

Swami Ishwarananda – “The Guru and His Guidance”

Lake Shrine Temple - September 18, 2011

Let's begin the service with a prayer. Let us close our eyes, focus at the kutusta...at the Christ Center. Visualize each Guru as we pray to them and pray from our hearts. Heavenly Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved God, Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya, Swami Sri Yukteswarji, our guru, Paramahansa Yoganandaji, saints of all religions we bow to you all. Divine Mother, Divine Guru, by Thy grace and by our efforts to follow your guidance, may our hearts be filled with Thy love. May our thoughts be saturated with Thy wisdom and make our souls radiate the ever new joy of Your spirit which is ever one with God. Aum Peace Amen

Swamiji said that it was probably not difficult to make out that he comes from India and that his English might be a little difficult for us to follow because of his accent so he was going to try to speak slowly but that when he got halfway into the talk that he may switch to “top gear and go very fast.” He said he'd been “pulled up for that several times but still habits die-hard.” Also, that if halfway through we'd lost him or he'd lost us, to please raise our hands and let him know. He won't mind.

Swamiji began by saying it is indeed a great honor and blessing to be here participating in the meditation and the service at Lake Shrine in this beautiful, beautiful Temple. Not only beautiful because of its physical beauty but also because it has been sanctified, made holy, by the sacred vibrations of our Guru. Our Master spent a lot of time at this place...landscaping it...building it up. He wasn't there when this temple was built but he definitely knew that in the future the temple would come up here.

Then had our ex-president, our sangamata, Daya Mataji...she dedicated this Temple. So all those memories are there and the vibrations all of you bring every time you come here and meditate deeply seeking God...for just one purpose...that is, communion with God.

Swamiji says he usually likes to remind himself that the job of consecrating the Temple doesn't end there...when the last brick has been laid or the last cement work has been done but it is built continuously every day. The physical construction maybe over but the spiritual temple keeps building...keeps getting built every day. It is up to each one of us as we sit here to meditate because the Temple is the hive and whatever we bring in here through our meditative efforts is the honey.

Swamiji, again, said he felt very blessed to be able to partake of that honey today...stealing a little bit of it today...and was very grateful for that.

There was a very old saint in India who lived in the 13th – 14th century. His name was Kabir. He was a poet saint. Perhaps some of you are familiar with his writings. He was a poet and a God-realized saint. Talking about the rarity, the difficulty of finding great souls, he wrote a couplet...a few sentences of poetry, where he said: “Herds of lions never are seen, nor lots of swans and seals. Sackfuls of gems never are found. Sainly souls never improve the pond.”

He's trying to tell that us that you don't see lions in big groups...just a few here and there. You may go on safari the whole day and you might sight one lion. Also, swans are not found in big plots and gems, precious stones, are not found by sackfuls, like sand. So, also, saintly souls are rare to find.

Swamiji said that he thinks that if the poet were here today, seeing all you sitting and meditating, deeply trying to communion with God, that Kabir would have said that saintly souls sometimes do gather around. He also said that he really meant it because all these years he's had the opportunity of meeting several devotees of Guruji, both in India and here, and he said he is always pleasantly surprised how many of us are deeply seeking God. How many of us have come onto the path with no other purpose than to get closer to God...to have more of that communion in our life.

It is not easy in today's life...in today's world where there are so many distractions. Where spirituality is not a common topic in our day-to-day conversations. If we are able to devote time for mediation, morning and evening, if we have been touched by the Divine even just once and had that change our lives. He believes the credit for that goes to our Master for without his teaching, without his blessings, we won't have known that these possibilities existed and that there was this level of divine consciousness...this Kingdom of Heaven within where we can all go.

Swamiji went on to say that today he would like to build on that topic...on the favorite topic for most of us...the Guru and his guidance and how important and vital it is for us to have implicit faith in his guidance. It is not easy to generate faith...to evoke faith...in somebody else. We have a Guru who is able to do that and fortunate are the disciples who find such a guru. In that way we are very fortunate because we have this path; we have this Guru.

When we read in his Autobiography of a Yogi [AY] there are so many miraculous things he has written about. Swamiji said he thinks that if the same stories were written by somebody else he would have doubted them because some of them are so miraculous and so out of the world. But somehow...in the yogic science they say that if a God-realized saint has the power by which he is able to convince you by his words. It is the power of his speech because the person who always speaks the truth, he has the power to convey the truth to another person even if the other person doesn't fully understand. That is the power we see in the AY and in all the various incidents of his life that cannot erase them. That has brought most of us onto this path...his ideals...his teachings. Then if you practice meditation you have some taste of it...of the peace...of joy.

That way we are very fortunate to have this line of gurus because our Guru has promised that if we follow his guidance all of us will reach God and possibly even in this lifetime if we make sufficient effort. That is a big promise because most of us don't even have a concept of what God is. But he has made that promise.

Not only did he make that promise. He said, also, that they would all guide and guard us as we go on path in this lifetime and he didn't stop there. He said that in case some of us don't make it in this lifetime, they will continue to guide and guard us in future lifetimes until we reach God. Once that guru-disciple relationship is formed he said, "I will never leave your hand...I will never let go of you even if you

let go of me, momentarily.” So as promises go, that is a pretty watertight promise...foolproof promise. It’s a guarantee!

In this commercial world they have all kinds of guarantees. They have a six month guarantee, a one year guarantee, a 5 year guarantee and a lifetime warranty. Swamiji said he always used to wonder what a lifetime warranty on a suitcase mean. Whose lifetime are we talking about? Definitely not the lifetime of the customer but if it’s the lifetime of the suitcase how to determine when the suitcase is dead. So he really wants to find out what the lifetime warranty on a suitcase is.

But our Guru has made this promise of guarding us over several lifetimes and that is not a promise that is lightly given. Saints who speak the truth...whenever they make a statement it is not made just for an effect nor to impress us but there is an eternal truth behind the statements they make. So you can take it as a fact.

From that viewpoint we must believe that even though we may not understand how he’s going to do it, he will take care of us life after life. Sometimes we’re not satisfied with that! We want the Guru...we want the Master...we want God to do everything for us.

There was an elderly lady who was traveling by bus and as her stop approached she got up and went to the front of the bus and stood near the door. The driver noticing that she had to get off slowed down the bus as the stop approached. The lady turned to the driver...a young man...and she said, “Son, I know the stop is here but house is in the lane about a 100 yards from here. Could stop the bus there and you help me so I don’t have to walk so much?” He was more than willing to do that and said, “Sure, ma’am” and went ahead and made the stop near the lane. Then the lady said, “Could you just go into the lane? My apartment block is just ten houses down the lane.” So he looked at her curiously and said, “ Sure ma’am and on which floor do you want me to stop?”

Sometimes we want too much! We should know that we have to make some effort. Our Master says that the Kriya Yoga is like the airplane...the airplane route to God and he is the pilot. Brother Anandamoy says that the Guru is the pilot but we have to get onto the plane. If we don’t sit in the plane then the pilot and the plane cannot do anything. That means we need to do our job of practicing...practicing the techniques...and trying to spiritualize our life.

We deserve to be happy in this life but as Guruji says that it is difficult but if we make a few changes in our life then we find that our meditative efforts are really bearing fruit. Change in lifestyle plus meditation techniques both help...both are needed. This is the good fortune we have. We have the Guru. We have the path but we have to follow it.

The more faith we have and the more our goal is clear as to what we want to do, the more diligently, the more seriously, we’ll practice the techniques. Therein is the role of faith. We also have to understand that faith will not develop to the full extent in one day. It takes time...it grows gradually. Just like love for a person grows gradually because faith and love are more or less the same...love implies faith...faith implies love.

So love for God, faith in God, faith in the Guru develop gradually. It is okay to doubt. It is okay to have doubts...to have misgivings. The difference between the great souls and those of us who are still struggling on the path is even when they had doubts they kept on. They realized that they might not see how this particular problem is going to end. They might not be able to visualize how God was going to pull them out of this particular problem but they know from past experience that He would do it. That is faith...proof of things unseen. We do not yet see how the problem is going to be solved but we have faith that he will take care of it.

Great souls like our Guru, Daya Mataji, and other saints...Christ and his disciples...had this burning faith right from the beginning. We see that in the life of Christ and his disciples, in Master, in Sri Yukteswarji, Daya Mataji and Guruji. They recognized the guru instantly; the first time they saw him. From that moment their faith was unshakable. It never wavered at all.

For example, if you read the Bible there we have a story of Christ coming for the first time into the town of Galilee after several years. He's walking on the banks of Sea of Galilee and there he sees two fishermen. He goes to them and says, "Follow me." They threw down their fishing nets and followed him. Swamiji said that he thinks that is one of the greatest miracles that Christ performed because, if today, someone of that stature came and called me...leave everything and follow me without knowing anything about him the average person would have said, "Who are you? I don't know you? What is your biography? Do you have any experience in this?" It's natural. These are the doubts of the common person. But the Disciples of Christ knew him from a previous lifetime obviously. So the soul instantly recognizes and says, "Yes" he is my guru.

The same thing is seen in the AY. The moment Master saw Sri Yukteswarji he was magnetically pulled towards him. He wanted to go away but his feet turned and until he ran and fell at the Master's feet he couldn't stop himself. Those kinds of experiences are rare and we should not expect to have them. If you have them you are indeed blessed!

Using himself as an example, Swamiji said Master had to hit him in the face with the application form. He'd read the AY while he was in the tenth grade. He said that to be frank it was not because he was very spiritual but that he was spending the summer holidays at his uncle's place where there was a fairly decent library. He'd finished all the other non-spiritual books...fiction, crime, thrillers, you name it...and since he still had time on his hands he picked up the AY thinking it looked interesting. In tenth grade his English was so great, but still he struggled through. He liked the stories but the science of Kriya Yoga left him cold...no interest. What he like was the Tiger Swami.

It's a thrilling story about this Swami who was so powerful that he wrestled with tigers with his bare hands. It caught his imagination. After that he forgot about the book. However, somehow he got interested in the saints of India and the world. He started reading about their lives and he came to the point where he thought he needed someone to guide him...to show him the path. As time went on the thought became stronger and stronger. After this went on for a few months a friend came saying, "I know that you are interested in yoga and all that. My uncle has been to a Ranchi Ashram and brought this application form. Would you be interested in this?"

He said he looked at the application form and there was Master's picture. He said he told his friend that he'd read his book. After that he applied for the Lessons and started practicing and never looked back.

That how it happens in most of our cases. It is not that we instantly recognize the guru for what he is. For most of us faith grows gradually, like a light on a dimmer switch. As the light is increased it grows brighter...it happens like that.

Initially we read the Guru's teachings, we like what he's saying and we say, "Yes, I agree with what he's saying." Then we practice the teachings and we find they change our life. We realize the teachings are really and that what we want. Perhaps we take diksha...we start practicing Kriya Yoga and then we realize his presence within helping us silently. Then we will realize he's no ordinary man; he's divine.

As the time passes, as that feeling of his presence and assurance of his divinity increases, eventually, we realize that he is no one else but God come in a human form for us. That is the final realization and that realization these great souls have right at the beginning. That is why their faith is so unwavering. For others it takes time.

That is the realization, which is unshakable. The saint, Kabir, whom Swamiji quoted in the beginning, went a step further. In one of his poems referring to the greatness of the guru, he says: "If both God and Guru are here in front of me simultaneously whom should I bow to first?" It is a dilemma! So he's asking this question and in answering it he says: "I will bow down to the Guru first because only through the Guru I will reach God."

He is placing the guru even before God because without the guru God would not be found. That seems right because guru is that form of God who came especially me [Kabir] so he takes precedence. The impersonal God is for everyone. The guru is for me so he comes before the impersonal God. That is the sentiment there.

How do we develop this faith in the guru? Swamiji says for that he thinks we need to keep reminding ourselves that we are not dealing with an ordinary person. This line of Gurus...Christ, Krishna and our line of Gurus...they are not ordinary persons. They are avatars. They are God incarnate.

We need to keep reminding ourselves because it is easy to take somebody for granted just like we may take this temple for granted after we've been coming here for ten years. It no longer thrills us the way it thrilled us the first day. That is a failing with most of us...we take familiar things for granted.

Sometime after we've been on the path we take the guru for granted. That only diminishes what we can get out of that guru. We always have to remember that we are dealing with God and He's always there for us. He never forsakes us.

If we keep reminding ourselves of this our faith will be strong. Even when we are not progressing, even when we feel things are not going well, even when there are difficulties in our life we have to keep reminding ourselves..."God, Divine Mother and the Guru will take care of me. I cannot see how they are going to do it because I'm such a mess but they will take care of me."

Sometimes our lives do go through those ups and downs. When we travel in an airplane there can be periods of turbulence...the plane bounces up and down and we may be frightened but we can't jump off the plane. In the same way we have to hold firmly to the Guru's hand. He sees us through.

Our prayers may not always be answered but our needs will be. That is a promise. We may not get what we want but we will get what we need. That faith we should have.

Master says, "God-realization is the most difficult state to reach." We are not embarked on an easy journey. It's not going to be easy. As Master says, "God-realization is the most difficult state to reach." Let no one fool themselves or think that someone else can give it to them. "Whenever I fell into a mental state of stagnation, my Guru could do nothing for me." This is Master talking about his guru, Yukteswar. "But I never gave up trying to keep in tune with him by cheerfully performing whatever he asked me to do." That is the difference. Keep on. "I have come to him for God-realization, I reasoned, and I must listen to his advice."

Master also had to go through those difficulties and in spite of the periods of stagnation and everything...he had to go through periods of dryness...periods of stagnation and we can't expect anything better. We will have struggles, we will have difficulties but it's all part of the game. Once we are through that our faith actually will be stronger...we come out stronger because the trials. We should always remember that.

How do we develop that faith...by always remembering that we are dealing with God Himself and by trying to be in tune with the guru as much as possible. Swamiji says that he's sure that he's not the only one telling us this during Sunday services.

The foundation is practicing the teachings...meditation...practicing the techniques of OM, Hong Sau and Kriya. Nothing is more powerful than these techniques to put us in tune...in touch... with the Divine within us.

Another very powerful way to develop faith is attunement that Swamiji said that he had personally experienced was by serving the Guru in whatever way we can. Some are materially rich, some have time they can donate, some can do neither but they can come here and meditate regularly. Even that is contributing...that is serving the Guru...coming here and meditating alone or in group meditations or taking care of the gardens...anything we do that connects us with the Guru, that we will feel his presence...his presence flowing into our hearts.

How much should we serve? Swamiji said he always uses Mother Teresa as his standard. She said: "Give until it hurts." That's painful! Whether it's service or whatever contribution... anyway we do it...we have to push our limits...not pull back. Then we see that the faith is flowing ever more strongly. Try it out and see for yourselves.

"Loyalty," as Master said, "is the highest law." Swamiji said the way he reasoned it out was that Master...the Guru gives spiritual words to the disciple...the sacred words when he is initiated. After that he is like our parents...both mother, father combined. Once we have that relationship we don't have any

desire to go to any other mother or father...our friends mother or father may be rich, they may be different but that mother and father are not going to take care of us. Therein comes the loyalty.

My Guru is my mother and father. Swamiji said that is his sentiment and that's how he thinks of loyalty. Nobody else can help him. If any other help is going to come it is going to come from them--our line of gurus.

If we can just remember these things Swamiji is sure we can maintain our faith, maintain our attunement, maintain our love for the Gurus and sooner or later we will see that they are always there and that they are the best of givers.

He closed with Master's words: "A guru is among all men the best of givers. His generosity, just like the Lord Himself, knows no boundaries." Others can give only so much...they can give only so much of their love, only so much of their wealth but a guru gives completely of himself. Nobody can give more.