

Brother Balananda

Father's Day - June 17, 2012

Phoenix Temple

Brother started with a gentle visualization, taking us back to when we were 5 months old, lying in our crib on the back, not yet able to move around freely. We are so confused - we'd just been in the astral where we could move freely, enjoy the beauties, feel limitless - once in a while, a giant appears who is very sweet to us, we even get something sweet to drink when she holds us tight. Then another giant comes, and he picks us up, swings us around - yes, that feels a bit more like the freedom we had, but we need him to hold us ...

Master said, "If you close your eyes and visualize vast, illimitable space, you become overwhelmed and enthralled--you feel naught but pure wisdom. The hidden, infinite sphere wherein there is no creation, no stars or planets--only pure wisdom--is the Father. And Nature with her diamond-dazzling stars, the Milky Way, the flowers, birds, clouds, mountains, sky--the countless beauties of creation--is the Divine Mother."

The old adage was, "Father knows best." Well, that isn't always true with our earthly fathers as this story will show.

A father raised his two boys very wisely, always thinking first when a problem came up, and trying to instill in his sons the same wisdom. One day, as the boys played in the yard, their big dog must have burrowed underneath a fence - he came bounding into the yard holding the neighbor lady's rabbit between his teeth. The boys could not get the rabbit out of his mouth, so they ran to the father for help. Again, the father thought for a while, and then said - "ok, here's what you can do. Obviously the rabbit is dead. So take it, wash it off, fluff it, and put it back into the cage next door. I will meanwhile mend the fence. When our neighbor comes back from church, she will find the rabbit dead but will think it died of natural causes." The boys did as told, and everything looked very natural.

When the lady came home, they heard her shriek and scream, she just wouldn't stop. Finally the father and boys went over to see what was going on, and the woman pointed to the cage. "I don't know what happened ... I buried that rabbit three days ago and now it is back in the cage!"

See, father does not always know best. A father can teach us much, but what is most important?

Our Guru says, "The father plays his greatest creative role when he implants in his children thoughts that will lead to God-realization."

So if our earthly father does not know the answers, where can we go? We all have a spiritual father - the

Guru. And his perfect channels.

I was blessed to have the guidance of two perfect spiritual fathers - Brother Premamoy who was the counselor for the postulants in the ashram, and Brother Bhaktananda, with whom I served at the Hollywood temple. Today I want to tell you some of the stories and experiences I had with these two spiritual giants.

Both these divine channels set the example for all of us: Brother Bhaktananda would have a huge schedule of duties, giving services, classes, programs, counseling at all hours day and night, performing weddings, christenings, memorial services - nothing could stop him. In those days we had no answering system on the phone. When it rang, one of us would pick it up before the 3rd ring. And most of the time, Bro. Bhaktananda was already there, speaking to the caller. And that phone would ring sometimes way into the night, 11 pm, 2 am ... eventually Brother took the phone into his room so that during the night, others would not be disturbed but he would always answer every call.

Brother Premamoy too was always available to everyone, even towards the end of his life, when he was on an oxygen tank, he would still counsel every postulant in training.

One day, Brother was driving Br. Premamoy early in the morning, before sunrise. Br. Premamoy asked him to pull over to take a little time for a meditation. There was perfect stillness as the sun rose. He could hear Brother softly do the 20/20/20 exercise, exhale - and go breathless. He set the example that even a short meditation could be deep.

Once Brother approached Brother Premamoy with a list of bad habits, asking for counseling how to best tackle them all. His advice was, "Arrange your list of bad habits first in order of the habits that are most bothersome to others, and then in order of the ones most obstructing to your spiritual progress. Work on one a week, or if it is a particularly difficult habit, for 2 weeks. For example if 'anger' is at the top of your list, next to it write the opposite good habit - 'calmness/evenmindedness.' Then look up everything Master had to say on 'calmness/ evenmindedness.'

Brother learned how to always strive for perfection in everything he had to do. Once he had to set up the altar for a special ceremony in Hollywood, arranging every item exactly as prescribed. When he was finished, Bro. Bhaktananda looked it over, nodded, and then moved one chair a bit. Brother checked later - the adjustment had been 1/4th of an inch. Perfection.

Both Brothers were always completely poised and even-minded. One time a lady started ranting and raving at Bro. Bhaktananda after a service, telling him how wrong he was about this and that and all the time, Brother stood very calmly, his only response being "is that so?" and again after every new attack - "is that so?" The woman finally gave up, confused by Brother's complete calmness.

Teaching wisdom also implies teaching discipline, and both Brothers would do that when needed, but always you felt it was done for our highest good, and with love. Once Brother Balananda, still a young

novice, mopped the floor and inadvertently knocked against a stand with Master's picture, which fell and the glass shattered. His discipline was "Oh Justin, bad karma! I sure don't want to be in our shoes!" but it was said with a twinkle.

Yet another time he had forgotten to turn off the watering system in Encinitas, and knowing the fragile situation of the bluff, this was indeed a dangerous thing to soak the area with too much water. When he confessed to Brother Premamoy, he said, "Yes, that was a big mistake. Now forget it, but do not forget the lesson. Make yourself a watering schedule."

A father also gives love to his children, although rarely in a demonstrative way. Even Master had to ask Sri Yukteswar after his return from America. He said, "Guruji, I know you love me, but my mortal ears ache to hear you say so." Only when Sri Yukteswar responded "Be it as you wish. During my married life I often yearned for a son, to train in the yogic path. But when you came into my life, I was content; in you I have found my son." Two clear teardrops stood in Sri Yukteswar's eyes. "Yogananda, I love you always" our Guru felt a weight lifting from his heart. "Your answer is my passport to heaven."

I knew our spiritual fathers loved us, but they expressed it quietly. One day I had two conflicting duties - I was to gather petals for a ceremony, but I also had to do the dishes. And that day there was a huge amount of dishes which I did as fast as I could, knowing time was running short. When I was finally finished with them I went out to the garden and there was Brother Bhaktananda, who had meanwhile gathered the petals for me.

Another time, when I was new to Hollywood, fresh from the heat of Phoenix, I was cold during my private meditations in the morning, and had to take the blanket from my bed. This went on for a time and I wished I had something to keep me warm. One day we were in the office when Brother Bhaktananda opened a file drawer and pulled out a packet. In it was a beautiful large chuddar. "Here, Justin, would you like this?"

Daya Mata reminded us: "Loving God and your fellowman is the highest wisdom in this world."

And Brother Bhaktananda assured the Hollywood devotees, "You belong to Master; you are his own; and he loves you so much."