

Nisargadatta on Teaching
~ An excerpt from *I Am That*
Talks with Nisargadatta Maharaj

Q: What made you decide to become a teacher?

M: I was made into one by being called so. Who am I to teach and whom? What I am, you are, and what you are—I am. The ‘I am’ is common to us all; beyond the ‘I am’ there is the immensity of light and love. We do not see it because we look elsewhere; I can only point at the sky; seeing of the star is your own work. Some take more time before they see the star, some take less; it depends on the clarity of their vision and their earnestness in search. These two must be their own—I can only encourage.

Q: What am I expected to do when I become a disciple?

M: Each teacher has his own method, usually patterned on his Guru’s teachings and on the way he himself has realised, and his own terminology as well. Within that framework adjustments to the personality of the disciple are made. The disciple is given full freedom of thought and enquiry and encouraged to question to his heart’s content. He must be absolutely certain of the standing and competence of his Guru, otherwise his faith will not be absolute nor his action complete. It is the absolute in you that takes you to the absolute beyond you—absolute truth, love selflessness are the decisive factors in self-realisation. With earnestness these can be reached.

Q: I understand one must give up one’s family and possessions to become a disciple.

M: It varies with the Guru. Some expect their mature disciples to become ascetics and recluses; some encourage family life and duties. Most of them consider a model family life more difficult than renunciation, suitable for a personality more mature and better balanced. At the early stages the discipline of monastic life may be advisable. Therefore, in the Hindu culture students up to the age of 25 are expected to live like monks—in poverty, chastity and obedience—to give them a chance to build a character able to meet the hardships and temptations of married life.

Q: Who are the people in this room? Are they your disciples?

M: Ask them. It is not on the verbal level that one becomes a disciple, but in the silent depths of one’s being. You do not become a disciple by choice; it is more a matter of destiny than self-will. It does not matter much who is the teacher—they all wish you well. It is the disciple that matters—his honesty and earnestness. The right disciple will always find the right teacher.

Q: I can see the beauty and feel the blessedness of a life devoted to search for truth under a competent and loving teacher. Unfortunately, we have to return to England.

M: Distance does not matter. If your desires are strong and true, they will mould your life for their fulfillment. Sow your seed and leave it to the seasons.

Q: What are the signs of progress in spiritual life?

M: Freedom from anxiety; a sense of ease and joy; deep peace within and abundant energy without.

Q: How did you get it?

M: I found it all in the holy presence of my Guru—I did nothing on my own. He told me to be quiet—and I did it—as much as I could.

Q: Is your presence as powerful as his?

M: How am I to know? For me—his is the only presence. If you are with me, you are with him.

Q: Each Guru will refer me to his own Guru. Where is the starting point?

M: There is a power in the universe working for enlightenment—and liberation. We call it *Sadashiva*, who is ever present in the hearts of men. It is the unifying factor. Unity—liberates. Freedom—unites. Ultimately nothing is mine or yours—everything is ours. Just be one with yourself and you will be one with all, at home in the entire universe.

Q: You mean to say that all these glories will come with the mere dwelling on the feeling ‘I am’?

M: It is the simple that is certain, not the complicated. Somehow, people do not trust the simple, the easy, the always available. Why not give an honest trial to what I say? It may look very small and insignificant, but it is like a seed that grows into a mighty tree. Give yourself a chance!

Q: I see so many people sitting here—quietly. What for have they come?

M: To meet themselves. At home the world is too much with them. Here nothing disturbs them; they have a chance to take leave of their daily worries and contact the essential in themselves.

Q: What is the course of training in self-awareness?

M: There is no need of training. Awareness is always with you. The same attention that you give to the outer, you turn to the inner. No new, or special kind of awareness is needed.

Q: Do you help people personally?

M: People come to discuss their problems. Apparently they derive some help, or they would not come.

Q: Are the talks with people always in public, or will you talk to them privately also?

M: It is according to their wish. Personally, I make no distinction between public and private.

Q: Are you always available, or have you other work to do?

M: I am always available, but the hours in the morning and late afternoon are the most convenient.

Q: I understand that no work ranks higher than the work of a spiritual teacher.

M: The motive matters supremely.