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Extracts from
Sri Babuji's Satsangs

The Aesthetic Experience

DEVOTEE: Guruji, you ask us to be focused, to check that every step we make is taking us towards our goal, and to drop whatever we may be doing that is not helpful to us, but what about the arts, what about beauty in our life, could that not also be part of our need?

GURUJI: If you can experience aesthetics in your own life, in your own mind and body, what more piece of art than that is needed for us? We're breathing, we're seeing, we're thinking, we experience so many things. What is it that is breathing? What is it that is seeing and thinking and experiencing? What is happening here? What a mystery it is! Suddenly we are happy, suddenly we are not happy. We're full of doubt, then suddenly we have so much faith. Some people give us happiness, some trigger aversion. What are all these things? See the beauty in this. To me, every one of you is a great piece of art! And the pieces of art we see outside are only a reflection of our own self. They describe it, they are a shadow of it. Once they successfully reflect that, once they are a replica of it, then they are considered to be beautiful art, because when looking at them, we look at the aesthetics of our own life.

What I am stressing is, try to know *this* one [your own self]. Everybody's mind, everybody's thought, everybody's life, is just a piece of art. To me, you all look like different pieces of art, more beautiful than those by Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. [Guruji chuckles] Yes, they are beautiful pieces of art, but why can't we enjoy this here [pointing to his heart] just as we enjoy something which has been done on a canvas? It is so real. *This* is art! This is aesthetics! This is aesthetic experience!

I prefer – instead of going for the works of Michelangelo – that everybody tries to be a Michelangelo and experiences their own art. [Guruji chuckles] Just think how much he must have experienced his own art! Like that, experience your own creations. There is so much art, there are so many minds – beautiful. As I am saying this, every mind is thinking in a different way – somebody is receiving it, somebody else has a doubt, "What is this?" Somebody is



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afraid to ask a question, somebody else is sleepy... See the beauty of it!



DEVOTEE: Baba is giving us everything in life. In spite of this I sometimes try to withdraw from all that he has given me, thinking, "What is all this? I should not be here, I should go away, withdraw from all these mundane things." I don't know whether this is a genuine feeling or if it happens because of concepts I've accumulated from things I've read. Or maybe it's just a negative way of looking, not seeing the beauty of what I have in life?

GURUJI: Whatever it is, even if it is as profound as a scripture, if it makes you dry and drab, unaesthetic – give it up, turn your eyes away from it! Not that it is bad, but if it makes you lose the awareness of beauty it won't be of any use.

All the scriptures are expressions of love – try to see that. What are the Vedas, the mantras? That which the *rishis*, the seers, exclaimed in their ecstatic experience of Brahman – their utterances. They sang, they danced and those became the mantras. So, intrinsically what are they? They are the expressions of their own ecstasy, their ecstatic love, love of Brahman, that experience – whatever you call it. All the scriptures are expressions of that.

If you look at them like that you'll see their beauty. But in simply trying to master the scriptures, we make them dry, and make our own soul dry and drab, incapable of experiencing, appreciating or feeling the beauty, the love, the ecstasy, the art. It is not science – I look at it as art. The saints and *rishis* are all artists. Even the divine – God – is also referred to as an artist, a *kavihi*.

So everything is a piece of art. That which affects the heart is real art!



GURUJI: Always remember this: just try to realize what an opportunity has been given to you – being in such a situation in Shirdi, or wherever it is. And most of your sorrows and problems are all your creations, they have no real meaning at all!

Life is short. Don't waste it on those things which are not at all connected to why you are here. Remember your purpose! Then the book of life will be like a good novel – a pleasure to read. Otherwise it will be like a textbook. Don't read it like a textbook, something where we have to know every word and meaning, annotate and reproduce it, and if we can't we may fail, so there's a sense of performance. But when it's a novel, how do we read? We remember things, we enjoy it, we can even reproduce it better. This life is a novel, a beautiful novel! Written by whom? Written by Baba. He is the author. Try to read it and enjoy it – don't make it a textbook!



GURUJI: Aesthetic experience is where you feel one with something, you forget yourself. In Sanskrit it's called *rasaanubhuti*, aesthetics. For instance, when you are watching a movie or a drama, or reading a very interesting book, what happens is you become one with the characters in it. You cry with them, you laugh with them. You forget that you are so-and-so. Experiencing that is aesthetics.

I often give the example of a movie, a tragedy. The Telugu movie, *Rakta Sambandham*, for instance, is a beautiful tragedy. As far as I know, any normal human being [Guruji laughs] who watches it won't leave the cinema without crying, even a very stoic or stone-hearted person. They go to see it and they cry and cry and cry there, so much. And they come out and

say, "I have to go and see that movie again!" [laughter]

I know a person who has seen that movie two hundred times. Going there just to cry! [laughter] What is that? Crying is an unpleasant experience. But why does he crave it? Because even though he is crying, what he is getting there is an aesthetic experience, and that gives him such joy. That is the mystery of it! How could anybody *want* to cry?

Why are Shakespeare's tragedies more famous than his comedies? If anybody wants to name a masterpiece of Shakespeare they name a tragedy. Why tragedies? Is it the sadistic nature of human beings that if somebody is suffering we become happy? No. It is because it is an aesthetic experience, not our sadistic nature. Because the one who watches also cries – a sadist won't cry when somebody suffers. That is the difference.



DEVOTEE: When I experience something beautiful, I want to share it, I want to tell someone about it, I want to talk about it. But there aren't any adequate words, so there seems to be no way to share it.

GURUJI: The only thing you can do is just try. Yes, we have to try. The people who experienced that love, that aesthetic experience, they also tried and tried and tried. That is what all the scriptures are. They tried to describe their experience but they failed. They said, "No, I can't describe it," but they didn't say so in the beginning. They knew it was indescribable, but they still tried to express it. If somebody writes a poem it doesn't mean they are actually able to describe the real poetic experience, to really share that experience, but they try. The result of that effort in their heart, that is poetry.

The one who simply gives up in the beginning – when looking at the Himalayas, "Beautiful! How beautiful are they? Ah, I can't explain it" – he can't be a poet! A poet is one who tries. "I can't explain it to you, to be honest, but I'll try." Then he takes his pen. He becomes a Wordsworth – the English poet. His words are always worthy, that's why he is words-worth. [laughter]

The longing, the spirit, the struggle behind those words, that is enough. All this longing is just like a baby crying. The mother knows whether maybe some ant or something has bitten it, or if it is asking for milk, or is not able to get to sleep, or is too hot – or in the West, maybe too cold – or whatever. The mother knows even though the baby is simply crying. What does it mean? Are there any words? The mother understands the spirit behind those different cries of "Baaa baaa" [Guruji imitates the crying of a baby] in different modes and tunes. "Oh, this 'baaa baaa' is for that, this 'baaa baaa' is for this." [laughter] In fact, all poetry is baaa baaas. The mother understands the longing behind it.



DEVOTEE: Is it correct to say that we need to strive in order to become aware of choicelessness? It seems to be a paradox.

GURUJI: Actually it is good if you experience the paradox. Yes, it is a paradox. There is such beauty in it. Doesn't it have beauty? That is why it is one of the beautiful elements of poetry.

Life is a book, a beautiful poem. Try to experience its beautiful aesthetics. The whole of life becomes poetry when we see it that way. Paradox, yes! Paradox doesn't mean that there is no truth in it; it is the truth. You see it everywhere. For example, Arunachala – it is a paradox! *Aruna* means dynamic, *achala* means static. What is this static-dynamic? It's a paradox!

So try to experience the paradox. Enjoy it, don't resist it. It can give you so many beautiful insights, so many beautiful experiences. Try to experience your whole life like a

poem. Read “Arunachala Padikam”, which Ramana Maharshi wrote on his own accord, without being asked by anybody. Usually he wrote only when somebody asked him to, or put a question, but “Arunachala Padikam” is the one work he felt like writing. To me, that is his real poem – his heart. See how many paradoxes you can find in it! He enjoys it.

It is like when we see a great mountain. It is great, but what about you? You are so small. But is being so small a sad situation? One should be ashamed of it? No! Here we enjoy it! We forget ourselves and what we experience is the vastness there. The experience of enjoying being small is exactly what happens when you are in the presence of a Sadguru. That is why he’s called guru – guru means big. He’s so big that he makes us feel so little – but that does not belittle us! We enjoy it. It is a paradox again. That enjoyment, the aesthetics of it, is the relationship between us and our Sadguru.

Everywhere there is beauty, everywhere there is poetry!



Guruji’s voice

