
Sahaj Marg Study Group

Spiritual Experiences

Set 5, Handout 7 (From 'My Master', pages 145 - 154)

My Master teaches that few spiritual experiences have real significance and therefore undue importance should not be attached to them as this may divert us from our goal. Persons who give too much importance to experiences are likely to 'miss the wood for the trees.' Too much importance has been given to dreams, visions, hearing of voices and the like in the traditional works on the subjects of religion, yoga and mysticism. This has led aspirants to wrongly conclude that where there are no such experiences, something is seriously wrong with their practice of the method. My Master has emphatically stated that experiences, as experiences, have no value since what should concern us is the attainment of the Goal, and not experiences en route. We may take note of them in the same manner as we note the passing landscape when on a journey. No greater importance should be attached to them. In any case, a desire or craving for experiences is definitely a wrong attitude, and should be changed forthwith.

On one occasion when Master was at Hyderabad, an eager group of persons was around him, asking questions. One young man asked this question about the validity of spiritual experiences. Master gave his usual answer, that we should not worry about them. The abhyasi however pressed for an answer, asking whether such experiences did not denote stages on the journey, and thus were indicators of how far the journey had been completed. As an analogy he said, "Sir, when I travel from here to Bombay by train, the stations on the way come in a particular order. So by knowing which station we have arrived at I can judge how near I am to my destination. Surely spiritual experiences have a similar value." Shri Ishwar Sahai who was present smiled and said, "What you say is true if I go by train. Suppose I travel by air, then how am I to judge what stages of the journey have been completed? We have then to rely on the captain of the plane to tell us where we are, and how much farther we have to go to reach our destination. Even when the captain tells us where we are the information may convey nothing to us. So this question is to be answered like this." The questioner laughed and said, "Yes, I see the point. You take us by air..!"

Speaking in a very general manner, experiences can be classified as falling into three groups. The first group contains experiences arising out of the abhyasi's own imagination, or as a result of his having projected them himself. Abhyasis, indeed all human beings, are prone to discuss matters among themselves, and to exchange notes on each other's experiences. In spiritual *sadhana* this is not advisable since, in the same sitting, different abhyasis may undergo different experiences. This does not mean that one is progressing more, or faster, than another. Experiences depend on such diverse factors as the *samskaras* of the

individual, his previous background, social environment and so on. If abhyasis discuss each other's experience, some may feel that they are not getting the right experience from meditation, and may feel dejected. Worse, they may project the same things unconsciously during subsequent sittings and have experiences which are their own creation. Therefore Master advises abhyasis not to discuss their spiritual experiences with each other, but only with Master himself or with the preceptor. Such experiences are not true spiritual experiences and have no value whatsoever.

The second group covers all experiences arising from the cleaning process. Master has stated that when the system of the abhyasi is cleaned, then the past impressions are removed. When these impressions surface to the mind then the original experience or activity which created the impressions is once again created in the mind. So the abhyasi has an 'experience.' In general the experiences which abhyasis have are of this category. The visions of gods and goddesses that abhyasis experience during meditation are of this type. Whenever such an experience comes up, it is an indication of a past involvement with that particular deity. I have referred elsewhere to one such experience where Master himself saw a monkey in the place of an abhyasi. Many abhyasis have startlingly clear visions of gods or saints. Quite a few make the tragic mistake of thinking that the goal has been reached, since their chosen personal god has granted them his *darshan*. It is a pity that persons who practise without the guidance of a capable Master mistake such experiences for divine revelations, and go back to the traditional forms of worship of that particular deity which appeared to them. Abhyasis have to be on their guard against such misinterpretation of experiences. Many abhyasis report having visions of gardens, hill-stations and the like. These also belong to the same category. Some experiences may also refer to a previous life. Generally the abhyasi will not be able to know this. But Master and the preceptors will be able to correctly interpret and evaluate such experiences, particularly if they have occurred during sittings with the Master or the preceptor.

The third category contains what Master has referred to as "revelatory experiences." These are of a very valuable nature as they contain messages from the inner Self of the abhyasi which, if properly interpreted, can help him considerably on his journey. Such experiences may come during meditation sittings, or as dreams. Master has also stated that orders, instructions, and advice from the Master himself can be conveyed in this way.

Some eight months after I commenced the practice of meditation under the Sahaj Marg system, I had a dream. In the dream there was a narrow river, with a tarred road beside it. On the other side of the road, away from the river, was a large hall. I went up the steps and found an enormous quantity of footwear lying outside the door. I inferred that there was a large gathering inside. In the next scene I found Master coming out of this hall. I joined him. Both of us walked up the road along the river. We came to a narrow bridge spanning the river. We got

on to it to go across, and just as we were halfway across I bent down and touched his feet. This dream was the cause of immense satisfaction to me. At the conscious level I had fully accepted my Master. This dream now confirmed that at the subconscious level too there had been an acceptance of the Master, and so my acceptance of him was now total. I accepted this dream as revealing an inner condition.

A few years later I had a period of depression which lasted about three months. During this period I could not meditate satisfactorily and, if I remember right, I had stopped meditating for some time. At the peak of this depression I arrived in Bangalore on an official visit. Before going to bed I prayed to Master, telling him that I was unable to help myself in any way, and that it was now up to him to put me back on the path from which I seemed to be straying. I prayed for his guidance and assistance to find the way again. I slept very deeply that night. I woke up as usual at about 5 a.m. but strange to say, I went to sleep again, and slept very deeply. During this second sleep I had a dream. I dreamt I was in a large compound. I entered a large building half of which was an open courtyard, where several women seemed to be cutting and preparing vegetables for cooking. The other half was covered. I entered it. It was in total darkness. At one end there was a raised dais, and on it was seated a person whom I could not as yet see. As I looked at him some illumination began to glow behind him. I saw his silhouette. Slowly the light became stronger, and I saw Lalaji sitting on the dais, a radiant smile on his beautiful face, his beard illuminated by the light from behind him, wearing a shawl around his shoulders. I stood mute before him. Lalaji spoke to me. He said, "So far you have been meditating in one way. I shall now teach you another method. Meditate on my form as that from which the entire manifested Universe has been created." Though Lalaji spoke, the voice I heard was that of my Master Babuji Maharaj. As soon as I woke up I sat in meditation, meditating as advised for over an hour. The meditation was very deep and I was in a condition like that of *samadhi*. My depression vanished. It was as if a new beginning was made. When I reported this experience to Master he exclaimed, "You have had a wonderful experience. A secret has been revealed to you. You know what it is? It has been revealed to you that my Master and I are one, though people see us as separate beings."

Perhaps a year later I had another vivid dream. I dreamt that I was taking evening group meditation in a thatched pavilion with only the roof to it. There were no walls on any side, only poles to hold up the roof. It was twilight, and getting dark. I closed my eyes and started the sitting. A few moments later I had the feeling that all the abhyasis who had been meditating had got up and were moving around. I opened my eyes, and saw that all the abhyasis were indeed moving around but all had their eyes closed. Each one had a dagger in his hand which he was trying to plunge into me. I was frightened and shouted, "Master! Master!" At this stage I woke up. I referred this to Master. Master said, "It is a good dream. It is an indication that the lower vrittis are being destroyed. It is a sign for further progress."

When we analyse the situation we discover an important trend. The imaginary experiences and those projected by the abhyasi himself, come very early in a person's spiritual life and, fortunately, do not last long. The experiences arising out of cleaning may be numerous, and may last for many years depending on the condition of the abhyasi. The revelatory experiences come when the abhyasi is established on the path, and devotion for the Master has filled his heart. There is no set time for this. It may be the very same day on which one commences abhyas, or never at all.

Apart from these experiences there are those that can be created by the power of the transmission itself, when consciously done with such an intention. I recall going to Dr. Varadachari at Madras one hot summer evening for a sitting. When I reached his residence I was hot and sweating profusely. Within minutes of my arrival he asked me to sit with him in meditation. I continued to feel very hot as the fan was not on. But, strange to say, within two or three minutes of commencing meditation I felt a cool breeze blowing around me. I cooled off immediately. The breeze continued to blow, and I actually felt a little chilly. At the same time I could feel that the atmosphere around me was still as hot as ever. I was puzzled, but enjoyed the cool breeze that seemed to be blowing for my benefit. When the sitting ended Dr. Varadachari asked me what I had felt. I told him of the peculiar sensation. He bellowed with laughter. His eyes had a mischievous twinkle in them. "See," he said, "That is the beauty of this system. I knew you were feeling hot and so I transmitted to you from the water center. So you felt cool and refreshed. A capable preceptor must be able to work upon the system as a musician plays upon an instrument!"

I heard of a second instance from Master himself. It was in the early days of his *sadhana*. He wanted to try the effects of different levels of transmission. He transmitted to an abhyasi from a particular center which would produce signs of intoxication. Master said, "Now look here, when the sitting was over this abhyasi could hardly get up. He had all the signs of drunkenness upon him. He was completely intoxicated. This was transmission of a low, material order. This should not be done as there is no benefit to the abhyasi. We must always transmit from as subtle a level as possible."

A third occasion relates to my father. He had a hankering to visit the holy shrine at Badrinath. He had had this desire ever since his boyhood. We had arrived at Shahjahanpur to attend the wedding of Master's son Chi. Umesh. My father expressed a desire to go from there to Badrinath, and sought Master's permission. Master said, "Why do you want to go there? It is dangerous. The roads are bad and a journey now is a great risk. If you are hankering for the experience you hope to get there, sit in meditation and I will give you the experience here itself right now. There is no need to undertake such a troublesome and risky journey for this purpose!" The implications of this are tremendous. I will relate one particular example to show at what levels such experiences can be imparted

to a disciple if Master desires to do so. There had been a lot of new thinking about the moon, several years before moon travel was even contemplated in the West. Our sister Kasturi had expressed a desire to know what conditions were like on that satellite. Master said, "All right. Sit in meditation. I will try to give you the experience of that condition." Sister Kasturi told me that she did have a profound experience and had noted the details down in her diary. Later visits to the moon by the American astronauts revealed certain conditions which she had experienced many years earlier.

We thus see that one more order of spiritual experience is now introduced into the picture. We have to reclassify the subject of spiritual experiences into two major classes. The first one consists of all those experiences that an abhyasi experiences by himself during his meditation, with or without preceptors, as well as in dreams. This class is amenable to the three-fold sub-division I have referred to earlier. The second major class contains all experiences which the Master deliberately induces in us, or makes possible for us to experience. Such experiences can be of any level of 'being'. I recall our preceptor, Shri S.K. Rajagopalan, telling me many years ago, of an occasion when a high-ranking official visited my Master. This official desired to be enlightened on various topics. At the end he asked Master what the state of *jivan mukti* was. Master answered that he could not explain or describe this state but could enable the official to experience it if he so desired. The official said, "I see," and went away. Shri S.K. Rajagopalan used to bewail the ignorance of that official which deprived him of a heaven-sent opportunity for immediate grace being bestowed on him. Who can enter such a state, even if it is only for a moment, and ever be the same again? The experiences Master bestows on us are of this order where each such experience raises us to levels of 'being' impossible for us to attain by our own effort. Such experiences are not mere experiences. They are moments of grace and bliss when the abhyasi basks in the infinite love of the Master.