



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Heaven on Earth

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As a resident of Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram, I feel that I live in heaven on earth. I felt the same when I went to live with my Baba, that I was moving into heaven.

The environs, especially in Baba's India Ashram, were heavenly. Three meditation halls opened daily at 3:00 am. I walked past night-blooming jasmine in the gardens to get there, along pathways with sacred statues in every corner. We had a lotus pond and 100 acres of mango orchards. Our little café served chai, lattes and croissants next to a reflecting pool with a fountain in the middle.

You also have your own setup, perhaps with a meditation room or nook, gardens or plants for you to enjoy as well as delectable coffees and treats in your own kitchen. Does that make it feel like heaven for you? Maybe you would simply call it "comfortable."

I quickly discovered the heaven I was experiencing wasn't about nature nor interior décor. Having also stayed in beautiful hotels and retreat centers, I know the difference. It was Baba that made the place heavenly.

I lived in a house next to his deer garden, also adjacent to his peacock garden with both white and brightly colored birds. Baba came every afternoon to feed the critters. I waited outside for his arrival, then watched the daily ritual unfold. Nothing momentous was happening on the outside, yet Baba was the one who made it into heaven on earth.

That's why the garden team did their work, called guruseva, service to the Guru, one of the most powerful of all of yoga's practices. That's why I got up for early morning meditation, followed by chai and chanting. Baba is why we gathered in the central courtyard at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., to sit with him as he fingered his amber mala, doing japa (mantra repetition) for all of us.

I say he did mantra for us because, while I was sitting with him, I was not repeating mantra. My mind was flowing with mantra-virya, the mantric energy he emanated. Deeper than peace, thicker than bliss, more full-filling than love, I couldn't jump-start a thought, not even a sense of awe or gratitude.

I was absorbed in ever-deepening inner realms, experiencing an open-eyed meditation simply by focusing on him. Looking outward at Baba was the same as looking inward at my own Self, except Baba made it easier and deeper.

That's what the Guru does — makes it easier and deeper for you. Everything they do is to help you find you. They make themselves available as their guruseva to their own Guru, which is why my Baba spoke of his Baba so often. Yet his descriptions never made me feel like I'd missed out, never having met Nityananda in-person. I wasn't missing out because I was with Baba. Living with a Self-Realized yogi is like living with God. Yes, I was in heaven on earth.

Ishvaro gururatmeti murti-bheda-vibhagine¹ — Manasollasa 1.30

God appears in divided form: as God, Guru and Self.

One of the unique teachings of yoga is that God is embodied as the universe and everything in it, including you. The formless is being all the forms. The difference between you and the Guru is that you don't yet know your own inherent Divinity, but the Guru does. Getting there is easier when you accept the support of one who has already been through the process.

In a sense, you are birthing yourself into a new reality, a dimensionality that extends inward and outward at the same time. The Guru knows more about it than you do, both from personal experience as well as their formal training and authorization to serve. This is why the full moon of

¹ Ii"svaro gururaatmeti muurti-bheda-vibhaagine¹, <https://shlokam.org/shloka/ishvaro-guru-atmeti.htm>; commentary on Adi Sankaracharya's Sri Dakshinamurthy Stotram

July is dedicated to the Guru, with light shining through the night to illumine the darkness you get lost in. For yogis, Guru Purnima is the most important of all holy days.

Like a midwife or doula coaches the woman giving birth, the Guru guides you, but you have to do the work. You are growing into a new way of living: more enlivened, more empowered, more compassionate, more present, more real.

The Guru's home is called an Ashram. While we all live in a bubble of our own making, the Guru's home houses a potent energy field. Baba described it this way:

Abodes of Siddhas, sacred places, and centers of pilgrimage are permeated by a Divine power generated therein. It is the living, moving, talking power of God which, though established in its own glory, manifests itself by assuming a physical form for the sake of devotees.²

The physical form gives us a way to dive inward by focusing outward. Since you already have expertise in turning outward, the Guru uses your skills to open up new dimensions inside. For me, meditating, eating and sleeping in my Baba's home was like being a child cuddled in his lap. My internal programming was reformatted all the way back to my infancy.

People go to sacred places and pilgrimage sites so they can step into the Divine energy that pervades them. I have visited many including Jerusalem, Rome, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Rishikesh, Kashi and more. I looked for God in all the major religions as well as outside of them. I experienced God in all of them, yet I never heard trumpets resounding nor saw angels descending to earth. The experience was always an inner experience.

Baba explained my experience to me — that you find God within. This makes God accessible in any and all locations, wherever you happen to be. You find God within you, being you. For myself, I needed Baba's guidance and support in order to find my way inside.

His presence and his Guru's presence still pervade his hometown of Ganeshpuri. This is the Ashram's mystical secret, that the Guru's energy "envelops the place — sporting, manifesting itself, and generating ever-new bliss which never dies."³

This is why Gurus share their home with other residents and guests, as well as inviting people for even an hour, to a class, chant or meditation. In the Ashram, you are energized by Divine energy, giving you access to the bliss of Consciousness which arises from within. Even remembering time you have spent in the Ashram gives you this experience anew.

You can also energize your home with Divine energy. Hang Guru photos, especially large ones, and do aratis (candle flame ceremonies) every day. It will give you the inner experience that you seek. Meditate, chant and do other practices in your home and it will begin to vibrate with you.

All your life long, your efforting has been for one purpose: to experience your own Self. In relationships, you wanted others to trigger an inner opening in you. Sometimes it worked. In activities, you hoped your attainment would uplift you. Perhaps you have traveled, looking for great and wonderful experiences, even finding them. But they were momentary. You may have mementos in your home, treasures from various places, photos of certain people. Do they support your experience of your own Self? That's what you're really looking for.

Your home already vibrates with your energy. If it is not enlightenment energy, what kind is it? You can change it by cultivating the experience of your own Self, again. Playing Sanskrit chants fills your ears and heart with the Divine, again. How about singing along? Even dancing? Carve out a few minutes to repeat mantra. Repeating the enlivened mantra gives you the experience of your own Self, again. Again and again, until again turns into always.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "SADHANA: PRACTICE & PROCESS"

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² Swami Muktananda, "Ashram Dharma" (New York: SYDA Foundation, 1995), page 3

³ Ibid., page 4