



Rose Petals

Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

On Death and the Love of Life

GURUJI: Many, many problems will be solved if you realize just one thing, and accept it as the bare truth. And that one thing is: how transient, how temporary, how short our life is! Everybody knows that, but nobody realizes it – they do everything as if it's going to be permanent. Is there any truth, even an iota of truth in the sense of permanence? If one realizes that, at least most of our problems change. Our whole attitude towards life changes. But we live as if we were going to be permanent, as if others were going to be permanent, and as if things were going to be permanent. But for how long? We think we have a hundred years more, or even a thousand. And in what way are those things which we normally fret and fume over contributing to our happiness or unhappiness?

There is a poem in the Telugu translation of the Srimad Bhagavatam, “Kaare raajulu raajyamulu klgane, vaareri siri muutan kattukoni poovanga jaalare?” “There are so many kings who have ruled big empires – where are they all now? When they left, did they take their whole empire with them?” In spite of knowing this and studying history, you still think you are going to be permanent! Maybe that is why I like history – it is my favourite subject. Because it shows me the impermanence, the transient nature, of everything. To me all of history is just like a Veda, an Upanishad, a Purana, a spiritual treatise. What else will teach us the impermanence of life more than history? Just think about it!

In this short span of time of our life, we create so many problems, problems in relationships, fighting with one another. We try to amass as much wealth and as many properties as we can – buying lands, building houses, looking at them as if they were our creations, becoming attached to them. Is this really needed? Is it really wise? To me more than anything else, the remembrance, the awareness of the bare truth of impermanence is enough: no scriptures are needed, no guru is needed to tell you this truth – it is so obvious! It is a truth which yawns in our faces. Just be aware of that, and see how your attitude towards the world – to people, to things, to your own personality – changes. How much we are wasting our time! Can you get it back? Don't waste your time, especially in unhappy pursuits. I'm not saying, “Don't waste your time and try to completely dedicate yourself to Baba.” At least try to be happy, whatever your concept of happiness is. Just like when you have to leave India to go back to the West in two or three days, then how do you feel? “Oh, let us have a satsang, let's have darshan, let's enjoy as much as possible!” You feel like this because you know you are leaving. But we're forgetting that our whole life is a trip like this and our leaving is already scheduled. What about that?



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DEVOTEE: I have a question. What are the roots of fear?

GURUJI: Fear comes because you're afraid to lose something you love. It springs from love. The basic fear is the fear of death. Even that fear comes because you love your life so much you don't want to part with it. For us, death means the cessation of life, our existence, what we are; we cease to exist. We don't want that to happen because we love it so much. Whether it is happy or unhappy we want to perpetuate it. This love of life, this urge for survival, is so biological it is basic in every human being. All of our fears, even the ones in our daily life, are an outcome of love – the thought that we may lose something which we love very much.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, lately a number of us have had to face the experience of family or dear friends dying, and the reality of death. I'm just wondering what you feel is the most helpful way to think about and approach death.

GURUJI: What I would say is, instead of thinking about and trying to know how to approach death, first take care of your approach to life.

DEVOTEE: But suppose life is not very attractive?

GURUJI: Is death attractive? [Guruji laughs] It's not about being attractive or not. There are two inevitabilities that we experience: one we are experiencing, and the other one we are going to experience. Our life is something inevitable, isn't it? [Guruji laughs] Death is also inevitable. Now life is at hand, try to think of *life*.

DEVOTEE: If a loved one is suffering a great deal, what can we do to help and support them in their process?

GURUJI: It depends upon your relationship to the loved one. There's no specific theory about how to support them, it's personal. How you want to support them and what kind of support they need differs from person to person. Just saying things like, "Don't be worried!" is all just talk and not actually supporting anyone. What I would think is, that death is inevitable. People say that our whole life is based on fear of death. I don't see it like that. I see that what is actually basic to our human life, our being, is love of life. We love our life so much that the thought of the extinction of it is fearful to us. Are we taking care of that which we love, or thinking of that which we fear? If we take care of our life fully and live a fulfilled life, we need not worry about death, because anyhow it is inevitable. Life is also inevitable, we can't avoid it too. Why I say inevitable is, that for many people if the question is asked, "Why are you living?" the most honest answer they could give is, "Because I haven't died yet!" [Guruji laughs] Let us not experience that sad situation. Let's find some meaning in life, some purpose, some fulfilment. Not simply accepting its inevitability.

Let us take care of 'the bird in the hand', the life you experience now, instead of worrying about 'the bird in the bush', something that will happen in the future. Talking about death which we don't know through experience is just beating about the bush. Life is here, you are experiencing it. Think of how to make it the best, how to get the best out of it. And if at all you want to give any support to those who are troubled with death, say these things to them. Then that is the way, the very way to help them stop thinking about death.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, death doesn't just bring up sadness but also a questioning about the very nature of life, about the uncertainty of our own position.

GURUJI: That is what I am saying. It should bring up that question, and then the next question is: in the face of that uncertainty, what are we doing? Anybody's, and especially a beloved person's death, should give us that enquiry.

DEVOTEE: Do you mean how we're spending our time and what we are doing with our own lives?

GURUJI: Yes, that's what I mean.

In the ordinary emotional sense it is quite natural that one grieves over the loss of a beloved. But who will grieve over our death? Is it not proper on our part to leave behind at least one person who will grieve over our death? What are we doing for that?



DEVOTEE: What can I give to someone who is close to death?

GURUJI: As far as I know, what we can give is to pray to Baba. Or if you are thinking of material things, of course I am not good at advising about that. And especially for one who is close to death, materially nothing may be helpful to him. What he needs is to face death happily. So what will help him do that? Baba's grace! So pray to Baba. Pray for him to die happily, pray for those who want to live, to help them live happily, and pray for yourself that you may also live happily. So pray, pray, pray, always pray! Baba, Baba, Baba! That is the solution.



DEVOTEE: Gururji, being seventy-six now, I think a lot about my last breath and my last hour, and I've read that one should hold on to the guru's feet until that last breath and then let go. But that seems to be a little frightening, to let go at the very end. Could you please talk about that?

GURUJI: Why is it frightening?

DEVOTEE: It is frightening to let go.

GURUJI: That is what even Ramana Maharshi says about the fear of death. When he had his experience of realization, what he experienced was the fear of death. Because there we lose ourselves, our own identity, which we have been nourishing for so long, holding onto it with a passion. That will go. For us, that is death. But actually we don't know what death is because we haven't died so far, so how can we be afraid of it? Maybe death is more beautiful than life, who knows? But we're afraid of death because our concept of death means losing ourselves. That is exactly what spirituality is about too. Spirituality also says when you realize yourself, you lose yourself, the ego will be erased, dissolved, and there will be no you left, there will be only That. This is a kind of definition of death for us. That is what Ramana Maharshi beautifully wrote in *Arunachala Padikam*, "I call out to all those people who are ready to commit suicide: Come! Here is a beautiful way to commit suicide. Come to Arunachala!" So holding on to our guru's feet means, in other words, we are 'courting death'.

But when our biological death happens, it will be more beautiful, more peaceful, more assuring if we are at the guru's feet. That makes death not death at all.



DEVOTEE: Couldn't it be that we fear death because we've done it before?

GURUJI: Do you remember it? You don't remember it. The reason why you don't want to die is

because you want to live.

DEVOTEE: If I don't remember it, why is the thought of death always associated with pain and suffering? Is it not instinctive?

GURUJI: Even though life also has suffering and pain, you want to live, and you want to mitigate the suffering and live a happy life. It is only the quality of life which you don't like, not life itself. You want to live, but with a difference: you want to live happily. So it is the love of life that makes you want to live. Love is basic, not fear.

DEVOTEE: Could it be, Guruji, that for some *jnanis* for whom knowledge is fundamental, there is no longer a difference between life and death? I'm thinking of Nisargadatta Maharaj. In his last talks before he passed away in 1981 he was saying that, to him, there was no longer any difference whether he was in the body or not, that life per se held no attraction for him because he knew a state beyond both life and death. And some people were shocked at this. In this respect could one say that knowledge is more fundamental than love?

GURUJI: Here there is no question of love or knowledge or truth. He loved his life so much that he got true life. We love life but we don't get the real life. He loved life truly and he got true life. So his love was fulfilled. And once the love was fulfilled he had no fear of losing life. He knew whether life is there or not, he is there – true life is there. Because we do not know it, we fear, "Oh, we may lose it!" But for him there was no fear.

DEVOTEE: A *jnani* knows he'll live beyond death.

GURUJI: Yes.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, I live my life as if it's never going to end, unaware of its impermanent nature.

GURUJI: Actually, it is everybody's case; uncertainty is always there, but nobody sees that. When we take a breath and then exhale, we can't be sure whether we'll take another breath or not. It's not our conscious effort or choice to be able to breathe. If it were our choice, if it were in our hands, nobody would stop breathing! We are put into such a helpless situation, but in another way it is such a beautiful condition. Even though it appears helpless, it is also very beautiful. So instead of breathing suffering and suffocating ourselves, let us enjoy that happiness in every breath.



GURUJI: I want you to be happy, happier, happiest – emanating happiness and making other people and your environment happy. So happy that it's not enough only you are happy, everyone around you should also be happy.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, I think every one of us here could say that our life has changed in the direction you are saying, and we could say we didn't do anything for it. That it is all your grace and Baba's grace. But is there anything we can do?

GURUJI: I'm not asking you to do anything, I'm only asking you to experience and enjoy what Baba has given you and what he is ready to give you. That's all. Why I am again and again telling you this is because I feel that your lives have become routine, run-of-the-mill lives. That thrill! You are losing the thrill of it. Let it not be mechanical. Every day should be a new day, a fresh day, as if you haven't existed yesterday and you're not going to exist tomorrow. Today is, this moment is the real

truth, it is the real reality. Happily live a fulfilled life. Love with art, live like an artist. Try to enjoy your life like that. And, as I have told you, if you have a problem tell me. I will take care of it. If you don't have any problems, enjoy it. [Guruji laughs] Is it such a difficult instruction?



GURUJI: The fundamental pull of our love to the Sadguru is the love of life. Whether we love Sai Baba, Ramana, Arunachala or anyone else, we love them because we love ourselves. We love them because they represent the perfect fulfilment of our own life, our own existence – how we want to be! We don't like the state of affairs where our life feels lifeless. The Sadguru represents a state where life is experienced in its fullness. So it is our love of life that is expressed in our pull to the Sadguru. When we really love our own life and realize everything is life, we love all of life. Then everything becomes an extension of that. So, in a way, Sai Baba is an extension of our own life. [Guruji laughs]



Guruji's voice

