



Rose Petals

Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

Hollow Man, Stuffed Man

DEVOTEE: Guruji, you were talking earlier about the hollow man in T. S. Eliot's poem¹ and I was wondering, what is the difference between hollowness and emptiness, between the hollowness T. S. Eliot is referring to, and the emptiness that is needed to allow Baba's treasure to come in?

GURUJI: Emptiness means there is nothing inside, neither positive nor negative, not even the awareness of our own limited self, this limited personality; there is only some void, which is good, in fact. What T. S. Eliot was referring to is not that. He was speaking of a hollowness which is shallow, "We are the hollow men," meaning shallow talk, shallow actions, where nothing inside is real but we keep on doing and saying something or other in order to keep our limited ego alive. That is hollowness, which he defined in the next line, "We are the stuffed men." A stuffed man is like the scarecrow they put in fields to drive away the birds, an effigy. It looks angry but it has no feelings. People are acting just like that scarecrow, Eliot says.

Most people are stuffed, stuffed with so many things: politics, some shallow news, some information. Early in the morning we immediately have to read the newspaper or switch on the TV to get the news. Or the moment we meet somebody we start exchanging the news we have collected with the news they have collected. One person stuffs the other fellow, and that fellow stuffs him back. That is how all this stuffed man activity is going on. That is "stuffed"! [Guruji chuckles]

DEVOTEE: So when we are trying to create an environment that is conducive to keeping our focus, how can we skillfully remove the distractions, such as people we have already invited into the environment?



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¹ The questioner is referring to the acclaimed poem "The Hollow Men" (1925) by T. S. Eliot. Guruji had a deep love and knowledge of English literature and had specialized and excelled in the subject as a college student.

GURUJI: You don't need to do anything. The moment you stop acting as a hollow man or a stuffed man, it's finished – the other stuffed men can't relate to you! For them you seem so irrelevant [laughter], so shallow. They feel you are not one of them, and they will slowly drop away by themselves.

DEVOTEE: It's frightening, though, Guruji, to totally experience one's hollowness and no one wants to explore it because it's depressing. How can we face the fear of going into that hollowness?

GURUJI: By understanding that it is more dangerous to be hollow and not face it, that it is more dangerous not to know you are hollow. Anyway, what you face is what you are. It's not a ghost, it's not something unknown! Why should we be afraid of facing our own selves?

DEVOTEE: When we see through that stuffing, is that when true emptiness happens?

GURUJI: When this stuffing is gone, yes. Unstuffing is done! [Guruji laughs]



GURUJI: When you sit in meditation and try to focus on something, whether it's the void, emptiness, Baba, Buddhahood, vipassana, or whatever, the moment you sit, thoughts come. Why are they coming? What is the purpose of those thoughts? Just look at what thoughts are coming and you will see the hollowness, the stuffedness. The thoughts are all the effects of what is actually stuffed inside.

DEVOTEE: Is everything which is not about the object of one's focus all just stuffing?

GURUJI: Is it not? The *real* stuff is your object of love. So stuffing ourselves with meaningless things is having no real stuff, isn't it? [laughter]



DEVOTEE: Is it a fear of losing ourselves that makes us fill up the emptiness?

GURUJI: That's one of the reasons, yes, but usually our fear doesn't get to such an intensity. We stuff ourselves mostly out of habit; it's mainly our patterns, the habit energy, those things on the surface level. If you go deeper and deeper into it and actually experience that voidness, then the fear of losing yourself will come. Usually, though, the thoughts just keep coming. It's not that you "think" – it's rather that thoughts go on.

DEVOTEE: Is there a way to work with that, Guruji, if one sees that process?

GURUJI: One of the ways is to ignore those thoughts. The moment you are aware of them, simply ignore them. Don't think, "What am I thinking? Why has that thought come?" They are not worthy of even that much attention! Just ignore them and focus on your object. "Suddenly I'm thinking of my family! Maybe I should follow those thoughts?" Simply stop this and they will go away. The next day those thoughts won't appear again; something else will come. Ignore them! Keep bringing your mind to your object. That ignoring is the crucial thing. If you start analysing, another pattern starts with the analysis, and then in the name of analysis you'll be simply thinking, brooding, daydreaming... [Guruji chuckles]

Just ignore whatever thoughts are not about the object of your focus, even the good

thoughts, and put the mind on your object. After some time, they get tired and they won't come. It is only a pattern, and if the pattern is broken, the thoughts won't come.

DEVOTEE: What is that pattern? You mean a pattern of a particular way of thinking?

GURUJI: Yes, a pattern of thinking, but usually it is very difficult to see. If you can maintain a journal you will see that particular kinds of thoughts come up with a particular frequency – negative thoughts, thoughts about various things, maybe about the mother, or the father, or our work. Try to make a detailed journal and you will see that certain kinds of thoughts come up with a certain frequency. Write in it every day and see how the thoughts and patterns are going on. There is a pattern. The content may change a little, but the pattern will be the same.



DEVOTEE: So pattern and habit energy are the same thing?

GURUJI: They're the same. I call it pattern, and in Vedantic terminology they call it *vasana* or habit energy.

DEVOTEE: Does that mean something which has been repeated over time, again and again?

GURUJI: Yes, again and again. And they get strengthened.

DEVOTEE: How did it start? Every pattern must have a beginning, which we then go on repeating.

GURUJI: It started when you were not aware of these things, when you were hungry, when you were crying for milk and looking for the mother. It starts the moment our mind begins functioning: two patterns, three patterns, two million patterns, three million, one billion... It goes on like that, multiplying.



DEVOTEE: So you are saying that the best way to overcome patterns is simply to ignore them?

GURUJI: Yes, ignore them! Different spiritual schools have various methods, but the main technique focused on overcoming patterns is repeating a name or a mantra, a sound – *japa*, or whatever you call it. Actually, the whole practice of mantra is based on breaking our patterns.

DEVOTEE: But Baba didn't give any mantras.

GURUJI: There was no need. He knows another way. Without needing any tool he breaks the pattern. It's gone! At a certain moment, say in a satsang, or when we are just looking at the mountains, or at the Ganges, the same Ganges we have seen a thousand times, or the same place we've been to a hundred times, suddenly something happens in us: a pattern is suddenly broken, just like that! Then you find that you are not the same person, your way of thinking has changed. What happened we do not know, but we notice that something has changed in us. Something is simply taken away, and something else has come in, and we feel that we are new, the world is new, the whole path is new, and we start looking at our same old friends in a new way. That *he* can do!



DEVOTEE: Gururji, what's the relationship between emptiness, which is a positive experience, and habit energy of thought, or the patterns?

GURUJI: Once you become free of patterns, you experience the emptiness, the voidness, the *shunya*. It is the patterns which are making you hollow, stuffed. First we have to put the *real* stuff into us, so that this gas, this hollowness, will slowly go.

There are two approaches to experiencing it: the Buddhist approach and the Vedic. Buddha wanted to directly experience that emptiness. He saw that all this is just hollowness; it's not real, so get rid of it. But can you do it? It is the branch on which you are sitting. How can you cut the branch on which you yourself are sitting! So the other approach is to try and put something real in your mind, some *real* stuff, so that you slowly get filled and eventually you can remove that too. Actually, *shunya* [emptiness] is *purna* [fullness] and *purna* is *shunya*. In Sanskrit their meaning comes to the same thing – *shunya* is zero and *purna* again is zero, but zero infinitely full! So what the Buddha calls *shunya*, in Hinduism they call *purna*. *Purna* and *shunya* are the same, but how people view existence is different, and the technique and the approach is different.



GURUJI: Usually we stuff our minds with so many things. When we first get up we ask, "How is the weather? Oh, today it's cool. Oh, the sun is beautiful." And as soon as we pick up the phone, "It's cold, it's damp, it's wet, it's dry... Yesterday it was like that and today the forecast is like this." Or, "How was that movie?" "How is the Uttaranchal government? Before it was Uttar Pradesh and how is the new government doing and who is the Chief Minister?" [Gururji chuckles] And what is this and what is that...? All this *stuff*!

In the first issue of *The Spectator*, the editor, Addison, wrote about why he was starting the paper.² One of the reasons he gave was to provide that kind of hollow and stuffed man something meaningful to contemplate, so that they would have something useful to stuff in their empty brains. "I want to provide them with some good stuff. The moment they get up, *The Spectator* will be there on their table, giving them something useful to ponder, about society, or about themselves." I like that!

DEVOTEE: [jokingly] Is that also one of the things that happens for us in satsang?

GURUJI: [laughs] Maybe – so there will be some stuff for you to talk about which makes you focus on your object, something which is relevant, which is meaningful to you and to achieving your object. Whether or not you are talking about it I do not know, but I try. Otherwise those kind of meaningless thoughts will go on.

Why do you read newspapers? You do not know. Is it not simply stuffing yourself? Just think! If you were a business person and you really needed the information, or if it was connected to something practical, there would be some meaning in it, but avoid stuffing yourself with things which are not relevant to you, which are not directly – or even somewhat indirectly – connected to your life, to achieving your goal, your object, whether

² *The Spectator* daily newspaper was founded in London in 1711 by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Popular and influential, it ran for eighteen months. In 1828 the title was used for the launch of a political and cultural magazine that still plays a significant role in contemporary British print media.

practical or spiritual, whatever it is. Avoid that mere stuffing and unnecessary talk! It is an addiction. We do so many things which are not relevant to us.

Make it a principle not to talk about anything which is not useful to you or the other person. Whenever you talk about something it should be useful either to you or to someone else. That which is not useful to either of you is stuffing. Just check all the talking you do. See how much you are stuffing yourself and others! Most of our talk is just stuffing. Examine it and you'll know. Then you'll start talking meaningfully, your company will be meaningful, and you will be in meaningful company. Then your whole life will become really meaningful.



Gurujī's voice

