GURU POORNIMA 2017 – Rajiv Kapur Satsang

**vande Gurunam caranarvinde**

**samdarsita svatma sukhava bodhe**

**nih shreyase jangalikayamane**

**samsara halahal mohasantyai**

*“I bow to the lotus feet of the Guru and his lineages, through which is revealed eternal joy and wisdom of the SELF. He is like the snake charmer who destroys the poisonous web of samskara, by reducing the illusions that bind us.”*

We all know that Shankara was the greatest exponent of Advaita Vedanta and almost everything we read and understand in the form of Upanishads are popular commentaries given by him. However not many know that he also wrote a yogic text by the name “Yoga Taravali” which provides a glimpse of his mastery over the science of experiential Yoga. Yoga Taravali is a rare gem of a scripture. Unfortunately not many have offered their commentaries on this and so it remains a hidden and unknown text.

The first verse of Yoga Taravali is in praise of one’s Guru. In India we always begin any prayer by paying respect and homage to one’s Guru. In fact we place the Guru before even Self and God. Saint Kabir in one of his famous couplets wrote :

**Guru govind dono khade, kaake lagu paaye**
**Balihari guru aapno, govind diyo bataye**

*“If the Guru and Govind (Lord Krishna) are standing together, at whose feet will you bow down first? I owe the Guru first for he has revealed Govind (God or SELF) to me.”*

Interestingly pop star Madonna also sang the first two lines of the verse of this text on her popular album, “Ray of Light” in the song “Shanti/Ashtangi”. I will begin with these two lines of the verse:

**vande Gurunam caranarvinde**

**samdarsita svatma sukhava bodhe**

*“I bow to the lotus feet of the Guru and his lineages, through which is revealed eternal joy and wisdom.”*

These first two lines of this verse talk about bowing at the feet of the Guru. Bowing at the feet of the Guru is a part of tradition and is considered a very auspicious way for a shisya to get blessings. However many take it in the literal sense and physically fall to touch the feet of the Guru. This is mere outward ritual while real bowing should be from within. Bhagavan Sri Ramana always pointed us to that **inner** ritual of bowing.

A devotee once approached Bhagavan and asked him if he could prostrate to him and touch his feet.

*Bhagavan replied, “The real feet of Bhagavan exist only in the heart of the devotee. To hold onto these feet incessantly is true happiness. You will be disappointed if you hold onto my physical feet because one day this physical body will disappear. The greatest worship is worshipping the Guru’s feet that are within oneself.”*

The word “Gurunam” is very important. Gurunam means lineage or tradition and not just a Guru or teacher.

So when a shishya bows at the feet of a Guru a few things are being conveyed. First the shishya vows to the Guru that he will walk the path that his Guru walked upon as laid down by his Guru (tradition). In the physical dimension legs are organs of actions to reach any destination. Symbolically by worshipping the Guru’s feet inwardly a sadhaka vows that no matter what obstacles come his way he will keep walking until he has reached his goal. He will keep putting efforts into meditation and Self-inquiry until he completely eradicates all his *vasanas.*

The physical feet are also symbolic of the two *antahkaranas (inner organs)* – *manas* and *buddhi,* which meanmind and intellect respectively. Holding the feet indicates that the shisya is willing to place full trust in the mind and the intellect of his Guru and the process given to him towards his sadhana. In a Guru’s Consciousness his mind and intellect are well-integrated while in most seekers they are in conflict with each other. Mind says something and intellect another thing and it becomes hard to recognize the true inner voice. Therefore it is better to follow the advice of one’s Guru.

Lastly falling at the feet also indicates that he has surrendered his ego to the Guru because without surrendering his ego there will be no space or room for the Guru’s teachings to enter, grow and deepen. Ego thrives on comfort especially on that which reflects familiar patterns and tendencies. The Guru has to often do a spiritual “surgery” to weed those out. The ego is there guarding these tendencies. Therefore one has to mentally surrender his or her ego to one’s Guru for the “procedure” to be successful. One cannot have one half of the body on the “operating table” and the other half off the table and ready to leave midway through the surgery. One has to leave all at the hands of the Guru until the very end.

*“The benefit of performing namaskaram to the Guru is only the removal of the ego. This is not attained except by total surrender” ~ Sri Ramana.*

The last two lines provide a glimpse into the heart of the Guru’s presence--his wisdom and grace.

**Nih shreyase jangalikayamane**

**samsara halalala mohasantyai**

*“He is like the snake charmer who destroys the poisonous web of samskara, by reducing the illusions that bind us.”*

“Jangalika” means snake charmer. A real Guru is truly like a snake charmer. If a Guru is not a charmer he cannot be a Guru. A lot can be felt through the intoxicating eyes of a Guru. Look into the eyes of Sri Ramana, Sri Lahiri Mahashay, Yoganandaji or Osho and you will see the eyes that can draw anyone towards them, almost hypnotize them. Oshos eyes could pull large crowds towards him while Yoganandaji eyes pulled people towards love. Sri Ramanas and Lahiri Baba’s eyes were more inwards and instantly drew people inwards into their own hearts straight into truth. My Guru, Dubeyji, too had powerful eyes. They were very loving and kind but at the same time sharp like a hawk. He had this constant “bullshit meter” where he could sense things straight without any filters. He was openly critical of everyone who talked about love for SELF/God but had very little experience or practices to back the talks. In most cases the ones he criticized were often his own shisyas. Anytime any one of us went into an “All is Awareness” or “There is no I here” or “We are never born or never die” kind of neo-Advaita rambling he would make a funny face and ask how many hours we had sat for practice in the past two days. He would call many of us “Faki baaz”. “Faki baaz” means those who talk too much without substance. He was extremely thorough with the science of Kriya Yoga and no one could get away with any bullshit.

Let me tell you all something else. None of us actually practiced less, yet Dubeyji called us all “Faki baaz.” Because for him there was nothing like too much practice. “If we are breathing we should be practicing” was the best way to describe his attitude.

Dubeyji was also very good at hunting down egos. I remember he once told his close sangha disciples that I had attained *kechari mudra* (a difficult mudra) in under one month and that it can happen only through the Grace of God. I was super-elated and my ego began to swell. Dubeyji obviously sensed that in me. Later my dear friend, Rishi, was talking to him and told him that since I had attained *Kechari* I now believed I could attain many more siddhis. Guruji was furious. He told Rishi that I first needed to graduate school before I could talk about PhD subjects. Guruji knew Rishi would often take instruction from me for Kriya practice. What better way to teach me a lesson on humility! So he told Rishi, “Go advise Rajiv to work harder and not rest on his past laurels.” I obviously got the message and even though I felt really shaken at the time I saw the compassion and love he truly had for me. Dubeyji was not angry with me. He was dealing with the ego that the world (samskara) often brings as poison in our spiritual life. When I saw that clearly in my mind, my love for my Guru increased even more. He was a charmer, charming the snake of vasanas away from our lives slowly but surely.

Dubeji would warn me against dangers, perils and traps that lurk around us and often times he had to pull me out of them. He would do it so very lovingly and then would smile and say it was all good. There were periods when I drifted into a *bhoga* and missed my practices, and then I would feel guilty about it. He would say, “Don’t beat yourself up. Everyone here is a *bhogi*. Just get back into practice. Be a big bhogi but a better yogi.”

I remember the last advice Dubeyji gave me was “Remember whenever you get into a ditch again, fall back more strongly into practice.” The real master is within our practice. To me Dubeyji will always be the best snake charmer I have ever met and I would again gladly be the “Faki baaz” if that could bring him back in my life.

The word “*halahal*” has special significance in Indian mythology. During *samundra manthan* (churning of the ocean) the devatas and the asuras were expecting the nectar of immortality. But what came out first was poison (halahal). That created panic amongst both the devatas and the asuras. Shiva then appeared and drank the poison and Shakti, the consort of Shiva, anxiously pressed his throat with her hands to prevent the poison from descending into the stomach.

When deep churning takes place due to one’s sadhana, the activated kundalini first brings to the surface a lot of negative tendencies (halahal) which have been kept hidden. This can often overwhelm a sadhaka and he may not know how to get rid of it or process it. The Guru appears as Shiva due to his compassion and through Shakti, the power of transmission and grace helps his shisya through such challenges.

Gurus may or may not be physically present but they continue to guide us from subtle realms. I always feel the protective sheath of Bhagavan Ramana, Dubey Baba and Devi Maa Shakti guiding me through the darkest phases of my life.

Jai Guru!