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INTRODUCTION

 On 8th September 1981, at 7.32 pm, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, the sage of 10th Lane, Khetwadi, Mumbai, entered 'Mahasamadhi'. Thirteen days after their Maharaj's death, his devotees held the 'Bhavanjali' (offering emotion and devotion) at Laxmi Baug to honour Sri Nisargadatta.

Under the Chairmanship of Mr. P. O. Kasbekar, many devotees paid reverential tribute to their guru by speaking about him, the times they spent with him, and what they learned from him.

Maharaj spoke only in his mother tongue, Marathi. He knew only a few words of English. S. K. Mullarpattan was one of Maharaj's principal devotees and the English interpreter who translated Maharaj's words for the foreign visitors who attended the talks. What follows is the Speech he gave that evening.



TRIBUTE

F_rriends,

You have just heard a very moving speech and a touching poem recited by Mrs. Doongajibai. Her recitation has raised us all to sublime heights of devotion. Therefore my talk, probably, may bring you down to the level of gross-earth on which we are firmly placed, as I want to start my talk from this level.

Now, to say that I shall talk on Sri Maharaj would sound precocious on my part. Because to talk on Maharaj, I must know Maharaj, and to know Maharaj, I must first know Myself. This was his fundamental teaching. Therefore, my attempt at this speech would be something like an earthworm trying to explain about space and the cosmos. Nevertheless, the talk must go on and I must talk about that personality through which the very

parabrahma (Supreme Absolute) spoke and expressed Itself. So, when I say I am talking about Maharaj, it is about that body – that instrument – through which the veritable *parabrahma* spoke and guided us so lovingly all these years, by coming down to our gross level and leading us spiritually upwards.



Friends, Maharaj was nearing 80 years of age when I had his *darshan* (blessed presence) for the first time. Even at this ripe old age, he was active and energetic. His daily talks used to be highly impressive and penetrating. Many a time, just prior to his talk, even though he may not have been feeling well, we found him becoming energised as the discussions proceeded and, finally, he would appear as the very personification of energy. This was the state of his health, over the last 5 years.

After the morning sessions, he preferred to take a short walk accompanied by two or three devotees, among whom I was also usually present. During these morning walks, we would stop at some wayside restaurants for a cup of tea or a glass of *lassi* (yoghurt drink).



The loft where Maharaj gave his talks, as it is today.

In those days, the morning sessions were held from 10 am to 12 noon, and the evening sessions from 5 pm to 6.30 pm. So you can just imagine that, at the age of over 80, he was conducting talks and discussions every day for over three to three-and-a-half hours. His health was excellent, and I was told by his son, Mr. Babiseth, that he suffered no serious illness of any kind except minor ailments like cough and cold, and that he had never been confined to bed.

In 1978, Dr. Rajgopal of Jaslok Hospital visited Maharaj to pay his respects. During the talks, the doctor detected a kind of hoarseness in Maharaj's voice and expressed his desire to examine Maharaj's throat. He took Maharaj to Jaslok Hospital and after examining him said that he suspected throat cancer. He wanted to conduct further tests, but Maharaj did not agree to it. Meanwhile, Maharaj carried on with his talks as usual without any break until 1980. Then, again in April 1980, his voice

became more hoarse. Maharaj's family physician, Dr. Kale, upon examining him discovered some constriction in the throat and sounded a note of caution. So, he insisted that Maharaj must be re-examined thoroughly. With the special efforts and strong persuasion of Mr. S.V. Sapre, Maharaj agreed to the necessary tests. The results indicated that the cancer had developed considerably.

However, this announcement had little effect on Maharaj. He remarked nonchalantly, "What is cancer after all! I am not afraid of death. This 'I AM-NESS' – the birth itself, is the beginning of cancer – the beginning of suffering, and 'I am' not all that. So, if at all any doctor treats me, it will be actually my body and not me – The Absolute."



Later on, since Maharaj was not prepared to get himself treated, Mr. Ghia Seth – an industrialist – insisted that Maharaj should be shown to Dr. Paymaster, who was the best cancer specialist in Bombay. So, he was taken to Dr. Paymaster who told Maharaj about the seriousness of the disease, describing in detail the unbearable

suffering of a cancer patient, if proper treatment was not given in time. But this did not dissuade Maharaj and he declined to undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatment, and would not even agree to be hospitalised.

Meanwhile, a close disciple of Maharaj, Mr. Shrikant Gogate, suggested homeopathic treatment and recommended a homeopath from Malvan – the native town of Maharaj. He was Dr. Suvarna, who had specialised in the treatment of cancer. Dr. Suvarna's treatment, we felt, produced some good results as his throat showed no further ravaging effects of the disease. He was taking normal food. His daily talks went on uninterrupted, as energetically as ever, and everything went on smoothly. Meanwhile, a host of experts such as Ayurvedic Vaidyas, *Nadi* (pulse) Vaidyas and Acupuncture Specialists visited him from time to time. An acupuncturist treated him for four days, but Maharaj was not inclined to continue with the treatment. A *Nadi* Vaidya gave some oil to be used as nasal drops. These treatments gave some temporary relief. But none of the experts gave any hope of a cure. They only expressed their fears that the end would come in about two to three months.

But, as feared by them, the worst did not happen even after about eight months. This hopeful sign, they credited to the spiritual attainments of Maharaj.

Ominously, however, it was noticed that from July 1981 the dreaded disease gained the upper hand. As a result of this, the duration and frequency of the talks came down considerably. From two hours, the talks now came down to one-and-a-half hours and later they lasted for just thirty minutes. Many a time, out of sheer weakness, he was not able to come up to the mezzanine floor where the talks were given. During such times, we played cassette-tapes of his earlier recorded talks.

On August 18, 1981, Maharaj had an attack of pneumonia. He developed some cough and congestion of the lungs. Dr. Kale started antibiotic treatment and his temperature came down to normal. Everything appeared to be under control. But, being very weak, Maharaj could not continue his talks.



Then, on 6th September, 1981, Maharaj gave the final signal. From his bed, he said in a low whisper, “Within the next three days I shall go.” We were aghast, the end was near! Nevertheless, we were not inclined to take his words seriously. Earlier, whenever we enquired about his health, he had replied, “What health – the very next moment I may not be there.” So, in a similar vein, we did not take the “three days notice” in all its seriousness.

Then, the ominous 8th of September dawned. We found him rather better – much better than what he had been on the previous two days. Since he was not able to walk due to weakness, he was lying and resting on his bed. That morning, as usual, he had his tea, and after some time also sipped a little milk. Then, he had a shave. Around 11 am, he also took porridge. Normally, whenever the porridge was brought to him by his daughter-in-law, Maya Vahini, he would protest and refuse to take it. But then, Maya Vahini, with a lot of persuasion, would force him and coax him to take it. But, surprisingly, there were no protests at all this time, and he readily partook of it. This dispelled our gloom and we thought that Maharaj was improving...

least suspecting that this could be the last stage!

Then, as usual at around 11.30 am, when I sought Maharaj's permission to go home for lunch and return in the afternoon - he appeared disturbed. He looked straight at me and said with gestures, "Do you want to leave me in this fashion and go?" I felt quite sad and undecided and waited around for some time. After half an hour, when Maharaj slept, his son Babiseth asked me to go home for lunch.

Earlier in the day, Dr. Kale, after examining Maharaj, had suggested that oxygen should be given to Maharaj in case he had difficulty in breathing. So, Babiseth had asked me to find out the availability, and the shop from where an oxygen cylinder could be obtained.



On my way back, later in the afternoon, I made enquiries about the availability of oxygen. Luckily, I found a shop that was dealing in oxygen cylinders. I reached the house at about 5.30 pm. On my arrival, Babiseth told me that Maharaj's condition was serious.

He said that for the last three hours, Maharaj was breathing very tensely. Babiseth and Maya Vahini were very worried. They were alone in the ashram and did not know what to do.



The staircase leading up to Maharaj's room in Vanamali building.

When I arrived, Maharaj was sleeping. I immediately checked his palms and feet. They were rather cold. To make them warm, we applied hot water bottles and massaged them. His breathing was not normal; it was quite shallow. I suggested that we should immediately get an oxygen cylinder and administer the oxygen. I rushed to the shop and reached just in time before it closed for the day. I collected the cylinder and rushed back to the ashram. I reached there at 6.45 pm.

Looking at Maharaj, I thought that this time around he might actually be serious about quitting, about shedding his body.

“If I could only make him stay on with us,” I thought. I kneeled next to his body, lowered my head and put my lips close to his ears.

I said, “Maharaj, the new apartment will be ready next month. It is our earnest desire that you should bless it with your presence.”

In reply, Maharaj folded his palms together and firmly shook his head. He pointed silently towards his body and indicated with hand gestures that this was not meant to be. At this point, we were still not inclined to take his body language seriously. I interpreted his body language as just another sign of his usual disinterest in worldly matters. After this exchange, I started giving oxygen to Maharaj.

After some time, probably around 7 pm or so, I asked him loudly, “Maharaj, are you feeling better?” He shook his head indicating a clear “No.” This was the last communication that occurred between us and him. There was no response from him when, a little while later, his granddaughter, Savi, loudly called out “Jiji, Jiji!”

I was standing near his head, further down were the devotees, Mr. Veermole, Miss Vanaja and my brother, Gurunath. They were massaging and pressing his hands, legs and feet, trying to generate heat in them; a hot water bottle was applied. All his family members, including his son, Babiseth, were present in the room. All along I was watching Maharaj's breathing closely. While I kept touching and massaging him, I could feel his palms getting colder and colder. At the same time, his breathing got shallower until it finally came to a halt. It had stopped forever. I felt his pulse. There was no pulse any more. I looked at Babiseth and said, "It is all over." The watch showed the time. It was 7.32 pm.



It was both amazing and strange to me that I did not feel any sadness at any stage of Maharaj's departure – were it while standing close to him, massaging him or checking his pulse. It never occurred to me that Maharaj was actually an old man. Rather, I felt as if I was putting a baby to sleep for the night. But sadly, it was the eternal sleep.

Shortly after Maharaj had gone into *Mahasamadhi* (shed the body), messages were sent to the people concerned, who started pouring into 10th Lane till late in the night to pay their last respects to their guru.

The next day, Wednesday, 9th September, the Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj Kendra, took over Maharaj's *gurubandhu* (community of devotees). It was decided that the cremation would take place at the Walkeshwar burning *ghat* (open-fire cremation ground). The setting was appropriate. It was located near the ancient Banaganga temple complex that stands edged along the Arabian



Sri Nisargadatta pays his respects at the samadhi of his guru, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

Sea. In 1936, the mortal remains of Maharaj's guru, Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj, were cremated there. A *samadhi* (shrine) in his memory was later erected at this place.

The Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj Kendra proclaimed that Maharaj's death was not an occasion for sorrow

and sadness, but a time for festivities. After all, the event signifies *maha yoga*, the ultimate Yoga, in which the individual Self merges with the Absolute. To emphasise the spirit of celebration, the Kendra organised a magnificent procession.

At 12.30 pm, the procession to the burning *ghat* started from Maharaj's house at 10th Lane, Khetwadi. His sacred body was placed on a richly decorated truck. The procession was accompanied by a colourful band of musicians. At intervals, fireworks went off. Nearly 300 people, including family members and devotees, escorted the body of Maharaj.



Here, I would like to narrate a remarkable incident that occurred during the procession. A couple of months before Maharaj's demise, a devotee from abroad, Jozef Nauwelaerts, imported a specially-designed reclining chair from Brussels for his guru. Jozef's gift was to provide comfort for Maharaj's suffering body. On the 5th of July, 1981, Maharaj used the chair for the first time. He liked it and found it comfortable to sit on. He often used to

sit in the chair while giving talks and attending *aarti* (sacred flame ritual).

Now, on the occasion of Maharaj's *Mahasamadhi*, the chair was put to good use for the last time. Maharaj's body was placed in the chair in a sitting posture. The chair, with Maharaj's body seated in it, was set on the decorated truck and carried in the procession. On his last journey, Maharaj sat "throned" in the chair, giving his last talk – in silence. Thus, the chair that Jozef had brought with such devotion and love for Maharaj, served his guru well.

The procession reached the cremation ground around 3 pm. After performing the appropriate rituals for a guru's *Mahasamadhi*, *bhajans* (songs of devotion) and *aarti*, Maharaj's body was consigned to the flames at 3.30 pm. The day was Wednesday, 9th September, 1981.



Now, friends, I would like to express gratitude to various persons who looked after Maharaj's comfort and well-being during the past few years.

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Suvarna from Malvan, and Dr. Kale. For our sakes, they both worked very hard to keep Maharaj's disease under control during the last sixteen months.

Thanks are also due to Maharaj's *sevakaries* (persons doing spiritually-oriented service) who served him so well over several years by massaging him, and doing various kinds of work for him and the ashram.

Thank you, Mr. Pundlik. You looked after Maharaj's general well-being for well over 40 years. Mr. Pundlik is present with us in the hall right now.

Thanks to Mr. Iranna who is known to us all as Anna. He served our guru for nearly 25 years. He visited Maharaj twice a day, mornings and evenings, in order to massage his body and press his head.

My thanks go to Mr. Korgaokar and Mr. Veermole, both of whom looked after Maharaj for a number of years.