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Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

The Question of Choice



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DEVOTEE: Guruji, the way you speak about getting a glimpse of the Sadguru's state, you make it sound as though we had a choice whether to hold on to that blissful experience or be distracted from it. Is it really a choice?

GURUJI: It is a choice, but in fact it's a choiceless choice. It feels like a choice, but actually we don't have a choice, not only in this respect, but in almost all aspects of our life. The concept of choice is very tricky. This so-called choice is governed by our past habits. We get distracted by the habit of always looking for something new.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, it seems that the glimpses we had were given, and we didn't do anything to get them. Is there at least something we can do not to stop them?

GURUJI: Everything is given, how can you 'stop' anything?! Not only that experience, all our experiences have been given. But it's how we take them, how we receive them and how we

relate to them, that makes us feel that we are choosing. Just think about any experience in your life, is it really your choice? For instance, it feels like you have chosen this path, but was it really a choice? Are we really capable of choosing?

People think that their life is the result of their choices and that they have the freedom to choose. They have a concept of spiritual life where they think that by treading the path one loses the choice – as if you had it before and were going to lose it now. What I say is, you never had it to lose! [Guruji laughs] Just think of anything – how you dress, what you eat, where you live, when you get up, anything, take any small, insignificant, trivial thing and try to explore it. You will see that you don't have much choice!

DEVOTEE: But it often feels as if we had a choice.

GURUJI: Yes, it feels like it.

DEVOTEE: For example, in satsang, whether I go and sit here, or there, in front of you.

GURUJI: No, if it was your choice you would be sitting here. [Guruji points at his feet] [Laughter] So within what is left you try to make another choice, which is the next best, and then the next best. And finally, you'll be satisfied with what you get and think, "Oh, it's my choice." [Guruji laughs]

DEVOTEE: But the experience feels like having a choice: choosing to sit here or there.

GURUJI: Yes, that's what I'm saying, everyone feels like that. Everybody says it is my choice, my choice, my choice! That feeling in Vedantic jargon is called *ajnana* or ignorance. That *ajnana* is not somewhere inside, at the back of your head. No, it's there in every action, in every thought, in every breath. That's how it tricks you.

DEVOTEE: But what makes it not my choice?

GURUJI: Explore, explore! It's not so easy to experience it. It's not enough just to think, "Oh, I thought I had choices and now I'm told there are no choices, so I'll stop thinking like that!" No, it's not so easy. But if one can really see and experience it, it is what some traditions call 'choiceless awareness'. We are all choiceless, but we are not aware of the existence of our own choicelessness. If we are aware of how choiceless our whole being is, how it is simply flowing, and if we can learn to observe the flow – not as a glimpse, but as a continuous experience – then we will be in that choiceless awareness. Choiceless, right, we are all like that. Awareness, that's the problem – we don't have it! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE: If we should ever be aware of our choicelessness, is that a good place to be?

GURUJI: Yes, a very good place.

DEVOTEE: Because it is the truth?

GURUJI: It is the truth. What better place is there than truth?



DEVOTEE: Would it be correct to say the reason our choosing is choiceless is because we are so conditioned by our past, our emotions, our environment, by so many things. When we reach a point of being unconditioned, will there then be complete freedom to choose?

GURUJI: That's correct. You express it in terms of conditioning and freedom, I express it in terms of helplessness and ability. The immediate effect of that inevitable choice, we experience as helplessness, not as conditioning. We try to choose but are unable to choose. Finally, when the choice becomes inevitable, we 'choose' something but the moment we choose, we experience a kind of lack of fulfilment because we have done it helplessly. So, in fact, what we want is the ability to make the right choice. It's said that, in the state of choiceless awareness, the right choice will come. Why do we have to achieve that choiceless awareness? In order to choose properly. [Guruji laughs] That is the whole paradox. So in contrast to helplessness, we gain the power to choose.



DEVOTEE: So what seem like choices are dictated by our patterns and habits?

GURUJI: Yes, past habits. We are all driven by our own habit energies. They are called in different traditions, patterns, *vasanas*, *samskaras*, *karmas*, so many things. But whatever you call it, this is the essence of it.

DEVOTEE: Doesn't the spiritual path endeavour to remove these patterns and past habits and erase the ego?

GURUJI: What is ego? It is the net result of all your past actions. That is what is called ego. So, some say, "Erase your ego", others say, "Destroy your *vasanas*" or, "Destroy your patterns." This is all jargon, but whatever it is, this is the thing that should happen.



DEVOTEE: Do saints like Sai Baba and Sri Ramana actually have any choice?

GURUJI: No, they don't have any choice. They have no choices at all. Because whatever is happening, they simply flow spontaneously with it. They don't *choose* like we do, especially about their own life.

DEVOTEE: Because they don't have preferences?

GURUJI: They don't have preferences, they don't have choices. There is nothing to choose.

DEVOTEE: What do you mean by "they flow spontaneously with it"? In a situation there is usually more than one possibility, so what does it mean to flow with it?

GURUJI: To choose is to have resistance to something that is happening. A person who doesn't have any resistance and accepts all things equally, flows spontaneously with whatever comes.

DEVOTEE: When there is spontaneity, there is no choice?

GURUJI: Yes, when there's no choice, there'll be spontaneity! [Laughter] But check, is this so-called choicelessness really spontaneous? Question again! We call certain things spontaneous, but are they really spontaneous? Explore! I'm not giving any answers, I'm only trying to make you think. Trying! [Laughter]



DEVOTEE: And what is will?

GURUJI: I think the effect which gives us the illusion that we are making a choice, is called will. And if we go on willing and willing and willing like that, willing to be a part of that delusion, that would be our last will! [Laughter]

DEVOTEE: What about the concept of God's will?

GURUJI: The ability to choose perfectly, to will perfectly, is godhead – that's what is meant by 'God's will'. "Thy will be done"¹ is about trying to be one with God who wills, to be one with that will. So it is about trying to get the capacity to be one with God's will. Instead of the word 'choice' they use the word 'will'. In fact, in English they mean almost the same. So they are saying that only God has the capacity to choose; you don't have it! So, try to gain that perfect will. As the Bible says, "Be perfect, therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect." That is the message.

It may appear as if you are becoming subservient to God's will, but you're not. It's more like becoming one with it – your will and that will are not two, they become one. Then you become as perfect as your Father in heaven. They express it in terms of imperfection and perfection; I express it in terms of helplessness and capacity or power; someone else may express it in terms of conditioning and freedom. Fundamentally, they are all referring to the same thing.



¹ A half verse from *The Lord's Prayer*, taught by Jesus to his disciples. It is the most common Christian prayer.

DEVOTEE: If we have no choice, it means we have actually no control over our lives.

GURUJI: It's a mystery that once you come to know you have no choice, it makes you feel very sad because you love to have choices, you want to choose. If I say, "No, there are no choices for you," it feels like a punishment, as if you've lost your freedom and have become helpless. "Oh, choicelessness, what a sad situation!" It feels like that. But if you can see it from another angle, you will enjoy it. And, the moment you enjoy the choicelessness, that glimpse of fulfilment becomes a view.

Some people say, "It's all *prarabdha karma*, there's nothing you can do. Everything, every moment when you're moving, when you're sitting, whether you're breathing or not, everything is predestined!" But it is not predestined or choiceless in the way you think. It is not that kind of choicelessness, that you can't change at all. Yes, to some extent you can change it, it is not completely predestined. [Guruji drops a pen and catches it in mid-air] The pen is destined to fall to the floor. Its velocity is dependent on its weight, the height it is falling from and the density of the air – all these things determine its speed. But if I catch it in the middle of its fall, where is predestination now? If this possibility was not there, there would be no question of spirituality, a Sadguru, mukti or liberation. What is this liberation you're all trying for? Liberation from the condition of predestination. If you don't accept this, and think that even liberation is part of your destiny, is it real liberation?

Fate or grace, free will or destiny – these are big questions, books are written on them, hmm? [Guruji laughs] It won't lead us anywhere. Just think about these things: do you really have a choice? And what makes you think, what makes you experience, that having a choice gives you joy? And what is actually choicelessness, and why does it make you so sad? Think about these things! It's a different kind of choicelessness than what you think it is. There are no words for it, that's the problem.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, if one could accept real choicelessness, then there would come with it a tremendous sense of security because, if it's no longer my choice that things happen, then it must be someone else's choice. And that 'someone' or 'something' has, as it were, taken care of me my whole life, so why worry? I mean, one's sense of security must increase immensely if one can really rest in that choicelessness.

GURUJI: Yes, that is exactly where Baba comes in. He gives you that sense of security so that you can explore, and enjoy the choicelessness. You give the choice to him and you feel, "Yes, I have given the choice to him, he will steer my life. He will take all decisions for me." In fact, you are not giving the choice to him, but it feels like it and that gives you a sense of security so that you can go further; otherwise you can't, because it's just like trying to cut the branch you are sitting on. It is perilous to you, so you don't do it. This is exactly where the Sadguru comes in, so it becomes easier for you. But to some, instead of thinking of this in a positive way, they feel like they have given up their liberty, and all their choices are gone. To them it almost feels as if they are bound, like slaves. But it's not true. It means they are not capable of seeing the beauty in it. You have brought up a very good point – in giving the choice to a Sadguru who loves us, who can take better decisions for us, we feel secure, we feel happy.

So, when you feel that it is really choiceless – whether you like what's happening or not, whether you understand it or not, whether you have any idea of what's going to happen or where all of this is going to end [Laughter] – you don't mind, because you have that sense of security. Then the real path starts, and you begin to experience real love. That's what the experience of love is like!



DEVOTEE: Guruji, let us say that we accept our helplessness, and feel we are being helped – where

is the role of our action in this? Because a kind of apathy could set in, a sense of, “Okay. Anyway, it’s not my choice.”

GURUJI: In most cases, what happens is, we are not sure about our choice and we find ourselves caught on the horns of a dilemma: is it good, or is it bad? Is it right or is it wrong? We don’t know whether it is really beneficial to us or not. But once we hold on to the Sadguru, we happily choose without fear. So we don’t stop making our so-called choices, but now we enjoy them. Before, we couldn’t, we always bore the whole burden of our choice. Now, it is a totally different thing.

DEVOTEE: Do you mean we choose with light-heartedness and a sense of security?

GURUJI: More security, yes. If you want to call it light-hearted, okay, but it is not simply light-hearted. It is with a lighter heart, a heart which is bereft of its burden, lightened, as the burden of the whole responsibility is taken away.

DEVOTEE: Guruji, within this, where is the place for aspiration?

GURUJI: To go on seeking and trying to keep up that sense of security, trying to experience and lead a carefree life – carefree, not careless – that becomes the endeavour, totally.



DEVOTEE: So, it finally comes down to *saranagati* – going to the guru for refuge?

GURUJI: It’s not that you go to the guru to surrender; what happens *is* surrender. Even to surrender is not in your hands. The state itself, what you experience, is called surrender. What happens is, people see surrender as a practice, as one of the means to get Self-realisation, but it is not a means that you can choose. A Sadguru has to trigger that love and once you start tasting and experiencing that love, then surrender becomes so choiceless that there is no choice for you: there is no other way.

That love will slowly make us lose our choices. Not that losing choice is the objective in itself, it is a result, an effect of something else. Because we love so much, our choices becomes unimportant. What our object of love loves, we love. We merge into His choice. We lose ourselves, our individuality, and merge into a greater love.

When you realize there is no other way, no other choice to your destination, you take refuge! That is called *saranagati*.

