

THE MASTER AND THE METHOD

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"I offer my salutations to that Guru, who is verily the Existence Absolute and the Bliss of Brahman, the bestower of Supreme Joy, the Embodiment of Knowledge, transcending the pairs of opposites, (All-pervading, Infinite, Changeless and Untainted) like the sky, attainable through the scriptural declarations such as "Thou art That". One and Eternal, pure and Motionless, the witness of all mental functions, beyond comprehension and devoid of the three Gunas"

Our scriptures proclaim that Guru is Sakshat Sacchidananda Para Brahman itself. He is the way, the Truth and the Life. No disciple can, therefore, truly venture to write about Him until he has become one with the Master, the Absolute. This attempt on my part is hence the contemplation of his auspicious qualities. I pray that Guru Maharaj may be pleased to bless it by inspiring the thoughts and expression.

Like the Vedas, the direct word of God lends itself to different interpretations, our Sadguru being a Great Master presents many facets and thus goads men with different predispositions and belonging to various spiritual levels to duties suited to their predilections and qualifications and sets them on the Godward path. The scope of this article will however be limited to a few aspects of the guidance given by Him to His monastic disciples and advanced aspirants.

Many visitors to the Ashram ask me "How does your Master guide your sadhana? How do you feel the effect of His Grace?" Such questions are difficult to answer as they pertain to one's subjective experience. The relationship between the Guru and His disciple is spiritual and hence psychic. Of all human relationships, it is at once the most powerful and elevating, intimate and personal. Like all great Masters, our Guru Maharaj teaches mainly through the tremendous power of spiritual silence. In His presence all doubts are dispelled and confusions cleared and therefore few elucidations are actually sought by his close disciples. He writes very little -a few messages in aphoristic language on rare occasions. His silent transforming influence on the heart is His essential teaching and the seeker is not aware of it in the initial stages. It is only after some years that he finds himself totally transformed like a ball turned inside out. The working of His Grace is seen as one's own experience as growth in inner life and therefore is inexplicable.

Often during the Manana or reflection stage of my sadhana, I used to feel the effect of this silent teaching of the Master working within me as Antaryamin by way of flashes of the exact and deep import of important scriptural passages. They invariably occurred in the small hours of the morning just before I woke up. Sometimes my doubts, albeit not even expressed, would get clarified by Gurudev in the course of His casual conversation with other devotees. Hence, the greatest vigilance and earnestness are required on the part of the seeker, as he has to wait on every word of the Master, directly said or indirectly conveyed. Otherwise, one may stay very close to Him for many years but still he will derive only little benefit.

Growth in inner life is a gradual process which takes time, unless one has already evolved in his previous births. Once turned to spiritual life, every step, in its own way, contributes to his development either by strengthening a positive latent tendency or weakening a negative one by working it out. Our Gurudev believes in the natural growth of maturity; seldom does He impose His will on the aspirant by strong imperatives of dos and dents except of worse in cases of important crises in his life. Our Guru Maharaj disapproves the tendency on the part of some seekers to change from one Master to another on account of their restlessness and without any valid reason. He says in His own characteristic way "A cow which is under the care of a kind-hearted cow herd who has tied it by a long rope to a peg in

the centre of a green pasture, gets its fill by the afternoon itself. On the other hand, another cow which is on its own, trespasses into the fields, gets beaten up and is still half-fed and hungry even at the time of dusk!!" It is a different matter if the Guru Himself sends His disciple to another teacher for further sadhana or for some special reasons; or after the Mahasamadhi of his Guru, the aspirant seeks the guidance of another Master, his intense sadhana needing such personal direction. In fact in my case, I was initiated into sannyasa in 1953 by His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswathi Maharaj of Rishikesh. But as the Himalayan climate did not suit my health, I sought His permission and joined our Sadguru at Tapovanam in 1957. Both the great Masters assured me that all real Gurus are one, like water being the same everywhere. The point is that unless the whole mind of the aspirant is tuned to his Guru and attains to that perfect state of reliance on the truth of the instructions given by Him, which is called Sraddha or faith, a whole hearted and single-pointed practice will not be possible. It is truly said: "The man is made up of his faith; as a man's faith is, so is he. This Sraddha is the index of the intensity of his aspiration for liberation. It polarises all the mental faculties and powers of the seeker and thus determines the pace of his progress.

By making his surrender to his Master unqualified and absolute, the aspirant has now commenced the process of sinking his small self comprising "I" and "My" notions by hanging his ego on the peg called Guru. In other words, the ghost of "Kartritva" (the sense of doership) is now nailed on the evergreen tree of surrender to the Master. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi says gracefully: "Submit to me and I will strike down the miad. 'Our Master declares: "A true disciple has no sadhana to perform. His only job is to surrender himself completely to his Guru." Bhagavan Sri Ramana says again: "He that has earned the Grace of the Guru shall undoubtedly be saved and never forsaken, just as the prey that has fallen into the tiger's jaws will never be allowed to escape. But the disciple, for his part should unswervingly follow the path shown by the Master." Thus, it is all Grace. In the words of Swami Ramdas "It is Grace in the beginning, Grece in the middle and Grece in the end".

Like all other great Masters, our Gurudev also holds the view that with perfect love or Bhakti, the true knowledge or Gnana is bound to come even unsought, and that from perfect knowledge, true love is inseparable. Raja Yoga concerns itself with the close relationship between the centres of consciousness and psychological reactions, and thus provides the invaluable tool of discipline by which purification of psychic Prana or the vital is effected and a perfect mastery over them is acquired by the aspirant who harnesses it for his spiritual sadhana. Thus the best equipment for an aspirant will be a harmonious blending of Gnana, Bhakti and Yoga. Swami Vivekananda says: "Three things are necessary for a bird to fly- the two wings and the tail as a rudder for steering, Gnana or knowledge is the one wing Bhakti or love is the other and Yoga is the tail that keeps the balance". Bhakta is one who keeps meditating on God with that deathless love which the ignorant have for the fleeting objects of senses. Such "a devotion is indeed the best amongst all the means leading to Liberation ". Bhakti floods the aspirant's heart with the divine water of the Ocean of love, which is God Himself and no place is left for little loves. Bhakta's renunciation is that Vairagya or turning away from all things that are not God, which results from his great Anurakti or love of God. With such spontaneous renunciation, the gate is thrown open for the soul to soar to the lofty heights of Para Bhakti or Supreme Love "when he stands clinging to Him, knowing Him and seeing Him as immanent in and fully pervading all beings like ghee in milk, fire and heat in wood and oil in sesame". This unswerving and all-absorbing love results in total self-surrender and annihilation of ego.

When the stage of Para Bhakti is reached, "the Supreme reveals by itseff and this phase is known as Para Yoga or Higher Yoga` says our Sadguru. These definitions of Higher Bhakti and higher Yoga given by Him are very significant As the Bhakta is the beloved of the Lord, He Himself helps him to realise His true nature. Lord Krishna says : "To these, ever devout, worshipping Me with love, I give that devotion of Knowledge by which they come to me. Out of mere compassion for them, I, abiding in

their self, destroy the darkness born of ignorance, by the luminous lamp of wisdom ". "It is only by the Grace of God, men become inclined towards Advaita".

I was a Bhakta by temperament and training from boyhood. I was much inspired by a great bhakta who often used to get into Bhava Samadhi. He introduced me to the books "Lord Gauranga" by Shishir Kumar Ghose and "Sri Krishna, the Lord of Love" by Baba Premananda Bharati. When I was ordained as sannyasin by His Holiness Sri Swami Sivananda Samswathi Maharaj of Rishikesh, besides giving me mahavakyaU padesa, He initiated me to Saranagati Mantra also as preparatory sadhana. In 1957, when I joined our Gurudev at Tapovanam, He advised me to continue the Mantra japa for some more time. After a few years, the Master, working within me aroused in me a deep interest in Sankara Vedanta. His Grace brought about the propitious circumstances for Sravana or scriptural study under Sri Swami Vidyananda Giri. Manana and Nididhyasana followed.

When the aspirant shows a tendency to get lost at the levels of image worship of gods, the Master out of great consideration gently warns him at the appropriate stage of his maturity, telling him "The Self alone is to be meditated upon; for, all these are unified in It".

Our Gurudev lays great emphasis on adequate preparatory discipline to be undergone by the seeker before taking to the real spiritual life of contemplative meditation. He assigns a very important role to Karma Yoga or desireless action dedicated to God as the only means for attaining Chitta Suddhi or purity of mind. After joining our Sadguru, for about ten years I was placed in charge of management of the temple and editing the Ashram magazine. In 1966 when I entered the stage of Nididhyasana, I was completely relieved of all the responsibilities and given the necessary seclusion.

The Sadhana prescribed by our Gurudev differs from person to person as it is determined exclusively by the latencies or Vasanas of the individual. My Gurubhai, Swami Dasagiri continued to be a Karma Yogi till the end. Our GuruMaharsj **wrote** to him in September 1971 thus on the glory of Karma Yoga: "To perform action at the sublimest heights of Karma Yoga, reposing in the Self and with the constant awareness of That and being one with That in the beatific state of Self-Realisation is That Matchless Transc-endental Bliss itself." It is to be mentioned here that in 1969 when Sri Swami Dasa Giri was relieved of his heavy responsibilities as the manager of the Ashram and sent with me to the contemplative centre, Sri Gnanananda Pranava Nilayam at Yercaud, with Guru Maharaj's blessings, he made very remarkable strides in meditation within a short time. Those of us who were present at the time of his Mahasamadhi on 24th December 1971, were fully convinced that he had received in an extraordinary measure the Grace of our Sadguru. Later we were told by Him that Sri Swami Dasa Giri was in the state of samadhi when he shed his body and that he reached heights not attainable even by yogis.

It is only when a degree of purity of mind has been attained through Karma Yoga and the aspirant has been psychically awakened by Bhakti, he is introduced to the path of Self-inquiry consisting of Sravana or hearing the Truth, Manana or reflection and Nididhyasana or meditation. Master is particular that the seeker should have developed to a remarkable Extent Sadhana Chatushtaya or the four means of attainment viz. Viveka or discrimination between the Real and non-real; Vairagya or dispassion; the group of six virtues - (Sama or calmness of the mind, Dama, or control of senses, Uparati or self-withdrawal. Titiksha or forbearance, Sraddha or faith and Samadhana or self-settledness) and Mumukshutva or aspiration for Liberation. Only then can he understand the higher Vedanta properly and assimilate it with profit. Sadguru is also keen that the student should get at the cream of the Upanishadic teaching directly relevant to his sadhana, which is indeed Para Vidya and not get misled into bylanes of metaphysical dogma and dialectics. He underlines the importance of depth of reflection and meditation on the contents of a few important books or manuals of Vedanta and discourages extensive reading for its own sake. Simple treatises most often referred to by Him in this

connection are Vedanta Choodamami, Kaivalya Navaneetam and Ribhu Gita. He warns the aspirant against developing Sastra Vasana or attachment to scriptural study, an obstacle so difficult to surmount later. He sternly disapproves any study of books during the stage of Nididhyasana, except as a spiritual exercise to stimulate the mind whenever it gets sluggish.

Certain readings from Upanishads, Vivekachoodamani and Srimad Bhagavad Gita were recited by the monastic disciples every morning in the Master's presence and this Samskam built over a few years was later found to be very valuable for reflection.

Needless to say that His Upadesa of Mahavakya of "TAT TWAM ASI" given to some disciples and of "AYAM ATMA BRAHMA" in one case of Vidwat Sanyasa was of special importance, transmitting as it did a great spiritual charge from Him to the initiates.

In the stage of Manana, the aspirant enters the phase of Self-enquiry during which he discriminates between the enveloping sheaths or Kosas and the indwelling Self and rejects the former to know the Residuum as Self. Thus it is not a process of mere reasoning in the mental plane, but a diligent practice to make all the knowledge gathered during Sravana a part of his consciousness by constantly rejecting all that is non-Self. "To fix the mind firmly in the heart until the forces of projection and veiling due to Rajas and Tamas are destroyed and to awaken with unswerving and vigilant concentration on the Self, ceaseless like the unbroken flow of oil, the true and cognate tendency which is characteristic of the Atman and is expressed by sayings : "AHAM BRAHMASMI" ("I am Brahman") and "BRAMAIVAHAM" ("Brahman alone am I") is termed Nididhyasana or Atmanusandhana, that is constancy in the Self" says Bhagavan Sri Ramana in His introduction to the translation of Vivekachoodamani. During Manana and Nididhyasana, the aspirant receives special attention from Guru Maharaj in various ways. Constant emphasis is laid by Him on the necessity for the sanyasin to live always in spirit giving the minimum and due attention to the flesh. He should offer up his body to Prarabdha Karma, as it is indeed its product. A monk's non-identification with his body should become as natural to him as his non-identification with his dream body or shadow. By the Grace of Sadguru, he is helped to get over "the indecent clinging to life."

Our Master places a glowing ideal before His monastic disciples. "Sky thy roof, grass thy bed and food what chance may bring, well cooked or ill-cooked, judge not". He tells them "Mahabhogi" or the Perfect Enjoyer is he who with patience consumes everything that comes his way like the blazing forest-fire, without discriminating whether it is tasty or not, clean or unclean and healthy or otherwise". In another of His exalted moods, He will sing from the lines of the Saint Pattinathar: "Wandering in the dark like a ghoul, lying motionless like a corpse, eating all alms like a dog, running hither and thither like a jackal, considering all women as his mother, treating all as his own and moving with humility, the true Gnani or Knower will be child-like in his disposition". Some of the sannyasin disciples had also been encouraged to take Madhukari Bhiksha, the alms collected from a few houses, like the honey gathered by the bee from many flowers.

Gurudev advises moderation in everything. Golden mean is the role prescribed by Him in the matter of food, sleep or speech. He would remind the aspirant "To him whose food and recreation are moderate, whose exertion in action is moderate, whose sleep and waking are moderate, to him accrues Yoga, which is destructive of pain ... '. Austerities like fasting or vigils as also vows of silence are not normally encouraged by Him except for special reasons.

The Master repeatedly advises His disciples to maintain mental equipoise under all circumstances by dropping all mental preferences, developing the habit of reposing in the Witness and standing apart from the workings of the mind. Whilst Guru Maharaj understands the difficulties of the

seeker and readily forgives his lapses, He does not at all countenance pride or arrogance in him. He severely discourages the habit of finding fault with others or the tendency to complain.

A sannyasin's life is a constant struggle to transform his entire lower nature. Vasaanas and desires in him if merely suppressed, will get revived in a recoil. They have to be overcome by being exposed to the light of Truth and knowledge. Annihilation of Vasana, is indeed Jeevanmukti or liberation while yet alive. The Master is therefore very particular that the sannyasin should overcome all the past aptitudes and attachments to the relatives, friends and vocation of his earlier life. He warns him against the distracting projections of the mind or Vikshepa; for, shutting out the external world is indeed the stepping stone for Liberation. He calls upon the seeker to renounce all his Sankalpas or mental resolves and fancies and become a true Sarva sankalpa sannyasi. By His own example, He teaches him that there is no yesterday or tomorrow for a monk and hence there is no place in his life for initiative and planning. Becoming a sarva arambha parityagi, he has to live from moment to moment, just allowing things to happen to himself and accepting everything without any reaction.

Our Gurudev does not advise any external aid to develop concentration. "Concentrate within" is always His dictum. Although a great authority on Hatha Yoga and Pmnayama, seldom does He recommend these techniques. He advises watching the breath with constant Ajapa of "SOHAM", synchronising "SO" with the outgoing breath and "AHAM" with the incoming. It is interesting to note that Bhagavan Sri Ramana also considered this method as the easiest and the best to control the mind. He says that by watching the breath, Kumbhaka or retention results. Our Gurudev insists on patient and persistent practice and draws the special attention of the aspirant to the immortal words of Lord Krishna: "Little by little, let him withdraw, by reason (Buddhi) held in firmness; keeping the mind established in the Self, let him not think of anything".

In essence, His method is that of Vichara or enquiry after the preparatory phases of Bhakti and Yoga. This has been beautifully summed up by a devotee in an invocatory verse in Tamil thus : "My salutations unto the holy feet of my Sadguru who teaches Yoga through Bhakti and then Gnana through Yoga to all those caught up in the cycle of birth and death because of their mistaken attachment to the ignorant and estrangement from the saints!"

It is only when the mind is externalised through the activity of the intellect and the senses, that the world of names and forms makes its appearance. As opposed to this bahirmukha drishti or release of the mind and its emergence, antarmukha drishti or introversion is the restraint of the out-going mind and its absorption in the heart. Our Sadguru reiterates this point very often by saying that when the mind under the impulsion of Rajas or activity, becomes restless and influenced by Tamas or darkness, it manifests the external world. Such a mind cannot catch the reflection of True Consciousness. It has to be made very subtle, pure and placid through great Vairagya and practice of Atma Nishta. Total retirement from all activity is one of the important requisites for this single-pointed devotion to Knowledge. Sadguru always provided the necessary seclusion for the disciples who have reached this stage of Nididhyasana.

It will be relevant here to give a typical example of the teaching the Master from one of His letters to the monastic disciples. It is in the form of a benediction embodying in itself a spiritual instruction of perennial value.

"May Sadguru's Grace be with you to be thinking of That incessantly, to attain Self-Realisation or Atma Sakshatkara leaving behind mind, all mentation and thought, to be That and to be the Bliss beyond all That ! Blessings again and again to you to enjoy That as the Inner Light within you and be That in the Ultimate State beyond all the triad and transcending all duality!"

In the state of waking, one is with the consciousness of the physical body and the senses; Consciousness of the physical body and the senses; in dream, with a world of names and forms created by the mind with It as its Witness; and, in deep sleep, as a Witness of Itself. In the Fourth state or Turiya beyond, one is That as a Brahmavid, Variyan or Varishta. To be That in the States of a Jeevanmukta and Variyan and coming down to lower heights now and then, assuming jivahood is the stage of practice. Again my blessings to you to reach the highest state of Aroodha, when all is left behind, jivahood liquidated and mind annihilated !"

Our Guru Maharaj frequently refers to the analysis of the three states of consciousness viz. waking, dream and deep sleep, and points out that it is only by merging of the one in the next successively, the Fourth or Transcendental state of Turiya can be apprehended. It is essential that Atman is the changeless Substratum on which the changing states of waking, dream and sleep are superimposed. Attaching the greatest importance to the destruction of the mind, He often quotes from the ecstatic outpouring of Saint Thayumanavar; "There the thought (mind) was born and there again the thought (mind) died and rose purer. All states exist there. There even the trace of duality with an experiencing ego considering itself as witnessing Self is transcended". The mind after having attained to the knowledge of Reality of Atman does not imagine, as there remains nothing to be imagined. The mind is then like fire when there is no fuel to burn. In that state, Brahman alone is realised and hence mind consisting of determination and volition ceases to exist. The mind becomes identical with Brahman which is devoid of all duality of cognition. Thus it is said "The Birthless (Brahman) is known by the birthless (mind)".

A misconception prevails amongst a few aspirants that surrender to Guru is not consistent with the path of enquiry and that once Upadesa of Mahavakya is received from the preceptor, His guidance is no longer necessary for further sadhana of Manana and Nididhyasana. That they are misled in holding such views will be clear from all that has been stated earlier. Such wrong notions are entertained only because of inadequate experience and insufficient appreciation of the great role of the psychic influence of the Master over the disciple in giving direction to and speeding up his spiritual evolution. A point to be always remembered is that all truly liberated men have laid the greatest emphasis on the devotion to Guru. In this matter, our Guru Maharaj Himself sets an example to His disciples. All His references to His Guru, His Holiness Sri Swami Sivaratna Girt of Jyotir Math (particularly on the day of His Aradhana on Chitra Poornima) are always surcharged with sublime emotion, revealing our Sadguru's extra-ordinary devotion and love for His Preceptor.

Our Master's emphasis on the respect for tradition and Guru Parampara or the line of Preceptors is well brought out by the importance attached by Him to the Pada Pooja or the worship of Padukas of Acharya Sankara, which takes place almost everyday at Tapovanam. The exalted mood in which our Sadguru Himself carried the Padukas on His head on Sankara Jayanthi in 1964 made an unforgettable impression on the minds of all the devotees present. Acharya Sankara Himself says "Gnana Nishta or single-minded devotion to Knowledge is indeed unattainable to those who have not been properly initiated into traditional knowledge by the Gurus (the Great *Ones*)".

"Lord! You are the Reality Itself remaining as my innermost Self, ruling me during all my countless incarnations ! Glory be to You, Who have now assumed a form in order to instruct me ! How can I ever repay Your great help and Grace which will enable me to attain Liberation? Glory, glory unto your **holy feet**".