

The Quintessence of My Teaching

By SRI NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

This dialogue took place about a year before Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's death, when he was 83 years old.

Maharaj: Whatever appears has really no existence. And whatever has not appeared also drops away; what remains is That, the Absolute. "That" is like Bombay.

Visitor: Bombay certainly seems to be appearing at the moment. We should sell him another city.

M: But I normally ask you this kind of question, whether Bombay sleeps, whether it wakes up in the morning, whether it is worried, whether it has pain and pleasure. I do not refer to the people of Bombay, nor to the land, but to that which remains.

Now you know that you are. Prior to this moment, did you have this knowledge that you exist? This consciousness, *beingness*, which you are experiencing now, was it there earlier?

V: It has been, on and off.

M: This confidence that you are, the knowledge of your existence, was it there earlier?

V: When I do what Maharaj tells me, it is very clear. It is still in an infantile stage, but my sense of "me" is completely undone, and there arises great happiness, peace and clarity; but it comes and goes, and I forget.

M: Its inherent nature is time-bound. It has appeared as childhood and it is there now; but it wasn't there some years back. So you cannot possibly say that it is the Eternal. So don't believe that it is true.¹ And so long as you are having this "I"-consciousness, you will be trying to acquire things; so long as you know that you are, the things that you possess have an emotional significance to you. Now there is the fact that your "I"-consciousness itself is time-bound. So when this dissolves, what is the value of all those things which you possessed?

V: Nil.

M: As long as you have not understood this child-consciousness, you'll get involved in the world and its activities. Therefore, the real liberation is only when you understand that child-consciousness. Do you agree?

V: I do agree.

M: During your entire lifetime, you do not have any permanent identity. Whatever you consider yourself to be changes from moment to moment. Nothing is constant.

V: And what you think you are going to become changes too, with time, in spite of yourself.

M: That change is also made possible by the child-consciousness. Because of that, all these changes take place. That is why you must grasp this principle.

If you really want to understand this, you must give up your identification with the body. By all means, make use of the body, but don't consider yourself to be the body while acting in this world. Identify yourself with the consciousness, which dwells in the body; with that identity, you should act in the world. Will it be possible?

So long as you identify yourself as the body, your experience of pain and sorrow will increase day by day. That is why you must give up this identification, and you should take yourself as the consciousness. If you take yourself as the body, it means you have forgotten your true Self, which is the *atman*. And sorrow results for the one who forgets himself. When the body falls, the principle which always remains is You. If you identify yourself with the body, you will feel that you are dying, but in reality there is no death because you are not the body. Let the body be there or not be there, your existence is always there; it is eternal.

Now who or what has heard my talk? It is not the ear, not the physical body, but that knowledge which is in the body; that has heard me. So identify yourself with that knowledge, that consciousness. Whatever happiness we enjoy in this world is only imaginary. The real happiness is to know your existence, which is apart from the body. You should never forget the real identity that you possess. Consider a patient on his deathbed, certain to die. Now when he first comes to know of his disease, say cancer, he gets such a shock that it is permanently engraved in his memory. Like that, you should never forget your true nature — the true identity I have told you about.

A patient who is suffering from cancer is, as it were, all the time silently chanting "I'm dying from cancer"; and that chant proceeds without any efforts. Similarly, in your case: Take up that chant "I am consciousness." That chant, too, should go on without any effort. One who is constantly awake in his true nature — having this knowledge about himself — is liberated.

A patient suffering from terminal cancer always remembers his state and ultimately undergoes that very end; so much is certain. Similarly, one who remembers that he is the knowledge, that he is the consciousness, has that end, he becomes the *Parabrahman*.

So if you are about to photograph this land, I would say, no don't photograph... take a photograph of it but without land. Whatever is Bombay, take a photograph of that and show me. Can you?

V: I could not do it.

M: So that is like photographing yourself without the body. You are that, like Bombay. Remembering that you are the consciousness should be without any effort. When

you say "I," don't refer to this body's "I," but to that "I" which represents this consciousness. The consciousness is "I," and make use of this knowledge when you act.

The pleasure or happiness that you have had, is it through the words that you have heard or because you have had a glimpse of your *atman*?

V: I have been studying a lot all along in doing the *sadhana*. Since I met Maharaj, things are becoming clarified and also I am getting confirmation of what I have learned.

M: What should be your ultimate conclusion after reading a lot, doing *sadhana* and listening to these talks? It is that the hearer, the knower, is not concerned with the *upadhi* — that is, the body, mind and consciousness — and that he is separate from this *upadhi* that has come upon him.

V: Does that mean *sakshivan*, witness-consciousness?

M: You use that word *sakshivan*, but what do you really mean by it? That there is sentience, through which you see what is happening. But other than that, is anything needed for witnessing to take place? The sun has arisen, and there is daylight. Have you put yourself out to do any witnessing? Or do you see effortlessly; therefore, witnessing simply takes place. There is nothing that what you call the "witness" has to do; witnessing happens purely by itself.

This knowledge "I am" has dawned on you. Since then, whatever other knowledge you have acquired, whatever experiences you have had, whatever you have seen of the world, has all been witnessed. But that one to whom the witnessing takes place is entirely separate from that which is witnessed. In this witnessing, in these experiences, you have assumed that you are the body, and you are involved in it. Therefore, you get the reactions of whatever you have seen and witnessed only through this identification with the body. But actually, you are not concerned with that which makes your seeing possible and that which has been seen. You are apart from either of them.

V: Living the worldly life and being a person of the *grihastha ashrama*,² drudging, working, sleeping, laughing, mixing with people of all nationalities, is it possible just to *be*, and not identify oneself entirely with the body?

M: Show me a sample of that which you think is identifying itself with the body.

V: Generally, one identifies oneself with the body. One should not do so. You are not body, consciousness or *buddhi*. You are something different. "I" is something different. But you do identify living in this world. Is it possible not to identify completely?

Interpreter: That question has been conveyed. But Maharaj is asking: "What is this 'I' that cannot keep away from identifying with...?"

V: The same "I" of which Maharaj talks.

M: Why is there any relationship between you and what goes on in the world? How does the relationship between the body and the world arise?

V: Because the "I" is encased in the body. And it is the body that keeps coming in contact with material beings, other bodies, animate and inanimate.

M: You think it is the body that is coming in contact. If that consciousness had not been there, how could the body have come in contact with the rest of the world? What actually is it that comes in contact with the world?

V: The "I" comes in contact with the world through the body.

M: Whatever the *madhyama* is, if that consciousness were not there, where is the question of either the mind medium or that with which the medium comes into contact? If the consciousness were not there, then does the body exist or even the world exist?

V: That is very correct.

M: Then consider this beingness or consciousness as the supreme God and let go(d). And even then, you as the knower of this are separate from the consciousness and the body.

V: I understand.

M: That which you have understood can work no more mischief on you, then. Is it not so? [*laughter*]

V: I have understood with my *buddhi*.

M: Which means that you can only use the instrument of the intellect to understand. But what is prior to the intellect?

V: The *atman*.

M: You understand the *atman*. Therefore, that which understands the *atman* must be prior to even the *atman*.

V: That means *buddhi*.

M: *Atman* is prior to *buddhi*, and you understand *buddhi* and also that *atman* is prior to *buddhi*.

V: I understand *atman* with *buddhi*; my *buddhi* tells me that there is *atman*. I want to understand *atma-jnana*. With *buddhi-jnana* came *atma-jnana*. I want the *atma-jnana*, not *buddhi-jnana*.

M: There should be no confusion. Understand a simple fact and that is that any kind of experience can only come upon the consciousness that is there. And you are separate from both that consciousness and the experiences which come on that consciousness.

Unless there is consciousness, call it *buddhi*, mind or whatever, can anything be there? The answer is obviously, no. Thus, in that consciousness I can see my body and the

world; and it is basically only on that consciousness that any movement or experience can take place.

V: So that consciousness has the power to think or to feel?

M: On that consciousness, something happens. Whatever movement, thought, or experience there is can occur only on this consciousness. And you are prior to this consciousness; therefore you are neither the consciousness — that is, the instrument — nor any thought or experience, or whatever it is that is happening on that instrument. You are apart from it. Now stick to that.

V: Stick to what?

M: To the fact that you are apart from it.

V: And you are That. That I know, But oftentimes, one cannot forget that one is in the body.

M: Remember that this body is made of the five elements; it is a material body — I call it food-body — and in that is this consciousness because of which the body possesses its sentience, enabling the senses to function. For the senses in the body operate only thanks to the consciousness. And you are separate from this body and the consciousness. That is the only the only thing to remember.

All you have is the vital breath, the life force. And part of the *prana* is the *atman*. Other than that, what have you got? I keep coming back to the same thing. Other than that, there is absolutely nothing.

[Maharaj is commenting on "X," who is having a lot of troubles.] All these difficulties that come and go should be merely watched like something in a play. When one scene is finished, another scene takes place, going on like an act. Then, the entire act and the entire play, does it take place anywhere but in yourself? If she did not have this consciousness, would she be aware of this play that is going on? So ultimately, whatever the play, whatever scenes and acts that take place, they are merely movements in her own consciousness.

[*The lady has been urging Maharaj to take care of himself.*] Who is to take care of what? I know what has come upon my original state, and there is nothing to take care of that. It is a happening that has come and will take care of itself. And whatever has happened, I have not been affected. So, again, who is to take care of what? I am not concerned with taking care of anything. The world has been in existence for millions of years. There have been thousands of avatars and great men, and important personalities. Has a single one of them been able to do anything to change the natural course of events in the world?

Whatever has come upon this original state is time-bound, but the original state is timeless and spaceless. And that is one whole, a Wholeness. Not really one, because if you say "one," there are immediately two.

V: Is what Ramakrishna said and what Maharaj is saying the same thing?

M: I have already told you, the basic essence is only whole. All these differences are subsequent; they are to the concepts. So basically, when in the Wholeness, how can there be sin or merit, or any kind of duality?

There is something by which you are able to say that you understand. And you are separate from that. What you think you have understood is only a movement in your consciousness. And you are separate from that consciousness. So as far as you are concerned, there is no question of understanding or not understanding,

V: We always think when we have a mental grasp of someone's teaching that *ipso facto* we have realized that teaching. But we have not at all, we are essentially the same person, suffering in the same way.

M: How did that original creation take place of the body as infant? And even prior to its birth: How did the conception happen? How did the infant come into being, without it asking for it? Understand that. Understand thoroughly that drop of stuff which eventually has developed into a body, and then you will understand the whole mystery that you are not that. This body that is now occupying a certain space, how much space did it occupy upon its conception? And what was it then? If you understand that, you will understand the mystery of the Self.

You base yourself on the body that you are now, and don't understand its root. That is why we think we are this body. And for that, you must do meditation. What is meditation? Meditation is not this body-mind meditating as an individual, but it is this knowledge "I am," this consciousness, meditating on itself. Then the consciousness will unfold its own beginning.

Identification is with what? With this body that is now. But does it understand its origin? If you understand the temporal aspect, then you won't take so much pride in the body that is now existing.

[*Maharaj is now talking about himself*] The body is thoroughly old, my mission is fulfilled. Now you people come, which is all right, but my mission is done. My soul is about to leave this body. I am happy. I clap! [*clapping his hands*] I am in a clapping mood that I am about to pass on. I am no longer in love with, or held by, anybody, anything, any attachment.

Forgetfulness — that noble, most elevated forgetfulness — will not arrive until all doubts have been dispelled. Unless the doubts are eradicated, that peace will not prevail.

So long as I remain identified with the body, I want to be occupied with actions, because I am not able to sustain that pure "I" without them. I cannot endure it, because I identify with the body-mind, with all kinds of activities. I call it *jiva-atman*, which means "conditioned by the body-mind," and is the self that is occupied with all the activities. And the "I" which is unconditioned by, and not identified with, the body-mind — that therefore has no form, design, or name — is *Paramatman*. The *jiva-atman* is being witnessed by *Paramatman*, which is your real Self only.

V: What is it doing? Is it partaking in the working of the world?

M: *Paramatman* need not participate in the activities of the world, but without that principle no activities could take place at all. Just as is the case with *akash* (space): without it, no activities are possible.

Activities are going on naturally, spontaneously, in the same way that there is no author or doer of your dream world. Nevertheless, you fully put to use your dream world. You will not be able to comprehend this so long as you try to understand things as an individual. But once you are the universal manifest consciousness and abide in that *Paramatman* spirit — "I am" without form and distinction — then you will realize how things are.

V: It can be doubted whether Krishna was the incarnation of God into a human being. If it is indeed so, however, then we must attach importance to what he told us.

M: Whatever Krishna stated is perfectly correct. For that moment, that particular time in history, it was most appropriate. But that moment, that time, has gone. He also has gone. The spiritual elevation happened in him; that is why he is great.

You are seeing and understanding things through the concepts which you have absorbed. But, as a matter of fact, the actual state of affairs is quite different. You are holding on to it as the truth, but whatever you have heard will not remain as authority or as permanent; it will disappear. Then after the disappearance of everything, whatever remains, that you are: *neti-neti*.

You have been continuously changing; you are in a state of flux. No identity of yours has remained as a permanent feature. And in due course you will also become very old. So is there any constancy in all this?

V: The truth is that the body is perishable, but *Atma* is imperishable, eternal.

Second visitor: Do you know that or have you read it?

V: I am experiencing and also have read it. I am getting old and have seen people perish.

M: Yet there must be some author authorizing all these activities. You take the grosser four elements, which are engaged in activity. These four elements are presided over by space. In what activity is that engaged? If you are going to investigate the world of your observation, you will never reach your destination. Unless you give up whatever you have heard and abide in yourSelf, you will not understand all this. You may take it upon yourself to investigate this entire manifest world and whatever you have heard, but you will be caught more and more in a quagmire.

When incarnation takes place, what is its cause? And in what form does it occur? The stories you have heard...

V: Why doesn't everybody become Krishna?

M: What is that childhood? What is that child-principle? Investigate that. The touch of that quality, the child quality: understand and realize it. When did you encounter yourself? Since when and how? After collecting all the messages and concepts in the world, you cannot investigate yourself. When Krishna was born, he had that touch of "I-am-ness." The same goes for yourself. Understand that! What is that touch of "I-am-ness," that touch of child in you? Since when did you know that you are? And with what did you know that

you are? If you try to employ whatever you have heard, you will never be able to understand this. You know that you were not, but now you know that you are. How did this happen, this confluence? You were not and suddenly you are. This is what we want to discover.

V: I think I will give up on all this.

M: You just find out and enquire about your own self. Since when did you come to know your self? And how? Did anybody tell you that you are? Or did you come to know yourself spontaneously?

V: I was told and also it kept occurring to me when I read Ramana Maharshi's questions, "Who is it that dreams, who is it that sleeps?"

M: Give up your body identity. Since when did you start knowing yourself? Concentrate on that only.

V: Who is the one who slept?

M: Give up that question, because it is not relevant. There is no value in your question. At the moment I do not want you to ask any questions. I am driving you to the source and would be satisfied with your knowing what you are. I want to find out from you with what it is you know you are. Confine yourself to this area. Focus only on your knowing that "you are." How do you know you are? Just be there. You have been shadow-boxing with the many concepts you have collected from the world — you are fighting with all that. What is the use of it?

You know you are. How do you know it? And with what did you know it? This is the sum total of my teaching needed to put you on the right track, its very quintessence.

When all your questions are answered, my talks are very easy to understand. And when you understand, all your questions have gone. It is a vicious circle: So long as you have questions, you cannot follow what is being said.

V: What happens is that certain questions keep cropping up.

M: I am going for the basic questions only: What are you? Since when are you? How did you happen to be? And due to what are you? I don't want to deal with a lot of sundry questions; they are of no value to me. If you like my teachings, you may sit here; otherwise, by all means quit this place.

In any true spiritual search, whatever you have heard, whatever you have done, is of no use at all to arrive at the real truth. The knowledge "you are" has happened. Due to what?

First of all, you witness that you are. Stay put there only, with this "you are." Just be there. Then with the help of this "you are," you are witnessing the world. If you are not witnessing "you are," you will not be witnessing the world either.

When you do not know you are, people also will not know that you are and they will cremate you. So long as you know you are, people will respect you, as you are something. When you do not know you are, people will dispose of you. Stay put there. You must be

present there only, at this point — the "you are" point, bereft of all concepts, all hearsay. When you recognize and realize the knowledge that you are, you will also know what Krishna is. Any number of incarnations have come and gone. But when you understand yourself, you will realize all the incarnations.

Because you know you are, you know the world is. You also know that God is. If you don't know you are, where is the world and where is the God?

There have been so many incarnations, and now you know you are. That "you are" is the divine principle because of which all the incarnations were. Many people have come here, but rarely has anybody after listening to me, come closer to himself, rarely anyone will understand what I am driving at. But that rare person, in the process of understanding me, will come closer to himself, the one who listens. Those who really understand will abide in themselves.

You did not know your parents before your birth, nor did the parents know you. In spite of this, how did the knowledge "you are" sprout in that particular situation? What is this amazing thing? I am again putting the same question. The parents did not know the child, and the child also did not know his parents before his birth. Now the child says, Here I am. How is that?

This itself is the greatest miracle, that I got the news "I am." Have you any doubts that you are?

V: No, that is self-evident.

M: Prior to knowing that you are, what knowledge did you have? What question can you put here, at this point? What do you know?

V: One should not ask any questions until one has achieved the goal. When one achieves that, the questions will be dissolved.

M: That is exactly what I am telling you. You know that "you are" is a very great miracle. This type of talk is not expounded anywhere else. The very source, the seed of this philosophy, nobody will expound. They will tell you to go and worship a certain God and you will get his blessing — you will be benefiting in such and such a way. Do this and you'll get that.

That deep urge to understand the truth is definitely going to occur. But if you desire to inquire into this entire objective⁴ world and are captivated by it, you will never reach the goal.

By trying to learn all the history of Rama, Krishna, Christ, etc. you will not attain it either; you will never get satisfied. You will have that peace and quietude only when you know yourself, when you have that intimate knowledge "you are." You know you are. How did it happen to be with what you are? Because of what are you? What is the cause of it? Find out all that.

Your present capital is what you have read — whatever you have heard and read. But that type of investment is of no use in the spiritual field.

As I tell you, abide in yourself, be your own being, then only you will you get that peace and quietude.

V: So I should not ask any questions?

M: Correct, no questions. Just be what you are. As I tell you, when you abide in your own self, all your questions will be dissolved by the knowledge "you are."

The manifested extends beyond any limits; it is spread all over, ample. If that knowledge "you are" is not there, where is the world? And where are the gods?

By reading various books and listening to everything else, you cannot become a mahatma, but only through that knowledge "I am." Don't concentrate on the body. Because of the body, you call yourself a male or a female. Just hold on to that knowledge "I am" only, without body sense — beyond name and form or design. But you have to employ name, form and design for the sake of worldly activities.

You are lucky, I am not expounding this in great detail to other people. To them, I simply say: You are "you," that knowledge "you are." Accept that only, and be on your way.

Don't meditate on anyone, any God or sage. And that knowledge "you are," don't embellish it with the body. I do not tell people more than they need and may not go into great detail. Because your parents have come to fruition, you are here at this moment. The knowledge that you are has no form and no name; it is purely knowledge "you are." A name and form is good only for the purposes of the world. Presently you are adjustable by the name; name means "myself." And to that name, you have given the disguise of the body. After relinquishing the name that is imposed on you, tell me your name. By hearing nobody, what can be your name?

V: No name!

M: Similarly, you accept the body as your identity. Right here and now, drop your identity with the body and sit still. Just drop this body like a discarded garment; drop also the identity with the name. And now you tell me about yourself. Whatever you are is most appropriate — that greatest principle that you are, about which you cannot give any information. But you are.

So long as you show that you are becoming more intimate with yourself, and getting to know that self, your comments are all right. The love for that knowledge "I am," the most lovable principle, is the knowledge "I am" itself. Is it not correct? That self, that knowledge "I am," has immense love for the self alone. But when that self or that love of the self becomes mixed up or associated with the body, the miseries begin.

V: One should have that realization of "I-ness," right?

M: Yes, but how can that happen unless you have full confirmation that "I am" is purely "I am"? You must have a firm conviction that "I am" is only that "I am," without body-mind form — the knowledge "I am" purely.

V: I am trying to do it, practice it.

M: When you say you are practicing that, it means you are developing your conviction. You are confirming your conviction about it. That is all. What other practice do you need?

V: What else is needed? Is there a technique for it?

M: That itself is the technique, because of which the world is. Male or female is the title of the body form, not of the *atman*, not of the Self.

V: I understand all this. It has been explained beautifully every day, we have read it in the books, we understand it, and that is why I have come here.

M: All these things are said by you, but has the knowledge come within the purview of the knowledge "I am"?

V: No.

M: You must have that full conviction, whatever you may have said. That is the truth and that is "I am." There are no techniques, except the technique that I am -- the firm conviction that "I am" means "I am" only, abidance in "I".

V: I am trying to do that, and I think everyone here present is trying to do the same.

M: When a guru is really a *jnani* — that is, one who has realized himself — you should abide in him. When such a guru guides or directs a disciple, no spiritual technique is necessary. There was a time when Arjuna also was not doing any spiritual practice. All the armies were in the battle area, and the horses were ready to rush at the enemy. What time was available for Arjuna to practice? He just listened and accepted whatever Krishna told him, and that was all he needed to get realization. Arjuna reached the goal through his right attitude and because his guru, Krishna, was realized.

Don't practice this thing, only develop your conviction.

How long do you do this type of meditation? Until you stabilize in the conviction: I am the knowledge "I am." At that stage your individuality is completely extinguished; you no longer have a personality. And "you" denotes the manifested. In place of the lost individuality has come the manifest totality.

For a realized sage, there is no question of going into *samadhi* and descending from *samadhi*. So long as the so-called sage does not abide in that stage, in that selfhood, until then he has to practice going into *samadhi* and coming down from *samadhi*.

V: By sage, you mean the individual?

M: A seeker. Normally the word *sadhaka* is used here, and also *mumukshi*. *Mumukshi* is a lower stage and means "inclined to spirituality." *Sadhaka* means one who thinks he is not "body-mind" but the manifest only.

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