

At Every Breath, A Teaching

Rudite Emir

Gurudev never tried to give the illusion that just because we had turned to the spiritual life, everything would run smoothly, without obstruction, but warned us instead that on the material plane, change and disturbance and sorrow are part of the mix. He compared life's journey to travel over a long - distance road:

When you are traveling across the country a long distance, some part of the road may be under repair or in bad condition. At such patches of rough road, drive slowly and move carefully, and once the smooth road comes, step on the gas. Patches of the road will always be slightly bad

Criminal or Dignitary

In a letter, Gurudev told the story of a father who pointed out to his son a man who was being hustled along the road between four soldiers. The father said: "Son, that one who is walking between the soldiers is a great criminal, and he is being taken to prison."

After a few yards, the son and father came to the main road and saw a large crowd waiting on the sidewalk. The road had been cleared of traffic. Soon they saw a procession of soldiers on motorcycles, followed by the President of the country riding inside a luxurious limousine, which was protected on all sides by many soldiers.

The boy cried out, "Daddy, there goes the biggest criminal!" The father hushed the child as he lovingly explained that they were seeing not a criminal but the President. Gurudev elaborated further:

Both of them, the criminal and the President, have soldiers around them. A man is a prisoner when he is under the command of the soldiers. But when the soldiers are under his command, he is the President or king himself.

Similarly, you may have your own house and child. You will become their prisoner if they come to rule over you. But you shall continue to be the sovereign when you control them, not they you.

No Molding Required

Radhika Krishnakumar had brought her small infant to Swamiji and asked, "How do I teach him to become a good human being?" "You don't have to mould him or teach him anything," was Swamiji's reply. "You just keep improving as a person, and he'll be fine."

"He Does It All"

One day in 1992, two people approached Swamiji about doing some healing work on him through a method that analyzes and treats the human system at the energetic level. For the analysis, the practitioner needed a few strands of his hair. His immediate response was, "No! I don't want to keep this body around. I've finished my work here."

However, after some more gentle pressure from the inquiring parties, he tugged vigorously at his beard, but no hairs come loose. "Nothing! Not one!" he said. Then he

gave an offhand hint as to where some loose hair may be lying about. The two devotees took this as a go ahead sign and located a hairbrush with the required strands.

When the practitioner did her analysis, the results were so astounding that she repeated the measurements over and over again to assure that she had done her work correctly. But the unprecedented results remained the same: At the pathological (physical) level, Swamiji's body was showing readings so low as to indicate death of the body. However, when the readings were taken at his energetic level, they were so high that they went off the scale. The practitioner's interpretation was: Swamiji's as - though - dead physical body was being kept alive by some immense source of energy.

When a devotee relayed the analysis to him, she asked: "Swamiji, how do you do it?"

His reply was immediate and vigorous, "I do absolutely nothing; He does it all. This one is a totally useless fellow. It is His work alone!"

To many devotees who heard this story, it became a scientific corroboration of what they had heard said for many years: A master is an instrument in the hands of the Lord. His life is sustained not by his own desires, for they no longer exist, but by the aggregate desires of those around him.

A similar theme was repeated on many occasions.

Chief Sevak

During a spiritual picnic back in the early days, Gurudev demonstrated how one should conduct oneself as a worker, a sevak (one who serves others). At the outset of the journey, he declared that he was the "Chief Sevak".

He boarded his bus only after everyone in the entire convoy of buses was in his or her seat.

En route, one of the buses had a breakdown. Gurudev stopped the whole convoy and remained near the bus that was being repaired. Only after the repairs were completed, did he allow the convoy to resume the journey.

Working with Crooks

One man told Swamiji, "I have a problem: The man I work with is a crook. But this work is my livelihood! What do I do?"

Swamiji's answer was: "Do your work; do your level best. When it gets very difficult, wink at the Lord. When the time is right, the crook won't be there any more."

Viji Sundaram, who served as editor of the Chinmaya Mission Vedanta journal Tapovan Prasad, writes about the lesson she received about journalism from her guru. "In the five years I worked for the Mission as editor of Tapovan Prasad," she said while Gurudev was still alive, "I learned a lot about the profession I had chosen just by watching Swamiji slip into the role of writer. He could, and still can, do it effortlessly. No writer's block seemed to trouble him.

I once asked him how he did it, and he said, 'I let the thoughts flow through me,' and added, for my benefit, 'When you compromise your values, you block the flow of your natural creative instincts.'

No Doors Closed on Love

Whenever Neeru Mehta travelled with Swamiji, she would go into his room before he retired to check on his drinking water, offer her *pranams*, say "Hari Om!" - and then leave the room.

Twice, once in Lucknow and once at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, when Gurudev stood up to close the door, Neeru bowed and stood facing him. He looked and waited, then said, "Please turn around. I can't close the door in your face."

"This sentiment is expressed by many persons," says Neeru, "but no one I have met in my life, except for Swamiji, puts it into practice: not closing the door in the face of someone you love."

A Transforming Moment

Swami Chidananda, teacher of Vedanta courses both at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in Mumbai and Sandeepany San Jose in California, experienced a deeply transforming moment with Gurudev during an informal gathering. Swamiji had just come out of his room to give some time to a group of devotees. They were singing *kirtan* [devotional songs] when Swamiji walked very slowly into the room.

"As he came near me," recalls Swami Chidananda, "he held my folded hands for a while, greeted me, and then proceeded to take his chair. That was it. I do not know what went through me, but I sobbed continuously for perhaps twenty minutes."

Curbside Yajna

One early Saturday morning during a *Yajna* in Napa, California, Swamiji and his listeners had already gathered by the high school door where his 6 a.m. classes on *Vivekachudamani* had been held all that week. The caretaker had remembered to open the doors of the building every morning except this, a Saturday. But that didn't stop Gurudev. With a smile on his face, he sat down cross - legged on the cold curb of the sidewalk, motioned the rest of us to sit down in front of him, opened the text, and began to teach. And so he continued for the next one and a half hours as the brisk morning grew gradually warmer around us and traffic noises in the distance slowly beckoned the day awake.

Blank Tape

Gurudev's talks were being planned at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California. One devotee asked Gurudev for his permission to record the talks on audio tape, but Gurudev did not grant it. The devotee decided to record the talk anyway. He set up all the equipment, checked it carefully, and proceeded to record the talk. However, when he checked the tape at the end of the lecture, he found that it was still blank.

Shivaratri Miracle

It was Shivaratri at Sandeepany Sadhanalaya in Mumbai. Although Gurudev usually retired to his room in the evening, that night he had said: "I'll come out at midnight and go to the temple. Whoever wants to come with me, come, but just remember one thing: Nobody should touch me!"

Those who were there that night recall that when Gurudev came out of his room, he was "shining," as though light were streaming from him.

The *brahmacharis* and the devotees who followed in his footsteps in their bare feet to the Jagadeeshwara Temple say that the spots where Gurudev had placed his feet were warm.

Playing with One's *Prarabdha*

Bharati Sukhatankar was helping Swamiji pack. Giving her his cufflinks, he said, "There will be four bags there. Look for one small plastic bag inside a larger plastic bag. Put the cufflinks in the small empty bag."

Bharati remembered some cufflinks that Swamiji had with a beautiful image of orchids pressed into them. She didn't see them in the suitcase.

"Swamiji, whatever happened to the cufflinks with the engraved orchids?"

"Swamiji replied, "My dear, you must learn to play with your *prarabdha* (that portion of one's past *karmas* that is being lived out in one's current life). I know the art. You don't."

It was Swamiji's *prarabdha* to receive things from others: gold cufflinks, silver - knobbed chappals, silver - tipped canes, gold chains - but he just continued to give them away, playing with his *praradbha* with ease and joy.

Like an Army General

Swami Gangeshwarananda was 108 years old when Gurudev dedicated a *yajna* in his honor. Swamiji had great respect for this old, blind Swami and visited him whenever he could. One time, Swamiji, with his *padukas* on, had just walked across some wooden planks over a canal and arrived at the blind Swami's side without informing anyone. "Chinmayananda, so you've come!" said Swami Gangeshwarananda.

Swamiji was curious how the blind Swami had known that it was he who had arrived.

"The way you walk," answered Gangeshwaranandaji. "Only one Swami walks like that, and it is Chinmayananda. You walk like an army general!"

Heaven

At one of the Swamiji's camps, a devotee asked him at Satsang:

"Swamiji what does one need to do to invoke an experience of *Brahmaloka* - Heaven?"

Swamiji gave no answer. Pindrop silence followed for some fifteen minutes. One could hear the leaves rustling outside.

Finally Swamiji said, looking at the questioner: "*Buddhu* [you fool], where do you think you've been for the last three weeks?"

Spiritual Prescription

Once an eminent doctor came to meet Gurudev at his ashram with a copy of Gurudev's Holy Gita (Bhagavad Gita) and asked for his autograph. Gurudev wrote the following message in her copy of the book:

Rx.

*Two stanzas, three times a day, for three months.
To be repeated if symptoms persist.*

Encounter Groups

Referring to the undisciplined use of some encounter group techniques, Gurudev wrote in a letter to a study group leader: The mutual exploration of the mind is a dangerous game. It is scavenging work. It is dangerous. Beware! The cleaning of your own mind itself is sufficient work. Don't try to clean all "commodes." If you must, then wear a mask and a pair of thick gloves. Teachers do it often. They have the defense equipment plenty.

If you keep on analyzing yourself, your despair will increase - and your thoughts will unnerve you. Please stop it. Rise above them. *Viveka* and *Vairagya*, right knowledge and dispassion, are the wings for the bird of life in you to reach the roof gardens of liberation.

Recognizing Your Divinity

Swamiji was telling us that when the Guru first tells you that you're *Brahman* and not the body, you don't quite believe him. He expanded on this idea with a story from his own experience:

One day, Swamiji was walking down a path near Rishikesh. It was so hot that not even "a decent crow" was out at that time.

"Hey, Swami!" a female voice called out, but he paid no heed. He had just recently taken *sannyasa*, and his station was new to him. He didn't realize that he himself was being addressed. When he finally realized it was he the woman was addressing, she invited him to have *bhiksha*.

"In the same way," said Swamiji, "you need time to get used to the idea that you are in essence the pure Self - *Atman*, *Brahman*. It takes practice.