



Rose Petals

Extracts from Sri Babuji's Satsangs

Effort from the Heart

GURUJI: In many religious philosophies there is confusion about whether the state of nirvana is gradual or instantaneous. Some people say it is sudden, like satori, while others say no, it doesn't happen like that, it happens gradually, in stages, and that even the Buddha got it in stages. Still others deny this, saying the Buddha got nirvana instantaneously; it was a sudden, effortless realization. What is the truth? The truth lies somewhere in-between the two.

I will give you an example: You go to a mango orchard and see a beautiful, ripe mango growing on a tree. You pick up a stone and try to knock it down. You aim one stone and miss the target. You throw another stone and miss. Seven, eight, nine stones miss. The tenth stone hits the target and it falls. Tell me: did the mango fall with ten stones or one? Hmm? Tell me! If it's with one, you'd have got it with the very first stone. And if you say ten stones, did all ten hit the target? No, it came down with only one stone. But the point is, the one which hit the mango was the tenth. The previous nine stones gave you the art of throwing accurately so that the tenth hit the target. Once one stone hits the target it's over, but the whole process is learning the art of hitting it. For some it may take ten, for others three, for others it may take a hundred or even a thousand – or only one. If you really want the mango, you'll go on throwing until you learn the art and hit it. I say 'art', mark my words, not 'efficiency'.



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DEVOTEE: What do you mean by 'art'?

GURUJI: Do you play badminton? When the shuttlecock comes, will you calculate its force and angle? Will you calculate its mass, the speed of the wind against it, and the surface of your racquet? And then, after calculating all this – this squared, that squared – will you hit it? Will anybody do that? [Laughter]

First, when the shuttlecock comes, a beginner misses it. But with practice, you learn the art of returning it. You simply come to know. Spontaneously and effortlessly you hit the shuttle in such a way that it goes across the net. A good athlete is an artist because he doesn't calculate.



DEVOTEE: To make effort, do we need to have an experience or glimpse of what we seek?

GURUJI: It is not necessary. If you are really vexed with your present condition, it is enough. Either you should feel the need to get something or to get rid of something. Often both are not there; we are not so anxious to get rid of something, and we are not burning to get something. Our so-called sadhana becomes almost routine, something artificial which doesn't touch our heart. When I say effort is not needed, I'm referring to that routine kind of effort. But when the love for something is triggered, or you have been so vexed with your present condition of being that you want to get rid of it, that is the basis for right effort.

If you are about to drown, you grab for even a blade of grass hoping it may save you – you have no choice. You don't think, "Is this blade of grass really going to save me, considering my weight and the velocity of flow?" You don't think of all these things, you simply grab whatever comes to you. This is spontaneous effort, made from great need.

When love is triggered, you want to experience it more and express it. And that process may appear from the outside as an effort, but it's not really an effort. I call it an expression, because effort is such a misleading term, implying a goal, a practice, a path and so on. I am not asking you to tread a path. I haven't defined a path or promised any destination. These expressions of love are spontaneous, helpless expressions. You may call them effort, I don't mind. They are needed not to achieve something but to experience something. They are not a means towards something; the means themselves are fulfilling. But for those in whom this love is not triggered, even if I sit here and give discourses for a thousand years, they can't understand it. They may still ask, "What is the difference between this effort and that effort?" That difference is so subtle and so subjective that you can't define it and differentiate it. So if you ask me the question whether effort is needed or not, what can I say? In one sense, yes; in another sense, no. So it is futile to enter into discussion, or to form a dogma or a doctrine claiming that effort is needed or is not needed, or to say, "it all happens by grace." It doesn't mean anything. First we have to understand what effort is, why people make effort, what their attitude is towards effort – all the different shades of meaning and connotations that effort has for different people.



GURUJI: So effort should come from the heart, not from determination or some kind of discipline. It should mingle and fuse with your emotion. Once effort is fused with your emotion, then everything you do becomes part of it, and that emotion allows your focus to be there naturally in all things. The effort becomes an expression of your emotion. That is why I say meditation is not a way or means to achieve something, but instead to relish an experience. That is real meditation. Just imagine, you love Baba, but you haven't had a chance to sit with him for some time. Then, finally, you are happily sitting there enjoying the experience. Enjoying, not struggling to get something. If you really love Baba, do you need to make an effort to focus on him? You simply experience him. For instance, after taking a meal you are satisfied and no longer hungry, so you take a siesta, happily relaxing. That is meditation.

DEVOTEE: How does this happen?

GURUJI: From love. As long as you have love, it'll come naturally. Then everything becomes part of it. Everything becomes meditation, because all our actions are expressing our experience. That is why I say 'experience and express'. That is the 'express-way'! [Laughter]



DEVOTEE: Guruji, does realization depend upon our efforts?

GURUJI: How realization happens, when it happens, what efforts are needed, whether practices culminate in satori or moksha or are totally unconnected to it – all these questions are just another koan in the field of spirituality. When the Buddha attained nirvana, was it because he had practised all kinds of meditations and yogas, studied different schools of philosophy, and performed austerities for six years? He came to Bodhgaya and sat under a bodhi tree. He felt that all his extreme efforts were futile and useless. He said, “I will sit here until I find the solution to my question and discover the truth. Otherwise, I won’t get up from this seat, let me die here!” He sat, and then he attained enlightenment.

DEVOTEE: Isn’t it a bit like the example you give of the stones and the mango?

GURUJI: In one way yes, because Buddha realized the futility of all those practices and schools, and maybe that’s how he got the determination to sit like that. But sitting there and getting what he got, in another way, was totally unconnected to what he had practised. So we can’t say it is a culmination of practice, and we can’t simply brush aside practice saying it has nothing to do with it. It has something to do with it, but nothing to do with it! That is the mystery.

The persons who have realized it, they say that it was sudden, instantaneous, effortless. “It just came to me,” they say. And that is like the tenth stone. So in one way it’s gradual, in another way sudden.



GURUJI: For a period of time, after I came to my Master, I also explored different techniques of meditation and all these things – almost the whole gamut of spiritual practices. But the fulfilment I got had nothing to do with all the things I had done. Maybe they all added up to that experience, perhaps they were like the tenth stone in the mango tree story. But, when I explored all those techniques, my need was to solve a personal problem, not because they were sadhanas prescribed by the scriptures, nothing like that. It was an urgent problem for me and I just had to find some way through it, one way or another.



GURUJI: A Buddhist will say, “You have to earn your own nirvana. Buddhas only show the way and you have to tread it.” And on the devotional path they say, “There’s nothing you can do, effort is not needed. Everything comes by Guru’s grace.” Which is true? Both are correct. And both are wrong, if you stick to the extreme positions. The truth lies somewhere in-between the two.



DEVOTEE: Guruji, you said we need to make effort to change our patterns, but you also said we can’t do anything and Baba will take care. It seems to be paradoxical.

GURUJI: There are two reasons for that. One is, you don’t trust that the Sadguru will do it. So you always ask, “What am I to do? Any practice, any meditation technique, any sadhana?” You still have a need to do something, to make some effort. The second reason is, effort is needed so that things don’t get worse. [Laughter]

Baba has bought you a ticket. He has put you into the train in the first class compartment. All you have to do is stay on the train and not get down somewhere on the way. That's all. But if you see a beautiful station and think, "Oh, I want to get down here," then sticking to the train feels like a big effort. Then Baba has to give you an instruction, "Don't do it! Stay on the train, stick to it." It feels like an effort, but in fact it is not.

DEVOTEE: But isn't staying on the train choiceless?

GURUJI: If it is choiceless, then no effort is needed and happily we stay. The problem is, we are not in a state of choicelessness. We still have so many choices, so many things to choose from, and Baba is one among these. When there is only one choice we don't call it choice – there's nothing to choose.



DEVOTEE: For me, it's more helpful to be told I have to make an effort, so that finally I'll come to the point where I'll give up making effort. But if someone told me from the start, "You don't need to make effort," I don't think I'd get anywhere.

GURUJI: I'm not saying effort is not needed. I'm not saying that. Only know the limitations of your effort. You make effort because you need it and you have to do what is needed. So you learn that all this effort is needed to make you realize its fruitlessness, its limitations. What's going to give you the experience is grace, not effort, and when it comes you receive it, not achieve it. Effort only makes you receptive to the grace. Otherwise, even if grace is given, you aren't able to receive it.



DEVOTEE: What do you think the Buddha meant by 'right effort'?

GURUJI: It can be understood in many ways all of which point to the same thing. First, why do we make effort? The other day I was explaining to you that all our human endeavours, all our efforts, are consciously or unconsciously directed to the concretization of our abstract sense of fulfilment. If we keep making effort without knowing exactly what we want, we will realize our efforts are fruitless. So this would not be called 'right effort'. Also, all effort implies a sense of achievement, and effort done with a strong sense of achievement is futile in most cases and bound to fail. So it also is not the 'right effort' Buddha spoke of.

Just two days ago, a boy was telling me his problems related to his effort to do well in his examinations. "I am studying and studying, preparing to appear for my examination, and I can't remember anything." But if you really look closely, that same boy who can't remember a sentence he has repeated a thousand times, can immediately tell you the words to a song from a movie that was released ten or fifteen years ago. He'll immediately tell you which movie, which director and even repeat the whole dialogue. Is his memory poor? Or if he's read a good novel fifteen years ago, he can still recall all the characters and who wrote it, even though he only read it once and never tried to remember it. But when he's trying to memorize something in his studies, he fails to remember even a single fact.

So an effort which isn't experienced as effort is the 'right effort'; it's so effortless it doesn't feel like an effort at all. When we make effort, we are pulled to do something, but at the same time we are drawn in different directions by other kinds of pulls, so we fail. But when all our pulls, all the emotions in our heart are actually harmonized and put into order, then the 'effort' that springs from that harmony is 'right effort'. That's why in Sanskrit it's called *samyag vyayama*. In fact 'right effort' is not an exact translation for what the Buddha said. '*Samyag*' is usually translated as 'right', but it

actually means 'that which has *samma*', a kind of evenness and harmony, meaning effort springing from a complete and perfect harmony of the heart. Then everything we do, everything we see, everything we speak, everything we think, expresses that harmony. And that is right effort, right seeing, right thinking, right speech, and right living.

