



About Nisargadatta

Accounts from Students of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Luckily there are many first-hand accounts from students of the great *jnani* (sage), Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897 – 1981.) However, most of them are spread across the Internet on various sites, and there is no one document I am aware of which collects them all. I thought, in the information saturated and disparate age of the Internet, that it would be a convenient thing to compile them all in one spot for posterity. It is hoped that any original author will appreciate the spirit in which this undertaking has been assembled: it is intended to recognize and appreciate the efforts of various students to set down in words their impressions of a great teacher. I haven't sought permission or copyright for any of these quoted passages, nor do I stand to make a penny out of it. One thing I am impressed by is the eloquence, wit and love demonstrated by every single passage included. Surely the spirit of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj is shining through here. The collection concludes with a reproduction of the only known published book Nisargadatta wrote in his own hand, *Self Knowledge and Self Realisation (Atmagnana and Paramatma Yoga)*, 1963.

*Matthew Brown
Toronto, 2010*

Contents

1. Timothy Conway
2. ShriKant Gogate & P. T. Phadol
3. David Godman
4. Cathy Boucher
5. Alexander Smit
6. Milo Clark
7. Dr. Lakshyan Schanzer
8. Swami Shankarananda
9. Jack Kornfield
10. Nisargadatta Maharaj: *Self Knowledge and Self Realisation*
(first on-line printing)

**Srî Nisargadatta Mahârâj (1897-1981)—Life & Teachings of Bombay's Fiery Sage
of Liberating Wisdom**

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(Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, blissfully seated in his family home in Bombay. Photo by Greg Clifford.)

Every great once in a while, Absolute Awareness manifests within its fascinating dream-play a powerful dream-figure to talk about the nature of the dream and to indicate the transcendent Absolute. Such a figure was Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, a sage of the highest order, a tremendously gifted teacher who spoke directly from Absolute “pure Awareness, unborn Reality,” and thus from real spiritual authority.

The Maharaj was quite clear that all personalities, including his own, and all memories of personal history, are an illusion, devoid of any real, lasting substance, for **there is only the one transpersonal Divine Self**. When asked about his past, the Maharaj declared that there is *no such thing as the past—nothing has ever really happened!*

Bearing this in mind, we shall speak on the conventional level, the level of historical events within the dream of life, to note something of the sage's earth-side history. His biography, which he himself once dismissed as a “dead matter,” is *nevertheless quite useful in displaying or modeling for us the shining virtues of total dedication, one-pointedness, faith in and obedience to the Inner Guru and outer Guru, self-sacrifice, simplicity, loving-kindness, and all-embracing compassion.*

The body of **Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj** (*née Maruti Sivram pant Kambli*) was born on the full-moon day in March, 1897. His deeply religious parents named him Maruti in honor of the festival that day to Hanuman (Maruti), the fabled monkey-king hero of the *Ramayana* epic poem, the helper of Lord Rama. Though born in Bombay, second eldest of six children, Maruti was raised on a family farm in Kandalgaon, a rural village to the south in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri District. This was because his father Sivram pant, who had been employed by a merchant in Bombay, had moved the family to the countryside in 1896 when a plague-epidemic broke out in that bustling port city. We learn from a biographical booklet that "Maharaj's father Shivram pant Kambli and mother Parvatibai were both ardent devotees.... [They] observed very rigorously the traditional fasts and holy days. They made no distinction as between Siva and Vishnu. His father loved to sing *bhajans* [devotional songs], especially loudly as do the followers of [the] Varkari system. [The Varkaris are mystics and devotees of India's Maharashtra state, founded by the sage Jnanesvar (1275-96) and invigorated by the last leading historical figure of the movement, poet-saint-sage Tukaram (1607-49).] ... [Sivram pant] had in his possession a number of traditional holy books which he read regularly and devoutly." (S. Gogate & P.T. Phadol, *Meet the Sage: Shri Nisargadatta*, p. 5)

In his youth, Maruti performed all the forms of hard labor required by life on a farm. Though he received little or no formal education, he was exposed to spiritual ideas by quietly listening to and absorbing the conversations between his father Sivram pant and the latter's friend, Visnu Haribhau Gore, a pious brahman.

Sivrampant died in 1915, and in 1920, a 23-year-old Maruti came to Bombay (after his older brother) to find work to help support the family back home. At first he landed a job as an office clerk, but then he took the initiative to move out on his own, eventually becoming prosperous in business as the owner of a chain of small retail shops with 30-40 employees, primarily selling *bidis*, hand-rolled leaf cigarettes. In 1924, Maruti married a young woman named Sumatibai. Their family came to include a son and three daughters. At the behest of a friend, one Yasvantrao Bagkar, in 1933 Maruti visited **Sri Siddharamesvar Maharaj** (1888-1936), a sage of the Navnath Sampradaya, a line of householder gurus tracing its origins to legendary *avatars* (Divine incarnations) Gorakhnatha (also sometimes traced further back to Lord Dattatreya). The Navnath lineage taught the sublime philosophy and direct, nondual experience of Absolute Being. On Maruti's third visit to Sri Siddharamesvar (or Siddharameshwar), he received instruction in meditation and formal initiation into the Navnath line (Incheheri branch). He was given a *mantra*, and, upon receiving it, began to recite it diligently. Within minutes, he inwardly experienced a dazzling illumination of varied colors and fell into *samadhi*, complete absorption into the unitary state of non-dual awareness. Eventually Maruti became Siddharamesvar's leading disciple. He totally obeyed his guru, doing or giving up whatever Siddharamesvar commanded, since the Guru's word was law unto him. The transformation in his character was so great that all of Maruti's employees also became initiates of Siddharamesvar. After a year of association with Siddharamesvar, Maruti was asked to give spiritual discourses on numerous occasions; we learn, for instance, that he gave a series of 12 discourse-commentaries on spiritual books at the hometown of his friend Bagkar in 1935. Maruti began to impress people, not only with his cognitive understanding of spirituality but also his radiant exemplification of Truth. In those days, he gave spontaneous talks to anyone coming to his shop seeking his spiritual wisdom. Some brought their sick relatives to him, hoping for cures. He sent the afflicted to a cafe at the street corner, telling them to drink a glass of water therein—and in doing so, they were often healed. Siddharamesvar learned of this and asked Maruti to stop intending such healings, which are trivial in light of the need for spiritual awakening from the ultimate "dis-ease" of identifying with the body-mind personality. Nevertheless, over the years, many miracles and synchronicities still occurred. Maruti eventually took on the name *Nisargadatta*, meaning "naturally-given truth" or "one dwelling in the natural state." As he later told a dear disciple and successor, Jean Dunn: "*At one time I was composing poems. Poems used to flow out of me and, in this flow, I just added 'Nisargadatta.'* I was reveling in composing poems until my Guru cautioned me, 'You are enjoying composing these poems too much; give them up!' What was he driving at? His objective was for me to merge in the Absolute state instead of reveling in my beingness." (*Consciousness and the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, pp. 7-8.) Nisargadatta became primarily interested only in practicing the meditation as prescribed by his Guru and singing devotional *bhajan* songs. In his meditations, Nisargadatta experienced strange and colorful divine lights, various divine forms of God and saints, visions of beautiful landscapes never seen before, and deep trance states of *samadhi*. These manifestations of initial "imbalance" ceased after a while, giving way to absorptions—later, final absorption—in the utterly natural state of *nisarga samadhi*, or *sahaja samadhi*. This "extraordinarily ordinary," "unconditioned condition" is formless

Awareness abiding unto ItSelf while a form-full world of changing appearances arises. It has been likened to “waking sleep” by the illustrious sage, Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), wherein one experiences the utter peace and care-free bliss of formless deep sleep while clearly aware of arising forms of experience. This *nisarga* or *sahaja samadhi* transcends all dramatic, flashy “experiences”—for such experiences are changing and transient, and rooted in the dualistic, subject-object split. **Nisargadatta himself tells of his time with his Guru, and what transpired in the more mature phase of his spiritual practice (*sadhana*):**

*My association with my Guru was scarcely for two and a half years. He was staying some 200 kilometers [120 miles] away, and he would come here once every four months, for fifteen days. This [realization] is the fruit of that. The words he gave me touched me very deeply. I abided in one thing only: the words of my Guru are the truth, and he said, "You are the **Parabrahman** [Absolute Reality]." No more doubts and no more questions on that. Once my Guru conveyed to me what he had to say I never bothered about other things—I hung on to the words of the Guru. (Prior to Consciousness, pp. 1-2, April 4, 1980)*

My Guru told me: "...Go back to that state of pure being, where the 'I am' is still in its purity before it got contaminated with 'I am this' or 'I am that.' Your burden is of false self-identifications—abandon them all." My guru told me, "Trust me, I tell you: you are Divine. Take it as the absolute truth. Your joy is divine, your suffering is divine too. All comes from God. Remember it always. You are God, your will alone is done." I did believe him and soon realized how wonderfully true and accurate were his words. I did not condition my mind by thinking, "I am God, I am wonderful, I am beyond." I simply followed his instruction, which was to focus the mind on pure being, "I am," and stay in it. I used to sit for hours together, with nothing but the "I am" in my mind and soon the peace and joy and deep all-embracing love became my normal state. In it all disappeared—myself, my guru, the life I lived, the world around me. Only peace remained, and unfathomable silence. (I Am That, Dialogue 51, April 16, 1971)

Sri Siddharamesvar Maharaj passed away on November 9, 1936, just before the Divali festival commenced. Nisargadatta had traveled a bit with Siddharamesvar, such as to his Guru's home town of Patri, and "he did not miss, during those days, even a single traditional function [e.g., celebrations of birthdays and mahasamadhi passing days of the Gurus of recent lineage holders of the Navnath sampradaya] held at Inchgeri, Bagewadi and Siddhagiri (Kolhapur) [in Maharashtra]." (*Meet the Sage*, p. 15)

A year later, during the Divali celebrations in Fall, 1937, **Nisargadatta left home**, taking up the life of a renunciate, an acceptable thing in India for someone who is genuinely called to spiritual freedom. He was inspired by a remark his guru had once made: “Is there anyone ready to renounce material life completely for the sake of his Sadguru’s word?” Without informing anyone, Nisargadatta left Bombay, travelling on foot southeast to Maharashtra's holy temple town of Pandharpur (a center for the Varkari movement). There, he gave up his costly clothes, put on a simple garment, and with only two small pieces of loincloth and a coarse woollen covering, he began the life of a penniless wanderer. Under the scorching sun, Nisargadatta walked to Gangapur, then turned south and roamed on foot through Tamil Nadu in India's deep south, visiting more shrines, temples, and holy places. Through the Grace of his discarnate Guru, Nisargadatta was never without food. On one occasion, an old man and a house miraculously

materialized themselves out of nowhere in a barren place to provide the hungry, tired Nisargadatta with food, water and a brief resting place. When he departed, on a whim he looked back after taking several steps: the place had completely vanished! It was evidently a yogic mental creation inter-dimensionally dreamed up by Siddharamesvar to assist his dedicated successor on his path of utter renunciation.

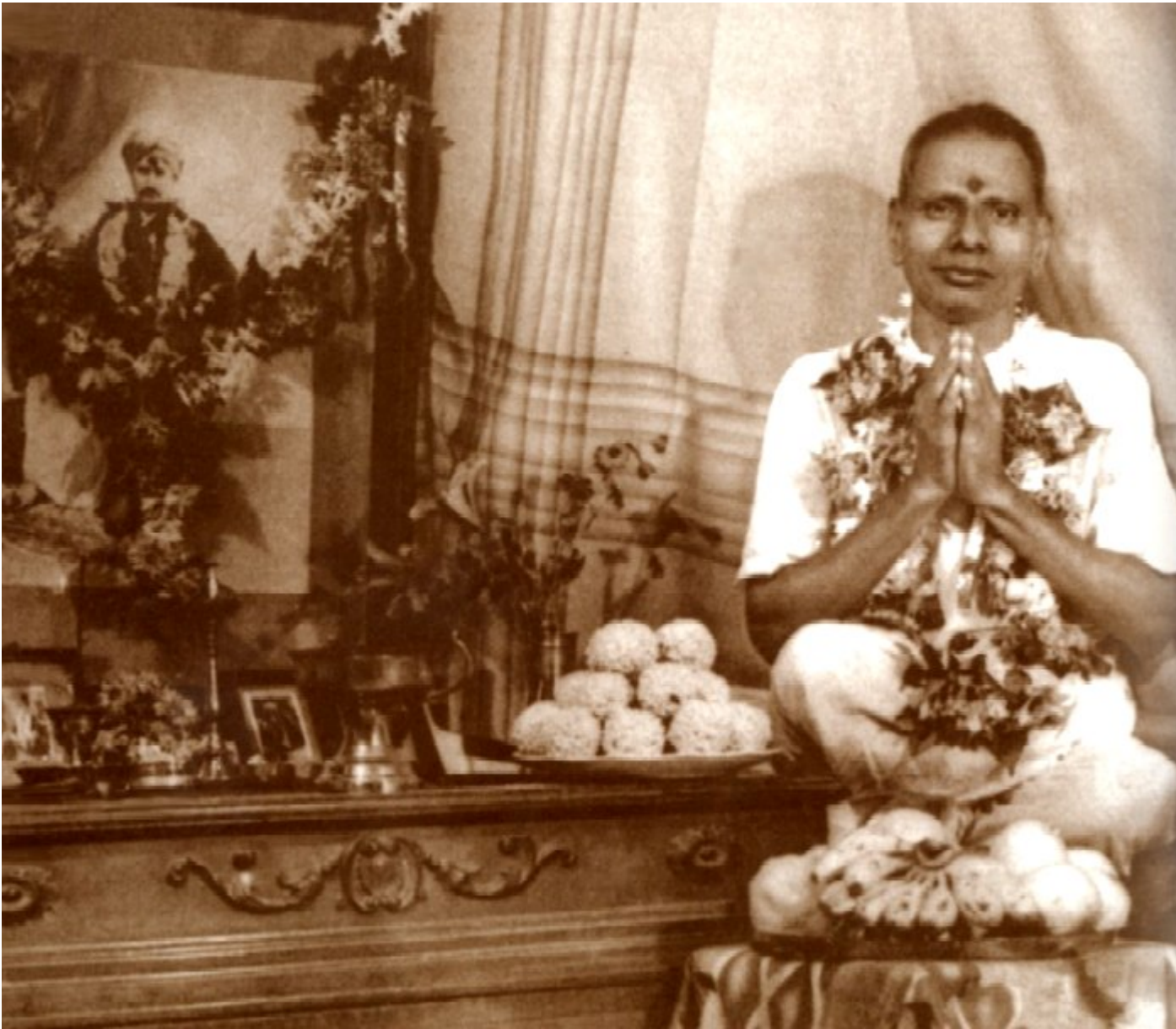
After visiting the pilgrimage town Rameswaram, at the southern tip of India, Nisargadatta traveled northward, coming back through the eastern part of Maharashtra state, where a fellow disciple gave him a photo of Sri Siddharamesvar, some saffron cloth for a sannyasin's robe, and a copy of the nondually-oriented wisdom text, *Dasbodh*, by Samartha Ramdas, a 17th century Marathi sage. Nisargadatta then walked north as far as Agra, Mathura-Brindavan and Delhi, intending to continue on up into the Himalayas and there adopt the life of total renunciation and austerities. However, meeting and conversing with another fellow disciple of Siddharamesvar in Delhi convinced Nisargadatta that returning to live with his family in Bombay would not impede the spirit of renunciation—for true renunciation is an inward unattachment having nothing to do with one's external situation. On the return journey he evidently opened up in an irreversible, unbroken realization of the *Atma* or transcendent-immanent Divine Self. His spiritual practices had exhausted all *samskaras*, the problematic likes and dislikes inherited from past karma. He had spontaneously, finally awakened to Absolute Self, Absolute Reality. All attachment, aversion, and delusion had ended. Nisargadatta was now totally free in the Freedom of the *jivanmukta*, one liberated while still functioning with a body. As he put it, "*Nothing was wrong anymore.*"

After his eight months of wandering, pilgrimage and full awakening from the dream of "me," **Nisargadatta came once again to Bombay in 1938**. His business virtually wiped out, he lived in the family apartment (Vanmali Bhavan building) on 10th Lane in the hectic downtown Khetwadi area, just one block from a busy boulevard, maintaining one nearby tiny alcove street-front shop as an income-source for his family. He himself reduced all bodily needs to a minimum, and spent almost all his free time in the little mezzanine loft he had built in the high-ceiling apartment. Here he could be found absorbed in meditative *samadhi* or singing *bhajans* or reading great Hindu scriptures of nondual wisdom and devotion: *Yoga-Vasishtha*, Eknatha's *Bhagavat*, Ramdas' *Dasbodha*, Jnanesvar's *Amritanubhava* and *Jnanesvari* (Gita Commentary), Tukaram's poems, Sankara's treatises, and some major *Upanishads*, and, last but not least, the words of his Guru, Sri Siddharamesvar, whose teachings had been collected by several disciples, including Nisargadatta (see, for instance, the two volumes of *Amrut Laya: The Stateless State*, available for purchase on the Internet at www.sadguru.com). Nisargadatta fathomed the highest meaning of these texts through the deep spiritual insight gained from quality time with both the Inner Guru and the outer Guru, Siddharamesvar, though he'd never received any formal higher-education or training.

Nisargadatta's sharpness as a spiritual teacher was honed through intense conversations with his brother disciple K.A. Sabnis, better known as Sri Bhainath Maharaj. "From 1941 onwards he came in close contact with [Bhainath].... Everyday they usually used to go to Girgaum Chaupati for a walk after the shop hours. They were engrossed for hours together in their [entirely spiritual] discussion.... In those days of the Second World War there used to be a black-out every night. Sometimes even curfew hours were on, due to communal riots and house-fires. Close by, country bombs used to explode on the open

streets. Braving such tense atmosphere and unmindful of the rain or the cold winds, these two Gurubandhus were engrossed for hours together in spiritual discussions on the Chaupati sands or the Chaupati bandstand or sitting on the footsteps of a closed shop or standing at the corner of N. Powell [Rd.]. It was not uncommon that when they reached home it was two or three hours past midnight. Their daily routine mundane duties, however, did not suffer on that account.... These long and subtle talks on spiritual matters helped both. This nightly spiritual fire was continuously on for 25 years." (*Meet the Sage*, pp. 24-5) Nisargadatta did most of the talking, once telling Bhainath, "You are very cool like Lord Vishnu. Look at me! I am like the fiery Lord Rudra [Siva]."

Pushing his body to its limits of endurance, Nisargadatta's physical health broke down; he contracted tuberculosis at one point, and cancer at another time. But in each case, faith in his Guru and regular exercise, such as 500 daily prostrations in front of the picture of his Guru, restored his body to health.



(Photo of a young Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj seated in his shrine room by the altar featuring a framed, garlanded image of his Guru, Sri Siddharameswar Maharaj (1888-1936))

During the years 1942 to 1948, the passing away of a dear daughter, his devoted (if somewhat "bossy") and beloved wife, and his revered mother, and the horrible violence and turbulence of India's independence and subsequent partition, could not shake Maharaj's enlightened equanimity, which treats all happenings as the dream-drama of an unborn, undying, universal consciousness. Fully awake, nothing can disturb one who abides as transcendental, absolute Awareness beyond its play of consciousness.

Ever since his return to Bombay in 1938, Nisargadatta had been sought out by those desiring his counsel on spiritual matters. Many wanted to become his disciples and get formal *mantra*-initiation from him, reverentially calling him "Maharaj," "Great (Spiritual) King." Yet he was reluctant to have disciples and serve as a guru. **Finally, in 1951, after receiving an inner revelation from Siddharamesvar, he began to initiate students into discipleship.** In 1966, Nisargadatta finally made a complete retirement from any further business-work and let his married son, Chittaranjan, take over full operation of the tiny shop selling bidis and various goods. But long before this, Nisargadatta was allowing devotees to gather in his 8x12-foot mezzanine room for twice-daily open sessions of meditation, bhajan, and inquiry into spiritual truth. This room was later expanded to 8x18 feet to accommodate the larger groups that began to visit him after Maharaj was introduced to the wider world of spiritual aspirants by the several pages on him in Peter Brent's 1972 book, *Godmen of India*, and, especially, by the December 1973 publication in Marathi and English of the **amazing book, *I Am That: Conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj.***

This landmark book of searing nondual truth was edited and translated by Maharaj's longtime sagely friend and interlocutor, Maurice Frydman, an illustrious Polish Jew turned Indian citizen, a brilliant engineer, tireless humanitarian and activist in Gandhi's justice movement, and a great mystic himself who had studied under Ramana Maharshi and J. Krishnamurti from the late 1930s onward. Maharaj regularly referred to his friend Maurice as a true gnostic-sage, a *jnani*, and the Maharaj was at Maurice's bedside when the latter "dropped the body" in 1976. Incidentally, the book-title *I Am That* is somewhat confusing. The Maharaj always taught that one must stand prior to all identifications with "I am this" or "I am that" and dwell in the basic "I am" sense until the Divine Grace of one's Real Nature awakens one to the Absolute Awareness beyond even the "I am"-sense. Thus, the word "That" in the book-title *I Am That* refers only to the Absolute prior to and beyond the "I Am."

Even before the 1972 release of Brent's book and the first edition of *I Am That* the following year, **Maharaj had become widely known** through word of mouth and through some small booklets of his talks, teachings and writing, and the fact that he was the leading disciple of Sri Siddharamesvar. Biographers Gogate and Phadol wrote of Sri Nisargadatta in 1972: "Averse to publicity, he is well-known to many earnest aspirants of Truth.... The great Saint Shree Nisargadatta Maharaj personifies a continuous flow of ecstatic bliss of Self. His saintly life itself is an auspicious living message providing inspiration and guidance to all.... He speaks out what he himself experiences within.... Shree Maharaj reveals, through his daily discourses and talks, the essence of Reality through his own conviction with exceptional vigor and clarity. Knowledge flows through his talks everyday for hours on end. It pours freely like the rain and is addressed to all who are present. Narrow distinctions of male and female, high and low, caste and creed, isms or schools make no sense here. His sublime and Saintly looks pour peace and love equally on all.... His audience includes seekers from different walks of life. Professors, pleaders [lawyers], judges, high executives, political and social [and spiritual] leaders often visit the Ashram [his mezzanine loft] to seek spiritual guidance from him. Seekers of Truth from the West like Shri Maurice Frydman often visit him for discussion and spiritual guidance. Since he has no expectations from others, he is, as in his day-to-day practical life, exceptionally plain and uninhibited in his spiritual teachings as well.

Worldly matters have no room with him. Shree Maharaj is against making use of spiritual powers (*siddhis*) to seek worldly ends though his faithful devotees do experience his powers in their daily life.... On the holy days like the birthdays and anniversaries of Sadgurus in the tradition, Guru Purnima, Deepavali, Deevali, etc., celebrations are held in specially rented big halls with great enthusiasm. On these occasions Shree Maharaj himself loudly sings devotional songs and dances to the tune. It is a lovely scene to witness. Shri Maharaj does not at all like the idea of celebrating his own birthday, but he had to acquiesce in the importunities of his devotees. In the recent past [late 1960s, early 1970s] the number of disciples of Shree Maharaj in the city of Bombay and in other places has considerably increased. He undertakes tours four or five times a year to visit, along with some disciples, holy places like Bagewadi, Inchgeri, [and] Siddhagiri, which are the birth places of Sadgurus in the [Navnath] Sampradaya. He also visits, though rarely, the places of disciples who stay out of Bombay." (*Meet the Sage*, pp. 32, 30, 29-30)

By the latter 1970s, the Maharaj's traveling had largely dropped off due to old age and illness (throat cancer, diagnosed in 1980). Roughly 20 visitors daily, now including a disproportionately greater number of Westerners, were coming to Sri Nisargadatta for spiritual clarity, the number of persons expanding to about 30 persons on Sundays and holidays. Except for a throng of long-standing devotees, these visitors were frequently new faces, since the Maharaj was not interested in collecting a following, but preferred that his students hear, understand, and then go live the teaching. Thus, he never allowed any separate spacious ashram to be built, though, as mentioned, he did allow large halls to sometimes be rented for bhajans and discourses on certain holy days, and for this purpose and a few small publishing and charitable projects the "Sri Nisargadatta Adhyatma Kendra" organization was registered in 1976. Because the *I Am That* book in the latter 1970s began to draw a greater number of people than could be squeezed into his little mezzanine loft, the Maharaj generally allowed people to stay for only a few weeks or even just a few days. Many persons would come for up to two weeks, then clear out, go elsewhere, and come back several months later for another short period before leaving, usually to return once again at a later date.

The Maharaj's **mezzanine loft** was marked by a strong, strangely beautiful peace, despite the fact that the ensuing years saw this particular Bombay neighborhood, like many other urban areas of the developing world, grow increasingly in density, din, odor and squalor. There, in that little room up the narrow, steep stairs, a little bit above and away from the outside noise and smell (from a public urinal across the street and other urban odors), one encountered Maharaj in the vastness of consciousness disguised as the little Indian man in the tiny urban loft. On the loft's south end was a fairly large window overlooking 10th Lane, on the other end to the north, next to the stairs, stood the rather regal wood-and-silver altar to Sri Siddharamesvar and the Navnath line of Gurus. Completing the configuration were one long wall with a window to the east and a facing wall on the west side, without windows, along which the stairs descended. Numerous framed photos and images, including not just Sri Siddharameshvar and the Navnath line of gurus, but other sages like the illustrious Sri Ramana Maharshi, J. Krishnamurti, Maurice Frydman, and even a painting of Maharaj himself, gazed down beneficently from their position high along the walls.

The living, breathing Nisargadatta Maharaj, about 5'4" tall, was usually dressed in a simple white cotton short-sleeved shirt or long-sleeved white kurta, sometimes going bare-chested in the heat or, in the cooler periods, wearing over his white shirt a beige kurta or an old orange sweater vest, sometimes including a dark wool jacket. Instead of modern trousers, he preferred the traditional white dhoti worn long down to the ankles and/or folded under and between the legs. When walking outside, he often donned, not just sunglasses, but also the white "freedom cap" worn by so many of the older Indian men. He wore no special robes, regalia or paraphernalia. His only concession to tradition was a dab of red vermilion powder between the eyebrows. His few physical props were his lighter, his incense sticks, and his cigarettes. Even when the doctors finally succeeded in getting him to stop smoking bidis around late 1980, he wryly confessed that he was still often chewing tobacco. When teaching, the Maharaj usually sat cross-legged on a cushion on the floor, or sometimes on a low folding chair, with a small towel over his lap. He varied where he sat, from the windowed end of the room, to a position near the stairs, to a spot against the long wall. (For an even more vivid and extensive description of the environs and happenings around Maharaj, see **Milo Clark's delightful essay "A Day with Maharaj"**, linked in the **Resources** section below.)

Maharaj declared: "*I speak every day on the same subject.*" (*Seeds of Consciousness*, p. 165) That subject was **our real Identity as the birthless-deathless, infinite-eternal Absolute Awareness or Parabrahman, and Its play of emanated universal consciousness.** For Maharaj, our only taxing problem is a case of *mistaken identity*: **we presume to be an individual, and, originally and fundamentally, we are not an individual, we are intrinsically always and only the Absolute.** The play of consciousness as an individual, a person, a "me," is fleeting, insubstantial and thus a playful dream of *maya*-illusion. Insofar as we, the formless Absolute (*Parabrahman, Nirguna Brahman, Shiva*) have any "relatively real" manifestation, we *are* the entire play of Universal Consciousness (*Saguna Brahman, Shakti, Caitanya, Cidakash*). Which is why the Maharaj would often state, on the matter of our "relative level" identity, "Look upon all as your Self," "Consciousness is the same in all," "It is the same Consciousness in Lord Krishna, a human being, a donkey, or an ant," "There is only one Consciousness," "You are I only, I am you," "my real nature is your real nature," and so forth.

The Maharaj's quintessential spiritual way for any visitors and disciples ripe enough to understand was **awakening to this Universal Consciousness and even beyond that unto the Absolute Awareness or Open Divine Reality.** The specific method was a radical *disidentification* from the dream of "me and my world" via intensely meditative self-inquiry (*atma-vicara*) and supreme Wisdom-Knowledge (*vijñana* or *jñana*). "I know only *Atma-yoga*, which is 'Self-Knowledge,' and nothing else.... My process is *Atma-yoga*, which means abidance in the Self." (*The Nectar of Immortality*, pp. 22, 25)

Operationally, this is the classic **threefold practice of hearing the Truth of our Absolute Nature, pondering this Truth, and meditating deeply on this Truth** (*sravana, manana* and *nididhyasana*) until we are fully, unshakeably established in this **conviction** that we are *not* the body-mind-soul ego personality or individual, no, our real nature or identity is the trans-egoic Reality-Awareness. This threefold practice of hearing-pondering-meditating is identified as the classic way of awakening in the ancient *Upanishads* (e.g., *Bṛhadaranyaka* iv.5.6, *Paingala*, iii.2) and later scriptures, and in the

works of Sankara (c.700 CE) and other *advaita* (nondual) sages. The eminent Mahayana Buddhist forefather Nagarjuna (c.110-200) likewise had advocated this triple method of hearing-pondering-meditating (*sruti-cinta-bhavana*) on the Truth of *Sunyata*-Absolute Openness-Emptiness.

Maharaj often emphasized the need for **deeply hearing, pondering and meditating upon—and firmly stabilizing in**—his teaching about the "I Am" consciousness and the Absolute Awareness beyond. But he frequently summarized for his listeners this classic triple method in an even pithier formulation of the way: "**Just be what you hear**"—i.e., *be* the truth of Awareness, the Source-Reality denoted by these words of wisdom.

In slightly more elaborate form, as Maharaj himself so often put it, you clearly and intuitively know or apperceive that *you are*. No one has any real doubts about this fundamental fact of their consciousness, beingness, knowingness, presence or "I-Am-ness." Maharaj would say, *meditate on and remain as this "I-Am-ness,"* fervently focus on and ponder this fundamental experience or fact of "I Am," free of all limiting identifications with "I am *this*" or "I am *that*." Notice the chronic tendency to identify with "this" or "that" as *me*—"me" in the form of "my mind," "my body," my being a "man" or a "woman," my being "good" or "bad," my being a devotee of this religion or that, this political party or that. Said Maharaj: "Just be, and don't get restless 'trying' to be, *just be*." "Just be in your beingness." Simply and clearly dwelling as the unidentified, undefined "I Am" sense of sheer presence (what Sri Ramana Maharshi always called "the I-thought"), **the Grace of One's Real Nature as Absolute Reality or Parabrahman takes over and finally even merges that basic "I Am" presence into Pure, Absolute Awareness**, our Infinite, Eternal, Ever-Abiding Identity. This Awareness is more "no-knowingness" than "knowingness," more *Absence* (of anything or anyone) than *presence*. Yet this "Absence" is no mere "vacuous emptiness" but is the Stupendous Reality, the *Nirguna Parabrahman* (quality-less Divine Reality) beyond *saguna Brahman* (Divine Reality with qualities, manifestation, beingness), as sage Sankara, Nisargadatta and other Indian sages distinguish.

In other words, one's life and the life of every sentient being is the play of consciousness (*caitanya*) and its vital force (*prana*). Identified as an individual, one's consciousness is somatic- or body-based (i.e., the body comprised of food-essence). But one's real, trans-individual, transpersonal Being is the Absolute Awareness that is bodiless, mindless, spaceless, timeless, birthless, deathless, and Vastness beyond vastness, Aliveness beyond aliveness, Intelligence beyond intelligence, the one and only unmanifest Self beyond all apparent manifest selves. Says Maharaj, one must deploy all one's consciousness and life-force to investigate how **this consciousness is the root of all experiences of the *jiva* or individual**—bodily, mental and psychic. Going further, however, one must find out **what is the transcendent Source of this all-manifesting consciousness**. As Maharaj stated the *two stages of disidentification via witnessing*: "There are two witnessing stages; beingness [consciousness] witnesses all this manifestation. [And] witnessing of this beingness, consciousness, happens to that eternal principle, the Absolute." (*Prior to Consciousness*, p. 4) He also declared: "There is only one consciousness [manifesting all beings-events]. You must become one with and stabilize in that consciousness, then you transcend it." (*Consciousness and the Absolute*, p. 12)

Beyond mere conceptualizing or intellectualizing about this on the level of individual consciousness, **there must be authentic establishment or stabilizing in/as this**

transcendental Source, the Ultimate. *Because Absolute Awareness can never be seen, perceived, thought of or grasped as an object (just as the fingertip cannot touch itself), the only "task" is to simply, magnificently abide, remain, "stay put" or "keep quiet" as this Absolute Awareness or Parabrahman, the No-thing which dreams up everything as Its wild, wonderful, pleasurable, painful play of consciousness and its objects.*

I once heard the Maharaj declare, in typical parlance, "Presently we are one with 'I am-ness.' This is delusion. You as the Absolute must get out of that. Were you concerned about this 'I am' before you came into it? Because it came into being spontaneously, without any of your doing, so it will disappear, spontaneously, without your doing, and the Absolute which you are will remain."

Thus, paradoxically, you can't "try" to abide as Absolute Awareness, for you *always already are THIS Awareness*, prior to the universal consciousness and any sense of individuality. As he sometimes clarified: "What you ARE you cannot *become*. You can only *be That*." Likewise, one can't even "try" to witness, for one's real nature as the Absolute is already witnessing the consciousness, and, in turn, consciousness is already witnessing the world, sensations, thoughts, emotions, etc. of the apparent individual. **Nisargadatta Maharaj made the most of this paradox, giving lots of imperatives** to be utterly *earnest* (an oft-used word!) in disidentifying, witnessing, letting go, constantly meditating, stabilizing and remaining as Awareness, **yet he also often said that there is "nothing to do," and "don't make efforts."** Thereby, the sage created in his listeners a sense of paralyzing paradox of "*effortless effort*" which wondrously leads to a profound awakening to What We Already Are as Absolute Awareness. And yes, **one must paradoxically get "established" or "stabilized" in THIS Reality**, not just settle for fleeting glimpses. Which is why the Maharaj so often urged, "**You must meditate!**" And meditation must mature or ripen into the **deepest and firmest possible intuitive conviction** that we are not consciousness and the "I Am-ness," but are the Absolute always spacelessly right HERE, timelessly right NOW. This Reality is immediately our very Truth, "nearer" than the either the bodymind complex or the "I Am-ness." In case there is any confusion on this point, consider the following. When people, faced with the Maharaj's teaching on the Absolute beyond the sense of "I-Am-ness," responded with any expressed intention to *get rid of or suppress or terminate* the "I Am," **the sage would clearly tell them that this is not needed.** He would say that, just as one's Absolute Eternal Nature is spontaneously Real, so also the "I-Am-ness," though only temporally, relatively real (and hence ultimately *false*, destined to disappear), is *spontaneously present*, albeit as a superimposition on our Real Nature. It is the spontaneous play of the unlimited, changeless Absolute which sports as the ever-changing creative "I Am" consciousness, which in turn has whimsically or mischievously conjured up the limited individual sense of personality. So, says the Maharaj, **there is nothing to do about the "I-Am-ness" but just penetrate it by deeply meditating upon it.** This is "**meditating on the meditator,**" "**contemplating the contemplator,**" as he sometimes said. Such profound meditation on the root-sense of individuality and personal presence results in a paradoxical combination of *complete witnessing* of the "I Am" along with *being completely one with* the Consciousness that is "I Am." Upon fully seeing-being this "I Am," by the Divine Grace of one's Real Nature this root of all individuality

is transcended, and What remains is only the inconceivable, unimaginable Ultimate, the Alone (All-One), the Absolute Freedom, Fullness and Felicity.

In addition to the Maharaj's well-known and much-discussed *cognitive-intuitive* way of awakening to the Absolute via the preliminary step of contemplating the "I Am-ness" or consciousness, Sri Nisargadatta also sometimes outlined (especially during some talks in mid-July 1980) a much less-known preliminary path: what might be termed an *energetic-intuitive way of awakening based on contemplating and fully feeling and unfolding the prana or sakti, the life force, life breath or vital energy*. Ancient Indian texts speak of this life force, subdividing it into the *pañcapranas* or "five breaths / vital forces": *prana, samana, apana, vyana, and udana*, the energies that govern breathing, digestion, excretion, circulation, and regulation of the three basic cyclic states (waking, dream, sleep). The Maharaj did not delve into particularities but instead simply pointed out the obvious—that without the *prana* or *sakti* vital energy, we cannot live, think, feel, move or do anything. Whereas consciousness is the "static" *sentience principle* in our lives, the *prana-sakti* life force is the "dynamic" *working, acting, kinetic principle*, said the Maharaj, though ultimately "[they] are not really two... they are really one.... Consciousness and life force are two components, inextricably woven together, of one principle." "Life force, love and consciousness are all one in essence." (*The Ultimate Medicine*, pp. 124, 161, 165.) Therefore, this vital force is really *Pranesvar*, the Lord of Energy, the effective God of our lives and world, "the highest principle," the "Great Power or Great Energy without which there cannot be consciousness" (*ibid.*, p. 170.) "This life force is God and God is this life force." (*ibid.*, p. 121.)

Accordingly, Sri Nisargadatta said (as he would often likewise say of consciousness or the "I Am-sense"), make this life-force power your friend and your highest God—meditate upon, pray to and worship this God, "your constant companion," instead of praying to some mere abstract image or heavenly concept of "God" as is done in most devotional religious paths. Now, the Maharaj did *not* teach or recommend the two traditional ways of working with the *prana-sakti*: the complicated tantra of kundalini yoga (working with the *cakra* energy centers along the spine, balancing the *ida* and *pingala* energy currents, etc.), or the even more ancient eight-part Yoga of Patañjali with its breath-regulation (*pranayama*), postures (*asanas*) and so on. No, the Maharaj simply made a general but very *subtle* recommendation to *befriend, focus on, fathom, worship, abide in and just be this vital force, and be careful not to "dissipate" or "demote" or "sully" the life energy by identifying it merely with the body and its urges*. By "unconditioning" the life force, one allows this *prana-sakti* to spontaneously "purify," to transcend any fixation on the individual person and selfish desires. The vital energy then can "unfold" or open up freely to its true vast and potent nature as the transpersonal, universal life force. Finally, "this life force... merges with the light of the *Atman*/Self." (*ibid.*, p. 121) Thus does one transcend death, for the universal life-force cannot perish. There is tremendous **austerity** in what the Maharaj is teaching, whether in his intuitive way of self-inquiry into universal consciousness or his way of abiding as the universal life-force. He is, after all, speaking of the deepest possible renunciation—*renunciation of being a bodymind individual*, a "me." And yet, of course, this is *no actual "renunciation,"* since one is only remaining or abiding as What One truly IS, in all the glorious majesty and empty-fullness of One's Reality: Absolute Awareness-Bliss-Grace.

Meanwhile, on the conventional, mundane level of **the play of consciousness as an apparent individual**, one is *not* to become a zombie, sociopath, or idle simpleton! The Maharaj insisted that one must allow the body-mind and vital force to appropriately fulfill its destined duties and relationships. "You must not keep yourself idle; so do go on working. [However,] whether working for the poor, the community or for progress, whatever it is that you do, be at that stage of knowledge, of real consciousness." (*The Ultimate Medicine*, pp. 132-3) He also remarked: "Understand that the total manifestation is the child of a barren woman [i.e., not real, only dream-like], but having understood this, give full attention to your work, and let that work be done as efficiently as possible.... It does not mean that you should neglect your worldly duties; carry these out with full zest." (*Consciousness and the Absolute*, pp. 43, 12) Clearly, this attention to one's duties does *not* mean falling into worldliness, selfishness, and ego-based attachments and aversions, the entangling realm of desires and fears. Sri Nisargadatta in his own way would often echo the well-known **counsels of his Guru, Sri Siddharmamesvar, "Realize the Self and behave accordingly!" "Use this Self-Power in the right way."** Over the years, Nisargadatta himself issued frequent warnings in his conversations not to succumb to pride, body-based desires, exploitation of others, hypocrisy, ambition, needless complications in one's lifestyle and relationships, and so forth.

And why? Because these things entangle one in the felt-sense of egoic individuality and this, in turn, produces the big, long, miserable dream of the egoic rebirth cycle, *samsara*. The Maharaj, speaking purely on the **Absolute Truth-level** (*paramarthika-satya*), would usually deny the doctrines of karma, life after death, and rebirth—for these presume the existence of a separate individual being or person, which he ultimately denied. But the records we have of the Maharaj's conversations also display with about the same frequency his brief mentions and even explicit warnings on the **conventional truth-level** (*vyavaharika-satya*) about getting karmically enmeshed in the rebirth cycle. So if one is still identified with being an individual bodymind, and fueling this delusion with unvirtuous, unskillful attitudes and behavior, welcome to the confused, conflicted dream of *samsara*! If one has abandoned selfishness through wisdom, devotion, dedication and virtue, and thereby allowed the authentic transcendence of egoic individuality, one easily stands Free and Clear as Absolute Awareness, the always-Unborn Reality.

Much has been made about Sri Nisargadatta's **forcefully electric style** in presenting and teaching the Truth of What We Are for his listeners—a style that could quickly turn explosive and blazing—with severely pointed words, coarse speech (even untranslated cusswords), personally challenging "impolite" remarks, outrageous statements, and those famously fierce gazes and dramatic movements and extravagant gestures performed like a great thespian orator—hands loudly clapping or slapping down onto his thighs, a finger suddenly extended upward or sideward or jabbed toward the listener.

Not only did the Maharaj sometimes insult his own Hindu tradition (e.g., irreverent humorous puns on the names of the gods and goddesses), he often insulted or testily confronted his own students and visitors. David Godman, author of valuable books on Ramana Maharshi and his disciples, recalls in his colorful and insightful memoir of visits with Maharaj [see Resources section below]: "We all got shouted at on various occasions, and we all got told off from time to time because of things we did or said. We were all a little fearful of him because we never knew when the next eruption would come. We had

all come to have the dirt beaten out of us, in the same way that the *dhobis* [washer-folk] clean clothes by smashing them on rocks. Maharaj smashed our egos, our minds and our concepts on the immovable rock of the Self because he knew that in most cases that was the only way to help us."

Switching metaphors, we might say that Maharaj functioned as just the right kind of "irritant" to get inside our egoic shell, thenceforth to begin his work of making out of us a big, beautiful, bursting-forth Pearl of Enlightenment.

Not infrequently the Maharaj demanded that certain people just leave, usually if he detected in them a lack of respect for the tradition, an over-intellectualizing of spiritual Truth, or a disobedience to one of his commands—e.g., still making comments or asking questions after Maharaj had told that person to "be still" and "be what you have heard." And yet he let the courageous, sincere ones return to subsequent talks. Alexander Smit (d.1998), a leading Dutch disciple, recalls: "He sent many people away, and these really went and mostly didn't come back. Then he would say: 'They are cowards. I didn't send them away, I sent away the part of them that was not acceptable here.' And if they then returned, completely open, then he would say nothing about it." It seems that the Maharaj picked on particular "ripe" persons just to provoke them into an even more profound disidentification from the ego-mind. Smit reports his own turbulent clash with Maharaj on Sept. 21, 1978: he threw a little tantrum and provocatively, rudely insulted the Maharaj as "crazy" when the sage told him he could no longer attend; the Maharaj then loudly, angrily cursed Smit, demanded he leave, and then completely avoided him for two days, only to reinstate Smit after the young man wrote a long sincere letter of apology. Said Maharaj, in part: "I am very happy with your letter and nothing happened." Smit was endlessly grateful that the Maharaj, already in advanced age, had expended so much energy (and risked a heart attack) to courageously confront Smit's stubborn intellectualism and "cunning resistance" to fully living the Truth. On another occasion, when Smit called Maharaj a "killer" of the ego, Nisargadatta responded: "I am not a killer. I am a diamond cutter. You are also a diamond. But you are a raw diamond and you can only be cut by a pure diamond. And that is very precise work, because if that is not done properly then you fall apart into a hundred pieces, and then there is nothing left for you."

Unlike his Guru Sri Siddharamesvar, who mainly taught by delivering informal, spontaneous discourses and laid-back commentaries on text verses, Nisargadatta, who had done some of the same earlier in life, for most of the last few decades preferred to engage his visitors in **rigorous, often quite confrontational, question and answer sessions** concerning our Real Identity as the Absolute and the ultimate falsity of the manifest play of consciousness. And when not soliciting and getting questions, Maharaj himself was often the one blasting away with questions, probing people's level of spiritual understanding, provoking them into awakening, and modeling for them what it means to engage in profound enquiry and self-enquiry.

He was indeed a formidable tiger in Bombay's urban jungle, roaring of the Self's Freedom. He frequently deployed *koan*-questions like a Zen master—e.g., "What were you before you were born, before the 'I Am-ness' came to be?" "How did this consciousness come about?" "How did you happen to be?" "Have you any idea when all this began?... What did actually happen?" "Are you an entity? What are you?" "What makes you consider yourself a person?" "With what do you identify?" "What is this body,

what is it?" "What is there prior to the mind?" "What are you using to be aware right now?" "You talk about this sage or that one—but how about you? Who are you?" And he wielded a slashing, smashing Siva mode of deconstructive verbiage to take away people's postures and self-concepts—e.g., "You are not the body, you are not the mind, you are not the 'I am' or beingness or even the universal consciousness and its life force, you are not any 'thing' or 'process' or 'individual' at all." Nisargadatta's natural Freedom wanted us entirely Free of all that might experientially obscure our true Identity as the Absolute Reality, the *Parabrahman*.

Sudhakar Dikshit, an editor and publisher of the Maharaj's *I Am That* teachings, and disciple as well, provides a fine image of the sage: "Think of a tall granite cliff on the seashore, buffeted day and night by turbulent waves and winds, yet majestically standing erect in its sheer height, its top enveloped in the clouds. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, the supreme master, is such a cliff of spiritual granite in human form. He is stern and unbending. He speaks bluntly and upbraids sharply, but with his powerful words he sweeps away the mental debris of his visitors—moral cant, ritualistic religion and philosophic pretensions of various sorts. He is brutally straightforward, completely devoid of sugarcoated civility, but in reality he has no desire to assert or dominate. He is what he is, because he is steeped in *jnana* [Wisdom-Knowledge] and he talks from the plane of true awareness where the human soul is merged into the Oversoul, the Brahman." ("Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: The Man and His Teaching," in *Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj Presentation Volume: 1980*, p. 2)

But the Maharaj was not just a severe granite cliff, or a raging fire of destruction incinerating all egoic identifications, tendencies and attachments. ("When you come here, you will be cremating yourself. Whatever identity you have, whatever idea you have about your own self, will be cremated." [*The Experience of Nothingness*, p. 133.])

He was basically a supremely-in-bliss **optimist**, knowing that everyone was eventually going to awaken, because there is truly and ultimately only the Truth of *Parabrahman*, Absolute Divine Awareness. Accordingly, underneath all the fiery demeanor and confrontations that left many people quaking with a certain "self"-preserving anxiety or even terror, there was an ecstatically gleeful quality to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. Peter Brent, who enjoyed an edifying conversation with the sage back around 1970 (partially reproduced below), reports that the round-headed, large-nosed, toothless, often almost raucous-voiced Maharaj had an unusual light in his eyes and "is happy, he smiles a great deal.... I remember the Guru's face as what he said was being translated--his smile was that of a man who has told a good joke and knows he will get his listeners' laughter as soon as they have understood it: a conspiratorial smile, a glee he could hardly contain...." Many of us saw that same gleeful smile and merrily twinkling eyes displayed on the Maharaj's face during the thunder and theatrics of his ego-busting tirades.

We hasten also to note here that Nisargadatta Maharaj was **a very devotional and spiritually respectful man, devoutly respecting the One Spirit or Reality in everyone**, and maintaining an outwardly devotional life, even if he had inwardly long ago dropped any sense of dualism toward a separate God. This devotional, spiritually respectful aspect is lost on some of those who have more recently endeavored to spread Maharaj's teachings and even emulate his style of teaching. The Maharaj sang in his Marathi tongue the old *bhajan* songs and litanies four times daily (two sessions open to visitors), performed the traditional *arati*-worship ritual to his lineage of gurus and

egalitarian distribution of *prasad* (fruit, sweets or flowers), and every morning tirelessly cleaned, garlanded and anointed with sandalwood paste and *kum-kum* (vermillion) powder those altar photos and higher-hanging photos of the sages and saints adorning his meeting room. He was also known to have lovingly initiated many aspirants from East and West into *mantra*-recitation in a traditional Guru-disciple relationship (see a text of one such encounter, reproduced below), and to promote veneration of the Guru, as Sri Siddharamesvar had likewise done before him.

For those persons who were terrified or perhaps enamored by his confrontational, one-upping and even "wrathful" teaching style (which complemented the frequently deconstructive content of his teachings), we should also never neglect the **many positive teachings** issued by the Maharaj on the sublimity of Absolute Realization, the Guru, God, Life Force, Love, and the True, Beautiful and Good, which are to be found in the pages of the classic text of conversations with the sage, *I Am That* (edited by Frydman), and far more devotionally presented in **an early work written by Maharaj himself, *Atmagnyana and Paramatmayoga*, "Self-Knowledge and Self-Realization"**—a work now widely available for perusal on the Internet (click [here](#) to read the entirety of this short book).

And who can forget Nisargadatta's great *compassion*? Not just with his close friends and family members (including a few beloved little grandchildren). The Maharaj freely welcomed into his humble home several times daily a small throng of persons for the early morning meditation (8-9 a.m.), two *bhajan*-singing sessions, and the even more populous mid-morning and afternoon talks (from 10:30-noon and 5:00-6:30 p.m.). Many of these people were first-time visitors and/or foreigners, including bedraggled travelers like this writer. (After surviving a 26-hour bus-ride from Kerala up to Bombay, and a wild taxi ride straight to his door early in the morning of Jan. 9, 1981, I was welcomed by the 84-year-old sage directly into his downstairs living quarters just minutes after he had emerged from his morning bath, adorned only in a dhoti and towel, while I stood a soot-covered mess with dusty backpack. He kindly instructed me to place the pack, an item not fit to bring into any Indian home, onto the clean floor under a nearby cot.) Many of us enjoyed powerful "initiatory" dreams of Maharaj and teaching dreams thereafter.

Maharaj did not have to do this work, but spontaneously and most generously he did: letting folks invade his private space, which he had turned into a low-key, semi-public center for nondual awakening, therein to tirelessly teach, guide and awaken us with endless graciousness, never charging a single *paisa* (cent) for all his generous bounty. And he asked for no service or gifts from devotees. (But he allowed *prasad*-gifts of fruit or flowers to be brought and distributed to all, and he did accept from some of us our purchased boxes of the incense-brand regularly wafting in his mezzanine loft.) Some of us were also immensely grateful to receive one-on-one quality-time with the venerable old sage—wherein he briefly chatted with us with jocular warmth and even tender affection, frequently beamed his unusually intense and caring gaze into our depths, or worked in enigmatic ways with our subtle-energy fields, especially, it seemed, during the **bhajan-singing sessions**.

For instance, one evening, while several of us stood with him and sang the traditional devotional songs, featuring especially the hymns of Marathi Sant Tukaram, the Maharaj came over, paced back and forth, looked at me with great loving intensity, then carefully shifted me a few times, first here, then there, to different spots in the room. This and the

unusual look in his eyes suggested that he was aligning me with subtly-detectable energy fields pervading his shrine room. Perhaps it was for this reason that he once declared within earshot of several of us: "*Those who think they understand come only to the talks. Those who really understand come to the bhajans.*" This remark suggests that Maharaj held a much richer, subtler view of the significance of the *bhajans* than when he apparently dismissed them on a few other occasions as "pointless," only performed in "obedience" to a request by his Guru that they be done four times daily. (For full text and audio files of these bhajans as sung by Nisargadatta's co-disciple Sri Ranjit Maharaj and his disciples, go to www.sadguru.com/Bhajans.html)

In 1980, toward life's end, Maharaj's body was showing all the symptoms of a virulent, painful **throat cancer**. This didn't deter him from accepting into his apartment the never-ending stream of visitors from all walks of life and from all over the world who came to him to discover spiritual truth and the timeless peace of the Absolute. Though it was agony for him to speak, nevertheless, for the sake of dissolving all ignorance, Nisargadatta with great energy and vigor invited and answered their questions for three hours daily, he presided over the rousing *bhajan* sessions, and carried out the ritual worship of his lineage of gurus. And he still took his fairly long walks on the seashore in the mornings and evenings. Some of these activities fell off toward the last weeks of his life, but he continued to somehow courageously muster the ability to talk through the physical pain with visitors right up to his very last days.

In the last months of his earthly life, Maharaj **shifted the focus of his verbal teaching** more toward the purely transcendent Absolute Awareness and away from the manifest consciousness. Whereas in earlier decades he taught a process of complete disidentification from the manifest realms followed by a sagely "re-identification" with the manifest totality (*sans* ego) in a spirit of love, devotion, empathy, compassion and appropriate conduct, all rooted in the context of open, free Absolute Awareness— now the Maharaj usually and quite bluntly urged only final abidance as the Absolute, beyond the 'I Am,' bodymind, worlds, beings, conduct, relationship or personality (—though he did say that everyone should continue "with zest" to fulfill their duties and relationships in the world, and adopt as a guiding principle "caring for others"). In other words, whereas for many years the Maharaj's *upadesha* inclusively balanced both the transcendent and immanent Reality, both formless and formfull abiding, now, in his waning time, it was heavily emphasizing negation, detachment and disidentification from the fleeting and fundamentally false phenomenal realms. Whereas previously he had occasionally spoken about the play of universal consciousness as a kind of wonderful whimsy, albeit a dream-like illusion, now he regarded it as an unnecessary burden. Readers can and should be careful with these exclusive, rather "stark"-sounding teachings from Nisargadatta's last months lest they fall into mere intellectualism, quietism, nihilism, or hedonism instead of the mature, authentic liberation and awakening that Maharaj exemplified and promoted. Had not the sage declared: "This knowledge is for those who have no desires"? (Dec. 30, 1980) And, as "impersonal" or "supra-personal" as these teachings of the final years may sound, we can also recall the sage's attitude of love and compassion toward persons, such as when a questioner asked him "if Maharaj thinks of his disciples." The sage quickly replied, "I think of them more than you know." (Dec. 26, 1980)

The Maharaj had once been told by someone, "You will die." He retorted: "I am dead already. Physical death will make no difference in my case. I am timeless being." (*I Am That*, dialogue 55) On the morning of Tuesday, September 8, 1981, the Maharaj, knowing that the end of the physical body was near, invited a few close associates to come visit him later in the evening. That night he went into the "no-mind" state: his breathing grew shallower and shallower, finally stopping altogether at 7:32 p.m.

Back in the 1960s, Sri Nisargadatta had one afternoon fully witnessed his own "death," and now he had dropped the dream-like body with the greatest ease and peace, to abide as the *videhamukti* state, the all-pervasive, free state of Absolute Awareness, before/beyond the body. With him at the end were his remaining family members, two close attendants, his long-time friend and chief translator, Saumitra Mullarpattan, and another translator-friend of more recent years, Ramesh Balsekar. (Both Mullarpattan and Balsekar's reminiscences of the Maharaj's last weeks have been published.)

The next day a funeral procession, involving many hundreds of devotees and a lorry gorgeously decked out with roses and garlands, started at 12:15 p.m. and, amidst a musical band and dancers, made its way to the Banganga cremation ground, where the *mahasamadhi* (resting) site of Nisargadatta's guru Sri Siddharamesvar is also located. At 3:40, Maharaj's son Chittaranjan Maruti Kambli lit the funeral pyre and the body of Sri Nisargadatta was placed on it, to dissolve into the elements from whence it came.

The physical body is gone, but **the powerful spiritual influence of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj lives on**—via the written and taped collections of conversations, via the archived video footage of the sage in his "natural state" of teaching and worshipping and living, via ongoing dream experiences and other subtle-level contacts for those attracted to him, and via the Absolute Presence-Absence—his and our Real Divine Nature. This true Self is awakening more and more people to the Being-Awareness-Bliss that Nisargadatta timelessly IS, along with all other authentic sages who have surrendered their limited identity into/as the Absolute Reality.

May all sentient beings likewise discover this Absolute Identity and allow themselves to be fully awakened and stabilized in this transpersonal Reality, the *Parabrahman*.

"To be a living being is not the ultimate state; there is something [the Reality] beyond, much more wonderful, which is neither being nor non-being, neither living nor not-living. It is a state of Pure Awareness, beyond the limitations of space and time." (—Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I Am That*, dialogue 30)

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Resources:

See the **video**, *Awakening to the Eternal: Nisargadatta Maharaj: A Journey of Self Discovery*, Inner Directions (POB 130070, Carlsbad, CA 92013, www.InnerDirections.org), 1995 [contains many excerpts from the extensive film footage shot by a Belgian devotee of Maharaj, Jozef Nauwelaerts].

Nisargadatta Maharaj, *The Wisdom-Teachings of Nisargadatta Maharaj: A Visual Journey* (Matthew Greenblatt, Ed.), Inner Directions, 2003 [beautifully illustrated with dozens of photos, and with Maharaj's pithy wisdom-aphorisms in Marathi language collected by Dinkar Keshav Kshirsagar (and approved for distribution by the Maharaj) from a series of talks between 1977-9, later translated by Damayanti Dungaji, Jean Dunn and Suresh Mehta].

---- ***I Am That: Conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*** (Maurice Frydman, Ed. & Tr. from the Marathi; Sudhakar Diksit, Ed.), Durham, NC: Acorn, 1982, 1992 (first published by Chetana Ltd., Bombay, 1973, and in an expanded, revised, two-volume edition by Chetana in 1976 and a third edition in 1978). [This is **the classic, primary and most balanced text of Maharaj's teachings**, including 101 sessions with Maharaj from May 7, 1970 to April 29, 1972.]

---- ***Self Knowledge and Self Realization*** (written by Nisargadatta himself) (Jean Dunn, Ed., 1978, from an original 1963 English translation by Vasudeo Madhav Kulkarni of Nisargadatta's Marathi work *Atmagnyana and Paramatmayoga*, published at Nisargadatta's Vanmali Bhavan bldg., Khetwadi 10th Lane, Bombay 4). [The re-worked edition by Jean Dunn was published on the Internet by Ed Muzika on Aug. 22, 2005, at gathering-minds.net/ref/selfknowledgeandselfrealization.php. This short work by Maharaj, with Introductions by Dunn and by Muzika, reveals the strong devotional *bhakti* nature of Sri Nisargadatta for his Guru Sri Siddharameshvar. It can be read in its entirety by clicking [here](#)]

---- ***Seeds of Consciousness: The Wisdom of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj***, Grove, 1982 (2nd ed., Acorn, 1990) [selected talks from July 1979 to April 1980]; ***Prior to Consciousness: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj***, Acorn, 1985 [substantial excerpts from 108 sessions from April 1980 to July 1981]; ***Consciousness & the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj***, Acorn, 1994 (Jean Dunn, Ed.) [more selected talks from 76 sessions, May 1980 up to June 30, 1981].

---- ***The Nectar of Immortality***, 1996 [21 talks from Jan. to Nov., 1980]; ***The Ultimate Medicine***, 1994 [11 talks, most from July 4-15, 1980]; and ***The Experience of Nothingness***, 1996 [10 grouped selections of talks from the last year of Maharaj's life]; all edited by Robert Powell and published by Blue Dove Press, San Diego.

---- ***Beyond Freedom: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*** (S.K. Mullarpattan, Ed.) [talks from the last two years, based on tapes found by Mullarpattan, Maharaj's longest-time translator, in a 112-page book].

---- ***I Am Unborn: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj***, published for free as an online 130-page book by Vijayendra Deshpande at www.nisargadatta.in/WebCMS/Upload/Downloads/I%20AM%20UNBORN.pdf [edited by Pradeep Apte & compiled by V. Deshpande, based on extensive notes by Damodar Lund of 56 sessions from Nov. 30, 1979 to Feb. 13, 1980]

Website <http://nisargadatta.in/WebCMS/CMSPage.aspx?PageID=1> or, for short, <http://nisargadatta.in/>, is Vijayendra Deshpande's website on the Maharaj, with several great photos, an audio file of the Maharaj speaking, the *I Am Unborn* book, the *Meet the Sage* biographical booklet, Pradeep Apte's nearly 400 excerpts about the "I Am" from the 7 primary texts of Maharaj's teaching, as well as an even more focused selection of 100 teachings on the same, and more.

Website prahlad.org/gallery/nisargadatta_maharaj.htm has numerous lengthy excerpts of Nisargadatta's conversations with interlocutors, derived from several of the above-referenced books.

Website www.maharajnisargadatta.com/ by Aditya likewise has much material on Nisargadatta's teachings.

Ramesh Balsekar, *Pointers from Nisargadatta Maharaj* (S. Dikshit, Ed.), Acorn, 1983; *Explorations into the Eternal: Forays into the Teaching of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, Acorn, 1987 [by one of the three main translators of Maharaj's teachings in the last years, a retired bank president who first came to Maharaj in 1978, and who has subsequently written many other books on spirituality, all flawed by a certain fatalist outlook and neglect of the Maharaj's teachings on earnest "effortless effort" in meditation and appropriate behavior for a sage--for insightful assessments by various persons on Ramesh's flawed teachings and behavior, click [here](#)].

Robert Powell, *The Blissful Life*, Acorn, 1984 (see therein Milo Clark's rich and witty description "A Day with Maharaj," pp. 15-27, also reproduced [here](#)) ; *The Wisdom of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, Blue Dove Press, 1995. [Though Powell, a longtime researcher of Zen and J. Krishnamurti, never personally met Nisargadatta, he has spent the last two decades of his life promoting the Maharaj through these books, especially presenting the Maharaj in his strongly negating, deconstructive and disidentifying aspect of the last period of his life.]

Mark West, *Gleanings From Nisargadatta*, Australia: Beyond Description Publishing, 2006 [Transcripts of excerpts from talks given in the late 1970s by the Maharaj, translated by S.V. Sapre, while Mark was present and recording notes; 134 pages.]

Shrikant Gogate & P.T. Phadol, *Meet the Sage: Shri Nisargadatta*, Bombay: Sri Sadguru Nisargadatta Maharaj Amrit Mahotsav Samiti, 1972. [This 32-page book, which has been uploaded to Vijayendra Deshpande's website, listed above, contains **a much fuller biography of Nisargadatta** than the account given by Gogate and Phadol as the Introduction for the book *I Am That*.]

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: Presentation Volume: 1980, Bombay: Sri Nisargadatta Adhyatma Kendra, 1981. [This volume has contributions from many of the Maharaj's disciples and well-wishers, and select teachings from the sage.]

S.K. Mullarpattan, *The Last Days of Nisargadatta Maharaj*, India: Yogi Impressions Books (available in the USA from Advaita Press [Redondo Beach, CA], 2007 [a 38-page book giving a detailed reminiscence by Maharaj's longest-serving English interpreter, a beloved disciple].

David Godman, "**Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj**,"

www.davidgodman.org/interviews/nis1.shtml. [David Godman, the longtime librarian at Ramanashramam, and author-compiler of several wonderful books on Ramana Maharshi, Annamalai Swami, Lakshmana Swami and Saradamma, as well as Papaji/Poonja, visited Bombay several times from 1978 onward to see and hear Nisargadatta. This is his well-written, lengthy reminiscence, filled with interesting, funny and also quite poignant and even "miraculous" anecdotes.]

Timothy Conway, "**Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj--My Recollections**," www.enlightened-spirituality.org/Nisargadatta_My_Recollections.html. [Verbatim diary-notes and tape-transcriptions from my time with the Maharaj, January 9-22, 1981. See link near bottom of this page.]

Conrad Goehausen, "**Do Not Pamper the Mind: The Teaching of Nisargadatta Maharaj**," *The Laughing Man*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1985 [with talk-transcripts furnished by Colleen Engle of Portland, OR].

Alexander Smit (d.1998), "**Every Escape is Bound to Fail**,"

www.ods.nl/am1gos/am1gos2/indexframe2_us.html?as_inter_us.html~infoframe

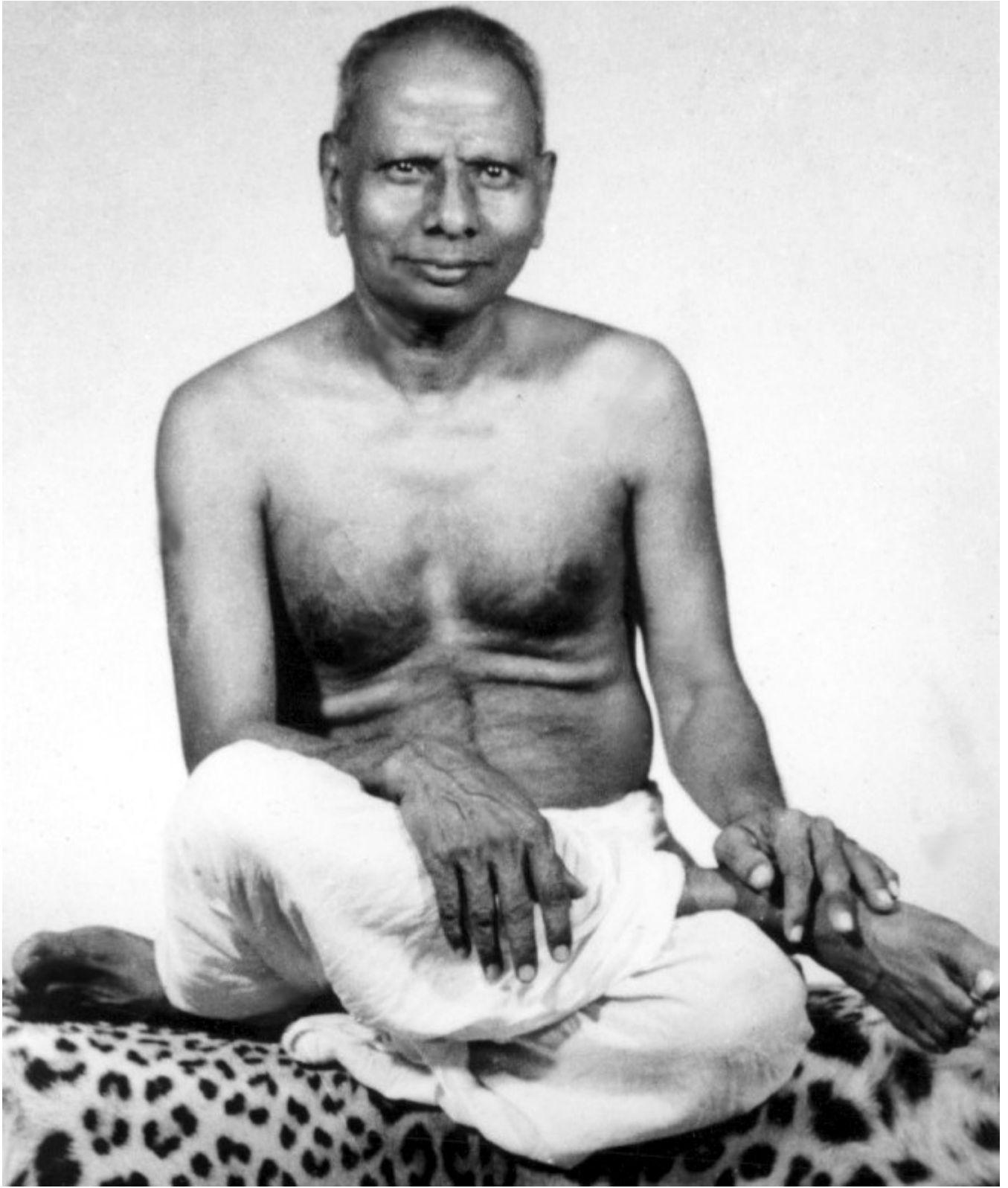
[interview of Smit by Belle Bruins, 1988, posted to the Internet on Oct. 21, 2001, about Smit's time with Maharaj from 1978 on, one of the few people encouraged by Maharaj to share his teachings].

Cathy Boucher, "**Meeting Maharaj**," www.nisargadatta.net/cathy1.html.

Swami Shankarananda's email reminiscence on meeting Nisargadatta, www.itisnotreal.com/subpage24.html.

Lakshyan Schanzer, "**Discovering Nisargadatta Maharaj**," www.harshasatsangh.com/LunarPages/pages/mag3lakshyan.html.

Other persons' accounts of meeting Nisargadatta Maharaj can be found in published books: Peter Brent, *Godmen of India* (NY: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 136-40; Stephen Wolinsky, *I Am That I Am: A Tribute to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, Quantum Institute, 2000; and Earl Rosner (Swami Paramatmananda), *On the Road to Freedom: A Pilgrimage in India*, Vol. 1 (San Ramon, CA: Mata Amritanandamayi Center, 1987), pp. 212-8 [reproduced below].



(Photo by Jozef Nauwelaerts)



(Photo by Ajit Balsekar)

Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj--Part I:

[A Marathi-language *abhanga*, translated into English, written by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, and sung daily as part of the morning *bhajan* session of songs and chants:]

Thy Presence fills every nook and corner of the whole universe

O Auspiciousness! Where can I invoke thee?

You are everywhere, world's refuge

Can a special role be given?

The holy Ganges flows from consciousness...

Thy feet—how to give obeisance!

O Purity! Marble-white complexioned

Can oblations wash a speck?

O Untainted! What can taint thee?

Cool waters drench not the heat absorbent

Sandalwood disappears in your calm

When endless sky covers thee

Garments are unnecessary—O Love!

Knowing the very ocean of wisdom

Needless, the sacred thread of knowledge

Precious jewels—ruby, pearly, amethyst

Fade, as thou art Lord, gloss of all

When thou art the fragrance, blossoming

Flower garlands, can they adorn thee?

When all appeased, will hunger, thirst remain

Since there is only

Finis...finis...finis!

Thou are all-pervading! Where to circumambulate?

The Vedas have negated all description

How can I invoke thee?

The lustrous sun-light fades before thee

What of the camphor flame? [used in the *arati*-worship rite]

No place for any immersion [in holy water-tanks in temples]

Since you fill all surroundings.

All desire to worship thee is banished

The concept of you being God and I being devotee has vanished.

This is my invisible spontaneous prayer

I got the light of understanding regarding the worship of thy feet

Glory—thy nature!

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[Two short excerpts from Nisargadatta Maharaj's very early written work, *Self Knowledge and Self Realization*, published in English translation in 1963:]

All the characteristics of the Saint naturally spring from his experience [of being nondual Awareness]. As there are no desires left in him, nothing in the world of sense can ever tempt him, he lives in the fearless majesty of Self-realization. He is moved to pity by the unsuccessful struggle of those tied down to bodily identity and their striving for the satisfaction of their petty interests. Even the great events of the world are just surface lines to him... The Saint who has direct experience of all this is always happy and free from desire. He is convinced that the greatest of the sense experiences is only a momentary affair, impermanence is the very essence of these experiences; hence pain and sorrow, greed and temptation, fear and anxiety can never touch him....

The ever-awaited first moment was the moment when I was convinced that I was not an individual at all. The idea of my individuality had set me burning so far. The scalding pain was beyond my capacity to endure; but there is not even a trace of it now, I am no more an individual. There is nothing to limit my being now. The ever present anxiety and the gloom have vanished and now I am all beatitude, pure knowledge, pure consciousness.... I am ever free now. I am all bliss, sans spite, sans fear. This beatific conscious form of mine now knows no bounds. I belong to all and everyone is mine. The "all" are but my own individuations, and these together go to make up my beatific being.... Bliss reclines on the bed of bliss. The repose itself has turned into bliss.

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[The following is a translation of almost all of **Nisargadatta Maharaj's 2-part "Preface"**, written in 1961 and 1962, for a book of 130 talks by his Guru, Shri Sadguru Siddharameshwar Maharaj, entitled in Marathi *Adhyatma Dnyanacha Yogeshwar*, and in English translation *Master of Self-Realization: An Ultimate Understanding* (D.A. Ghaisas, Tr.) (Mumbai: Sri Sadguru Trust [Gautam Mudbhatkal, 5 Ganesh Villa, Tejpal Scheme Road No. 2, Vile Parle (East), Mumbai 400 057], 2006, pp. 110-3.)

These are discourses, the words being those of my Master. I cannot explain His words and therefore I keep quiet about that. When the ego becomes silent, "*Soham*," ("I am He" [the Divine]) automatically starts functioning. *Soham* is endless, limitless, measureless, and is the messenger of Truth, who is Self-evident. The message and the messenger are not separate in Him. This messenger is himself the joy that is the enjoyment of the endless. The description of the enjoyment of the Self is called "discourse" in this world, which is really a commentary. The voice of the Master is also called the "Divine Word." ... The sky is the space, and space is the vast expanse of speech that is the Word. Word is the natural quality of the sky as is well known from the days of the Vedas. First there is vibration in the space that is sky (wind), then there is the sound, and then the words appear. The words then become the base of the subsistence of all creatures and things. The sky is the ocean of words of the measureless. That ocean sings in praise to the immeasurable. The purpose of singing in praise of anything is to shed all bad qualities. This Divine Speech is doing the work of discarding the duality, or sense of separateness from The Essential Unity of Existence, through the medium of the mouth of the Master. At the very moment and in the very place where all reverence towards the Master arises in our heart, the separateness disappears like an insignificant tiny insect. But alas, such things rarely happen! It is seldom that one among billions of people comes to the Realization that the Master is Truth itself, *Parabrahman*, the Ultimate Reality incarnate. When the teaching of the Master is dear to one, and totally acceptable, and when one understands that the feet of the Master are the source of the spontaneous experience of

the Divine Self within, which directs and performs all the actions and functions of the body, when one holds fast to the feet of the Master within one's heart without a speck of doubt, when unfailingly the stream of the blessings and the bliss of the revered Master flow very naturally from within, which is the movement of the "Life All-Pervading." Where complete trust in the divine feet of the Master is active, there the Grace of the Bliss of the Master comes to reside in the nature of Spiritual Joy, called "*Pralhad*." Then the non-duality, without the blemish of the separateness of "You" and "I" in the Consciousness, flows unhindered. There is no satisfaction other than the Grace of the Master, which is total Self-bliss, solid, and impenetrable.

At the time when the Master (Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj) was giving his discourses, the writer of this preface was a fresh entrant of the path, and was but a novice. The only acquaintance was that he was introduced to Maharaj and had the opportunity to see Him. The work of listening to the discourses of Maharaj and taking them down in broken sentences was being done by the writer. He was not even knowing whether what he wrote down was correct or not, but the capacity to take down all that he heard was growing, and it can be said that almost all that was heard has been noted in His presence. There were other co-disciples who were learned, and had the opportunity of being in the company of Maharaj for many years. They were also taking down the teachings of Maharaj.... It is now 25 years since Maharaj has left his physical body. During the last two or three years, the writings were read out and correctly re-written.

I say from my conviction of Self-Knowledge, that such a Master and such teachings are very rare in this world. I say this out of my faith in the wisdom of our Teacher and my own Self-Confidence. These words are expression of my faith. As is one's achievement, so is his experience, so is his contentment and his peace, and so is his satisfaction. All this is the result of one's loyalty. Since my acquaintance with my senior co-disciples, I have always been humble before them and I pray to my Master that I will continue to be so humble before them in the future also.

The reason why I have total reverence for my senior co-disciples is that they somehow managed to keep our Master in Bombay for a long time by offering Him the sweet dish of their Devotion and I could have the opportunity to meet the Master who is the "Ocean of Knowledge." They not only had the benefit of seeing Him and serving Him with Devotion, but having been liberated through Self-Knowledge, they themselves became the saviors for others. The Cosmos that is the Universal Spirit, and Form, abides in Him. It takes refuge in Him, and the senior co-disciples were able to have intimate relationship with Him, and thereby they were saved and became liberators for others. That was and is the imperishable power of the glimpse (*darshan*) of the Master and His teachings. Even those who are simple souls without much learning, are purified by having seen only once The Great Master who is the "Ocean of Light and Merit," the "Embodiment of Knowledge," the "Knower of Science," and "Ocean of Wisdom." The sayings and discourses of such a Great Master form the contents of this book. Those who will read them again and again, learn by heart, and deeply think upon the truthful meaning of these teachings, will become the meaning incarnate, and themselves become full of the meaning of the Self.

I am putting these words before you as a preface to this book. Every sentence in this book has the potency of giving the fruit of Self-Realization. One who will read regularly and ponder over these discourses, will himself become the channel for the expression of the

inherent spirit of these words. The heavenly records contain the imprints of all the Saints, and the bevy of Godmen, their projected schemes, their utterings, their meanings, and the very Life within. The Realized Ones truly speak from the fountain of their own experience and there is great conviction in their speech. Their speech has the capacity to discard the ignorance of the ego, and every line in this book will eradicate the reader's ignorance about his True Self and bring forth the True Nature of his Being.

Nisargadatta

Saturday, 4th November, 1961.

Nisargadatta Ashram, Vanamali Bhuvan,
Khetwadi, 10th Lane, Bombay

[Preface to Part II:]

[...] The publisher and some other Guru-Brothers of mine were urging me to write a preface to this book. However, to venture to do so is difficult, because the subject of this book is extraordinary, deep, vast, and in a way, endless. When we call this Knowledge as "Spiritual Knowledge," or *Vidnyana* [Skt: *Vijnana*], the words that we intend to use are better left unspoken. Ignorance means "no knowledge" or absence of Knowledge, while Knowledge implies that there is awareness of Ignorance. That which is "known" is Ignorance, and as it has no existence as such, it disappeared. The Knowledge which knows that "This is not That" has nothing more to be known, and has therefore, become mute. The capacity of knowing did not remain there. As speech did not get any object to be described by words, the speech was stopped. Knowledge, together with speech became still. By "The Power of the Self," the Knowledge remained without any object, in the Self, only.

When we say that Knowledge must have something to be "known," it is Ignorance that is the "known," and therefore the term "Knowledge" became applicable to it. Now, as there is not any other object, it remained with itself without focus on any object. So, the function of knowing is gone. The sense that "I Am That" is also not functioning. He who saw that "Knowledge" has no place, actually lost his power of seeing, and then saw. Thus, the Life-Energy (*Chaitanya*), has no status. The *Vidnyana* is the "Power" which has perceived all of this. When Knowledge loses its quality of knowing because of "Spiritual Perception" that is *Vidnyana*. It is pristine Life-Energy only, and it undergoes a natural transformation, where it has no concept whatsoever, which makes for awareness of oneself as the five elements, or God, or *Brahman*. Now, that *Vidnyana* is witness to the Knowledge that has lost its duality. It is also witness to egolessness and the appearance of forms, like waves on water. So, we define this as "*Vidnyana*." In *Vidnyana*, there is neither a doer, nor an enjoyer, nor a provocative agent for either. There is only natural Being, which is "Self-Knowability." It has no sense of being any "thing" that is a mixture of the five elements, or any form, any names, any shapes, or a devotee, or an *Avatar* [Divine Incarnation], or any active principle. Only that *Chaitanya*, the "Power" which has transcended all states, is *Vidnyana*.

Blessed are those who were lucky enough to listen to the discourses which were like showers of Nectar from the mouth of the Sadguru Shri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, who was the embodiment of this Supreme Knowledge, *Vidnyana*. Equally blessed will be those who will read and listen to these discourses, and will become like the Immortal Nectar itself. They will never have fear of death, nor will they die. Those who devote themselves to the Sadguru, as if He is the most auspicious embodiment of the Absolute

Brahman [*Parabrahman*], may receive this Sacred Knowledge, and realize that they are not the body, but that they are that Life-Energy which moves the body. Gradually, then again while being increasingly aware of this Spiritual Self-Existence, there is the unnamable awareness of this Pure Awareness. When the understanding permeates the whole Conscious Existence, the spiritual aspect of life also loses its existence in the "Totality of Understanding." An example is not much warranted here, but it cannot remain unexpressed, and therefore, the example of a person who dines, is alluded to. When a person takes food and it is digested, the various articles of food are mingled in his system of the physical body, and he becomes satisfied and gets nutrition and strength. Similarly, the spiritual aspect of the Consciousness is mingled into the "Wholeness of Understanding," by giving peace, nourishment, and contentment. Therefore, that which is called the Science of Self-Knowledge, the Reality, which is *Paramatman*, the Absolute *Parabrahman*, remains unaffected by a permanent natural transcendent state, which has an endless Contentment.

Saint Dnyaneshwar [Jnaneshvar] said, "The Ocean of all Happiness is the husband of Rakhumadevi (Rakhumadevi is the wife of Vitthala), who is our Father." Thus, even when the creative forces of the universe are taking place, this body of scientific understanding remains unaffected. Although it has multidimensional forces full of action, it remains beyond all qualities. It is inactive and unchanging, as a Reality complete with the very "Essence of Nature." It is a "Fullness of Bliss" beyond measure. By reading these discourses, full of Supreme Knowledge, those who are ignorant will have wisdom, and will reach "The Highest State" by deep Devotion to the Sadguru. It is my humble prayer to all the people of the world who are themselves like Gods, that they will please read and learn this book. Now, I will end my preface.

Dear readers, unknowingly, you are originally only Brahman. Therefore we request you, on our personal experience and conviction, that although you are Brahman today without being aware of it, you may knowingly be Brahman by having Direct Knowledge through reading this book. My salutations!

Nisargadatta

Nisargadatta Ashram Vanmali Bhuvan,

Khetwadi, 10th lane, Mumbai 4

Friday, 27th July, 1962.

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[Excerpt from a **birthday discourse given by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj** at Bombay's Laxmibaug Hall, no date (likely late 1960s, 1970 or 1971), reproduced in S. Gogate & P.T. Phadol, *Meet the Sage*, Bombay: Sri Sadguru Nisargadatta Maharaj Amrit Mahotsav Samiti, 1972, pp. 2-3:]

Today's celebrations are not in the glorification of any individual. This is an auspicious occasion for you and for me to glorify the unity of a devotee with his Sadguru [True Guru, Divine Guide]. To name a particular day as being the birthday of One who is not only eternally existent but eternal Existence itself is, in the spiritual parlance, incorrect. It is also wrong to personify a true devotee. As long as you conceive yourself to be an individual male or a female being, you will not be the all-pervading, eternal and transcendental Self. Go with the conviction that you are not the bodily self, that you are

beyond births and deaths, that you are dynamic, being dynamism itself, and are apparently experienced only as pure and simple Awareness. Be free, proclaim saints, go on asserting within that *Atma* [Absolute Self] is not weak or devoid of power. Believe steadfastly with a simple belief that *Atma* is rich with its fullness [*purnam*]. It is not possible to delve deep enough to reach the seed—the Gurubeej [Guru-seed]—the inner faith on Sadguru. Devotion to Guru reaches the Guru through devotion to the Self and the Sadguru's blessings emerge and flower through the Self and are consciously received externally by the devotee. Godhead is nothing but pure Awareness of your being. The achievement of this fruit—this Godhead—is accomplished through unshakeable faith in the pure Self. That which is called the Satswarup, the Self, is through this faith thoroughly comprehended. There should be conviction of this comprehension. The conviction implies unshakeability. That should be accomplished. There should be unflinching conviction of the Self being fixed, immobile. That which you conceive yourself to be is myth, because you take yourself to be the bodily being. The incomprehensible on the surface of which the awareness of being is experienced is called the Sadguru. Call conviction only to That which does not budge, which is immobile. *Parabrahma* is fixed, immobile. The Self is fixed (in *Parabrahma*). The Self is *Parabrahma*.

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[Maharaj, in conversation with journalist Peter Brent, circa 1970, asking Brent whether he was interested in the two persons in the Guru-disciple relationship or the relationship itself, and the nature of the latter; Maharaj taught him:]

The *Guru* and *shishya* [disciple] are like two kernels in one jack-fruit, one raw, the other ripe. The raw one wants to be ripe; the ripe one is ripe and wants nothing more. While the raw one feels different it will continue to demand, to want something. But there is no difference--it is all jackfruit, all the same stuff. The difference is only felt by the unripe. When I met my Guru, I experienced the ripeness in him. Now that ripeness is in myself, I am one with my Guru. At the start, I used to ask myself, "What is Guru?" "What is shishya [disciple]?" But now I no longer ask myself such questions because they are meaningless. There is no separation so there can be no answers, no explanation--there is only being.... The Guru-shishya relationship is organic--they are one.

Everything occurs within your consciousness; when you travel, remember that things move in you, not you in them. You even exist because you are within your consciousness, so you are within Consciousness, *Cit*, in the absolute sense. In the end, you must say to yourself, "I am everything and so I do not need to change." You must reach that point of realization. [Peter Brent, *Godmen of India* (NY: Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 138-9]

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[Maharaj, in conversation with longtime spiritual aspirant Neal Rosner in 1979. This is an especially good example of Maharaj's under-reported emphasis on love of Guru and God, and his critique of a merely intellectual approach to nondual Truth. Note that Rosner, who was later ordained (in 1995) and renamed Swami Paramatmananda, the senior Western disciple of the awesome "Hugging Mother" Ammachi / Mata Amritanandamayi (whom Rosner met just a few months after seeing Maharaj), had already been living for 12 years at Ramanashramam in Tiruvannamalai with Ratnamji, a sagely disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Rosner had read *I Am That* and wanted to meet

Maharaj, but was having severe health problems with back pain and chronic fatigue. He wrote to Maharaj that he desired to meet the sage. The very next day Rosner met a new acquaintance, a Frenchwoman "pseudo-nondualist" by name of Ananda, who paid for the plane tickets and taxi to bring both herself and Neal to see Maharaj in Bombay. En route, Ananda harangued Neal with the **neo-advaita view** that there is no need for any disciplines or devotion. She declared:]

"All of these things are only for weak-minded people. You should just go on thinking 'I am That,' 'I am That,' and you will realize the Truth of it one day."

"I think that you have overlooked an important point in the philosophy of Vedanta," I objected. "All of the texts and teachers of that school thought insist that, before one even takes up the study of it, one must have certain qualifications. A child in kindergarten cannot possibly do justice to a college textbook. He may even pervert the meaning. In the same way, before one takes up the study of practice of Vedanta, the mind should be rendered unmoving [i.e., free of attachments and aversions] [...] There is not even a trace of bad in the Supreme Reality and one who had not given up such negative qualities as lust, anger and greed cannot be taken to be one who has realized the Truth. A safer course would be to consider oneself as a child of a Realized Soul or of God. To benefit from being the child of such a one, we must try to approximate his character. Only if we can do this, will our mind gradually become pure and unruffled by passions and the Truth will be seen, and not until then."

"You are still weak-minded. You will see when we get to Maharaj. He will tell you to throw all this mushy sentimentalism overboard," she retorted, somewhat irritated.

I had already met a number of people like her and knew there would be no value in arguing, so I kept quiet.

Reaching Bombay, **a friend took us to Maharaj's apartment.** [...] He was now in his 80's and lived with his son in a three-room flat. He had also created a small loft in the living room where he would spend most of his time. It was there that we met him.

"Come in, come in. You are coming from Arunachala, are you not? Your letter came yesterday. Are you enjoying peace near Ramana?" Maharaj jovially asked me, motioning for me to sit near him. Immediately I felt an intense peace near him, a sure sign that he was a great soul. *"Do you know what I mean by peace? When you put a doughnut in boiling oil a lot of bubbles will come out until all of the moisture in the doughnut is gone. It makes a lot of noise also, doesn't it? Finally, all is silent and the doughnut is ready. That silent condition of mind which has come about through a life of meditation is called peace. Meditation is like the boiling oil. It will make everything which is in the mind come out. Then only peace will be achieved."* A very vivid and precise explanation of spiritual life if I had ever heard one!

"Maharaj, I have written to you about the spiritual practices that I have done until now. Kindly tell me what more remains to be done," I requested him.

"Child, you have done more than enough. It would be quite sufficient if you just go on repeating the Divine Name until the end is reached. Devotion to your Guru is the path for you; it should become perfect and unbroken by thoughts. Whatever may come to you accept it as His gracious will for your good. You are hardly able to sit up, aren't you? [Neal had been long enduring intense pain in his back.] It does not matter. Some people's bodies become sick like this when they sincerely do meditation and other spiritual

practices. It depends on the physical constitution of each. Even then, you should not give up your practices but persist until you reach the goal or until the body dies," he said.

Turning to Ananda, he asked, "What kind of spiritual practice are you doing?"

"I just go on thinking that I am the Supreme Being," she replied, in a somewhat proud tone.

"Is that so? Did you ever hear of Mira Bai? She was one of the greatest lady saints who was ever born in India [in Rajasthan, circa 16th century]. From her childhood itself she felt that Lord Sri Krishna was her all in all and would spend most of her days and nights in worshipping Him and singing songs about Him. Finally she had a mystic vision of Him and her mind merged into Him. She thenceforth sang songs about the glory and bliss of the God-realized state. At the end of her life she entered into a Krishna temple and disappeared in the sanctum sanctorum. You should walk in the same path as her if you want to achieve the goal," Maharaj said smilingly.

Ananda turned pale. Maharaj had pulverised her mountain of "Nonduality" in one stroke! She could not speak.

"I may talk Non-duality to some of the people who come here. That is not for you and you should not pay any attention to what I am telling others. The book of my conversations [*I Am That*] should not be taken as the last word on my teachings. I had given some answers to questions of certain individuals. Those answers were intended for those people and not for all. Instruction can be on an individual basis only. The same medicine cannot be prescribed for all.

"Nowadays people are full of intellectual conceit. They have no faith in the ancient traditional practices leading up to Self-Knowledge. They want everything served to them on a platter. The path of Knowledge makes sense to them and because of that they may want to practice it. They will then find that it requires more concentration than they can muster and, slowly becoming humble, they will finally take up easier practices like repetition of a mantra or worship of a form. Slowly the belief in a Power greater than themselves will dawn on them and a taste for devotion will sprout in their heart. Then only will it be possible for them to attain purity of mind and concentration. The conceited have to go a very round-about way. Therefore I say that devotion is good enough for you," Maharaj concluded.

It was time for lunch so we all left Maharaj to himself. While I was going, he asked me if I would be staying for some days in Bombay. "I don't know. I am having no plans," I replied.

"Very good. Then you come here this evening after 4," he said.

The evening saw me back in Maharaj's room. He asked me to sit near him. Though I had known him only for a few hours, I felt as if I were his own child, that he was my mother or father. A European came and put a large currency note in front of Maharaj. "Please take it back. I am not interested in anyone's money. My son is over there and he is feeding me and looking after my needs. After you attain some peace of mind there will be enough time for these things. Take your money, take it!" he exclaimed.

With great difficulty I sat and watched what went on until 7 o'clock. I felt fully satisfied and peaceful and thought that I could not possibly get anything more than Maharaj had told me. I thought of going the next day back to Arunachala [the holy mountain behind Ramanashramam on the northwest side of Tiruvannamalai]. I mentioned it to him and asked him for his blessings.

"If you feel like that, then you may go. Do you know what my blessing is for you? Until you leave your body, may you have full devotion and surrender to your Guru." Maharaj looked at me compassionately. Moved at his kindness I started to cry but controlled myself. Even then a few tears trickled down my cheeks. He smiled and gave me a piece of fruit. He then got up and, taking a huge pair of cymbals, started to sing devotional songs in praise of his Guru.

I bowed down to him and went to take rest in my room. Ananda was not to be seen since the morning. I thought that the humiliation must have been too much for her and she did not want to show her face. I therefore struggled on my own and somehow reached Arunachala, minus a sadder but wiser Ananda.

[--from chapter 6 of the original manuscript by Earl Rosner, *On the Road to Freedom*, Vol. 1 (pp. 214-8 of the published 1987 edition by the Mata Amritanandamayi Center at San Ramon, CA. Note: this excerpt is also available at nisargadatta.net/SwamiParamatmananda.html]

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[**Maharaj, in conversations with Jean Marc and Mahindra Thakur, Marc's friend and translator**, no date. The printed version of this dialogue was given to me in 1981 by **Sunyata**, a Danish-born advaita sage [1890-1984] who lived 45 years in India and then the U.S.; Sunyata has evidently slightly customized the piece, streamlining in a few places the imperative verb phrase "be aware of" to his own characteristic use of "aware" as a verb--e.g., "aware the One," "aware the Seer," "aware space."]

[Maharaj speaking to Mahindra:] I will explain to you a simple technique, which is called *Dhyana Yoga* [realization via meditation]: Sit in the open air every day in the morning—at any convenient time, irrespective of any laws and regularities—on a simple *asana* [seat or posture], for 30-60 minutes. Keep your eyes half open and [be aware of] your nose-tip. This is only to withdraw your mind from external sense-organs. Then try to be aware of the Seer. You have not to think about sense-organs. You have only to do nothing—no thoughts. Be only aware of the one who is sitting in *Dhyana* [meditation]. You have to focus on him only. Aware the One, who is beyond body, without body [*videha*]. Practise this slowly, slowly every day and all your problems will be solved. Have the feeling of *Caitanya Brahman* [Divine Reality as Pure Consciousness]. Be aware of *Purnam* [wholeness, fullness]. If your eyes close during this, let it be. You will aware space. All forms of which you are aware within are modifications or shapes of the One who is sitting. Call him Krishna, Shiva, or any other divine Name. It is all *darsan* [sight] of the one who is sitting. Continue sitting in this *sadhana* [spiritual practice]. From within, That [Absolute Awareness-Reality] will give its message, guidance, and spontaneous insight. Remember: "I am not the body." Be aware of the Seer. "I am beyond the body."

[To Jean Marc:] You can also continue the same *sadhana* [practice] given to Mahindra, if you like. Feel that you are *Caitanya Brahman* [Pure Consciousness-Reality], that is the only one study you have to do. [Jean Marc: "Is *kapalhat* (a yogic breathing exercise) a good practice?"] [Maharaj:] Do not play with breathing without a real Master. It is very dangerous.... Try to aware the Seer. Feel mentally that you are beyond the body. You will get much peace in this. Increase this practice every day by one minute. As a tree grows and gives fruits, wisdom and insight will dawn and flourish and fragrance will spread more and more.... You can do your duties as they are called for and as it is necessary.

“All experiences come and go. I alone neither come nor go.” If this condition is realised it is the true wisdom, all else is ignorance. As an aspirant, do always all your worldly duties as you feel right and leave the bad. Use always common sense or sense of intuitive discrimination. Then you will realise, above conditions and experience, ultimately, that you are beyond both ignorance and knowledge. Take this in your hand [i.e., to heart], what you are searching for all this time. Take this! Take this! Stop searching anywhere and be quiet. Be still. You have listened to this, now sit down [outwardly and inwardly]. Do not think and do not worry, but Be—awarely. Awarely Be what you are. And Be that completely.

[Jean Marc: “Maharaj, I am very interested in *mantras*, because sound and vibrations seem to be very important for my way of feeling, but my mind cannot accept what seems to be (the) conditioning and superstition (around the practice of mantra-recitation).”]
[Maharaj:] It depends on your own choice. Mantra is necessary if you can feel it, and if you can't, it is not. Do you want me to give you one mantra? [Jean Marc: “No don't, if it is not necessary. Is it necessary?”] Yes, it is good for Jean Marc and I will give you one also, Mahindra. I am very happy that J.M. came here. Tell him that I will tell mantra three times and he has nothing to do but listen and feel [it] mentally only. You have not to employ lips, tongue or throat and you must not tell it to anybody.... Mantra should not be revealed to anyone. You can repeat it loudly [in public] if necessary, ... like “*Hari Om*” or any other mantra, but do not say that it is your mantra and this will help you and give you Grace. Mantra is divine elixir or divine wine. Its intoxication is all-pervading. It is *Atma* [Divine Self] intoxication. You will get *samadhi* [absorption in Atma] ultimately, and even initially you will get divine bliss.

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Teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj--Part II:

[Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj--My Recollections](#) --verbatim diary-notes and tape-transcriptions of conversations with Sri Nisargadatta, made by Timothy Conway during a visit from January 9 to 22, 1981. Contains some more great photos of the Maharaj as well as his profound teachings and colorful instances of how he worked to awaken disciples on both the physical and subtle planes.

[Excerpts from *I Am That*](#) --At this link are to be found Miguel-Angel Carrasco's considerable excerpts (approx. 80 pages), arranged by topic, from the classic text *I Am That: Conversations with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (Maurice Frydman, Ed. & Tr.), Bombay: Chetana, single volume edition, 1992 (first published in 1973 and in a revised, two-volume edition in 1976).

[Excerpts from *Consciousness & the Absolute*](#) --At this webpage link are to be found some interesting photos of Maharaj and most of the conversations from the first 32 pages of the book *Consciousness & the Absolute: The Final Talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj* (Jean Dunn, Ed.), Acorn Press, 1994.

The full text of Nisargadatta's own written book, *Self-Knowledge & Self-Realization* -

-This text, **written by the Maharaj himself**, published in the early 1960s, is essential reading for many insights into his own devotional nature and understanding of subtle processes of the *yogas* of wisdom, meditation, and mantra.

The full text of *I Am Unborn* --the complete text of a **130-page free online book** compiled by Vijayendra Deshpande, edited by Pradeep Apte, based on notes of 56 talks with Nisargadatta Maharaj over 76 days from Nov. 30, 1979 to Feb. 13, 1980, made by Prof. Damodar Lund. (Also available at this website of Deshpande is the full text of the short biography booklet *Meet the Sage*, by Gogate and Phadol.) Incidentally, Jeff Johnson, who kindly told me of this *I Am Unborn* book, further informs me that a print copy is available for purchase at websites like lulu.com.

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With heartfelt appreciation, i thank and acknowledge Eliyahu Elliott Isenberg and Paul Ramana Das for first telling me of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj in 1979; Jean Dunn, for so kindly welcoming me upon my arrival at Maharaj's in January 1981; all the dear translators who served to help us understand Sri Maharaj's Marathi words (especially Saumitra Mullarpattan and Ramesh Balsekar); Greg Clifford and others for the great photographs of Maharaj; all those who have in any way helped bring out the many books of Maharaj's life and teachings; and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj himself, whose only interest was abiding as the Absolute and awakening sincere aspirants to This Truth. *Jai Guru Jai!*

Nisargadatta Maharaj: Meet the Sage

By Shrikant Gogate and P.T. Phadol , 1972 (?)

Copied from <http://www.inner-quest.org/NisargadattaMS.htm>

The occasion is the auspicious birthday celebrations of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The lavishly illumined Laxmibaug Hall of Bombay is agog with bustling devotees of Sri Maharaj. A huge portrait profusely garlanded with fresh and colorful flowers on a specially decorated platform captures the gaze of all present.

At the corner of this bright, beautiful and decorated platform is seated Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. He is clad with usual homely wear of a snow-white dhotee [loincloth], a yellowish khamees [shirt] and a simple topi [hat]. The conventional trappings of sandalwood paste marks and strings of conventional beads that usually go with other holy persons are conspicuous by their absence on his body.

His bright dark complexion, a full face, a broad forehead and in particular his large eyes pouring grace all around characteristic of an accomplished being [siddha purusha] are the cynosure of his numerous devotees present.

Nearby are seated his respected Gurubandhus [co-disciples] and his illustrious devotees like Sri V. S. Page and Sri Maurice Frydman.

Following the speeches, praising the glory of Sri Maharaj, of a few illustrious invitees he has begun his discourse. His words full of divine wisdom thrill and instill peace into the hearts of his countless devotees. See how powerful and inspiring are the following words coming from his holy lips:

"Today's celebrations are not in the glorification of any individual. This is an auspicious occasion for you and for me to glorify the unity of a devotee with his Satguru [fully enlightened Guru established in reality]. To name a particular day as being the birthday of One who is not only eternally existent but eternal existence itself is, in the spiritual parlance, incorrect. It is also wrong to personify a true devotee. As long as you conceive yourself to be an individual male or a female being you will not be the all-pervading, eternal and transcendental Self. Go with the conviction that you are not the bodily self, that you are beyond births and deaths, that you are dynamic, being dynamism itself and are apparently experienced only as pure and simple awareness. Be free, proclaim saints, go on asserting within that Atma [one's true nature] is not weak or devoid of power. Believe steadfastly with a simple belief that Atma is rich with its fullness. It is not possible to delve deep enough to reach the seed - the Gurubeej - the inner faith on Satguru. Devotion to Guru reaches the Guru through devotion to the Self and the Satguru's blessings emerge and flower through the Self and are consciously received externally by the devotee. Godhead is nothing but pure awareness of your being. The achievement of this fruit - this Godhead - is accomplished through unshakeable faith in the pure self. That is what is called the satswarup, the Self, is through this faith thoroughly comprehended. There should be conviction of this comprehension. The conviction implies unshakeability. That should be accomplished. There should be unflinching conviction of the Self being fixed, immobile. That which you conceive yourself to be is myth because you take yourself to be the bodily being. The incomprehensible on the surface of which the awareness of being is experienced is called the Satguru. Call conviction only to that which does not budge, which is immobile. Parabrahman [Supreme Reality] is fixed, immobile. The Self is fixed [in Parabrahman]. The Self is Parabrahman."

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj through whose holy lips gush forth these powerful words annihilating the encrustations of the individuality of his listeners rarely ever speaks of his worldly life. There is, according to him, no import to the happenings in the worldly life of a saint. To speak of the Self while being rooted in the self remains the only mission left with the saints and the audible message coming through the [inaudible] Self is commonly called the discourse of a saint. It is therefore difficult to draw a graph of his worldly past life.

The worldly life of a saint, though insignificant from his viewpoint, gives guidance and provides inspiration to his devotees. The devotees have, therefore, to collect information about the past life of their Satguru to inform their inquiring mind and in particular for their own good.

Sri Maharaj's birthday was unknown for a long time. Devotees needed to discover it, since how could they, otherwise, celebrate it? To those who mustered courage to ask him about this, he said, "How to tell the date of birth when there is no memory of the birth? Why to talk of things that have not taken place!" Though this was true on the spiritual plane devotees needed to know the day when their Satguru's bodily form took shape in this material world in order to embellish the exterior of their devotion. After a long search this day could be ascertained. On the break of the dawn of the auspicious full moon day of Chaitra month of the year 1897, popularly known as Hanuman Jayanti, Sri Maharaj took bodily form. A few details of his antecedents could also be collected from his near relations and close associates.

To write the biography of a saint, as it is, is really a very difficult task. A devotee once asked Swami Vivekanand as to why he did not write a biography of his Satguru, to which question he replied that it was impossible for puny words to do full justice to the magnitude of his Satguru's life.

Being faced with the same difficulty an attempt is being made below to narrate, in short, the material past life of Sri Maharaj.

1. CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

The sprawling district of Ratnagiri - a mine of gems - lies snugly hugged to the warm sea along its long coastline. This district has added luster to the Indian life by providing to it numerous human gems in all walks of life. Sri Maharaj was born in Bombay and was brought up in a village named Kandalgaon in the lovely countryside, 4 to 5 miles deep from Malwan, a seaport to the south of this District. The hilly countryside here is extremely beautiful. It is ever green with mango, cashew and coconut trees. The exterior of the inhabitants of this district is seemingly rough and uncouth like the exterior of the local jack-fruit, but their interior is sweet like the inside of this fruit and sweet and luscious like the local mangoes.

In keeping with the local custom, being born as aforesaid on the auspicious birth anniversary day of Sri Maruti, Sri Maharaj was named Maruti. In later life, he had the distinction of being the leading disciple of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

Sri Maharaj's father, Shivrampant Kampli and mother, Parwatibai were both ardent devotees. Sri Shivrampant was, up to 1896, in the service of a merchant at Colaba in Bombay. At the first outbreak of the epidemic of plague in that year in Bombay, he left for his district and purchased some land at

Kandalgaon near his home town Revandi and eked out his livelihood. He was simple and obliging by nature. He had in his possession a number of traditional holy books which he read regularly and devoutly.

Sri Maharaj's parents observed very rigorously the traditional fasts and holy days. They made no distinction as between Shiva and Vishnu. His father loved to sing bhajans, especially loudly as do the followers of the Varkari system.

There was one Brahmin friend of Sri Shivrampant. His name was Sri Vishnu Haribhau Gore. He tilled his land and owned also a coconut and betel-nut garden.

He had a mastery over astrology. Shivrampant often had long talks with him, especially on spiritual matters. Sri Maharaj regarded Sri Gore as a pious person. To him Sri Gore was the ideal in the virtues of honesty, courage, tenacity and hard work. He greatly respected him. The devotional life of his parents and the virtuous life of Sri Gore molded Sri Maharaj's childhood which became fertile for divine grace.

There are hardly any childhood memories available of Sri Maharaj. The first memory he has is of his being carried on the shoulders by his father one early morning on the slopes of a hill, when in front the Sun was brilliantly rising above the horizon. Sri Maharaj says this first and a very vivid memory he still carries very clearly till today.

Sri Maharaj had his elementary education up to Std. IV at Kandalgaon. While observing the village life he developed a liking for tending cattle, tilling land and gardening. He particularly liked taking household cattle for grazing far in the open. He spent happy time in the jungle with the young herdsmen of his age.

The mystery of nature always posed him with a problem. How was it that only a basketful of paddy, once sown gives mounds of yield? How, when there is nothing but soil in the field, abundant grains come out of it? How is it that mangoes come out of the tree? How sour mangoes when small turn out later to be sweet and luscious? Why the seed of a cashew fruit is outside the fruit when all the other fruits have their seeds inside them? These and such other mysterious questions tormented his young mind. Adult replies did not satisfy him. The mysterious and wonderful play of nature enthralled his mind and provided him inspiration for love of God.

He was from the very beginning of an obliging nature. He immediately responded to a needy call. In times of distress he ran to help them put out fires, pull out a cattle from a well, etc. For this, he made no distinction as between a caste Hindu and a Harijan. If there was death in any household he would himself go out and render all assistance to its members. The life of poor Harijans in particular touched a sympathetic chord in his heart. He was distressed by their hard life.

How did poverty still exist when the world had long been in existence? When the villages were very old why were pathways leading to them so primitive and difficult? When all human beings were similar, why are we regarded high and the others low? Such questions tormented him. If the world existed before I was born, how was it that I did not know that it was there? He brooded over such occult questions also. Journey to Bombay:

On the 14th night of Falgun month of the year 1915 Shivrampant quietly breathed his last. A few hours before, he had given pre-intimation to his dearest friend Sri Gore that he would leave the world that

day.

The paternal love and security of four brothers and two sisters was no more. Agriculture was a poor means of livelihood in those days. The elder brother of Sri Maharaj left for Bombay in 1916 to eke out life.

Sri Maharaj also left for Bombay in 1918 to explore life there. He occasionally would go to Kandalgaon to look after the land there. He had endeared himself there to all with his obliging and friendly nature. Even in those olden days he had befriended many Harijans. He had at times even helped them drag carcasses. His pure mind did not even so much as think of inequality amongst men.

After intermittently being either in Bombay or in Kandalgaon for 2 to 3 years, Sri Maharaj permanently settled in Bombay in 1920. He joined a night school for a short while to acquire the rudiments of the English language. He worked for a couple of months as a clerk in the Princess Dock. The fetters of service inhibited his enterprising mind. He therefore left his job and entered business.

2. SUCCESS IN BUSINESS

Owing to his industrious and friendly nature he started getting stability in business. He even then stayed in Khetwadi. He married in 1924. His wife's name befitted her name Sumatibai. The field of his business slowly started enlarging. Shops, big and small, of tobacco, beedis [hand-rolled cigarettes], cutlery, ready-made garments etc... were opened by him at Khetwadi, Grant Road and Bori Bunder. His technique was to acquire a place for a shop in a building under construction in a locality suitable for business by starting negotiations with the agent of the owner in advance. Thus, his business flourished. There were 30 to 40 employees working under him.

3. ASPIRANT TO SPIRITUAL REALISATION

He was fully engaged in his expanding business. He was making good money, but he had not forgotten the Almighty. Devotion to God also deepened.

One of his friends in business, Sri Yashwantrao Baagkar by name, was a kind-hearted person and was a devotee of God. He and Sri Maharaj often had long talks on devotional matters. Sri Maharaj from the very beginning loved to read books on spiritualism. He liked the book "Nawnath Bhaktisar" in particular. In addition to reading books on spiritualism he also observed traditional fasts and performed other usual religious practices. He snatched time from his busy schedule to go to Bhuleshwer or Walkeshwer temple. In those days his mother stayed with him. Every morning he used to give her flowers and reverently touched her feet. This to him was worship of God. He never forgot to give grass to cows. The cows that always used to have grass at his hands developed relationship with him. In the month of Shrawan he religiously used to go every morning to Bhuleshwar temple to offer leaves from the Bel tree to God Shiva.

There was one yogi by the name of Sri Athavale in the Girgaum area in those days. Sri Maharaj learnt yogic exercises from him for a few months. Sri Baagkar used to go for darshan [to see or be seen by a Guru or God] of Sri Satguru Siddharameshwar Maharaj and also attended his programs of devotional songs and spiritual lectures. He even received grace from Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj in the form of initiation. Thenceforth, he pressed Maharaj to have darshan of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj. Sri Maharaj avoided it. He refused to believe that there could ever be saints or sadhus [renunciates] in a mushroom city like Bombay. He refused to touch, by his forehead, the feet of any human form.

When the importunities of Sri Baagkar failed, he requested Sri Maharaj that, at least for his sake, Sri Maharaj should accompany him for a darshan of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

Willy-nilly Sri Maharaj accompanied Sri Baagkar. In those days Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj used to be at the residence of late Sri Krishnarao Pathare, Solicitor. The usual program of devotional prayers and spiritual discourses used to be held there. The day Sri Maharaj went there first, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj was having a discourse on a line from the book, "Yoga Vashistha." "Look inward, Oh Lord I", was the theme of the day's discourse. Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj profoundly expounded the theme. The talk exalted renunciation. Sri Maharaj plainly told Sri Baagkar that the call was beyond him. He, however, at the requests of Sri Baagkar, went thrice in succession for the darshan of Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

Sri Baagkar strongly desired that Sri Maharaj should receive initiation from Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj. He succeeded at last. Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj by disclosing one secret thing above him created confidence in him and initiated him by giving a Nama Mantra and explained to him how to meditate. Within a few minutes Sri Maharaj experienced within him dazzling illumination of various colours and went into deep trance. Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj soon awakened him. Thus, at the end of 1933 the stage of an aspirant was over and he became a sadhak [spiritual seeker].

4. GREAT HIERARCHY OF SATGURUS

In the field of spiritualism the hierarchy of Satgurus has a great significance. It is a fortune of a sadhaka to have a long tradition of enlightened Satgurus. The hierarchy of Satgurus Sri Maharaj belonged to is well known as the Nath Sampradaya [School of Philosophy] which had a brilliant past. Sri Revannath, alias Sri Revan Siddha, was the first of the famous Nav [nine] Nathas. From his one name Revan Siddha his Sampradaya is also known as the Siddha [a realised being] Sampradaya. In this Sampradaya, a disciple is taught to have a direct experience of the Self.

After Sri Revannath, Sri Marul Siddha, Sri Kad Siddha, Sri Guruling Jangam Maharaj of Nimbargi, Sri Bhausahab Maharaj of Umadi and the last Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj belonged to the line of the great Satgurus of Sri Maharaj.

Sri Bhausahab Maharaj built a Shrine for Sri Gurulinga Jangam Maharaj at Inchgeri, District of Bijapur, and widely spread spiritual knowledge there. Sri Amburao Maharaj, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, the world-famous philosopher Gurudeo Ranade Maharaj Sri Girimalleshwar Maharaj and other great disciples of the Sampradaya spread spiritual knowledge far and wide. Sri Bhausahab Maharaj used first to initiate his disciples only on Mondays and Thursdays. It was a Saturday when Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj first met Sri Bhausahab Maharaj. Sri Bhausahab Maharaj knew the potential of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj and gladly broke his practice and gave him initiation on a Saturday. From then, he started giving initiation even on Saturday. Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj spread spiritual

knowledge between the years 1924 and 1936 with great effect in Bombay and round about Sholapur.

5. UNFLINCHING FAITH IN SATGURU

The grace of Satguru completely changed the course of Sri Maharaj's life. He dedicated his worldly life with his Self to the lotus-feet of his Satguru at his very first prostration before him. At the very first meeting his mind introverted and settled on the feet of his Satguru. In the words of Sri Maharaj, he was bound in wedlock.

Whatever his Satguru said or was saying was law unto him. So unflinching was his faith on his Satguru that every word coming from his Satguru's lips was finality to him. He cared for nothing else-beyond that. He got everyone of his employees initiated by his Satguru.

Whenever Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj was in Bombay, the usual programmes of chorus singing of devotional songs and of spiritual discourses were held with great clat.

He was an accomplished yogi, a renunciation [vairagya] incarnate. Though in the midst of royal splendor, he was detached from everything as a lotus leaf is in water. There was quite a number of rich and learned persons amongst his thousands of disciples. He, however, gave spiritual knowledge freely and bountifully to all his disciples irrespective of their social status as well as being kind-hearted yet fearless and outspoken.

He hardly received any education. He studied only up to elementary second standard. He had, however, such spiritual height that while giving a spiritual discourse he shone like a blazing Sun. He expressed spiritual knowledge in such a simple language in his talks that listeners flocked to him in great numbers. He spoke with such conviction based on Self-experience that many learned persons sat mute and bumble at his feet.

The description given by Swami Ramdas in his "Dasbodh" befitted him completely. His talks were virtual boons of divine grace to his disciples. In one of his talks he says:

"God is nothing else than the devotee. Give up the idea that there is a devotee and a God. It is a myth that some one else will come and do something for you. Whatever is, is of your own making. Nothing extraneous will give you Godhood. Maya [doubt] has the power to dislodge or shake you from your conviction, but it has no power to give you Godhood Your will has given you the shape you experience. Be God or whatever you like; you have only to will so. Name what you like and you have it. What you acquire comes to being. How will people call you God if you yourself do not believe in your Godhood? When you will realise that you were committing a "sin" or a blunder in behaving like a worldly being then Godhood, will dawn on you. When you feel so, then take it, that You are acquiring Godhood. Why, you have actually acquired it, nay, you will then experience that you needed no acquisition of it because it was there eternally within you already. As a man naturally feels ashamed to wear the garments of a woman, so a man who has acquired Godhood will feel ashamed of the material life. You must always feel that ultimate Reality is ever free. You should be ashamed of going round as a human being. Why should you need different objects for the gratification of different senses of the body when you are convinced that you are not the body but pure consciousness [Brahma] itself. Beware and examine critically the thoughts coming to your mind. Do it as a daily routine. Go on observing, how

far, what you took yourself to be before, is undergoing a change. Observe and compare the change in your attitude to life before and after you met the Satguru - what you consider yourself to be before and what you consider yourself to be now. See what feelings evoked Pleasure in the mind before and what feelings do so now. See what attributes we give to our life, that is, what form and meaning we now give it. Acquisition and dispossession take place involuntarily according as what form and quality your consciousness takes shape of. Our mind, intelligence, Chitta and Ahankar put together go to form our right which we try to exercise with reference to our form, inner consciousness and the place or the destination where, we aim to go. By focusing your inner gaze directly on your conceived outward form and inner cognition, you realise the Self at first hand and the conviction of such realisation is called the steadfast Self-Realisation".

6. IDEAL SEEKER [VAIRAGYA]

The powerful teaching of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj carrying conviction with it revolutionised Sri Maharaj's life. His zest for family life and business waned. He practiced meditation and sang devotional songs with sincerity. Thereafter, he indulged more and more in spiritual thinking and to him, practicing meditations as taught by his Satguru and singing devotional songs with sincerity remained the only pursuits of his life. The vow given to him by his Satguru was his only guiding star in the future course of his life. Implicit obedience, without raising even a shade of doubt, of his Satguru's word became the key-note of his life. If his Satguru bade him give up a thing, he unhesitatingly and instantly did so. He derived great happiness in the service of his Satguru and carrying out his orders. He once accompanied his Satguru to his home town, Patri. He did not miss, during those days, even a single traditional function held at Inchgeri, Bagewadi and Siddhagiri [Kolhapur]. In 1935, he had gone to the home town of his friend Sri Baagkar. He gave twelve discourses there on spiritual books. On hearing them Sri Baagkar was greatly pleased and cited in approbation the mythological story of a Parijata flower tree which, though in front of the doors of Satyabhama, actually shed flowers in front of the house of Rukmini - both the wives of Lord Krishna. Occult books difficult of understanding earlier became now simple and plain to him. He was fast gaining spiritual height. At every step he experienced the grace of his Satguru.

Being occupied with the daily chores of business, he practiced meditation mostly at night. He experienced strange and colorful divine lights in his meditation. He also experienced various divine forms of God and saints. He experienced beautiful sights of places and lands never seen before. Thus, his spiritual life was blooming fast.

7. THE LOSS OF SATGURU

Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj dropped his body a little before the Divali festival in the year 1936 on the Ekadashi day of the later half of the month of Ashwin. The material form which pleased the eyes of his devotees was no more. It was like a heaven-fall to them. Sri Maharaj extremely grieved his Satguru's loss whose absence he keenly experienced every now and then. Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj laid his material body in Bombay. His beautiful marble shrine is built on the Banaganga

Walkeshwar cremation ground. Sri Maharaj used to visit the place very often. A shrine is built also at Bagewadi.

Sri Maharaj used to remember the powerful words of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj. In his last days, he used to say, "Disciples as such there are many, but is there one who is ready to renounce material life completely for the sake of his Satguru's word?" The wound caused by the arrow of this question tormented his mind. He often used to be completely distracted. His business remained neglected. The idea of complete renunciation of material life was taking root in his mind. He yearned for Self-realisation.

8. THE WANDERING SANYASIN

The days were of Divali celebrations in the year 1937. There was gaiety all around. Sri Maharaj, however, was calm towards everything. Tears often gushed in his eyes at the memory of his Satguru and his grace. His Satguru's last words tormented him more and more. It became almost impossible for him to carry on with his business.

He took a final decision to renounce material life completely while the Divali celebrations were in full swing. Without informing his aged mother, wife and children and literally throwing his business to the winds, he left Bombay and took the path to Pandharpur.

At Pandharpur he gave up his costly clothes, put on a simple khamees and only with two small pieces of loincloth and a coarse woolen covering he began the course of penniless wandering. Saffron colour signifies renunciation. His outer wear became in its true sense, therefore, in tune with his inner mind which had turned saffron-coloured. The memory of his Satguru was his only thought and the only support. Blessed be he, who, just for the sake of a word from his Satguru, kicked off his wealth and completely renounced his material family life.

He coursed and walked his way from Pandharpur to Ganagapur. From there he turned to the South. While wandering in the State of Madras he reached Rameshwar. Having loved to walk long distances he wandered only on foot. Since communication through the language of the South was impossible, he relied only on mute gesticulations.

Through the grace of his Satguru, food for subsistence was never a problem to him. Some one or the other with reverence for sadhus chanced to meet him at lunch time and offer him food with great respect. Some even used to offer him a ticket for his further journey or fare for it but he politely declined it. Sometimes along with other wandering sadhus he was implicated by the police in some trouble. But, by the grace of his Satguru, he used to be honourably let off on each occasion. The undaunted faith in his Satguru had made him fearless.

He turned back from Rameshwar in the South. Wandering through Karnataka, he entered Maharashtra. Accidentally a brother disciple met him at Sholapur. Out of love, he gave Sri Maharaj a fine photograph of his Satguru, a copy of "Dasbodh", a piece of saffron cloth with its ends tied together to be slung on his shoulders to serve as a receptacle, camphor and scented sticks. Then he started for the north. Traversing through Madhya Pradesh he reached Agra. Then he set out for Delhi via Mathura-Brindavan. Then he made up his mind to go to the Himalayas to visit holy places and do penance there.

9. MYSTIC EXPERIENCES

In the course of his wanderings, he had many mystic Divine experiences. That deepened his faith in his Satguru. Exhausted and tired of long walks when sometimes he caressed his hot bare feet he saw on them the divine Picture of his Satguru. That instantly relieved him, of his exhaustion and refreshed him. This direct experience of the grace of his Satguru filled his heart with emotion and filled his eyes with tears of love for him.

In his wanderings, he everyday used to do one yogic exercise known as Tratak. This required fixing a long gaze on the disc of the Sun. He used to do this so long that ultimately the burning Sun used to cool down and looked like a piece of ice. He, thereafter, gave up this practice.

Once he set off for his next halt. He walked on till noontime. He looked around and afar but there was no trace of a human habitation; long barren fields lay stretched everywhere. He became very much hungry. In that barren land he did not know where and how to go further. His Satguru, however, was, as always, uppermost in his mind. Once again he looked back. He now noticed a small habitation. He went there out of curiosity. It was a small, old house. When he approached it, a man inside received him with reverence and fully fed him. After his meal Sri Maharaj set off for his next journey. He was wondering how the house came to be noticed and how at once he also got food. While so wandering and when he had not walked even fifty paces, he casually looked back in the direction of that house. And Oh! There was no trace of the house which he had left only a few moments before. No human being could also be seen anywhere. All around lay, as before, long stretches of barren fields. The intensity of the emotional upsurge of this moving experience of his Satguru's grace could well be imagined.

[Top of the page](#)

10. RETURN

Sri Maharaj reached Delhi by the Mathura-Brindawan Road. He intended to go to the Himalayas for a pilgrimage and to spend the rest of his life there only in penance. Dedication to his Satguru was, according to him, to be complete - by his body, speech and mind.

Sri Maharaj wanted for his next journey a small pot for drinking water. He had however, no money for it. While walking through the streets of Delhi, he accidentally met a brother disciple. The full story of Sri Maharaj enhanced his respect for him but he could not approve of his plan to go to the Himalayas. He said to Sri Maharaj, "Blessed are you as you have stood the test of a true devotee by complete renunciation of your worldly life. But does attainment of divine life call for going to the Himalayas? The entire hierarchy of our great Satgurus, as you will see, has, by its own example, exemplified the unity of the worldly and the divine life. The teachings of the "Dasbodh" also support this. How can you absolve yourself from your moral responsibility for the maintenance of your wife and children? No, that won't do. Do go back to Bombay. I shall make all arrangements for your journey back to Bombay. By the grace of Satguru, I am sure, while leading a material life you will also acquire fruition of the

spiritual life."

Sri Maharaj could not rebut his revered brother disciple's arguments. In deference to his advice, he returned to Bombay. That was a great fortune of his family members and his future devotees. It is the Satguru's will, it is true, and that ultimately prevails.

11. LIFE DIVINE AND MATERIAL

On his return to Bombay after an absence of many months he took stock of his business. It was completely upset. He could retain only his present bidi shop. His old zest for business having waned he was content with running only his present small shop. Since that was just enough for the sustenance of his family he devoted minimum time to it and gave as much time as possible for his spiritual pursuits. Beyond the time that was absolutely necessary to keep his family and business going, he was always engaged in meditation, singing devotional songs contemplation and similar other spiritual matters. He did not do any conscious efforts for these spiritual pursuits [sadhana] because; whatever sadhana was going on was involuntary taking place at the beckoning of the call within. Without going out anywhere else he made use of the mezzanine floor of his tenement itself for his spiritual practices. Having traversed long distances over a protracted period, independently and without any means his self-abnegating nature [vairagya] had come to stay. He followed a strict and regulated daily regime. He spoke but a few words. His devotion to his Satguru was so singular - that he never thought of going out to temples or meeting any saints.

He regularly spent hours in meditation. While in meditation he intuitively received replies to his spiritual doubts from within and, felt reassured. He read spiritual books like "Dasbodh", "Sadachar" by Sri Shankaracharya and in particular studied the "Yoga Vashistha" and Eknatha's "Bhagwat". He was lost in getting at the root of their meaning. He also carefully read works like "Srimat Bhagavad Gita", "Upanishads", "Dnyaneshwari" and "Amruta-nubhava".

He loved singing devotional songs from the early days. While singing these songs in front of a portrait he used to become oblivious of the surroundings, turn his back to the portrait and was lost in himself and lay still for a long time in the ecstasy of the luminous divine light in front of his eyes. He literally experienced chewing a paan [betel-nut] himself when he sang a line meaning a devotee offering a paan to the Lord. He got all the spiritual experiences explained in the traditional song of his Sampradaya [school of thought] sung everyday in the afternoon. Owing to the rousing of serpent power [kundalini] he gained very high spiritual experiences and was lost in their ecstasy for long periods.

Being engrossed in these matters his health remained neglected and it broke down. He felt very weak. Through the pleadings of his relatives, medical treatment was started. The doctor's diagnosis of T. B. frightened all. Sri Maharaj, however, remained unmoved. "Yes, the doctor has pronounced it to be T. B.," said Sri Maharaj, "but what will it do when the tube inside is full of my Satguru's vow?" Without taking much of a medical treatment he started doing regular physical exercises.

He started doing sashtang namaskars and baithakas and increased their number up to 500 a day. He started doing physical exercises with wooden clubs [mudgals] also. His health started improving and within a few months, he became quite fit.

A few years later his health broke down again and he became weak. He passed blood 3 to 4 times through his urine. The doctor frightened everyone again by suspecting cancer and advised taking six X-ray photos immediately. For the sake of his relatives, again, he agreed to take a few medicines but refused X-ray photos. "If you really have faith in me", he said to them, "give up the idea of taking photographs of the disease". At these resolute words of his, they kept mum. For their sake Sri Maharaj agreed to a minor course of medicines. Through sheer faith in his Satguru, he was cured. His health improved within 2 to 3 weeks.

12. AS A SIDDHA [ACCOMPLISHED BEING]

Sri Maharaj's spiritual practices were unfolding themselves involuntarily through sheer faith on his Satguru. In course of time his sadhana culminated into his ripening as a perfect Siddha - a Seer through direct Self-realisation. The primal reality of the Self got confirmed by its direct revelation through the Self. Delving deep into the mystic Self, he experienced the inner blinding flame which illumines the universe. He saw the eye which perceives through the mortal eye. By the grace of his Satguru he acquired through Self-realisation the immortal fruit of Reality in the form of jivanmukti [final liberation] as a culminating point of his sadhana. The routine of his daily life outwardly continued to be as before. He was doing nothing though he seemed to be doing everything. Even after fulfilling his duties in his shop and towards his family he snatched hours for offering prayers and singing devotional songs to his Satguru and for loud spiritual thinking with his dear brother disciple.

From 1941 onwards he came in a close contact with his brother disciple Sri Bhainath Maharaj. Everyday they usually used to go to Girgaum Chaupati for a walk after the shop hours. They were engrossed for hours together in their discussion, the subject matter of which was nothing else but spiritualism. In those days of the Second World War, there used to be a black out every night. Sometimes even curfew hours were on, due to communal riots and house-fires. Close by, country bombs used to explode on the open streets. Braving such tense atmosphere and unmindful of the rain or the cold winds, these two Gurubandhus were engrossed for hours together in spiritual discussions on the Chaupati [beach in Bombay] sands or the Chaupati bandstand or sitting on the footsteps of a closed shop or standing at the corner of N. Powell. It was not uncommon that when they reached home it was two or three hours past midnight. Their daily routine mundane duties, however, did not suffer on that account.

Sri Maharaj was much spirited and clear-cut in his talks. Sri Bhainath Maharaj had, therefore, usually to play the role of a listener. Commenting on his calm habits Sri Maharaj once said to him, "You are indeed very cool like Lord Vishnu. Look at me ! I am like the fiery Lord Rudra."

These long and subtle talks on spiritual matters helped both. This nightly spiritual fire was continuously on for 25 years. Self-realisation had made Sri Maharaj cool towards the ups and downs, the happiness and misery in his life. The loss of a dear daughter, devoted wife and a revered mother during the years 1942 to 1948 and the severe loss in his business did not ruffle him. On the contrary, these shocks hardened his vairagya [dispassion]. Owing to lack of attention, his landed property in the Konkan was literally thrown to the winds. Braving great miseries one after another, he once coolly exclaimed, "Fortunate shall I be, if miseries do befall me."

Experiencing his spiritual height and powers, his well wishers and devotees started gathering around

him. To avoid distraction he used to avoid them. If some one persisted, he cut him short by giving him a short shrift. How long, however, a sweetly smelling flower can keep off the bees? They shall hover round it whatever the obstacles. The well-wishers and the devotees were, likewise, irresistibly attracted towards him. They used to get their spiritual doubts and difficulties cleared by him. Mundane matters were a taboo with him. He is against using spiritual powers [siddhis] for performing miracles. Most of his time of the day being spent in his shop, the spiritual discussions used to be in front of his shop. Some aspirant or other was always seen standing in front of his shop. To avoid encumbrances he never used to invite others to him or to go to them. His devotion to his Satguru, as said earlier, was so singular that he never so much even as crossed any other sadhu.

In those days there was in Bombay one famous Avalia [Sufi] by the name of Tikku Baba. One of his chelas [devotees] often used to visit Sri Maharaj and tell him many things about Tikku Baba's greatness and invited Sri Maharaj to visit him. Even Tikku Baba sent him messages to come and see him. Sri Maharaj did not yield. Before dropping his body Tikku Baba sent him a message, "I am dropping my mortal body, do come and receive my spiritual powers". Without the slightest wavering of his mind, Sri Maharaj conveyed his message to him, "My contract has already been finalised, once and for all time."

13. ON THE SEAT OF SATGURU

Many received guidance through the discussions held in front of his shop. Some of his devotees expressed a desire that he initiate them. Sri Maharaj was reluctant to play the role of a Satguru, he used to direct them to one accomplished Gurubandhu of his. Some of his devotees however, insisted on initiation from him only. He did not yield to their importunities. Whenever the question of giving a Nama Mantra [initiation] arose he quietened them by a cross question whether the saints like Saibaba, Upasanibaba, Satam Maharaj or the like ever gave Nama Mantra. All the same, they could not give up their insistence and preferred to wait patiently for years to get the Nama Mantra from Sri Maharaj. Although, in order to avoid encumbrances he was avoiding them, he could not disobey the dictum from his Satguru much longer. His Satguru himself strongly willed that Sri Maharaj bless his devotees by initiating them into the field of spiritualism by giving them Nama Mantra and spread true knowledge in the world. He yielded and started, in deference to the will of his Satguru, to initiate from 1951 onwards true aspirants by giving them Nama Mantra. Thus, after all, he assumed the role of a Satguru.

14. ASHRAM REGIME

After he started giving Nama Mantra, devotees began to gather at his residence for their sadhana. The present mezzanine floor was half its size then. He got it complete, full-sized. More aspirants could, therefore, make use of it for their spiritual practices. A lovely portrait of Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj was installed in the place which has turned itself into a regular ashram now.

The love and care the devotees get from Sri Maharaj defy description. One truly gets the experience of saint Dnyaneshwara's couplet from one of his abhangas meaning:

"At the meeting of the saints today
my happiness is at its superlative.
Mind is disinclined to meet, father,
mother, dear ones and other relatives."

Blessed be the devotees endowed with such divine love!

Sri Maharaj likes plain and disciplined life. All the programs held in the ashram are characterised by their regularity and cleanliness. That is largely due to the willing cooperation and efforts on the part of his only son, Sri Chittaranjan, his daughter-in-law, Mayadevi and his younger daughter, Kumari Suprabha. The eldest daughter born Sulochana is now Srimati Mangala Hate, being married to Sri M. D. Hate, an old devotee of Sri Maharaj. Since his retirement in 1966 from active business, Sri Maharaj's son looks after his shop. All the inmates in the ashram being very kind by nature all the incoming devotees are warmly welcomed. One also hears here the twitter of the two young grandchildren of Sri Maharaj.

The day in the ashram begins with a Kakad Arti followed from 8 a.m. onwards by the portrait worship of Satguru, Pothee-reading and simultaneous group meditation for an hour for those present. This is immediately followed by the singing of the morning Bhajan, Arati, and Prasad distribution. This concludes by 9.30 a.m. Sri Maharaj impresses on the minds of his devotees the necessity of increasing the practice of deep meditation and doing Satguru bhajan with all devotion. This perhaps is the only place in the whole city of Bombay where one can practice dhyanyoga very regularly. The singularity of this holy place is that, despite the constant din of the traffic on the road below, the mind of a sadhak, within a few minutes, turns inwards and losing bodily consciousness, enjoys, through divine experiences, inner bliss.

Daily in the evening, discussions on spiritual matters are held for those who are interested in them. One can hear masterly analysis of what is knowledge [dnyana] and what is devotion [bhakti]. In course of his talk he, off and on, keeps on smoking bidies. The aroma of costly scented sticks [agarbatti] constantly lingers on. At 7 p.m. begins the evening bhajan. This is followed for an hour or an hour and a half by a very inspiring and powerful discourse on dnyana and bhakti by Sri Maharaj. The day concludes with the singing of devotional songs, Arati and Prasad distribution. On holidays, the number of devotees attending being large, the evening program of singing devotional songs and Sri Maharaj's discourse is held in the commodious hall of Sri Bhainath Maharaj. On the holy days like the Birthdays and anniversaries of Satgurus in the tradition, Guru Purnima, Deepavali, Dev Deepavali etc., celebrations are held in specially rented big halls with great enthusiasm. On these occasions Sri Maharaj himself loudly sings devotional songs and dances to the tune. It is a lovely scene to witness. Sri Maharaj does not at all like the idea of celebrating his own birthday, but he had to acquiesce in the importunities of his devotees.

In the recent past, the number of disciples of Sri Maharaj in the city of Bombay and in other places has considerably increased. He undertakes tours four or five times a year to visit, along with some disciples, holy places, like Bagewadi, Inchgeri, Siddhagiri which are the birth places of Satgurus in the Sampradaya. He also visits, though rarely, the places of disciples who stay out of Bombay. On such occasions the disciples not only get opportunities to express their devotion for their Satguru through physical service but also get their divine life refreshed by added vigor and vitality. Sri Maharaj reveals, through his daily discourses and talks, the essence of Reality through his own conviction with exceptional vigor and clarity. Knowledge flows through his talks everyday for hours on end. It pours freely like rain and is addressed to all who are present.

Narrow distinctions of male and female, high and low, caste and creed, isms or schools make no sense here. His sublime and saintly looks pour peace and love equally on all. Like the pure and refreshingly cool waters of the Ganges, his powerful language gives peace to the spiritually thirsty according to their needs. His audience includes seekers from different walks of life. Professors, pleaders, judges, high executives, political and social leaders often visit the Ashram to seek spiritual guidance from him. Seekers of Truth from the West like Sri Maurice Frydman often visit him for discussion and spiritual guidance. Since he has no expectations from others, he is, as in his day-to-day practical life, exceptionally plain and uninhibitive in his spiritual teachings as well. Worldly matters have no room with him. Sri Maharaj is against making use of spiritual powers [siddhis] to seek worldly ends though his faithful devotees do experience his powers in their daily life.

The language used by Sri Maharaj has its own singularity. Always deep-rooted in the Supreme reality, he reveals at ease, to the surprise and ecstasy of his listeners the glow of their spiritual self through the words spontaneously flowing out of his holy lips giving a spiritual twist to their conventional meaning. New aspirants do not easily grasp the inner meaning of the language, peculiarly his own. One realises the value of his spiritual language only after listening to a few of his discourses through the inner silence with rapt attention. One is, then, involuntarily drawn towards him to listen to him. His power of exposition is rare indeed.

Himself seated firmly in the absolute non-dualism he peals out through his peculiar spiritual language the truth of direct Self-realisation. By correctly listening to him, his devoted listeners, then, enjoy the spiritual ecstasy of Self-realisation blossoming through their own Self and are immensely pleased with their rare fortune.

The discourses or talks of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj are now available in book-form. Though averse to publicity, therefore, he is well-known to many earnest aspirants of Truth. Three or four compendiums of his talks have been published. They are immensely useful to seekers of Truth. Some of his lyrical poetry [abhangas] has also been published. In the worldly sense his 71st Birth Anniversary Day was celebrated by his devotees in 1967 with great clat. On this auspicious day his devotees published one commemoration book. They took an opportunity, through this book of expressing their Self-gratification for being fortunate in getting a life-time chance of rendering what is, in spiritual parlance, called a service to the Satguru. Even in this book are included valuable articles explaining the teachings of Sri Maharaj.

The message of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj borne out from his Self-experience appears at the very outset of this article. They are not mere hollow words. He speaks out what he himself experiences within. Countless obeisance be at his holy feet! The great saint, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj personifies a continuous flow of ecstatic bliss of the Self. His saintly life itself is an auspicious living message providing inspiration and guidance to all.

The glory of saints can be described only by saints. To try to do so is beyond the words of mortals. It is better, therefore, to conclude here the puerile attempt made above.



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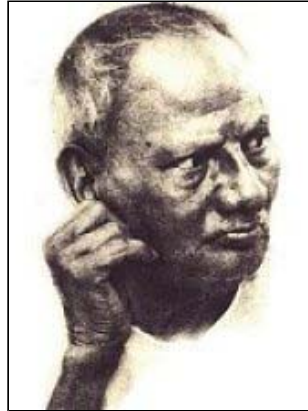
[Remembering](#)
[Nisargadatta](#)
[Maharaj](#)

[Temple Times](#)

[My son, the](#)
[Missionary](#)

Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj

Page 1



Nisargadatta Maharaj

I was sitting with a visitor recently, looking at a new book on Nisargadatta Maharaj that consisted of photos and brief quotes. I knew some of the people in the pictures and narrated a few stories about them. This prompted a wider and lengthy discussion on some of the events that went on in Maharaj's presence. After she left I felt prompted to write down some of the things I had remembered since I had never bothered to record any of my memories of Maharaj before. As I went about recording the conversation, a few other memories surfaced, things I hadn't thought about for years. This, therefore, is a record of a pleasant afternoon's talk, supplemented by recollections of related incidents that somehow never came up.

Harriet: Every book I have seen about Maharaj, and I think I have looked at most of them, is a record of his teachings. Did no one ever bother to record the things that were going on around him? Ramakrishna had *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*, Ramana Maharshi had *Day by Day*, and a whole library of books by devotees that all talk about life with their Guru. Why hasn't Maharaj spawned a similar genre?

David: Maharaj very rarely spoke about his life, and he didn't encourage questions about it. I think he saw himself as a kind of doctor who diagnosed and treated the perceived spiritual ailments of the people who came to him for advice. His medicine was his presence and his powerful words. Anecdotes from his past were not part of the prescription. Nor did he seem interested in telling stories about anything or anyone else.

Harriet: You said 'rarely spoke'. That means that you must have heard at least a few stories. What did you hear him talk about?

[Page 1](#)

[Page 2](#)

[Page 3](#)

[Page 4](#)

[Page 5](#)

[Page 6](#)

In this page:

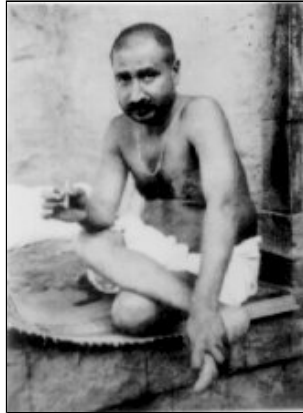
[What else did you glean about his background and the spiritual tradition he came from?](#)

[So far as you are aware Maharaj never publicly acknowledged anyone else's enlightenment?](#)

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David: Mostly about his Guru, Siddharameshwar Maharaj, and the effect he had had on his life. I think his love for his Guru and his gratitude to him were always present with him. Nisargadatta Maharaj used to do five *bhajans* a day simply because his Guru had asked him to. Siddharameshwar Maharaj had passed away in 1936, but Nisargadatta Maharaj was still continuing with these practices more than forty years later.



Siddharameshwar Maharaj

I once heard him say, 'My Guru asked me to do these five *bhajans* daily, and he never cancelled his instructions before he passed away. I don't need to do them any more but I will carry on doing them until the day I die because this is the command of my Guru. I continue to obey his instructions, even though I know these *bhajans* are pointless, because of the respect and gratitude I feel towards him.'

Harriet: Did he ever talk about the time he was with Siddharameshwar, about what passed between them?

David: Not on any of the visits I made. Ranjit Maharaj once came to visit during one of his morning sessions. They chatted in Marathi for a few minutes and then Ranjit left.

Maharaj simply said, 'That man is a *jnani*. He is a disciple of my Guru, but he is not teaching.'

End of story. That visit could have been a springboard to any number of stories about his Guru or about Ranjit, but he wasn't interested in talking about them. He just got on with answering the questions of his visitors.

Harriet: What else did you glean about his background and the spiritual tradition he came from?

David: He was part of a spiritual lineage that is known as the Navnath Sampradaya. This wasn't a secret because he had photos or pictures of many of the teachers from his lineage on his walls. He did a Guru *puja* every morning at the end of which he put *kum kum* on the foreheads of all the teachers in his lineage and on the photos of everyone else he thought was enlightened. I should mention that his walls were covered with portraits. Ramana Maharshi was there, and so were many other famous saints who



Ranjit Maharaj
(Click on image to enlarge)

were not part of his lineage. Mixed in with them were other pictures, such as one of Sivaji, a famous Marathi warrior from a few hundred years ago.

I once asked him why Sivaji had made it onto his walls, and he said, 'My son wants me to keep it there. It's the logo on our brand of beedis. He thinks that if it is mixed in with all the other pictures that I do *puja* to, sales will increase.'

Harriet: What did he say about all these photos of the people from his lineage? Did he never explain who they were?

David: Never. I only found out what their names were a few years later when I came across a book by R. D. Ranade, who was in a Karnataka branch of the *sampradaya*. He, or rather his organization, brought out a souvenir that contained the same photos I had seen on Maharaj's walls, along with a brief description of who they were.

I do remember one interesting story that Maharaj told about the *sampradaya*. He had been answering questions in his usual way when he paused to give us a piece of history:

'I sit here every day answering your questions, but this is not the way that the teachers of my lineage used to do their work. A few hundred years ago there were no questions and answers at all. Ours is a householder lineage, which means everyone had to go out and earn his living. There were no meetings like this where disciples met in large numbers with the Guru and asked him questions. Travel was difficult. There were no buses, trains and planes. In the old days the Guru did the traveling on foot, while the disciples stayed at home and looked after their families. The Guru walked from village to village to meet the disciples. If he met someone he thought was ready to be included in the *sampradaya*, he would initiate him with mantra of the lineage. That was the only teaching given out. The disciple would repeat the mantra and periodically the Guru would come to the village to see what progress was being made. When the Guru knew that he was about to pass away, he would appoint one of the householder-devotees to be the new Guru, and that new Guru would then take on the teaching duties: walking from village to village, initiating new devotees and supervising the progress of the old ones.'

I don't know why this story suddenly came out. Maybe he was just tired of answering the same questions again and again.

Harriet: I have heard that Maharaj occasionally gave out a mantra to people who asked. Was this the same mantra?

David: Yes, but he wasn't a very good salesman for it. I once heard him say, 'My Guru has authorised me to give out this mantra to anyone who asks for it, but I don't want you to feel that it is necessary or important. It is more important to find out the source of your beingness.'

Nevertheless, some people would ask. He would take them downstairs and whisper it in his or her ear. It was Sanskrit and quite long, but you only got one chance to remember it. He would not write it down for you. If you didn't remember it from that one whisper, you never got another chance.



Nisargadatta
Maharaj
(Click on image to
enlarge)

Harriet: What other teaching instructions did Siddharameshwar give him? Was he the one who encouraged him to teach by answering questions, rather than in the more traditional way?

David: I have no idea if he was asked to teach in a particular way. Siddharameshwar told him that he could teach and give out the Guru mantra to anyone who asked for it, but he wasn't allowed to appoint a successor. You have to remember that Nisargadatta wasn't realised himself when Siddharameshwar passed away.

Harriet: What about personal details? Did Maharaj ever talk about his childhood or his family? Ramana Maharshi often told stories about his early life, but I don't recollect reading a single biographical incident in any of Maharaj's books.

David: That's true. He just didn't seem interested in talking about his past. The only story I remember him telling was more of a joke than a story. Some man came in who seemed to have known him for many years. He talked to Maharaj in Marathi in a very free and familiar way. No translations were offered but after about ten minutes all the Marathi-knowing people there simultaneously broke out into laughter. After first taking Maharaj's permission, one of the translators explained what it was all about.

'Maharaj says that when he was married, his wife used to give him a very hard time. She was always bossing him around and telling him what to do. "Maharaj do this, Maharaj go to the market and buy that."

She didn't call him Maharaj, of course, but I can't remember what she did call him.

The translator continued: 'His wife died a long time ago, when Maharaj was in his forties. It is usual for men of this age who are widowed to marry again, so all Maharaj's relatives wanted him to find another wife. He refused, saying, "The day she died I married freedom".'

I find it hard to imagine anyone bossing Maharaj around, or even trying to. He was a feisty character who stood no nonsense from anyone.

Harriet: From what I have heard 'feisty' may be a bit of a euphemism. I have heard that he could be quite bad-tempered and aggressive at times.

David: Yes, that's true, but I just think that this was part of his teaching method. Some people need to be shaken up a bit, and shouting at them is one way of doing it.

I remember one woman asking him, rather innocently, 'I thought enlightened people were supposed to be happy and blissful. You seem to be grumpy most of the time. Doesn't your state give you perpetual happiness and peace?'

He replied, 'The only time a *jnani* truly rejoices is when someone else becomes a *jnani*'.

Harriet: How often did that happen?

David: I don't know. That was another area that he didn't seem to

want to talk about.

I once asked directly, 'How many people have become realised through your teachings?'

He didn't seem to welcome the question: 'What business is that of yours?' he answered. 'How does knowing that information help you in any way?'

'Well,' I said, 'depending on your answer, it might increase or decrease my level of optimism. If there is a lottery with only one winning ticket out of ten million, then I can't be very optimistic about winning. But if it's a hundred winning tickets out of a thousand, I would feel a lot better about my chances. If you could assure me that people are waking up here, I would feel good about my own chances. And I think feeling good about my chances would be good for my level of earnestness.'

'Earnestness' was one of the key words in his teachings. He thought that it was good to have a strong desire for the Self and to have all one's faculties turned towards it whenever possible. This strong focus on the truth was what he termed earnestness.

I can't remember exactly what Maharaj said in reply except that I know he didn't divulge any numbers. He didn't seem to think that it was any of mine or anyone else's business to know such information.

Harriet: Maybe there were so few, it would have been bad for your 'earnestness' to be told.

David: That's a possibility because I don't think there were many.

Harriet: Did you ever find out, directly or indirectly?

David: Not that day. However, I bided my time and waited for an opportunity to raise the question again. One morning Maharaj seemed to be more-than-usually frustrated about our collective inability to grasp what he was talking about.

'Why do I waste my time with you people?' he exclaimed. 'Why does no one ever understand what I am saying?'

I took my chance: 'In all the years that you have been teaching how many people have truly understood and experienced your teachings?'

He was quiet for a moment, and then he said, 'One. Maurice Frydman.' He didn't elaborate and I didn't follow it up.

I mentioned earlier that at the conclusion of his morning *puja* he put *kum kum* on the forehead of all the pictures in his room of the people he knew were enlightened. There were two big pictures of Maurice there, and both of them were daily given the *kum kum* treatment. Maharaj clearly had a great respect for Maurice. I remember on one of my early visits querying Maharaj about some statement of his that had been recorded in *I am That*. I think it was about fulfilling desires.

Maharaj initially didn't seem to agree with the remarks that had been attributed to him in the book, but then he added, 'The words must be true because Maurice wrote them. Maurice was a *jnani*, and the *jnani*'s words are always the words of truth.'

I have met several people who knew Maurice, and all of them have extraordinary stories to tell about him. He visited Swami Ramdas in the 1930s and Ramdas apparently told him that this



Maurice Frydman
(Click on image to enlarge)

would be his final birth. That comment was recorded in *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* in the late 1930s, decades before he had his meetings with Maharaj. He was at various stages of his life a follower of Ramana Maharshi, Gandhi, and J. Krishnamurti. While he was a Gandhian he went to work for the raja of a small principality and somehow persuaded him to abdicate and hand over all his authority to people he had formerly ruled as an absolute monarch. His whole life is full of astonishing incidents such as these that are virtually unknown. I have been told by someone who used to be a senior Indian government official in the 1960s that it was Frydman who persuaded the then India Prime Minister Nehru to allow the Dalai Lama and the other exiled Tibetans to stay in India. Frydman apparently pestered him continuously for months until he finally gave his consent. None of these activities were ever publicly acknowledged because Frydman disliked publicity of any kind and always tried to do his work anonymously.

Harriet: What were Frydman's relations with Ramana Maharshi like? Did he leave a record?

David: There are not many stories in the Ramanasramam books, and in the few incidents that do have Maurice's name attached to them, Ramana is telling him off, usually for trying to give him special treatment. In an article that Maurice wrote very late in his life, he lamented the fact that he didn't fully appreciate and make use of Bhagavan's teachings and presence while he was alive.

However, he did use his extraordinary intellect and editing skills to bring out *Maharshi's Gospel* in 1939. This is one of the most important collections of dialogues between Bhagavan and his devotees. The second half of the book contains Frydman's questions and Bhagavan's replies to them. The quality of the questioning and the editing is quite extraordinary.

A few hundred years ago a French mathematician set a difficult problem and challenged anyone to solve it. Isaac Newton solved it quickly and elegantly and sent off the solution anonymously. The French mathematician immediately recognized that Newton was the author and apparently said, 'A lion is recognized by his claws'.

I would make the same comments about the second half of *Maharshi's Gospel*. Though Frydman's name has never appeared on any of the editions of the book, I am absolutely certain that he was the editor and the questioner.

Harriet: So far as you are aware Maharaj never publicly acknowledged anyone else's enlightenment?

David: There may have been others but the only other one I know about, since I witnessed it first-hand, was a Canadian – at least I think he was Canadian – called Rudi. I had listened to some tapes before I first went to Maharaj and this man Rudi featured prominently on them. I have to say that he sounded utterly obnoxious. He was pushy, argumentative and aggressive; apparently Maharaj threw him out on several occasions. I had never met Rudi; I only knew him from the tapes I had heard.

Then one day Maharaj announced, 'We have a *jnani* coming to visit us this morning. His name is Rudi.' I laughed because I assumed that Maharaj was making fun of his pretensions to

enlightenment. Maharaj could be quite scathing about people who claimed to be enlightened, but who weren't. Wolter Keers, a Dutch *advaita* teacher, was someone who fell into that category. Every so often he would come to Bombay to see Maharaj, and on every visit Maharaj would tell him off for claiming to be enlightened when he wasn't. On one visit he started lecturing Wolter before he had even properly entered the room. There was a wooden stairway that led directly into the room where Maharaj taught. As Wolter's head appeared above the top step, Maharaj suspended his other business and started laying into him.

'You are not enlightened! How dare you teach in the West, claiming that you are enlightened?'

On one of my other visits Wolter was due to arrive and Maharaj kept asking when he was going to appear.

'Where is he? I want to shout at him again. When is he going to arrive?'

On that particular visit I had to leave before Wolter came so I don't know what form the lecture took, but I suspect that it was a typically hot one.

Anyway, let's get back to Rudi. When Maharaj announced that a '*jnani*' was due, I assumed that Rudi was going to get the Wolter treatment. However, much to my amazement, Maharaj treated him as the genuine article when he finally showed up.

After spending a good portion of the morning wondering when Rudi was going to appear, Maharaj then asked him why he had bothered to come at all.

'To pay my respects to you and to thank you for what you have done for me. I am leaving for Canada and I came to say goodbye.'

Maharaj didn't accept this explanation: 'If you have come to this room, you must have some doubt left in you. If you were doubt-free, you wouldn't bother to come at all. I never visit any other teachers or Gurus because I no longer have any doubts about who I am. I don't need to go anywhere. Many people come to me and say, "You must visit this or that teacher. They are wonderful," but I never go because there is nothing I need from anyone. You must want something you haven't got or have a doubt to come here. Why have you come?'

Rudi repeated his original story and then kept quiet. I was looking at him and he seemed to me to be a man who was in some inner state of ecstasy or bliss that was so compelling, he found it hard even to speak. I still wasn't sure whether Maharaj was accepting his credentials, but then the woman he had arrived with asked Maharaj a question.

Maharaj replied, 'Ask your friend later. He is a *jnani*. He will give you correct answers. Keep quiet this morning. I want to talk to him.'

It was at this point that I realised that Maharaj really did accept that this man had realised the Self. Rudi then asked Maharaj for advice on what he should do when he returned to Canada. I thought that it was a perfectly appropriate question for a disciple to ask a Guru on such an occasion, but Maharaj seemed to take great exception to it.

'How can you ask a question like that if you are in the state of the Self? Don't you know that you don't have any choice about what you do or don't do?'

Rudi kept quiet. I got the feeling that Maharaj was trying to

provoke him into a quarrel or an argument, and that Rudi was refusing to take the bait.

At some point Maharaj asked him, 'Have you witnessed your own death?' and Rudi replied 'No'.

Maharaj then launched into a mini-lecture on how it was necessary to witness one's own death in order for there to be full realisation of the Self. He said that it had happened to him after he thought that he had fully realised the Self, and it wasn't until after this death experience that he understood that this process was necessary for final liberation. I hope somebody recorded this dialogue on tape because I am depending on a twenty-five-year-old memory for this. It seems to be a crucial part of Maharaj's experience and teachings but I never heard him mention it on any other occasion. I have also not come across it in any of his books.

Maharaj continued to pester Rudi about the necessity of witnessing death, but Rudi kept quiet and just smiled beatifically. He refused to defend himself, and he refused to be provoked. Anyway, I don't think he was in any condition to start and sustain an argument. Whatever state he was in seemed to be compelling all his attention. I got the feeling that he found articulating even brief replies hard work.

Finally, Rudi addressed the question and said, 'Why are you getting so excited about something that doesn't exist?' I assumed he meant that death was unreal, and as such, was not worth quarrelling about.

Maharaj laughed, accepted the answer and gave up trying to harass him.

'Have you ever had a teacher like me?' demanded Maharaj, with a grin.

'No,' replied Rudi, 'and have you ever had a disciple like me?'

They both laughed and the dialogue came to an end. I have no idea what happened to Rudi. He left and I never heard anything more about him. As they say at the end of fairy stories, he probably lived happily ever after.

[Next: I realised that it was not his nature to keep quiet. His teaching method was geared to arguing and talking.](#)

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)

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[Remembering](#)
[Nisargadatta](#)
[Maharaj](#)

[Temple Times](#)

[My son, the](#)
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Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj

Page 2



Nisargadatta Maharaj

Harriet: You say that Maharaj never visited other teachers because he no longer had any doubts. Did he ever talk about other teachers and say what he thought of them?

David: He seemed to like J. Krishnamurti. He had apparently seen him walking on the streets of Bombay many years before. I don't think that Krishnamurti noticed him. Afterwards, Maharaj always spoke well of Krishnamurti and he even encouraged people to go and see him. One day Maharaj took a holiday and told everyone to go and listen to Krishnamurti instead. That, I think, shows a high level of approval.

The most infamous teacher of the late 1970s was Osho, or Rajneesh as he was in those days. I once heard Maharaj say that he respected the state that Rajneesh was in, but he couldn't understand all the instructions he was giving to all the thousands of foreigners who were then coming to India to see him. Although the subject only came up a couple of times while I was there, I got the feeling he liked the teacher but not the teachings. When Rajneesh's foreign 'sannyasins' showed up in their robes, he generally gave them a really hard time. I watched him throw quite a few of them out, and I saw him shout at some of them before they had even managed to get into his room.

I heard a story that he also encountered U. G. Krishnamurti in Bombay. I will tell you the version I heard and you can make up your own mind about it. It was told to me by someone who spent a lot of time with U. G. in the 1970s.

It seems that Maurice Frydman knew U. G. and also knew that he and Maharaj had never met, and probably didn't know about each other. He wanted to test the theory that one *jnani* can spot another *jnani* by putting them both in the same room, with a few other people around as camouflage. He organised a function and invited both of them to attend. U. G. spent quite some time there,

[Page 1](#)

[Page 2](#)

[Page 3](#)

[Page 4](#)

[Page 5](#)

[Page 6](#)

In this page:

[What was Maharaj's attitude to Ramana Maharshi and his teachings? Did you ever discuss Bhagavan's teachings with him?](#)

[Did Maharaj ever confirm himself that this is what he was doing, or trying to do, with the people who came to him?](#)



Maurice Frydman
(Click on image to enlarge)

but Maharaj only came for a few minutes and then left.

After Maharaj had left Maurice went up to U. G. and said, 'Did you see that old man who came in for a few minutes. Did you notice anything special? What did *you* see?'

U. G. replied, 'I saw a man, Maurice, but the important thing is, what did you see?'

The next day Maurice went to see Maharaj and asked, 'Did you see that man I invited yesterday?' A brief description of what he looked like and where he was standing followed.

Then Maurice asked, 'What did *you* see?'

Maharaj replied, 'I saw a man Maurice, but the important thing is, what did you see?'

It's an amusing story and I pass it on as I heard it, but I should say that U. G.'s accounts of his meetings with famous teachers sometimes don't ring true to me. I have heard and read his accounts of his meetings with both Ramana Maharshi and Papaji, and in both accounts Bhagavan and Papaji are made to do and say things that to me are completely out of character.

When Maharaj told Rudi that he had no interest in visiting other teachers, it was a very true statement. He refused all invitations to go and check out other Gurus. Mullarpattan, one of the translators, was a bit of a Guru-hopper in the 1970s, and he was always bringing reports of new teachers to Maharaj, but he could never persuade him to go and look at them. So, reports of meetings between Maharaj and other teachers are not common. Papaji ended up visiting Maharaj and had a very good meeting with him. In his biography he gives the impression that he only went there once, but I heard from people in Bombay that Papaji would often take his devotees there. He visited quite a few teachers in the 1970s, often when he was accompanying foreigners who had come to India for the first time. It was his version of showing them the sights. They would never ask questions; they would just sit quietly and watch what was going on.

Harriet: What was Maharaj's attitude to Ramana Maharshi and his teachings? Did you ever discuss Bhagavan's teachings with him?

David: He had enormous respect for both his attainment and his teachings. He once told me that one of the few regrets of his life was that he never met him in person. He did come to the ashram in the early 1960s with a group of his Marathi devotees. They were all on a South Indian pilgrimage tour and Ramanasramam was one of the places he visited.

With regard to the teachings he once told me, 'I agree with everything that Ramana Maharshi said, with the exception of this business of the heart-centre being on the right side of the chest. I have never had that experience myself.'

I discussed various aspects of Bhagavan's teachings with him and always found his answers to be very illuminating.

He asked me once, 'Have you understood Ramana Maharshi's teachings?'

Since I knew he meant 'Had I actually experienced the truth of them?', I replied, 'The more I listen to Maharaj, the more I understand what Bhagavan is trying to tell me'.

I felt that this was true at both the theoretical and experiential

levels. His explanations broadened and deepened my intellectual understanding of Bhagavan's teachings and his presence also gave me experiential glimpses of the truth that they were all pointing towards.

I have to mention Ganesan's visit here. V. Ganesan is the grandnephew of Ramana Maharshi and in the 1970s he was the *de facto* manager of Ramanasramam. Nowadays, his elder brother Sundaram is in charge. Ganesan came to visit Maharaj for the first time in the late 1970s. As soon as he arrived Maharaj stood up and began to collect cushions. He made a big pile of them and made Ganesan sit on top of the heap. Then, much to everyone's amazement, Maharaj cleared a space on the floor and did a full-length prostration to him.

When he stood up, he told Ganesan, 'I never had a chance to prostrate to your great-uncle Ramana Maharshi, so I am prostrating to you instead. This is my prostration to him.'

Harriet: That's an extraordinary story! Were you there that day?

David: Yes, I was sitting just a few feet away. But the truly extraordinary thing for me was what happened next. Maharaj and Ganesan chatted for a while, about what I can't remember.

Then Maharaj made an astonishing offer: 'If you stay here with me for two weeks, I guarantee you will leave in the same state as your great-uncle Ramana Maharshi.'

Ganesan left that day and didn't come back. I couldn't believe he had turned down an offer like that. If someone of the stature of Maharaj had made an offer like that to me, I would have immediately nailed myself to the floor. Nothing would have induced me to go away before the time was up.

When I returned to Ramanasramam I asked Ganesan why he hadn't stayed.

'I didn't think he was serious,' he replied. 'I just thought he was joking.'

It was during this visit that Maharaj asked Ganesan to start giving talks in Ramanasramam. 'I have been to Ramanasramam,' he said, 'and you have wonderful facilities there. Many pilgrims come, but no one is giving them any teachings. It is a sacred and holy place but people are leaving it and coming here because no one is teaching there. Why should they have to travel a thousand miles to sit in this crowded room when you have such a great place? You need to start giving talks there. You need to start explaining what Ramana Maharshi's teachings are.'

Ganesan was unwilling to follow that advice either, or at least not at the time. There is a strong tradition that no one is allowed to teach in Ramanasramam. Ramana Maharshi is still the teacher there and no one is allowed to replace him. It is not just a question of having a new Guru there; the ashram management does not even encourage anyone to publicly explain what Ramana Maharshi's teachings mean. Ganesan didn't want to rock the boat and incur the ire of his family and the devotees who might object, so he kept quiet. It is only in the last few years that he has started teaching, but he is doing it in his own house, rather than in the ashram itself. The ashram is still very much a teacher-free zone.

I talked to Ganesan recently about Maharaj and he told me a

nice story about a Frenchwoman whom he took there.

'When I started to visit Maharaj some of Bhagavan's devotees criticized me for abandoning Bhagavan and going to another Guru. Many of them seemed to think that going to see Maharaj indicated that I didn't have sufficient faith in Bhagavan and his teachings. I didn't see it that way. I have visited many great saints, and I never felt that I was abandoning Bhagavan or being disrespectful to him by going on these trips. A Frenchwoman, Edith Deri, was one of the women who complained in this way. We were in Bombay together and I somehow convinced her to accompany me on a visit to Maharaj. She came very reluctantly and seemed determined not to enjoy the visit.

'When we arrived Maharaj asked her if she had any questions. She said that she hadn't.

"So why have you come to see me?" he asked.

"I have nothing to say," she replied. "I don't want to talk while I am here."

"But you must say something," said Maharaj. "Talk about anything you want to. Just say something."

"If I say something, you will then give some reply, and everyone will then applaud because you have given such a wonderful answer. I don't want to give you the opportunity to show off."

'It was a very rude answer, but Maharaj didn't show any sign of annoyance.

'Instead, he replied, "Water doesn't care whether it is quenching thirst or not".

'And then he repeated the sentence, very slowly and with emphasis. He often repeated himself like this when he had something important to say.

'Edith told me later that this one sentence completely destroyed her skepticism and her negativity. The words stopped her mind, blew away her determination to be a spoilsport, and put her into a state of peace and silence that lasted for long after her visit.'

Harriet: I have read on many occasions that Ramana Maharshi preferred to teach in silence. I never get that impression with Nisargadatta Maharaj. Did people ever get a chance to sit in silence with him?

David: During the years that I visited it was possible to meditate in his room in the early morning. I forget the exact timings, but I think that it was for an hour and a half. Maharaj would be there, but he would be going about his normal morning activities. He would potter around doing odd jobs; he would appear with just a towel around his waist if he was about to have a bath; sometimes he would sit and read a newspaper. I never got the feeling that he was making a conscious effort to teach in silence in the way that Ramana Maharshi did by looking at people and transmitting some form of grace. However, he did seem to be aware of the mental states of all the people who were sitting there, and he not infrequently complained about them.

'I know who is meditating here and who is not,' he suddenly announced one morning, 'and I know who is making contact with his beingness. Only one person is doing that at the moment. The rest of you are all wasting your time.' Then he carried on with

whatever he was doing.

It was true that many people didn't go there to meditate. They just saw it as an opportunity to be with him in his house. They might be sitting cross-legged on his floor, but most of the time they would be peeping to see what he was doing instead of meditating.

One morning he got tired of being spied on this way and exploded: 'Why are you people cluttering up my floor like this? You are not meditating; you are just getting in the way! If you want to go and sit somewhere, go and sit on the toilet for an hour! At least you will be doing something useful there.'

Harriet: What about the other times of the day, when he was available for questioning? Did he ever sit in silence during those periods?

David: There were two periods when it was possible to question him: one in the late morning and one in the evening. Translators would be available at both sessions. He encouraged people to talk during these sessions, or at least he did when I first started going to see him. Later on, he would use these sessions to give long talks on the nature of consciousness. He never sat quietly if no one had anything to say. He would actively solicit questions, but if no one wanted to talk to him, he would start talking himself.

I only ever had one opportunity to sit with him in complete silence and that was at the beginning of the summer monsoon. When the monsoon breaks in Bombay, usually around the end of the first week of June, there are very heavy rains that bring the city to a standstill. The storm drains are generally clogged, and for a day or so people are walking round in knee-deep water. And not just water. The sewers overflow and the animals that live in them drown. Anyone brave enough to go for a paddle would be wading through sewage, waterlogged garbage and the corpses of whatever animals had recently drowned. Public transport comes to a halt since in many places the water level is too high to drive through.

One afternoon two of us waded through the floodwaters to Maharaj's door. We were both staying in a cheap lodge about 200 yards away, so it wasn't that much of a trek. We scrubbed off the filth with water from a tap on the ground floor and made our way up to Maharaj's room. He seemed very surprised to see us. I think he thought that the floods would keep everyone away. He said in Marathi that there would be no session that afternoon because none of the translators would be able to make it. I assume he wanted us to leave and go home, but we both pretended that we didn't understand what he was trying to tell us. After one or two more unsuccessful attempts to persuade us to go, he gave up and sat in a corner of the room with a newspaper in front of his face so that we couldn't even look at him. I didn't care. I was just happy to be sitting in the same room as him. I sat there in absolute silence with him for over an hour and it was one of the most wonderful experiences I ever had with him. I felt an intense rock-solid silence descend on me that became deeper and deeper as the minutes passed. There was just a glow of awareness that filled me so completely, thoughts were utterly impossible. You don't realise what a monstrous imposition the mind is until you have lived without it, completely happily, completely silently, and completely effortlessly for a short period of time. For most of this time I was

looking in the direction of Maharaj. Sometimes he would turn a page and glance in our direction, and when he did he still seemed to be irritated that we hadn't left. I was smiling inwardly at his annoyance because it wasn't touching me in any way. I had no self-consciousness, no embarrassment, no feeling of being an imposition. I was just resting contentedly in my own being.

After just over an hour of this he got up and shooed us both out. I prostrated and left. Later on, I wondered why he didn't sit in silence more often since there was clearly a very powerful quietening energy coming off him when he was silent. Ramana Maharshi said that speaking actually interrupted the flow of the silent energy he was giving out. I have often wondered if the same thing happened with Maharaj.

Harriet: And what was your conclusion?

David: I realised that it was not his nature to keep quiet. His teaching method was geared to arguing and talking. That's what he felt most comfortable doing.

Harriet: Can you elaborate on that a little more?

David: I should qualify what I am about to say by stating that most of it is just my own opinion, based on observing him deal with the people who came to him. It doesn't come from anything I heard him say himself.

When people first came to see him, he would encourage them to talk about their background. He would try to find out what spiritual path you were on, and what had brought you to him. In the face of Maharaj's probing questions visitors would end up having to justify their world-view and their spiritual practices. This would be one level of the interaction. At a deeper and more subtle level Maharaj would be radiating an energy, a *sakti*, that quietened your mind and made you aware of what lay underneath the mind and all its ideas and concepts. Now imagine these two processes going on simultaneously. With his mind the questioner has just constructed and articulated a version of his world-view. Underneath, though, he will be feeling the pull of his beingness, the knowledge of what is truly real, as opposed to the ideas that he merely thinks to be real. Maharaj's energy will be enhancing awareness of that substratum all the time. At some point the questioner will become acutely aware of what seem to be two competing realities: the conceptual structure he has just outlined, and the actual experience that underlies it. There was a certain look that appeared on some people's faces when this happened: a kind of indecisive 'which way should I go?' look. Sometimes the questioner would realise immediately that all his ideas and beliefs were just concepts. He would drop them and rest in the beingness instead. This, for me, was the essence of Maharaj's teaching technique. He wouldn't try to convince you by argument. He would instead make you argue yourself into a position that you felt to be true, and then he would undercut that position by giving you a taste of the substratum that underlay all concepts. If you were ready for it, you would drop your attachment to your concepts and rest in what lay underneath them. If not, you would blunder ahead, going deeper and deeper into the minefield of the mind. Some people got it quickly. Others,

who were desperate for a structure to cling to, would come back again and again with questions that were designed merely to refine their understanding of his teachings.

Talking to visitors and arguing with them was an essential part of this technique. For it to work effectively Maharaj required that visitors talk about themselves and their world-view because he needed them to see that all these ideas were just concepts having no ultimate reality. He needed people to look at their concepts, understand their uselessness and then reject them in favour of direct experience.

I should mention here the limitations he put on the types of question that he was willing to answer. He would sometimes tell new people, 'I am not interested in what you have heard or read. I am not interested in second-hand information that you have acquired from somewhere else. I am only interested in your own experience of yourself. If you have any questions about that, you can ask me.'

Later, after you had had your initial dialogues with him, he would introduce an even more stringent test for questions: 'I am not interested in answering questions that assume the existence of an individual person who inhabits a body. I don't accept the existence of such an entity, so for me such questions are entirely hypothetical.'

This second constraint was a real conversation killer. You couldn't say, 'How do I get enlightened?' or 'What do I do?' because all such questions presuppose the existence of an 'I', an assumption that Maharaj always used to reject.

I still have vivid memories of him listening as translators explained in Marathi what some questioner had said. As he understood the gist of what the question was Maharaj's face would sometimes turn to a scowl. He would clench his fist, bang it on the floor and shout '*Kalpana! Kalpana!*' which means 'Concept! Concept!' That would sometimes be the only answer the questioners would get. Maharaj was definitely not interested in massaging visitor's concepts. He wanted people to drop them, not discuss them.

When this second restriction effectively cut off most of the questions that people like to ask Gurus, Maharaj would fill the vacuum by giving talks about the nature of consciousness. Day after day he would continue with the same topic, often using the same analogies. He would explain how it arises, how it manifests and how it subsides. In retrospect I think he was doing what the ancient rishis of India did when they told their disciples 'You are *Brahman*'. When a *jnani* who is established in *Brahman* as *Brahman* says to a disciple, 'You are *Brahman*,' he is not merely conveying a piece of information. There is a power and an authority in the words that, in certain cases, makes the listener become and experience *Brahman* as he hears the words. This is a power and an authority that only *jnani*s have. Other people can say 'You are consciousness,' 'You are *Brahman*,' endlessly, but these will just be pieces of information that you can store in your mind. When a *jnani* tells you this, the full authority of his state and the full force that lies behind it are conveyed in the statement. If you take delivery of that information in the heart, in consciousness, then you experience that state for yourself. If you take delivery in your mind, you just store it there as an interesting piece of

information.

When Maharaj told you endlessly 'You are consciousness,' if you received that information in utter inner silence, it activated an awareness of consciousness to such an extent that you felt, 'He isn't just telling me something; he is actually describing what I am, right now in this moment'.

Harriet: Did this ever happen to you?

David: Yes, and I think that this is what he was referring to when he talked about 'getting the knowledge'. It wasn't an intellectual knowledge he was talking about, and it wasn't Self-realisation either. It was a state in which concepts temporarily dissolved leaving a simple awareness of the being that underlay them. While they lasted the states were very useful; they gave you the conviction and the direct experience that there was something real and enduring that exists whether the mind is there or not.

Harriet: All this is very interesting, but as you have said, a lot of it is your own personal conjecture. Did Maharaj ever confirm himself that this is what he was doing, or trying to do, with the people who came to him?

David: Not directly. He never explained or analysed his teaching methods, or not while I was there. Most of what I have just said comes from my own experience and my own interpretation of what I saw going on there. Other people may have other theories to explain what was going on. However, the facts of the matter are indisputable. People came to Maharaj, had talks or arguments with him, and at some point dropped their accumulation of ideas because they had been convinced that a direct experience invalidated all the long-held cherished notions they had accumulated.

Let me tell you about one conversation I had with because it gives some good circumstantial evidence for what I have just been trying to explain. Firstly, I should mention that I sometimes used to argue with Maharaj simply because I knew that he liked people to argue with him. He seemed to like the cut and thrust of debate, and if no one had anything to say or ask, I would pick up the ball and start a discussion with him.

I can't remember any more exactly what we talked about on this particular day, but I do remember that we spoke for about five minutes, during which time I was ostensibly pointing out what I claimed were contradictions in his teachings. He, meanwhile, was doing his best to convince me that no contradictions were involved. It was all very good-humoured and I think he knew that I was only disputing with him because, firstly, we both liked talking and arguing about spiritual topics and, secondly, no one else had any urgent questions to ask. After about five minutes, though, he decided to bring the discussion to a close.

I don't think you really understand the purpose of my dialogues here. I don't say things simply to convince people that they are true. I am not speaking about these matters so that people can build up a philosophy that can be rationally defended, and which is free of all contradictions. When I speak my words, I am not speaking to your mind at all. I am directing my words directly at consciousness. I am

planting my words in your consciousness. If you disturb the planting process by arguing about the meaning of the words, they won't take root there. Once my words have been planted in consciousness, they will sprout, they will grow, and at the appropriate moment they will bear fruit. It's nothing to do with you. All this will happen by itself. However, if you think about the words too much or dispute their meaning, you will postpone the moment of their fruition.'

All this was said in a very genial tone. However, at this point, he got very, very serious.

Glowing at me he said very sternly, 'Enough talking. Be quiet and let the words do their work!'

End of conversation.

I always recollect this exchange with happiness and optimism. I feel I have been graced by his presence and further graced by the words of truth he has planted within me. I think those words will always be with me and I know that at the appropriate moment they will bloom.

[Next: He was directing his words at the consciousness within you in an attempt to make you aware of who you really were](#)

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)

[Home](#) [Interviews and personal stories](#) [Books by David Godman](#) [Arunachala Saints](#)
[Tamil Translations](#) [Ramana Maharshi - his life and teachings](#) [Contact David Godman](#) [Search](#) [Links](#)

1
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Inspiration of Sri
Ramana Maharshi](#)

[Remembering
Nisargadatta
Maharaj](#)

[Temple Times](#)

[My son, the
Missionary](#)

Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj

Page 3



Nisargadatta Maharaj

[Page 1](#)
[Page 2](#)
[Page 3](#)
[Page 4](#)
[Page 5](#)
[Page 6](#)

* * * * *

In this page:

[Did Maharaj ever speak about how or why some people got the direct experience, while most people didn't?](#)

[So did he think that the people who came to him were 'advanced'? There must have been a mixture of all kinds of people.](#)

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Harriet: Have you obeyed his instructions? Have you stopped thinking about the teachings?

David: Until you showed up today I hadn't really thought about the teachings for years. I haven't even read many of the new books of dialogues that have come out about him. That answer I gave a few minutes ago, 'The more I listen to Maharaj, the more I understand what Bhagavan is trying to tell me,' is in one of the books but I didn't find out until a few years ago.

My former wife Vasanta was reading the book and she said, 'There is someone here from Ramanasramam. Do you know who it is?'

She read a few lines and I realised that it was me. I used to read *I am That* cover to cover about once a year, but I don't even do that any more. Sometimes, if I am in the Ramanasramam library, I pick up *I am That* and read the opening sequence of chapter twenty-three. It is a beautiful description of the *jnani's* state that I never tire of reading. Other than that, I rarely read or think about the teachings any more.

Having said that, I think it would be correct to say that I have more than enough other concepts in my head which are all acting as a herbicide on the words of truth that Maharaj planted within me. However, I have great faith in the irresistible power of Maharaj's words. Sooner or later they will bear fruit.

Harriet: Ramesh Balsekar used to say, 'The only effective effort is the immediate apperception of reality'. Some people would take that to mean that if you don't get the direct experience as the Guru, in this case Maharaj, is talking to you, you are not going to get it at all. Are you sure you are not just suffering from a case of wishful thinking?

David: There is something in what you say. If you could keep your intellect out of the way when Maharaj was speaking, his words, and the authority behind them, would do their work. When he spoke he wasn't asking you to join in the process at all. How could he be asking you to do anything when he knew that you didn't exist? He wasn't asking you to understand, and he wasn't saying, 'Do this and you will be enlightened'. He wasn't addressing you at all. He was directing his words at the consciousness within you in an attempt to make you aware of who you really were. However, if his words didn't immediately produce results, he knew that they might deliver the goods later on. Remember what happened in his own case. Siddharameshwar told him that he was *Brahman*. Nisargadatta struggled with this for three years until he finally dropped his doubts and realised it to be the truth.

There is a power in a *jnani's* words and that power does not dissipate two seconds after the *jnani* has uttered them. It lingers and it carries on being effective; it carries on doing its work.

Harriet: Did Maharaj himself corroborate this?

David: Yes. I can't remember how the subject came up, but I heard him say, 'The words of enlightened beings have a power that makes them endure. The great saints of the past gave out their teachings, and those teachings have survived because there is an inherent power and authority in them. Other people may have been saying the same thing at the same time, but the words of those people have disappeared because there was no power in them. The words of *jnanis* have endured because they have the power and authority of the Self behind them.'

I mentioned this answer to Papaji when I was interviewing him a few years ago. He gave it his whole-hearted endorsement.

Harriet: When you say that the words 'have endured' does that mean that they have simply endured in books, as remembered quotations, or do they still have the power to awaken people, even centuries after they were spoken? Is not the immediate presence of the Guru necessary for that?

David: I think I would have to say that a living human Guru is necessary for all but the most mature to realise the Self. However, once you have seen a real Guru and been with him, his presence is always with you. You can tune into his presence, his grace, and his power in any number of ways: through his photo, through thinking about him, and through reading his words.

Harriet: Again, I feel compelled to ask, 'Is this your own opinion or do you have some support from Maharaj to back it up?'

David: I remember a conversation I had with Maharaj on my first visit. I can't remember how we got round to the subject, but we ended up talking about the power of the Guru and the various channels it manifested through. I had been deeply impressed and deeply moved by *I am That*, and I told him so.

Me: For several months I have been reading *I am That*.

Through those words I felt a very strong connection with you and the teachings. Can one have a connection with a Guru simply by reading his words, or is it necessary to come in person to see him?

Maharaj: The words will do their work wherever you hear or read them. You can come here and listen to them in person, or you can read them in a book. If the teacher is enlightened, there will be a power in them.

Me: In my particular case I read the words of a Guru who was still alive, and those words compelled me to come here and see you. Perhaps your words had such a strong effect because you are still alive and teaching. I made contact with a living teacher, a living presence. What about a hypothetical case of someone picking up *I am That* in fifty years' time, and in a country several thousand miles away. That person will never have a chance to see you. Will those words still have the power to transform and awaken?

Maharaj: Time and space exist in your mind, not in the Self. There is no limit to the power of the Self. The power of the Self is always present, always working, always the same. What varies is the readiness and willingness of people to turn their attention to it. If someone picks up this book ten thousand miles away in a thousand years' time, those words will do their work if the reader is in the right state to listen to and assimilate the words.

He didn't actually say that one could get enlightened by reading the words of a dead Guru, but he was quite clear that the words of an enlightened being, even in book form, were charged with a power that future generations could tune into. I think I asked this particular question because of my relationship with Ramana Maharshi. I was the 'hypothetical' person in the question who had discovered the words of great but deceased Guru. I suppose I really wanted to know whether Ramana Maharshi could be the Guru for someone like me who had been born years after he passed away. Maharaj didn't really answer that question for me, but he did convince me that a considerable part of the power and the authority of Guru could be found in his recorded teachings.

Over time, I came to the conclusion that a living human Guru really is necessary for the vast majority of people, but at the same time I have a great respect for the power that resides in the recorded words of such people.

Harriet: Was this particular dialogue recorded? I think it would be quite an important one for the many people such as myself who have only discovered Maharaj in the years since he passed away.

David: I doubt it. It was a very quiet afternoon session, and only a few of us were there. There were never any organised recordings. People who had a tape recorder would bring it along and make a

recording from wherever they were sitting in the room. In the last couple of years several people were doing this, but when I first went, hardly anyone was doing it.

Harriet: You spoke about 'readiness' and 'willingness to listen' as being key factors. Did Maharaj ever speak about how or why some people got the direct experience, while most people didn't?

David: I did talk to him once about this. It was on one of my later visits. I had gone there with a friend of mine, Cary McGraw, and I discovered that it was Cary's birthday that day. When he told me, we were sitting in a café on Grant Road in the interval between the end of the *bhajans* and the start of the morning question-and-answer session. While Maharaj's room was being swept and cleaned, we all had to disappear for half an hour or so. Most of us would go for a tea or coffee break on Grant Road.

I asked Cary what he would like for a birthday present and he replied, 'Go back in there and have a good argument with Maharaj. I used to love to listen to you when you used to harass him about his teachings, but nowadays you hardly open your mouth at all. Go back in there and get him fired up about something. That will be my birthday treat.'

I didn't feel much like asking anything, and I definitely didn't feel like embarking on a full-blown debate. I think by that time Maharaj had finally subdued my argumentative tendencies; I was quite content just to sit at the back and listen to what everyone else had to say.

We went back in, but I had no idea what to talk about. When everyone had settled down, Cary gave me a nudge and I suddenly found myself talking about why some people get enlightened and others not.

'Ramana Maharshi,' I said, 'got enlightened in a few minutes. It took you three years from the moment you met your Guru until you realised the Self. Other people try for fifty years and don't succeed. Why is it like this? Are the people who try all their lives and fail doing something wrong?'

Most other Hindu teachers would answer a question like this by saying that some people had more or less finished their work in previous lives and were therefore able to realise the Self very quickly in this life. This wasn't an option for Maharaj because he steadfastly refused to accept that reincarnation took place at all. This itself was a little strange to me because in the period that I used to visit him the dust jacket of *I am That* reproduced a dialogue with him in which he explained in quite some detail how reincarnation took place. However, in the era that I visited him I never once heard him accept the validity of reincarnation, and he frequently said it didn't happen. My question was really, 'If one discounts the theory of reincarnation, which you seem to do, how can someone like Ramana Maharshi get enlightened with no desire for it, no effort and no practice, while everyone else struggles unsuccessfully for decades and fails?'

'It's the chemical,' announced Maharaj. 'Some people are born with a pure chemical and some are not. Those with a pure chemical get enlightened, and those with an impure chemical don't.'

'The chemical' was one of Maharaj's idiosyncratic analogies or

metaphors. I think it was derived from the chemical on a roll of film. We are all issued with a 'chemical' at the moment of conception, said Maharaj, and that is our destiny for this life. In one sense it is like a roll of film, a script that has been given to us for this life. Traditional Hinduism teaches that we have *prarabdha* karma, an unchangeable destiny for this life that is an inevitable result of actions that have been performed in previous lives. Maharaj couldn't incorporate past-life activities into his 'chemical' theory, but he did have an alternative selection of factors to offer.

I can't remember whether it was during this particular conversation or on some other day, but I remember asking him about the components of 'the chemical'. He replied that it was a combination of a wide variety of factors: parents' genes, astrological configurations at the time of conception, the future environment that one was going to be brought up in – these were just a few that he mentioned. These all coalesced at a particular moment and issued a body, or rather an embryo, with its appointed destiny.

'This is all very deterministic,' I said. 'If the purity of the chemical determines whether or not we get enlightened, why should we even care about it or not? What is the point of trying or not trying, wanting or not wanting, if the purity of the chemical has already decided the matter for us in advance? We may as well all go home.'

Maharaj replied, 'No, it is not completely determined in advance. The vast majority of people in the world are born with a dirty chemical. Nothing they do or don't do will make any difference. Enlightenment is not for them, and most of them won't even care about such matters. At the other end of the spectrum there will be an extremely small number of very pure beings who will become aware of their true nature without any striving or inclination.'

He didn't say so, but I assume he would have put Ramana Maharshi in this category.

'Between these two extremes,' continued Maharaj, 'there are a small number of people whose chemical is only slightly impure. These people have a chance to get enlightened. If they can meet with a Guru who can show them the truth and if their earnestness and seriousness are high enough, they can purify their slightly dirty chemical and find out who they really are. That is why we are all here today. People who come to a teacher with a strong thirst for freedom are the ones who have only a few impurities. They are the ones for whom liberation is possible.'

Harriet: So did he think that the people who came to him were 'advanced'? There must have been a mixture of all kinds of people. They couldn't all have been candidates for liberation.

David: Yes, there was a very eclectic mix of people there, from curiosity seekers to people who had travelled half way round the world because they were desperate for liberation and thought that Maharaj could help them. I sometimes used to sit next to a homoeopathic doctor who lived a few streets away. He had no interest in liberation and just saw Maharaj as a good source of entertainment.

'This is the best show in the neighbourhood,' he told me once. 'I

just come here because I like watching how Maharaj deals with all the people who come. I don't believe a word he says, but he puts on a good show.'

This man, incidentally, told me that Maharaj's language in the original Marathi was occasionally very crude and vulgar. He told me that the translators, who were all respectable, middle-class Hindus, were probably too embarrassed to pass on the full force of his vulgarity. At the end of the sessions he would take me aside on the street outside and take great delight in telling me about all the various sexual jokes and innuendos that the translators had omitted tell us. I think the doctor's entertainment included watching his neighbours squirm as they listened to Maharaj's more outrageous remarks.

Maharaj to some extent determined the sort of people who were likely to come and stay by setting the agenda on what he was willing to talk about and what he wasn't. He wasn't interested in what he called 'kindergarten lessons'. That meant he generally refused to talk about many of the tenets of traditional Hinduism: ritual worship, karma and reincarnation, common practices such as *japa*, things like that. A large proportion of the foreigners who were there had come because they had read *I am That*. They wanted to talk about liberation, not traditional Hindu practices and traditions, and Maharaj was happy to oblige them. The people who wanted to talk about other things soon left to find somewhere more suitable for their inclinations and interests. Some, though, came with traditional ideas and beliefs and fell under the spell of Maharaj and his radical teachings, but I think these people were in the minority.

I remember Mullarpattan telling us one day, 'I was a traditional Ram *bhakta* when I first arrived here. I thought that if I could have a vision of Ram, I would be sure to join him in Vaikunta [Ram's heavenly realm] when I died. The first day I came, Maharaj told me that Vaikunta didn't exist. I was very shocked to hear a Guru speak like this, but I felt attracted to him and I stayed on. Within a short period of time I dropped all my ideas about the gods and their heavens.'

Some of the other local people were very much interested in Maharaj's uncompromising teachings on liberation, but during the time that I was there, the foreigners generally outnumbered the locals by about three to one in the morning question-and-answer session. This could have been because many of the Bombay devotees had to go out to work, but even on weekends and holidays, the foreigners always outnumbered the Indians.

There was a separate session in the evening that was conducted in Marathi. We were never invited to that because there wasn't enough room for everyone, so I have no idea what went on in those sessions.

Harriet: Did you get the feeling that the foreigners were treated a little differently from the local people?

David: I would just say that we had different attitudes, different backgrounds and, for the most part, different aspirations. When we spoke to Maharaj, his answers reflected these differences.

One morning a new Indian couple arrived and asked Maharaj in English a series of questions about how to live a detached spiritual

life while they were in the middle of all their family and work responsibilities. This is a standard question in India and everyone in the guru business must have a standard answer to it. Maharaj dealt with them very politely and respectfully and talked to them for about fifteen minutes. At the end of that period he asked them to leave. This was a little bit unusual. Usually, when a questioner had finished talking to Maharaj he would go back to his seat and listen to what everyone else had to say.

On this occasion Maharaj watched them disappear down his staircase. He waited about ten seconds more before bursting into a delighted laughter.

Slapping his thigh, he said, 'That is the sort of boring conversation I used to have every day before all you foreigners came along!'

I think he enjoyed talking to people who didn't come along to talk about all their family or work problems. He also knew he could be more irreverent and risqué with the foreigners, which was something he enjoyed.

Harriet: Can you give me an example?

David: One morning he looked around and noticed that there were no local people there at all except for the one translator.

A mischievous look appeared on his face and he said, 'Three things are absolutely necessary for human life: food, oxygen and sex.'

We all perked up. This was something different from the usual lecture on consciousness. We waited for him to continue, to develop his theme and explain in more detail, but he refused to elaborate.

Instead he said, 'Come on! Somebody dispute that statement. It's very controversial. Somebody disagree with me.'

It looked like he wanted to start an argument, but about what wasn't clear.

When no one else seemed interested in disputing his statement, I stepped into the breach to be the fall guy.

'If you don't breathe for a few minutes, you die,' I began. 'If you don't eat for a few weeks, you die. But I have never heard of anyone dying because they didn't have sex. How can you say that it is essential for human existence?'

Maharaj refused to explain himself. Instead he just repeated himself.

'Three things are absolutely necessary for human life: food, oxygen and sex.'

I couldn't see where he was going with the conversation, or where he wanted me to go with it.

'Are you saying that we should all have sex because if we don't we will all die?'

I was trying to provoke him into revealing why he had suddenly brought this topic up.

'No, I'm not saying that at all. I'm simply saying, 'Three things are absolutely necessary for human life: food, oxygen and sex.'

I tried a couple of other approaches but didn't get anywhere, and no one else in the room seemed willing to pitch in and help out. He just kept on repeating his original statement. After a few minutes he heard footsteps on the stairs. He immediately started talking

about consciousness, and as the new visitors, a group of local people, came into the room, he was well into one of his standard explanations. He obviously didn't feel comfortable discussing sex in front of his Marathi devotees. I never did find out what the point of his statement was because he never brought it up again.

Next: [Maharaj was the first person to tell me that this was what I should be doing with my life.](#)

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)

[Home](#) [Interviews and personal stories](#) [Books by David Godman](#) [Arunachala Saints](#)
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[Realization.org](#)
interviews David
Godman

[Michelle Mikklesen](#)
interviews David
Godman

[Living the](#)
[Inspiration of Sri](#)
[Ramana Maharshi](#)

[Remembering](#)
[Nisargadatta](#)
[Maharaj](#)

[Temple Times](#)

[My son, the](#)
[Missionary](#)

Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj

Page 4



Nisargadatta Maharaj

[Page 1](#)
[Page 2](#)
[Page 3](#)
[Page 4](#)
[Page 5](#)
[Page 6](#)

* * * * *

In this page:

[Were the translators all good? I have been told that some were better than others.](#)

[How did you first come to hear of Maharaj, and what initially attracted you to him?](#)

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Harriet: From what you are saying, I get the feeling that Maharaj had a great respect for the foreigners who came because they came looking for the truth about themselves, not for some palliative, a practice or belief that would keep them happy for a while.

David: In one sense, yes. I did hear him say a couple of times that he respected the fact that we had all abandoned our lives in the West in order to come to India in search of liberation, but that didn't mean that in practice he treated us respectfully. We all got shouted at on various occasions, and we all got told off from time to time because of things we did or said. We were all a little fearful of him because we never knew when the next eruption would come. We had all come to have the dirt beaten out of us, in the same way that the dhobis clean clothes by smashing them on rocks. Maharaj smashed our egos, our minds and our concepts on the immovable rock of the Self because he knew that in most cases that was the only way to help us.

I told you a few minutes ago that Maharaj discounted all theories of reincarnation, but he did tell one story that possibly indicated that we had all been searching for God in India before.

'At the end of the *Ramayana*,' he said, 'all the animals who had helped Ram to win the war were given rewards. The monkeys were all told that they could go to a monkey heaven. Now, what is heaven to a monkey? Vast quantities of food, lots of fighting, and limitless sex. So, all the monkeys were reborn as human beings in the West in the twentieth century to experience their idea of "heaven". After some time, though, they all began to get bored of all this excess. One by one, they all started coming back to India because they wanted to find Ram and be with him again.'

Harriet: What did he shout at you for?

David: I remember one time trying to talk to him about effort. I think I was talking about the various efforts I had made to realise the Self. This was soon after I started going to see him. I didn't realise at the time that the word 'effort' was a no-no in that room. He really didn't like anyone using it. The idea that there was a person who did something to achieve some spiritual state was a complete anathema to him. He seemed to feel that it showed a complete lack of understanding of his teachings.

When he started to get annoyed with me for using the word, I just ploughed ahead, thinking innocently that he probably hadn't understood what I was trying to say. The more I attempted to describe my 'efforts' and justify them, the more annoyed he got with me. I ended up getting an earful about my wrong understanding and wrong attitude. I was quite taken aback at the time. I had never come across a teacher before who disparaged hard work and effort on the spiritual path. On the contrary, all the others I had encountered had heartily endorsed such activities. That's why I initially thought that there must have been some kind of misunderstanding. I realised later that when Maharaj spoke, he wasn't giving instructions that he wanted you to act on. He was simply telling you who and what you were. You were supposed to understand and experience what he was talking about, not turn it into a practice. Making a practice out of it simply confirmed for him that you hadn't really understood what he was saying. One question that always rubbed him up the wrong way was, 'Yes, Maharaj, I understand intellectually what you are saying, but what do I do to actually experience it?' If you said that, you didn't understand him, or what he was trying to do, at all.

I have an embarrassing memory of another time he got angry with me. One afternoon my attention was wandering and my mind was embroiled in some larger-than-life ego fantasy. I was off in my own little world, not really listening to what was going on. Maharaj stopped the answer he was giving to someone else, apparently in mid-sentence, turned to me and started shouting at me, demanding to know whether I was listening and understanding what he was saying. I did a little prostration as an apology and put my attention back on what he was talking about. Afterwards, a few people wanted to know why he had suddenly launched such a ferocious attack on me. So far as they were concerned I was just sitting there minding my own business. I definitely deserved that one, though. In retrospect I can say that it increased both my attentiveness and my faith in him. When you know that the teacher in front of you is continuously monitoring all your thoughts and feelings, it makes you clean up your mental act quite a bit.

On another occasion Maharaj got angry with me simply because one of the translators didn't understand what I had asked. I said that the previous day he had said one thing, whereas this morning he was saying what appeared to be the exact opposite. The translator somehow assumed I was criticising the quality of the translation on the previous day and passed on my critique to Maharaj. He really got angry with me over that, but that one just bounced off me because I realised immediately that it was all due to a misunderstanding. Someone eventually told the translator what I had actually said, and he apologized for all the trouble his comments had caused.

Harriet: Were the translators all good? I have been told that some were better than others.

David: Yes, there were good ones and not-so-good ones. I think everyone knew who was good and who was not, but that didn't result in the good ones being called on to do the work if they happened to be there. There seemed to be some process of seniority at work. The translators who had been there the longest were called on first, irrespective of ability, and those who might have done a better job would have to wait until these more senior devotees were absent. When I first went a man called Sapre did most of the morning translations. He was very fluent and seemed to have a good grasp of Maharaj's teachings, but he interpolated a lot of his own stuff in his English answers. Two sentences from Maharaj might turn into a two-minute speech from Sapre. Even though most of us didn't know any Marathi, we knew that he must be making up a lot of his stuff simply because he was talking for so long. Several people complained to Maharaj about this, but he always supported Sapre and generally got angry with the people who complained about him. That was the cause of the outburst I just mentioned. Maharaj thought I was yet another person complaining about Sapre's translations.

Mullarpattan was next down the pecking order. I liked him because he was very literal. Possibly not quite as fluent as some of the others, but he scored points with me because he stuck to the script both ways. I once asked Maharaj a question through him, and when the answer came back, it made absolutely no sense at all. Mullarpattan, though, was beaming at me as if he had just delivered some great pearl of wisdom.

I thought about it again and it still made no sense, so I said, somewhat apologetically, 'I don't understand any of that answer. It doesn't make any sense to me at all.'

'I know,' replied Mullarpattan, 'it didn't make any sense to me either. But that's what Maharaj said and that's what I translated.'

Somewhat relieved, I asked him to tell Maharaj that neither of us had understood what he had said and requested him to explain the topic a little differently. Then we got on with the conversation.

I really respected Mullarpattan for this. He didn't try to put some sense into the answer, and he didn't tell Maharaj that his answer didn't make any sense. He just translated the words for me in a literal way because those were the words that Maharaj had intended me to hear.

Right at the bottom, in terms of seniority anyway, was Ramesh Balsekar. He didn't come to see Maharaj until some point in 1978. I thought this was unfortunate because in my opinion, and in the opinion of many of the other foreigners there, he was by far the most skilful of all the translators. He had a good understanding of the way foreign minds worked and expressed themselves, and a good enough intellect and memory to remember and translate a five-minute rambling monologue from a visitor. He was so obviously the best, many of us would wait until it was his turn to translate. That meant there were occasionally some long, embarrassing silences when the other translators were on duty. Everyone was waiting for them to be absent so that Balsekar could translate for them.

All the translators had their own distinctive style and their own distinctive phrases. When I read Jean Dunne's books in the 1980s I was transported back into Maharaj's room because I would be hearing the words, not just reading them. I would look at a couple of lines, recognise Mullarpattan's style, or whoever else it happened to be, and from then on I would hear the words in my mind as if they were coming out of the translator's mouths.

Harriet: So all these books are simply a transcription of what the interpreter said on the day of the talk. They are not translations of the original Marathi?

David: I don't know about the other books, but I know that's what Jean did. For a couple of weeks I spent the afternoon in her flat, which was near Chowpathy Beach. On that particular visit, my own place was too far away, so I just slept there at night. Jean was doing transcriptions for *Seeds of Consciousness* at the time and she would occasionally ask for my help in understanding difficult words on the tape, or she would ask for an opinion on whether a particular dialogue was worth including. I know from watching her work and from reading her books later that she was working with the interpreter's words only.

Harriet: Did she ask Maharaj if she could do this work? How did she get this job?

David: From what I remember, it was the other way round. He asked her to start doing the work. This created a bit of resentment amongst some of the Marathi devotees, some of whom thought they had the rights to Maharaj's words. There was an organisation, a Kendra that had been set up in his name to promote him and his teachings, and certain members seemed a bit miffed that they had been left out of this decision. One of them came to the morning session and actually said to Maharaj that he (i.e. the visitor) alone had the right to publish Maharaj's words because he was the person in the Kendra who was responsible for such things. I thought that this was an absurd position to take: if you set up an organization to promote the teachings of your Guru, and your Guru then appoints someone to bring out a book of his teachings, the organization should try to help not hinder the publication. Maharaj saw things the same way.

In his usual blunt way he said, 'I decide who publishes my teachings, not you. It's nothing to do with you. I have appointed this woman to do the job and you have no authority to veto that decision.'

The man left and I never saw him again.

Harriet: Did you never feel tempted to write about Maharaj yourself? You seem to have written about all the other teachers you have been with.

David: On one of my early visits Maharaj asked me what work I did at Ramanasramam. I told him that I looked after the ashram's library and that I also did some book reviewing for the ashram's magazine.

He gave me a strong look and said, 'Why don't you write about

the teachings?'

I remember being a little surprised at the time because at that point of my life I hadn't written a single word about Ramana Maharshi or any other teacher. And what is more, I had never felt any interest or inclination in doing so. Maharaj was the first person to tell me that this was what I should be doing with my life.

As for writing about Maharaj, the opportunity never really arose. In the years that I was visiting him, I wasn't doing any writing at all, and in the 80s and 90s I had lots of other projects and topics to occupy myself with.

Harriet: You have some good stories to tell, and some interesting interpretations of what you think Maharaj was trying to do with people. I am finding all this interesting, and I am sure other people would if you took the trouble to write it down.

David: Yes, as I have been talking about all these things today, a part of me has been saying, 'You should write this down'. The feeling has been growing as I have talking to you. After you leave, maybe I will start and try to see how much I can remember.

Harriet: I suppose we should have talked about this much earlier, but how did you first come to hear of Maharaj, and what initially attracted you to him?

David: Sometime in 1977 I gave a book, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, by Chogyam Trungpa, to a friend of mine, Murray Feldman, and said that he would probably enjoy reading it. I knew he had had a background in Buddhism and had done some Tibetan practices, so I assumed he would like it. He responded by giving me a copy of *I am That*, saying that he was sure that I would enjoy it. Murray had known about Maharaj for years and had even been to see him when Maurice Frydman was a regular visitor. I remember Murray's vivid description of the two of them together: two old men having intensely animated discussions during which they would both get so heated and excited, they would be having nose-to-nose arguments, with lots of raised voices and arm waving. He had no idea what they were talking about, but he could feel the passion from both sides. In those days, if you visited Maharaj, you were likely to be the only person there. You would get a cup of tea and a very serious one-on-one discussion, with no one else present.

A few years later I heard Maharaj say, 'I used to have a quiet life, but *I am That* has turned my house into a railway station platform'.

Anyway, back to the story. I am digressing before I have even started. I went through the book and I have to admit that I had some resistance to many of the things Maharaj said. I was living at Ramanasramam at the time and practicing Bhagavan's teachings. There were clear similarities between what Maharaj was saying and what Bhagavan had taught, but I kept tripping over the dissimilarities: statements that the 'I am' was not ultimately real, for example. However, the book slowly grew on me, and by the end I was hooked. In retrospect I think I would say that the power that was inherent in the words somehow overcame my intellectual resistance to some of the ideas.

I went back to the book again and again. It seemed to draw me to itself, but whenever I picked it up, I found I couldn't read more than a few pages at a time. It was not that I found it boring, or that I disagreed with what it was saying. Rather, there was a feeling of satisfied satiation whenever I went through a few paragraphs. I would put the book down and let the words roll around inside me for a while. I wasn't thinking about them or trying to understand them or wondering if I agreed with them. The words were just there, at the forefront of my consciousness, demanding an intense attention.

I think that it was the words and the teachings that initially fascinated me rather than the man himself because in the first few weeks after I read the book I don't recollect that I had a very strong urge to go to see him. However, all that changed when some of my friends and acquaintances started going to Bombay to sit with him. All of them, without exception, came back with glowing reports. And it wasn't just their reports that impressed me. Some of them came back looking absolutely transfigured. I remember an American woman called Pat who reappeared radiant, glowing with some inner light, after just a two-week visit.

Papaji used to tell a story about a German girl who went back to Germany and was met by her boyfriend at the airport. The boyfriend, who had never met Papaji and who had never been to India, prostrated full length on the airport floor at her feet.

He told her afterwards, 'I couldn't help myself. You had undergone such an obvious illuminating transformation, I felt compelled to do it.'

I know how he felt. I never prostrated to any of the people who had come back from Bombay, but I could recognise the radical transformations that many of them had undergone. Even so, I think it was several months before I decided to go and see for myself what was going on in Bombay.

Harriet: What took so long? What made you wait?

David: Something has just surfaced in my memory, something I haven't thought about for years. After reading *I am That* a few times, I developed a great faith in Maharaj's state and power. I knew he was the real thing. I knew that if I went to see him I would accept any advice that he gave me. Around that time I heard reports that a couple of foreigners I knew had been to see him, and that he had advised them both to go back to their respective countries. This alarmed me a bit. I was very attached to being in Tiruvannamalai, and I definitely didn't want to go back to the West. Something inside me knew that if Maharaj told me to go back to England, I would go. I didn't want to leave India, so I held off going to see him for a few months.

There was another unresolved issue. I wasn't sure at that point whether or not I needed a human Guru. The Ramanasramam party line has always been that Bhagavan can be the Guru for everyone, even people who never met him while he was alive. I seem to remember having a knowledge of all the places in the Ramanasramam books and in *I am That* where the subject of Gurus came up. I would read them quite often, without ever coming to a final conclusion about whether I needed a human Guru or not.

Harriet: So what made you finally overcome your resistance to going to Bombay?

David: An Australian woman, who had been before, suggested we go, and I agreed. I always knew I would go sooner or later. I just needed a push to get me going, and this invitation was it. I am trying to remember when it was. I think it was the middle of 1978, but I can't be more accurate than that.

Harriet: What were your first impressions? What happened when you arrived?

David: I remember sitting in his room, waiting for him to come upstairs. I was very nervous and apprehensive, but I can't remember why. I recollect trying to start a conversation with the man sitting next to me, but he asked me to be quiet so that he could meditate.

Maharaj came in and a few minutes later I found myself sitting in front of him, telling him who I was and why I had come. It was an afternoon session and not many people were there. Since I was the only new person present, he called me up to find out who I was and what I wanted.

I explained that I had come from Ramanasramam, that I had spent two years there, and that I had been practising Bhagavan's teachings on self-enquiry fairly intensively. At this period of my life I often used to meditate eight hours a day, although by the time I met Maharaj this was beginning to tail off a bit.

Maharaj eventually asked me if I had any questions and I replied, 'Not now. I just want to sit and listen to you for a while.'

He accepted this and allowed me to disappear to the back of the room. I should say at this point that I had already felt the power and the peace of his presence in the room. It was something very tangible.

Harriet: Did you go there with questions that you wanted to ask him? Was there anything that you wanted to talk to him about?

David: I really can't remember. I knew I would end up talking to him, but I didn't have any particular burning question.

Harriet: How long did it take for you to summon up the courage to start a dialogue with him?

David: I think it was the next day, in the afternoon session. That means I must have sat through two full sessions, just listening to what other people had to say, and to what Maharaj had to say to them.

Eventually, when there was a lull in the conversation I asked, 'I have been doing self-enquiry, trying to keep attention on the inner feeling of "I", for several years, but no matter how intensively I try to do it, I don't find that my attention stays on the "I" for more than a few seconds. There doesn't seem to be an improvement in my ability to keep my attention on this inner feeling of "I". Do the periods of being aware of the "I" have to get longer and longer until they become more or less continuous?'

'No,' he replied, 'just having the strong urge to seek this "I" and investigate it is enough. Don't worry about how well or how long you are holding onto it. The strong desire to know the "I" will keep taking you back to it when your attention strays. If something is important to you, it keeps coming up in your mind. If knowing the "I" is important to you, you will find yourself going back to it again and again.'

After that I think I talked to him almost every day, mostly about various aspects of his teachings on consciousness. He seemed to encourage questions from me, and I always enjoyed quizzing him. However, the exact details of the questions and answers seem to have slipped through the cracks of my memory.

Next: [Let me redress the balance by telling one very long and very lovely story.](#)

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)

[Home](#) [Interviews and personal stories](#) [Books by David Godman](#) [Arunachala Saints](#)
[Tamil Translations](#) [Ramana Maharshi - his life and teachings](#) [Contact David Godman](#) [Search](#) [Links](#)

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[Home](#) [Interviews and personal stories](#) [Books by David Godman](#) [Arunachala Saints](#)
[Links](#) [Search](#) [Bhagavan, his life and teachings](#) [Contact David Godman](#) [Tamil Translations](#)
[Translated site material](#)

INTERVIEWS

PHOTOS & LINKS

[Realization.org
interviews David
Godman](#)

[Michelle Mikklesen
interviews David
Godman](#)

[Living the
Inspiration of Sri
Ramana Maharshi](#)

[Remembering
Nisargadatta
Maharaj](#)

[Temple Times](#)

[My son, the
Missionary](#)

Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj

Page 5



Nisargadatta Maharaj

Harriet: All this talk about Ramana Maharshi has reminded me of something else that I wanted to ask. We started off this afternoon with a question about why Maharaj isn't the topic of memoirs, at least book length ones. A few people have written short accounts, but I have never come across a full-length book about living with him. Many of the Ramana Maharshi books are filled with stories of miraculous events that seemed to be taking place around him. Many of his devotees tell stories of how faith in Bhagavan changed their lives or somehow, in an improbable way, transformed their destiny. I know that Bhagavan himself disowned all personal responsibility for these events, but that didn't stop people writing them down and attributing them to Bhagavan's grace.

I suppose my question is, did similar things happen around Maharaj, and if they did, why did no one ever bother to write them down?

David: I don't know how common such events were, but I know that they did happen. And if similar things did happen to other people, I really don't know why those who know about these events don't want to write them down.

Let me redress the balance by telling one very long and very lovely story.

At some point in the late 1970s I was asked to take a South American woman called Anna-Marie to Bombay and look after her because she hardly spoke a word of English. Her native language was Spanish and I think she lived in Venezuela, but I have a vague memory that this wasn't her nationality. I was planning to go to Bombay anyway to see Maharaj, so I agreed to take her and look after her. Very early on in our journey – we were still in Madras – I realised that I had been given a bit of a basket case to look after.

[Page 1](#)
[Page 2](#)
[Page 3](#)
[Page 4](#)
[Page 5](#)
[Page 6](#)

* * * * *

In this page:

[At the end of that period
the translator begin to
explain what she had said.
We all sat there,
absolutely dumbfounded.](#)

[So you would say that
Maharaj was looking after
the welfare of devotees, in
the same way that other
great Gurus were?](#)

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Anna-Marie was completely incapable of looking after herself, and was incredibly forgetful. Before we had even managed to get on the train to Bombay, she managed to lose all her money and her passport. By retracing our steps, we eventually tracked them down to a bookstore near the station. Miraculously, the manager had found the purse and had kept it with him in case we came back looking for it.

A few hours into our train journey from Madras to Bombay Anna-Marie went to the bathroom. On Indian trains that means a squat toilet which is just a hole in the floor with footrests on either side of it. Anna-Marie was sitting there, doing her business, when the train jolted on the tracks. Her glasses fell off and disappeared down the hole in the floor. It turned out to be her only pair, and without them she was more or less blind. I realised this later in the day when we stopped at a station further down the line. Anna-Marie was standing on the platform when the train started to pull out of the station. She made no move to get on. When I realised what was happening, I jumped off and pushed her onto the moving train. I had already realised that she was having trouble seeing things, but I didn't realise how bad things really were until I discovered that she couldn't see a moving train, with about twenty-five carriages, that was about ten feet in front of her. I knew that my first priority, once we got to Bombay, would be to get her a new pair of glasses. I remembered that there was an optician quite near to Maharaj's house. I had noticed it on previous trips while I was waiting to catch a bus to go downtown.

Early the next morning, as soon as the shop opened, I took her in to get her eyes tested and to get her some glasses. The test took a long time, partly because of Anna-Marie's deficiency in English, and partly because the optician couldn't work out what her prescription was.

After about half an hour he came out and said, 'She needs to go to a specialist eye hospital. I can't find out with my instruments here what her prescription might be. There is something seriously wrong with her eyes, but I don't know what it is. Take her to "Such and Such" Eye Hospital.'

Whatever the name was, I had never heard of it. He started to give me directions, but since I didn't know Bombay, I wasn't able to follow them. This was when the first 'miracle' of the day happened. It was to be the first of many.

'Don't worry,' said the optician, 'I'll take you there myself.'

He closed his store – there were no assistants to man the counter while we were away – and we set off on a walk across Bombay. We must have walked over a mile before we finally arrived at the hospital. He took us to the office of an eye surgeon he knew there and explained that his instruments were not sophisticated enough to work out what was wrong with Anna-Marie's eyes. He then left us and went back to his store. I have encountered many acts of kindness in all the years I have been in India, but I still marvel at this shop owner who closed down his store for a couple of hours and then went on a two-mile round-trip walk just to help us out.

The eye surgeon set to work on Anna-Marie's eyes. Even he was impressed by how complicated her eyes were. He tried her out on several machines and gadgets, but like the optician before him, he failed to come up with a prescription.

'What is wrong with this woman?' he asked. 'How did she end

up with eyes like these?'

I shrugged my shoulders. 'I have no idea. I barely know her and she hardly speaks any English.'

We went off to a different part of the hospital that, to my untrained eye, seemed to have bigger and fancier machines. This new combination of equipment finally came up with a reading for Anna-Marie. Our curiosity had been piqued by this long complicated process so we tried through sign language and the few English words she knew to discover how Anna-Marie's eyes had come to be so peculiar. After a few false starts she realised what we were asking. It turned out that she had fallen out of a building in South America and had landed on her face. Having watched her behaviour and activities in the previous two days, I found this to be an entirely believable scenario. I don't think I have ever come across someone who was so accident-prone.

Her eyes had been damaged in the fall and had been stitched in various places. As a result of this surgery there were places on the eyeball that had a very eccentric curvature. This accounted for the first optician's inability to work out what she needed. Even the big eye hospital took almost an hour to figure out what she needed.

I got to talking to the eye surgeon and discovered that we had a mutual acquaintance in Tiruvannamalai. In fact, he knew quite a few of Bhagavan's devotees. Like the optician before him, he decided to take us under his wing.

'Where will you go to get this prescription fulfilled?' he asked.

'Well, the first man we went to, the one who brought us here, was very helpful to us. I would like to go back to him to give him the business since he was so kind to us.'

'No, no,' said the surgeon, 'he only has a little shop. He won't be able to fulfill an order like this. It is too complicated. I will take you to the biggest optician in Bombay.'

He too closed down his office and took us on another trip across Bombay. As we walked through the front door of the store he was taking us to, everyone jumped to attention. He was clearly a very respected figure in the eye world.

'These are my friends,' he announced, waving at us. 'They have a difficult prescription to fulfill. Please do it as quickly as possible because this woman can't see anything without glasses. She is virtually blind.'

He left us in the hands of the manager of the store and went back to the hospital. The manager's big, beaming smile lasted as long as it took him to read the prescription. He put it down on the counter and started to talk to us very apologetically.

'Normally, we keep lenses for every possible prescription here in the store. We have a huge turnover, so we can afford to make and keep lenses that we have no customers for. Sooner or later somebody will come and buy them, and everyone appreciates the fact that they can get what they want on the spot, without having to wait for anything to be made. But this prescription is such a ridiculous combination, no one would ever think of making it or keeping it. Until I saw it myself I would have guessed that nobody in the world had eyes that corresponded with these numbers. We will have to make a special order and that will take a long time because the glass grinders are out on strike at the moment. Even if they go back to work, it will probably be weeks before we can get them to make an order like this because they already have a lot of

pending orders. I'm sorry, I can't help you, and nobody else in the city will be able to help you either because this prescription is just too unusual for anyone to stock.'

This apology took about five minutes to deliver. While it was going on one of the boys from the store, who obviously didn't know any English, picked up the paper and went to the storeroom to look for the lenses. That was his job: to pick up the prescriptions from the front office and find the corresponding lenses in the storeroom. Just as the manager was coming to his conclusion, the boy reappeared with two lenses that exactly corresponded to the numbers on the prescription. The manager was absolutely flabbergasted.

'This is not possible,' he kept saying. 'No one would make and keep lenses like these.'

He finally adjusted the impossibility by saying that someone must have ordered these lenses long ago and had forgotten to collect them.

Because we had been declared friends of the great and famous eye surgeon – we had only known him for about two hours – we were given a massive discount and about half an hour later Anna-Marie walked out of the store wearing what I was absolutely convinced was the only pair of spectacles on planet earth that she could actually see the world through. Now, was there a miracle in there, or were we just the fortunate recipients of an amazingly serendipitous sequence of events?

I decided to pick the initial optician who agrees to close down his store and take us to the one eye surgeon in town who happens to be interested in Ramana, who then takes us, against my wishes, to the only store in Bombay where lenses can be found for Anna-Marie. I am a bit of a sceptic, and in my jaundiced opinion there are too many good things in that sequence to be attributed to chance alone.

My own belief is that when you go to the Guru, the power of that Guru takes care of any physical problems that may arise. He doesn't do it knowingly; there is just an aura around him that takes care of all these problems. We never even told Maharaj about Anna-Marie's glasses. When we set off that morning, I just assumed that she had fairly normal eyes and that within half an hour or so we would be able to buy some glasses that would bring the world into focus.

This was not the end of the story. I told you it was a long one. Anna-Marie was sitting with Maharaj every day for about a week, but of course, she couldn't understand a word of what was going on. There was no one there who spoke Spanish. Then, one morning, she appeared very red-eyed and I asked her what was the matter.

'I was up all night,' she said, in very broken English, 'praying for a Spanish translator to come today. There is something I have to tell Maharaj, and I need a translator to do it.'

Later that morning, as we were all sitting in a café on Grant Road in the interval between the end of the *bhajans* and the beginning of the question-and-answer session, we noticed a new foreign face at an adjoining table – a woman who was reading a copy of *I am That*. We introduced ourselves and discovered that, surprise, surprise, she was a professional Spanish-English translator who worked in Bombay and who had recently come across

Maharaj's teachings. She had decided in a general sort of way to come and visit Maharaj, but only that morning did her general urge translate into positive action. Anna-Marie, of course, was over the moon. The translator she had spent all night praying for had miraculously manifested on the next table to her about fifteen minutes before the question-and-answer session started.

We all went back to Maharaj's room, curious to find out what Anna-Marie wanted to say to him. This is more or less what she had to say via the translator.

'I was living in Venezuela when I had a dream of a mountain and two men. I found out soon afterwards that one of the two men was Ramakrishna, but for a long time I didn't know who the other man was or what the mountain might be. Then, last year, I saw a photo of Ramana Maharshi and realised that this was the second man in the dream. When I did some research to find out more about him, I soon realised that the mountain in the dream was Arunachala. In the dream Ramana Maharshi looked at me in a very special way and transmitted a knowledge of his teachings to me. He didn't do it verbally. He just looked at me, and as he was looking, I just felt that he was filling me up with an understanding of his teachings, a knowledge that I could articulate quite clearly, even though no words had passed between us. I knew that I had to come to India to find out more about him. I persuaded a friend of mine to bring me here, even though I knew that Ramana Maharshi was no longer alive. I knew I had some business here and something was compelling me to come. While I was in Tiruvannamalai I heard about you, and I knew that I had to come and see you as well. That same compulsion that made me come to India to find out about Ramana Maharshi has made me come here as well. I don't know what it is, but I knew that I had to come.'

Maharaj interceded at this point: 'What were the teachings that were transmitted to you in the dream? What did Ramana Maharshi tell you as he was revealing his teachings in silence?'

Anna-Marie talked in Spanish for about five minutes without any translation being given by the interpreter. At the end of that period the translator began to explain what she had said. We all sat there, absolutely dumbfounded. She gave a perfect and fluent five-minute summary of Maharaj's teachings. They were quite clearly not Ramana's teachings but Maharaj's, and this woman was giving a wonderful presentation of them. I think it was one of the best five-minute summaries of the teachings I had ever heard. And remember, this was from a woman who was on her first visit, someone who had had very little acquaintance with Maharaj's teachings before coming there that day.

Maharaj seemed to be as impressed as everyone else there. He stood up, took Anna-Marie downstairs and initiated her into the mantra of his lineage by writing it on her tongue with his finger. I mentioned earlier that he would volunteer to give out the mantra if anybody wanted it. If someone asked for it, he would ordinarily whisper it in his or her ear. This is the only case I know in which he gave out the mantra without being first asked, and it is the only instance I know of in which he wrote it with his finger on a devotee's tongue. What does all this mean? I have absolutely no idea. I have long since given up trying to guess or rationalise why Gurus do the things they do.

Harriet: That's a great story! So you would say that Maharaj was looking after the welfare of devotees, in the same way that other great Gurus were?

David: I would answer a conditional 'yes' to that question. 'Yes' because it is the nature of enlightened beings to be like this – they don't have any choice in the matter because these things go on around them automatically. However, on a more superficial level the answer might be 'no'. If people took their personal problems to him, he might get angry and say that it was none of his business. He didn't perceive himself as someone who dealt with individual people who had problems. I saw several people go to him to tell him that they had had all their money or their passport stolen, and his standard response was to tell them off for being careless. I told him once that I was worried about how much I was sleeping. At the time, though, I did think this was a legitimate spiritual question because I had read many teachers who had said that it was bad to sleep a lot.

His answer, though, was 'Why are you bringing your medical problems to me? If you think it is a problem, go and see a doctor.'

In that particular case his advice turned out to be perfectly correct. I discovered later that I was suffering from a major infestation of hookworm, almost certainly as a result of walking around India for years with no footwear. Hookworms eat red blood cells and if they get out of control, they eat more than the body can produce. Eventually, you get very anaemic, which means feeling tired and sleepy all the time. So, in this particular case, what appeared to be a cranky, dismissive answer was the most useful thing he could say. I would say that the Self put the right words into his mouth at the right moment, but at the time neither of us knew just how right they were.

Despite his generally irritable response when people went to him for personal help, I think he was fully aware that he was looking after all his devotees' well being, even though it may not have looked that way a lot of the time.

Harriet: Again, can you give me an example of this, or is this just guesswork?

David: I remember a large fat man from Madras who came to see Maharaj with what he said was a problem: 'I have been doing *japa* for many years and I have acquired *siddhis* as a result. If I am very pleased with someone, very good things happen to him or her automatically. I don't think about it or do anything. It just happens by itself. But if I get angry with someone, the opposite happens. Very bad things happen, and sometimes the person even dies. How can I stop these things from happening?'

Maharaj told him, 'All these *siddhis* have come on account of your *japa*. If you stop doing the *japa*, the *siddhis* will also stop.'

'I don't think I can do that,' replied the man. 'The *japa* has taken me over so completely, it is no longer voluntary. It just happens by itself whether I want it to or not.'

Maharaj repeated his advice, but the man wasn't interested in carrying it out. He looked very pleased with himself and I got the feeling that he had just come there to show off his accomplishments. My opinion was confirmed when he announced

that he was now willing to answer questions from anyone in the room. He hadn't come there to receive advice, he had come to give it out.

Maharaj asked him to leave and said that if he was really interested in his teachings he could go in the evening to the house of one of his women devotees, a Sanskrit professor who sometimes did translations for him, and she would explain them to him. He was told not to come back to the room. I suspect that Maharaj wanted to keep him away from us because there was something strange and threatening about him. I am not a very psychic kind of person but I could definitely feel an unpleasant energy coming off this man. It was something that made me feel physically queasy. He really did have an aura of bad energy around him. I checked with some of the other people afterwards, and some of them had felt the same way.

All this took place in a morning session. That evening the Sanskrit professor showed up an hour late, looking very flustered. Maharaj immediately wanted to know what was going on.

'This man from Madras came to my house and I couldn't get him to leave. I told him that it was time for me to come here, but he wouldn't get up and go. I didn't really want to force him to go. He might have got angry with me, and then I might have died.'

Maharaj appeared to be outraged. He puffed out his chest like a fighting cock going into battle and announced, very angrily, 'No one can harm my devotees. You are under my protection. This man cannot do you any harm. If he comes to talk to you again, throw him out when it is time for you to come here. Nothing will happen to you.'

This was the only occasion when I heard Maharaj make a strong public declaration that he was protecting and looking after his devotees.

Maharaj himself had no fear of people like this. He told us once about a yogi who had come to his beedi shop to test his powers. This yogi apparently had many *siddhis* and he came to see if Maharaj, of whom he had heard great things, could match him. Maharaj just went about his business in the shop and refused all challenges to show off what he could do. Eventually, in an attempt to provoke him into doing something, the yogi said that he would curse him and make something very bad happen to him.

Maharaj apparently looked at him with complete unconcern and said, 'You may be able to pull down a thousand suns from the sky, but you can't harm me and you don't impress me. Now go away.'

Next: [I think this whole episode was orchestrated by the power that looks after the affairs of devotees who have a strong urge to be with a Guru.](#)

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)

[Home](#) [Interviews and personal stories](#) [Books by David Godman](#) [Arunachala Saints](#)
[Tamil Translations](#) [Ramana Maharshi - his life and teachings](#) [Contact David Godman](#) [Search](#) [Links](#)



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[Translated site material](#)

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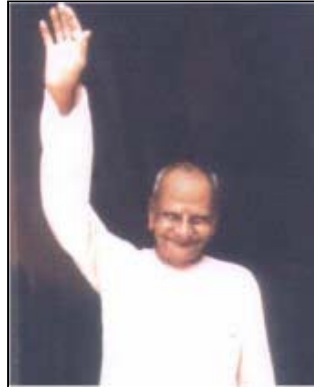
[Remembering
Nisargadatta
Maharaj](#)

[Temple Times](#)

[My son, the
Missionary](#)

Remembering Nisargadatta Maharaj

Page 6



Nisargadatta Maharaj

[Page 1](#)
[Page 2](#)
[Page 3](#)
[Page 4](#)
[Page 5](#)
[Page 6](#)

* * * * *

In this page:

[I ask this because there
was no ashram or centre
where all of Maharaj's
devotees could stay.](#)

[Did you carry on going to
see him until he passed
away? Were you there in
the final days?](#)

* * * * *

Harriet: What about you? Were there any instances when you felt that he was looking after you, taking care of your physical well being as well as your spiritual health?

David: There is nothing remotely as spectacular as Anna-Marie's visit, but I can tell you the story of one trip I made to see him. There are a few incidents on the way that are nothing to do with what you are asking, but by the time I get to the end, you will realise what it is all about.

In 1980 I wanted to see Maharaj but I had no money at all. I couldn't afford the train ticket, and I definitely couldn't afford to stay in Bombay for more than a day or two. I accepted an invitation to give a talk about Bhagavan at a seminar in Delhi on condition that I could come back via Bombay. My train ticket was paid for by the organisers, so that took care of the transport arrangements. My meagre funds would allow me two days in Bombay, so I booked the tickets according. In India you have to book your train tickets at least seven to ten days in advance in order to get the train you want.

I made my speech in Delhi and then took the train to Bombay. On the suburban train that ran from the main Bombay station to Grant Road I had all my money, my passport (actually a temporary travel document that was given to me while I waited for a new passport) and my onward train ticket stolen. It was a classic piece of work. There is always a crush as everyone piles into the carriage at the same time. In the general scrummaging someone managed to slit the bottom of my bag and remove my wallet. My first reaction was actually admiration. It had been such a slick, professional job. The slit was only about half an inch bigger than the size of the wallet, and the whole operation had been carried out in a couple of seconds while I was trying to ensure that I got onto the train.

Fortunately, my local train ticket was in my shirt pocket. In

those days there was a Rs 10 fine (about 20 cents US at today's rate) for ticketless travel, and I wouldn't have been able to pay it if I had been unable to produce a ticket at my destination. When I arrived at Grant Road, I didn't even have that much money to my name. I think I had just over a rupee in loose change in one of my trouser pockets. That constituted my entire worldly wealth. I walked to 10th Lane, Khetwadi, the alley where Maharaj lived and invested all my change in a cup of tea and a morning newspaper. It was very early in the morning and I knew that it would be a couple of hours before anyone I knew showed up. I didn't want to go in and tell Maharaj that I had been robbed because I had seen how he had reacted to other people in that situation. I was hoping to float a loan from someone I knew and then find a floor to sleep on, because without a passport, I wouldn't be able to check into a hotel.

Jean Dunne showed up around the time I expected and I told her what had happened. I knew her well because she had lived in Ramanasramam for a couple of years before she started to visit Maharaj in Bombay. She lent me a few hundred rupees, which I assumed would be enough to have a couple of days in Bombay and get back to Tiruvannamalai. I planned to go to the train station later that morning and get a new copy of my onward ticket issued. Maharaj, though, had other plans for me.

Someone told him that I had been robbed on the suburban train and I braced myself for the expected lecture. Instead, he was astonishingly sympathetic. He spoke to one of his attendants, a bank officer, and asked him to put me up for the duration of my visit. I ended up in a very nice house in quite a good area of Bombay. Quite a change from the bug-ridden lodges that I usually had to frequent. Later that morning I went to V. T. Station to get a new ticket. Much to my amazement, there was no record of my name on any of the trains that were leaving for Madras. In those days there were no computers; all bookings were made by hand in big ledgers. A very civilised and sympathetic railway official (you don't meet many of them when you are not on Guru business in India!) took a couple of hours off to pore over all the ledgers to find out the details of my ticket. There are about 750 people on each train and I think there were three or four trains leaving for Madras on the day that I planned to leave. After scanning over 2,000 names for me, he regretfully announced that I didn't have a reservation on any of the trains that were leaving that day. I began to suspect that some power wanted me to stay in Bombay because mistakes like this are very rare in the railway booking system. In the twenty-seven years I have been using the trains here, I have never ever arrived at a station and discovered that my booked ticket simply didn't exist. I had no alternative except to go and buy a new ticket, which I did with the funds I had borrowed from Jean. The next train with a vacant berth wasn't leaving for over two weeks, which meant that I had that much time to spend with Maharaj.

I had come with very little money, expecting a two-day flying visit. Instead, courtesy of Maharaj and a mysterious event in the railway booking office, I had a luxurious two-week stay in a devotee's house.

I made my way back to Maharaj's house and found that someone had told him about the talk on Ramana Maharshi's teachings I had given in Delhi a few days earlier. That was

something else that I wanted to keep quiet about. Maharaj had strong views on unenlightened people giving public speeches about enlightenment. I had only agreed to do it so that I would have a chance of coming to see him, but I suspected that this wouldn't be a good enough excuse for him.

I discovered that he had found out about the talk because when I walked into his room he called me and asked me to come to the front of the room. I went up and sat facing him in the place where the questioners would usually sit.

'No, no,' he said, 'sit next to me, facing all the other people.'

My spirits sank. I knew that I wouldn't enjoy whatever he had in mind.

'Look at my little room,' he began. 'Only about thirty people come to listen to hear me speak. But David here has just been giving spiritual talks in Delhi. Hundreds of people apparently came to listen to him, so he must be much better at it than me. So today David will give a talk for us.'

This was worse than anything I could have imagined when he called me up. I tried unsuccessfully to wriggle out of his invitation, but when I realised that he wasn't going to back down, I gave a five-minute summary of the paper I had read out in Delhi. It was about the unity between the practices of surrender and self-enquiry in Bhagavan's teachings. One of the translators asked me to go slowly so that he could give a running translation for Maharaj. Through the duration of the talk Maharaj was glaring at me very intently. I think that he was waiting to pounce on me if I made some comment that he didn't agree with. I made it to the end of my summary without being interrupted by any scathing comments from Maharaj. I thought that this in itself was quite a major accomplishment.

After my conclusion he looked at me and said in a fairly mild tone, 'I can't quarrel with anything you said. Everything you said was correct.'

Then he fired himself up and said very strongly and forcefully, 'But don't go around giving talks about how to get enlightened unless you are in that state yourself. Otherwise, you will end up like that Wolter Keers.'

I have already told you what he thought of Wolter Keers and his teaching activities. That was a fate I was determined to avoid. All this took place twenty-three years ago. I haven't given a public talk since then.

I need to fast forward a bit here and get to the end of the story. I arrived back in Tiruvannamalai more than two weeks later. I had no income, no prospect of receiving any money from anyone, and I had a debt of several hundred rupees that I owed to Jean. I went to work the next morning in the ashram library and found an orange envelope on my desk with my name on it. I opened it and found a bundle of rupee notes inside. I counted them and discovered that it was exactly the same amount that had been stolen from me in Bombay: not a rupee more, not a rupee less. There was no mention of who had put the money there, and no one ever came forward to say that he or she was the person responsible. So far as I was aware, no one in Tiruvannamalai even knew about the theft. I hadn't told anyone, and I had been back in Tiruvannamalai less than twenty-four hours when the envelope appeared.

I think this whole episode was orchestrated by the power that

looks after the affairs of devotees who have a strong urge to be with a Guru. This power took me to Bombay, stole my money and ticket, removed all traces of my booking from the railway ledgers, arranged excellent accommodation for me for more than two weeks, brought me back to Tiruvannamalai, where it then returned all my money to me via an anonymous donor.

Harriet: Where did you normally stay when you went to Bombay? What did other visiting devotees do for accommodation? Where did you all eat and sleep? I ask this because there was no ashram or centre where all of Maharaj's devotees could stay.

David: It depended on how well off you were. Bombay has always been an expensive place to live in. If you didn't have much money, your choice was very restricted. Some of my friends used to stay at a Buddhist ashram, but that involved participating in a lot of their rituals, which was something many of us didn't want to do because some of the timings clashed with Maharaj's sessions. There were some other cheap options that were either a long way away or which also involved participating in some activity you didn't want to, or submitting to strange rules that were not convenient. I avoided all these places and always stayed at a cheap lodge that was about 200 yards from Maharaj's house, on the same alley. It was called the Poornima, and many of us who were short of money ended up there. I seem to remember that it was Rs 22 for a double room, an amazing price for Bombay even in those days. A couple of streets away there was a place that served cheap lunches to local people who were working in the area. It was made of mud and there were no chairs or tables. However, you could get a great lunch there – chapattis, dhal, and vegetables – for Rs 1.40. I can't remember the exchange rate in those days. I think it may have been about twelve rupees to the dollar. That should give you some idea of the prices.

Maharaj would always ask where you were staying when you first went to see him. If you said 'Poornima' he knew you were either short of funds or being very careful about spending them. He clearly approved of people who didn't waste money, and who got good bargains when they went out shopping. He had spent his whole life being a businessman who knew the value of a rupee, and it irked him considerably to see foreigners wasting money or getting cheated.

One morning when I was there visitors were offering flowers and sweets to him. People would bring flowers to decorate the portraits for the Guru *puja* that took place every morning, and some people brought sweets that would be distributed as *prasad* at the end of it. That day, three foreign women were standing in front of him with flowers that had stems, which meant that they were hoping he would put them in the vases that were kept near him. He asked the first one how much she had paid, and when she told him he was shocked. He got angry with her, said that she had been cheated, and refused to accept the flowers. The second woman suffered the same fate. The third woman's flowers were accepted because she had done a little bargaining and had got the price down to a reasonable amount. Devotion didn't seem to be a factor when it came to getting your flowers accepted. The best way to get your

flowers in his vase was to bargain ferociously for them and get a price that would satisfy him.

Now the subject of flowers has come up, I have to digress a little mention the *bhajan* and the Guru *puja* that took place between the meditation and the question-and-answer session. It was the only occasion when Maharaj would allow people to garland him. After he had been garlanded, he would stand in the middle of the room, banging cymbals to the tune of the *bhajan* that was being sung. Mostly, his eyes would be closed. At the beginning he would start off with small finger cymbals one or two inches in diameter. As the *bhajan* hotted up he would move on to bigger and bigger cymbals which would be passed on to him by an attendant. The biggest pair were almost the size of garbage can lids. They were huge and the noise they made was ear-splitting. You could hear them several streets away. When Maharaj moved on to this biggest set of cymbals, he would already be wearing so many garlands, they would be sticking out in front of him, sometimes to a distance of about two feet. It wasn't possible to bang the biggest cymbals without utterly destroying the garlands. Maharaj would bang away with his eyes closed, and every time the cymbals came together petals would fly off in all directions. By the time it was all over, the floor would be covered with fragments of the flowers he had shattered and sprayed all over the room. It was a beautiful sight and I never got tired of watching him smash his cymbals together and spray flowers in all directions.

Let's get back to his parsimonious habits. I stayed at the Poornima on a visit I made in 1979. I was spending two weeks with Maharaj before flying back to England to visit my family for the first time since I had come to India in 1976. My mother had sent me a ticket, feeling, possibly with some reason, that if she didn't pay for my trip, I might never come home again. I had accumulated orders for copies of *I am That* from friends in England. The British price was about ten times the price of the Bombay price, so all the Maharaj devotees I knew in England had put in orders for cheap copies. I appeared in Maharaj's room with this huge pile of books and asked him to sign them all for the people who were waiting for them in England.

He looked at me very suspiciously and said, 'I thought you had no money. How could you afford to buy all these books?'

I explained: 'They are not for me. They are for people in England who don't want to pay the British price. They have sent me money to bring them Indian copies.'

When I told him the retail price in London he was truly horrified.

'Take as many as you can! No one should pay that price for a book!'

He pulled out his pen and happily autographed all the books.

Harriet: Did you carry on going to see him until he passed away? Were you there in the final days?

David: No, and I didn't want to be. I didn't want sit there watching him slowly die. I wanted to keep my memory of a man who was a perpetual dynamo, an amazingly vital centre of force and energy. I knew that he didn't regard himself as the body, but I didn't want to be there, watching the cancer slowly reduce him to an invalid. I

can't remember the date of my last visit, but I do remember that he was still talking without much trouble.

I haven't explained how Maharaj kept the traffic flowing through his room. You need to know about this to understand what comes after. Because of the restricted space available, Maharaj would generally only allow people to spend about two weeks with him. New people were coming every day and there simply wasn't enough room for everyone to sit on the floor.

When Maharaj saw that it was getting congested, he would pick out a few of the people who had been there the longest and ask them to leave, saying, 'You can leave now. New people have come and there is no room.'

The selected people would then have to leave, but if they were still interested, they could come back after another couple of months and put in another two weeks there. That was the system that many of us followed: two weeks there followed by two or more months somewhere else. Usually, when I arrived, I would tell him that I had a return ticket to Madras in two weeks' time. He trusted me to leave on the appointed day.

On my final visit, though, I have a memory that I was trying to stay few days longer than I had originally intended. I do remember that for a couple of days I would sit in a back corner, hoping he wouldn't notice me, because he knew that my time was up. One morning I couldn't get to my corner seat in time because something delayed me. I found myself sitting quite close to him, effectively blocking his view of some of the people who were immediately behind me. I should mention that I am 6'2" and that my back is disproportionately long for my size. I have short legs and a long back, which means that when I sit on the floor with a straight back the top of my head is the same distance from the floor as someone who is about 6'4". Of course, on that particular morning Maharaj wanted to have a conversation with the person who was sitting immediately behind me, someone who was a lot shorter than I was. I tried unsuccessfully to squirm out of the way, and Maharaj tried to peer round me but it was no use because there wasn't any extra floor space for me to manoeuvre in. We were packed in like sardines in a can.

Eventually Maharaj looked at me and said, with some irritation, 'Why are you still sitting here taking up floor space? I can't see the people behind you. You are full of the knowledge. You are so full of the knowledge it is coming out of your ears and making a mess on my carpet. You can go now and make space for other people.'

That was the last time he spoke to me. I took his irascible remarks to be a blessing and a benediction, a sort of graduation certificate. I left that day and never went back.

Over the next few months I kept receiving reports about his failing health but I never felt tempted to go back one more time. That is, until he suddenly appeared in one of my dreams telling me to come and see him. It was such a forceful dream, it woke me up. I lay there in my bed, wondering if it really was him telling me to come, or whether it was just my subconscious manifesting a secret wish to go and see him one more time. I fell asleep without resolving the issue one way or the other.

A few minutes later he reappeared in my next dream, glaring at me: 'I just told you to come. Why didn't you believe me?'

I woke up and knew that he wanted me to come. Maybe he

wanted one last chance to assault my stubborn ego. I didn't go and I can't give any satisfactory excuses for my refusal to respond to this dream. This was just before he passed away in 1981. I could give any number of reasons, but none of them rings true to me or satisfies me. When I study my memory of this event, I can't find any excuses that will pass muster in my conscience. I didn't go, and to this day I can't remember what stopped me.

Harriet: Did the dreams continue? Did he ask you to come again?

David: No, it was only on that one night. However, after he did die I started to have vivid and regular dreams in which I was visiting him in his room. I would go up the steps and find him there, sitting in his usual seat, and giving out teachings in his usual way. My dream logic would try to work out why he was still there, still teaching. In the dream one part of me knew that he had died, but another part was witnessing him still alive, still teaching in his usual corner. In these dreams I would sometimes come to the conclusion that he hadn't really died at all, that he had faked his death, waited until all the crowds had left, and then gone back to teaching with a small group of people who were somehow in on the game. My dream brain invented all kinds of stories such as these, but even in the dreams they never really convinced me. I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't quite figure out what it was.

These dreams went on all through the 1980s and well into the 1990s. The last dream in this sequence was different. I found Maharaj teaching a small group of people inside the main room of the Ramanasramam dispensary. This was unusual because I had never before dreamed of him anywhere outside his room. Also, the people were different. They were not the Indian faces who populated his room in the earlier dreams. They were all foreigners, all people I knew well. This time there was no doubt, no confusion about why or whether he was still alive.

I looked at Maharaj, turned to my friends who were sitting on the floor with him and said, with a great feeling of exaltation, 'See! I told you! He's alive! He didn't die at all! He's still alive!'

The dream ended and I have never dreamt of him again.

Harriet: What did you make of all this? What did it all mean for you?

David: I don't need Freud on this one. He didn't die because he was never born. He is alive as the Self within me. He can't die. He is inside, biding his time, waiting for the words he planted there to destroy me and my little, circumscribed world. I know that he hasn't given up on me, and I also know that one day he will prevail.

Page: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#)

[Home](#) [Interviews and personal stories](#) [Books by David Godman](#) [Arunachala Saints](#)
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Cathy Boucher

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Meeting Maharaj by Cathy Boucher

Hur has requested that I share my experience of meeting Nisargadatta Maharaj in 1978. I never took notes when I was there in Bombay so these recollections have been sealed in my memory for the last 23 years.

In 1976 or 1977 (I believe) a book review of I Am That appeared in the Mountain Path Magazine. The Mountain Path is the in house magazine of Sri Ramanasramam in South India. It was a very positive and because Maurice Frydman had been associated with Sri Ramana Maharshi, it carried some weight.

This was the first time I found out that there could be a living Jnani, a realized Sage of the caliber of Sri Ramana Maharshi. I sent for the book, read it and was blown away. I wrote to Maurice Frydman and he began to correspond with me. At some point he asked me to find a publisher for I Am That in the United States. So I began sharing I Am that with various spiritual publishing houses. I specifically sent it to Shambhala, Rainbow Bridge and Unity Press. They didn't feel it was good fit for their publishing houses. Then I got a letter from Mr., Dikshit, publisher of Chetana Press (which is the publisher of I AM That) informing me that Maurice Frydman had died and my letter had been found on his desk. So I began to correspond with Mr. Dikshit. I decided that I really wanted to visit Nisargadatta and started a correspondence with Mr. Hate (who was Maharaj's son-in-law). Which brings me to January 1978 when I flew Air India to Bombay with the intention of meeting Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj.

We arrived (my friend Rick and I) around 3 in the morning and sped at break neck speed from the airport to our hotel. The town looked like it was littered with corpses because so many people sleep in the streets. We got to our hotel room by stepping over the sleeping hotel staff and settled in for a little sleep. At promptly at six our phone rang, the management requiring our passports. The din outside our room turned on almost automatically, traffic racing up from Marine Drive. Across the street was the gray shiny Arabian sea.

I wasn't sure I could stand our hotel room when we first arrived but after some sleep and meditation we agreed that it was a good place to stay. Mr. Hate called and said that he would take us to see Maharaj later that day. Mr. Hate, who was thin, and wiry with a big smile said

that we should bring an offering when we see Maharaj. So we drifted through the neighborhood marketplace and settled on some bananas. The street where Maharaj lived was round the corner from the Alfred Cinema. The noise in the streets was cacophonous. We came to his home and stepped in. There was no formal satsang going on. In fact, Maharaj was getting a shave from a roving barber. My first look at Maharaj was very intense, especially because his whole face was covered with lather and his eyes burned with an intensity that I could not fathom.

Was this love, anger or just total Awareness? I kind of wondered to myself if this was all a big mistake. Maharaj was about my height, around 5'3" give a few inches. So he looked directly into my eyes. He was so intense. Mr. Hate explained who we were, where we came from, etc. So much intensity flowed through his eyes, through his whole being. We were invited to return the next morning for Satsang.

Satsangs with Maharaj were predominately for western devotees and his Indian ones who had a discerning, discriminating mind. Maharaj also gave discourses for his Indian devotees and performed pujas.

The Satsang room was a loft above the family living area. When I had read I Am That, I got the picture of Nisargadatta Maharaj building a little room, probably not tall enough to stand upright in. However, in reality, the room was spacious at least 10'x20' (my guesstimate.)

One had to climb a narrow and sharply inclined staircase to get to it, but once in, there was quite a bit of room. Of course, when you filled it with 10-20 visitors it would be crowded. The room was ringed with photos and drawings of various gurus. Some I did not recognize, some were familiar. There was a large photo of Ramana Maharshi which was up above Maharaj's cushion, Maharaj sat directly below a mirror and on the opposite wall was another mirror. To the side of Maharaj was his portrait. The room had pictures of the nine Gurus of his lineage and a huge silver altar with a large photo of Sri Siddharameshwar. On many of the framed and glassed pictures was a dot of kumkum. Maharaj would replace the flower garlands and refresh the kumkum. If you arrived early you could see him engaged in this devotional activity. Those who think that Maharaj was not devotional would find out that he was very serious in this.

When I came to Satsang for the first time, I was a bit full of myself. I hadn't met many women interested in non-duality and I assumed that I was kind of unusual. As I sat there before Maharaj I found out that a young woman from Germany named Barbara Eistel was beginning a guru-disciple relationship with Maharaj. She had come from Sri Ramanasramam where she had just found out about Maharaj. He was very solicitous to her. He was encouraging her to take initiation from him. It was like watching a romance, a dance. Meanwhile, I found that the circumstance had laid bare my conceit and it was a necessary take down. One thing that happened straight off was seeing that people were prostrating themselves before Maharaj. The first time, after bringing him the offering, to prostrate oneself was very intense. As an American I had not bowed to another human

being. It strikes at one's individuality, But once I got hang of it, I loved to prostrate before Maharaj. Prostrating, I was told symbolized " None of me, Just you" or " I lay everything at your feet" For me it got to be such a blissful experience, I just loved to prostrate myself. Maharaj looked like it was no big deal for him. You got touch his feet, bow down to him. I just loved it, it was the best!!! There were several Indian translators. I don't know if it happened the first day but shortly about that time I was "assigned" a translator, Mr. Mullarpattan. Although Maharaj didn't speak english he would use a few phrases " Questions? Questions?" "Awareness". There was another outstanding translator, Mr. Sapre, whose command of non-duality was impressive. Maharaj would sit, lighting many many incense sticks, light bidis to smoke. It would be a hazy affair. He would be focused on the questions while occupied with the many lightings of incense. Then he would speak and his answers would come out like a machine gun fire. He spoke in a coarse way , but it became like music to my ears. He would really press us to ask questions. "He would say, you are spending millions of rupees everyday to be here, ask questions." There was an incredible sense of camaraderie amongst us visitors and devotees. The room would be hot (for me) but cool for maharaj. It was January and Maharaj wore an orange cardigan vest.

Mornings began abruptly in our hotel room. It would seem like raucous traffic would mingle with what I call Indian Morning Music, the loud expectorations of our fellow hotel mates. That would get us up and going. My friend Rick and I had discussed taking a side trip to Sri Ramanasrama in Tiruvanamalai. I had only 17 days in India and wondered what the correct thing to do. We visit the AAA (actually it must have another name in India) to get some travel information. Then off to Satsang. Although I do not remember the exact chronology, I do remember that early in my visit Maharaj received a package and was very intent on opening it to find out its contents. I turned out to be incense, which he promptly began to light. I remember being abit critical of Maharaj. But that felt absurd. Meanwhile the guru disciple play between Barbara and Maharaj continued. He was inviting her to take initiation (which would be a mantra initiation.) She considered it. Maharaj told a story . He said there had been a Siddha who had many powers. This siddha lived a few blocks away. One day Maharaj received an invitation from the Siddha saying "I am dying, come now and receive the transmission of all my powers." Maharaj said something to the effect that because he had met his Guru, he would not bother to travel the few blocks to receive this transmission.. Maharaj answered my questions and I felt that I had good rapport with him. At the end of the session as I was going down the stairs he turned to me and intensely said " You are not going to roam about are you?" I took this as an order, not a question and resolved to spend my entire visit at Maharaj's feet. I felt that he was pointing me to stay put, and with the opportunity of living Satsang beneath the photo of Ramana, I felt like I was visiting with the Maharshi as well. Maharaj had several Guru Bais. This means those who are fellow disciples of the same guru. In Maharaj's lineage, Siddharameshwar had more than one enlightened disciple. There was a Guru Bai, named Bainath Maharaj, who was also fully enlightened. He spoke fluent English but did not translate for Maharaj nor did he hold Satsang of his own. When he would show up at Satsang, Maharaj would show him the greatest deference. They had an obviously deep connection. I often wondered why Bai Nath didn't teach, but then again, Nisargadatta did enough for both.

Early on in my visit to Maharaj, we were invited to hear Maharaj speak at a spiritual center. The center was celebrating its 50th anniversary. The men and women were split by gender and we sat on a cold marble floor. Maharaj was a guest speaker as was a Shankara Order swami. In India, when a holy personage enters a room, everyone rises to their feet. I remember Maharaj coming in to the room with very dark sunglasses on. But he was not settled until his Guru Brother, Bhai Nath Maharaj was seated. He must have given a hours talk in Marathi. Of course I didn't understand a word he said but after the talk, Mr. Sapre gave a full translation (or his own illucidation) of the talk. People put offerings at Maharaj's feet. At the end of the program, Maharaj stood up, took the offerings and gave them to the the Swam, who has shared the dais with him. The next morning in Satsang Maharaj asked us if we knew why he had given the swami his offerings. Maharaj said " I gave him the offerings because speaks to feed his belly." This suprised me because I had not noticed Maharaj being critical. He went on to talk about people wearing the ochre robe to feed their bellies. So it became clear to me that Maharaj didn't really accord people any special status because of title or order. Maharaj, felt no patience with people who were pundits.

Because Bombay was a major departure point from India people who had been at Sri Ramanasramam would leave via Bombay and also take the opportunity to meet Maharaj. This is how Barbara Eistel came to meet Maharaj. Infact he said to Barbara, "if you stay for three weeks I will give you the whole transmission?" Now Barbara had to make a major decision because she was due to start medical school in Germany within two weeks. She had a discussion about staying and missing medical school but instead becoming something like a physical therapist instead. He really encouraged her to stay, and she did.

I remember one time a man came from Sri Ramanasramam. I believe that he was the librarian there but lived in England and was on his way home. Mr. Sapre refused to put his questions to Maharaj. He felt the mans questions were not coming from the right place. This upset me quite abit because I feel that no one should come between the disciple and the Guru. Mr. Sapre did not think he was sincere enough, partly becasue this man had visited Anandamayi ma. Although Maharaj could and would throw people out, this guy didn't even get a chance. His questions were not put to Maharaj. It was horrid.

On a Sunday morning we went to sit with Maharaj.The ususal translators were not present although I believe someone was there to translate. It was informal and quite lovely. A young man about 30 showed up to pay his respects to Maharaj. He lived about an hours drive from Maharaj and did not attend daily satsang. As I expressed my understanding, he seemed to nod and smile and agree. At some point I noticed that he had awful teeth, I also had a strong sense that he had transcended identification with the body and that this was an advanced disciple. Later, after descending the steps, we stood by the outer door, getting

ready to depart. He came to us, drinking some chai. He looked at me directly and said "By the grace of my Guru, I am completely satisfied." He then handed the cup of chai to me, and I took a sip. I feel that I met an enlightened disciple of Nisargadatta that day, but I have never known his name. If the lineage continues, I believe it continues through him.

A little about Mr. Hate. Mr. Hate (pronounced Hotay) was Maharaj's son-in-law. I don't remember what Maharaj's daughter died of but I do remember that Mr. Hate said when she lay dying, that her father visited her and she burst into laughter. Something like that. They had a daughter who was about 7 when I visited. Maharaj decided that Mr. Hate needed to remarry and so told one of his devotees that she would be a good match for Mr. Hate and that they should marry. When I visited they had been married one to two years and had a newish baby. They seemed perfectly suited to one another and were completely devoted to Maharaj. They lived in a suburb of Bombay called Vile Parle (pronounced Veal Parlay). Mr. Hate invited us to come to dinner, which we did. I was very impressed with how copacetic their relationship was, that they seemed deeply inlove and it was a beautiful family. And it was an arranged marriage by Maharaj. Maharaj was very wise in this because within a year or so of my visit Mr. Hate died of some instestinal or somekind of sudden illness. I always thought of how brilliant Maharaj was in finding a stepmother for his grand daughter and how perfectly they Hates were together.

When we went for dinner at Mr. Hate's house we discussed plans for a new spiritual center for Maharaj, a new Adhtatma Kendra. It had been designed but of course never came to be. I never felt that Maharaj desired another place and his loft had a rich patina of Bombay smog on the green walls. However they did get to paint his room before Maharaj dropped the body. Anyway, at dinner was the son of the enlightened guru brother. This guy was pretty westernized and worked for the huge advertising company J. Walter Thompson. He said that if we wanted we could come over and visit his father. We accepted the offer. That night when I went home I agonized over "roaming about" as I had take Maharaj's question very literally. I wasn't going to visit any other spiritual teachers and here I was off going to see Bhai Nath Maharaj. So the very next morning we sped of to Bhai Nath's house to leave a message that we would not be visiting at noon as planned. But immmediatly we were shown in and Bhai Nath said, "The truth is very simple: You are not the body and the ego is unreal, that is the whole of it." Then we left! We went right to satsang with Maharaj and I relayed the whole thing about not roaming about and seeing Bhai Nath. He laughed and laughed and said " Oh no, you are free to see anybody!" He thought it was hilarious. I made plans to see J. Krishnamurti that

very evening, with my translator friend, Mr. Mullarpattan.

Maharaj had spoken to a Rajneesh Sanyassin with much love and compassion when he asked the sanyassin "Don't you get to ask your guru these kinds of questions?" The Sanyassin said that it was difficult to get close and ask these kinds of questions. The whole room was permeated by Maharaj's love and concern.

It was an interesting time to be in Bombay, in 1978. There were many western seekers in the city. The Rajneesh sanyassins stood out in my mind because they all wore red or bright orange, yet the women many times dressed in tank tops (orange ones) without bras. They had a very sexual presence. I am not a prude, but I think that India wasn't quite ready for them, couldn't quite make out the walking paradoxes they appeared to be, sexual sanyassins. There were also many Muktananda devotees. It was a revelation to me to see how many English, German and Dutch seekers there were, with a minority of American ones. I became aware of my own national pride which I had not been aware of, like how I was special because I was American. But there were many more sincere European seekers (more deluded ones too!).

This brings me to the day that J. Krishnamurti came to Bombay to speak. Apparently Rajneesh had encouraged his sanyassins to come to town to hear him speak in the late afternoon, early evening. The young sanyassin whom Maharaj spoke so compassionately with brought a group of about twenty sanyassins to meet him.

The first thing Maharaj did was divide us by gender. Then he told a mother who was a sanyassin to make her child pull in his legs (as they were stretched out towards Maharaj) as it was impolite.

He started off saying that he had separated them by sex because although he wasn't concerned about sex, it appeared that they were very fixated on it and he felt that it would help them concentrate. He said "If it was up to me I would stack you one on top of another like a pile of wood, but you are so fascinated that I have separated you." This is my paraphrase, but I clearly remember the part about stacking you one on top of another.

He asked for questions. I remember one woman relaying a Buddhist analogy about using skillful means as a boat to the other shore which is Nirvana. Maharaj said "I would put you all into the boat, send you to the other shore and I would stay here on this shore!"

He was intent on breaking through their spiritual concepts and was not impressed with them in the least.

Before I left for Maine, I was telling you all about when I felt like I betrayed Maharaj because I had gone to see his Guru brother, Bhai Nath Maharaj. After sharing with Maharaj the whole of it, he laughed and

said, "Oh no, you are free to see anyone!" I had taken his question "Are you going to roam about?" as an injunction not to seek and was too literal about it. My translator, Mr. Mullarpattan smiled and told me that J. Krishnamurti was going to be speaking that very evening. Now, I never really felt much interest in Krishnamurti but I was curious. Even in Maharaj's loft there was a line drawing of Krishnamurti. People seemed to speak about Krishnamurti with reverence. I remember there was even some talk about attempting a meeting between Maharaj and Krishnamurti. I was told it never happened because Krishnamurti's car could not fit down Ketwadi Lane. This may have been wishful thinking, not really what happened.

It was a very interesting scene. I went with my translator friend, Mr. Mullarpattan. It was held out of doors, in a kind of open park. There were many Rajneesh Sanyassins and affluent, young, intellectual Indians. Krishnamurti seemed peaceful, beautiful but fretful. There was a hilarious scene where he was saying "Nowadays the pressures of society deform the brain, we can't even see the birds." Meanwhile behind him there was a bird caught in a kite string. The Bombay Fire Department was trying to free it while buzzards were circling the poor trapped bird. It was a real Keystone Kops kind of a scene. And I thought, "Krishnamurti, you are so caught up in your imagery of nature you can't see the birds as they really are!" Next morning after speaking to Maharaj he said "Krishnamurti is a great thinker" I took that in a negative context while the rest of the folks thought he was complimenting Krishnamurti. I looked into Maharaj's eyes. I felt a oneness. I had to agree, Krishnamurti was a great thinker.

Just because a Guru might comment on a teacher doesn't mean that he is in competition with that teacher. Maharaj could be critical but does that mean that he felt in competition. No I don't think so. What was interesting to me was that everyone else took Maharaj's comment as a complement. They thought that being a great thinker was a great accomplishment. Competition in itself isn't bad, look at Shankara. He competed, debated and won. He reformed Hinduism as a result of that competition.

Bombay has many beggars. We would see many children beggars when we took walks on Marine Drive. People would flaunt their deformity and make our western minds swoon. Some days I would be giving money to anyone who asked. The next day I would refuse everyone. No matter what I did, I didn't feel comfortable. I was impressed with one young beggar who had a deformed lower leg. He would come up to our taxi as we were sitting in traffic and lift his leg and show us his deformity. We would keep running into him. After awhile, we would all be laughing, "You again!" One day in particular we ran into him in the area where Maharaj lived and then shortly afterwards in another part of town. I

was impressed that he was so mobile. That night I sat in my hotel room thinking about our beggar friend. He seemed bright and full of energy. I thought, I could give him all the money in the world but it would not be the same as bringing him to truth. After all, he lived in the same town as Maharaj. I talked to my friend Rick about this. After thinking about it some more, I decided I would invite my beggar to Satsang. I felt I could never really help the beggars of Bombay in a real way except in this fashion. I decided the next time I ran into him (and I knew I would!) that I would give him the address. The next day that happened. We laughed as usual, I think I gave him some money and a piece of paper with Maharaj's address written on it. Then we left him and went off to Satsang. Satsang was full underway. Then somehow we came to the point of the condition of a lame man. I had not instigated the current topic of conversation, it was a complete coincidence, when there was a knock on the door. Then the announcement that there was a lame man at the door. With great effort, people were able to get my beggar up the steep ladder stairs to Maharaj's loft. Once there, the beggar friend sat down. I remember he looked all around the room, blinking his eyes. It occurred to me at that moment that he had never been in a satsang kind of situation. I don't think I considered the fact that he came with out any clue as to what awaited him, but I hadn't given much of an explanation with the address. The dialog with Maharaj continued, however, I could see that Maharaj was much annoyed by the appearance of my beggar. After admitting that I was the one who had invited this man and being scowled at, I realized that I had made a faux pax. I guess inviting in local beggars was something that just wasn't done and Maharaj made no effort to hide his annoyance. I became more upset because I had never had Maharaj annoyed with me and I had all these noble ideas that were shattered. The beggar just looked astonished. He was quiet. At the end of the session Maharaj said to my translator " He is here just to feed his belly, give him twenty rupees!" Mr. Mullarpattan nodded his assent. We all got down from the loft and out on to the street. I stood quietly weeping. I went up to Mr. Mullarpattan who repeated what Maharaj had said to him. But Mr. Mullarpattan told me that when he went up to the beggar to give him the twenty rupees the beggar refused to take it! I thought, Wow! the beggar must have at least felt my love, even if he didn't quite get everything else! Twenty rupees is nothing to sneeze at when you you are poor. I felt wrung out feeling Maharaj's annoyance and my own ambivalent feelings about what I had done. Yet Mr. Mullarpattan was showering me with love and support and that let me feel that it was going to be all right!

I had been bringing offerings that I purchased in the marketplace. Somedays it was sweets, sometimes fruit, most days flowers. It is customary to bring them and since the first day when Mr. Hate

suggested it, it became my habit. It was one of those things that just went with prostrating. I liked to bring a small garland of flowers, made out of jasmine or tuberose, something pretty. One day I brought such a small garland and Maharaj smiled and explained, through the translator that these garlands were actually decorations for women's hair. At this time Maharaj's granddaughter (by his son) was standing in the corner grinning. I had to laugh as it never occurred to me that this was for another purpose than the one I had given. He beckoned to his granddaughter and gave her the little garland. In a moment she swooped down, got the garland and ran down the stairs, laughing. It must have been hilarious for her! There were so many Indian customs that I didn't know.

When people brought sweets or fruit, they would be divided and distributed at the end of the talks. I remember that they would take an old school notebook and rip the pages out and fold the prasada into them. It struck me how everything was valuable in India, even a used notebook could be used for a higher purpose.

One day my friend, Rick and I took a taxi to Maharaj's home. As we approached the Alfred Cinema our taxi driver said "You like your Guru?" "No charge."

Now we had only told him to take us to the address near the Alfred Cinema and had not mentioned Maharaj. So my friend and I got out of the taxi and started walking (after thanking the driver.) The driver came running up and said, "No charge for me...but the petrol..." I felt like an insensitive boor, I hadn't understood that the driver had to pay for the petrol and it came right out of his pocket. We apologized profusely and paid him. He said "Enjoy your Guru." Now I do not know if he assumed that Westerners in Bombay would be visiting a Guru, or if he knew of Sri Nisargadatta. People in the neighborhood would, the local policeman, the people on the street. But no one would let on that he was a famous Guru.

Mr. Mullarpattan, my translator asked me if I would like to visit the samadhi of Sri Siddharameshwar (Maharaj's Guru). A samadhi is sort of like a monument or gravestone commemorating a saint or sage's grave. Although I wasn't sure if I would like to see it, I took Mr. Pattan up on his invitation. It took us two double-decker busses to go from his house to the cremation ground by the Arabian Sea. Our translator explained that although most people were cremated, some enlightened beings were buried because they had already been cremated by the fire of Self Knowledge. This was the case in Sri Siddharameshwar's case. Cremated in life, it was unnecessary to be

cremated in death. The place was kind of intense, with the grey Indian Ocean in the back ground and the ashy empty biers. The samadhi was old. Mr. Pattan brought the requisite articles for a puja, a banana, some camphor, incense. We chanted and circumabulated the samadhi and he did an aarti for us. It was more inspiring than I had imagined and I felt moved and privileged to be at this holy spot. I came to a deeper reverence for Sri Siddharameshwar.

The recent posts on devotion bring to mind my final evening in Bombay. I had been invited several times to come to an evening of chanting that was mostly attended by the Indian devotees. I figured that since it was my last evening I better go and check it out. Previously I had watched Nisargadatta clean and anoint all the holy pictures in his room. He would put fresh kumkum on the pictures of the Navnath Sampradaya, Siddharameshwar and other holy personages. This was done with great diliberation. I hadn't thought of Maharaj as a devotionally oriented Guru 'til then. But to sit in his room and see the huge silvery altar to his Guru, one got the feeling that it came naturally to him. There were also occassions when he would be re-enacting the devotion between Vithoba and Tukaram. (I think these were the Marathi Saints.) Maharaj's face would light up, beatifically. I Am That never portrayed Maharaj in this fashion and I think that it needs to be pointed out now.

At Maharaj's place the chanting was loud, almost raucous. Maharaj himself, was in charge of a huge puja bell, looking like the Liberty Bell. He was ringing it vigorous. The sound was incredible. It shattered my head into a million pieces. In any other situation this would have been impossible, a real bummer, a migrane maker. However it was utterly blissful and I felt that Maharaj was destroying "me". Were there two at that time? Was there a separate "one" being venerated. I think not! Maharaj showed me that devotion to the Guru, devotion to the One with out a second, was possible. He was the exemplar. My other favorite part of the evening was the chanting of " Jai Guru Jai" Everyone there (except me) was familiar with this chant and it was sung with alot of gusto. At the end of the chant, Jai's are given to Nisargadatta Maharaj, Siddharameshwar Maharaj, Bhausahib Mahara (siddharameshwar's guru), His Guru's Guru and maybe even further back. To acknowledge the lineage going back in time was very powerful. And very alive. Infact, I left the house with the sound of more rousing "Jai Guru, Jai" spilling out into the street and following us to Grant Road.

Did I believe that Maharaj saw any dualism in his devotional activies. Absolutely not!

Years later I saw a video of Maharaj with his disciples at this same

samadhi, doing puja, chanting. I believe it was either a death anniversary or so other important occassion. Having been there, I felt that I understood the experience more deeply. Of Maharaj's reverence for Siddharameshwar.

And in years after that, when I heard of Maharaj's own funeral, I could visualize it taking place. Supposedly, he was taken on the back of a truck, a brass band playing, the whole neighborhood turning out. Which was interesting because they acted like he was just an ordinary guy. Maharaj was cremated. But I think that is in keeping with the way he lived, like a common man, no fanfare.

Interview with Alexander Smit

Belle Bruins

Copied directly from http://www.ods.nl/am1gos/am1gos2/indexframe2_us.html

(Amigo on-line magazine, Issue #2, 2001)

The following interview with Alexander took place in 1988. It seems like an eternity ago. For me it was a time of the after effects of a spiritual search in which people of the same generation from all parts of the world searched en masse for new ways and dimensions of religious experience and came into contact with the contrasts between West and East. We had learned new concepts and ideals, values and norms. 'Spiritual' communes sprung up everywhere; we were building a 'new world' that collapsed again, as always and yet again. In written or translated texts, words such as Guru or Spiritual Master or Him and Her were written in capital letters and He or She were treated as deities as is still the case in India and its surrounding countries.

It seems to me now, in 2002, that my interview with Alexander reflects the spirit of that time. 'It seems old fashioned' writes Sietske Roegholt in reaction to a letter I wrote, 'to think that way about teachers who after all nowadays would rather be a friend or are still so young in their 'complete or not complete' realization...' We both find that a new time has arrived, that of the complete demythologizing of the teacher. Some people cheer that on, others are holding their breath. Are we throwing out the baby with the bathwater? Are there probably not enough people of the caliber of Nisargadatta among us at this moment? Questions without answers. Whoever knows can say it.

One of the reasons that this interview has never been made public before, is that Alexander always taught me that disciples should never know how their spiritual master came to clearness; it would lead them to make ideas about how 'it ought' to happen to them. Now, 3 years after his death I notice two things: a. almost every day a new spiritual master, man or woman, appears, and b. they speak openly about their realization. And the seekers? Slowly it has penetrated them that 'it' is only a 'happening' that moreover has as many forms as there are people.

What Alexander had foreseen, has long become 'reality', no matter how much he would have found that to be bad; the West has made much of the Eastern religious experience its own. It is in the nature of things that this new flower has come, because that's the way it must happen, that's how it is and that's how it always will be in the Play of Consciousness.

b.b., 21.10.2001

In conversation with Alexander Smit..

Alexander at the age of 25.



September 1988.

Location: the kitchen of his house on the Prinsengracht in Amsterdam. We were busy going over the translation of THE NECTAR OF THE LORD'S FEET (Dutch title SELF-REALIZATION) by his Spiritual master Nisargadatta Maharaj and he wanted to do an 'interview' for a change, as a sort of practice. The interview has survived a computer crash, break-in and theft, because

luckily I had typed it out and printed the tape previously. I have preserved this as a treasure for years. Until now.

Alexander met Nisargadatta in September of 1978. In the beginning of September of that year Jacques Lewenstein had been in India and come back with the book I AM THAT and tapes of Nisargadatta.

Alexander: That book came into the hands of Wolter Keers. He was very happy with it, because after the death of Krishna Menon (Wolter's spiritual master) he had not heard anything so purely advaita. After Wolter had read the book he decided to translate and publish it 'because this is so extremely good'.

Wolter gave me the book immediately and I was very moved by it. Then there was an article in Panorama or The New Revue: GOD HAS NO TEETH. A poorly written story by the young man who did Showroom (TV). There was a life-sized photo of Nisargadatta's head in it. That was actually my first acquaintance with Nisargadatta. By then Wolter had already told me: 'I can not do anything more for you. You need someone. But I wouldn't know who.' But, when he had read I AM THAT he said: 'If I can give you a piece of advice, go there immediately.' And that I did.

What were you seeking?

I was seeking nothing more. I knew everything. But, if you had asked me what I had learned I would have said; I don't actually know it. There is something essential that I don't know. There was a sort of blind spot in me that no one knew what do with. Krishnamurti knew nothing that he could say about it. Bhagwan was for us at that time not someone that you would go to, at least for this sort of thing. Da Free John was also not it. Those were the known people at that time. I had a blind spot. And what typifies a blind spot is that you don't know what it is. You only knew that if you were really honest

with yourself, if you really went to the bottom of yourself, that you had not yet solved the riddle.

For the first time in Bombay?

A little staircase going up to an attic room. First came my head, and the first thing that I saw was Mrs. Satprem and Nisargadatta. There were maybe three or four people there. 'Here I am', I said. And he said: 'So, finally you came.'

Yeah, that is what they all say, that I heard later, but for me it was the first time that I heard it. I did have the feeling when I went in that now it was really serious. Now there is no escape possible, Here something is really going to happen.

Naturally I had already met many of these people: Krishnamurti, Jean Klein, Wolter, Swami Ranganathananda, Douglas Harding, and also some less well known Indians. I was naturally too young for Ramana Maharshi and Krishna Menon. They died in the fifties. I was 7 or 8 years old then. That is not the age to be busy with these sorts of things.

It held also true for us at that time, 'wait' for a living master. And I had a very strong feeling that this was the man that I had been looking for. He asked if I were married, what I did, and why I had come to India.

What precisely did you want from him?

Self-realization. I wanted to know how I was put together. I said: 'I have heard that you are the greatest ego killer who exists. And that is what I want.' He said: 'I am not a killer. I am a diamond cutter. You are also a diamond. But you are a raw diamond and you can only be cut by a pure diamond. And that is very precise work, because if that is not done properly then you fall apart into a hundred pieces, and then there is nothing left for you. Do you have any questions?' I told him that Maurice Frydman was the decisive reason for my coming. Frydman was a friend of Krishnamurti and Frydman was planning to publish all of the earlier work of Krishnamurti at Chetana Publishers in Bombay, And that he had heard from Mr. Dikshit , the publisher, that there was someone in Bombay who he had to meet. (I AM THAT was of course not yet published at that time because Frydman had yet to meet Nisargadatta). Frydman went there with his usual skeptical ideas. He came in there, and within two weeks things became clear to him that had never become clear with Krishnamurti. And I thought then: if it all became clear to Frydman within two weeks, how will it go with me?



I told all this to Nisargadatta and he said: 'That says nothing about me, but everything about Frydman.' And he also said: 'People who don't understand Krishnamurti don't understand themselves.' I thought that was beautiful, because all the gurus I knew always ran everyone down. It seemed as if he wanted to help me relax. He didn't launch any provocations. I was able to relax, because as you can understand it was of course a rather

tense situation there.

He said; 'Do you have any questions?'

I said; 'No.'

'When are you going to come?'

'Every day if you allow me.'

'That's good. Come just two times every day, mornings and afternoons, for the lectures, and we'll see how it goes.'

I said: 'Yes, and I am not leaving until it has become clear.'

He said; 'That's good.'

Was that true?

Yes, without a doubt. Because what he did — within two minutes he made it clear, whatever you brought up, that the knowledge you presented was not yours. That it was from a book, or that you had borrowed or stolen it, or that it was fantasy, but that you were actually not capable of having a direct observation, a direct perception, seeing directly, immediately, without a mediator, without self consciousness.

And that frightened me terribly, because everything you said was cut down in a brutal way.

What happened with you exactly?

The second day he asked if I had any questions. Then I began to ask a question about reincarnation in a more or less romanticized way. I told that I had always had a connection with India, that when I heard the word 'India' for the first time it was shock for me, and that the word 'yoga' was like being hit by a bomb when I first heard it on TV, and that the word 'British India' was like a dog hearing his boss whistle. And I asked, could it mean that I had lived in India in previous lives? And then he began to curse in Marathi, and to get unbelievably agitated, and that lasted for at least ten minutes. I thought, my god, what's happening here? The translator was apparently used to it, because he just sat calmly by, and when Maharaj was finished he summarized it all together; 'Maharaj is asking himself if you are really serious. Yesterday you came and you wanted self-realization, but now you begin with questions that belong in kindergarten'...

In this way you were forced to be unbelievably alert. Everything counted heavily. It became clear to me within a few days that I knew absolutely nothing, that all that I knew, all the knowledge that I had gathered was book knowledge, second hand, learned, but that out of myself I knew nothing.

I can assure you that this put what was needed into motion. And that's how it went every day! Whatever I came up with, whether I asked an intelligent question or a dumb question, made absolutely no difference. And one day he asserted this, and the following day he asserted precisely the opposite and the following day he twisted it around one more time even though that was not actually possible. And so it went, until by observation I understood why that was, and that was a really wonderful realization. Why do I try all the time to cram everything into concepts, to try to understand everything in terms of thinking or in the feelings sphere?

And, he gave me tips about how I could look at things in another way, thus really looking. And then it became clear to me that it just made no sense to regard yourself —

whatever you call yourself, or don't call yourself — in that way. That was an absolute undermining of the self-consciousness, like a termite eating a chair. At a certain moment it becomes sawdust. It still looks like a chair, but it isn't a chair anymore.

Did that lead to self realization?

He kept going on like this, and then there came a moment that I just plain had enough of it. Really just so much ... I would not say that I became angry, but a shift took place in me, a shift of the accent on all authorities outside of myself, including Nisargadatta, to an authority inside myself. He was talking, and at a given moment he said 'nobody'. He said : 'Naturally there is nobody here who talks.' That was too much for me. And I said: 'If you don't talk then why don't you shut up then? Why say anything then?'

And it seemed as if that is what had been waiting for. He said: 'Do you want that I should not talk anymore? That's good, then I won't talk anymore and if people want to know something then they can just go to Alexander. From now on there are no more translations, translators don't have to come anymore, there is no more English spoken. Only Marathi will be spoken, and if people have any problems then they can go to Alexander because he seems to know everything.'

And then began all the trouble with the others, the bootlickers and toadies who insisted that I had to offer my apologies! Not on my life. Yeah, you can't offer excuses to a nobody, eh?!

And to me he said; 'And you, you can't come here anymore.' And I said: 'What do you mean I can't come here anymore. Try and stop me. Have you gone completely crazy? ' And the translators were naturally completely upset.

They said nothing like this had ever been seen before. And he was angry! Unbelievably angry!. And he threw the presents that I had brought for him at my feet and said: 'I want nothing from you, Nothing from you I want.'

And that was the breakthrough, because something happened, there was no thinking because I was.. the shift in authority had happened. As I experienced it everything came to me from all sides: logic, understanding, on the one hand the intellect and on the other hand at the same time the heart, feelings and all phenomena, the entire manifest came directly to me from all sides to an absolute center where the whole thing exploded. Bang. After that everything became clear to me...

The next day I went there as usual. There was a lecture, but indeed no English was spoken. I can assure you that the tension could be cut with a knife, because I was the guilty party of course. He wanted to push that down my throat and the translators just went along quietly. There was not even any talking. And the next day, there was not even a lecture. He arrived in a car, and drove away when he saw me and went to a movie...

Then I wrote him a letter. Twelve pages. In perfect English. I had someone bring the letter to him. Everything was running over. I wrote everything. And his answer was: let him come tomorrow at 10 o'clock. And he read my letter and said: 'You understood. This confrontation was needed to eliminate that self-consciousness. But you understood completely and I am very happy with your letter and nothing happened.' Naturally , that cleared the air. He asked if I wanted to stay longer. 'From this situation that took place on September 21, 1978, I want to be here in love .' And he said; 'that is good.' From that day on I attended all the talks and also translated sometimes, for example when Spaniards, or Frenchmen or Germans came. I was a bit of a helper then.

So actually you apply the same method as he did: the cutting away of the self-consciousness to the bone and letting people see their identities. Was that his method?

Yes. Recognizing the false as false and thereafter letting the truth be born. But the most wonderful thing was, MY basis dilemma, and if I say 'my' I mean everyone in a certain sense, is that if at a certain moment you ask yourself: what did I come here for, that seems to be something completely different from what you thought. Everyone has ideas about this question, and I had never suspected in the farthest reaches of my mind that the Realization of it would be something like this. That is the first point. The second is, it appears that at a certain point you have the choice of maintaining your self-consciousness out of pride, arrogance, intellect. And the function of the Guru, the skill with which he can close the escapes from the real confrontation was in his case uncommonly great, at least in my case. And for me that was the decisive factor. Because if there had been a chance to 'escape', I would certainly have taken it. Like a thief who still tries to get away.

Did he ever say anything about it?

He said that unbelievable courage is needed not to flee. And that my being there had almost given him a heart attack, that he no longer had the strength to tackle cases like mine as he became older. So I have the feeling that I got there at just the right moment. Later he became sick. He said: 'I have no strength anymore to try to convince people. If you like it, continue to come, maybe you can get something out of it, but I have no strength anymore to convince people like him (and then he pointed to me). I am so grateful to him, because it only showed how great my resistance was. There has to be a proportional force that is just a bit stronger than your strangest and strongest resistance. You need that. It showed how great my resistance was. And it showed how great his strength was, and his skill. For me he was the great *Satguru*. The fact that he was capable of defeating my most cunning resistance — and I can assure you after having gone into these things for 15 years — my resistance was extremely refined and cunning, was difficult for him even though he knew who he was dealing with. That's why I had to go to such a difficult person of course. It says everything about me. Just as he said in the beginning that it said everything about Frydman. But I have never seen the skill he had in closing the escape routes of the lies and falsehoods so immensely great anywhere else. Of course I have not been everywhere, but with Ramana Maharshi you just melted. That was another way. With Krishna Menon the intellect could just not keep it together under the gigantic dismantling, but by Nisargadatta, every escape was doomed to failure. People who came to get something, or people who thought they could bring something stood naked outside the door within five minutes. I saw a great many people there walking away in great terror. At a certain moment I was no longer afraid, because I felt that I had nothing more to lose. So I can't really say that it was very courageous of me. I can only say that in a certain sense with him I went on the attack. And what was nice about it is that he also valued that. Because, he sent many people away, and these really went and mostly didn't come back. The he would say: 'They are cowards. I didn't send them away, I sent away the part of them that was not acceptable here.' And if they then returned, completely open, then he would say nothing about it. But during those happenings with me, people forgot that. There was also a doctor, a really fine man, who said; 'don't think that he is being brutal with you; you don't have any idea how much love there is in him to do this with you.' I said: 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that.' Because I

didn't want any commentary from anyone. After all, this is what I had come for! Only the form in which it happened was totally different from what I had expected in my wildest dreams. But again, that says more about me than about Maharaj, and I still think that.

So, his method was thus to let you recognize the false as false, to see through the lies as lies, and to come to truth in this way?

Yes, and that went deeper than I could have ever suspected. The thinking was absolutely helpless. The intellect had no ghost of chance. The heart was also a trap. And that is exactly what happened there. That is everything. And I know that after that day, September 21, 1978, there has never been even a grain of doubt about this question, and the authority, the command, the authenticity, has never left, has never again shifted. There is no authority, neither in this world or in another world, that can thrust me out of the realization. That's the way it is.

Did Maharaj say that you had to do something after this realization?

I asked: 'It is all very beautiful, but what now? What do I do with my life?'

Then he said: 'You just talk and people will take care of you.' And that's the way it has gone.

Did you go visit him often?

Various times. As often as I could I was there every year for two or three months. Until the last time. And when I knew that I would never see him again there was entirely no sadness or anything like that. It was just the way it was. It was fine that way,

Did he do the same with others as he had with you?

Not as intensely and not so persistently.

You get what you give?

Yes, that is so. In a certain sense he did that with everyone, but if someone was very sensitive he approached it in a different way. Naturally it makes difference if an old nun is sitting in front of you, or a rebel like myself, who also looks as if he can take quite a bit. The last time he said; 'He will be powerful in Europe. He has the knowledge. He will be the source of what I am teaching.' And then he directed those headlight eyes of his towards me. That is still so wonderful...

It is ten years ago now, and it seems like a week. I have learned to value his words in the passage of time. The things I questioned in the past I see becoming manifest now. At first I thought; the way he has put this into words is typical Indian conditioning after all, but the wonder is that all the advice that he gave taught me to hang on to them. I didn't follow them a few times and that always lead to catastrophes.

For example?

For example he said to me: 'Don't challenge the Great Ones. Let them enjoy.' And I have to admit that I had trouble with that. But knowing my rebellious character — and naturally he saw that immediately — he still had to give me that. And every time that I see that, that aspect of my character wants to express itself, I hear his voice: 'Don't challenge the Great Ones.' He anticipated that. I know that for sure. And in that way he

also said a number of things that suddenly made sense. Then I hear him. And Wolter always said: 'After the realization, the only words that remain with you are the words of your Guru. All your knowledge disappears, but the words of the Guru remain.' And I can now confirm that that is true, that it is like that.

Was Wolter also a disciple of Nisargadatta?

No, but he was there often.

I have understood that you find the Living Teaching very important. Is that especially true for Advaita?

The objection to books about Advaita, including the translations of Nisargadatta's words is that too much knowledge is given in them. That is an objection. People can use this knowledge, and especially the knowledge at the highest level to defend and maintain their self-consciousness. That makes my work more difficult. Knowledge, spiritual knowledge, can, when there is no living master be used again to maintain the 'I', the self-consciousness. The mind is tricky, cunning. And I speak out of my own experience! Because Advaita Vedanta, without a good *living* spiritual master, I repeat, a *good one*, can become a perfect self contained defense mechanism. It can be a plastic sack that leaks on all sides, but you can't find the leak. You know that it doesn't tally, but it looks as if it does tally. That is the danger in Vedanta. Provided there is a good *living* master available, it can do no harm. But stay away from it if there is no master available! Provided it is well guided Advaita can be brilliant.

Do you mean that people could act from their so called 'knowing' as if they are more than the content of their consciousness? That they therefore assume that the content is worthless?

Yes. That is why up to now, I have never wanted to write a book. But, as long as I am alive there are Living Teachings. When I die they can do whatever they want to with it, but as long as I am alive I am there.

To take corrective action?

Yes.

Do people have a built in defense mechanism?

At the level of the psyche there is a defense mechanism that prevents you from taking in more than you can cope with, but at a higher level sooner or later you have an irrevocable need for a spiritual master who can tell you certain things, who has to explain things because other wise you get stuck. Whoever doesn't want a living master gets stuck.

Books could lead to people becoming interested and going on a search.

To a good spiritual master of flesh and blood. Living!

Did Nisargadatta foresee that you would manifest as a guru?

I think guru is a rotten word, but he did say: 'Many people will seek your blessings.'

So you couldn't do anything else. It happened by itself.

He said; 'The seed is sown, the seasons do the rest.'

Isn't that true for everyone?

Yes, but some seeds fall on good soil and something grows, but other seeds don't grow. Out of million sperms only one reaches the egg.

At Nisargadatta's bhajans were also sung and certain rituals done, especially for the Indians. Did you also participate in that?

I participated two times. The *bhajans* I thought, were really special...

What is their goal?

Singing *bhajans* has a purifying effect on the body, thinking, and feeling, so that the Knowledge can become manifest and finds its place there. I don't have any need of it, but I see that the singing offers social and emotional solace and thus I am not against it. In addition *prasad* was distributed and *arati* done.

What is arati?

A form of ritual in which fire is swung around and camphor is burned. Camphor is the symbol of the ego. That burns and nothing remains of it. Just as in self-realization nothing of the self-consciousness remains. It is a beautiful ritual. It makes you attentive to all kinds of things. The fire is swung at your eye level so what you see may be beautiful, at your ears so that what you hear may be pure, and at your mouth so that what you eat may be pure. It is Hindu symbolism that has become so common in India that it has mostly become flattened out and routine. It has something, as a symbol, but Westerners shouldn't try it unless they understand the symbolism completely. I find the singing of OM good, that works, that is a law. It works to purify the body, thinking and feeling, so that the Knowing that it is can be manifest and find a place in your life.



Did Nisargadatta follow a certain tradition?

But of course. The *Navdath Sampradaya*. The tradition of the Nine Gurus. The first was Jnaneshwar (Jnanadeva) from the 13th century, who became realized when he was twenty and also died at that age. Nisargadatta was the ninth.

Are you the tenth?

No. I always call Maharaj 'the last of the Mohicans'.

Still you always talk about the tradition.

I work following a traditional background, because there lies the experience of a thousand years of instruction. Instruction that works! I have learned to value the Tradition. I am totally non traditional, but in my heart I am a traditionalist. When I talk

about 'the tradition' I mean the tradition of Advaita so as that became manifest in the *Navdath Sampradaya*.

What is the importance of tradition?

The importance of a tradition is just as with violin playing, that you have had predecessors who have done it in a certain which you know works. But many traditions have become dead end traditions because they don't work anymore. That is why you always see renovators like a Buddha, a Krishna, Krishnamurti, Ramana Maharshi in a certain sense, and Bhagwan (Osho) and Nisargadatta. The way Nisargadatta said it is after all quite different from the way his Guru said it, and the way it is here made manifest, is after all also very different then at Nisargadatta's. It is about the 'essence'. Just as consciousness is transmitted by means of sex, enlightenment is transmitted by the Guru.

Did Nisargadatta teach you the tradition?

You can't learn a tradition; you can only become self-realized. And that is what happened. I know what I know. Done.

And then a tradition is born?

Yes, precisely, you say it very well.

We are now busy with book 'Self-realization. What do you think about that book?

It is no easy book. It is no easy bedside companion.

In one way or another, translating the book has done much for me.

You have been busy with these things for a long time, thus the reading of a relatively direct form of Nisargadatta's words must have an effect, But even you found it to be a difficult book. The theme of the book — who were you before the conception, before body/thinking/feeling appeared and before the forming of words in the mind — is not simple to say, but by repeated readings, and talking with each other and all kind of other things, a few things have become clear.

It has to be digested?

Yes, especially digesting it is important. You can eat a lot, but it has to be digested.

Did you just see him sometimes in the daytime, like here in the kitchen?

He lived in that house and everyone went to their hotel or family, or to friends, or had lodgings with the translators. Someone always stayed to care for him a bit, but everyone simply went their own way. There was nothing like an *ashram* in the usual sense, a care institution, a salvation army for seekers. Absolutely not.

How was he between the acts?

Changeable, from extremely friendly to grumbling.

Did you find him to be a nice man?

Never thought about it for a second.

Would you like to be his friend?

.....

That cannot?

No, Odd question.

I don't agree, you could at least say 'he is my Guru, but as a human, as a person'... if you at least could still see him as a person.

Just a whopper of a person, but yeah, there are no meaningful words that can be said about it.

I don't believe that.

Really not.

Did you ever eat with him?

Yes.

Did you ever listen to music with him?

No.

Did you ever just chat with him about little things?

Yes.

How was that?

Normal, just like with you.

Did you find that scary?

No.

Never? Also not in the beginning?

No.

Did he have a normal householder's life?

Yes.

Was he married?

Yes, he had children.

What kind of a father was he?

Strict.

What kind of husband was he?

I don't know because his wife was dead.

Did he have girl friends?

No.

Did he sometimes speak about sex?

No, never.

What did he do in his spare time?

He had no spare time. All his time was spent on the 'talks'. Or he slept or took walks, or he looked outside, and he smoked a little *beedee*.

How did he experience being sick?

He didn't think about it. It's just something of the body, a little something.

What was his attitude towards women 'seekers'?

The rule for Indian women was keep your mouth shut and listen. Ask no questions. Unless they were very brave, then he allowed it from time to time and answered them, just as with them men. Western women he just answered, just like with the men. But with Indian women he was very traditional: 'just keep quiet.'

What did he think about Bhagwan (Osho)?

It varied. It depended who was asking the question.

Now, Ok, you don't want anymore. I give up.

(laughs and turns of the microphone.)

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From *The Wisdom of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, Ed.
Robert Powell, New York: Globe Press Books, 1992.

A Day with Maharaj

by Milo Clark

“Maharaj,” to me, was just a temporal title of an Indian potentate until I met this lineage holder of a spiritual title,* which, in this man’s case suggests nothing regal, encompassing no estates, grants no domain. His physical circumstances are very simple yet apparently lacking nothing to him. The bulk of his being is entrusted to a small room, perhaps 10 by 15 feet in size, and filled with objects related to his being there as Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The entitlement brought no affectations, only some objects related to the lineage which he did not seek. Along with the other tenants of Vanmali Bhavan (the name of the building on Tenth Lane in the Khetwadi district of Bombay, where Maharaj lives with his family), he walks down the long hall to the far end of the building to use the communal toilet facilities. With a mischievous twinkle rarely absent from his unusually bright eyes, he scoffs at all the guru business and trappings. With a sweeping wave of his hands, he says that when he goes about he is just an old man out for a walk so nobody bothers him and he can go as he pleases.

Maharaj, as most of the Westerners in attendance called him, holds court in his little room much of the day and evening. The room is reached by a small, steep ladder which looks like a fold-up attic ladder from the Indian equivalent of Sears Roebuck. He will be found near the top—to the right side in the morning and to the left later in the day. On approaching a spiritual master of a Hindu tradition, one customarily touches

* A succession of gurus, the Navnath Sampradaya, has existed for centuries, originating with the legendary Rishi Dattatreya. The last nine rishis of the succession are easily identified; they were all householders, engaged in farming and trading. The last in the succession was Maharaj.—R.P.

head to floor in respect for the tradition bearer. Given the space involved and the immediate proximity of Maharaj to the top of the ladder, a rather adept maneuver is required to bring this off with some sense of grace and proportion. A visitor learns to keep legs in the stairwell and to execute the bow on emerging. Any alternative method requires a suppleness of spine worthy of an inchworm.

The space is no more than six feet high and was created many years ago by dividing the front room of this two-room suite in half vertically. There are numerous opportunities to impale one's head. A heavy central beam, at least six by six inches, has three heavy hooks for hanging large bells during ceremonies. On the side of the beam facing Tenth Lane, there is a metal rod, perhaps half an inch in diameter, extending from one side of the room to another. From this rod, at its easternmost end toward the outside wall of Vanmali Bhavan, hangs a heavy brass bell with a base diameter of about six inches. This bell would swell the chest of any respectable yachtsman. We shall hear more about this later.

I do not know how long Maharaj has been in this space, but it feels like a very long time. Maybe as long as 50 years, since this is also the location of his beedie shop, now boarded up below, which was his business before his spiritual enlightenment and, I understand, for some years afterwards. Beedies are very potent Indian cigarettes with an acrid, quite vile smelling smoke. They are made by rolling some crumbled tobacco in a small leaf finished off with a wisp of colored string which also clues the addict as to which end to light while holding the whole thing together. In honor of his former trade or, perhaps more accurately, in testimony to the addictive powers of the beedie, Maharaj chain-smokes the little devils. It was hinted that Maharaj still helps out on beedie rolling now and then. His son carries on the family trade in a tiny alcove shop just down the alley to the east before the tea shop on the corner.

Maharaj states his age (at the time of my visit) as 82 years of suffering in this body. He says so or, more correctly, is translated as having said so in his native Marathi, with a wry smile and toss of his eyebrows, hinting that it may not have been all that bad.

The room has a patina and shine coming from much rubbing and wiping on its objects and surfaces. The floor is covered with a collection of rugs and carpets typical of the “as-is” section of a Goodwill store. My guess, nevertheless, is that a shrewd rug merchant would be delighted with some of them. There are two low windows, one to the south facing Tenth Lane and the other in the eastern wall about two thirds back into the room. This latter opening is to a narrow space between buildings. The view includes a bit of rusted-through, corrugated roofing fallen from the adjacent building, some crumbling masonry, and various metal-reinforcing rods festooned with bits of cloth of indeterminate ancestry and circumstance. The windows are masked on the inside by heavy wire mesh. Both walls, what little is uncovered, and wire mesh were painted the same bilious green once dear to American hospitals. On opposite sides of the room about three feet or so back from the front wall along the longer side walls are two quite old appearing but once fine mirrors now losing their silvering here and there. By carefully placing oneself, there are reflections of a multitude of self-images.

At the far interior end of the room is a wooden case and chest of drawers laden with important-looking articles and secret recesses containing items for ceremonies and Maharaj’s personal needs. Toward the side and above the low windows can be found a set of cushions, a backrest and two folded animal skins lined with velvet cloth. I have not seen this group of articles used during my visits, and sense that these were used during the late-night sessions, which were attended primarily by Maharaj’s Indian devotees and conducted in Marathi with no translation offered.



By the center of the wall, also on top of the case mentioned above, is an elaborate (for these circumstances) altar arrangement backed by a large, silver-framed picture of a stern visaged Indian of apparent importance garbed in a richly decorated uniform of Western cut. My impression was that this was a previous lineage holder of the Maharaj title now held by Nisargadatta. The altar itself has many silver pieces of differing sizes and shapes. A small flame burns continuously in a tall stand centered on the picture. There are two impressive lions on duty flanking the altar and heavy drapings along the edges of the frame. The base and panels are deeply embossed silver of complex designs and reliefs. There is no doubt that this altar arrangement holds significance to those who regularly attend Maharaj in this space.

Around the perimeter, in those areas not occupied by mirrors, altar and throne cushions, a wainscoting runs along about four feet above the floor. Oh, yes, I must also mention two formidable oil paintings of the current Maharaj. One is placed to the interior side of the altar arrangement mentioned. Under this portrait and between the altar case and a big dark wooden armoire is a tiny square of floor that became my refuge and support during the painful hours spent on that hard floor. The second portrait hangs on the interior (western) wall between the mirror and the front wall. Against the opposite wall lies a pile of cushions. Upon and above the wainscoting is a collection of framed representations of human faces and bodies, mostly photographs of various vintages. I recognized several that would be of Maharaj, and one of Ramana Maharshi. Another, more a drawing than a photograph (but who is to know?), conveys the impression of Babaji, the Avatar dear to Yogananda (Founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship). The others were unknown to me and ranged from additional figures in fancy dress similar to the distinguished gentleman over the altar to those in simple dhoti or loincloth pictured in various yogic poses

with faces composed in samadhi or spiritual rest. When, during a slack moment, I ventured to ask the translator whom some of these visages may represent, Maharaj (who purports to know no English) sternly wagged his finger at me, fixed me with one of his dark looks of great import and let loose a torrent of words which were translated as, “When you know who *you* are, you will know who *they* are!” That was followed instantly, if not simultaneously—so quick are his changes—by the kind of merry twinkle old Saint Nick is supposed to have given before laying finger to nose and disappearing up the chimney with a “Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.”

Minor details abound. There is a trap door with counterweight which folds up to the interior wall. Above the trap door is a small railing to warn the unwary. At the head of the ladder, high on the wall right under the central beam, is a round, brass-cased doorbell button. This button, when pushed, rings a buzzer down in the living quarters below. Maharaj, at the start of bhajans (the chanting ceremonies), would stalk about the room banging cymbals mightily and glaring at the head of the ladder in expectation of the desired attendance of his family. They would hardly ever put in an appearance, but Maharaj would scowl and go over to push many times upon the button. Sometimes his daughter would come up and join in and, satisfied, Maharaj would go back to intent concentration on his cymbals.

To the front left are some small shelves with items related to housekeeping. You should also know that Maharaj sleeps in this room. The pile of cushions in the eastern corner conceals the bedding and frame which are brought out and assembled by his daughter for afternoon nap and nighttime sleep. And, on the two window sills, both about eight inches deep (the thickness of the walls), are flower vases, water pitchers, metal stands, trays and ashtrays. Yes, holy ashtrays (sounds like something from “L’il Orphan Annie” or “Batman” comics). Maharaj’s endless

succession of beedies comes out of a silver box kept by his side. The silver looks almost worn through to the wood of the box. He seemingly is involved with lighting a beedie or new stick of incense almost all the time. He used one of those Ronson type coffee-table butane lighters (given to him by some admirer) with a childlike fascination in its workings yet carried off with a casual aplomb. I was there during a better part of the year, I was told, yet the air in Bombay, at least during my visit, averaged a stage-two smog alert by Los Angeles standards. Maharaj carefully keeps ten or more sticks of incense burning from his seven incense holders. His favorites seemed to be "pacholi" and "Mt. Everest." At times other than discourses—i.e., bhajans, readings, puja (worship)—additional incense would be lit before the altar and at other places in the room. As though that were not enough, ritual camphor was burned at least three times daily. All of this contributes richly to the patina constantly applied and dutifully rubbed. Needless to say, the reek of Maharaj's omnipresent beedies was well camouflaged.

Maharaj's day begins very early with orthodox Hindu ceremonies attended primarily by his Indian devotees. About 8:00 A.M., he supervises meditation for an hour to an hour and a half. Then comes the first bhajans of the day. Women and men are separated along some invisible lines created to fit the occasion by Maharaj, which he will imperiously enforce with much motioning and posturing until everyone is arranged to his liking. This room is his territory and let no one forget that. Over a period of time, however, it becomes clear that he will change the rules frequently to fit the circumstances as he sees them.

Bhajans start with selections chanted from a small book in (I assume) Hindi, but maybe Marathi. I have heard the rhythms before and, now and then, recognize some familiar phrases so that I can join in with words as well as sound. Next there are readings from, first, a very thick old leather-bound book; then, a slightly smaller volume; and finally, a small and quite thin little

book with a paper cover such as a school child might use. The readings are very pleasant to the ear, and the intent is clear even if the words are not. After readings, more chanting. During the chanting, the women are clustered to the back of the room and allowed to participate from memory. They are given access neither to the books nor to the impressive collection of cymbals brought out from a chest hidden by the bed frame and distributed to the men to use.

Bhajans with Maharaj was a deeply moving time. Imagine this little room with its sooty low ceiling and eight-inch thick walls stuffed with people singing mightily and pounding cymbals and bells with some force. The build-up of sound pressure forces something vital to happen. Never forget that big bell hanging from the central beam and the three large hooks folded up against the beam. During bhajans, one of these hooks gets a much bigger brass bell. The chest also gives up some big brass plates, which are ritually smashed with mallets to add to the whole process.

Now we start. Chanting, hand cymbals, rhythms led by some of the Indian devotees and accented by Maharaj who gets the biggest cymbals. After a lot of working along through some heavy verse, interspersed with an occasional, vehement "Jai Guru!"* someone takes away Maharaj's larger cymbals to replace them with the very largest ones. Simultaneously, up goes the big bell, and two devotees of some distinction go to work with great enthusiasm to keep the Queen Mary safe in heavy fog. Various other gongs and bongers appear to add to the wondrous cacophony. Something explodes in the middle of my skull, and the rocket ship takes off. The climax of Beethoven's Ninth played at maximum volume barely comes close to this three times daily concatenation in Maharaj's tiny room.

*"Hail to the Guru!" in the Hindi language.

But there are other, no less awesome moments in a day with Maharaj. Discourses begin with Maharaj pointing an imperious finger at some hapless victim. But, first, we should arrange the room again, which takes quite a bit of time between sessions. In the morning everything is cleared from the floor except for a vase of tall flowers placed about two thirds of the way toward the front—in men's territory. Also, in front of the rear side window is placed a silver stand with a reading rack and some other things. Books are stacked on the side. The reader sits on a lower silver platform between the case and the bookstand table. Maharaj's seven incense burners and their tray are here, too.

In the early stages of morning bhajans, Maharaj will often go downstairs to read the newspaper or attend to whatever occupies him during the readings. On his return, he bustles about stoking up the altar and seven incense burners, trims the wick on the oil lamp in front of the big picture over the altar, changes bowls on the altar, and fusses with this and that until it meets his satisfaction. When the time is right, he goes over near the doorbell button at the head of the trap door and hits another button which produces four loud rings. Back across the room, he gets his smaller set of biggest cymbals and starts in.

If anyone has a garland for him, this is the time to present it. Some also go up to put flowers between his toes and to kiss or touch his feet, in classic Hindu obeisance. Maharaj stands through it all with a slightly disapproving look. In comments at other times, Maharaj says that he goes along with the orthodox Hindu rituals, since that is the custom and he belongs to the tradition. The garlands are usually taken off immediately and handed to one of the retainers, with a gesture indicating which picture is to be graced with the offering. That done, we really get with the bhajans.

After morning bhajans, there is a half-hour break to rearrange the room for morning discourses, a period of teaching, question and answer, show and tell with Maharaj. During this

time, the Westerners tend to congregate in the corner tea shop for cha, or chai, the Indian potion composed of the dregs from the tea harvest mixed with milk and copious amounts of sugar. Cha is to English breakfast tea as beedie is to Pell Mell. When we come back, the floor is cleared and Maharaj is in morning position under the mirror on the interior wall facing east and barely away from the trap door opening as people come and go during discourses. The translator is next to him, as a rule, even closer to the opening, although sometimes the translators will sit elsewhere toward the front and eastern side. Then, with men arranged to the west and women to the east, or vice versa, depending upon whatever logic governs at the time, discourses begin. The finger is pointed.

Maharaj's message is always the same. Maharaj says that he and Krishna are the same. In context, that statement implies that what he has to say had already been stated in myriads of ways and thence interpreted, analyzed and commented upon way beyond the capacity of one's intellect to absorb. Once the mind games were surrendered, then whatever one needed to know would be known. Although the message may be the same, the process of arriving at it varied with the person selected for the moment's play. Maharaj delights in the play of words, personalities and languages. He is animated and speaks quite rapidly as a rule. Sometimes he goes into long speeches. Other times he gestures, points, bounces up and down, grimaces, chortles, harruumpfs, fusses, coughs or grabs at something or someone within range to illustrate his point. The contents of this consummate actor's bag of tricks and his range of expression seem limitless.

His translators vary in capacity, but almost always someone of quite good English comes along. The main variation is in the type of English spoken. At the top of my comprehension scale are two of the translators, one man and one woman, who have a very broad capability to use idioms and accents from both



American English and British English. Then come several other translators whose competence is limited to Indian English. This takes some getting used to, especially since it is spoken very rapidly with a wonderful mush-mouth quality. There are clear indications of pecking order among the translators. The two most competent linguistically are also most competent otherwise in Maharaj's view, since he allows them considerable latitude in interpreting his comments. Others are subjected to critical comments and corrections by Maharaj, who seems to understand English very well but will not speak a word of it. The international character of the audience leads to frequent forays into other languages, too. A comment can go from Marathi to English to Spanish to French to Italian to Polish before getting around the room, although this is rarely the case. Now and then, long exchanges go on in local languages which are not translated, only summarized.

Maharaj's rural upbringing and earlier adult years spent in this district as a beedie merchant have colored his speech with, I am told confidentially, an earthy and even bawdy manner. After a while, the twinkle in his eyes and the rapid changes in color of the translator's faces under the dark Indian skins would hint at the graphic nature of his comments. The translators would gulp and scan their minds for some way to exorcise that comment before passing it on. The contrast between the Krishna of contemporary ultra-puritanical Hinduism and the earthy aspects of the Gopi stories of sensuous abandon and celebration from earlier Hindu tradition is brought to mind in Maharaj's earthy style. After all, he says with that raunchy twinkle, he and Krishna are one.

Maharaj has a great sense of humor, and he delights in little puns and games. His mostly toothless face lights up and plunges to dark depths in instants. He makes more faces than a clown or mime could generate. He can work on someone who is deaf, dumb and blind with compassionate patience, as he did one

American woman whose pilgrimage to India seemed to require lecturing Maharaj on subtle points of Sanskrit and Hindu doctrine. Her every sentence began with, "Yes, but..." He would work and work with her, going along each of her lines of thought and always coming back to the same simple point of *Advaita*, which is the very essence of his teaching. With others, he cuts right in and heavily if he does not like the answer. He does not wait for translation either. During my first days with him, he asked me frequently if I had any questions. Once he said that I should play flint and steel with him, because from that kind of friction comes a spark and he likes sparks.

His handling of people as they come along was instructive. Whenever a new head would appear at the top of the ladder, Maharaj would usually ask what brought them here. The replies varied, of course, but generally contained some variant of, "I came to see you." On more than one occasion he would curtly reply, "You have seen me, you can go now." Others would be told to stay until he said they could leave, or that 2, 5, 15 or some other number of days was how long they should remain. As my indefinite stay lengthened, I found my niche between the altar case and the armoire and settled in there for meditation on "All this is the Self and I am That." I paid less attention to the translations per se and more to Maharaj's being. He would shock me awake now and then with a summons for grilling and instruction on some particular point. I was reading the Bhagavad Gita daily. Invariably, he would make a point of speaking directly about the verses I had worked on that day. Others reported the same thing. He would speak directly on whatever they happened to be studying at the time.

Each day, year round, year after year, Maharaj followed a routine taking him from early morning to late at night in the service of his teaching. Yet, within this routine, he seemed always open, always fluid. The evening of our Christmas Day 1978 was very different and, yet, totally within his context. All

in all, it was an open, relatively unstructured period. There were few Indians present and those that were there were familiar faces. There was Jenny, Australian, but mostly in England for the past five years; Jean, French; myself; a younger Indian couple who were very casual and comfortable with Maharaj; an older, garrulous Indian gentleman, and the also older Indian gentleman whom I called "Keeper of the Faith." The younger Indian man was translating with some help from his wife, whom Maharaj clearly doted upon, with some occasional vehement interjections from the older, garrulous Indian gentleman.

Early in the session, a group of Indians (two couples and one small boy) came. They had not been there before and were just shopping, I guess. The little boy, without being bothersome, got into being a little boy and the translator suggested that he be taken below. Shortly thereafter, the group picks up to go with ritual bowing, foot touching and such, which Maharaj barely tolerated. The men shuffle around in their pockets for some money to leave. Having settled on whatever they thought appropriate, a bunch of bills is offered to Maharaj who scowls, waves his hands about in disdain, takes the money and jabs it back at them. There is a shattering moment of confusion and disbelief among the visitors, while the translator insists that Maharaj never takes money just for people being there. So, the visitors take the money back and leave in disarray.

Then the quality of the session changed radically; the rather young translator seemed to enjoy Maharaj's confidence, and, as mentioned above, his very beautiful wife (Radha incarnate) was a favorite of Maharaj. Both were free to make interpretations and comments without interference from him. The discussion slowly changed from the question-and-answer format between Maharaj and individuals to an open exchange among the group, which Maharaj orchestrated and enjoyed much. Jean is trying very hard to get through Marathi and English to French. Jenny and I try to suggest French words, and Maharaj would indicate

which ones he thought appropriate. He would rattle off a vehement string of words and point out this or that person to try to translate (without the translator's intervention) into English or French, and then coach us through like a game of charade. The time ran on rapidly and the older Indian gentlemen got into quite a tizzy with Jean, with much gesturing, pointing, very rapid Indian English (which has got to be a third language), laughing and grabbing. Everybody gets into the act and Maharaj is very involved in the whole thing. Meanwhile, Keeper of the Faith was getting nervous about the time for bhajans passing, Maharaj was studiously ignoring him. According to my plan, I was to leave for Madras the next morning (unaware that I would be back in Bombay four days hence for my second and longer visit with Maharaj). I told the translator how much I admired the big ship's bells and that I collected bells at home.

Later, when Keeper of the Faith prevailed and the small group present begins bhajans, there is a very different quality to the session. Jean, who usually holds back during bhajans, comes in strongly and Maharaj gets into an exchange with him on setting the rhythms. We get a bit syncopated. Keeper of the Faith frowns strongly, but then surrenders to the beat. When bell ringing time comes, Maharaj assigns me to the bigger brass bell. Keeper of the Faith is shocked, but, with him leading on the other big bell, we get it going at a high level and he once again finds himself enjoying the whole thing. Bhajans went around twice that evening, and I shall never again have trouble with being in Bhakti ananda (devotional bliss).

Another incident earlier that evening says much about Maharaj, I feel. On my first stay, I quickly got into the habit of stopping at a stand on the way to Tenth Lane to get some fruit or flowers for offering, that being my understanding of Hindu tradition to honor the guru with flowers and provide something for prasad, or offering. The room is full of flowers and garlands,

so it must please people to give them. He takes the flowers, makes some little fuss over them (very little) before handing them to his daughter or one of the Indians with orders about which vase or place to put them—the logic of which I cannot discern, if there be any. For the evening session on Christmas Day, which I thought would be my last day with him, I cast about for something more personal to give to him, something which would please me more. I came upon a small stuffed heart sent to me by a dear friend for a Christmas present in India, which had touched me deeply. I was sure the sender would be as delighted to give it to Maharaj as I was. I was under no illusion that it would make any real difference to Maharaj, the difference was only to me. I wanted to make as little as possible of it, in any case, and just slip it to him on leaving. I also bought some sugar candy for prasad.

When I arrived, no one else had arrived. We were alone there. I gave him the sugar candy for prasad and the heart. He took both, gestured the question whether the candy was prasad, which I acknowledged. The heart, he turned around and upside down and squeezed before putting it on his little table next to the beedie box and lighter. Later, when the young couple came who were to translate, he picked up the heart and let out a long stream of Marathi which was translated as, “He asks, what is this?” I replied, “It is only a heart shape.” Rhada incarnate asks, “Is it yours?” and I say, “Of course.” She then explained that everything is the same to Maharaj, but that he recognizes that all things presented to him are not the same to the donor. When they are seen as the same by the donor, the latter is closer to realizing the I AM consciousness. I understood.

There is a pert little lady, maybe 11 years old, who is Maharaj’s granddaughter. She brings a special light to his eyes whenever she comes up. She orders him around for this and that, and he mock-meekly complies in a little game all their own. The next time she stuck her head up the trap door, he called her

over and gave her the heart which she seemed to like very much, and the cycle completed itself very nicely to my mind.

As mentioned, I was unaware that I would soon be back for more. During the second, much longer stay, I ceased trying to fix attention on concepts or put symbols to words translated. I simply tuned in, and thoughts formed and passed as they would. Every once in a while he confirms where I am and puts me through whatever he puts me through for the place of ignorance I am in at the moment.

One evening a lightning bolt of comprehension hit, much fell into place and I spent the balance of my time there well focused on my “mantra”: All This is the Self and I am That.

Maharaj says he has never seen God and knows nothing of those things about which religions make so much. For him, truth is truth in any costume and he entertains no concepts about God, only the reality of “I am That.” Yet, he will go on at great length spouting concepts and Sanskrit names triggered by a question. After he has demolished both the question and the questioner with concepts, he will tell a story or give an example demolishing himself and his most recently espoused concepts. The message is always clear that there is nothing but what *is*, and what is, is whatever your mind/body creates for itself so long as you refuse to give it all up. He says that once you know yourself and are neither attached nor detached to your actions, whatever you do will be right.

I understand.

Meeting Nisargadatta Maharaj: By Dr. Lakshyan Schanzer

Posted by [Harsha](#) on February 10th, 2007



By Dr. Lakshyan Schanzer

My name is Lakshyan Schanzer. I have been practicing and teaching yoga and meditation since 1971. I am also a psychologist and practice a meditative approach to psychotherapy. This is my first writing about my experiences with Nisargadatta Maharaj.

By 1978 I had been practicing and teaching for about 7 years (primarily Integral Yoga) and had reached a 'wall' in my practice. I was having wonderful experiences/results on a daily basis. Yet, for me, these experiences were just that; only experiences. Yes, they were important and healing ones, bringing revelations and insights into my history, release of deep feelings, or guidance about the coming day or accurate premonitions about the future.

However, as I became accustomed to 'pushing the buttons' that generated these experiences, I began to ask myself: "Was there any value beyond these temporary conditioning effects of regular practice? That is, if we experience ourselves as the product of conditioning, and if practice is just to create a 'sattvic' body-mind condition, does cultivating one condition over another give any real freedom?"

In spite of my pessimistic reasoning, of course I continued my practice. Obviously it is better to condition yourself to have positive life experiences rather than to have negative ones. Yet, because of my sense of truth or maybe because of a scientific bent, I really wasn't satisfied in thinking that the result of practice was just a kind of conditioning.

I focused heavily on these kinds of thoughts: Was I just 'luckier' than someone who didn't practice? What if my conditions changed so that I couldn't keep up this sadhana practice (i.e. if my health or means of survival changed)? How would my sattvic state really be any different than anyone else's non-sattvic suffering? I began to ask my teachers these questions, inquiring if something was lacking in my practice. Most really didn't understand my problem. At best, the answer was: "Just practice more."

I believe it was this kind of self-examination that led me to Maharaj. I had already begun a career in integrating meditative practice with the world of mental health and health psychology. Interested in continuing my studies (especially regarding the integration of yoga into health care settings) and hoping to take these questions to some known or unknown guru, I planned a trip to India for December 1978.

I arranged to visit various centers, ashrams, even hospitals, and of course, gurus. I did not know that Nisargadatta even existed, let alone that I would be directed to see him. Yet, within two days of my arrival in Bombay one of the head monks (I think his name was Pierre) in Swami Muktananda's ashram said: "Since my guru isn't here right now, you really should meet a fully enlightened master. Here is his address".

What follows are some of my first impressions of my first meeting with Maharaj that I kept as notes during the trip:

The taxi driver was having trouble locating the address. Maharaj's apartment was located at Ketwadi Street, a humble residential area, not far from the prostitute district. Neighbors could not tell where to find this Jnani Yogi, even though he had been residing and teaching there for many years. Finally after finding it, one of Maharaj's devotees spotted the taxi and was directing people upstairs to a tiny (maybe 12 x 12 ft) room. There were about ten people already sitting with a wiry little old man. Maharaj inspected each person as they ascended the loft where he gave satsangh.

Maharaj welcomes

As I sat down, I felt a tremendous pressure of feeling around my heart. I felt like crying. I decided I would just sit there and stay with this feeling.

Maharaj sat there in dialogue with Mularpattan, a translator.



Maharaj and Mularpattan

It was an open and lively discussion with Maharaj responding to questions by the group.



The group

The topic was about how the mind can be made to remain unidentified with perception. The subject and discussion was so in tune with my own thinking and my struggle to understand the effects of practice. I was right at home. And in spite of my decision to sit still and reflect, I found myself just jumping in, asking questions.

Sitting with Maharaj was a riot! There was so much fun and mirth in his manner of expression, and the response of the group. I was captivated by the energy around him.



Maharaj Instructing

At the end of one of the visits Maharaj asked: “How many of you have understood what I have been saying?” A few of us would raise our hands. To those he would say: “Then you need not come back.” Then he announced: “And those of you who have not understood, you also should not come back.”

Finally he asked the question: “and who will be here tomorrow?” Everyone raised their hands!

There was something about the PLACE from which he spoke that was so impressive intellectually and so attractive because of its lucid, frank, and spontaneous manner. I also had read Ramana Maharshi and was drawn to his teachings. My own practice was along these analytic lines. Yet, here was a man who was constantly experiencing it.

Maharaj was the most unpretentious guru I have ever met. He chain-smoked bheedis, Indian cigarettes.



He wore simple and sometimes slightly stained clothes and then would joke about how he was well known for his elegant appearance.

In the mornings each would arrive at the small apartment with offerings of fruit and flowers. I observed Maharaj decorating his altar preparing for meditation and chatting with his wife. He would exit for the bathroom and I could hear his sounds from there... He was completely normal and human in his behavior.



Yet within this appearance of everyday normalcy, was the guru who was answering my questions about practice and conditioning with uncanny precision, even though he did not speak English. Here are some of my findings from near the end of the visits:

1. Body-Mind beingness is not reality, i.e. any subjective experience or thought, or object, is time bound, is changeable and therefore by definition not real.
2. What is real is permanent, changeless and is untainted by the unreal. i.e. what is real can never combine with the unreal.
3. Reality is in the sense of 'Self', and That is the reality we seek in the practice of yoga.
4. Non-attachment begins right with perception.

This is a more profound grasp of non-attachment than the idea of non-attachment as weaning oneself from desires. That is, subjective experience (perception, thoughts, and feelings) is also a changeable object, and therefore also not reality.

These points might appear as "preaching to the choir". Yet for me, they were the answer to my concerns about conditioning, and have become the foundation of my approach to yoga. That is, 'practice' is not conditioning. Rather than creating a condition of bodymind, practice is the removal of conditioning. Practice is really a restoration, bringing one back the original, prior-to-conditioned sense of self.



My experience with Maharaj was not always serene.

One day a group of disciples of one of the most popular guru's of the time had come for satsangh. Maharaj took delight in challenging these students. Maharaj boasted how good his talks were: "You'll never find anyone talking like me!" I also observed him telling other students to "remember me like Lord Krishna" as a part of their practice. Having sat with quite a few gurus, my mind was shaken. Since when does a Jnani tell seekers to worship him? Why this fascination to run down students of other teachers? I left the satsangh feeling disgusted and disturbed.

The next morning I resolved to confront Maharaj. However wonderful I felt about his points on the real and unreal, these doubts needed to be cleared up! I asked Maharaj why he had said these things to the visiting students. Maharaj said: "What I teach others is not for you to use". However, Maharaj also picked up on my anger. He said that if I had such questions I should leave. People in the group were shocked.

Yet, something in me clicked. I saw Maharaj modeling being completely non-attached. He was not actually asking me to leave (which I could have, if I were attached to being angry about the perceived hypocrisy). He was modeling not being at the mercy of any subjective state. I thanked him, saying my speaking up was to be able to be silent (i.e.

with my silent self). Maharaj paused, seemingly taking it in, and then went right on to the next questioner.

I felt another shift within myself, of letting go and feeling completely in the spontaneous “Now”. My initial excitement of being with this guru was back again and with more force of clarity.

This sense of spontaneity of presence was lasting. I felt I had connected with some sense of source that the man we called Maharaj was operating from. I remember another incident toward the end of my stay with him that illustrates this. At one point Maharaj was prodding people for questions. (He always seemed to want to engage visitors from their sense of self.) He asked a fellow with a beard: “You have a beard. You must be wise. Ask some questions!” Absorbed in the sense of spontaneous source, I found my mouth opening and saying: “The beard grows itself! Wisdom is in that spontaneous being!” Maharaj seized on my comment: “ That’s exactly it! Every event happens this way!

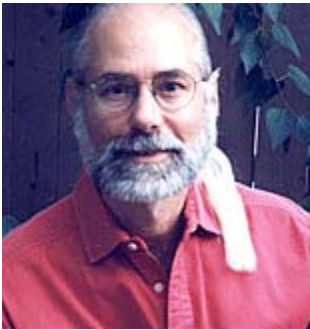


Is that clear? Asks Maharaj

In all, from the beginning of my brief visit with Maharaj I felt validated as a seeker, having found something that was never lost. And for which I have been ever grateful.



Maharaj and the Author Dr. Lakshyan Schanzer in 1978



Dr. Lakshyan Schanzer in 2004

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Images are taken by the author.

This entry was posted on Saturday, February 10th, 2007 at 4:41 pm and is filed under [Advaita](#), [Gurus](#), [Smoking](#), [Enlightenment](#), [Self-Knowledge](#), [Ramana](#), [Lakshyan Schanzer](#), [Nisargadatta](#), [Nonduality](#), [Personal Growth](#), [Wisdom](#), [Teachers](#), [Spirituality](#), [Mind](#), [Pictures](#), [Story](#), [India](#), [Identity](#), [Yoga](#), [Meaning](#), [Travel](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed. You can [leave a response](#), or [trackback](#) from your own site.

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[The Mountain Path](#)

[Nisargadatta](#)

[Ashtavakra Gita](#)

[Practices](#)

[Satsang Online](#)

[Animals](#)

[Collected Works](#)

[Photos](#)

[Psychoanalysis](#)

[Resources](#)

[Site Map](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Other](#)

[Collected Works-II](#)

[E-mail](#)

A good percentage of seekers who find this site, do so for more information about Nisargadatta. Maharaj had an extraordinary intellect and personal power. Most of us only know him from his transcribed and translated talks which dwell on his intellect. The little book he wrote found on this site reveals another man. What more is there?

This page will be dedicated to publishing personal meetings with Maharaj. There is nothing more telling about a person than how they relate to others. Even then, a lot that goes on in these interchanges is cultural, such as the bruskeness of some Zen masters, or

The first experience will be from my long time friend Swamia Shankarananda.

If anyone has met Maharaj, I ask them to share their experiences with us.

Recently Swami Shankarananda, my friend for nearly 30 years, sent me this email describing his meeting with Nisargadatta, which reveals a much different take on Maharaj than most of us ever hear.

I never met Maharaj and only knew of him through his transcribed talks and through Jean. For the life of me I could not imagine a realized being without flowing love and devotion. Shankarananda's email reveals a side of Nisargadatta that puzzled me because it appeared to be missing.

Dear Ed,

Somebody showed me Nisargadatta's little book. Then there was your name and intro to it! Congratulations for making it available.

You may or may not remember that I met him once. I didn't know he was a formidable jnani. I had only heard that there was a saint living in Bombay. Girija and I went in to take a 2 day break. I convinced her to meet him. We went to his door. A woman told us to wait upstairs in the little Satsang room.

N. came out. I realised later that it must have been his rest time. We spent a terrific hour with him, not able to understand anything the other was saying. He chain smoked bidis. I showed him a picture of Baba and he said, "Ah Muktananda!" He showed me a picture of his Guru. He had his grandkids bring up tea. He was full of love and full of energy and there was tremendous love flowing between us, particularly me and him. Girija was less engaged.

At the end he invited us to come back for Bhajans that night. I wanted to go, but Girija felt that we had been disloyal enough, so we didn't. My take on him was that he was a real Maharashtran bhakti saint. It wasn't until a year or two later that "I Am That" came out. I was, of course, stunned by the power of intellect and wisdom that was there. For me, that confirmed his stature, since I already had seen the quality of his Being. But you'd be mistaken if you minimised his devotional side. I think he really was a bhakta, but one with a strong intellect. He always credits everything to the Guru. And don't forget that he held chanting sessions every night, and himself did the pujas and waved the lights to the saints and deities. Sometimes disciples give a one-sided picture because they are only interested in one side of a Great Being's manifestation. I think that has happened with Nisargadatta.

By the way, I think you have to give some of the credit for "I am That" to Maurice Frydman. Maurice was a Polish Jew., living in Bombay. He had worked with Gandhi, Ramana, Krishnamurti, and then discovered N. His translations make "I Am That" head and shoulders above any of the other Nisargadatta books. In fact, none of the others is even close. The boys in the Ashram dorm frequently stayed with Maurice when they went into Bombay for R & R. I never met him but I heard lots of stories.

I'm not saying he wrote "I Am That" but that he heard and reproduced the human side of Maharaj. Without that humanity, you have 50,000 neo-Advaitins parroting a few wooden ideas over and over again until your mind is stupefied.

I hope you and Kerema are well and happy.

Lots of love,

Swamiji

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Jack Kornfield

Copied from <http://nisargadatta.net/kornfield.html>

Buddhist teacher **Jack Kornfield** describes his encounter with Nisargadatta Maharaj in *"The Eightfold Path for the Householder."*

There's something in us, in our nature, which compels us to discover. I remember a very powerful moment with the old guru who I studied with, Nisargadatta Maharaj, who taught the way of Nisarga Yoga. "Nisarga" means natural. The basic translation of his name was "Mr. Natural". He was this 80-year old cigarette-smoking man. He had a little cigarette stand. He was kind of a combination like Krishnamurti and Fritz Perls. He would put you on the hot seat when you came in and ask you about your spiritual life.

One day we were in a room about this big. People were coming in and asking questions. Somebody came in and asked a question and was a little bit dissatisfied and left. And another person raised their hand and said, "Maharaj, what will happen to that person who came and asked that question and left? Is it all over for them in this life? They didn't stay here. You are a great guru, and they weren't interested, and they went home." And he twinkled at that moment, he really lit up, and he said, "It's too late. Even the fact that they put their foot in this room, even if they hadn't asked the question, means that somewhere in there there's a seed of really knowing who we are and what this life is about. Not what you were taught in elementary school or what's on TV or the newspapers, but a deep seed of knowing our true nature, that wants to discover; it's like coming home. The fact that he just walked in the room means that that seed has started to sprout. And no matter if he tries to forget it and goes back and gets lost, sooner or later that will manifest in awakening.

...I'll read you a passage from Nisargadatta Maharaj, the old bidi wallah who I studied with in Bombay; wonderful old teacher. He sold little Indian cigarettes on the street corner, and he was fully enlightened somehow at the same time. He had these classes. He died a couple of years ago. He was a wonderful old man.

Someone asks:

What can truth or reality gain by all our practice?

He uses truth and love interchangeably. He says:

"Nothing whatsoever, of course. But it is in the nature of truth or love, cosmic consciousness, whatever you want to call it, to express itself, to affirm itself, to overcome difficulties. Once you've understood that the world is love in action, consciousness or love in action, you will look at it quite differently. But first your attitude to suffering must change. Suffering is primarily a call for attention, which itself is a movement of love. More than happiness, love wants growth, the widening and deepening of awareness and consciousness and being. Whatever prevents that becomes a cause of pain, and love does not shirk from pain."

The Eightfold Path for the Householder:

Ten talks by Jack Kornfield,

transcribed from audio tape

<http://cedar.evansville.edu/~mb62/errata/8path.htm>



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- [Hommage à H.W.L. Poonja](#) - [Dialogue avec Raphael](#) - [Entretiens avec U.G. Krishnamurti](#) -

SELF KNOWLEDGE AND SELF REALISATION

By [Nisargadatta Maharaj](#) - Edited by Jean Dunn

Introduction by Ed Muzika

Below is the book I promised to publish written by Nisargadatta. It is the only book ever written by Nisargadatta in his own hand. As indicated by Jean in her editor's notes, it was published in 1963. There were 100 copies of this book printed by her. She gave 20 or so copies to friends and students and one to me. For some reason she decided not to give any more out. It has never been published in the West. Therefore, you are among the first to see it.

Concerning copyrights, Jean was never able to find anyone who claimed ownership of the copyrights. Perhaps I should now see who comes out of the woodwork. I am still amazed by the battles that have surrounded the writings/teachings of all the well-known spiritual teachers even while they were alive let alone after they were dead.

Jean told me it is hard to recognise the later Nisargadatta in this book as the style is so devotional and traditional. True. But Maharaj is there. This book is copied exactly as printed with all the absent commas and spellings as found in the original. There are undoubtedly additional errors caused by my scanner and recognition software, which casual editing has not found. I thought it more important to get the information out into the



[Nisargadatta Maharaj](#)

public domain and worry about spelling and grammar later.

Those accustomed to the bold pronouncements on the nature of reality found in his later talks might be surprised by the obvious bhaktic melody throughout this little book. It is also obvious that this is the autobiography of Maharaj's awakening, not his early teaching. It is a love song both to himself and to his guru.

One might ask, "What happened to the Bhakta?"

I have no idea of what Maharaj was like before he met his teacher. Perhaps he was rude and acerbic then, had a brief period of bhaktic immersion, then reverted to his pre-awakening personality. So, is his later public persona a teaching style, also used by tons of Zen masters (priests, rabbis, sheiks, etc.), or did he just have a raggedy personality which returned?

I don't know. If I were to guess, I would lean towards the latter view.

Everyone I know who has seen this book has a different theory; all are speculative. I wish I had had more time to talk to Jean about what he was like. In a larger sense, who cares? His personality is not important in a teaching sense, although this issue may be very important to someone who wants to understand the enlightenment process clinically.

For most of us, it is what his words do to us and what they did to me that is important. This little book speaks to many who have been closed out by the content and style of his later talks.

Editor's Notes by Jean Dunn

The original script for these writings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was written in the Marathi language and called *Atmagnyana and Paramatmayoga*.

A translation in English by Vasudeo Madhav Kulkarni, at the time a Professor at Elphinstone College, Bombay, India, was published on April 8, 1963, under Maharaj's title, translated as *Self Knowledge and Self Realisation*.

Professor Kulkarni's adaptation was published with a foreword by Shree Ram Narayan Chavhan, at Shree Nisargadatta Ashram, Vanmali Bhavan, 10th Khetwadi, Bombay 4, India.

Professor Kulkarni's translation was printed in India by J.D. Desai, Pashtra Vaibhav Press, 273 Vithalbhai Patel Rd., Girgaon, Bombay 4, India.

FOREWORD

I first purchased this little book in Bombay in 1978, and while it was difficult to read, it was so very dear that I decided to edit it, making it easier to understand. I did this for myself, and just recently, after lending it to others, and on their insistence, I decided to print a few copies for those on the spiritual path. I tried and failed to trace the original publishers.

While Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, in his last few years, would not entertain any questions about experiences in this 'dream world', I feel that this book tells of his own spiritual path and experiences.

Nisargadatta Maharaj was from the spiritual lineage of the Navanathas.

He was born in Bombay in 1897, and was brought up on a farm in Kandalgaon, a village south of Bombay. He had an alert, inquisitive mind, and was deeply interested in religious and philosophical matters. After the death of his father, he moved to Bombay in 1918, and in 1924 married Sumatibai, who bore him a son and three daughters.

Although he started life in Bombay as an office clerk, he soon went out on his own and started a small business, and in a few years he owned several small shops. A hunger for truth grew in him, and in 1933, due to a friend's urging, he approached the great Saint, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, and was initiated by him.

After the death of his Guru in 1936, the urge for Self realisation reached its zenith, and in 1937 he abandoned his family and businesses and took to the life of a wandering monk. On his way to the Himalayas, where he intended to spend the rest of his life, he met a brother disciple who convinced him that a life of dispassion in action would be more spiritually fruitful.

Returning to Bombay, he found only one store remaining of his business ventures. For the sake of his family he conducted the business but devoted all his energy to spiritual sadhana. He built himself a mezzanine floor as a place for meditation (this is the room where we all used to gather to listen to him talk).

In his own words, "When I met my Guru, he told me, 'You are not what you take yourself to be. Find out what you are. Watch the sense I AM, find your real Self...' I did as he told me. All my spare time I would spend looking at myself in silence... and what a difference it made, and how soon! It took me only three years to realise my true nature." His message to us was simple and direct with no propounding of scriptures or doctrines. "You are the Self here and now! Stop imagining yourself to be something else. Let go your attachment to the unreal."

Maurice Frydman, a Polish devotee, often acted as translator and the questions and answers were so interesting that tape recordings were made, and in 1973 these were published under the title *I Am That*. As a result, readers from many different countries came to Bombay seeking the spiritual guidance of Sri Maharaj.

From 1978 to 1981, when Sri Maharaj died from cancer of the throat, his talks were so much deeper than in the previous years that, with the help of a few other devotees, the tape recordings were again resumed and I transcribed and edited them, with the blessings of Sri Maharaj, and these were published under the titles of *Seeds of Consciousness* and *Prior to Consciousness*; both titles were suggested by Sri Maharaj.

JEAN DUNN

SELF KNOWLEDGE AND SELF REALISATION

1. DIVINE VISION AND THE DEVOTEE

Divine vision means acquaintance with, and crystalline understanding of, the universal energy. God and the devotee are one, in his very nature the devotee is identical with God. So long as one has not realised God, one does not know what justice and injustice are, but with realisation the devotee comes to know the distinction between justice and injustice, the essential and the contingent, the eternal and the evanescent, and this leads to his emancipation.

The divine vision eliminates individuality; the manifest is clearly distinguished from the unmanifest. When the sense of individuality is replaced by that of impersonal consciousness the devotee knows that he is pure consciousness. Manifestation is pure consciousness manifesting itself in all the different names and forms; the spiritually enlightened take part in it sportily, knowing that it is only the play of universal consciousness.

The name and form of the spiritually enlightened Saint experiences the pangs and sorrows of life, but not their sting. He is neither moved nor perturbed by the pleasures and pains, nor the profits and losses of the world. He is thus in a position to direct others. His behaviour is guided exclusively by the sense of justice.

The temporal life must continue, with all its complex interactions, but the Saint is ever aware that it is only the pure consciousness that is expressing itself in different names and forms, and it continues to do so, in ever new forms. To him, the unbearable events of the world are just a tame and harmless affair; he remains unmoved in world-shaking events.

At first people, through pride, simply ignore him, but their subsequent experiences draw them toward him. God, as justice incarnate, has neither relations nor belongings of His own; peace and happiness are, as it were, His only treasure. The formless, divine consciousness cannot have any thing as its own interest.

This is the temporal outline of the Bhakta.

2. THE SOUL, THE WORLD, BRAHMAN AND SELF REALISATION

The consciousness of one's own being, of the world, and of its supporting primal force are experienced all at once. Awareness of one's own being does not mean here the physical consciousness of oneself as an individual, but implies the mystery of existence. Prior to this, in the ignorance of one's own being, there is no experience of Brahman as being there. But the moment one is aware of being, he is directly aware of the world and Brahman, too.

At the stage prior to this cosmic awareness, the self and its experiences are limited to the worldly life. This worldly life starts with birth and ends in death. To become aware of oneself, the world and God all of a sudden is a great mystery indeed. It is an unexpected gain; it is an absorbing and a mysterious event, extremely significant and great, but it brings with it the responsibility of Self-preservation, sustenance and Self development as well, and no one can avoid it.

One who leads his life without ever wondering about who or what he is accepts the traditional genealogical history as his own and follows the customary religious and other activities according to tradition. He leads his life with the firm conviction that the world was there prior to his existence, and that it is real; because of this conviction he behaves as he does, gathering possessions and treasures for himself, even knowing that at the time of death he will never see them again. Knowing that none of this will even be remembered after death, still his greed and avarice operate unabated until death.

When we concentrate our attention on the origin of thought, the thought process itself comes to an end; there is a hiatus, which is pleasant, and again the process starts. Turning from the external world and enjoying the objectless bliss, the mind feels that the world of objects is not for it. Prior to this experience the unsatiating sense enjoyments constantly challenged the mind to satisfy them, but from the inward turn onwards its interest in them begins to fade. Once the internal bliss is enjoyed, the external happiness loses its charm. One who has tasted the inward bliss is naturally loving and free from envy, contented and happy with others' prosperity, friendly and innocent and free from deceit. He is full of the mystery and wonder of the bliss. One who has realised the Self can never inflict pain on other.

3. LIFE DIVINE AND THE SUPREME SELF

With heartfelt love and devotion, the devotee propitiates God; and when he is blessed with His vision and grace, he feels ever happy in His presence. The constant presence establishes a virtual identity between the two. While seeking the presence of the Supreme Soul, the Bhakta renounces all associations in his life, from the meanest to the best, and having purged his being of all associations, he automatically wins the association with the Supreme Self. One who has attained to the position of unstinted emancipation can never be disliked by others, for the people themselves are the very Self-luminous soul, though ignorant of the fact.

In this world of immense variety, different beings are suffering from different kinds of ailments, and yet they are not prepared to give up the physical frame, even when wailing under physical and mental pain. If this be so, then men will not be so shortsighted as to avoid their saviour, the enlightened soul.

That overflowing reservoir of bliss, the beatific soul, does confer only bliss on the people by his loving light. Even the atmosphere around him heartens the suffering souls. He is like the waters of a lake that gives nourishment to the plants and trees around the brink and the grass and fields nearby. The Saint gives joy and sustaining energy to the people around him.

[Top of the page](#)

4. THE ASPIRANT AND SPIRITUAL THOUGHT

Spiritual thought is of the Highest. This seeking of the Highest is called the 'first half' by the Saints. A proper understanding of this results in the vision of God, and eventually matures into the certainty of the true nature of the Self in the 'latter half'.

One who takes to the path of the spirit starts with contemplation and propitiation. It is here, for the first time, that he finds some joy in prayer and worship. At this preliminary stage he gets the company of co-aspirants. Reading of the lives and works of past incarnations of God, of Rishis, of Saints and Sages, singing the glories of the Name, visiting temples, and a constant meditation on these result in the photic and phonic experiences of the mystic life; his desires are satisfied to an extent now. Thinking that he has had the vision of God, he intensifies his efforts of fondly remembering the name of God and His worship. In this state of the mind, the Bhakta quite frequently has a glimpse of his cherished deity, which he takes to be the divine vision and is satisfied with it. At this juncture, he is sure to come into contact with a Saint.

The Saint, and now his preceptor, makes it plain to him that what he has had is not the real vision, which is beyond the said experiences, and is only to be had through Self Realisation. At this point, the aspirant reaches the stage of the meditator. In the beginning, the Sadhaka is instructed into the secrets of his own person, and of the indwelling spirit; the meaning and nature of Prana, the various plexuses, and the nature and arousal of the Kundalini, and the nature of the Self. Later on, he comes to know of the origin of the five elements, their activity, radiation, and merits and defects. Meanwhile his mind undergoes the process of purification and acquires composure, and this the Sadhaka experiences through the deep-laid subtle center of the Indweller; he also knows how and why it is there, only that the deiform element is kindled. This knowledge transforms him into the pure, eternal, and spiritual form of a Sadguru who is now in a position to initiate others into the secrets of the spirit. The stage of Sadhakahood ends here.

As the great Saint Tukarama said, the aspirant must put in ceaseless efforts in the pursuit of spiritual life. Thoughts must be utilised for Self-knowledge. He must be alert and watchful in ascertaining the nature of this 'I' that is involved in the affairs of pleasure and pain arising out of sense experience.

We must know the nature of the active principle lest its activities be led astray. We should not waste our energies in useless pursuits, but should use those energies in the pursuit of the Self and achieve identity with God. Spiritual life is so great, so deep, so immense, that energy pales into insignificance before it, yet this energy tries to understand it again and again. Those who try to understand it with the help of the intellect are lost to it. Rare is the one who, having concentrated on the source atom of the cosmic energy, enjoys the bliss of spiritual contemplation. But there are scores of those who take themselves to be spiritually inspired and perfect beings. They expect the common herd to honour and respect their every word. The ignorant people rush towards them for spiritual succour and do their bidding. In fact, the pseudo-Saints are caught in a snare of greed, hence what the people get in return is not the blessings of satisfaction, but ashes.

The self-styled man of God, speaking ad nauseum about spiritual matters, thinks himself to be perfect, but others are not so sure. As regards a Saint, on the other hand, men are on the lookout for ways to serve him more and more, but as the ever contented soul, steeped in beatitude, desires nothing, they are left to serve in their own way, which they do with enthusiasm, and they never feel the pressure.

Greatness is always humble, loving, silent and satisfied. Happiness, tolerance, forbearance, composure and other allied qualities must be known by everyone; just as one experiences bodily states such as hunger, thirst, etc., one must, with equal ease, experience in oneself the characteristics connoted by the word 'Saint'. As we know for certain that we need no more sleep, no more food, at a given moment, so too we can be sure of the above characteristics from direct experience. One can then recognise their presence in others with the same ease. This is the test and experience of a tried spiritual leader.

5. THE MYSTIC

The blissful mystic clearly sees the difference between his characteristics before and after realisation. All that is transient has an origin in time and is subject to change and destruction, while he is free from change and can never perish. The unchanging one views the ever changing world as a game.

All the characteristics of the Saint naturally spring from his experience. As there are no desires left in him, nothing in the world of sense can ever tempt him, he lives in the fearless majesty of Self-realisation. He is moved to pity by the unsuccessful struggle of those tied down to bodily identity and their striving for the satisfaction of their petty interests. Even the great events of the world are just surface lines to him; the number of these lines that appear and disappear is infinite.

Individuals are only the faint streaks of these lines, and only as such lines are they recognised. When the streaks vanish there remains nothing to recognise as individuals. The interval between the moment of emergence and the disappearance of a line is what is called life. The wiped out line can never be seen again.

The Saint who has direct experience of all this is always happy and free from desire. He is convinced that the greatest of the sense experiences is only a momentary affair, impermanence is the very essence of these experiences; hence pain and sorrow, greed and temptation, fear and anxiety can never touch him.

6. THE LILA OF GOD

Sport or play is natural to God, our experiences are known as the Lila (play) of God. Without any prior intimation, we suddenly have a taste of our own being; excepting this one instance of the taste, we have no knowledge of the nature of the Self. But then, even this bit of experience is hidden away from us. We are forced into a series of activities and experiences: that I am a homosapien, I am a body, my name is such and such, this is my religion, my duty, etc. One action follows another, and there is no rest from them, no escape, we have to see them through. This goes on inevitably, until perchance, it loses all its charm, and we seek the spiritual treasure.

If the purpose of all this be inquired into, we get different accounts from different people. Some claim it is because of the actions of millions of previous lives, but nobody has the direct experience of these past lives; it is obvious that this is fiction.

Dazzled by the ingenious inventions and discoveries of the scientists, some base their interpretation on empirical facts and offer them as explanations, but the suddenly experienced taste of our own being cannot be interpreted in this way. When the world is called by the word Maya or illusion, it is condemned to be mean; when the same thing is called by the words 'play of God', it becomes great! In reality the facts are what they are. Who is the recipient of the high designation, who confirms the uselessness for the condemnation, who is He, what name should we give Him after first-hand experience?

That we have experiences is a fact; others tell us about their experiences, we receive information concerning relations, and instruction in the performance of activities, and we organise our behaviour accordingly. Someone from these guides initiates us into what is said to be the core of the indwelling Spirit, but that too turns out to be a transient affair. For the acquaintance secured thus does not possess the experiential core of the taste, and the initiator himself proves to be part and parcel of that bit; thus both he and his knowledge are lost to us. Now we are free to go our own way, but for want of the necessary taste, this self-help is equally helpless. We are where we were.

What is it that we call the Lila of God? How are we related to this sporting God whom we saw, talked to, had friendship with, and intense love for. In spite of all this closeness and fondness, what is our relation to Him? All the previous experiences with their peculiarities have vanished. The Lila of God disappears along with the pseudo experience with the advent of the present experience.

7. THE SPIRITUAL ASPIRANT, THE FIRST MOMENT OF BLISS AND ITS CONTINUOUS GROWTH

The ever-awaited first moment was the moment when I was convinced that I was not an individual at all.

The idea of my individuality had set me burning so far. The scalding pain was beyond my capacity to endure; but there is not even a trace of it now, I am no more an individual. There is nothing to limit my being now. The ever present anxiety and the gloom have vanished and now I am all beatitude, pure knowledge, pure consciousness.

The tumours of innumerable desires and passion were simply unbearable, but fortunately for me, I got hold of the hymn 'Hail, Preceptor', and on its constant recitation, all the tumours of passions withered away as with a magic spell!

I am ever free now. I am all bliss, sans spite, sans fear. This beatific conscious form of mine now knows no bounds. I belong to all and everyone is mine. The 'all' are but my own individuations, and these together go to make up my beatific being. There is nothing like good or bad, profit or loss, high or low, mine or not mine for me. Nobody opposes me and I oppose none for there is none other than myself. Bliss reclines on the bed of bliss. The repose itself has turned into bliss.

There is nothing that I ought or ought not to do, but my activity goes on everywhere, every minute. Love and anger are divided equally among all, as are work and recreation. My characteristics of immensity and majesty, my pure energy, and my all, having attained to the golden core, repose in bliss as the atom of atoms. My pure consciousness shines forth in majestic splendour.

Why and how the consciousness became self-conscious is obvious now. The experience of the world is no more of the world as such, but is the blossoming forth of the selfsame conscious principle, God, and what is it? It is pure, primal knowledge, conscious form, the primordial 'I' consciousness that is capable of assuming any form it desires. It is designated as God. The world as the divine expression is not for any profit or loss; it is the pure, simple, natural flow of beatific consciousness. There are no distinctions of God and devotee, nor Brahman and Maya. He that meditated on the bliss and peace is himself the ocean of peace and bliss. Glory to the eternal truth, Sad-Guru, the Supreme Self.

8. DEVOTEE AND THE BLESSINGS OF GOD

The Bhakta pours out his devotion, moulds his behaviour in every respect in accordance with the will of God. In turn, he finds that God is pleased with him, and this, his conviction, takes him nearer to God and his love and friendship with Him grow richer and richer. The process of surrendering to the will of God in every respect results in His blessings.

One who is blessed by God is a blissful soul. Being at peace with himself, he looks at the objects of enjoyment with perfect indifference. He is content with whatever he has and is glad to see others happy. If a person believes that he is blessed by God and is still unhappy, it is better if he give up this delusion and strive for the coveted Grace with sincerity and honesty.

Divine plenitude and favour is not judged by the objects of sense, but by the internal contentment. This verily is the blessing of God.

9. THE UNITIVE LIFE

Him have I seen now whom I so earnestly desired to see, I met myself. The meeting requires an extremely difficult and elaborate preparation.

I pined to see the most beloved one. It was impossible to do without it, I was sure to die if I were not to do it. Even with the innermost sincerity of my whole being I was not able to get at it, and the situation was unbearable. Yet with love and determination, eagerness and courage, I started on my journey. I had to get through different stages and places in the undertaking.

Being quite deft, it would not allow me cognition, at first. But lo, I saw it today, I was sure, but the very next moment I felt perhaps it was not it. Whenever I saw it I was intent on observing it keenly, but not knowing its nature with certitude, could not decide either way. I could not be sure that it was my Beloved, the center of my being. Being an adept in the art of make-up, it dodged me with a quick change of form ere I could arrive at a conclusion. These were the visions of various Incarnations of Rishis and Saints, internal visions in the process of Dhyana and Dharana, and external ones of the waking state eventual to the siddhis, such as the power of prophecy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and the power to cure normally incurable diseases, etc. Some were eager to serve me, to have faith in me and to honour me, and this led me to believe that I had seen it for certain; it is here its skill in make-up lies. It is so deft in the art of changing the form, quality and knowledge, that the intellect does not know where it stands, let alone the penetration through its nature. But, what is this miracle? Wonder of wonders! The flash, curiously glistening, majestic splendour! But where is it? It disappeared in a flicker before I could apprehend it. No, nothing could be known about what happened to me or to the lightning. I could not say whether the extremely swift flash and the means of my reconnaissance were one and the same or different. In the glow of the flashing miracle the whole of the cosmic array is experienced directly. The contact is immensely interesting. The flash experience makes one feel it should be as spicy forever; this is the characteristic feeling of the cosmic experience. But in the very attempt to arrest the glowing flash for a basic understanding, one loses it.

It is extremely difficult to get at the root of the cosmic energy, that perfect adept in assuming an infinite variety of forms. The consciousness to be apprehended and the power of concentration are one and the same. Being polymorphous by nature, it cannot be pinned down to any definite form or name or place, as for instance, the internal experiences of the Dhyana yogin. In the first instance, the attention of the meditator is silence in excelsis, this is transformed into light, the light assumes the form of space, the space in turn changes into movement. This is transmitted into air, and the air into fire, the fire changes into water, and the water into earth. Lastly, the earth evolves into the world of organic and inorganic things. The water from the rain takes the form of the juices in the grains and vegetables, which essences supply nourishment and energy. This energy takes the form of knowledge, courage, valour, cunning, etc. The limbless process goes on. Neither form, name, nor quality is enduring. Nothing is permanent or determinate.

The felt experience of the spiritually enlightened is difficult to negotiate with. This may mean either that it is beyond our capacity to get at, or it is beyond reach; yet one must go on with concentration. The identity of the 'I' as the miracle in the process of the dazzling glitter, and the 'ego' of the empirical consciousness prior to the experience, must be firmly established in Dhyana Yoga (meditation). Is the spiritually saturated soul the same as the experience or is it even beyond that? There is no duality to the experience one has in the process of Dhyana Yoga. At the enlightened stage even the sense organs are involved in the meditation of the spiritual adept, for the sense organs and the five elements are one and the same at the core. The material elements, subtle matter and consciousness, the three qualities, Satva, Rajas and Tamas, and the three sources of knowledge, perception, inference and testimony were seen, are being seen, and lo! They are not there.

The characteristics of origination, sustenance and destruction come under Dhyana Yoga itself. The activity of Prakriti in all its forms, manifest and unmanifest, and the consciousness of Purusha are also included in it. In the Dhyana Yoga process the eight chakras are activated simultaneously and are experienced as such. All these, in a single, unitive experience, I constitute the contemplation. Meditation, consciousness, experience, are all but a single unity.

Dhyana Yoga is the supreme activity of life. Concentration is the central thing in experience.

The transformation of Dhyana Yoga into Mama [sic] Yoga is a difficult process. In the consummation of this process alone is the Atman cognised with certitude. As long as Dhyana Yoga is not completely transformed into Jnana Yoga, so long there is no Self knowledge. The test of Dhyana is knowledge, then follows the duality of knowledge and the Atman. In the experiential knowledge, there is a race between knowledge as Self and Self as Self. But in deep samadhi there is an understanding between contemplation and the Self. This results in the realisation of bliss. The bliss is transformed into supreme beatitude and the self is absorbed in the supreme Spirit. Knowledge to itself, contemplation into itself, the primal Maya, God, the Absolute state and the original throb are all a single whole of Self-experience. The ever cherished and desired Being is realised here.

Prior to this, in the process of the attainment of the siddhis incidental to Dhyana Yoga, there ooze forth experiences in the form of arts, love, and memories of past lives in different regions such as Patala, Swarga and Kailas. In some cases one has a taste of different siddhis and Avatars and of a series of meetings with others in different regions. There are experiences of being the Brahma of Satya region, Shiva of Kailas, and Vishnu of Vaikunth from time immemorial. Again, there are different phases of the yogin's feelings, the best and the worst, and the endless panoramas, not pleasant nor enduring; and the inevitable adjuncts of Dhyana Yoga must go on until it is transformed into Jnana Yoga; i.e., the transition from the Samprajuata (silent mind in meditation) to the Asamprajuata (altered state of consciousness, silent and alert mind) state of samadhi. Until then there is no Self-realisation. But, on the other hand, if in the process of this transition the nature of this phase of Dhyana Yoga be known, Self-realisation is automatic.

All the experiences and visions arising out of Dhyana Yoga are transitory. In the contemplation, there is an infinite variety of phases and forms, and none of them is lasting. Whatever is taken to be helpful and great and determinate vanishes in an instant and a new form takes its place to yield place to the next. That knowledge from which all the varieties issue forth in experiences, such as earth, water, fire, air, ether, and their various specifications, is itself unstable. Starting from meditation, the contemplating soul, having experienced a taste of previous lives, is further transformed into the primal Maya, primordial energy, and Godhead, and even into the characteristics of the supreme Self by the power of meditation, and all this for a trice, and it disappears. It is here that it is called Kala, the final liquidation of individuality. It is here that the separation from itself is compensated for, and finds itself with spiritual certitude, never to be lost again. The imperishable, indissoluble, eternal Paramatman shines forth with perfection beyond the reach of empirical experience.

[Top of the page](#)

10. KNOW WHAT ?

The continuous process of getting to know the environment goes on from the birth of the 'I' consciousness. Though the 'I' consciousness is automatic, hence effortless, one has to learn to do various things; one also must learn about one's own person and its care. Some things are mastered of necessity, and of one's liking; others which are not essential must also be learnt.

In the process of conscious learning, over and above the world of things, we are told we must also learn of the things beyond the world; but before trying to know the things beyond, we must know the controller and support of the universe called God, so that other things may be known with His help.

Who is God and how is He to be propitiated? We are told that this is to be achieved by forming friendship with saintly persons and by regularly and devoutly carrying out their instructions; but then, we are told, it is a matter of rare good fortune that one comes across such a saintly soul, and when one comes across such a person, by rare good fortune, the saintly soul tells us, "You yourself are God. Think of Him alone, meditate on His being. Do not engage yourself in thinking of anybody else."

For a while I used to deal with various matters and perform activities such as knowing and learning with the idea that I was a human being, born of the 'I' consciousness; next I started meditating on myself as God in order to know myself. Now I know that I am the knower of whatever I remember, perceive, or feel; hence, ignoring all that is remembered, perceived, or felt, I contemplate on the nature of the knower.

I am sitting in a secluded place where none can see me, with my eyes half closed. Whatever I remember, perceive, feel or experience comes into being from within myself. My meditation is my torch and what I see is its light, all that I see and remember is just the light of my meditation.

Now I do not feel the necessity to meditate anymore, for the nature of meditation is such that it is spontaneous. In its process, it gives rise to innumerable forms and names and qualities.... and what have I got to do with it all?

Now I am convinced beyond doubt that this meditation of mine is born of God; and the world of things is the product of my meditation only. The cyclic process of origination, sustenance and destruction is the very core of the world's being. However more I may try to know, the same process must repeat. My inquisitiveness has come to an end.

11. SPIRITUAL BLISS

The spiritual aspirant is absorbed in his spiritual experiments and experiences, and the journey continues. One already has the experience of the world through his senses, hence he tries, as far as possible, to depend only on himself, he tries to gauge the extent to which he can go with the minimum of help from others and eschews the use of many things in the world. In due course, the aspirant is sure to win peace; nothing is wanting, he has enough and to spare. He is satisfied and his behaviour reveals it. He expects nothing from those with whom he deals. Is expecting material returns from others any different from begging? If it is true that he has attained to happiness beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, why should he expect a beggarly share from material gains? If he has in his possession the blissful spring of eternal life, why should he ask a price from his dealings with others? It is impossible that one who has realised his Self should rely on others; on the contrary, he feeds others on spiritual food with absolute ease.

As the happiness of the people increases, they begin to love him with greater sincerity, they know his importance in their lives. Just as they acquire and store food, so too they take care of one who has attained the position of eternal peace, identity with the universal spirit, perfection. Yet some people get to know some occult processes from great Saints and practice them, enabling them to acquire certain occult powers and they are misled into thinking they have what they have been striving for, and style themselves as Raja yogins, and engage in the avid pursuit of material pleasures; but one who has tasted the pure bliss of eternal life in Brahman is forever satisfied, the perfect soul does not desire worldly honours.

It is impossible that the spiritually perfect soul should ever desire to be called the preceptor or to make others bow down before him or to expect all to honour his word in every respect. One who gets the

highest kind of happiness from his life source has no interest in material happiness. That is spiritual happiness which makes everyone happy. These are the external qualities characterising the enlightened satyagrahin (seeker of truth).

12. THE TENDER HEART OF THE SAINT

The heart of a mother is full of tenderness, but it is limited to her child only; but the heart of the Saint is all inclusive, it knows the how and whence of the origin of each one and the vicissitudes they have to go through.

The Saint is full of spiritual knowledge and pacific repose, there is nothing wanting. He practices his sadhana in such a way as not to be discovered by others; he has no use for the external marks of saintliness, he dresses in keeping with the time and climate.

Being in touch with the atom, the first cause of the universe, he knows its nature quite well. Blossoming forth is the very nature of the core of this atom, hence changes and differentiation are bound to be there. Knowing this well, the Saint is neither elated by pleasing events nor depressed by the opposite ones.

He has gauged the depth of the knowledge of the common man. He knows its nature from beginning to end. He knows the how and the why of the mentality, also the worthlessness of its achievements and failures. The needs of the body prompt the creature to acquire means of sustenance, but the greed for these makes the creature pursue them to the point of uselessness, and all of this without the least idea of what awaits the life in future. What the creature deems essential and strives to acquire, the Saint knows to be sheer trash.

The Saint is never a victim of passions. Life is a mixture of passions and emotions; Atman, the origin of passions and emotions, is the very core of the Saint's vision, the nature of which he is thoroughly acquainted. He knows its activities and varieties of manifestation, as well as their consequences. The life principle is the principle of feelings, passions, emotions. Desires and passions engendered in this principle are just emotive experiences, they have nothing of substance in them; yet the poor creature thinks them to be of great significance in his life, embraces the basically worthless desires, indulges in sense enjoyment, and runs after them helplessly.

The mother, with sincerity but in ignorance, feeds the roots of misery, while the Saint, with the same intensity, weeds them out. The Saint knows what the welfare of the people lies in much better than does the mother of her child. That is why the heart of the Saint is said to be kind.

13. DEVOTION TO BALAKRISHNA AND HIS CARE

During the process of Bhakta, Bhajan, and renunciation, the experience of the immensity of God is on the increase, but as the vision becomes more frequent, it gets narrower day by day. Here vision and knowledge are identical. In whatever name and form God is propitiated, that name and form he presents himself in. The various forms and names are woven into prayers and hymns and are sung by the common man.

The devotee by his firm determination, and God by his fascination for devotion, are attracted to each

other and the moment they come face to face they merge; the devotee loses his phenomenal consciousness automatically, and when it returns he finds that he has lost his identity, lost into that of God and can never be separated again; God everywhere and no separate identity.

The creator, enjoyer, and destroyer of all names and forms, the controller of all powers, is revealed now; this is God, the Self, Self-luminous, Self-inspired, and Self-conscious. Here is where the primal gunas originate. Though atomic in character, he has in him the absolute power to do what he wills, in accordance with the emotive character of the gunas, and to take any form. This is the atomic center, atomic energy, the first and final cause of the universe.

The God of Gods, the soul of the movable and immovable, the all-pervasive, qualified Brahman, the beloved of the Bhaktas, the ocean of love and devotion is born here. This is Adinarayana, residing in the hearts of the devotees; the Saints call him Balakrishna (Baby Krishna), for in the beginning he is seen to be the atom of atoms. By nature, he is innocence incarnate. He is easily moved by emotions and becomes many (immense), in accordance with the direction taken by the emotions. The nature of the expansion is determined by the excess of one or another of the three gunas. He manifests himself through each of the three gunas at different times in a non-partisan spirit. As the Saints are closely acquainted with him, they know what guna he would induce at any given moment and what the consequences would be, and hence they dissuade him from the excess of his nature. Excess of growth in any guna is dangerous. Satva guna is absolutely good, yet even that is harmful when hypertrophied; Rajas is restless and overbearing, while Tamas is blind and arrogant. Knowing this well, the wise man keeps his soul away from the effects of the gunas, hence the energy of the soul remains undiminished and develops in the right direction.

Satisfying various desires increases the taste for them, and the thirst for enjoyment slowly decreases the power of the soul in imperceptible degrees, but when, setting aside the temptation of the gunas, the devotee finds his pure soul, he fondly takes to its rearing with love and sincerity; only when the devotion is successful is the Atman realised. He is seen as a child at the dawn of victory, hence he is called the child of victory.

The Bhakta is alert not to allow it to be polluted by the craving for sensuous pleasures; the firmer it is in its nature, the greater becomes the power and strength of the soul, hence the Saints do not allow it to lose its steadiness. The crux of rearing it lies in keeping it firm, undeflected by the presence of the gunas. If the spiritual gain of the soul be eclipsed by sensuous desires, it is shaken to its very roots. It is difficult to keep the gunas at rest, that is why the Saints advise stabilising in Self-knowledge.

Those who have realised and stabilised in Self-knowledge are those whose glory is sung from time immemorial; it is their names that form the basis of divine meditation. Sri Krishna, Sri Vishnu, and Sri Rama are some of the innumerable names given to God; originally, these were the names given to the human form, but they became Self-realised and came to know the root cause of all experience. Those who came to possess this knowledge of the Self and kept it pure and secure are known to be Gods and Saints, while those who utilised it for the sake of sense enjoyment are called devils and Ravana. The highest and rarest gain is difficult of achievement, but, if achieved, it is superlatively beneficent, and if not properly cared for, is equally harmful. One who does not get excited by the possession of spiritual knowledge of the root cause can, with love and devotion, cultivate and brighten it. Devotion and prayer and renunciation are firmly established in him, he is always free from desires, and wherever he is the aura of peace and happiness is about him; the aureole shown about the heads of great Saints is a pictorial representation of this fact. Whoever approaches him gets an unsolicited touch of the divine bliss. The Saint never acts as an individual, all his actions are the expression of the divine Lila.

14. SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE PACIFICATION OF THE DESIRE TO KNOW

This universe came into being through the activity of the primal atomic (atmic) consciousness. There was nothing, not even a trace of appearance before self-consciousness, and in this state there came into being the consciousness of one's own existence, the awareness of one's own being. In fact, there was no time, nor space, nor cause. The awareness has no cause for it, hence it is futile to name one. There was no time, hence it cannot be dated. There was no space, hence its location is meaningless; yet the atomic consciousness was felt as such and nothing more, why so? For there was nothing over and above it to be aware of! The awareness only of being was there. How long this state lasted, there are no means to ascertain; but the great miracle is that the self-consciousness was there; with it was the cosmic will, followed by its realisation. The atomic consciousness, on account of its will and its instant realisation, became many and pervasive. Although apparently many, it is all one in essence.

When the atomic consciousness became many and pervasive on account of its will and its instantaneous realisation, the energy of the single atom diversified itself into many centers, each with its own peculiarity and will; hence the conflict. At any given moment, the innumerable centers express their will in a variety of ways; generally, the willing atom does not know the 'whither' and 'what' of its will, but the effect is bound to be there. The tangible result of the wills of the willing atoms is to be witnessed at the moment of cosmic destruction, when the whole universe is reduced to ashes. The loving wills are not cancelled altogether; the great moments of happiness in the world are the result of these wills. The characteristic of the individual energy to will is always operative. It is its essence and it owes it to the primordial energy.

The primal energy that scintillated first is one and homogenous, but appears to be heterogenous due to ignorance.

The quivering atomic energy is designated as the Great Principle by the Vedantas: the essential characteristic of the Principle is consciousness. The felt awareness expands itself into ether, the expanse of the ether is the space. With a single quality this Great Principle became time, space and cause. Next came the three gunas and the five elements. The speed was simply immeasurable.

The original scintillation moved in space and that was the air, the air gathered momentum and fire came into existence. The throbbing of the fire increased and became cold and that was water; the water cooled even more and that was earth. All the characteristics of the previous forms are crystallised in the earth and vibrate there; in virtue of this peculiarity there came into being innumerable varieties of living beings and vegetation, and the original quiver pulsates in and through their vital sap. The original will pervades the whole range of moving and immovable things and is constantly active there.

The scintillating characteristic prior to ether is filling every electron and proton and is constantly increasing in strength. As long as the quiver in the atoms is operative, so long the constituents must be in motion. The original will pervades the whole range of moving and immovable beings and is constantly active there.

The original consciousness sees nothing except itself. It has no organs, yet it is in action with innumerable Spiritual Knowledge and the Pacification of the Desire to Know 131 organs. It is never polluted. The various conscious centers hedged by the limiting adjuncts only think they are different from the original source, but there is only one being, one spirit, one quality; formless, timeless, non-spatial, the one, pure consciousness. There is no scope for difference or distinction. The creature, deluded by the narrow interests of 'I' and 'mine', suffers pain for nothing, it is limited only to itself. Everything takes place at the proper moment, in accordance with the law that binds all, and everything materialises at the proper moment. When Ravana becomes unbearable Rama is there to give relief. When Kamsa rules supreme, Krishna is there as an antidote. This is how the rhythm of ups and downs is maintained.

The controlling force of all these events is the same, it never changes. It cannot be that there is one God in one age and another in another age.

Just a single quality gives birth to the glow of the expanded universe; in the absence of that one quality, all is pure silence. When this one single quality is known and befriended, the heart mingles with the Heart; there is that supreme sense of inalienable mutuality of oneness of quality in all, and all as belonging to the One. The supreme unity is realised; hence it is called the Supreme Self.

All time, all space and all cause have become one for eternity, the One alone is all-active. It has no gain nor loss nor death. It is unborn, eternal, and yet is born every moment and manifests itself in every epoch. All spiritual and intellectual knowledge comes to rest here.

15. THE GAYATRI HYMN

"The Hymn of hymns, oh Uddhava, is the Gayatri hymn. I shall explain it to thee from the beginning to end; pray hear."

(Ekanathi Bhagawata XXI).

The Lord says, "Oh Uddhava, Gayatri hymn is the bedrock of all hymns." All means many. That in virtue of which this number comes to be experienced is Gayatri. The tri-syllabic A+U+M means Omkar, The Logos. The next step starts with two numbers. The first one is the consciousness of one's own being. It is the natural characteristic, the unuttered word. It is the unknowingly spoken word given out everywhere and every moment and no one knows about it. This word, uttered unawares, is the Gayatri hymn, the basis of all hymns. Innumerable words are spoken subsequently; and all the universes spring from them, but the prime source of all is the Gayatri Chhandas, the unspoken word, the unuttered sound. Everyone has the same experience, and what is the experience born of this unspoken word? One's own being.

There are innumerable varieties of being from the ant to the gods, but what is the original being? It is Gayatri. The experience of this being is one's own being. This Gayatri Chhandas comes first, the rest only follows. The characteristic of that being is explained by the Lord as follows: "What is the nature of that hymn? Even though there be the power to create innumerable universes, it cannot be left hold of." The original sound of the unasked for, unspoken, unthought of and unuttered word was born in the form of Chakrapani and it is unique to him; but not recognising it, the Perfect has come to be a deplorable creature through graded degeneration in the course of the temporal process.

The pursuit of the Chhandas is fascinating. For everyone, it is the same awareness of being, the unspoken word, yet spoken. In spite of the efforts of the four Vedas, six Shastras and eighteen Puranas, its interpretation remains incomplete? Still there is the uninterrupted fascination for the Gayatri Chhandas.

What does Gayatri Chhandas mean? It is the awareness of your own being, it is whatever you understand without speech. Wherever there is life, there is the hymn to support it. It vibrates in us, and in spite of years of miserable drudgery, we do not feel like parting with it. In virtue of this Gayatri hymn Sri Rama and Sri Vishnu came to this earth as incarnations, but they mastered it. This unwitting consciousness of your own being is the same in us and in them, but they did it consciously and experienced it as such. Other beings get only to the surface of the meaning, which is only a perversion thereof; the yawning of the creatures lets out the syllables A+U+M.

Meditate on the meaning as you have understood above. You are Chakrapani, the being with a thousand

hands and heads, the unuttered sound. The word and its resounding sense are the first Person, and are experienced as such. The sign of the experience is complete satisfaction of the mind. Gayatri hymn is the substratum of the satisfaction of all and it bursts forth spontaneously, for the sound is ever glorious. The name that resounds in you without being uttered is your own indwelling spirit.

It is enough if you silently listen to the ten sounds, five resoundings, dual reverberation and the single voice, and the symphony of them all. This basic Gayatri hymn is with you only.

Three groups of eight syllables make one series of twenty-four sounds. Gayatri Mantra consists of twenty-four syllables as follows: Oam, Bhooh, Oam, Bhuvah, Oam, Swaha, Oam, Mahah, Oam, Janah, Oam, Tapah, Oam, Satyam, Tat, Savituih, Varenyam, Bhargah, Devasya, Dhimahi, Dhiyo, Yo, Nah, Prachodayaat. Great Rishis and Saints acquire immense power by reciting this hymn of twenty-four syllables. Innumerable worlds are created and destroyed by its power, but consider the power of the bisyllabic word Rama that easily cancels all this power and rests in perfection.

VEDAS AS BASIC: They were basic to the subsequent interpretation, hence they are called basic, but the primal root, first cause of everything is this hymn.

THE BEATITUDE OF BRAHMAN: The experience of one's own being, of the vision of one's own Self and the eventual peace that is unparalleled is called Brahmananda. The experience of one's own nature without the help of others is later on interpreted as the Great Beatitude, (Paramananda).

SPIRITUAL LIFE: Just as there is the luster of luster, so also is Gayatri Chhandas the very life of spirit. The Lord says, "I am hidden and it is my treasure, but that which hides me also reveals me. How do I appear when seen? Surely as non-dual, non-different. He who listens to the vibrating hymn is hidden. With the devout recitation of this hymn everything will be distinctly clear, for it is already there; but if one wishes to realise my vision without it, he will have it, and it will be Advaita, non-dual." (The reference is to Nama yoga as an easy alternative to Dhyana or Raja Yoga.) What do the syllables of this immovable one signify? Absolute bliss of the Self, it is Sat (being), Chit (consciousness), and Ananda (beatitude). This is the essence of the Gayatri hymn. Its contemplation confers absolute bliss.

First published on the Internet by Edward Muzika, August 22, 2005.

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[Top of the page](#)

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