

The Paramount Importance of Self-Attention

Sadhu Om (as recorded by Michael James)

Between December 1977 and February 1980 I made rough notes of some of the things that I heard Sri Sadhu Om say either to me or to other friends or visitors, and many years later these notes were found and read by a friend, who then urged me to share them with other devotees, saying that they contain a wealth of ideas that would help anyone who is following the path of self-enquiry taught by Sri Bhagavan.

The accuracy of what I recorded in these notes is comparable to the accuracy of the recordings in books such as Talks and Day by Day, because just as the devotees who recorded conversations with Sri Bhagavan in such books did not write them as he spoke or in his presence, but did so afterwards from memory, so I did not write these notes as Sadhu Om spoke but did so a few hours later in my room. Therefore I cannot claim that I recorded exactly what he said, but only the impression that it made on my mind at that time, so my notes reflect my own imperfect understanding of what I heard him say.

Moreover, whatever he said was suited to the understanding and needs of whoever he was talking to, so he sometimes said things that, if taken out of context, would seem to conflict with the explanations that he usually gave about Bhagavan's teachings. Therefore when selecting and editing extracts from these notes for publication in this and the subsequent articles in this series, I have taken care to omit any portions that contain ideas that are not consistent with the explanations that he would usually give.

Since what I recorded was approximately the ideas that he expressed rather than his exact words, and since I wrote them in the form of brief notes that I intended to serve only as reminders, I have now edited these notes, expanding and adapting them wherever necessary, in order to make the ideas that I recorded suitably clear and coherent. Therefore what will be published in this series is neither the precise words of Sadhu Om nor the exact notes that I wrote, but I am confident that it nevertheless conveys reasonably accurately the ideas that he expressed.

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

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

Michael James

3rd December 1977

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

4th December 1977

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are no straight routes to our goal. That is, a rigid or formal approach is impossible, because self-enquiry is an art, and each situation must be dealt with in an appropriate manner

as it arises. Bhagavan has given us an armoury of weapons suited to each situation, so when the shield does not work use the sword. When the mind is agitated an attitude of surrender may help, but when the mind is quiet do not think, 'I should surrender; how to do so?' but instead use that quietness to abide as self.

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

5th December 1977

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

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

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

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

He used to give the example of a hard-shelled fruit which an elephant swallows whole and excretes unbroken, but when the shell is broken open the contents are found to have been digested. Likewise, when Bhagavan consumes anyone's ego, they will outwardly appear unchanged. No one can say how many egos Bhagavan has thus consumed¹.

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

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

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

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

¹ Compare verse 89 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai*: 'Arunachala, who, unknown to anyone, enchanted and stole my mind?'

6th December 1977

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9th December 1977

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

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

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

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

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

When an old woman cursed Bhagavan for roaming about the hill in the heat of the sun among all the thorny plants, asking him why he did just keep quiet, he did not reply arrogantly, ‘But I am a great *maharishi*’, but merely thought, ‘Yes, that is also good. Why not? To keep quiet is best’.

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

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

10th December 1977

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

To be qualified for the fourth standard [in the school of *bhakti*] one must have wholehearted love for *guru*, and one must try to put his teachings into practice, at least insofar as one understands them. Unless one sincerely wants and tries to follow the *guru*’s teachings, one does not have the true *guru-bhakti* required to be in the fourth standard³.

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

Progress can never be judged. Bhagavan knows exactly the right medicine required to mature each one of us, so he knows which *vāsana* (propensity) to release at each moment. Someone who is getting 5% today may get 100% tomorrow, whereas someone else who is

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

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

getting 90% today may not seem to improve for years. A person may be always caught up in worldly affairs, but if he is always feeling, ‘This is all useless nonsense; when can I be quiet?’ he may be doing better than someone who is always sitting in meditation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13th December 1977

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19th December 1977

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

Why to say that a mind or ego exists in sleep in order to know 'nothingness'? Why not understand instead that it is self that knows that 'nothingness', and that that 'nothingness' itself is nothing other than self. If you can understand that, then you can understand that self also knows this 'everythingness', and that 'everythingness' is also nothing other than self.

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

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

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

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

Our mind experiencing objects is like sunlight falling on a mirror and being reflected onto a wall. The reflection (which is like the objects we experience) is light, the reflecting mirror (which is like our experiencing mind) is light – and when looked at directly it seems to be another sun – and the sun (which is like self, the source of our mind’s light of consciousness) is light. Everything is light, and the light is one. Likewise, we and all that we experience are only the one light of consciousness, which is self.

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

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

Extracts from a tape-recording: 13th March 1977

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

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

When Bhagavan was asked, ‘Why should we attend to the first person or *atman*?’ he replied, ‘If you do not attend to the first person, you attend to second or third persons instead. If you do not do *atma-vicara*, you do *anatma-vicara*. Neither is necessary. To be is not doing, not attending’. Until one comes to the conclusion that attending to second or third persons – or even to the first person – is ultimately unnecessary, one should attend to the first person. But if that is felt to be tiresome, be free from that also, and just be happy with your mere being.

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

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

The knowledge of second or third persons indicates the presence of the first person. When the world is known, that shows that the first person is present. This is self-attention without effort. A *jnani* is always paying attention in this way. He is not actually *paying* attention, because he is self-attention. If he knows anything, he clearly knows, ‘Because I am, these are

known. Because I am, I hear this. Because I am, I smell this'. This 'I am' is a constant knowledge. This constant self-attention does not fade away when he seems to attend to second or third persons.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Both light and darkness are necessary to make a film show. In the projector there is light, but the film has darker portions that prevent the light passing through. Only through the less dark portions does the light escape to the screen. If light alone were present, no film show would be seen. Likewise, if a uniformly dark film were present, nothing would be seen. Therefore both light and darkness are essential. To make the show of this world, both *vidya* (knowledge or self-awareness) and *avidya* (ignorance or self-forgetfulness) are necessary. But is it necessary to have this show?

23rd December 1977

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

wipe their surplus *chunnam* [lime-paste] on it, and others spit on it. We must live in this world like those *nattan-kal*'.

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

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

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

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

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

The aspirant's love for and faith in his *guru* constantly drives him back to self-attention, which is the path taught by the *guru*, and as a result he comes to be increasingly convinced that his own self is the true form of his *guru*. Thus his dualistic *guru-bhakti* dissolves naturally and smoothly into non-dualistic *svatma-bhakti* (love for self alone), which is his true nature. One-pointed fidelity to the *guru* and his teachings is therefore an essential ingredient in *sadhana*, and it alone will yield the much longed for fruit of self-knowledge.

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

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

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

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

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

Take for instance the first sentence of *Ulladu Narpadu*: 'Except what is, does consciousness that is exist?' To a mind that is unaccustomed to the practice of self-attention this will seem a very abstract idea, because the first word *ulladu* ('what is' or existence) will immediately suggest the existence of things, so such a mind will understand this sentence to mean, 'Unless things exist, can they be known?' But Bhagavan is always pointing to self, so

by the word *ulladu* he means nothing other than ‘I’, which is the sole reality, that which alone actually exists.

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

All scriptures and *gurus* aim at drawing our attention to ourselves, but as I said in the first part of *The Path of Sri Ramana*, up till now they have all started by conceding to our ignorant outlook of taking the ego to be real, and so they start their teaching from that perspective. But why not start from the source – from what is actually real? Bhagavan was a revolutionary, so he never conceded that our viewpoint was correct, but instead always pointed directly to the one self-evident reality, ‘I am’.

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

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

24th December 1977

Sadhu Om (when asked why Bhagavan when he rewrote *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) as an essay omitted the first sentence of his reply to question 19 in the earlier thirty question-and-answer version: ‘God and *guru* will only show the way to attain *moksha* [liberation], but cannot⁴ by themselves [or of their own accord] establish individuals in *moksha*’): What he said there is true, because unless we want *moksha*, God or *guru* will never give it to us. Wanting or desiring is love or *priya*, which is one of the three aspects of the reality, *sat-cit-ananda* (being-consciousness-happiness), which is also known as *asti-bhati-priya* (being-shining-love), so it is the nature of self, and hence a prerequisite for *moksha*. Perhaps he omitted this sentence so that people would not misunderstand it and be discouraged, because the grace of God or *guru* works in us by sowing the seed of desire for *moksha* and then cultivating it into its fully blossomed state of *svatma-bhakti* (love for self), which is itself the state of *moksha*.

26th December 1977

⁴ In the more recent twenty-eight question-and-answer version, which was compiled and first published in 1932, about five years after Bhagavan had written his essay version, the editor (whose identity is not now known) changed the final verb in this sentence (the first sentence of the reply to question 20 in that version) from *serkka mudiyaaadu*, which means ‘cannot join [or establish]’, to *serkkaar*, which means ‘will not join [or establish]’.

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

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

28th December 1977

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

Who wants manyness? The *Vedas* say, 'You are that'. It must always come back to this 'I', so what is it? *Guru's* work is only to make us interested in investigating and knowing this 'I' – to make us want to remain as self. People think that other factors such as meditation, *tapas* and so on are involved, but all that is actually required is to want just to be.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29th December 1977

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

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

How often and for how many lives have we fooled ourselves thinking that our social service is selfless? We did it only for our own self-satisfaction or glory. It is natural for each one of us to love ourself. We are all naturally selfish, so we should first find out what is self. When we know ourself as we really are, we will experience everything as not other than ourself, and thus our selfishness will then be the highest virtue. Only a *jnani* knows how to be truly selfish, because without knowing self we cannot know what real (unlimited) selfishness is.

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

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

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

The basic mistake we all make is to take a body to be 'I'. This deeply entrenched feeling 'I am this body called so-and-so' is the root of all our trouble. If this tape-recorder is not

working, we must attend to it and not to other things, because then only will we be able to repair it. Likewise, to rectify this mistaken identity, 'I am so-and-so', we must attend to it in order to know what it really is: what or who am I?

Only when we thus investigate ourself will the false adjunct 'so-and-so' drop off, and what will then remain is only the reality, 'I am'. 'I am so-and-so' is the *naivedyam* [the food to be offered to God], and when Bhagavan has consumed the adjunct 'so-and-so', what remains is only 'I am', which is his *prasadam* [the purified remnant of God's food, which is shared among devotees as a token of his grace].

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

31st December 1977

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

1st January 1978

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ignore the mind, it needn’t concern us. We are not the mind, so when we lose interest in it, it will die a natural death. This is why Bhagavan is always drawing our attention to self. He never allows us to become interested in the thinking mind or anything other than the feeling ‘I’: ‘What is this ‘I’? What is the source from which it appears?’ All that is required is that our interest in this feeling ‘I’ should increase. That is *bhakti*.

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

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

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

When we start trying to attend to the first person, the *guru* within, who is self, will start working. Whenever we attend to ‘I’, the *guru*’s work is going on. Once we have been given a taste for self-attention, our love for it naturally increases and matures, like the momentum of a rubber ball as it bounces down a flight of stairs.

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

2nd January 1978

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

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

The influence of his silence is of course dependent upon [the receptivity of] us, the receiver set. As he says in *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), we must unfailingly follow the path shown by the *guru*. We must be sincere in our love for him. He says that he is self-shining in each one of us as 'I', so if we really love him, we will naturally and happily attend to this 'I'. When we are thus in his hands, he will make us do whatever is necessary. When we should attend to self, he will make us do so, and when we need some other experiences, he will provide them also.

If Bhagavan was truly a fit *guru* (our real self) when he was appearing as a body, then he must also be a fit *guru* now. But then he was with all his (*brahman*'s) five aspects, *sat-cit-ananda-nama-rupa* [being-consciousness-bliss and name-and-form], whereas he is now without *nama-rupa*, his false aspects, and hence he shines unimpeded as pure *sat-cit-ananda*. Therefore his power is now infinite.

He always used to say that his body was veiling his true nature, and that those that took that body to be *guru* would be disappointed. Now his body has gone, he has left us with no outward form to cling to, so we have no alternative but to accept that 'I am' alone is the *guru*. I have found that many disciples who have come to him after the passing of his body are more sincere and have clearer understanding than most of those who came earlier.

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

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

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

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

The mind must be made one-pointed so that it will cling to one thing alone, but for that it is not necessary to practise concentration on any second or third person, such as our breathing, a

mantra or a form of God. We can just as well start our concentration practice by attending to the first person, 'I'. If we wish to learn to cycle in order to cycle to Tirukoilur, it is not necessary to practise in some open space here. Why not start our practice on the road to Tirukoilur? Likewise, since self is our goal, why not start by attending to self?

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

In *Nan Yar?* Bhagavan says, '... when the body dies, the mind seizes and takes the *prana* away'. This simply means that when the mind subsides into its source, the tendency or habit of breathing also subsides. Then as soon as the mind rises again, projecting a new body, the function of breathing restarts automatically and immediately. Whenever there is body-consciousness, there is breathing. Breathing is an ingrained habit of the mind, and if we try to see how breathing starts, the mind subsides. This is another clue for self-attention [because what breathing starts from is only ourself].

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3rd January 1978

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

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

If you look for the present moment among second and third persons, you will find no such thing, but will find only a constant movement from past to future. However, if you attend to the first person, attention will stand still, and when attention is still it subsides into its source. You will then know that self is always present in the ‘now’, and that all else is non-existent.

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

In the first sentence of the first *mangalam* verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan asks: ‘Without [or except as] that which is, can there be consciousness of being?’ That is, if there were not that which is, namely ‘I’, could there be the awareness ‘am’? This awareness ‘am’, which is self-shining, shows clearly that something real does exist, and that real something cannot be other than this awareness [because the awareness ‘am’ is a first-person awareness –

an awareness only of itself, not of anything else]. This sentence is clearly referring to the existence and awareness of 'I', and not to that of any object, because to be known objects depend upon 'I'.

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

4th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Now, in the waking state, we say so many things about the [deep] sleep state, because we have no clear idea of what sleep is. If we make proper research into sleep, we will discover that there is no difference between sleep and *jnana*. We can now take sleep as an example of the happiness that is enjoyed in the absence of the 'I', world and God. Our love of sleep proves our love of egolessness, as Bhagavan implies in verse 3 of *Ulladu Narpadu*: '[...] that state devoid of 'I' is agreeable to everyone'. What we now call sleep appears to be limited because on waking we rise again as 'I', but *jnana* has no such limitation, so the happiness of *jnana* is unlimited.

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

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

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

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

Arguments about world and God are futile, as Bhagavan teaches us in verses 2 and 3 of *Ulladu Narpadu*. The manyness of the world allows for dualities such as real or unreal, conscious or non-conscious, and happy or miserable. Where there is duality there will be doubt. Self is one, devoid of duality, so self-knowledge will allow no room for dualities or doubts. Therefore, we should avoid doing research on God or the world, and should instead do research only on 'I'. 'I' will then disappear along with both God and the world. The resulting 'state of egolessness is agreeable to everyone' (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse 3), as shown by our experience of sleep.

5th January 1978

Sadhu Om: If ‘I’ is taken to be a form, the world and God will also be experienced as forms (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse 4). Even the conception of a ‘formless’ God is a mental form or image. *Nirguna dhyana* or formless worship of God is a futile effort, like a person chasing the horizon in order to touch the all-pervading space (*Sri Arunachala Ashtakam* verse 3).

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

In verse 4 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan asks: ‘Can what is seen be otherwise than the eye [that sees it]?’ That is, the nature of what is experienced cannot be different to the nature of what experiences it. Therefore, the appearance of the world and God depends upon the appearance of the seer, ‘I’, and their forms depend upon the seer’s form.

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

This is expressed by Bhagavan in verse 27 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharamanamalai*: ‘O Arunachala, sun of bright rays that swallows everything [the entire appearance of the universe] ...’ (see also *Sri Arunachala Pancharatnam* verse 1). That is, in the light of pure self-awareness, which is Arunachala, the ego-‘I’, the world and God will all disappear.

When there is body-consciousness there is world-consciousness. If none of the five sheaths were experienced as ‘I’, neither the world nor God could be seen (*Ulladu Narpadu* verse 5). The world and God are therefore created by our misidentifying a body to be ‘I’. Hence the creator of both the world and God is only the ‘I’ that mistakes itself to be a body, so we should investigate ‘who is this I?’ From this we can infer that the world and God are only as real as the idea ‘I am this body’, and since this body-identification is unreal, so too are this world and God.

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

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

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

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

Bhagavan gave us the following definition of reality: only that which is *everlasting*, *unchanging* and *self-knowing* is real. [Hence nothing other than 'I' is real, because everything else is transient, mutable and known not by itself but only by 'I'.]

When we accept the existence of the world we see, we should accept the existence of a power – which we may call God – that is responsible for it and for ordaining our *prarabdha*, which is whatever we are to experience in this world. As Bhagavan says in verse 1 of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

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

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

The world does not exist apart from the body or the mind, as Bhagavan says in verses 5 and 6 of *Ulladu Narpadu*. The world is merely an expansion of the mind projected through the five senses of the body. The world-picture is projected on the screen that is the mind; it is illuminated by the mind; and it is seen by the mind. Therefore, since this mind is nothing other than self, in verse 1 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

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

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

So long as the delusion 'I am this body' is experienced as real, the world will also be experienced as real. Therefore the only way to experience the unreality and non-existence of the world is to investigate this feeling 'I am the body'. When we do so, it will disappear, and then we shall no longer be troubled by the false appearance of this world.

6th January 1978

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

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

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

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

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

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

The reason why Bhagavan emphasises that the appearance of the world is dependent upon the delusion 'I am this body' is to kindle *vairagya* [desirelessness] by making us understand that 'I am the body' is the root of all misery, and that it must therefore be eradicated. Cutting the branches or even the trunk of the tree of delusion is futile, because its root, 'I am the body', must be destroyed. It is destroyed only by self-attention. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

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

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

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

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

7th January 1978

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

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

Unless worship and prayer are done with an attitude of ego-abasement, they will not purify the mind. Worshipping with pride only feeds the ego. Better than worship is *sravana* (hearing or studying the *guru*'s teachings) and *manana* (reflection on them). Reading about the lives of saints and reflecting on their behaviour and teachings will help us to subside our ego. Better than that is *satsanga*: in the company of real *sadhus* [*jnanis*], we cannot but act with humility. *Satsanga* purifies the mind in many ways, but the best *satsanga* is to remain quietly as 'I am'.

As Sankara says in *Vivekacudamani* [verse 364], a hundred times better than *sravana* is *manana*, but one *lakh* (a hundred thousand) times better than *manana* is *nididhyasana* (contemplation), which is just remaining attentively as ‘I am’.

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

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

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

Self-attention is the most effective means of purifying the mind. The more you try to attend to self and the more you thereby experience the happiness of self-abidance, the more clearly you will understand and be firmly convinced that all happiness comes only from self, and that rising as ‘I’ is misery. Thus your desirelessness (*vairagya*) will increase and your attachments to things will become less.

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

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

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

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

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

In the state of true knowledge (*jnana*) no 'I' can rise either to say 'I know myself' or 'I do not know myself'. This is the truth that Bhagavan teaches us in both verse 33 of *Ulladu Narpadu* and verse 2 of *Sri Arunachala Ashtakam*:

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

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

To say 'I know myself' is as absurd as saying 'I do not know myself'. In verse 12 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

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

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

In verse 8 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

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

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

Worshipping that true substance (which is also called 'the supreme reality' or 'God') in any name or form may be a means to see visions of it in that name and form, but it cannot be a means to experience knowledge of the true nature of that reality, which is devoid of any name

or form. In order to know the true nature of the reality one must know the true nature of oneself, the knower. Therefore in verse 1073 of *Guru Vachaka Kovai* Bhagavan says:

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

If God is experienced or known as other than the knower, he becomes an object of knowledge and as such he depends for his existence upon the knower. Since the knower is unreal, so too is whatever it knows. Therefore, the absolute reality or God can only be known truly by the knower being one with it. When the knower and the known are both resolved into the one reality, that is true knowledge.

8th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Bhagavan begins verse 13 of *Ulladu Narpadu* by saying: 'Self, which is abundant knowledge (*jnana*), alone is real; knowledge that is manifold [that is, knowledge of multiplicity] is ignorance (*ajnana*)'. Self-knowledge shines as 'am'. Multiplicity here includes the world, God and the ego. Since nothing exists unless it is known (experienced), our knowledge of multiplicity is itself the existence of that multiplicity.

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

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

In Tamil the first person is called *tanmai-y-idam*, which literally means the 'selfness-place', because each of the three grammatical persons is considered to be a 'place' (*idam*). The second person is called *munnilai-y-idam*, the 'place that stands in front', and the third person is called *padarkkai-y-idam*, the 'place that spreads out'. Therefore Bhagavan is discussing these three 'places' when he says in verse 14 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

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

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

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

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

True knowledge (*jnana*) does not change, but the methods of teaching it have to be adapted and modified to suit the needs of people at different times. In ancient times Dakshinamurti taught through silence. In later times, people sometimes had to serve their *guru* humbly for twelve years without receiving any spiritual instructions, but by then their mind had become so pure that on hearing just one word or phrase of instruction they experienced the reality. Later still, Adi Sankara established the truth of *advaita* in the minds of scholars who were learned in the ancient scriptures, but in the light of Bhagavan's teachings we can see that he dealt inadequately with many subtle aspects of *advaita*. For our present times, it was necessary for Bhagavan to give us simple but refined explanations about everything in order to turn us selfwards.

Nowadays there are a thousand-and-one different meditations and a thousand-and-one different *yogas*, so Bhagavan had to introduce a new term: self-attention. However, only the term is new, because after some time you will understand that self-attention is ever going on. It is our eternal nature, because self is never unaware of itself.

Through his *tapas*, Bhagavan has stored up such a vast wealth that we, his children, need never worry about doing any *tapas*. Our only task is to enjoy our inheritance. When heroes like Bhagavan were thirsty, they took a crowbar and dynamite and dug a well singlehandedly. Now he has prepared a well, a pump-set, taps and tumblers to enable us to drink, but we are such useless creatures, we are just too lazy even to drink. He has given us this simple practice of self-attention, but we complain, 'O Bhagavan, this 'Who am I?' is very difficult'.

9th January 1978

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

In verse 14 of *Ulladu Narpadu* Bhagavan says:

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

Verses 14, 15 and 16 of *Ulladu Narpadu* should be understood as a whole, because they discuss the reality of time and place. In Tamil the first person, second person and third person are called the 'three places' rather than 'three persons', so verse 14 considers these three

divisions of 'place', whereas verse 15 considers the three divisions of time: present, past and future. Verse 16 concludes by re-emphasising the unreality of both time and place.

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

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

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

The perpetual wandering of our attention from one second or third person to another, and to and fro between past and future, is like the swinging of a pendulum, whose central vertical axis is 'I am' or 'now'. Just as a swinging pendulum is never out of contact with its vertical axis, yet never rests there, our attention is never out of contact with its centre, 'I am' or 'now', yet never rests there. The state in which our attention rests in 'I am' and in 'now' is known as *atma-nistha* or *samadhi* (which means *sama-dhi*: even, balanced, equipoised or equanimous mind), and is similar to a steadily resting pendulum.

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

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

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

The present place and time, the 'here' and 'now', is 'I am'. No second or third person can truly exist in the here and now, because they are all objects known by the first person, which alone is 'here', and hence they occupy places other than 'here'. Second and third persons are subject to change, and hence to time, so they exist only in the constant flow of time from past

to future, never stopping in the present. Therefore they can never be experienced in the precise present moment, the 'now'. Hence, 'being in the here and now' can only mean being in self, which is our natural state of self-attention. The 'here and now' is not an object; it is the subject, 'I', and hence it can only be known by non-objective attention.

10th January 1978

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

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

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

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

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

In *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) Bhagavan says that unless perception of the world-appearance ceases, self cannot be known as it really is. However, even if the world is perceived, it shows that self is known, because it is perceived only because 'I am'. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 6 of *Arunachala Astakam*: '[...] O Hill of Grace, let them appear or not appear [what does it matter?] Apart from you, they do not exist!'

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

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

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

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

not exist. I have not heard him myself, and all those who tell me what he says seem to have a very poor understanding of what he means.

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

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

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

11th January 1978

Sadhu Om: In Tamil Bhagavan often used *nam*, the inclusive⁵ first person plural pronoun, 'we', to denote self, as in verse 16 of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

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

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

When Bhagavan first wrote this verse he referred only to time, but then he modified it to refer to place also. In the original version, which is now verse 13 of *Upadesa Tanippakkal* (Individual Verses of Instruction), he wrote:

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

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

⁵ In Tamil there are two distinct first person plural pronouns: *nam*, which includes whoever is addressed, and *nangal*, which excludes whoever is addressed. When referring to self, Bhagavan always used the inclusive *nam* rather than the exclusive *nangal*.

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

12th January 1978

Sadhu Om: In *Upadesa Undiyar*, the second and third of the three lines of each verse ends with the word *undipara*, which is a compound of two verbs, *undi*, which means ‘rise’, and *para*, which means ‘fly’, so it can mean ‘rise and fly’, but also means ‘play *undi*’, an ancient game played by children, which probably involved jumping and singing. *Undiyar* is thus an ancient style of song composed in a particular metre, and such songs were originally composed to accompany that game. In this playful style of song Bhagavan expressed the highest truth, because such truth can be grasped only by a child-like mind⁶. The mind of a child is like a clean slate, whereas the mind of an older person is like a well-scribbled slate, burdened with many deep-rooted beliefs and preconceived ideas.

13th January 1978

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

The four *gurus* of Saiva Siddhanta, Appar, Jnanasambandhar, Manickavachagar and Sundaramurthi, were all *jnanis* from the time they started composing verses, but they spent all their lives like second standard students [devotees who worship or pray to many different names and forms of God], visiting so many temples and writing verses in praise of the temple deities.

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

⁶ In *Crumbs from His Table*, chapter 13, ‘Some Surprising Incidents’, Ramanananda Swarnagiri recalls: ‘Sri Bhagavan was correcting and aiding some youngsters of not more than ten years of age in memorising His Sanskrit work *Upadesa Saram* and the writer was laughing, so to say, up his sleeve, at the futility of coaching these youngsters who could not understand the A, B, C of this highly metaphysical poetry. Without the utterance of a single word, Sri Bhagavan turned to him and remarked that though these children might not understand the meaning of these poems then, yet they would be of immense help to them, and would be recalled with great relief and pleasure, when they came of age and were in difficulties.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14th January 1978

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18th January 1978

Sadhu Om: The self-attention we practise in the midst of other activities will not be very deep or intense, so we should also set aside time to practise it more intensely. When we do so, our aim should be to turn our attention 180° away from other things towards self. If we once succeed in turning our attention 180° towards self, we will experience perfect clarity of self-awareness, unsullied by even to slightest awareness of any other thing. This is the state of true self-knowledge, which will completely destroy the illusion that we are this mind, so after this the illusion of experiencing anything other than 'I' can never return.

While trying to turn your attention 180° towards self, whenever you feel your self-attention is becoming slack, do not try to keep up the pressure. It is better to allow your attention to

return to 0° for a while, and then to make a fresh attempt. If you wish to punch something, it is best to draw your fist right back, because then your punch will have maximum impact. Likewise, if you start your attempt to turn your attention selfwards from 0°, your effort will have maximum force.

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

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

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

19th January 1978

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

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

'Act without desire for the fruit,' says the *Bhagavad Gita*. Self-attention is not actually an action or *karma*, because it is a state of just being, not doing anything, but so long as we consider it to be something that we must do, it is the only 'doing' that will give no fruit or *karma-phala*. Therefore self-attention is the only true *karma-yoga*. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 10 of *Upadesa Undiyar* and verse 14 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham*:

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

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

If we rise as 'I', we will feel that we are entangled in action (*karma*) and in a state of non-devotion (*vibhakti*) or lack of true love for God, separation (*viyoga*) from God, and ignorance (*ajnana*) of our real nature. Therefore, subsiding back in self, the source from which we rose, by investigating who am I who experience such *karma*, *vibhakti*, *viyoga* and *ajnana*, is the correct practice of the four *yogas* or means of reunion: *nishkamya karma* (desireless action), *bhakti* (devotion), *raja yoga* and *jnana* (self-knowledge). When we investigate thus, the false 'I' will subside and disappear, and in its absence there will be no one to experience any *karma*, *vibhakti*, *viyoga* or *ajnana*. What will then remain is only the reality, which is the state in which we abide permanently as self without ever rising to be or to experience anything else.

Kunju Swami: In his later years, after all the court cases that he put against the ashram, Perumal Swami came to Bhagavan and complained, 'When I was a young man I came to you for *moksha* [liberation], but you allowed me to be led astray by my weak *buddhi* [mind or intellect]. Now I shall surely go to hell', to which Bhagavan replied, 'Do you think I am not there also?'⁷

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

20th January 1978

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

Making intermittent attempts to attend to self is the most effective way to proceed. It is useless to struggle constantly to attend to self, because that would be like standing deep in mud and trying to lift something out: the more you try to do so, the deeper you sink. A firm foothold is necessary, and it is provided by *sravana* and *manana*. The foothold is *vairagya* [dispassion], which is freedom from desire to attend to any second or third person object, and *bhakti* [devotion], which is love to attend only to the first person.

Our whole life should go on in this way, with our mind kept occupied in *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* [contemplation on self]. *Sravana* and *manana* may take a long time, depending on the individual mind, but the correct *nididhyasana* takes just a split second. We may be able to turn 179° away from everything else towards self, but even that is not perfect

⁷ On another occasion Kunju Swami told me a similar story: After the ashram had won a case that Perumal Swami had put against it and Bhagavan in a local court, he came to Bhagavan and declared angrily, 'Though you won this case, I will not leave you. I will take it to a higher court, and continue fighting until I win. If you are God, as they claim, you can put me in hell, but even then I will not leave you', to which Bhagavan gently replied, 'Even if you go to hell, I will not leave you'. Whether or not Perumal Swami understood what Bhagavan meant, these words of his were a gracious assurance that he would never forsake him but would certainly save him. I heard this story from other sources also, so I believe it is reliable. Therefore I am not sure whether these stories refer to two separate incidents, or whether the version I recorded here was the same incident with some details confused.

nididhyasana: it is just an attempt at perfect *nididhyasana*, and is like jumping nine-and-a-half feet across a ten-foot well. To land safely on the other side, we must jump the full ten feet. Likewise, to experience ourself as we really are, we must turn the full 180°.

One must also know what type of *sravana* will be effective. To be most effective, *sravana* must be focused and directed unswervingly in just one direction, so reading this and that from numerous different *gurus* is not proper *sravana*. You must first find a *guru* with whose thought-current you can agree, then discover what his real teachings are, and then practice them alone. Even reading books like *Day by Day* and *Talks* is not adequate *sravana*. There are many useful ideas in these books, but they are not presented there in a clear, coherent or sequential manner, so they are not sufficient to give you a firm foothold on Bhagavan's teachings and to stop you from sinking into a mire of confused and uncertain ideas.

Moreover, many ideas in such books are answers that Bhagavan gave to questions that various types of people asked him from a wide variety of perspectives, so such answers often do not represent his real teachings, since he always tailored his answers to suit the needs, concerns and aspirations of each questioner and their ability or willingness to understand whatever he might say to them. Therefore to understand such answers in a proper perspective, we need to view them in the clear light of his actual teachings, so anyone who does not already have a clear and thorough understanding of his essential teachings will be liable to misunderstand or be confused by some of the answers recorded in such books. Therefore if we wish to do *sravana* correctly and effectively, we must carefully and repeatedly study and reflect upon Bhagavan's own original writings such as *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?), *Upadesa Undiyar*, *Ulladu Narpadu*, *Anma Viddai* and *Ekatma Panchakam*.

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

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

Though we need to make intermittent attempts to attend to self, between such attempts we must also be vigilant at all times to avoid attending to any unnecessary thoughts. Most of the

thoughts that we think each day are not actually necessary, and they serve only to distract our attention away from self, so we must gradually cultivate the habit of taking interest only in self-attention instead in anything else that we may think about. If every moment that we spend attending to unnecessary thoughts were spent attending to self, most of our time each day would be spent in self-attention. Therefore indifference towards thoughts of anything other than self is a powerful aid in our practice of self-attention.

Bhagavan was so unconcerned about everything that he did not experience even the actions of his mind, speech or body as his own, so he never felt ‘I am thinking’, ‘I am talking’ or ‘I am doing’. Because of his complete lack of doership, on behalf of Perumal Swami he wrote a verse in praise of himself as Lord Subrahmanya but signed it ‘Perumal’⁸, and on behalf of Jagadiswara Sastri he wrote the verse *hridaya kuhara madhye ...* (in the centre of the heart-cave ...) ⁹, which he likewise signed ‘Jagadisa’.

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

21st January 1978

Sadhu Om: By allowing falsehood and injustice to thrive in this world, and truth and justice to be suppressed, Bhagavan is testing us. If we allow an ‘I’ to rise and object, he will laugh at us from within: ‘So you still believe this world to be real’. Therefore our duty is to keep quiet. If we are actually attacked, we must respond as if we were brushing away a wasp, but having taken whatever action is necessary, we should keep quiet, both inwardly and outwardly. We should not brood over the matter or bear a grudge towards anyone who does wrong to us.

26th January 1978

Sadhu Om: Like Bhagavan, Sri Ramakrishna also taught that we can know God only by trying to know who is this ‘I’ who wants to know God¹⁰.

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

⁸ This verse is referred to towards the end of section 291 of *Talks*, in which it is recorded that Bhagavan said that the handwriting of the verse was his own whereas the ideas in it were Perumal Swami’s, and when asked whether he agreed with the statement made in it, he replied ‘In the same way as an idol is praised as Subrahmanya’. (MJ)

⁹ Bhagavan’s Tamil translation of this verse is included in *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* as verse 8. (MJ)

¹⁰ Near the end of chapter 7 of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* it is recorded that on Monday 1st January 1883 Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘One ultimately discovers God by trying to know who this ‘I’ is’ (1942 American edition, p. 180). (MJ)

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

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

Therefore without the least hesitation we should sign over to him a blank cheque – that is, we should completely surrender to him our original freedom to will and act – because there is no one who loves us or cares for us more than he does. He loves us as his own self, so his love for us is even greater than our love for ourselves, because he loves us as we really are, whereas we love ourselves as a person, which is not what we really are.

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

30th January 1978

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

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

When we first come to the path of Sri Ramana, a certain amount of reasoning is necessary to give us firm faith in the truth of what he has taught us, but once our faith is firmly established, we can entrust ourselves blindly to him. Once we know that we are on a broad trunk road with strong barriers on either side preventing us from going astray, we can close our eyes and run blindly ahead! This is why I emphasise in the second part of *The Path of Sri Ramana* that one cannot become a *yoga-bhrasta* [a person fallen from the path of *yoga*] after entering the third (b) or fourth standards in the school of *bhakti* [the stages at which one has acquired one-pointed devotion to God or *guru* respectively]. We are now prey in the jaws of a powerful tiger, so we will never be forsaken.

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

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

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

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

1st February 1978

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

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

Since this 'I' is unreal, why should we worry about its defects: *karma* [action], *vibhakti* [lack of devotion], *viyoga* [separation] and *ajnana* [ignorance of self]? If we investigate the 'I' that seems to have these defects, we will find it to be unreal, and hence all its defects are likewise unreal. Therefore in verse 14 of *Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham* Bhagavan says:

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

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

All the so-called 'other paths' are only intended to purify the mind, because they cannot actually annihilate the ego. This is why Bhagavan says in verse 3 of *Upadesa Undiyar*:

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

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

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

Atma-vicara appears to be 'intellectual self-analysis' only in the view of those who do not have sufficient mental purity to understand that we can know ourself only by attending to ourself, and consequently to have true love for self-attention, which alone is the correct practice of *vicara*.

2nd February 1978

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

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

To make the mind subside [permanently], there are no adequate means other than *vicara*. If restrained by other means, the mind will remain as if subsided, [but] will emerge again. [...] Therefore *pranayama* [breath-restraint] is just an aid to restrain the mind, but will not bring about *manonasa* [the annihilation of the mind].

Just like *pranayama*, *murti-dhyana* [meditation upon a form of God], *mantra-japa* [repetition of sacred words such as a name of God] and *ahara-niyama* [restriction of diet] are only aids that restrain the mind [but will not bring about its annihilation]. [...]

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

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

In verse 17 of *Upadesa Undiyar* he says:

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

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

Whatever form your enquiry may take, you must finally come to the one I, the Self. [...] Self-enquiry is the one infallible means, the only direct one, to realise the unconditioned, Absolute Being that you really are. [...] every kind of *sadhana* [spiritual practice] except that of *atma-vichara* presupposes the retention of the mind as the instrument for carrying on the *sadhana*, and without the mind it cannot be practised. The ego may take different and subtler forms at the different stages of one's practice, but is itself never destroyed. [...]

The attempt to destroy the ego or the mind through *sadhanas* other than *atma-vichara* is just like the thief assuming the guise of a policeman to catch the thief, that is himself. *Atma-vichara* alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists, and enables one to realise the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute.

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

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

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

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

Every other *sadhana* entails doing some action (*karma*) by mind, speech or body, whereas *atma-vicara* entails the mind subsiding without the least action by focusing its entire attention on its source, 'I am'. Therefore, whereas any other *sadhana* is a practice of 'doing', *atma-vicara* is the practice of just being as we really are – with perfect clarity of self-awareness. Hence, since being is easier than doing, *atma-vicara* is the easiest of all paths.

The purpose of *niskamya puja*, *japa* and *dhyana*, and of all *sadhanas* other than *atma-vicara*, is only to purify the mind. Purification of mind is the sole benefit that can be gained from any such *sadhanas*, because none of them can ever by itself destroy the ego. The benefit

of a purified mind is that ‘it shows the path to liberation’, as Bhagavan says in verse 3 of *Upadesa Undiyar*. That is, it enables the mind to discriminate, understand and be firmly convinced that *atma-vicara* alone is the path to liberation.

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

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

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

Vali had a boon that he would receive half of the strength of anyone he faced in battle, so he was automatically more powerful than any opponent he had to face. Therefore even Rama could not have killed him in face-to-face combat, so he had to hide behind a tree and shoot him from behind. Just as Vali gained half the strength of his opponent, if we try to fight the mind in direct combat, we will be giving it half of our strength, because our attention is what sustains and nourishes it, so the more we attend to it (that is, to its constant flow of thoughts), the more we are giving it strength. Therefore the only way to destroy the mind is by attending only to ‘I’ and thereby ignoring all the other thoughts that constitute the mind.

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

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 ourselves) 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 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 (*sadhanas*) 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 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 8 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 8 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 such second or third person objects that he was unable to practice self-attention, so Bhagavan remarked that he was like a race-horse 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 practicing 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 therefore 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 practicing *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 in 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:

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-nistha* [abidance as 'that', the absolute reality called *brahman*].

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 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 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, so Bhagavan starts his teachings by disparaging the idea of meditation, but nowadays people call the hall where he lived the ‘meditation hall’ and they expect that everyone who comes to Ramanasramam should meditate. 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 1 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 practiced, 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 *sravana* [studying Bhagavan’s teachings] and *manana* [reflecting on them] we gain dispassion or indifference towards anything other than self, and

by *nididhyasana* [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 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 4 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.

21st February 1978

Sadhu Om: When we read any teaching of Bhagavan, such as a verse of *Guru Vachaka Kovai*, we should then and there reflect over it and try to put it into practice by abiding as self. That is, our *sravana* [reading], *manana* [reflection] and *nididhyasana* [self-contemplation] should go hand-in-hand, because then only are we truly reading what he taught. This is the correct way to learn his teachings.

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 desires is only temporary, because the *guru* knows that in order for us to hold this peace permanently we must master it ourselves, 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 liberation (*moksha*). 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 (*visaya-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?* (Who am I?):

Even though *visaya-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 *visaya-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 *visaya-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 unless a person is tired of whatever other *sadhanas* they have been practising and asks us 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 ourselves. 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 (*ādhāra*) 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 ourselves, ‘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 ourselves. 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 ourselves, 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?

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 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 nicely 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 *visaya-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.

23rd March 1978

Sadhu Om: There was once a *guru* who had many disciples, most of whom were householders (*grihasthas*). 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 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 celibate (*brahmachari*). 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 silence (*mouna diksha*) is far more effective than blessing by thought (*sankalpa diksha*). In his view sacred texts (*sastras*) 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 he 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 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.

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 near his village. 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.

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 devotion (*bhakti marga*), it is only knowledge that gives our mind peace and quiet. In verse 2 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 liberation (*mukti*), 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 misery (*duhkha nivritti*) and attainment of happiness (*sukha prapti*), 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.

5th April 1978

Sadhu Om: Why should we try to classify every action as either *prarabdha* or *agamyā*? 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.

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 thinking, but when it is directed towards ourself, it remains as our real self¹¹, 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 his 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 desirelessness (*vairagya*) 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.

¹¹ Compare *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 11-1-46 Afternoon (5th reprint, 2002, p. 104), where it is recorded that when asked ‘What is the difference between the mind and the Self?’ Bhagavan replied: ‘There is no difference. The mind turned inwards is the Self; turned outwards, it becomes the ego and all the world’.

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 practice 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 ourself 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 2 of chapter 2 of *Upadesa Manjari* Bhagavan said that practising this path of *vicara* is possible only for *pakvis* [those who are 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 ourself 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 ourself 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 ourself, as soon as we begin attending to ourself 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* and *moksa* alone, and that they have no other desires in this world or the next, yet if I were to show them one 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 ourself with something more than whatever body we now experience as ourself. 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.

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 used to advise us, ‘Investigate who it is who is longing and crying out for liberation (*moksa*)’, 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 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 oneself, so true knowledge is only awareness of oneself as we really are, and since our awareness of oneself is nothing other than oneself, we ourselves are true knowledge. Therefore to gain true knowledge we must attend only to oneself. The more we practice self-attention, the more we will gain a correct knowledge about oneself 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 ourself 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 ourself 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 ourself, 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 ourself, 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 it 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, we 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 and so on – is only a result of our past desires or longings. However, 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.

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 discrimination (*viveka*) dawned in him, so he prayed to Arunachaleswara only for union (*sayuja*) with him. Thus as a result of his doing Arunachala-*pradaksina* his *kamya bhakti* matured into *niskamya bhakti*, and the discrimination he gained thereby made him ripe enough to attain Siva-*sayuja*. Such maturity of discrimination is the benefit we can expect to derive from walking round Arunachala.

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 filthy 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*, *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 ourselves 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 ourselves 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 oneself alone is being oneself, 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 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.

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 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* and which is therefore represented here by the dancing of Nataraja, whereas 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.

Jnanasambandar praised Arunachala as 'ஞானத் திரளாய் நின்ற பெருமான்' (*jnana-t-tiralay nindra peruman*), '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'¹². When Sundaramurti was in Tiruvanaikka he sang a verse saying that Annamalai can be known only by those who have lost their ego, thereby illustrating 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

¹² See for example *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, section 529 (2006 edition, page 528).

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*¹³. 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 *pradaksina* [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.

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 *pradaksina* 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.

¹³ See for example *Talks*, section 283 (2006 edition, page 252), and *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 16-7-46 (2002 edition, page 273).

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 *ajnani*s (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's 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’ (*tannaiye bahyantara dirusti-bhedam-indri eppodum nadudal*), ‘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.

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.

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 Osborne asked Bhagavan whether *brahmacharya* is necessary, what he meant by *brahmacharya* is celibacy, but Bhagavan replied, ‘Celibacy is not necessary. If you abide in *brahman*, that is real *brahmacharya*’. If Osborne 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 is 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 action (*karma*), 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 tendency (*vasana*) 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* 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 rising 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 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 ourselves, when we meditate on him our attention is moving away from ourselves 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 ourselves and meditate on him accordingly, we will no longer be meditating on a mere thought of him but only on ourselves, so our attention will not be moving away from ourselves but will just rest motionlessly on ourselves, 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 gains, 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'.

22nd August 1978

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

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

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

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

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

Like everything else, time and space are a creation of our mind, and the very nature of our mind is to deceive us. In its ability to do so, the mind is indeed an *atīśaya śakti* (an extraordinary and wonderful power), as Bhagavan says in *Nāṇ Yār?*, but it is not real, so if we diligently investigate what it is by vigilantly observing the ego, the thought called 'I', which is its fundamental and essential form, we will find that there is actually no such thing, as Bhagavan teaches us in verse 17 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

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

25th August 1978

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The nature and importance of the vital work that he is constantly doing within us is beyond all human comprehension, but without it no one would ever be fit to obtain any benefit from

outward *sat-saṅga*, because it alone can purify and clarify our mind, thereby making us fit to yield to the subtle influence of his physical presence and to absorb and assimilate his outward teachings. If one is not inwardly prepared and ripe, one will not gain so much benefit from any form of outward *sat-saṅga*, but if one's mind is already to a large extent purified and hence clear, one will very quickly gain the full benefit of outward *sat-saṅga*, namely the blossoming of intense love to turn back within and drown forever in Bhagavan, who is the clear light of awareness that illumines our mind.

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Sadhu Om: Free will is our real nature. Since we alone exist, what can ever limit our freedom? It is only when we limit ourself as a body that we seem to have only limited freedom, and when our freedom seems to be limited, we also seem to be bound by its opposite: fate. However, even when our freedom seems to be limited, there is actually nothing other than ourself, so there is nothing that could ever limit our freedom in anyway. Therefore we are always free either to see ourself as one and indivisible, as we always actually are, or to see ourself as many, as we seem to be whenever we rise as the ego.

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

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

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

However, we have now been drawn to Bhagavan, so if we follow the path that he has shown us, our mind will gradually be purified and thereby we will gain a steadily increasing clarity of discrimination, as a result of which we will become increasingly disgusted with this habit of rising as the ego and projecting this appearance of soul, world and God, and hence we will reflect: 'Why should I repeatedly wander out into the scorching sunshine by rising as this ego in waking and dream and then return temporarily to the shade of the tree by subsiding in sleep? Why should I not just remain peacefully in the cool and comfort of the shade?'

When our discrimination thereby becomes clear and deeply rooted, we will turn back within and merge forever in our source, and thus we will discover that we have always been

free to just to be as we are and thereby to stop projecting any illusory appearances. Our infinite freedom was only seemingly limited, and what seemingly limited it was our foolish liking to wander in the sunshine by projecting the appearance of soul, world and God. That is, it was seemingly limited only due to our misusing it to see ourself as many instead of as the one infinite whole that we actually are, so we are always free to stop misusing it and to remain just as we always are.

29th August 1978

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

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

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

[For a while Natesan continued trying to persuade him that he should attend the function, and finally he said, 'You should come, and you can bring all your friends with you', to which Sadhu Om replied:] Everyone is free to do as they like, so whichever friends wish to attend will do so. And who are my friends? All are friends in my eyes, but no one is mine. As is said in verse 49 of *Jñānācāravīcārapāṭalam* [the chapter of *Dēvikālōttaram* that Bhagavan translated into Tamil], no one belongs to me, and I belong to no one.

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

30th August 1978

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

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

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

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

31st August 1978

Sadhu Om: After coming to Bhagavan and taking him as our *guru*, we have to be ready to give up many of our previous beliefs, and to modify and refine other ones. He has given so many correction slips to old ways of thinking. That is, like a teacher correcting the errors in a student’s essay, he has corrected errors in the way that people have interpreted ancient texts, and he has also expressed in a more refined yet clearer manner many of the truths that were formerly concealed within the often obscure or indirect wording of such texts.

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

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

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

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

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

Though the world and mind arise and subside simultaneously, the world shines by the mind. Only that which shines without appearing or disappearing as the base for the appearing and disappearing of the world and mind is *poruḷ* [the real substance], which is *pūṇḍram* [the infinite whole or *pūrṇa*].

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

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

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

Therefore in order to see the *poruḷ* as it actually is we must see ourselves as we actually are, and hence in the second sentence he says: ‘However, knowing the reality of oneself and [thereby] subsiding in and becoming one with the reality of that true substance is alone seeing [it] in reality’. What we actually are is only the nameless and formless *poruḷ*, so when we see the reality of ourselves, the mind that we now seem to be will subside and merge forever in and as the *poruḷ*, and this alone is seeing it as it really is.

It was previously believed that the term ‘heart’ refers to a place in the body where the Lord or *ātman* dwells, and since the heart is also referred to metaphorically as *guhā* [the cave or hiding-place], one of the names of Lord Subrahmanya is *Guhēśa* [the Lord of the cave or the cave-dwelling Lord]. However Bhagavan pointed out that ‘heart’ means the core, centre, interior or innermost part of ourselves, as implied by the Sanskrit term *hṛdaya* [which in some cases becomes *hṛd* or in compound *hṛt*], and therefore refers not to any physical place but only to our real self. For example, in verse 2 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Pañcaratnam* he explained clearly that what is called ‘heart’ or ‘*hṛdaya*’ is actually just Arunachala, the infinite space of

pure awareness, in which this entire world appears and disappears like a picture on a cinema screen, and which shines eternally within each one of us as ‘I’:

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

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

1st September 1978

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

Even Dakshinamurti taught only these two paths so long as he was answering the questions of the four Sanakadi sages, but finally he had to merge back into himself in order to teach them how to merge within and just be, which is the path of being (*sat*), and which can be taught only through silence and not through words. This is why Bhagavan often said that silence is the highest teaching, and it is ever going on in our heart, because it is our real nature.

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

It is only through silence that our real nature can be made known to us, as Bhagavan implies in verse 5 of *Ēkāṇṇma Pañcakam* (*kalivenbā* version):

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

Likewise, it is only to reveal itself through silence that our real nature is manifested outwardly in the motionless form of Arunachala, as Bhagavan explains in verse 2 of *Śrī Aruṇācala Aṣṭakam*:

When [the seer] investigated within the mind who the seer is, I saw what remained when the seer [thereby] became non-existent. The mind did not rise to say ‘I saw’, [so] in what way could the mind rise to say ‘I did not see’? Who has the power to elucidate this [by] speaking, when in ancient times [even] you [as Dakshinamurti] elucidated [it]

without speaking? Only to elucidate your state without speaking, you stood as a hill [or motionlessly] shining [from] earth [to] sky.

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

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

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

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

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

This is what Bhagavan implied in verses 8 and 9 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, in which he says that *ananya-bhāva* (attending to nothing other than oneself) is the best of all practices of *bhakti*, and that by the intensity of such self-attention we will be established in *sat-bhāva* (the state of being), which is beyond all mental activity:

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

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

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

* * * * *

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

and how it rises only by keenly attending to oneself, who now seem to be this mind, the one who sees all this multiplicity.

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

6th September 1978

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

When Chadwick wrote that ‘the egos with which we associate ourselves change’ (*A Sadhu’s Reminiscences*, 3rd edn, 1976, p. 9), what he should have said is that the adjuncts with which the ego associates itself change, because whatever we associate or identify oneself with is an adjunct (*upādhi*), and the ‘we’ who associate oneself with any adjunct is the ego, because our real self (*ātma-svarūpa*) never associates or identifies itself with anything other than itself, since in its clear view nothing other than itself exists.

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

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

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

This body does not say ‘I’ [that is, it is not aware of itself as ‘I’]. No one says ‘In sleep I do not exist’ [even though one was not aware of any body then]. After the one [called]

‘I’ rises, everything rises. Investigate [consider, determine or find out] with a subtle mind where this ‘I’ rises.

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

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

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

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

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

Though it is sometimes said that the ego in dream is different from the ego in waking, what is actually meant is that the body that the ego identifies as itself in each of these two states is a different body. If our body is injured in a dream, when we wake up we find that our waking body is uninjured, but neither of these bodies is ourselves, because they are each just a temporary adjunct. However we are what was aware of ourselves in dream as ‘I am injured’, and this same we are now aware of ourselves as ‘I am not injured’, so though the bodies are different, we, the experiencer of both of them, are undoubtedly the same. This experiencing ‘we’ is the ego or mind.

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

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

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

‘Because my parents told me.’

‘Do you need your parents to tell you that you exist now?’

‘No, I myself know that I am.’

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

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

‘How far back in your life can you remember?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

unchanging space between the moment just past and the immediate future moment – nothing can appear or disappear, so what shines is only ‘I am’, our awareness of our own existence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Until we rise as the ego, we are not aware of anything else, because as Bhagavan says in verse 26 of *Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu*, everything else comes into existence only when the ego comes into existence, and nothing else exists when the ego does not exist. Our real nature is not aware of either the appearance or the disappearance of the ego – in fact it is not aware of the

ego at all, because the ego is just a wrong awareness of ourself, whereas our real nature is clear self-awareness undefiled by the appearance of anything else. Therefore what is aware of the ego is only the ego itself.

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

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

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

Vivarta vāda [the contention that the ego and everything perceived by it is just a false appearance] can hold true only so long as the ego seems to exist, but when we see the reality of the ego, namely our true nature, we will see that no ego has ever existed, so *ajāta* [the fact that nothing has ever been born or come into existence, even as a false appearance] will then shine as the only truth, because since the ego has never existed, nothing else has ever actually existed, since according to *vivarta vāda* everything else depends for its seeming existence upon the seeming existence of the ego.

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

Firstly he says that there is no actual difference between waking and dream, and that while dreaming we seem to be awake, so the body we experience as ourself in dream seems to be as

gross or physical as the body in waking. Therefore whatever body that we experience as ourself, whether in waking or in dream, is a form composed of all the five sheaths.

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

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

In the same verse he says that when the ego leaves one form, it grasps another form, and an analogy he sometimes gave for this is a worm, leech or caterpillar, which leaves one hold only after grasping another one [as recorded, for example, in *Maharshi's Gospel*, Book 1, Chapter 5, *Day by Day* 21-11-45 Night, and *Talks* section 286]. However we should not take this analogy to mean that the ego leaves one body only after grasping another one, but rather that as soon as it leaves one body it grasps another one, because at any given moment it experiences itself as only one body.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So long as the ego is in contact with anything other than itself, its real nature is concealed from it, so in order to find its real nature it must attend to itself alone. This is why Bhagavan said: ‘Its true nature is known when it is out of contact with objects or thoughts’ and ‘The ego in its purity is experienced in the intervals between two states or between two thoughts’ (*Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book 1, Chapter 5). Therefore we should withdraw our attention completely from everything else by fixing it firmly on ourselves alone, as he implies in verse 16 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*:

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

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

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

9th September 1978

Sadhu Om: In verse 803 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* Bhagavan says:

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

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

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

And who can give *śivatva*? Only one who is dissolved in *śiva* as *śiva*, as Bhagavan implies in the previous verse, verse B15 of *Guru Vācaka Kōvai* (verse 10 of *Upadēśa Taṇippākka*):

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

11th September 1978

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

However, because we are so accustomed to attending to other things whenever we are either awake or dreaming, when we try to attend only to the awareness ‘I am’ it seems to shine with a fresh clarity, and this fresh clarity of self-awareness is what is generally called *sphuraṇa*. When we attend to other things the awareness ‘I am’ is mixed up and confused with awareness of a body and other such adjuncts, so instead of shining just as ‘I am’ it shines as ‘I am this body’, but when we try to attend only to our basic self-awareness, ‘I am’, the adjuncts recede into the background and self-awareness begins to shine more clearly and prominently. The more keenly we attend to ‘I am’, the more awareness of all other things fades away, until eventually we remain shining as ‘I am’ alone.

Whenever we attend to anything other than ‘I’ we seem to be a body, but when we try to attend only to ‘I’ we begin to recognise that ‘I’ is actually something quite distinct from whatever body I seem to be. We can make this more clear by considering an example. Suppose we hear that a close friend of ours has just died. We go to his house and see his corpse lying there. Yesterday we were talking with him, but today we see his body lying

lifeless. What is the difference between this lifeless body and the person we were talking with yesterday? Surely that person who was talking and laughing with us was something other than just this body, which is now a corpse. So who was it who was talking to us through the medium of this body? Who was seeing us and hearing our jokes? Who was recollecting the good times we had together in the past? Since the one who was talking, seeing, hearing and remembering is something other than this corpse, who am I who now talks, sees, hears and remembers through this corpse-like body that now seems to be myself?

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

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

If one asks how to investigate [this impure self-awareness that rises as 'I am this body'], [the reply is:] can this body, which is *jaḍa* [non-conscious] like a block of wood, shine and behave as 'I'? It cannot. Therefore, setting down the corpse-body as a corpse, and remaining without uttering 'I' even by [physical or mental] voice, if one keenly investigates what it is that now shines as 'I', then in [one's] heart a kind of *spurippu* [a fresh clarity] alone will itself appear to itself [or to oneself] without sound as 'I am I'. Without leaving that [fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate *ahaṅkāra-rūpa jīva-bhōda* [the sense of individuality in the form of ego], which is called [that is, which experiences itself as] 'body is I', and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished. This itself is said by sages and sacred texts to be *mōkṣa* [liberation].

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

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

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

freshness of that clarity will subside, after which pure self-awareness will shine forever as our natural, eternal and immutable state.

This is what Bhagavan refers to when he says: ‘Without leaving that [*spurippu* or fresh clarity of self-awareness], if one just is, it will completely annihilate the sense of individuality (*jīva-bhōda*) in the form of ego (*ahāṅkāra*), which is called [that is, which experiences itself as] ‘body is I’, and [then], like fire that catches on camphor, it will itself also be extinguished’. What is extinguished when the ego is annihilated is not the clarity of self-awareness but only the freshness of it, because it will then be experienced as the real nature of oneself (*ātma-svarūpa*), which is eternal and immutable.

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

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

12th September 1978

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

This is why Bhagavan advised us to investigate ‘who am I’ in order to experience what we really are, namely pure awareness or *sat-cit-ānanda* [being-awareness-bliss]. However, not understanding that what ‘I’ really is is nothing but pure awareness, people often asked him, ‘When you ask us to investigate who am I, which is the I we are to investigate?’, to which he would generally reply, ‘It is the ego’ [as recorded, for example, in *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 21-11-45 Night and 3-1-46 Afternoon]. Why did he answer in this way?

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

just one thing, a rope that seems to be a snake. Likewise there are not two different 'I's, a real 'I' and an ego, but just one real 'I' that seems to be the ego.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Just as the snake is nothing other than a rope, the ego is nothing other than our real nature. Therefore to see our real nature we just have to look at the ego very carefully. So long as we mistake ourselves to be this ego, we need to investigate it, but our aim is not to know the ego but only to know what we actually are. If we clearly understand the oneness of the ego and our real nature, we will understand that looking at the ego is nothing other than looking at our real nature.

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

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

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

What this person argued is like arguing that we should not look at the rope because Bhagavan said that we should look only at the snake. But how can we look at what seems to be a snake without looking at the rope? We may not recognise that it is a rope, but even when we look at it thinking it is a snake, what we are actually looking at is only a rope. Likewise, even when we do not recognise it as our real nature, when we attend to the ego what we are actually attending to is only our real nature, because what seems to be this ego is nothing other than that.

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

How can we see what we actually are so long as we cling to the belief that the 'I' we are investigating is only the ego? The very purpose of investigating ourselves is for us to see that we are not actually this ego, which we seemed to be till now, but are only beginningless, endless (limitless or infinite) and unbroken (undivided or unfragmented) *sat-cit-ānanda*, as Bhagavan

says in verse 28 of *Upadēśa Undiyār*, so when we attend to ourself we need to give up all ideas about two different 'I's, one of which we know, namely the ego, and the other of which we do not know, namely our real nature.

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

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

26th September 1978

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

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

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

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

This is the *bhāva* that Sundaramurthi [a renowned Tamil poet and one of the sixty-three saints whose stories are recounted in the *Periya Purānam*] had towards God, whom he

considered to be his friend and servant, believing that he would take care of all his needs. This is a very safe and sure *bhāva* to have towards God. Other *bhāvas*, such as the *nayaka-nāyaki bhāva* [that attitude that God is one's bridegroom or husband and that one is his bride], are not suitable for everyone. Only the very purest devotees like Bhagavan are fit to take God to be their lover and bridegroom. That is why he sang *Aruṇācala Akṣaramaṇamālai* [the 'Garland of Imperishable Marriage to Arunachala'] whereas I sang only *Ramaṇākṣara Malar Mālai* [the 'Flower Garland of Letters for Ramana'], because for most of us it is better to consider Bhagavan to be our beloved father and *guru* rather than our bridegroom.

2nd October 1978

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

18th October 1978

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

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

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

However, even if we lack the ability to cling to self-attention firmly and steadily, we should not be disheartened, because what is more important than our ability is our liking to do so. If we truly like to do so, the ability will certainly follow in the tracks of our liking. Therefore we should pray to Bhagavan with all our heart to give us unshakeably firm conviction that happiness is our real nature, because the more we are convinced of this, the more we will like to attend only to ourself, and the more we like to do so, the more we will be

able to do so. To succeed in this path, therefore, *bhakti* [liking or love], *vivēka* [discernment, discrimination or judgement] and the practice of self-attention must all go hand in hand. If we truly like to follow this path and thereby surrender ourselves entirely to Bhagavan, who is God, *guru* and our own real nature, he will do everything else for us.

19th October 1978

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

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

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

This was exemplified by Muruganar, who was his foremost disciple, yet who never accepted for himself the role of *guru*. Whenever anyone told him that they considered him to be their *guru*, he would respond passionately: ‘Who am I to be *guru*? Bhagavan alone is fit to be *guru* for all of us. He alone can save us, so take him alone to be your *guru*’.

20th October 1978

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

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

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

When he finally reveals himself within our heart as the light of pure awareness, he will have prepared us perfectly, so it will happen so smoothly and naturally that it will seem as if nothing has happened, and instead we will see that we are just as we have always been.

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

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

24th October 1978

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

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

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

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

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

2nd November 1978

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

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

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

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

3rd November 1978

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

We can elaborate on this analogy by saying that instead of pointing out that the necklace is around her neck, her friend gives her a mirror and suggests that if she looks in it that may help her to find her necklace. She then has a choice whether to look in the mirror or not. If she looks in it, it will enable her to see where she should look to find her necklace, namely on her own neck. The mirror is like Bhagavan's teachings. If we study them carefully, they will show us where to look to find the happiness we are seeking.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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