

["I am That"](#)

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Balsekar Takes Message Of Self-Knowing to US

"All of your problems are the body's problems-food, clothing, shelter, family, friends, fame, name, security, survival-all these lose their meaning the moment you realize that you may not be a mere body."

Thus spoke Nisargadatta Maharaj. Joking, frowning, laughing, shaking his fingers and pounding his fists, he was bantering mirthfully with a small group of entranced listeners crowded into his tiny Bombay loft. Juxtaposing profound truths with idle prattle, the five-foot sage continued his free-flowing soliloquy as people kept filling the room. Soon, there was barely enough room to sit.

"Look at yourself as you are!" he exclaimed. "See yourself as you are, accept yourself as you are and go ever deeper into what you are."

At first, newcomers to the customary assembly of regular guests were surprised by Maharaj's looks. This smallish man of "ordinary appearance" who favored home-made cigarettes and made small talk was certainly a pleasant enough fellow, but was he the sage that some had traveled thousands of miles to see? Only his twinkling, piercing eyes coupled with his enrapturing words of wisdom and an intangibly electric presence betrayed his spiritual distinction.

"See experience as mere experience and you have done all you can," he asserted. "Then you are vulnerable to reality, no longer armored against it as you were when you gave reality to events and experiences."

Within minutes all negative first impressions were obliterated. Maharaj had

successfully sparked an unearthly perception in his audience, transporting them beyond the walls of doubt. Suddenly, all spiritual hopes seemed possible.

"When the mind stays in the 'I am' without moving," he consoled the earnest seekers, "you enter a state which cannot be verbalized but can be experienced. Just try and try again."

Sri Nisargadatta is no longer there in Bombay. He attained his Mahasamadhi in 1981 at the age of 84. Today his timeless message lives on in devotee Ramesh Balsekar, who translated talks for the Maharaj while he was alive. Over the past few years, Ramesh-as he is affectionately known-has emerged as a spiritual leader in his own right. Although his manner is quietly demure, contrasting with that of his entertaining and outgoing Guru, his message is no less dynamic in its far-reaching effects.

Ramesh has just completed the second of two very successful teaching tours of the USA. The first was in 1987 and lasted 12 weeks. A ten-week tour followed in 1988, and plans are in the making for a third in 1989. The number of attendants is steadily growing in this multi-faceted program that features not only the penetrating teachings of Advaita Vedanta, but also an ever-changing scenery as he traverses the USA from New York to Aspen to San Francisco and Hollywood.

As HINDUISM TODAY discovered after diligent inquiry, Ramesh keeps his personal life very much in the background. Little is known about the man. And he would like to keep it that way. However, a few basic facts can be stated. After graduating from London University with a degree in commerce, Ramesh S. Balsekar took a position at a leading bank in India in 1940 and retired as its top executive in 1977. Around the time of his retirement, he intensified his spiritual quest. He met Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and became his ardent devotee, committing his life to the truth revealed to him through that encounter.

While Sri Nisargadatta was alive, Ramesh was inspired to preserve his Guru's wisdom in print and privately began to keep a log of the daily dialogs that took place in that unpretentious yet famous little loft. Maharaj came to know of this record and was pleased. Although he had initially forbade anyone of publishing anything about him or his teachings, he eventually allowed Ramesh to do so with

the injunction that the text be inspired from within.

"Let the articles continue, as many of them as would emerge by themselves," said Sri Nisargadatta. "The essential point is spontaneity. Don't persist, don't resist."

To date, Ramesh Balsekar has written five books. Only one of them, *Pointers from Nisargadatta Maharaj*, specifically details the teachings of his Guru, although all of them are inspired by his non-dualistic line of thinking. *From Consciousness to Consciousness* explores the Guru/disciple relationship and *Experience of Immortality* is a commentary on Saint Jnaneshwara's poetic work, *Amritanubhava*.

Saint Jnaneshwara, also known as Jnanadeva, was the founder of the Sri Nisargadatta lineage. He lived in Maharashtra, India, in the 13th century [See *HINDUISM TODAY* Vol. 10, No. 8]. *Experiencing the Teaching* is Ramesh's latest book and features his own perceptions of advaita.

As one might expect of a man extolling undifferentiated oneness as the source of all creation, Ramesh is self-effacing. This attitude is evident in his books and in his method of teaching. He does not see himself as a pundit and abjures such authority.

"Ramesh is a facilitator," says Rifka Hirsch, one of Ramesh's American students, in an interview with *HINDUISM TODAY*. "He does not set himself up as a teacher. He does not even openly claim lineage from Sri Nisargadatta. But there are many who are interested in what he has to say and seek him out."

Rifka went on to explain that while Sri Nisargadatta more actively recommended different practices to different people in accordance with their specific needs on the spiritual path, Ramesh makes no such suggestions. Instead, he categorically emphasizes to all the practice of simply participating in life with the perspective that "whatever you are doing at any moment is simply part of the impersonal manifestation."

In his book, *Experiencing the Teaching*, Ramesh describes a profound personal experience that changed his life and gives a glimpse into his relationship with Nisargadatta:

"While I was doing the translation at a session, I was suddenly interrupted by Maharaj. He was asking me to repeat what I had just said. It took me a moment or two to recollect what I had said, and in that instant I felt myself curiously transformed, out of context, into a distant and almost disinterested witness to the dialogue that followed between Maharaj and me. When after a while I was back in a relevant frame of reference, I found Maharaj sitting back with a contented smile while the visitors seemed to be gaping at me in an embarrassed manner. The session then proceeded to its normal conclusion, but my translation thereafter seemed to me to be rather mechanical."

Although Ramesh did not immediately remember his mystical conversation with his Guru, it came back to him later.

"Maharaj, how can I possibly exist with a form as an 'I'?" he boldly inquired of his delighted Guru. "I am always present absolutely; and as consciousness relatively, in which all manifestation is reflected. My absolute presence is my relative absence in the finite world. Maharaj, there is nothing egotistical about this. Anyone can say this-only, there is no 'one' to say this. There is only apperception."

He had been talking with Maharaj "on terms of full equality," something which had never occurred before or since.

Now, Ramesh is preparing for another USA tour. This time around, he's featuring nothing new-just timeless truths presented as directly as possible. And his part in it all is infinitesimal. As his Guru would say: "The person is a very small thing. He is but the shadow of the mind, the sum total of some memories."

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