weapon will certainly also give us the strength to use it. When a child is first given a slate and chalk he doesn't even know how to hold either of them, so his teacher holds his hands and guides them to write A, B, C and so on. Similarly, Bhagavan has given us this *brahmastra*, so he will certainly enable us to make full use of it.

5th June 1978

Sadhu Om: Knowledge is power or strength. We can see this even on a gross level: for example, human beings are more powerful than all other creatures only because of their knowledge. Likewise our *vasanas* [outward-going inclinations or tendencies] seem to be strong only because of our wrong knowledge about the world. That is, because we mistake the world to be real, our tendency to be attracted towards it is very strong. Therefore our *vasanas* can only be destroyed by correct knowledge.

What is actually real is only ourself, so true knowledge is only awareness of ourself as we really are, and since our awareness of ourself is nothing other than ourself, we ourself are true knowledge. Therefore to gain true knowledge we must attend only to ourself. The more we practise self-attention, the more we will gain a correct knowledge about ourself and the world.

Since real knowledge is only self-awareness, which is called *cit*, and since knowledge is power, which is called *sakti*, it is said that *cit* is the only real *sakti*, and that *cit-sakti* is the source of all other forms of power, which seem to exist and be real only because of it. Therefore, whatever Bhagavan says about true knowledge in verses 10 to 13 of *Ulladu Narpadu* applies equally well to true power. For example, when he says in verse 10, 'Only the knowledge that knows oneself, who is the first, [by investigating] to whom are that knowledge and ignorance, is [true] knowledge', he implies that only knowledge of the non-existence of the ego, who is the first to rise and who alone experiences knowledge and ignorance of other things, is not only true knowledge but also true power; when he says in verse 11 that knowing

other things instead of knowing oneself is not true knowledge but only ignorance, he implies that it is also not true power; when he says in verse 12 that that which knows (namely the ego or mind) is not true knowledge and that oneself alone is true knowledge, he implies that the ego (which alone knows anything other than itself) is not true power and that we ourselves alone are true power; and when he says in verse 13, 'Oneself, who is knowledge (jnana), alone is real', he implies once again that we ourselves alone are real power.

Likewise, since the term '*siddhi*' means 'attainment' and since it is also used to refer to any special power that one may attain, what he says regarding real *siddhi* in verse 35 of *Ulladu Narpadu* applies equally well to real knowledge. That is, when he says, 'Knowing and being *porul* [the one real substance, which is oneself], which exists as *siddham* [what is always attained], is [real] *siddhi*,' he implies that knowing and being oneself alone is real knowledge.

This is why he says in the sixth paragraph of *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), 'When one practises and practises in this way [turning one's mind or attention back towards oneself, its source or birthplace, whenever it is distracted away by any other thought], for the mind the power (*sakti*) to stand firmly established in its birthplace will increase'. The more we attend to ourselves, the more we will gain clarity of self-awareness, which alone is real knowledge, and in the bright light of such clarity the power of our *visaya-vasanas* (outward-going desires or inclinations) will fade away, because they derive their power only from our ego, which is the illusory knowledge 'I am this body'. This fading away of our *vasanas* is what he refers to in the tenth paragraph of *Nan Yar?* when he says, 'they will all be destroyed when *svarupa-dhyanam* [self-attention] increases and increases'.

When we first start to practise turning our attention back towards ourselves, the power of our self-attention will be relatively weak, so we will be able to notice the rising of any *vasanas* in the form of thoughts only after they have already swept us away. However with practice the power of our self-attention will increase, and the more it increases the more easily we will be able to cognise the exact moment that any *vasana* arises as a thought. If our self-attention is firm, our experience

at that moment will be that this thought arises only because I know it, so our attention will cling to ourself, the 'I' that is aware of the thought, and thus the thought will subside, being deprived of the attention that it needs to survive. Each time that we deprive any thought of our attention by holding fast to self-attention in this way, we are weakening the *vasana* that gave rise to it, and strengthening our love and ability to hold on to self-attention.

When practising self-attention in this manner, we should not be waiting or looking out for the next thought to rise, but should be focusing our entire attention only on ourself. If we look out for thoughts, they will definitely arise, because the nature of our mind is to expand in the form of numerous thoughts whenever we are not attending solely to ourself. If we try to attend only to ourself, whenever our self-attention falters even a little a thought about something else will arise, but if we are vigilant in our practice, we will immediately notice any faltering in our self-attention and the consequent rising of a thought, so we will immediately be able to turn our attention back to ourself before it is swept away.

Therefore self-attention is the only direct means by which we can gain the strength to abide firmly in and as ourself, the source from which we have arisen as this ego, and only by abiding thus can we weaken and eventually destroy all our *vasanas*. Our *vasanas* would be difficult to subdue and destroy only if they were real, but since they do not exist in sleep they are not real, and hence if we have sincere love to know who we really are, we can easily destroy them all merely by clinging firmly to self-attention.

As Bhagavan says in verse 18 of *Upadesa Undiyar*, our mind is just a collection of thoughts, and its root is only our ego, the primal thought called 'I'. And as he says in verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu*, this ego rises, stands and flourishes only by clinging to 'forms', which is another name for its thoughts about anything other than itself, so the only effective means to prevent the rising of our ego and its expansion in the form of numerous thoughts is to attend to it alone. That is, since we cannot rise and stand as this ego without attending to other things, if we attend only to ourself, this ego, it will subside

and disappear. This is what he means when he ends verse 25 of *Ulladu Narpadu* by saying, 'If sought [or attended to], this formless phantom-ego will take flight'.

Since this ego is unreal, like an illusory snake, it seems to exist only when we do not look at it carefully enough. Just as the snake will disappear if we look at it carefully, because it is really only a rope, our ego will disappear if we look at it carefully, because it is really only our formless and hence infinite self. Therefore it is only by attending to our ego, which is the root and first thought of our mind, that we can know it correctly – that is, know that it does not really exist – and only by knowing it correctly can we control or subdue it.

Thus the knowledge gained by self-attention is the supreme power by which we can conquer our mind, and since the entire world-appearance is just a projection of our mind, conquering our own mind means conquering the entire world – both this world and every other imaginable world. Therefore self-attention is the supreme undertaking, but since it is within the power of each one of us to attend to ourself, it is 'the direct path for everyone', as Bhagavan says in verse 17 of *Upadesa Undiyar*.

It is sometimes said that to conquer our mind we need to control all our desires, but we can control them only by knowing what desire really is. It is actually impossible to control desire entirely, because desire is love, which is the *priya* or *ananda* aspect of our real nature. That is, what manifests in our mind as numerous desires is only our love to be happy, and this love is the very nature of our real self, so it can never be controlled or conquered. Therefore the only way to conquer all our desires is to fulfil our fundamental love to be happy, which we can do only by knowing what we really are.

The desires we have for things other than ourself are endless, because whenever one such desire is satisfied, another will rise to take its place. Therefore we can never be satisfied by trying to fulfil our desires one by one. The root of all our desires is only our love for ourself, so we should redirect all our desires for other things back towards ourself by desiring and trying to experience only what we ourself really are. At present our self-love is scattered about in the form of numerous

desires, so it has become weak and fragmented. Therefore to make it whole and strong once again, we should focus it on its real target, which is ourself. By doing so, we will know what we really are, and then we will find that there is actually nothing else for us to desire.

Prayer is not futile, nor is it even just a temporary benefit. Our prayer is to our own self. It is the longing of ourself for ourself, and it will certainly bear fruit. After all, all this – the world, our life – is only a result of our past desires or longings. Some people get dejected because they pray for specific things and find that such prayers seldom seem to be answered, but eventually all our prayers will be answered in a better way than we can ever imagine, because all our longings will ultimately be fulfilled only when we know what we really are.

In the *Bhakti* chapter of part two of *The Path of Sri Ramana* I say that so long as a person in the third (a) standard is praying with one-pointed devotion to his beloved God for the fulfilment of all his desires, God may appear to him in form, but as soon as he is promoted to the third (b) standard – that is, as soon as he understands that he should give up praying to God to fulfil his petty desires and instead pray to him to give only himself – God will cease appearing to him in form. This is because God can give himself to his devotee only by teaching him that he is not any form but only the devotee's own formless self. Therefore God can often fulfil our longing more perfectly and effectively by not granting whatever we may pray for than he could by granting it.

So long as we are self-ignorant, we do not know what is really good for us, so rather than praying for whatever we think is good for us, we should pray only for what God wants for us, because he alone knows what is really good for us. As Bhagavan sings in verse 2 of *Sri Arunachala Padikam*, 'Your wish is my wish; that is happiness for me, Lord of my life', and in verse 7 of *Sri Arunachala Navamanimalai*, 'Whatever be your thought [or will], do that, my beloved, only give [me] increase of love for your pair of feet'. In one of the verses in *Sri Ramana Sahasram* [a thousand verses praying for *jnana*] I sing that he has given me more than I ever prayed for. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Eighteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

6th July 1978

Sadhu Om: King Vajrangada Pandya, who first discovered the greatness of *Arunachala-pradaksina*, went round the hill three times a day for three years. What gave him a taste for it at first was his expectation that he would thereby once again become Indra [the ruler of *svarga* or heaven], but after three years *viveka* (discrimination) dawned in him, so he prayed to Arunachaleswara only for *sayujya* (union) with him. Thus as a result of his doing *Arunachala-pradaksina* his *kamyā bhakti* matured into *niskamyā bhakti*, and the discrimination he gained thereby made him ripe enough to attain *Siva-sayujya*. Such maturity of discrimination is the benefit we can expect to derive from walking round Arunachala.

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

10th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Many people believe that their progress in sadhana can be measured by the amount of time they are able to remain without thoughts, but remaining without thoughts for some time is not the true aim of sadhana. Its aim is only knowledge, which means clear awareness of oneself. What is the use of remaining for five hours without thoughts if all one's desires, anger and other such defects return during the sixth hour? One may remain for three hundred years without knowing the body, but if one does not know oneself, what benefit can one derive from it?

Therefore when we practise sadhana our aim should not be to remain without thoughts for as long as possible, but should only be to know oneself. We investigate 'who am I?' in order to gain knowledge of oneself. Having understood that all our problems are due to our incorrect knowledge 'I am the body', we must strive only to obtain correct knowledge of oneself.

15th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Merely withdrawing our mind from second and third persons is not *atma-vicara* [self-investigation or self-enquiry], but just a secondary effect of it. Attending to oneself alone is *atma-vicara*, and when we attend only to oneself our mind is thereby withdrawn from other things. In verse 16 of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan says:

"Leaving aside external phenomena, the mind knowing its own form of light is alone real knowledge."

'Leaving aside external phenomena' means withdrawing our attention from second and third persons, but that by itself is not real knowledge, because we leave all external phenomena whenever we fall asleep. In order to know what is real, we must know our own 'form of light', which is the fundamental awareness that illumines our mind. Therefore in this verse the main clause is 'the mind knowing its own form of light is alone real knowledge', whereas 'leaving aside external phenomena' is just a subsidiary clause, because when our mind attends to its own self-awareness, 'I am', its attention is thereby automatically withdrawn from external phenomena.

Remaining for a while without thoughts is no doubt a peaceful and pleasant experience, but it is not the ultimate solution to our problems. What needs to be rectified is our illusory awareness 'I am this body', and since it is a mistaken knowledge of oneself, it can be rectified only by correct knowledge of oneself.

People generally assume that only the time they spend sitting in meditation is sadhana, whereas in fact sadhana is going on throughout the waking and dream states, and has been for countless births. Everything that we experience in our life, which is all given by the grace of guru, and our repeated reflections on the miseries of life, together with our repeated attempts to find the root of these miseries within oneself, are sadhana, because by all these means we gradually gain the power of correct discrimination, and thereby the maturity of our mind is increased, making us ripe for self-knowledge.

Self-abidance and self-attention are one and the same thing. Abidance is being (*sat*), whereas attention is knowing (*cit*), and as Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Upadesa Undiyar*, being oneself is knowing oneself, because oneself is not two, and because as he says in verse 23, there is no awareness other than what is to know what is, so what is (*sat*) is itself awareness (*cit*). A worldly-minded person abides in the world because he attends to the world, whereas a spiritual person abides in himself because he attends to himself.

18th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Guru alone knows all the vasanas that are lying hidden within us. He knows which ones he can allow to sprout as thoughts in order for us to destroy them with the power of discrimination that he has given us, that is, by investigating to whom they have appeared. He also knows which ones he must not yet allow to sprout, because they would be too powerful for us to destroy.

If allowed to marry, some aspirants would become immersed in worldly pleasures and desires, whereas others would develop detachment (*vairagya*), reflecting inwardly, 'What are these carnal pleasures? Just two bodies of flesh and bones trying to find pleasure in each other'. However, those in whom such *vairagya* quickly blazes

forth in married life may not be able to gain it if they were not given a taste of such a life, because they would then be hankering for such pleasures, thinking how wonderful it may be to experience them.

Providing circumstances that prompt our vasanas to sprout as desires or thoughts is like watering the seeds in a garden. By watering our less powerful and dangerous vasanas in this way, and by enabling us to conquer them by means of *viveka* and *vairagya*, the guru enables us to gradually gain the strength to face and conquer more powerful and dangerous ones. However, there are some vasanas that are so dangerous that he will never allow them to emerge, but will instead allow them to dry up by not being attended to so that they become like dry firewood, which will be consumed along with their root, our ego, when the fire of jnana eventually blazes forth.

Only guru can do all this for us. He knows not only all our present thoughts but also all that we could possibly think, do or experience. It is necessary for us to reflect and convince ourself of this, lest our ego proudly raises its head thinking 'I can conquer maya'. Humility is essential. By the strength of our own ego we can do nothing. We cannot even think without his grace. As Bhagavan says in verse 170 of *Guru Vacaka Kovai*:

"If even the gods Vayu and Agni [the gods of wind and fire] were unable either to move or to burn a trivial small straw, alas, who can or how to do [anything] egotistically by their own strength?"

It is always better to be humble and lie low. Let anything trample over us, because we cannot fall any further. In one of my verses I give the following illustrations: an eagle with its strong claws and beak can be chased away by crows; a mighty elephant will stand up and move aside for a line of black ants lest they enter its trunk; the sun can dry the ocean, but we can be protected from it by a small umbrella; a train can pull huge loads, but it cannot resist being stopped by a break operated by one finger of its driver; the Ganga can sweep away elephants in its current, but it cannot stop small fish swimming against its current. Likewise, even great yogis cannot conquer this maya, but we can simply by surrendering ourself to the grace of Bhagavan.

When we think more and more along these lines, our discrimination and longing to cling to his feet will increase, and we will therefore not be inclined to rise thinking 'I can do'. This battle between the *viveka* and *vairagya* given by Bhagavan and our tendency to rise as this ego must go on throughout this waking state. In this battle we often feel like a ship tossed about in a violent storm, but he is our helmsman, so we should pray to him as he taught us in verse 79 of *Sri Arunachala Aksaramanamalai*: 'Arunachala, protect me so that I may not be like a ship tossing in a great storm without a helmsman'.

28th July 1978

Sadhu Om: Strength lies in our being, not in our thinking. Therefore real strength comes only from self-abidance. Time is not an important factor in self-abidance, because we gain no spiritual benefit by remaining without thought for eight hours in sleep. Attention (which is a focusing of our awareness, *cit*) is the only important factor in self-abidance (which is a state of just being, *sat*), because the intensity of our self-attention is what determines the firmness and depth of our self-abidance. Knowing ourself alone is being ourself, and that alone is true strength (*sakti*).

If someone, after doing some tapas and thereby gaining a little power over others, takes people as his disciples, then as Sri Ramakrishna said he is like a small water-snake catching a big frog. He will not be able to swallow them, but he will not let go of them, so both will have to suffer. Having taken responsibility for the disciple's vasanas, such a 'guru' will himself be overpowered by the disciple's desires.

The real guru is not a person, but is only our own unlimited and hence non-personal self, because our infinite self alone can manipulate and destroy all our vasanas without itself being affected by them at all.



(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Nineteen

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

8th August 1978

Sadhu Om: In the first verse of *Sri Arunacala Navamanimalai* Bhagavan sings:

Though actually *acalan* [the motionless one], in that assembly hall [in Chidambaram] he [Lord Siva] dances in front of the mother, who is *acalai* [the consort of *acalan*]. When that Sakti [the divine mother] becomes tranquil in [his] *acala* form, know that he shines exalted as *Arunacalam*.

Lord Siva is our own real self, which is immutable and hence eternally motionless (*acala*), yet it is said that in Chidambaram he assumed the form of Nataraja to dance in front of Kali in order to

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

pacify her frenzied dance. Here Kali, who is Sakti, the divine mother of the entire universe, represents our ceaselessly active mind, which is the progenitor of all things. Kali is called *acalai*, the feminine form of *acalan*, the motionless Lord Siva, because in essence she is nothing other than him, just as our mind is in essence nothing other than our real self.

Just as the frenzied dance of Kali needed to be pacified in order for her to regain her original state of motionlessness, the ceaseless rising and activity of our mind needs to subside in order for us to regain our original state as perfectly calm and motionless self-awareness.

In other spiritual paths, which are represented in this verse by other holy places such as Chidambaram, our mind is given a single activity in order to subdue its other activities, so in order to cling to that single activity it needs to make strenuous effort, which is arduous *tapas* (austerities) and which is therefore represented here by the dancing of Nataraja.

In the path of atma-vicara, which is the path of complete self-surrender and which is represented here by Tiruvannamalai, no arduous activity or *tapas* is necessary, because simply by calmly clinging with love to ourself, our mind will merge motionlessly back into ourself, just as Sakti became calm in Tiruvannamalai simply because of her overwhelming love for Lord Siva in his motionless form as Arunachala.

Therefore this verse signifies the fact that in order for us to regain our original state of motionless self-abidance, no activity (dancing) of our mind is necessary, because ultimately we can remain as we really are only by completely giving up all activity, which we can do only by clinging firmly, steadily and peacefully to self-attention.

Jnanasambandhar praised Arunachala as ‘ஞானத் திரளாய் நின்ற பெருமான்’ (jñānat-tiraḷāy niṅḍra perumān), ‘the great Lord who stands as a dense mass of jnana’, and Bhagavan used to explain this saying that Arunachala is *jnanagni*, the fire of self-knowledge that will destroy the false awareness ‘I am this body’.¹ When Sundaramurti was in Tiruvanaikkaval, he sang a verse saying that Annamalai can be known only by those who have lost their ego, thereby illustrating

¹ See for example *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk§529, 2006. p.528.

that by merely thinking of Arunachala from afar great saints can understand its secret. And when Adi Sankara was travelling in these parts he approached Arunachala from the eastern side but did not enter the town, because he saw every grain of sand here as a *Siva-linga*, so he did *namaskara* (paid obeisance) from a distance. Referring to this, Bhagavan used to say that the very ground here is *jnana-bhumi*, the soil of jnana.

People generally take *sat-sanga* to mean the company of good people, but Bhagavan clarified its true meaning, explaining that real *sat-sanga* is only association with *sat*, and since *sat* is nothing other than *atma-svarupa*, our own real self, abiding in ourself as ourself is the correct and most perfect form of *sat-sanga*.² However, until we are able to abide in *sat* as *sat*, the next best form of *sat-sanga* is to associate with those like Bhagavan who abide as *sat*.

However, so long as we experience ourself as a body, anyone who abides as *sat* will seem to us to be a body, so when their body dies we will seem to lose their *sat-sanga*. Therefore Bhagavan taught us that Arunachala is the very embodiment of ‘*sat*’, so since Arunachala is always present here, *sat-sanga* with it is always available to us. Moreover, since we can associate with Arunachala merely by thinking of it, *sat-sanga* with it is not restricted by either time or place.

However, when we are able to be here, a special way to have *sat-sanga* with it is to do *pradakshina* (circumambulation) around it. Just as a moth is attracted to a candle flame and will fly around it until it eventually comes too close and is consumed by it, if we are attracted to Arunachala and walk around it, we will eventually be consumed by it. Therefore *sat-sanga* is a suicide policy.

When a needle is stroked by a magnet, its previously unaligned molecules are aligned, and thereby the magnetic property of each molecule becomes manifest in the needle as a whole. Therefore the magnetism induced in a needle by such stroking is not a property that it newly acquires, but one that was already inherent in it, albeit in a hitherto concealed manner. Though magnetism is the true nature of a needle, it is revealed only by its association with a magnet.

² See for example Talk§283, 2006. p.252, and *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 16-7-46, 2002. p.273.

Likewise by sat-sanga we do not acquire anything that we did not already possess, but our real nature is revealed to us. Just as the natural magnetism of a needle is revealed by repeated contact with a magnet, by repeatedly doing pradakshina around Arunachala or by frequent association with a jnani — whether by being in his physical presence or better still by studying, reflecting on and practising his teachings — we are enabled to see that our real nature is sat.

9th August 1978

Sadhu Om: The best way to celebrate Bhagavan's birth centenary would be to prevent the rising of the 'I' who rises to celebrate it in so many other ways. If we make this 'I' subside, then we will be truly celebrating his centenary in the way he would want us to do so.

10th August 1978

Sadhu Om: Reading, reflecting on and trying to practise Bhagavan's teachings is essential, because this is the means by which he prepares us and ignites the flame of his *sphurana* (fresh clarity of self-awareness) in our heart. If we do not constantly study, reflect on and practise his teachings, we would thereby be raising an inner barrier between him and ourself, obstructing the flow of his grace and preventing it from entering our heart.

16th August 1978

Sadhu Om: In verse 31 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* Bhagavan says:

To the *mey-jnani* [the knower of reality], who is asleep within the fleshy body, which is like a cart, activity [of mind or body], *nistha* [steadiness, inactivity or *samadhi*] and sleep are just like, to a person sleeping in a cart, that cart moving, standing or the cart remaining alone [with the bullocks unyoked].

Just as a person who is sleeping in a cart is not aware of the cart or whether it is moving, standing or remaining unyoked, the jnani is not aware of the body and mind or whether they are active, in *nistha* (a state of steadiness or inactivity) or asleep.

In one of his answers recorded in the first chapter of *Maharshi's Gospel*, Bhagavan uses this analogy but describes it in a more detailed

manner. However when reading what is recorded there we should bear in mind that the purpose of this analogy is only to make it clear to us that the jnani, who is nothing other than our own real self, is not at all aware of the body or mind or of any of their alternating states, because as he often explained, these exist only in the view of *ajnanis* (those who are ignorant and therefore mistake themselves to be a body and mind). Therefore we should not read more into this analogy than it is intended to convey. For example, when it is recorded in Maharshi's Gospel that he said that the traveller sleeping in the cart 'does not know these events but finds himself in a different place after he wakes up', we should not take this to mean that the jnani will eventually wake up from the 'wakeful sleep' of jnana and become aware of the body once again.

Regarding the portion, '*samadhi* is their standing still (because *samadhi* means *jagrat-sushupti*, that is to say, the person is aware but not concerned in the action; the bulls are yoked but do not move)', the explanation given in brackets is not what Bhagavan actually said but was added by whoever recorded it, because it confuses the sense in which he used the term *samadhi* in this context. That is, the jnani is always in *jagrat-sushupti*, the state of 'wakeful sleep', because he is what Bhagavan refers to here as the 'ever-wakeful Self', which is awake in the sense that it is always aware of itself and asleep in the sense it is never aware of anything else — any mind, body or world — so when he compares *samadhi* to the cart standing still, what he means by *samadhi* is not the permanent state of *jagrat-sushupti* but only the temporary state of self-absorption in which the body and mind of the jnani sometimes seem to be. In the view of an *ajnani*, the body and mind of a jnani like Bhagavan may sometimes be active and may at other times go into and later come out of a motionless state of inactivity, which is what he calls *nistha* or *samadhi* in this context, but as he explains by means of this analogy, the jnani is completely unaware of the coming and going of all such states, because in his view the only state is *jagrat-sushupti*, which is eternal and immutable.

However, what is particularly significant about this answer of Bhagavan recorded in *Maharshi's Gospel* is the context in which he used this analogy, because he usually used it to illustrate the fact that the jnani is not aware of any mind or body and hence of any of their

activities or states, whereas on this occasion he used it to explain that if we attend only to ourself and not to anything else, our body and mind will nevertheless do whatever actions they are destined to do, but we will not be aware of them. Since atma-jnana or jagrat-sushupti is a state in which we are aware of nothing other than ourself, in order to attain it here and now we should attend only to ourself and thereby refrain from being aware of anything else.

This is what he meant when he said that we should practise *sahaja samadhi* even in the midst of other activities, and in his introduction to *Drig-Drisyā-Vivekam* he explained that practising *sahaja samadhi* means ‘தன்னையே பாஹ்யாந்தர திருஷ்டிபேதமின்றி எப்போதும் நாடுதல்’ (*taṇṇaiyē bāhyāntara dhirusṭi-bhēdaminḍri eppōdum nādudal*), ‘always investigating [or attending to] oneself without the distinction of seeing outside or inside’. Being eternally aware of nothing other than oneself is *sahaja samadhi* (which is another name for *manonasa*, *atma-jnana* or *jagrat-sushupti*), and trying to be always aware of nothing than oneself is practising *sahaja samadhi*. *Sahaja samadhi* is our goal, and the only way to attain it is to practise it here and now. ▲

(To be continued)

The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

Part Twenty

SADHU OM
AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

16th August 1978 (continued)

Sadhu Om: In this first chapter of *Maharshi's Gospel* Bhagavan implies that the actions our body and mind are destined to do will continue whether we attend to them or not. The reason why he implied this was to encourage us to attend only to ourself and not to be concerned about anything else (which is what he also implied in verse 31 of *Bhagavad Gita Saram*, which is his translation of *Bhagavad Gita* 9.22). However we should not infer from this that the body and mind and their actions are real or that they actually exist when we do not attend to them, because their appearance is just a dream, and things that appear in a dream seem to exist only when we are aware of them. This entire world is an imagination or mental fabrication (*kalpana*), so when our mind ceases to imagine or project things, they cease to exist.

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

However this should be told only to those who are mature enough to accept it. For others it should be said that the world will continue unaffected if we attend to ourself. Whenever anyone asked Bhagavan whether they should give up their job or whether their family would be taken care of if they renounce, he would generally reply, 'Who asked you to renounce? Whatever work you are destined to do you will be made to do,' because by asking such questions they exposed that they were not yet ready to renounce.

When a devotee asked Bhagavan whether *brahmacharya* is necessary, what he meant by *brahmacharya* was celibacy, but Bhagavan replied, 'Celibacy is not necessary. If you abide in *brahman*, that is real *brahmacharya*'. If the devotee had been mature enough to be celibate, he would not have asked that question. But people ask such questions and then write books saying that Bhagavan said that *brahmacharya* and renunciation are not necessary for those who follow the path of *atma-vicara*. To understand Bhagavan's attitude regarding such matters, we should not ask questions but should carefully observe what he replies to questions asked by others. To understand his view is not easy unless one's mind is mature enough.

When I decided to resign my job, Janaki Mata came to know of my intention, so she asked Bhagavan whether I should do so, and he replied as usual saying that outward renunciation was not necessary, so for more than a year I had to wait. However when I finally decided to write my letter of resignation, I put it in a stamped but unsealed envelope and gave it to him, and he read it, put it back in the envelope and returned it to me without any comment.

From this I learnt that we should not mention what we intend to do even to our friends, but should just do it. If we act with the confidence that this entire life is just a dream and that what matters is only attaining self-knowledge, grace will take care of everything else. But until we are mature enough to have such confidence, working to earn a living will seem to be necessary.

19th August 1978

Sadhu Om: The *rishis* who were practising ritualistic actions in the Daruka Vana believed that there is no God except *karma* (action), so in the first verse of *Upadesa Undiyar* Bhagavan explains that since

karma is insentient, it cannot be God and cannot decide which action is to give which fruit when, so the way and time in which each action is to give fruit is determined only by God. In the second verse he explains that even after the fruit of an action has been experienced the seed of that action, which is the *vasana* (tendency) to do the same kind of action again, remains, thereby causing one to become ever more deeply immersed in the ocean of action, so *karma* (action) can never give liberation.

However in the third verse he explains that if we do action without any desire for its fruit but simply because of love for God, offering its fruit to him, that will purify our mind and show us the way to liberation. This means that karma done in such a spirit is not itself the path to liberation but can lead us to the path by purifying our mind, because only a purified mind will be able to grasp the fact that liberation cannot be achieved by any action but only by surrendering oneself entirely to God, and that one can surrender oneself only by turning within to vigilantly watch one's ego and thereby prevent it from arising to do any karma.

In verses 4 to 7 he then explains the relative efficacy of the different types of action that one can do for the love of God. In verse 4 he says that *puja*, *japa* and *dhyana* are respectively actions of body, speech and mind and that in this ascending order each is superior to the preceding one, meaning that they are increasingly effective in purifying our mind.

In verse 5 he says that if one considers all things to be forms of God and reveres them accordingly, that is good *puja* or worship of God.

In verse 6 he describes different types of vocal worship and *japa* (repetition of a name of God or a mantra sacred to him), saying that *japa* done in a loud voice is more effective (in purifying one's mind) than praising God by singing hymns, that *japa* whispered faintly within one's mouth is still more effective, and that *japa* done mentally is the most effective of all and is a type of *dhyana* or meditation.

And in verse 7 he says that steady and uninterrupted meditation on God, like the steady flow of clarified butter, is better than meditation that is frequently interrupted by other thoughts. This is because the more we love God the more our mind will be drawn to think only of him, and what purifies our mind is not the action itself but the love

with which we do it.

Up to verse 7 Bhagavan was discussing actions, which all involve an outward flow of our mind, but in verses 8 and 9 he shows us how we can divert our love for God to go beyond action to our natural state of just being, which is the state of complete self-surrender and hence the most perfect expression of love for God.

In verse 8 he says that rather than *anya-bhava* (meditation on God as something other than oneself) *ananya-bhava* (meditation on him as not other than oneself) is ‘the best of all’, meaning that it is the best of all practices of *bhakti* and of all forms of meditation, and in verse 9 he says that by the strength or intensity of such *ananya-bhava* being in *sat-bhava* (one’s natural state of being), which transcends meditation, is *para-bhakti tattva*, the true state of supreme devotion.

So long as we consider God to be something other than ourself, when we meditate on him our attention moves away from ourself towards our thought of him, and this outward movement of our mind is an action or karma.

On the other hand, when we consider him to be ourself and meditate on him accordingly, we will no longer be meditating on a mere thought of him but only on ourself, so our attention will not be moving away from ourself but will just rest motionlessly on ourself, its source, so this self-attentiveness is not an action or karma but our natural state of just being (*summa iruppadu*).

This is why Bhagavan says in verse 9 that by the intensity and firmness of *ananya-bhava* we will remain in *sat-bhava*, and that by being so we will transcend all *bhavana*, imagination, meditation or thinking.

Thus what Bhagavan implies in these first nine verses is that though we cannot attain liberation by any action or karma, if our actions are motivated only by love of God and not by any desire for temporal gain, they will gradually purify our mind and enable us to understand that God is what shines in us as ‘I’, so the best way to meditate upon him is to meditate on nothing other than ourself, and that if we meditate only on ourself, all actions will cease, and thus we will subside back into the source from which we rose.

Therefore in verse 10 he says that subsiding and being in the source from which we rose (which is ourself as we really are) is itself *karma*,

bhakti, *yoga* and *jnana*, meaning that it is the most perfect practice of all spiritual paths, which are generally classified in four categories, namely *karma yoga* (the practice of desireless action), *bhakti yoga* (the practice of devotion), *raja yoga* (the practice of disciplines such as breath-control as a means to control and subdue the mind) and *jnana yoga* (the practice of knowledge, which Bhagavan explained is only *atma-vicara* or self-investigation).

In verse 8 Bhagavan included a relative clause to describe *ananya-bhava* more fully, namely ‘*avan aham ahum*’, which means ‘in which he is I’, and which implies that since he (God) is ‘I’, by meditating on ‘I’ (which alone is *ananya*, ‘not other’ than oneself) one is meditating on him.

However, in Sanskrit he translated this clause as ‘*soham iti*’, which means ‘thus: he is I’, and because of this some people interpret ‘*avan aham ahum ananya-bhava*’ to mean *soham bhavana*, meditation on the thought ‘he is I’. This interpretation is not correct, however, because *ananya-bhava* means ‘otherless meditation’ or ‘meditation on what is not other’, so it cannot mean meditation on the thought ‘he is I’, since any thought is something other than oneself.

Moreover, in verse 9 Bhagavan explains that by the strength or intensity of *ananya-bhava* one will be established in the state of being (*sat-bhava*), which he describes as *bhavanatita*, which means ‘transcending (or gone beyond) meditation’, and which therefore implies being beyond any kind of thinking, so from this we should infer that what he means by ‘*avan aham ahum ananya-bhava*’ is not meditation on the thought ‘he is I’ (*soham bhavana*), because meditation on any thought is a mental activity, so like any other action it would tend to be self-perpetuating, as Bhagavan implies in verse 2.

In order to go beyond thinking our mind must subside, and since it rises, stands and flourishes by attending to anything other than itself, it will subside only by attending to itself, the one who rises to think anything.

When aspirants start to follow the path of *bhakti*, they generally do so with the idea that God is something other than oneself, so they worship, pray to and meditate on him as if he were another. However, since God is not other than ourself, we can never reach him so long as we consider him to be other, so we eventually need to be told that he

is actually just 'I', which is what Bhagavan refers to when he says in verse 8 '*avan aham ahum*', 'in which he is I'. However, when we are told that he is 'I', what we should infer is not that we should meditate on the idea 'he is I', but only that we should meditate on ourself alone.

As Bhagavan often used to say, why should we meditate on God as someone distant and unknown when in fact he always exists within us and is clearly known by us as 'I', our own Self? Since 'I' is our nearest and dearest and what we are always clearly aware of, the simplest way and most effective way to love God and to meditate on him is to love him and meditate on him only as 'I'. ▲

(To be continued)