

Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah

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Every student, every individual, every disciple, in every walk of life, whichever science he is learning has to undergo a process of discipline under a Master, under a person who is well-versed in that science which the student wishes to gain a Mastery over. This is also true in the science of *Atma Vidya*¹. When we approach a Guru, when we approach a Master, what exactly are we searching for? How is it that we have to approach the Master? What would be the best way to make use of the opportunity provided by the Lord that the Guru is there in our lives? These are but a few of the questions that come to mind when we think about this subject. The answers to these questions have been answered very beautifully in the *Guru Stotram*.

Who is the Guru?

We have many pre-conceived notions about how or who a Guru should be, the first one being appearance. This reminds me of an incident that happened the first time I had gone to some place in Andhra for a *yagna*. All the arrangements had been made over the phone. In the phone conversation, I had said, "I am so and so and I will be coming by such and such a train. Please come and pick me up at the station. I will be quite evident since I will be wearing all-yellow clothes." I got down at the station and waited with my small suitcase. I could see a bunch of people running around, obviously trying to search for somebody. The whole crowd which had to leave the station was already gone. The whole crowd which had to enter the train for departure was already on board. The train moved out from the platform. Now only that group and myself remained standing on the platform. Finally one of them dared to come up to me and ask, "*Woh tumhare Guruji kahan hain?*"² After confirming that they had really come for Uddhav Chaitanya, I said, "I am sorry to say, but it is me." "Ohhh! It is you! We thought...." Each one jumped in, giving a description of how they thought I should have been - we thought it would be somebody older. *Thodi si dadhi hogi*. Some beard at least. Maybe some baldness; *akhanda-mandalakaram*, a little paunch.

Who is the Guru? Gurudev is the Guru. Once, in Bombay, in a *Bala Vihar* class, I was talking to the children about God and *darshan* of God and similar topics. The children immediately asked, "Have you seen God?" Something flashed in my mind and I said, "Yes, I have seen God." And, who is that God? *Cinmayam vyapi yat sarvam*, if you have seen Gurudev, you have seen God. All the questions, all the confusions, all the different kinds of dilemmas about who the Guru should be are totally removed from life. Today if we are trying to understand that Guru's nature or essence, it is happening just because of his grace. *Cinmayam vyapi yat sarvam, trailokyam sacaracaram*, the moment we totally dedicate ourselves to this understanding our lives are miraculously changed. We see and experience life in a whole different dimension.

¹ Self-knowledge

² Where is your Guruji?

What is the nature of the Guru?

As the first verse of the *Guru Stotram* indicates, the Guru is *akhanda-mandalakaram*, the complete essence, unbroken, ever-existing; all-pervading that exists in every part of this universe. Right now the equipment that we have is not tuned to recognize that essence even though it is quite evidently available in and through the whole world, the whole universe in every form. In order that the essence maybe recognized, the Lord provides in a student's life, in a disciple's life, in an individual's life that essence in an embodied form. Each one of us expressing in this world has the same three instruments – B (body), M (mind) and I (intellect). By the grace of the Lord, these three instruments are totally functional, in absolutely beautiful condition in every human being, but they have to be tuned in such a way that the all-pervading essence can be understood.

After taking *diksha*, a whole group of us fresh *brahmacharis* went to Vrindavan. There after *Bankebihari darshan*, we went to the *asrama* of Akhandananda Maharaj. Govindanand Maharaj was conducting the *satsang*. The moment he saw sixteen yellow clad people in the crowd, he immediately invited us to come up to the stage, "*Virajye*³." After we sat down he gently passed the mike and said, "Any one of you please speak in the *satsang*." We were just fresh, immediately after *diksha*, but nevertheless one of us came forward and started speaking. He spoke in Vedantic jargon, trying to prove his point with quotations from different scriptures and Masters, "*Chittakakasha ke chidakasha mein jo Paramatma virajman hain...*" For fifteen minutes, he kept quoting from here and there. After fifteen minutes he thought he had done a very good job and he stopped. Govindanandaji had just one comment, "It is fine that you have told us what all these people said, but now tell us your opinion." The brahmachari was rendered speechless! Whenever we want to define something, especially, the Lord's nature or the Guru's grace, we end up giving quotations, but the Masters do not need to quote anything from anywhere. To prove the Lord's nature we quote from the scriptures, but the Masters are living proof of the authenticity of the scriptures. The *acarya*, the Guru is described by Sankara with these two words, *Brahmavit Srotriyah*, he who has Mastered different scriptures, who can eloquently give the message of the scriptures to his disciples and who also has a direct experience of that truth which is defined in the scriptures.

This can be seen in the life of Masters like Raman Maharishi. Early in his life, just after he left his family and was doing *tapas*, he was recognized by a great Master called Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni. Ganapati Muni asked him, "I know where are you reveling, but have you gone through the different scriptures, the Upanishads?" Raman Maharishi replied that he had not and asked Ganapati Muni to read one of the Upanishads to him. Ganapati Muni started with Isavasyopanishad. After having heard eleven-twelve mantras, Raman Maharishi asked him to stop. When Ganapati Muni asked for an explanation, Bhagwan said, "Everything that you are reading is nothing but my own nature that I am reveling in. I cannot bear so much self-praise." The Masters are the living proof of the scriptures, of the practical applicability of the philosophy of Vedanta.

How do we define philosophy? Normally, it can be defined in two ways. The first definition is delayed wisdom. We know we shouldn't get angry, yet we still get carried away by anger or other negative emotions. Then we repent after the fact. So, delayed wisdom is philosophy. The second definition is *para-vachan*, all the knowledge available to give suggestions to others, but without practical application in our own lives. We say that we respect this philosophy, revere this philosophy, but we end up saying that these principles cannot be applied in the so-called "real" world. In the "real" world these principles are obsolete. And here are the Masters who live these values to the core in this

³ Please be seated.

"real" world. Their lives prove that what is taught by the scriptures is not myth, but something that belongs to each one of us and is meaningful in our lives.

The Master is *caitanya*, all knowing, *sasvatah*, ever existing, not restricted to one body. When we restrict the Guru, or the principle of the Guru to one body, and refuse to accept the grace of that Guru through different sources, we are insulting the Master who has taught us this principle of all-knowing and ever-existing, *caitanya sasvatah*. And how does his experience flow to us? *Santah* - his memory, his *smaran*, the moment we think of him, the only thing that pervades our system is the piece and joy of the *smaran*, regardless of whatever kind of disturbance we are feeling. The moment the Guru enters in our lives, there is an undeniable peace that pervades over our entire being. All the many confusions and tensions that we carry around appear to disappear in his presence. Kabirdasji in one of his *dohas* says that the Guru is like a bitter *neem vriksha*, the *neem* tree, growing in a forest full of *candan trees*. Even that *neem* tree, in spite of being *neem*, just because of that *sangatya*, just because of that *satsang* of *candan* trees starts carrying the fragrance of sandalwood. Such is the contagious nature of the Master.

The Master is defined as *vyomatitah*. What is meant by *vyomatitah*? When our Guruji was teaching us in the *asrama*, and he felt that we had not understood the point, he would say, "Never mind, this is *vyomatitah*." We did not understand what he meant by that remark. Then he explained, "Between the ears what exists is *vyoma*. This subtle thought is not grasped because it is beyond this *vyoma*. There has to be some stuff between the ears. If it is *akasa*, space, empty, then you cannot grasp subtle concepts!"

The world in Sanskrit is known as *prapanca* - *prakarsena prakatita panca mahabhutani iti prapanca*. The five elements in different permutations and combinations express forth as this *jagat*. Each of these elements which is involved in the creation of this world is subtler than the other - earth, water, fire, air and space, with earth being the grossest one. If you look at a stone, you can see that the stone is two-dimensional; it has an x axis and a y axis. Water is subtler than earth because along with the x and y axis, it has a flow. Fire, not only spreads in two directions, but also in a third direction. When you burn a candle the flame goes up even if you turn the candle upside down. It has a third dimension that is subtler than the water. *Vayu*, the air which is even subtler than fire, spreads and moves all around. *Akasa*, which is the subtlest one, is so subtle that it includes the whole of this *brahmanda*, the whole of this universe, but at the same time, is also present in the eye of a needle. Subtlest is this *akasa*! This is where we can see the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. Buddhism stops here whereas Hinduism takes it one step further. In Buddhism, Nirvana is defined as nothingness, or *shunya*. *Shunyatva* is the nature of this *akasa*. When that nothingness is the object of perception, the entity that recognizes it cannot be nothing. *Vyomatitah*, the one who is recognizing that *vyoma*, nothingness, he is ever existing, all pervading Truth. That is the nature of each one of us, and that which does not get contaminated by any of these five elements and their effects is *niranjana*.

Such is the pure essence of the Master! So when we prostrate to the Master, we are not prostrating merely to the physical form, but to that essence. It is that principle that we are bowing down to. Immediately after Gurudev's *mahasamadhi*, Guruji, Swami Tejomayanandaji had come to spend some time with our batch at the *asrama*. During that time, he would regularly get visitors who would come up to him and cry about Gurudev not being with us any more. It was as if *Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati* were flowing from their eyes! He listened patiently for some days, but then one day he gave back a really strong response. In those days, Guruji used to sing this *bhajan* a lot, "*Bhagwan meri nayya us paar laga dena*." There was this *amma* who suddenly started crying in the middle of the *bhajan*, "Gurudev..." and he just stopped the *bhajan* right there and said in a thundering voice, "How dare you insult Gurudev by saying that he is not here? His physical form may not exist, but if you have not understood the principle that he has

been explaining all these years and you call yourself a devotee for the past thirty-fourty years and still say that he does not exist you are insulting his presence."

When we prostrate, we do *namaskar*, we are not prostrating to that form, we are doing *namaskar* to that Master who is beyond the form. *Bindu-nada-kalalintah, tasmai sri-gurave namah*. All that expresses forth in this world expresses in two forms - *bindu* and *nada*. *Bindu* is the form; *nada* means sound or subtle vibrations. *Kalalintah* is that which is unmanifest. There is a beautiful scientific meaning to this statement. Every particle that expresses in this universe, expresses forth because of the manifestation of subtle energy - *nada*. The whole world was created because of that vibration, that sound, that energy. In the Bible also it is said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." *Omkara bindu samyuktam nityam dhyayanti yoginah*. It is that Word which manifests as the world. Energy solidified is matter. Does that energy exist before solidification? Going into scientific terms, every particle can be broken down into atoms; atoms can be further broken down into electrons, protons and photons. Once we start analyzing photons, we find that something exists, which does not have a mass or movement, but it exists as energy or vibration. That energy expresses forth, solidifies to become this content, this matter. The Master is beyond *bindu* and *nada*; he represents that principle which creates and sustains this whole world, both manifest and unmanifest.

The Guru is one who has taught us that this essence is all pervading, ever existing. This understanding should enable us to approach any Guru to seek his blessings. But, what do we do? We exist as a body, so we relate to our Guru as a body from the standpoint of our own existence. This misapprehension does not allow us to accept the grace of the Guru flowing from other Masters because they are in a different physical form. We tend to restrict the Guru to one frame and refuse to accept his grace through the different bodies that he is expressing. This is, in fact, like an insult to our own Guru.

This principle can be understood through a story. Once Samarth Ramdas, Guru of Sivaji and a great devotee of Rama goes to visit Pandharipur, which is abode of Vithoba, another form of Lord Krishna. The moment Vithoba sees that Ramdasji is entering the premises of the temple, he immediately says to Rukmini, "Change your makeup, wear the makeup of Sita and I will change mine to Rama." She wants to know the reason. "Ramdas is coming." In this hurry of changing His form, the Lord still has a *murli* in one hand. Ramdas comes in and asks, "Lord, what has happened to You? You are such a straight forward person, why are You holding that twisted Krishna's, *vakra* Krishna's flute instead of an arrow?" Immediately the Lord realizes His mistake and changes it to an arrow and asks Ramdas if he is satisfied now. "Yes, now I am satisfied. *Tripto'smi*" Though he is visiting Krishna's temple, what is he looking for there? Rama, his own deity, his *istadeva*.

Once Gurudev had made a very powerful statement, "Cry not for me when I am not there. Dropping this physical form, I shall be reaching you in different counters." So the Master is expressing through different forms. Whichever form we prostrate to, whichever form we take blessings from, it is our own Guru blessing us through that form. Understanding this principle is very necessary for a disciple. We tend to get confused very easily. We neither have to be fanatics nor refuse the blessing of the Masters flowing from different sources.

When we understand that the Guru cannot be limited to one physical body, we can truly understand that the nature of the Guru is *adi-anadi* - he is the beginning and the beginning less. He is *parama daivatam*. The moment we accept the Master as nothing less than God Himself, it brings about a subtle transformation in how we relate to everyone and everything around us. When I was growing up in India I had a neighbor who worked as a railway guard. It was funny to listen to the language he used. How did he express himself? When he got angry with his children for being too slow, he would

say, "Why are you working like a goods train? Why can't you work like a super fast express? I have already given you the green signal" He used the metaphor of the train for everything that he thought, imagined or expressed because that is what he could best relate to because of his experience. The moment we recognize the Guru as the Lord himself, we grow out from our identification with the body. We are transformed and no longer live and express in this world as a limited body.

Why does the Master come to teach us?

After having understood this *tattva*, the essence of life, the Master need not come down to our level to live with us, but why does he do that? In the third chapter of the Bhagawad Geeta, we come across this *sloka*:

Yad yad acarati sresthas tat tad evetaro janah

Sa yat pramanam kurute lokas tad anuvartate

Whatever the *srestha purusha* does in his life we implicitly follow. During a Bala Vihar camp in India, a brother and sister presented a skit. The sister was acting like the wife and the brother was acting like the husband. The husband enters and sees that his wife is sitting on a sofa, her legs on a stool, reading a magazine and watching T.V. He throws his briefcase down, takes off his coat and shoes, unties his tie and throws it on the ground, looks at her and asks, "*Kuch chai wai milegi?* Do I get some hot tea?" Then, *shrimati uvaca*, the wife replies, "*Roj roj bolna parta hai kya?* Do I have to tell you every day? *Fridge mein pari hai.* It is there in the fridge. Go, heat it up and drink it." They presented this discussion for fifteen minutes. The boy, the brother was in the fifth grade. The girl, the sister was in seventh. At that tender age, the spontaneity with which they presented this whole show was hilarious. The only sad part was that, where did they learn all this? The show they presented was inspired from the home. We are tuned to and trained by what happens in our surroundings and the actions of those whom we accept as *srestha* in our lives. For those children, their parents were *srestha*, and they started imitating them. The Masters carefully live their lives following the scriptures just to lead the students to that same pinnacle of perfection.

In my early days, when I first met Gurudev there was a lot of bubbling enthusiasm to realize God, and understand the meaning of spirituality and *samadhi*. That is the time when I had also read about Vivekananda's meetings with Ramkrishna Paramhansa. I went to Gurudev with a list of questions. I thought I would bombard him with my questions and find my answers like Vivekananda. So, with that kind of an attitude, I went to see Gurudev, expecting that he would tell me different kinds of *sadhana* or *abhyasa*. I said, "Swamiji, I want to meditate and realize *Paramatma*." He must have had a good laugh inside, "That is fine. I will give you one spiritual practice. If you can follow it, it will lead you to a good path." And what was that spiritual practice? At that time it did not make any good sense, but it makes very good sense now. He said, "We have numerous accounts of the lives of *mahatmas*. Search for the biographies and autobiographies of such *mahatmas* and go through them, not like a novel, read through every page and every line understanding the essence." He suggested around fifteen-sixteen names. I was taken aback. I had come to him for meditation, for *samadhi*. Why was he telling me to read all these books about somebody else? Why should I read about somebody else? All these different kinds of reactions came to my mind. But it was later that I understood that reading the biographies and autobiographies, which describe the different kinds of experiences of the great Masters, encourages us to live that same spiritual life because whatever the scriptures have said these people have lived practically in their lives. The moment we are confused, the experiences of the Masters as they face similar problems gives us the courage to live the same kind of spiritual life. *Sarva-sruti-siro-ratna*, these Masters are the crown jewels of the scriptures.

How do we find a Guru?

Each one of us, if we are blessed to be introduced personally to a living Guru, it is the result of the *punya* that we have done through the body, through the mind and through the intellect. The result of meritorious actions, *punya phala* is reaching the feet of the Master. Our job is done once we reach the Master. Our *punya*, our *sukruta*, all that we have to do, is done. Now it is the Master's responsibility, it is the Master's duty to make us understand the truth of *akhanda-mandalakaram*, to direct us, teach us, tune us to see the essence in and through the universe.

Let us understand this by an example. Supposing you are planning to go to a resort for a weekend. Normally when people like us travel there is not much packing required. *Do kapde yeh le liye, do kapde woh le liye*⁴. If you are going with the whole family, then you really have to make a check-list, and make sure that everything is packed. Finally you rush to the airport with lot of tension; you get your boarding passes. Until you enter the airplane, you are still trying to remember if you forgot something or not. Once you have boarded the plane, settled down in your seat, there is nothing else that can be done. All that you had to do comes to an end. Now what is there to do? Sit back and relax, the pilot will take you to your destination. Similarly, if today we are sitting here, in front of the Master, it is the result of our *punya*. So what do we have to do? Sit back and relax. Let him function. I still remember one of Gurudev's statements very vividly. Gurudev said, "Even when I leave the body, I will be waiting at the gate to see that each one of you enters and then I will enter." So he has taken up that duty and responsibility. All that we have to do is to let him, allow him to fulfill his responsibilities. This art of the Guru functioning through us is called *sharanagati*.

What is surrender (*sharanagati*) to the Guru?

How can surrender be defined? How can it be explained? More than the Sanskrit word, I love the English word for this – surrender. It speaks volumes. What does surrender mean? *Mera sar unke under hai*⁵. That is surrender. Sometime before I came to the US, Guruji had called me up and said, "Prepare your passport and visa for US." I wanted to postpone it or avoid it altogether. I tried all my logic, but Guruji had an answer to disprove every point that I tried to make, "But you know, I had started this ...I had to complete this...I had to do this ..." Guruji very joyfully enjoyed all my different arguments because he knew that I was kidding around. After he heard everything that I had to say, he said one thing which completely shut me up because I did not have any logic available to answer it. What he said to me in Hindi was a very powerful statement, "*Dekho Bhaiya, sharanagati mein para nahin hote. Sharanagati mein para nahin hote.*" Translated into English, this statement has two meanings – in surrender, if you really say that you have surrendered, you do not have any ifs and buts. We cannot say, "I have got lot of faith, I have got lot of surrender, I have got lot of *shraddha*, but..." In *sharanagati* there is no but – *sharanagati mein para nahin hote. Para* also means wings. If you have really surrendered, it is not your responsibility to fly. It is that Master's responsibility to whom you have surrendered to take you to the other shore.

When we say that I surrender, prostrate or do *namaskara* or *namana*, the word itself so beautifully expresses the meaning, *na-mana, na mana iti namana*. Where my will, my *mana*, my mind stops functioning, allowing the Master to function through me, that is called actual *namaskara*. As has been said very beautifully, "*Prema ki gali ati sankri, jaa mein do na samaye.*" The path of love, the path of surrender is so narrow it cannot

⁴ Take two of these clothes and two of those clothes.

⁵ My head is under him.

accommodate two people at the same time. *Jab main tha to tu nahin, jab tu hai to main nahin*. As long as I think I am the one who has surrendered, I am the one who was trying to do the *sadhana*, the "I" always remained, so I remain where I started from. The day I know that it is not this "I" that has to function, it is He who has to function, that day when I allow the "I" to be totally removed, that day the Lord reveals Himself through the Master.

The *sruti*, the scriptures reveal their meaning through the Master. It happens effortlessly in a flash. In the last *sloka* of Svetasvatara Upanishad, it is said that the kind of *shraddha* we have in the Lord, if we have the same kind of *shraddha* for the Guru, *yatha deve tatha gurau*, all the meanings of the scriptures are revealed unto us. All that is required is to tune oneself to the Master. Tune the body, tune the mind, tune the intellect to the Master. But what do we do? Even Arjuna talking to Lord Krishna in the second chapter, though he seemingly says, *sadhi mam tvam prapannam*, accept me as your student, I'm totally at your disposal, in the eleventh chapter he concludes that *ajanata mahimanam tavedam, he Krsna he yadava he sakhe. Ajanata*, not knowing Your grandeur, not knowing Your greatness, I said many things that I should not have said. He repented after having understood that He was the Master standing in front of him, trying to help him.

People would come to Gurudev with all kinds of personal problems, "*Swamiji, mera beta shaadi nahin kara raha hai.*"⁶ Another gentleman would come and say, the marriage has been done, but then there are a lot of other problems. Somebody else would come and discuss their lawsuits relating to land or other property. Nothing related to the truth was said to Gurudev. He would just hear everybody, shrug his shoulders, laugh to himself and go into his room. This happens in every Master's life. There was a Master from Ganeshpuri who lived as an *avadhoot* and did not allow anybody near him. He would abuse them, he would hit them, and try to drive them away, but there was this one student who caught hold of his feet and said, "Do whatever you want to do, but I will not leave your feet until and unless you teach me the knowledge that will take me to the same place where you are reveling." The Master then made one statement, "For the past twenty five years I have been roaming around in this country. Nobody has ever asked such a direct question as you have asked. People have asked me to bless them for profits in business, good children. They have sought my blessings for everything belonging to the external world, not for something internal."

Sharangati is not a business. *Sharangati* means that when we bow down to the Master, it is His will which shall be done, and once we have that kind of a faith, he will take care of both our *bhukti* and *mukti*, material as well as spiritual needs. Ramakrishna Paramhansa, in one of his discussions with his students says that recognizing the Lord or having *sakshatkar* of the Lord is very easy. In the ninth chapter the Lord tells Arjuna:

Ananyas cintayanto mam, ye janah paryupasate

Tesam nityabhiyuktanam, yoga-ksemam vahamy aham

All we have to do is to have *ananya bhava*, have the unbroken thought of the Lord continuously for seventy-two hours. Wherever the Lord is, He will give His *darshan*. Once when I said this somewhere else, a gentleman raised his hand and said, "I have a doubt. I am ready to take that challenge, if it can be called one, for seventy-two hours, but what about my *khana*⁷ and *sona*"⁸? That is the reason we will never find the Lord. Even before we start, where is our mind? In *khana* and *baad mein sona*. For seventy-two hours we have to be totally dedicated to the Lord, without even thinking about our own bodily requirements.

⁶ Swamiji, my son is not getting married.

⁷ Food

⁸ Sleep

What should be the purpose of surrender to the Master?

The purpose of approaching the Master is explained very beautifully in the second verse of the *Guru Stotram - ajnana- timirandhasya, jnananjana salakaya*. Whenever we forget the *lakshya* (goal) and become *nirlakshya*, we face problems, troubles, miseries in our lives. In Visnu Purana it is said, "*Visnoha vismruti sarva dukhasya karanam.*" Forgetting the purpose is the cause for all miseries.

Whenever we act in the world, it is because of three reasons. What is the first reason? Instigation. What does instigation mean? We are instigated to act whenever we feel that we are being misused, not knowing the purpose for which we have been put into a certain situation. Even in a court of law, the person who commits a crime gets a lesser punishment than the one who instigates him. The second reason is inspiration. We see something, we hear something, or we are told something which gets us charged up to act. But even inspiration does not necessarily produce a permanent change, sometimes it can dwindle midway.

The third reason we act in the world is from an inner understanding of the *lakshya*. This is what the Guru trains us to do. It is something that is born from within, and that which is born from within cannot be lost or misused. And what is the *lakshya*, what is the purpose of reaching the Master? When we perform an experiment in the laboratory, the first point of discussion is the aim or purpose. Similarly, every effort that we put in this world is for *sukha prapti*, to reach that state of satisfaction, contentment, and fulfillment, but the goal is not achieved despite our best efforts. When we come to the Master, he enables us to remove the layer which stops us from being happy, which stops us from being contented. *Ajnana-timirandhasya, jnananjana-salakaya* – Guru is the Master who removes the *ajnana*. When we say remove the *ajnana*, it is not like removing a covering to reveal whatever is underneath. It is a very tricky process. When we reach feet of the Guru, we reach with a lot of confusions, with a lot of apprehensions in our bosom. We are fine as long as the Master does not specifically target us, but when he really engages himself to improve us, we start rejecting him.

Now what is the purpose of the Guru there? What does he do? Akhandananda Maharaj gives a beautiful definition that really hits home, "*Jo shishya ko dekhte hi gurrata hai, woh Guru hai.*"⁹ His purpose in doing this is to disentangle us from our entanglements. When this happens, our tendency is to react vehemently. We even end up making statements like, "These Masters should gain control over their anger, gain control over themselves, but look at them..." "He scolded me." "He scolded me in front of everybody." The pain is even more powerful, not just because we are reprimanded, but because it happens in public! So much for our *sharanagati!*

The Master's role is similar to that of a sculptor, who uses his hammer and chisel to unlock the hidden potential in a stone that is not visible to anyone else. Ask the stone what it thinks of this kind of treatment. The moment the door opens, it sees a monster coming in, a monster with a chisel and hammer, "I don't know what wrong I have done. What *papa*"¹⁰ I have done that this fellow is coming and hitting me daily?" The stone undergoes a lot of pain with every stroke, every blow of the chisel and hammer. Finally, it seems that the torture has come to an end. The sculptor leaves the stone alone for many days. Then one day he comes in and he starts rubbing the surface of the stone with sandpaper to get rid of even the smallest of imperfections. The stone starts feeling, "I thought everything was done. Why is he torturing me like this?" After having undergone

⁹ The Guru is one who starts growling as soon he sees the disciple.

¹⁰ Sin

the entire process, a beautiful *murti*¹¹ emerges from the stone; the real glory of the stone is expressed. It is installed in a temple. It is elated because it starts receiving *phool malas*¹², it starts receiving *alankara*¹³. The sculptor's vision created something worthy of being worshipped from a piece of worthless stone, but to reach that state the stone had to undergo the process of chiseling, and fine refinements. The stone goes to the sculptor and says, "What a beautiful opportunity you have given me!" And in all humility the Master, the sculptor replies, "I have done nothing. The potential always existed in you. All I have done is to remove that which was blocking the expression of your potential."

The relationship between the Master and the student is beyond human understanding or expression in words. When we talk of the highest in love, we talk of the love of a mother for her children, but the love of a mother for her children is born out of duty since she has given birth to the children. That love still has a selfish interest, but the love of the Master for the student is not born out of duty or responsibility. The student is not the responsibility of the Master, but still he accepts that responsibility so that the student can reach the place where he revels. His efforts to remove the *ajnana*, which are so painful for the disciple, are only for the purpose that the student can reach and enjoy the same kind of bliss that the Master is enjoying. Nothing less. Talking of nothing less, in the outer world we are graded on a relative scale - A+, A, B+, B. We may be promoted to the next grade even with 70% marks, but in the field of spirituality, it is either 0% or 100%. Either there is nothing or there is perfection, nothing in the middle. So the Master's effort is to make us reach that state of perfection. Nothing less.

The Master is not going to change our lives, the Master is not going to change our environment; the Master is not going to change the world that we live in. The Master is going to change our vision. It is not the *srishti*¹⁴ that has to be changed, it is the *drishti*¹⁵ that has to change, and here is a person who takes pains in changing that *drishti*, not the *srishti*. Here is a person, who with all love and concern tries to tune the body, mind and intellect, dispelling the darkness that we are living in so that we can understand the truth. He blesses us with that vision, *drishti*, so that staying in the same *srishti* we can enjoy the bliss and glory, which is quite evidently an expression of the Lord.

In order to do this, the Guru has to wipe the slate clean and create a disciple out of us. Guru is *Brahma*, Guru is *Visnu*, and Guru Himself is *Mahesvara*. Guru is nothing but that absolute truth and happiness which we are searching for. Why is the Guru called *Brahma*? Why is the Guru called *Visnu*? Why is the Guru called *Mahesvara*? Because in spite of who we are, it is the responsibility of the Guru to create a disciple out of us. That is no easy task.

Who is a disciple (*sisya*)?

Sisya is defined as "*Sasanat sisyaate yah sah sisya*", the one who is ready for any kind of discipline that is expected by the Master. Or, to put it in very simple words, the one who has accepted the fact that he is going to be disciplined. This is where the concept of *sharanagati* that was introduced earlier comes into play. When the Master tells the student to do something, there should be no reaction from the student, "*Para...but...*" absolutely no choice. It took the Lord Himself eleven chapters to create a disciple out of Arjuna whom He knew very well. It is the Master's responsibility to create that discipleship in us. He is Brahma creating that disciple in us. He is Visnu, who sustains us

¹¹ Idol

¹² Flower garlands

¹³ Ornaments

¹⁴ World

¹⁵ Vision

as a disciple to reach that state of perfection. How does he do this? By assuming the form of Rudra, destroying all the ignorance that we are holding on to.

This is also the cause of confusion in the minds of people because they see a contradiction in some of the characters depicted in the Puranas. On one side, they are called *maharishis*. On the other side, they cannot control their anger. For instance, we have the oft-quoted example of Durvasa, who was a *maharishi* well-known for his anger. In our ignorance, we question if he was a Master, he was a *maharishi*, how could he get angry? We forget that our anger and his anger are worlds apart. We get carried away by our anger, whereas the Master uses it so that he can correct his students. The anger of the Master is born out of love. The purpose is for the betterment of the disciple so that he can grow from this limited existence to that unlimited blissful existence that the Master is experiencing. It is like a mother forcing her child to take bitter medicine despite his protests. Is the mother being harsh out of love or a desire to hurt her child? The relationship of the Guru and the disciple is similar.

How does the Guru's grace express in our lives?

One cannot search for a Guru. When the seeker is ready, the Guru himself walks into his life. How does this happen? *Gurur-eva param brahma* – that Supreme Reality will express forth, manifest in the seeker's life as a Master, as a Guru, just as a bee goes to the flower when it blossoms. The flower does not have to seek the attention of the bee; it does not have to send an invitation to the bee saying, "Hey! I have blossomed. Why don't you come and have some nectar?" The moment the flowers blossom, the bees come searching. The moment we are ready, the moment the intensity for knowing the truth is strong in our bosoms, the Master **shall** walk into our lives. The Guru shall express forth, manifest forth in our lives.

The grace of the Guru expresses forth in every seeker's life as *jnana* and *sakti* - the knowledge as well as the capacity to use that knowledge at the right moment at the right given time. *Jnana-sakti-samarudhah, tattva-mala-vibhusitah*. A very beautiful picture of the Master has been painted here. *Jnana-sakti-samarudhah*, he is *samarudhah*, he enters our life through these two things, he bestows upon us, he blesses with these two things - *jnanam ca sakitm ca*. He blesses us with knowledge and also the capacity to use that knowledge in the correct place, in the correct environment. Whenever we listen to Vedanta, it always appears that we already know these principles. Greatness lies not in knowing something, greatness lies in applying that knowledge, or the *sakti*, the *samarthya*, the capacity in the right place at the right moment.

We all have knowledge, but don't know how or when to apply it. We have a brahmachari in the mission who is very jovial. Once Guruji had given him some work and he had thoroughly messed it up. Guruji does not tolerate any imperfections, and he started scolding him, "*Kya hai yeh? Tumhara dimag nahi hai kya?* What is this? Don't you have any brains?" His immediate reply made Guruji start laughing despite his irritation, "Swamiji, I have only a small bit of *dimag*, brain. If I use that up, what will I use for the rest of my life? *Woh bhi kharch kar doonga to baki jindagi kya karunga?*" Guruji said, "*Tum nahi sudhroge*. You are not going to change." We have brains; we have *jnana*, but lack the capacity to apply the *jnana* at the right moment, in the right environment, in the right atmosphere. The blessings of the Guru are flowing in our lives when we are able to apply the *jnana* at the right moment. It is not delayed wisdom. When we can translate that which is in our head to our hands that is when the grace of the Guru is flowing completely. Or rather, to put in other words, that is when we have tuned ourselves completely to the grace of the Master. That is when we can understand that we have surrendered completely to the Master. *Jnana* and *sakti* when expressed at the same time in a given situation, that is when our surrender is complete. That is what is called the

avatar or expression of the Guru in our lives. How is this *jnana*, this *sakti* equipped? *Tattva-mala-vibhusitah*, applied very logically and scientifically, lived enthusiastically. *Tattva* is the logic, *tattva* is the essence. With that kind of logic and essence he expresses forth in the most practical way in our life.

How does the Guru's grace express in our lives? *Bhukti-mukti pradata ca*. There is no spelling mistake here. It is *bhukti*, not *bhakti*. Until and unless we have *bhukti*, we cannot get *mukti*. The Guru's blessings are not only for our internal life. The moment we completely surrender, both the external and the internal are taken care of by the Guru. All we need to do is to tune ourselves to the grace of the Lord, grace of the Guru. *Bhuktim ca muktim ca yo dadati sah Guruh* - he blesses us with both. I had first hand experience of this when I was in Yuva Kendra. One of my friends asked me to come with Gurudev for *bhiksha*. *Bhiksha* with a *sanyasi*, what could it be? I did not want to take any risk. So I headed to hotel, had a good lunch and then went there. The moment I went there, it was like a five-star treatment. The first thing Gurudev said was, "Before we start, have my kids taken their food? First serve them all, then we will all sit together and eat." You trust him, and he gives you both *bhukti* and *mukti*. As Lord Krishna says in Bhagawad Geeta, *yoga kshemam vahamyam*. "All that you desire, I will give you. All that you have, I will take care."

What is our investment? If we talk about *vyanika buddhi*¹⁶, the Lord also answers us in *vyanika bhasha*¹⁷. If we are expecting, *yogam-kshemam*, what is our investment? Very simple. *Ananyas cintayanto mam...* Remember the Lord, remember His name every moment. This again causes confusion in our minds. How can I keep remembering the Lord and keep doing my work also? Do you do practice or *abhyasa* of your name? If somebody calls out the name, Uddhav Chaitanya, only I will reply because I know that it is me. I do not do *abhyasa* of my name daily by chanting, "*Aham Uddhav Chaitanya. Aham Uddhav Chaitanya.*" I don't do it, but I know very clearly that it is me. Or, even more intimate, do we do *abhyasa*, that I am a male, I am a female? We know that we are male or female, we don't need *abhyasa* for that. So *sahaja*, so easy should be the *smarana*, remembrance of the Guru also. *Bhuktim ca muktim ca yo dadati* - he will take care.

It has been said, "*Amar veh deshwah jahan se aayo.*" What is that place the Guru is pointing to? That place is immortal, *amar*, where there is no differentiation, only a homogeneous experience of oneness. Guruji's has made a beautiful point in one of his discourses on the Bhagawat. He was talking about the difference between Hiranyakashyapu and Prahlad. Hiranyakashyapu had such a gross mind, *jara buddhi*, he could not see the Lord even in animate things, whereas Prahlad had such a *sukshma buddhi*, subtle mind that he could see the presence of the Lord even in inanimate objects. It is not that the Lord is not present, Lord is not available. Many a time, when we pray, we ask for blessings, our prayers are incomplete. What do we ask for? We pray for His grace to always shower on us. Would we even be alive without His grace? This whole world which has been created, the whole *srishti*, if not for His grace, would fall apart.

Let us understand how beautifully the Lord's grace is functioning with an example. What will happen if we put a stone in the water? It will sink inside. The Lord is protecting the earth which is floating on the surface of water. Only the Lord can do that. If we want to keep something up in the *akasa*, in the space, we have to tie it with ropes to a pillar or some other kind of support. The endless number of astral bodies that we see, the different kinds of stars that we see, exist in space, rotating on their own axis without any kind of support. It is the Lord Himself who is expressing as that energy. *Sthavaram*

¹⁶ Trader's intellect

¹⁷ Trader's language

jangamam vyaptam, yatkincit sacaracaram – whatever we can name, it is that grace of the Lord that is flowing. *Sthavaram jangamam*, that which is stationary and that which is mobile, *caracaram*, that which is animate and inanimate, every thing that enters our lives, every experience that we have, is for teaching us this subtle truth.

In Bhagawat, we come across the story of Lord Dattatreya. Dattatreya said that he had twenty-four Gurus, each one from the *srishti* that he was involved in who taught him something immense with great subtlety. One of the teachers was a pair of bangles. He had gone to a house for *bhiksha*. The lady of the house spreads an *aasan*, makes him sit and goes inside and starts pounding the rice to remove the husk. Dattatreya Maharaj could not see her, but he felt that she was disturbed by the noise made by the two bangles on her right wrist. All of a sudden, the sound stops. Now, Dattatreya Maharaj is curious and peeps in to see what is happening. The lady had removed one bangle and put it on the other hand. Seeing this was enough to send him into a meditative trance. Moving the bangle from one hand to other hand, reminded him of Paramatma. Having that *sukshma buddhi*, to understand the grace, understand the message, that the Lord is sending through every experience, is a must for a spiritual seeker. What did Dattatreya understand here? The two bangles represent duality. *Dvayata bhayam bhavati, bhayam mrihyur bhavati. Dvayata bhayam bhavati* – in duality there is fear and *advaitam eva sukham* - happiness can only be found in oneness. Wherever there is One, wherever there is unity, wherever there is *advaita*, there cannot exist *bhaya*, fear, confusion, misery. In that unison, in that unity, what exists is always expressing forth as *ananda*.

Most of you are probably familiar with the beautiful piece called "Footprints." For each scene in his life, the devotee sees two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to the Lord. However, he noticed that many times along the path of life there was only one set of footprints. He asks the Lord why He had deserted him. The Lord replies, "My precious child. I love you and would never leave you. During the times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of prints, it was then that I carried you." The moment we have trust in the Guru, trust in the Lord, all the rest is taken care of. And this grace of the Lord is something which has to be experienced. The moment we experience it, as has been said in the Bhagawad Geeta, *yada gatva na nivartente...* there is no going back. The faith increases further, and never decreases.

Our faith is like that of the mountain climber who goes on a trek with all his equipment, ropes, bag, and backpack, who suddenly slips and falls. The rope that is tied around his waist somehow gets entangled in one of the shrubs and he is hanging in mid-air. It is totally dark and scared he starts praying to the Lord, "Oh Lord, please protect me." The Lord, as usual, in his compassion, says, "I am ready to protect you, provided you cut the rope." This fellow starts thinking whether he should take the risk because he was not sure whether it was really God's voice or an illusion. His only sure hope seemed to be the rope, so he hung on in the bitter cold. Next morning, the search party came and found him, frozen to death and hanging only five feet above the ground! If only he could have had trust in the Lord. Trust is not something we can use to bargain. Trust is not something that we normally define as blind faith. Faith, as Ravindra Nath Tagore has said, "Faith is that bird which rises in the dawn in expectation of the sunrise." It has not seen the sun, but seeing the dawn it knows that sun is going to come so it rises in anticipation. Such should be our faith in the grace of the Lord, the Guru.

We can conclude this by saying that His grace always exists. By not recognizing His grace, we are disgracing His grace. That is why Hinduism can be defined as a beautiful way of living. When we talk of Vedanta, when we talk of Hinduism, it is not a view of life, it is a part and parcel of life. It is not that spirituality can be practiced sometime down the lane, some time after retirement or some time later, or spirituality is restricted to a certain place or time. We should go to the temple, meditate and sit and worship in our *pooja griha*, but apart from doing that, we should extend spirituality in every walk of life,

every part of life, every moment and every thought. This is truly recognizing the grace of the Lord. The same kind of *abhyasa* described by the Lord to Arjuna is called *Vibhuti Yoga*. The Lord tells Arjuna, when you go into the world, do not restrict your spirituality only to a certain time and space.

How does the Master help us to grow?

Last time when there was a camp in Chicago somebody asked Guruji a question, "In spite of attending *satsang* regularly for 30 - 40 years, I don't find a systematic development or change in myself. So what is the necessity or the purpose of attending *satsang*?" Guruji answered with a story. A similar question was asked in one of the spiritual journals, and it really stirred up a lot of doubts and discussions. Finally all the discussions came to a conclusion when one gentleman wrote this beautiful letter to the editor, "For the past so many years, I have been eating regularly, three times a day and now today if you ask me, what I have eaten, and when, I may not be able to give you an exact answer. But definitely I know that if I had not had that kind of food regularly for the past so many years since I was born, I would not have been able to write this reply to you."

We may not be able to remember what has happened, how it has happened, or what we have read, what we have gone through. But then, whatever we have gone through is what has made us what we are now. So definitely it will have an effect, it will have an impact in our life, but the effect does not seem to be so effective because what we are trying to clean up is not something that we have accumulated only in this life.

Aneka janma samprapta - we have accumulated all kinds of tendencies through different lives. All these impressions have to be totally wiped out from our *chitta*, the memory bank. What is *chitta*? *Chitta* can be defined as RAM (random access memory) in computer terminology where everything that we have processed, everything that we have experienced gets recorded. And as these patterns of recorded things get piled up, they express forth as actions. To reach this state we must have gone through several different kinds of *yonis*. If somebody does something wrong, if somebody says something wrong we tend to get irritated, "Have I not told you how to do it? Why do you make a mistake?" But imagine the Guru's love and compassion. He keeps on repeating the same *tattva*, the same essence in different ways so that different students can understand it very easily. Never does he get disappointed that the students are not catching it.

Once there were two disciples who fought very vigorously with each other. They both approached the Guru, "Swamiji, mmm...he did this.." "Tell me," says the Guru, "Who started it all?" "Swamiji, he beat me. He called me names." The other disciple says, "He also called me names." The Guru asked, "What did you call him?" "I called him a donkey." The Guru instead of solving the problem started laughing very loudly. The students were puzzled. We came with our problem, why is he laughing? The Guru asked, "How many years have you been in the *asrama*?" One student said, "Five and a half years." The other student said, "Six years." The Guru laughed even more loudly, "For five and half to six years, I have been telling that you are *Satchidananda swaroopa* and it never clicked, and yet today he called you a donkey, and you think that it is real?"

The Guru always repeats the same thing to us - you are that *Satchidananda*. In spite of this repeated knowledge given and seeing that we don't grab that knowledge, he does not feel disappointed. He shows us the knack of eliminating those tendencies which we have accumulated over many lives through the beautiful process called *karma yoga* for the body, *bhakti yoga* for the mind and *jnana yoga* for the intellect. When somebody asks, "Are you a *karma yogi*, are you a *bhakta* or are you a *jnani*?" The three cannot be separated because we don't just exist at a body level, at a mind level or at an intellectual

level! When we are expressing through the body, whatever we do should be *karma yoga*. All the emotions that we have should be dedicated towards the Lord. Intellectually the *manana* should be there continuously happening within our heart.

The Guru communicates this knowledge to us with a tremendous amount of compassion and understanding. In Vivekachoodamani Adi Sankaracharya calls it *ahetuka daya*¹⁸. It is not a compassion born out of reasoning or logic. If logic and reasoning were to be applied, we are not deserving of that kind of compassion from the Master. In spite of what we are, the Master still showers his grace on us

What do we gain by following the Master?

Meerabai in one of her *bhajans* sings very beautifully, "*Mohi lagi lagan Guru charanan ki...*" For what? For crossing over the *bhava sagar*¹⁹ I need the help of the Guru. In the last *charana* or verse she says, "Now after having reached, when I look back, I am surprised that there is hardly any *bhava sagar* left! *Bhava sagar sab sookh gayo hai phikar nahin mohe taranan ki.*" What does the Master have to do to get us to reach that level of experience? *Sosanam bhava sindoshcha jnapanam-sara-sampadah.*

Every moment, through every experience the Master always tries to hint about that *tattva*. Many people used to go to Ramana Maharishi, who was a Master with a unique style of his own. He was very lovingly called *tata*, "*Tata, I have a stomach ache.*" His remedy would be, "Try to find out who you are." People would be puzzled, "What does a stomach ache have to do with who I am?" Ramana Maharishi would reply "When you get an answer to that question, you will no longer have a stomach ache or any other kind of problem."

Every kind of a problem that we face in this world arises from this misapprehension of who we are! The misapprehension of who we are leads to non-apprehension and confusion about who we can be, and leaves us searching for our own identity in this world. The Master is the one who always indicates our own true nature through every experience, every kind of *sadhana*. All that we can say in gratitude to such a Master is, "*Guroh padodakam samyak tasmai sri gurave namaha*". There is a beautiful analogy being expressed in this particular *sloka*. If we think that the *bhava sagar* is disturbing us, then offer that *bhava sagar* at the holy feet of the Guru. The moment we offer the *bhava sagar* at the Master's feet, what we get back in return is *padodakam* or *prasada*. Here when we talk of *prasada*, we are talking about *prasada buddhi*, not the *prasada* that is offered to the Lord. And when we say *prasada buddhi*, it is not referring to the kind of *buddhi*, which asks for *prasada*. All our miseries vanish the moment we know this art of offering everything unto the feet of the Lord or the Guru. When we offer our *bhava sagar* unto the feet of the Guru, what we experience after that is the *prasada* of that Master. And when the *buddhi* or intellect accepts that *prasada*, this attitude of acceptance makes our life happier. Whenever we learn the art of accepting life 100% without reacting to it, that is the day, that is the time the complete grace of the Guru is flowing through us.

But what do we do? Externally because of pressure we tend to accept what is happening to us, but internally we keep reacting to it. This kind of situation is called, "*Bahar se chandra mukhi, andar se jwalamukhi.*"²⁰ And this internal resentment keeps on bottling up, and given a chance explodes suddenly. Whenever I see people in a rage I immediately draw a mental caricature. Have you seen a pressure cooker? When the pressure builds up, it will explode from the force of the pressure if it is not released

¹⁸ Causeless compassion

¹⁹ Ocean of the world

²⁰ Externally cool, but boiling like a volcano internally

through the safety valve. So whenever somebody is blowing his top, I imagine a pressure cooker instead of his head! Externally we tend to accept, but internally we keep on reacting. Or, on the spur of the moment we react externally, and internally feel guilty for having reacted. There are two ways we can live life. If you have the guts, if you have the courage react completely, react 100%, but we don't have that courage. We react on the spur of the moment, but later start feeling guilty. The second and easier method is to follow the path which has already been walked by different Masters and where they are ready to lead us. Accept that path 100 %, without reacting. As Gurudev also said, "Sin is not in action, it is in reaction."

The moment we react it is a sin. The reaction itself is a sin. The reaction itself is an experience of *naraka*. So if we have the grace of the Guru we should be able to accept life as it comes, when it comes 100%. The one who knows this art of acceptance has the capacity to work with any kind of a situation as the situation demands. Here also we want a shortcut because we love shortcuts. When we are performing *puja*, the first thing we offer to the Lord is *asanam*, "*Ratna khachita hema simhasanam*," a beautiful golden throne studded with precious gems. But then what do we do? *Simhasan arthe pushpani samarpayami*, offer flowers in place of the golden gem-studded throne! If we don't even have flowers, what do we do? *Akshatani samarpayami*, escape by offering rice. How do try to escape in life? We try to escape with the logic, "I'll do it to the best of my ability." There is nothing, which is not possible for a human being. It is not the best that I can do. NO. It is the best that the situation is demanding out of you. You should be able to give. That giving is the art of living. So thus accepting life as the Guru's blessing or *prasada*, the *bhava sagar* is dried up. This is the knack of understanding *karma*, *bhakti* and *jnana* in one's life, as a *sadhaka*.

How should the student accept the grace of the Guru?

Now when the Guru is blessing the disciple with such a beautiful life, how should he accept the grace of the Guru or accept the Guru himself?

Acceptance of the Guru is not the recognition of an obligation on the part of the *sisya*, "Hey Guru, you exist in my life." Acceptance of the Guru in one's life, is nothing less than the acceptance of truth itself. Even before we go in to that discussion, let me tell you one thing which has helped me in my own *sadhana*. In every individual's life there must be at least one person to whom you will never say no, one person to whom you will not say, "No, this is not possible." There should be at least one person like this to whom you are totally answerable to. The moment we have recognized that person and are totally dedicated to him, we can face life with a different kind of courage. This could be God or it could be the Guru, both being Gurudev for me. How does this help in life? Whatever that person asks us to do, we know that it is for our own benefit and accept it 100% and work it out. At that particular moment when we are being instructed we may feel this it is not really a worthwhile endeavor, but then later on we realize that because of that kind of an instruction and that kind of an experience there is a tremendous change in our life!

Rather there are four things that we are really answerable to. Nothing else in the world should ever matter. What are these four things? Our inner self or conscience; *sruti* or the scriptures; the Master to whom we have dedicated ourselves and finally God Himself. Nothing else should bother us in life. Whatever we do if these four things are in alignment then we are leading a perfect life. Even if one of these things is not in alignment then we face misery, unhappiness, distress. So, *sadhana* can be defined as aligning the self, *sruti*, the Guru and God in our lives.

We may have a lot of *shraddha*, a lot of *bhakti* for the Guru, but whenever possible, whenever given a chance, we should try to spend as much of time as possible personally

in the *seva* of a Guru, a living Master. The mind has this tendency of bloating the ego saying, "Look, how great a *sadhak* I am." If we are personally with the Master, performing service for the Master is no easy task. *Na guror adhikam tapah*, being with the Guru is the highest kind of *tapas* because his aim is not to please the students. Whatever he is doing is for enabling the disciple to understand and reach for the higher self. It is similar to the process that gold has to undergo when it is transformed from the raw ore to beautiful jewelry. From the ore it becomes the metal, from the metal it is processed into different forms and bought by the jeweler who again heats it up and forms it into different ornaments. In order to become a necklace that hangs so beautifully around the neck, the gold had to go through a long and painful process, and being with the Master alone we can go through this kind of a process. That was the difference between Ekalavya and Arjuna. So when ever we get a chance to be with the Guru we should consider it as the Lord's blessing, a bonus. We can talk in theoretical terms about Guru being the principle, the *tattva*, the truth, but then to eradicate this ego and reach that state of perfection one has to go through this training under a Guru. Nothing is comparable to the experience of being with a Master who helps us to realize that *tattva*, understand that great truth. All we can offer to such a Master is our humble prostrations as Arjuna does after having seen the Lord's *Vishwa Rupa*, "Namo namas te 'stu sahasra-krtvah." Salutations unto You a thousand times!

What can we give back to that Master who has given us the best and nothing but the best?

What can we give back to such a Master who does not care about anything in this world? The first time when people met Gurudev their first impression might be, "Look at this man!" Wherever he went, he would get a red carpet welcome. The best kind of a car available would be ready and waiting for him. He would be wearing beautiful flowing silk orange robes and a Rolex watch, "Look at him! He calls himself a Master! He has everything that anybody could think of." His devotees would shower him with all kinds of presents - golden chains, rings, different kind of watches and other things. He would accept all of them with joy. The next moment he might listen to a child chanting all the seventy two *slokas* of the second chapter of the Bhagawad Geeta, he would hug the child, take off the chain that he got just five minutes ago and put it around his neck. When the parents protested, he would say, "You people think that the *sastras* cannot give money? This is the first payment that the *sastra* is giving." He was just not bothered about material things. To such a Master what can we give back? Who has always had everything, who does not desire anything, who does not care for anything? All that we can visualize, all that we can think of giving back to that Master is nothing but our humble prostrations, and how ever many times we give, we are still left feeling, "Have I given my best?" Nothing that we can give is comparable to that which is given to us by the Master.

Tattva-jnanat param nasti. Nothing can be compared to the *tattva* that the Master blesses us with, the absolute knowledge given so freely. The first time Gurudev was speaking in Chennai there were these orthodox pundits who threatened him, "If you don't stop speaking about Vedanta in this *mlecha bhasha*²¹, we will pour hot lead into your ears and mouth." He did not bother about who was saying what. He knew that he had his Guru's blessings. His purpose was very clear. So much so that when these pundits went to complain to the Kanchi Paramacharya, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, his reponse was, "How can I stop him when Saraswati herself is dancing on his tongue?" The Master who did not care about the world gave nothing but the absolute truth as the truth should be spoken without contamination. And whomsoever he came across, he blessed them

²¹ English was supposed to be a *mlecha bhasha*

with this absolute knowledge. To such a Master all that we can give, all that we can think of giving is our humble prostrations. *Tasmai sri gurave namah.*

What is the experience of the truth communicated by the Guru?

Whenever we have this kind of synchronization, this kind of experience with the Master such a person, such a *sadhak*, such a disciple is blessed indeed! What is the experience? When there is no difference left between God and the Guru, the Guru and the God both being accepted as one and the same with lot of devotion. *Mannathah sri jagannathah madguruh sri jagadguruh* - when this statement is accepted with gratitude what expresses forth in the disciple's life is unison with the whole universe around.

In our limited effort to understand the truth through different kinds of processes called *karma yoga, jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, dhyana yoga*, we sit to down to do *japa*, we sit down to do *puja*, we sit down to meditate, but that is only half the process. To understand that I am the truth, that is just half realization. What is the other half of realization? As it is said in Narayana Sukta, "Whatever I am experiencing within the self as that supreme reality that is the same reality that is expressing forth in all this multiplicity that I can see." This experience of the self, this experience of the truth that we are seeking in the seat of meditation, when it expands from the seat of meditation to the world around, that is when the experience is complete.

The Master makes it possible for us to feel the unison between the Master and the Lord and gives us the experience of seeing the unity in and through everything. This is the culmination of *jnana* and *bhakti*, which is called *para bhakti* in Narad Bhakti Sutra and *para jnana* in Yoga Vasistha. Both terms represent the same state. There should be no question in our minds about which is better, *jnana* or *bhakti*. The question itself is wrong. As Rajaji has said in his introduction to M.S. Subbalakshmi's beautiful rendition of Vishnu Sahasranama, "*Jnana* fructified is *bhakti*. *Bhakti* fulfilled is *jnana*." And to the Master, who has patiently stayed all along, holding our hand, seeing that we reach that experience, we can but bow down in all humility. *Tasmai sri gurave namah.*

Adi Sankaracharya in one of his beautiful works says:

*Sariram surupam tathá va kalatram
Yasascáru citram dhanam merutulyam
Manascenna lagnam gurorañghripadme
Tatah kim tatah kim tatah kim tatah kim*

Everything we have maybe just perfect, beautiful body, beautiful equipment, beautiful mind, a beautiful spouse, name and fame, a well-settled job, a good income, as much wealth as *Meru Parvat*, but in spite of having all these things if our life is not dedicated to the feet of the Guru, *tatah kim tatah kim tatah kim*? What good are all these things? All these things come and go. Dedication to the holy feet of the Guru makes a simple man greater in his simplicity.

What is the measure of our surrender?

What is the final barometer to measure whether our surrender at the feet of the Guru is complete or not? The answer is expressed beautifully in the last couplet of the *Guru Stotram*, which each one of us knows *kanthastha*²², but what has to happen is that what

²² Memorized

is stuck in the *kantha*²³ has to slide down to the *hriday*²⁴, to become *hridayastha*²⁵ not just *kanthastha*. What is that barometer?

Tvam eva mata ca pita tvam eva
Tvam eva bandhusca sakha tvam eva
Tvam eva vidya dravinam tvam eva
Tvam eva sarvam mama deva-deva

I met this old lady in Ahemdabad. It was such a unique experience meeting her; she left a beautiful memory in my heart. She spent most of her time in her own room. So I asked her, "*Mataji aap saare din karti kya hain?* What do you do the whole day?" She caught hold of my hand and took me to her room. Inside her room there was a replica of another room, "*Yeh mere Kanha ka ghar hai.* This is my Lord Krishna's house. Early morning I wake up. After I complete my morning rites I come and give Krishna a bath", and she showed me a small toothbrush, a small toothpaste..... Everything we have for ourselves, she had for Krishna. Her life was totally dedicated to Lord Krishna. I asked her, "After having done all these things, after giving Him breakfast and lunch what do you do?" She said, "My Kanha loves to read Bhagawat. So I sit in front of him, and in the mornings I chant Bhagawat. In the afternoons I write Bhagawat." She has written the Bhagawat two or three times. The whole *grantha*²⁶. After writing what does she do with all the paper? "I go to Narmada and offer it into the river." This is what she has doing for the past ten – fifteen years. She said she had no time for anything else in the world. Such a dedicated life, such a beautiful life of surrender!

Our greatness would be in understanding this example and living every day, every moment, dedicating each effort, each moment, each thought to the feet of Guru. *Tvam eva mata ca pita tvam eva*. If at all we have to ask anything, if at all we have to demand anything we ask the Guru, as we would ask our parents. Or rather we can go to the extent of saying that since we have dedicated our life to the Guru, it is his responsibility to look after us. After having dedicated our life to, whatever happens to us is no longer our responsibility. So what is surrender? Surrender can be otherwise defined as the highest kind of irresponsibility. I surrender unto you so that I can be irresponsible because the responsibility is yours now. It is no longer my responsibility. Anything that happens is your responsibility.

Once we have the attitude of complete and total surrender to the Guru we are in a position to demand what ever we want! He is the father, he is the mother, he is the friend, he is the wealth. The moment we have that kind of surrender everything can be demanded from the Master. Why? Because it is no longer our responsibility. It is his responsibility to take care of us. He better take care.

When we approach our Guru with that kind of an attitude the experience and interaction that happens is love, and the bliss of that love cannot be expressed, cannot be communicated through words. One has to experience it and live it. Not leave it, live it. And what is the final conclusion expressed in three short words? *Mama deva deva*, "All that can I can imagine as mine is nothing but you, and only you, nothing but you."

When we have this kind of an experience which can be defined as the highest form of irresponsibility that is when our surrender is 100% complete. So let us feel responsible enough to be irresponsible. That is the crux of *Guru Stotram*. When we have reached

²³ Throat

²⁴ Heart

²⁵ Reside in the heart

²⁶ Book

that acme of irresponsibility what flows through and what happens in life is nothing but a celebration, a dance, and in a celebration no body cries, just enjoys.

Tasmai sri gurave namah.