

Brother Govindananda

SRF/YSS Convocation 2018

Tuesday, August 7, 2018

(DISCLAIMER: These notes are our best attempt to capture the essence of what was said at this class. There is always a degree of human error involved when taking notes and we have transcribed them to the best of our ability.)

I was exhilarated at the reception to see all of these devotees putting Master's teaching into practice. We have come to see that no matter how many things life throws at us, Master has the answer.

Question1: I love to pick out various possession phrases by Master. "Make me feel you in and around me." "Help me to feel Thy presence. " What does it mean to be possessed by the guru?

Awhile back, I was working at the publications center. One of the monks asked me how long I had been in the ashram. I said, "Fifteen years. What have I learned in that time?"

He stopped, and then he said, "That's quite a question." And I still ask myself, what I have learned.

Motivating yourself is not always easy. Master said, "Resurrect me from the sepulcher of words."

It is like being raised from the dead. How do we react to this statement? Maybe with anxiety. I like the idea of feeling Gurujī's bliss, but I like the idea of also inserting a bad habit here and there. Ego has no desire to be possessed by anything.

My thought might be, "I'm not making progress here. I've been patient long enough. I thought, "What would happen if Gurujī came to me right now?" There was a little hesitation. I thought about this hesitation for weeks. The ego was concerned about Gurujī showing up, saying, "Things need to change around here."

To be possessed by Gurujī is only to be possessed by our Selves. "Eternity and I, one united ray. A tiny bubble of laughter, I Am become the Sea of Mirth Itself". (From Master's poem, "Samadhi")

The first reaction springs from our desire for independence. The second comes from our desire to be part of something greater than ourselves. We are a paradox. I spoke with Brother Pranavananda about this. He explained that we come to Convocation because we belong here. It is easier to see the desire in others and not in ourselves. It is a humbling thought that we need to belong.

I have a cousin who is now married. When I went to Hidden Valley to become a monk, she drove me there. After that, I didn't see her for twenty years. I had known her husband. They came to see me, and we went out to dinner, but the restaurant was packed.

My cousin said to her husband, who is a colonel, "Dear, your mission is to find us a table."

He turned to me and said, "My wife understands that the way to get me to do something is to call it a mission."

Brother Premamoy, who trained many of us when we were young monks, often used the term "esprit de corps". This is when we are inwardly singing, "At last I have come home."

Question 2: This may seem silly, but I wonder about the idea of immortality. The idea of eternity is daunting...overwhelming.

When we consider eternity, I think of the first time I visited India in 1992. I was overwhelmed there by the feeling of eternity.

Swami Smaramananda told me a story about a man who lived in an incredible mansion with vast grounds and beautiful gardens. Somehow, he decided to inhabit the tool shed, where he stayed, never enjoying the outside or the gardens. He said, "You think, " Up until now I was living in this beautiful garden surrounding a huge mansion, and I've been staying in the toolshed. I have never walked around the beautiful grounds."

Then you think, "Why was I so foolish all of these years?"

Then you enter the mansion of your Heavenly Father who owns that house, and you think, "Why did I stay in the toolshed all of these years? " This is ego consciousness.

The "Bhagavad Gita" is all about facing this fear. There is a reason that fearlessness is the first quality listed in the Gita. We are children of God. We meditate from that perspective. It is the ego that makes us feel that we are separate from eternity.

Master said, "To overcome misery, I don't want you to ever forget material remedies, but the greatest remedy is kriya yoga. This is the way of freedom."

When we are in fear, we have usually covered it up with other things. During his very first evening with him, Sri Yukteswar tells Master in his first lesson, "Look fear in the face and it will cease to trouble you."

Is it really that important to do that in the beginning? Yes!

Question 3: Master said once to live a life of balanced recklessness. How can I make this a part of my life? It sounds exciting, like, "Just go for it!"

Master tells us to smile a perpetual smile. "Smile that strong smile of balanced recklessness. We need to face the challenges that our life has created."

We can afford to be reckless if we're recklessly with God.

Swami Ram Tirtha's song includes the lines, "Friends and counselors pray waste not your breath. Take up my orders, devour up ye death," and "Beware all ye mountains, stand not in my way, your ribs will be shattered and tattered today." Swami Ram Tirtha had no fear.

In the ashram, I was asked what did I want to do. The senior monk had a major task that he wanted me to do, but it was daunting. It had a lot of risk, but there was also a lot on the upside. I went to the restroom and worked with Master on what I should do. This was balanced recklessness.

Master said, "Babaji will help".

I told my supervisor, "Yes". He told me he was already booking plane tickets.

There is a devotee I know who had a similar situation. He told me, "There was a risk. I took it, and I've regretted it ever since." (Laughter)

But when we do it with Master we have more assurance. We can't always make perfect decisions in this world. We wouldn't be here if that were the case.

I like to go hiding mountains north of here. We were passing a deep cavern. I said, "If I fall off here. It won't be the mountains that are shattered. Then I thought of Master's quote, "Danger and I were born together, and I am more dangerous than danger." I also remember thinking that I didn't want the other monk to go back and report those last words.

Question 4: I've been out of work for a long time. We have run out of resources. We may lose our home. This is the first time I have felt at the mercy of circumstances. I have asked for prayers for at least an alternative. It is a terribly crushing feeling that we feel at this time.

When we go through the most crushing experiences in life, the results can be to free us to make productive efforts to change. It can for me. Once, a family member called me. He had been diagnosed with an advanced, late-stage illness. I didn't ask about my feelings. I had to trick myself. I said, "Guruji, you know the answer. May this family member always feel guided and helped by you. "

After it was over, I felt not only closer to this family member, but also to God.

Anxiety is so easy to come by in this world. It can get out of hand very quickly. There is much good advice in the little book of Master's "Living Fearlessly." We can feel courage coming into our mind and our body. If anxiety is natural, the ultimate solution for anxiety can't be found in this world. The answers are spiritual.

Even physical exercises can help us a great deal when we are anxious. When I was first in the ashram, I was anxious about something for a week or two. One night, I was going home from work on the tube. I was catastrophizing.

"I can't meditate in this state. I'll just go for a run."

And it worked. I got it out of the body. Approach everything holistically. That happened over 20 years ago, The problem at work was still there. I just didn't have any anxiety about it. At all times pray, and bring Master into it.

Question 5: I was involved in a serious accident recently. I was badly hurt. I have had a deep battle with discouragement and despair. I have a hard time meditating. What can I do? I want to feel close to Master.

The accident is recent. You will feel close to Master before long. It is natural to feel inadequate and hopeless during challenges. There is a great article in the SRF Magazine called, "Happiness Set Point". No matter what happens to, we set a goal that in a year's time, we will regain our equilibrium. The author says, "We can have a happiness set point whether it involves winning the lottery or losing a limb."

We're greedy for joy and bliss. When these things happen, we need things to help us to move through the initial period when we are frustrated and discouraged. Master tells us that these difficult experiences are an essential part of our spiritual growth. This lesson, we all have to do.

I remember talking with a devotee. This was a long term devotee who was facing a debilitating condition that kept getting worse. This devotee told me, "I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy, but it's made me who I am."

I felt like I was bowing at His feet, I was so inspired. He was so clearly feeling close to Master through it all.

Sister Gyanamata can offer us something here. She told us, "We make too much of feeling, even admitting that the right kind of feeling is very enjoyable. What does it matter how you feel? Bear your lot as long as it is the will of God that you should do so. Act rightly, and in due time the right feeling of peace and joy will come."

Question 6: As a parent, I often feel overwhelmed with both working and dealing with my children. I am also taking on some of the problems and issues of close friends who are struggling. Can you help me a little with these challenges?

If we are already doing the best we can, doing better may mean doing less. We really can't take on the problems of others. That is their karma. My mother, who was always a helper, said that it was a good thing for the world that I had joined the ashram.

What is our mission? What are we to do? These feelings that come up are a warning that something has to change here. Who do we trust more- God or ourselves? It is better to die in our dharma. Pandharma is not our mission. It is not for us. Even our nearest and dearest belong to God.

(Dharma is the moral order of the universe and a code of living that embodies the fundamental principles of law, religion, and duty that governs all reality.)

Question 7: Could you please discuss detachment on the spiritual path? I have enough struggles drinking too much coffee and eating too many desserts.

One devotee told Brother Paravananda, “ Nothing was going well. Then I read Master’s “The Law of Success”, and everything changed. “

One of the monks researched over the years to find out what makes a successful life for us? Here’s what he came up with. Start small. Don’t move on until you have achieved some success. Then try something bigger. Bring guru into it.

Love is one of the greatest stimulants to the will. Under the influence of love on the will, we can do almost anything. Look at the talk in “Man’s Eternal Quest”, “Curing Mental Alcoholics”.

Master tells us that those with bad habits should associate with those with good habits. Even businessmen are now turning to fasting for mental clarity. If there is something we can’t seem to shake, try a little fast with fruit juice. The very thought of fasting shakes things up. It brings back anxiety and worry. There is a lot of research about how fasting really help the body, mind, and spiritual health. It also helps us with detachment. We learn all about it when we go on a little fast.

Question 8: When I am participating in group meditation, I often feel emotionally disconnected from the group. How can I feel more a part of the group?

When I first started attending an SRF Center, I didn’t want to wait around to talk to other devotees. I was so busy. As time went on, I naturally grew bonds with the devotees in the London Center, and it became my family for those four to five years. Whether we attend those groups or not, it always provides us with a foundation. Overtime, good attachments come about. Attending social functions and participating in service also helps us to bond with the group.

Question 9: How can one be free of attachments?

Krishnamurti said, “And can a mind that has not understood the whole significance of desire know ... suppress, transmute and all the rest of it, then what is one to do with desire? Then what is one to do with desire?”

Master’s phrase for desire was “Matter drenched”. He said that when good aspirations are pursued, we are wisely, actually increasing our peace as long as they are good desires. Our attachments increase when we go into the world.

Once a devotee complained to Brother Santoshananda said, "I have all of these duties. I supervise all of these people who go into the work. Then it hits me. What do I do?"

Brother replied, "Nothing. I suggest you try to do one less thing rather than losing your peace".

The devotee came back to him later and said, "Brother, it works! I'm kinder. I feel less pressure. I even feel deeper joy. I just had to retain the peace I feel within me. Now, wherever I go, I feel like I'm in the right place."

Question 10: I can't get it through my head why Spirit needed the entertainment of delusion. What is he getting out of this? He already had perfect love and bliss? Why this lila? Please have mercy on us.

(There was much laughter over this question.)

We are advised with satsangas that the best thing is not to answer questions that you do not have an answer for. At the end of "The Autobiography of a yogi", Sri Yukteswar says, "Some mysteries remain unanswered." (Laughter)

So why did God create the world? Here's what I think, what Master thinks. What would you do if you had all of that bliss and an overload of creativity? Do we feel we need a reason to have fun? So does God. God has His Happiness with the dial dialed all the way to the top. If he broke the dial off it would have happiness all the way up to the top of bliss. There is one thing He wants from this creation. We can choose to give him our love. Do we think we are separate from God? Wouldn't you create the universe if you were God? When you are a causal being, you will. Master said we can bring universes into being just like the Creator.

There is a quote from the Upanishads.

"From joy we come.

From joy we have our being.

And in this sacred joy

We will melt again."