

Satsanga by Swami Smarananandji

2nd April 2009

It feels so nice and joyous to be in Mumbai once again though in transit. Today I would like to share with you all a few thoughts on '*Banat banat ban jai*'.

This is one of Lahiri Mahasaya's favourite remarks as per Guruji's Autobiography of a Yogi. With these words Lahiri Mahasaya would often encourage devotees in meditation. Literally it means 'making, making one day made' and in essence it means '*striving, striving, one day behold the divine goal.*' It means to persevere in meditation. I thought meditation was a problem for you and me; I never thought it was a problem 150 years ago. It is a universal problem. Everybody has problems in meditation; so take heart; you are not alone.

One thing is for sure – no one in this world deals with so many failures as a meditator. Even the weakest football team in the world will score a goal sometime or the other but a meditator has to face constant failures. When we do not get a glimpse of the peace, love, joy etc. we feel 'I have not meditated'. We should be prepared for maximum failures in life. Nothing is failure. No attempted meditation is 'failure'. To succeed in the spiritual life the whole magic lies in perseverance.

According to the Dictionary:

Perseverance means to continue in spite of difficulties; to hold on; to persist; die hard. Definitely all this sounds very harsh. To continue in spite of difficulties. Why? But it is not really harsh in other ways. To persevere means building a foundation; lessons to be learnt; qualities to be cultivated; process of growing and learning; sacrifice of immediate gratification; endurance and patience; it is progress. Let us look at some of the meanings in detail:

1. To persevere means building a foundation.

For anything in life whether it is a building, a career, education, a business – a foundation is required. Similarly the spiritual life also requires a foundation. It is not a waste of effort. The most common e.g. in spiritual life to illustrate the importance of a foundation is that of the Chinese Bamboo. The seed is planted by the farmer. For the first four years there is no visible growth. Then shoots start appearing above the ground. Then in 6 weeks it grows to a height of 90 feet i.e. 15 feet per week. Does it mean the first four years are wasted? No! The tremendous growth by the plant in developing its root system so that it can hold that great height, to supply nutrition for the whole plant. Similarly personal growth may not manifest itself in the beginning. Let me give a mundane e.g. Someone is breaking a stone. Nothing happens with the first, second, third...ninth blow. But the tenth blow breaks the stone into small chips. Those 1 to 9 blows helped so that in the 10th blow succeeds. Similarly meditation for 2 – 3 years does not show any results. But that is necessary to build the foundation for the future.

2. Perseverance means a process of growing and learning.

A disciple was excusing his lack of spiritual progress on the grounds that he had difficulty in overcoming his faults.

Intuitively perceiving a deeper cause, ***Paramhansaji said: “The Lord doesn’t mind your faults (and defects – Swamiji said). He minds your indifference.”***

If it is difficult for you to meditate and you are still sitting down for meditation, you are showing I am committed; I want to meditate. If you are not meditating it shows your indifference to God. Pranayam – Kriya is the highest technique available to mankind. Krishna relates that it was he, in a former incarnation, who communicated the indestructible yoga to an ancient illuminator, Vivasvat, who gave it to Manu, the great legislator. He, in turn, instructed Ikshwaku, the father of India's solar warrior dynasty. These meditation techniques are like musical instruments. After 20 years a table player or a veena player says “I now feel as if I have become one with the instrument. What is there to learn about Hong Sau or Kriya. I can explain Hong Sau to you in two minutes or Kriya in 15 minutes. But it will take 15 years to fully grasp its import. It requires 9 – 10 years of practice to get to the stage where you can enjoy it. I never enjoyed Hong sau all these years as much as I enjoy it now. We get hold of it more and more. Keep on doing. It helps to reach mastery. Key to better success is continuous practice. That is essential. Eventually each one of us here will say: it is not difficult for me to sit for meditation, but it is difficult for me to get up from meditation.

But we have to get up to catch up with our other responsibilities. We may not be able to say that in the first or second year of meditation but at some point each one of you will be able to say: It is not difficult for me to sit for meditation, but it is difficult for me to get up from meditation.

Daya Mata said: “If you are not regular in your meditation, you will be a beginner even after 20 years.” Be regular then you will not ask the same questions after 20 years.

One devotee had a contract with Guruji and still has. “Regularity at meditation is my responsibility. Going deep in meditation is your responsibility.” Do we have any control over the depth in our meditation; No! But this devotee did not say ‘Unless Guruji’s grace is there how can I sit down to meditate.’ Sitting for meditation is something he can do. It is not ego. I am sure Guruji will not say that devotee is egoistic. That devotee later told Swamiji with tears in his eyes ‘I have always received more than what I expected. My only investment was regularity.’ All the joy, understanding, love that you are seeking will be yours in time if you keep on like the tabla player.

Here is an interesting analogy:

There is a Sufi tale told about a certain Master who was in an expansive mood. His disciples approached him and asked him to describe the stages he had passed through in his quest for the divine. “God first led me by the hand,” he said, “into the Land of Action, and there I dwelt for several years. Then I was led to the Land of Sorrows, and I lived there until my heart was purged of its attachments. That is when I found myself in the Land of Love, and the heat of that love consumed what was left in me of my worst impurities. Finally, after many years, I was brought to the Land of Silence, where the mysteries of life and death were bared before my wondering eyes.”

The disciples were impressed, and wondered aloud how long it would take each of them to make the same journey to the Land of Silence. But then the Master spoke again and said, “There is one more journey after the Land of Silence. One day I heard God’s voice say to me, ‘Now I will take you to the innermost sanctuary of the Temple, to the very heart of God.’ And that was the day I was led to the land of Laughter.” In the Land of Laughter we get little glimpses, at least, of who we really are and how we fit into the scheme of things. And there’s a lot connected to that perspective: compassion for ourselves and others; humility; forgiveness; and a better sense of how bound we are into the lives of others around us. And of course, there is also *joy*.

Now where are we? We have to go through all the stages in our quest. The saints were not spared; neither will you or me be spared. We have to go through all this only to bring in more understanding. Most of us are probably in several lands at the same time. All these stages are a part of the spiritual life. You should not expect to be spared.

We have to be in the Land of Action to give us a particular spiritual development and understanding. No God realization is possible without action. The Bhagwad Gita says:

Chp.3 Vs. 7:

But that man succeeds supremely, O Arjuna, who, disciplining the senses by the mind, unattached, keeps his organs of activity steadfast on the path of God-uniting actions.

And in his commentary *Guruji explains:*

...Meditation may seem to be withdrawal from activity because it demands from the beginner an absence of bodily movement. But deep meditation is intense mental activity – the highest form of action. Through the science of Kriya Yoga, the advanced yogi is able to withdraw his mind from the physical senses and direct their subtle astral powers to the inner activities of soul-freeing work. Such a spiritual specialist performs the true God-uniting activity (Karma Yoga).

This is the highest path of karma or action. It leads directly to God, as differentiated from outer activities of religion...

So meditation is intense activity because we have to work with the life force. More time is spent in the land of action.

Land of Sorrow: each event of sorrow brings some understanding.

Land of Love: it frees us from all dross. So give love, to all as family members – all caring; give, give, give.

Land of Silence: it is the stillness that you enjoy in meditation. When we sit and enjoy the stillness after the practice of the techniques free from thoughts, free from emotions it ultimately leads us to the Land of Laughter.

Perseverance is required for all this. Some may feel I am somehow getting stuck too long in the land of sorrow. But when you feel joy bubbling up within you in spite of conditions; then you are in the Land of Joy; Land of Laughter.

One disciple asked the Master: “Sir how long will it take me to attain enlightenment?”
He felt that the terms and conditions should be clear right at the beginning.
The Master said: “10 years.”

“So long?”

“No. I made a mistake. It will take you 20 years.”

“Why double the time for me?”

The Master said: “Come to think of it, in your case it will take 30 years.”

Moral: Some people never learn anything. Wisdom is not a destination. It is the journey.

What do you want in life? God realization is not like a binary system. Bulb is glowing or not glowing. It is like a van – a little slow at times, or a little faster. But it will finally take me to my final destination in different stages. It is not that this person knows God; this person does not know God. Knowing God comes step by step.

Enlightenment means I have to become Aham Brahmasmi. That means I must be God. I must manifest all the qualities of God such as love, joy, compassion, concentration, tolerance. If I don't have these qualities then I am not manifesting God. When do I get these qualities? When I become God or if I keep on cultivating these qualities I will become God?

Sw. Bhavanandji says: “Seeking God means expressing God.”

I must express the qualities of joy, love, compassion, forgiveness, even mindedness, tolerance. I must manifest all these qualities to manifest God. That is sadhana – whether it takes me 10 years or 20 years or more.

We all have some defects here and there. We should keep on looking at those defects in order to correct them. Perseverance means developing divine qualities of tolerance, forgiveness etc. I have to manifest those qualities. Known, unknown people are constantly disturbing and annoying me. I must tolerate. That is sadhana. It is not a station that you arrive at but the manner of travelling. If you are concentrating on arriving too fast, you have missed the point.

Napoleon Hill has said:

The strongest oak tree (it lives for many many years) of the forest is not the one that is protected from the storm and hidden from the sun. It's the one that stands in the open where it is compelled to struggle for its existence against the winds and rains and the scorching sun.

The oak tree grown in the greenhouse is well protected. How tall and strong it grows? You want to be protected? You are bound to face problems in life, more so if you want God. The key is not to escape but to face the world. Patience is required for that. In the modern world patience takes on different meanings:

Shirdi Sai Baba has said: Devotion without faith is not effective.

For my understanding I have extended it to:

Devotion without faith; faith without surrender; surrender without patience is not effective.

You tell Guruji, I am your bhakta but I have no faith in you? He is taking care of you; that you are in the personal care of Guruji. If this faith is not there then your devotion is not effective. Faith generally means Guruji will answer my prayers. Generally prayer means giving suggestions to God – what he has to do, when he has to do, how he has to do. This is how I started my spiritual life – defining what God has to do and when he has to do. Is it not that God is going to do not what I want but what I need? You must pray that God give me the understanding that whatever you give me is what I need. Have faith in God’s justice, in God’s timing. It is not that He will not answer. If that surrender is not there then our devotion is not effective.

The next is surrender without patience.

“God please do something by next weekend.” This is our prayer demand. I can tell you very clearly because it is a personal experience. Perseverance requires sacrifice of immediate gratification. In the corporate world we are taught to be target oriented, time oriented and have clear goals. In the spiritual life it doesn’t work like that. Read the shlokas 28, 29, and 30 of the 1st Chapter of the Bhagwad Gita.

Vs. 28 – 30 of Chp. 1:

O Krishna, seeing these, my relatives, met together desirous of battle, my limbs are failing and my mouth is parched. My body trembles; my hair stands on end. The sacred bow Gandiva slips away from my grip, and my skin is afire. Neither can I remain standing upright. My mind is rumbling; and , O Kesava (Krishna), I behold evil omens.

The devotee says to his inner soul guide:

“Because of the love for my indwelling, clashing good and bad habits, I am reluctant to kill my kinsmen of the senses who have dwelt so long in my bodily kingdom! My limbs of will-power-to-exercise-self control are failing me, and my mouth of spiritual intuition is dry. I am quivering with mental nervousness. My energies and thoughts shoot toward the senses. The sacred bow of self-control and of spinal perceptions is burning with restlessness. O Soul, destroyer of evil, I cannot keep my mental balance. My mind wanders as I face the enemy-senses in meditation. I feel a premonition of impending disaster.”

This is a true description of the state experienced by devotees after they have traveled some distance on the spiritual path. The beginner yogi, in the initial stages of soul contact, is eager, happy, satisfied. With further progress, he finds that the sense desires are diehard inmates of his life; he begins to wonder, even in the midst of divine realizations, if he has been wise in his decision to kill material joys for the sake of gaining spiritual happiness. In such confusion, the devotee tries to split his allegiance – giving half his attention to the body and its sense enjoyments and half to the inner assembly of soul joys. The result of these half-measures is

that the devotee's limbs of will power become paralyzed by the disease of latent sense attachments. He feels a dying away of the finer intuitive spiritual perceptions, the taste for material habits, like a fire, dries up the taste for the subtle spiritual perceptions.

Just as physical fear causes the hair to stand on end, so mental nervousness at the prospect of losing sense enjoyment causes the devotee's thoughts and his hairlike nerve energies to flow like streams away from soul happiness toward the region of the senses. During this period of dubiousness, the devotee finds that the astral perceptions of the spine begin to fade away. As described in previous stanzas, when one walks, or works in any way with the body, he is cognizant of sensory perceptions; but in meditation bodily sensations gradually vanish, the sense of physical weight is forgotten, and a strong perception of astral spinal power and of blissful calmness takes possession of the consciousness. But because the devotee is not yet advanced enough to hold on to this state and deepen it, his materialistic tendencies – his karma or the effects of all his past bad sensory actions – rise up in the consciousness. When the devotee then begins to be restless, the spiritual bow of spinal energy and perception (which kills sense attachments with arrows of soul happiness) slips away from the grasp of self-control. All thoughts lose their power of concentration and start to burn with restlessness, even as skin is scorched by an overexposure to the sun's rays. The mind wanders again and again into subconscious experiences – led by the samskaras or strong impressions of past wrong actions – and is unable to remain concentrated upon the object of meditation. It feels instead a dreary loneliness, and beholds a mental desert created by the renunciation of material joys.

When tilling the ground for cultivating crops, the lush growth of useless weeds must first be destroyed. Their disappearance causes the ground to look barren, until the time arrives for the invisible potential within the seeds to sprout up into plants and yield a good harvest! The field of consciousness is similarly overgrown with weeds of meaningless sense pleasures – habits which, in the beginning, are very difficult to forsake.

People would rather do anything to while away their time except meditate. Witness the hours lost in movies, card-playing, aimless chattering, reading cheap novels or sensational newspapers, watching television. When the guru and the self-control of the aspiring devotee ask him to destroy his mental weeds and to plant the spiritual seeds of meditation, his habits suddenly make him see his life as a desolate desert if it lacks the customary weedy abundance of useless activities.

In this pitiable state of momentary bleakness, the devotee must cast away all feelings of doubt and despair and have faith that after the field of consciousness has been well sown with the seeds of deep meditation, they will produce the mystic trees of Omnipresence, bearing fruits of undying happiness. It is not to the long-established sense "upstarts" in the bodily kingdom that the devotee owes his loyalty, but to the long-banished soul perceptions.

As Guruji said: "It doesn't matter how many times we fall; what really matters is how many times we get up."

What are the reasons for not persevering?

Lack of perceptible progress, lack of encouragement, lack of understanding.

The devotee has an expectation that God's response will come in a great blaze of light. This is erroneous. If only a little joy comes, hold on to it. Take time to sit in stillness – and feel whatever you call it peace, joy, bliss. Because you ate something nice, you met someone, you are happy. Something has to happen to make you happy. But in spite of anything happening around you if you are still feeling unconditional joy- if you can say, "I am still peaceful, may be for only 10 minutes" – then you know God is there. Don't ask for an all inspiring exceptional blazing joy.

"A common cause of spiritual discouragement is the devotee's expectation that God's response will come in a great blaze of awe-inspiring inner illumination. This erroneous notion dulls the devotee's perception of the subtle Divine responses that are present from the very beginning of one's meditative practices. God responds to the devotee's every effort, every devotional call. Even as a novice, you will realize this in your own seeking if you learn to recognize Him as the quiet, inner peace that steals over your consciousness. This peace is the first proof of God's presence within. You will know it is He who has guided and inspired you to some right decision in your life. You will feel His strength empowering you to overcome bad habits and nurture spiritual qualities. You will know Him as the ever-increasing joy and love that surges deep within, overflowing into your everyday life and relationships. - From 'The Great Light of God.'

More important than the lights and sounds is the assurance that I am in the care of Guruji. Not what someone is telling you. It can happen very frequently if only you are alert.

So what is perseverance? According to the Dictionary – it is to continue in spite of difficulties. Being die hard. It means lessons to be learnt, qualities to be inculcated, process of growing and learning, strengthening the spiritual muscles, patience and endurance.

Arjuna asked Bhagwan Krishna (applies more to me than to Arjuna):

Chp. 6:

Arjuna said:

(37) O Krishna! what happens to a person unsuccessful in yoga – one who had devotedly tried to meditate but has been unable to control himself because his mind kept running away during yoga practice?

(38) Doesn't the yogi perish like a sundered cloud if he finds not the way to Brahman (Spirit) – being thus unsheltered in Him and steeped in delusion, sidetracked from both paths (the one of God-union and the one of right activities)?

(39) Please remove forever all my doubts, O Krishna! for none save Thee may banish my uncertainities.

(40) The blessed Lord said:

O Arjuna, My son! a performer of good actions never meets destruction. Whether in this world or in the beyond, he falls not into evil plight!

(41) A fallen yogi, gaining entry to the world of the virtuous, remains there for many years; afterward he is reborn on earth in a good and prosperous home.

(42) Or he may reincarnate in a family of enlightened yogis; verily, a birth like that is much harder to gain on this earth!

(43) There, O Arjuna, he recovers the yoga discrimination attained in his former existence, and tries more strenuously for spiritual success.

(44) The power of former yoga practice is sufficient to force, as it were, the yogi on his onward path. An eager student of even theoretical yoga is farther advanced than is a follower of the outward scriptural rites.

(45) By diligently following his path, the yogi, perfected by the efforts of many births, is purged of sin (karmic taint) and finally enters the Supreme Beatitude.