

# The Way of Nisargadatta Maharaj

An Interview with Jean Dunn from [Inner Directions](#)

*Jean Dunn had the rare opportunity of being close to the contemporary sage, Nisargadatta Maharaj. With unquestioning faith, she wholeheartedly absorbed the teachings and presence of Maharaj, opening herself up like a reed to the flow of consciousness that Nisargadatta Maharaj was and is.*



*Over the years Jean published three books that contain transcripts of Nisargadatta's talks, recorded during the years she spent with him. Jean currently lives a very simple life in central California, where a small group of friends have gathered near to be touched by Maharaj's presence and message. NOTE: Jean left the body in 1996.*

*This is an interview between Jean Dunn and The Inner Directions Journal, followed by a few selections from the personal diary she kept from 1977-1981.*

**IDJ:** Was your introduction to spiritual life through Ramana Maharshi or were there other influences before Ramana?

**Jean Dunn:** Well, yes. That's a long story. I was interested in Joel Goldsmith. All my life, it seems I have been searching for something. We all are searching but usually in the wrong places; it does lead us on.

**IDJ:** Did Joel mention Ramana Maharshi's name to you?

**Jean:** No. I was told that he was preparing to visit India when he died.

**IDJ:** When did you first hear about Nisargadatta Maharaj?

**Jean:** About one year before I first saw him. I was staying in Sri Ramanasramam (the Ashram of Ramana Maharshi), and friends were regularly going to see him (Maharaj) in Bombay. I felt there was no need to see anyone else since the

Maharshi was my teacher. I put off the trip twice. The third time friends came and asked me to go, I agreed. So I did, and that was it.

**IDJ:** After seeing Maharaj did you return to Ramanasramam?

**Jean:** Yes, I continued to stay at the Ashram. When Maharaj got very sick, during the last couple of years of his life, I moved to Bombay.

**IDJ:** Can you give me a brief description of what took place daily in Maharaj's flat? Did he have a special routine?

**Jean:** Early in the morning, about 6:00 a.m., there was *arati* (offering of lights) with a group of us. I would arrive before it started and help clean up the room from the day before. After *arati* I went out for coffee and returned to help Maharaj hang the garlands and put *kumkum* (vermilion) on the pictures of different saints hanging in the room. There was a meditation for an hour, then *bhajans* (devotional singing). From 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon Maharaj answered questions from visitors. When the visitors left, we usually went out for tea or buttermilk. Maharaj would usually buy something for his granddaughter; he was crazy about her. When Maharaj rested in the afternoon, I would often



go and just sit with him. There wasn't another meeting until 5:00 p.m. and this lasted until 7:00 p.m. Following the evening session there were *bhajans*, then Maharaj read from various Hindu scriptures, explaining the meaning in *Marathi*, the local language.

**IDJ:** Was there a particular reading that Maharaj liked best?

**Jean:** Not that I know of, though I never asked. I sat through them because it didn't matter to me what he was reading from.

**IDJ:** Maharaj did not use traditional *Vedantic* terminology to describe the approach to Truth and the removal of ignorance. Would you say that was one of the unique aspects of his teachings?

**Jean:** To me it was. He was so natural, and yet you knew that he knew he was not that body. He let that body do whatever it was doing, whatever its nature was. I don't know how to explain it.

**IDJ:** Did Maharaj provide any type of initiation to those who accepted him as a teacher?

**Jean:** Yes. He gave me a *mantra*.

**IDJ:** Did Maharaj recognize a formal Guru-disciple relationship?

**Jean:** Well you see we're not separate. There's no separation; we are one. For the sake of conversation he may have said so, but he told me and the others there, "Don't imagine any separation; we are one."

**IDJ:** I believe Maharaj's own spiritual practice was complete in about three years, so he must have been a ripe soul. Did he ever admit to that? Did he ever talk about that?

**Jean:** No. He'd often talk before visitors came. There was a group of us that would come early, and he'd tell us stories.

Maharaj left everything after his Guru died; he was going to the Himalayas and decided to stay there until he got Realization. Along the way he was walking barefoot in an area where there were no houses to be seen. As soon as he felt hungry, he noticed smoke coming from a house on his left, so he approached it to ask the residents for food. The residents fed him and he drank water from their well. When he went back to the road and turned to look behind, from where he had just come, there was no house there at all.

Later, in the Himalayas he met a fellow disciple who persuaded him that it was more fruitful spiritually, to go back into the world. So he did and he returned to Bombay.

**IDJ:** At the time Maharaj returned to Bombay, was that what we would call a period of *sadhana* or spiritual practice?

**Jean:** Yes. That's when he built the room upstairs where we all met. He only had one business left out of eight, so he took care of that business while all of his spare time was spent upstairs in meditation. It took him three years, after his teacher died, to realize his true nature.

**IDJ:** Is there anything Maharaj specifically said or did that helped to transform your own life spiritually?

**Jean:** It was simply what he was. I probably needed all the teachings; just being in his presence was the key.

**IDJ:** Is it correct to say that Maharaj didn't stress any preconditions for serious seekers?

**Jean:** He said you must do your homework.

**IDJ:** What do you think he meant by homework?

**Jean:** I think he meant one must have been on a spiritual path and have studied the various teachings.

**IDJ:** Were there any other restrictions such as diet, etc.?

**Jean:** No, Maharaj was not a vegetarian.

**IDJ:** What about traditional practices?

**Jean:** No, though he did them at one time when he was young. The only thing he continued to carry on, in a traditional sense, were *bhajans*.

**IDJ:** Maurice Frydman said that “simplicity and humility are keynotes of his life and teachings.” How would you summarize his message to someone who is reading this for the first time?

**Jean:** If you’re seeking the Truth, this is it. But it’s not something everyone wants. Most people want something to make their life better: money, a better house, and so forth. This has nothing to do with the world. That’s why loving a Guru is so helpful. That love is your own Self.

**IDJ:** We don’t often find, in reading Maharaj’s teachings, the integration of Love and Wisdom that were manifest in him. Do you find that this understanding may be missing on the part of the reader?

**Jean:** Yes, particularly in European or Western countries. Until you meet your Guru or become one with the Guru within, the understanding is mostly intellectual. Maharaj said that this generation is ready for this teaching. There was a time when devotion to a God was prevalent; now people want Truth and the search is with the intellect.

**IDJ:** Could you expand on this further?

**Jean:** When you become one with your Self, it’s pure love. You can’t help but feel love and that love flows out. This love combines with knowledge, and you yourself are that knowledge. We have been seeking knowledge outside, but it’s right here where we are.

**IDJ:** Maharaj often uses the words *I Am* or *I Amness* to describe the gateway to

the Absolute. What is the *I Am* he refers to?

**Jean:** That's what you are at the present time, Universal Consciousness. That *I Amness* is the same as Consciousness, that which lets you know you exist.

**IDJ:** Did Maharaj encourage you to record his conversations, or did he have any direct participation in their subsequent publication?

**Jean:** No. I had been home to visit my family, and when I came back, there was no recording taking place. The talks were so deep that Suresh Mehta and I got a tape recorder and asked Vanaja, who attended daily, to record the talks for us. When she sent me the completed tapes, I just started transcribing them. It was continuing without anyone mentioning it until Maharaj discovered what I was doing. He then gave me his blessings, and it just developed into the books.

**IDJ:** Did you feel any difference when you returned to the states and practiced Maharaj's teachings, as compared to being in his presence in India?

**Jean:** No, no difference.

**IDJ:** Are there certain aspects of Maharaj's teachings that you would hold forth for those here in the West?

**Jean:** He stressed meditation and being your true Self.

**IDJ:** While Maharaj often didn't talk about effort in the conventional way, since no effort is needed to attain one's own Self, did he encourage effort, understanding that Realization is an effortless state?

**Jean:** There is no need for effort, only understanding. What effort can give you that which you already are? Simply observe that which you have been identifying with, with detachment, make no judgments; do not try to change anything. What is this thing which you have identified with? You will find that it is just like a robot or computer, which has been programmed by others. A child lives in pure Consciousness at a very young age. The mother tells it: "You are a boy (or girl), your name is —, I am your mother, this is your father." The

programming starts. Others, such as teachers, friends, etc. also program the child. The actions and reactions of that “person” are based on this programming.

## *From Jean's Journal*

**November 18, 1980**

**Maharaj:** *(to me)* Whatever projects you have started, complete them to the best of your ability. It doesn't matter if the projects are a success or failure. Complete what you start to the best of your ability.

Do not talk about the experiences you have with the blooming of the Consciousness; keep it to yourself. Stabilize in the Consciousness. Stabilize the Consciousness. Self must be determined to do this. You must make a decision.

**Questioner:** Is there anything which can be considered sacred?

**M:** Yes. That which does not get polluted with the experiences of the objective world is sacred.

**December, 1980**

**Maharaj:** Perhaps you might be getting some blessings, some benefits from listening to my talks, I don't know. A person who is already dead is not worried about anything. Whether the people like it or not, I don't care. All my actions are not through my body and mind but always Universal Consciousness, appearing to work through this body. So, I don't remember anything of the past and act. It is action in the now.

**Questioner:** Where does Consciousness come from?

**M:** It never comes and goes; it only appears to have come. It is a feeling that it comes and goes.

**Q:** Why does Maharaj know this and we do not?

**M:** It is not difficult for you to know also, but what is the identity with which you are asking?

**Q:** Can *karma* be changed? Is it karmic?

**M:** It is all Consciousness working, not this one is working and that one; it is all Consciousness working.

**Q:** Maharaj said he is not going to die?

**M:** No one was born and no one dies. When people first learned about this illness, those who have affection for me come and talk to me and write to me. They give so many medicines and advice. Why should I do that? Whatever has to happen will happen. I have no interest. Why should I run from doctor to doctor? I don't have fear, so I don't have to do anything. Those who have fear run from doctor to doctor, from medicine to medicine.

**Q:** What is *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (the literal translation is Being-Consciousness-Bliss)?

**M:** It is words, language. In the Absolute there is no emotion. You can take it that *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is the limit which your mind can describe of that state which cannot be described. The one who experiences *Sat-Chit-Ananda* is there before the experience.

You see me as tangible you think I am, but actually I am not. In my true state, I am not.

**April 22, 1981**

**Questioner:** Is stabilizing in Consciousness meditation?

**Maharaj:** Who stabilizes? It is Consciousness that stabilizes in Itself. (*Looking at me*) This one has understood her nature. It is all due to her faith in the Guru. Unless you have such faith in the Guru, you do not establish in your Self. These people go from this swami to that swami. What for? To gather knowledge from scriptures. Stick to your Consciousness; remain in that, and all the burden of



your concepts will drop off. Do not take the help of your Consciousness to build up new concepts.

**Q:** Habit is a great force which makes one stray off.

**M:** The habit of considering Self as the body has influenced everyone so much. The knowledge "I AM" is your Guru.

Be in the One who continually remains a witness to this "I AM." That is *Avalia* (*Avalia* is an Urdu word meaning one who is Original).

Who is the one who sings *bhajans*? It is the intellect of that Guru; who are you, an intruder?

The actions of the whole world depend on this intellect, but when this intellect reaches its apex, it gets merged into *Parabrahman* (the Absolute).

### **Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981): A Brief Biography**

Nisargadatta Maharaj was born in 1897 in the city of Bombay, as Maruti Shivrampant Kampli. As a child, Maruti displayed an introspective, independent and resourceful nature which eventually led him to open several shops in Bombay, selling *bidis* (hand-made cigarettes). Like all young Hindu men, his marriage was arranged, and he and his wife had four children. The successful *bidi* businesses were enough to keep the family in moderate comfort. However, that was not enough to satisfy the inner contentment that Maruti longed for. Imbued with a deeply religious temperament, he adopted several practices designed to fulfill this inner longing. One of Maruti's friends had been visiting a holy man in Bombay and convinced Maruti to join him on the next visit. This was the turning point in Maruti's life. His thirst for Truth ultimately lead him to Siddharmareshwar Maharaj. Accepting the holy man as his teacher, Maruti began his spiritual practice with great faith and determination.

In 1936, after the death of Siddharmareshwar Maharaj, Maruti suddenly abandoned his family and prosperous businesses and began wandering as a mendicant throughout India. During these wanderings, Maruti chanced to meet a fellow disciple who persuaded him that an active life of dispassionate action

was far more meaningful than such wanderings. Maruti took this advice and returned to Bombay to find only one of his businesses still thriving. Feeling that this was enough for his modest needs, he worked during the day at the *bidi* shop while devoting himself to the quest for Self-Realization. Maruti felt the need to have separate quarters to intensify his quest, so he constructed an upper floor to his modest Bombay flat. He would retire to this residential loft to spend time in inner solitude. Later, when the depths of his Realization could no longer be hidden, visitors came from all over the world to visit Nisargadatta Maharaj and have their doubts cleared. This small upstairs room is the place where Maharaj would meet seekers throughout the balance of his life.

Maharaj spoke from his own direct experience, hammering away at visitors' conceptions and "intellectual" understanding of Truth and Freedom. Maharaj taught that one is already free and has never been bound. By turning within, one will see that the mind is a collection of thoughts, simply a shadow on the screen of consciousness. His was an intense look that pierced into the very depths of the soul, infinitely compassionate to those who desired to wake up from the dream of ignorance. Again and again, Maharaj asks those who seek to find the "seeker" and discover their real nature.