

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

By

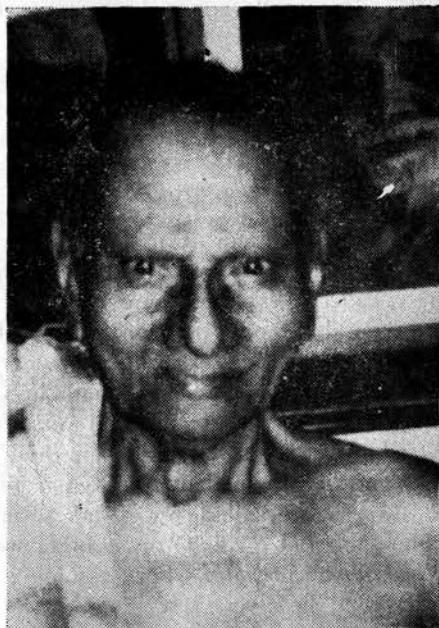
Jean Dunn

IN the city of Bombay, on a noisy, busy, commercial by-lane, there lives an enlightened sage, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. He is a member of the spiritual lineage of the Navanathas. Born in Bombay, on the auspicious day of Hanuman's Jayanti, in March, 1897, he was named Maruti. His father Shivrampant Kampli and mother Parvatibai were both very religious. Brought up on a farm in Kandalaon, a village south of Bombay, he had an alert, inquisitive mind and was deeply interested in religious and philosophical matters. Maruti moved to Bombay in 1918, and in 1924 married Sumatibai, who gave him a son and three daughters.

He began life in Bombay as an office clerk, but his energetic and independent nature soon made him take to petty trading. He opened a small 'bidi' shop, making and selling country cigarettes. In a few years he had several small shops. However there was a growing hunger for truth in him. He approached the great saint, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj and was initiated by him. In less than a year he was ripe for holding meetings for religious discourses.

After the death of his preceptor in 1936, the urge for self-realization reached its zenith and in 1937 he abandoned his family and business and took to the life of a wandering monk. On his way to the Himalayas, where he meant to spend the rest of his life, he met a brother-disciple who convinced him that a life of dispassion in action would be more spiritually fruitful.

Returning to Bombay, he found only one small shop remaining of his business ventures. For the sake of his family he conducted the business and devoted all his energy to spiritual sadhana. He built himself a mezzanine floor as a place for meditation.



Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

In his own words : "When I met my Guru he told me, "You are not what you take yourself to be. Find out what you are. Watch the sense 'I am', find your real self . . ." I did as he told me. All my spare time I would spend looking at myself in silence. And what a difference it made, and how soon ! It took me only three years to realize my true nature."

Soon, attracted by his wisdom and eloquence, people began gathering in the street near his shop and he talked with them whenever free. Later, when his son took charge of the business, the meetings moved into the house. Many foreigners, as well as Hindus, found their way to his humble abode and Maurice Frydman, a Polish devotee, often acted as translator. The questions and answers were so interesting that tape recordings were made. Maurice Frydman

translated many of these enlightening conversations into English and in 1973 these were published under the title '*I Am That*'.¹ As a result, readers from many different countries now come to Bombay, seeking the spiritual guidance of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The present room is now wholly inadequate to accommodate the increasing flow of visitors and plans are underway to acquire a larger place.

The small upper room at 10th Khetwadi Lane, built so many years ago for meditation is daily crowded for the question and answer periods. The walls of the room are lined with portraits of great saints of different religions. There is a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. The noisy street outside is forgotten. Maharaj's slight figure is the focus of attention. In appearance he is short, perhaps five feet tall, going bald, with twinkling, piercing eyes and an infectious smile. Someone once remarked on his big nose and ears and his smiling reply : "Perhaps I am descended from Ganesha (the elephant god)", illustrates his quick wit and unconcern with appearances. He seems to be a simple, ordinary person, much the same as you and I — for a very short while. Soon one understands, that, incredible as it seems, here is a living example that IT CAN BE DONE — IT HAS BEEN DONE ! Courage is renewed, the mind quietened, and there is a sense of well-being, of happiness,

He jokes, laughs, frowns, shakes his finger, pounds his fist to emphasise a point. Different expressions play on his face like sunlight on water. He is beautiful ! One feels his vibrant energy, the pure joy of being, flowing from him. He answers all questions simply, clearly and concisely, with no quoting of scriptures or propounding of doctrines. He is kind and gracious as he knocks the props right out from under you. Cherished concepts are seen for what they are — mere words. Now one understands the value of '*Sat-Sangh*'.

His message is simple and direct : "You ARE the Self here and now. Stop imagining yourself to be 'this' or 'that'. Let go your attachment to the unreal." The best examples

of his teachings are to be found in '*I Am That*'.¹ A few excerpts are given below :

Volume 1

Chpt. 1 : Don't you see that all your problems are your body's problems — food, clothing, shelter, family, friends, fame, name, security, survival — all these lose their meaning the moment you realize that you may not be a mere body . . .

When the mind stays in the 'I am' without moving, you enter a state which cannot be verbalized but can be experienced. All you need to do is to try and try again,

You observe the heart feeling, the mind thinking, the body acting : The very act of observing shows that you are not what you perceive !

Chpt. 3 : It is only when the mind refuses to flow with life and gets stuck at the banks that it becomes a problem. By flowing with life I mean acceptance — letting one what comes and letting go what goes. Desire not, fear not, observe the actual as and when it happens . . .

Chpt. 15 : The person is a very small thing. Actually it is a composite, it cannot be said to exist by itself. Unperceived, it is just not there. It is but the shadow of the mind, the sum total of memories. Pure being is reflected in the mirror of the mind as knowing. What is known takes the shape of a person, based on memory and habit. It is but the shadow or a projection of the knower onto the screen of the mind.

Chpt. 17 : What is wrong with being, knowing and acting effortlessly and happily ? Why consider it so unusual as to expect the immediate destruction of the body ? What is wrong with the body that it should die ? Correct your attitude to your body and leave it alone. Don't pamper, don't torture. Just keep it going, most of the time below the threshold of conscious attention.

Meditation will help you to find your bonds, loosen them, untie them and cast your moor-

¹ *I AM THAT* : Pub. : Chetana Ltd., 34, Ram-part Row, Bombay-400 001, India.

ings. When you are no longer attached to anything, you have done your share. The rest will be done for you. — By whom? — By the same power that brought you so far, that prompted your heart to desire truth and your mind to seek it. It is the same Power that keeps you alive. You may call it Life or the Supreme.

Chpt. 19 : Remember that language is an instrument of the mind, it is made by the mind for the mind.

Chpt. 20 : Seeking out causes is a pastime of the mind. There is no duality of cause and effect. Everything is its own cause.

When you realize that you are not the person but the pure and calm witness, and that fearless awareness is your very being, you are the being.

Desires are just waves in the mind. You know a wave when you see one. A desire is just a thing among many. Feel no urge to satisfy it, no action need be taken on it. Freedom from desire means this : the compulsion to satisfy is absent.

Chpt. 21 : Nothing can set you free because you ARE free.

Chpt. 29 : Just as a deficiency disease is cured through the supply of the missing factor, so are the diseases of living cured by a good dose of intelligent detachment.

There is no need for a way out ! Don't you see that a way out is also a part of the dream ? All you have to do is to see the dream as a dream.

The very idea of going beyond the dream is illusory. Why go anywhere ? Just realize that you are dreaming a dream you call the world and stop looking for ways out.

Chpt. 30 : Which theory of creation is true? — All are true, all are false. You can pick whichever you like best . . . Experiment with any theory you like — if you are but earnest and honest, the attainment of reality will be yours. As a living being you are caught in an untenable and painful situation and you are seeking a way out. You are being offered

several plans of your prison, none quite true. But they all are of some value only if you are in dead earnest. It is the earnestness that liberates, not the theory.

Chpt. 42 : All you can do is to grasp the central point, that reality is not an event and does not happen and whatever happens, whatever comes and goes, is not reality. See the event as event only, the transient as transient, experience as mere experience and you have done all you can. Then you are vulnerable to reality, no longer armoured against it as you were when you gave reality to events and experiences.

Volume II

Chpt. 63 : Life itself is desireless. But the false self wants to continue — pleasantly. Therefore it is always engaged in ensuring one's continuity. Life is unafraid and free. As long as you have the idea of influencing events, liberation is not for you : the very notion of doership, of being a cause, is bondage.

Chpt. 67 : It is the mind that tells you that the mind is there. Don't be deceived. All the endless arguments about the mind are produced by the mind itself, for its protection, continuation and expansion. It is the bland refusal to consider the convolutions and convulsions of the mind that can take you beyond it.

Chpt. 71 : You are looking for the causes of being what you are not ! It is a futile search. There are no causes but your ignorance of your real being, which is perfect and beyond all causation.

When you fight you invite a fight. But when you do not resist, you meet with no resistance. When you refuse to play the game you are out of it.

Nothing stops you from being a Jnani here and now, except fear. You are afraid of being impersonal, of impersonal being. It is all quite simple. Turn away from your desires and fears and from the thoughts they create and you are at once in your Natural state.

Chpt. 73 : Freedom means letting go. People just do not care to let go everything. They

do not know that the finite is the price of the infinite, as death is the price of immortality. Spiritual maturity lies in the readiness to let go everything. The giving up is the first step. But the real giving up is in realizing that there is nothing to give up, for nothing is your own. It is like deep sleep — you do not give up your bed when you fall asleep, you just forget it.

Chpt. 78 : Nobody can say 'I am the witness'. The 'I am' is also the witnessed. The state of detached awareness is the witness-consciousness, the 'mirror-mind'. It rises and sets with its object and thus is not quite the real. Whatever its object it remains the same, hence it is also the real. It partakes of both the real and the unreal and is therefore a bridge between the two.

Chpt. 95 : Keep quiet, undisturbed, and the wisdom and the power will come on their own. You need not hanker. Wait in silence of the heart and mind. It is very easy to be quiet, but willingness is rare. You people want to become supermen overnight. Stay without ambition, without the least desire, exposed, vulnerable, unprotected, uncertain and alone, completely open to and welcoming life as it happens, without the selfish conviction that all must yield to your pleasure or profit, material or so-called spiritual.

Chpt. 97 : The world appears to you so overwhelmingly real because you think of it all the time ; cease thinking of it and it will dissolve into thin mist. You need not forget ;

when desire and fear end, bondage also ends. It is the emotional involvement, the pattern of likes and dislikes which we call character and temperament, that create the bondage.

Do not be afraid of freedom from desire and fear. It enables you to live a life so different from all that you know, so much more intense and interesting, that, truly, by losing all you gain all.

Chpt. 99 : To find reality you must be real in the smallest daily action ; there can be no deceit in the search for truth.

Chpt. 100 : Before you can accept God you must accept yourself, which is even more frightening. The first steps in self-acceptance are not at all pleasant, for what one sees is not a happy sight. One needs all the courage to go further. What helps is silence. Look at yourself in total silence, do not describe yourself. Look at the being you believe yourself to be and remember — you are not what you see. 'This I am not — what am I ?' is the movement of self-enquiry. There are no other means to liberation. All means delay. Resolutely reject what you are not, till the real self emerges in its glorious nothingness, its not-a-thing-ness.

Just look at yourself as you are, see yourself as you are, accept yourself as you are and go ever deeper into what you are.

You are free from what you have understood. The outer expressions of freedom may take time to appear, but they are already there.

"Whether or not the results of meditation are obtained is of no importance. The essential is to arrive at stability ; it is the most precious thing that one can gain. In any case one must trust with confidence in the Divinity and await His grace without impatience. The same rule applies equally to japa : japa pronounced even once is a benefit, whether one is aware of it or not."

— SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI.
