

The Thirst for Satsang

I have just returned to India after a wonderful few months in New Zealand. I met many people who are insightfully aware of the value of meditation and *satsang* – the enquiry that evolves into the vision of one, unified, ever-present Self.

When I left NZ for India in 1985, meditation was generally considered to be weird, or at best, unusual. Now, meditation is ubiquitous. The global mushrooming of yoga studios has been instrumental in promoting the benefit of relaxation and meditation in one's life. The image of meditation is no longer attached to a religion or belief system. Meditation is now widely accepted as a means to enhance awareness on all levels; boosting physical energy, focusing the mind and evolving a discerning perspective in order to reduce stress in one's life.

What inspired me most while I was in NZ, was that the embracing of meditation has given birth to a significant curiosity, the need to question deeper and discover who I am, and what is my relation with all that I see, know and experience in my day-to-day life. This is the thirst for *satsang*.

Yoga in Sanskrit means unity. *Satsang* is *yoga* for the mind, enabling the mind to stretch beyond its dividing, categorising, and labelling nature, to expand and realise that you are united with all that which you observe.

An article by The United Independent NZ News, quoted me saying, "Just as meditation has become a household name globally, *satsang* is fast becoming an effective forum to recognise the ever-presence of Self, enabling one to wisely navigate the complex weave of human experience."

While I was in NZ, the questions I was frequently asked were:

- How can I be less busy and burdened with the demands in my life?
- How can I be less affected by sadness, hurt, rejection and negativity?
- How can I stop the mind's worry, judgment, and condemnation?
- How can I be fully involved in my life and yet not suffer?

Many questions expressed in diverse ways resolve into the eternal questions:

- How to quiet the mind?
- How to stop and be still?
- How can I be at peace?

Satsang does not spoon-feed an answer as we were expected to swallow in school. *Satsang* arouses examination that is free from the sense of reward or

punishment, free from blame or shame. In *Satsang* we observe the movement in the mind as a study, free from condemnation, justification, or explanation; free from old reactions to past memories fuelling the personal stories; and free from struggling to control thoughts.

We can observe that air, when it is still, is simply air. When air moves, it is called wind. Are air and wind separate? The wind is that which we can't control and so we never consider controlling it. We learn to enhance it, we shelter from it, or play in it, but we never suffer trying to still the wind.

So, let's enquire. Let's be in *satsang*. How to stop the wind? How to stop the busyness? How do you stop the constant narrative that drives the body and mind? If you try to stop the narrative through will-power, which is through desire, does it not create another conflict – another narrative about stopping the narrative!

Attending endless mental chatter drains a lot of energy and denies hearing our inner wish, which is to be free and take some rest to simply BE. But from the first stirrings of the waking state of consciousness in the morning, the things to be accomplished in that day are listed, along with future protections, present judgements, and past regrets.

All thoughts are movements of consciousness, just as wind is movement of air, or waves are movements of ocean. Is not watching movement in fact beautiful? Consider the elegance of a ballerina gliding across the stage; the majesty of a horse galloping over green pastures; the playfulness of dry leaves blowing in the wind; the exhilaration of walking by a stormy sea or the tranquillity of watching a sun set. We actually love to watch movement.

If observing movement does not bother in one circumstance, then why do thoughts bother when they move in the mind? Let the mind give up its struggle to control the thoughts and you will realise that You are the source of the mind, just as air is the source of the wind.

A verse from the Vedic text, *Patanjali*, expresses such a brilliant realisation – the observer is not separate from that which is observed: *“Simply turn your attention away from the objects towards the Seer of the objects, and the ever free Seer will reveal itself to your mind. You will know that the Seer, the Seen, and the Seeing are all one reality. At that very moment, your mind has attained true and ever-present freedom.”*

Meditation does not turn you into a disconnected spectator of your life. Rather, you realise that awareness is ever-present and therefore is more like the stage rather than an individual player on the stage. Realising you are the

underlying, ever-present Seer, and all is included within you, resolves the conflicted relationship between you and your mind, and the conflicted demands from work and family.

I am so delighted that there is a growing awareness of the value of *Satsang*. Without meditation, *satsang* is fruitless. Without *satsang*, meditation can be misleading. These two wings of the bird, in Sanskrit *gyan* (knowledge) and *dhyan* (meditation), allow one to fly in the space of higher awareness, from where one's perspective is not bound by the movement of the mind and its stories.