

**The Pathless Path to Immortality**  
**The Wisdom of Bhagavan Dattatreya**

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# The Pathless Path to Immortality

## The Wisdom of Bhagavan Dattatreya

The name Shri Bhagavan Dattatreya is still practically unknown outside of India. More lamentable still is the fact that, although still worshiped by millions of Hindus, he is thought of more as a benevolent God rather than a teacher of the highest essence of Indian thought. In the basic essence which runs through the three patterns of thought which I have classified as the Diamond Dharmas, we find their earliest expression in the Guru teachings of Dattatreya. These teachings preceded them all, and later became embraced in Brahma-Vidya.

Shri Dattatreya was a dropout of an earlier age than the period when the Veda and Tantra merged to become one simple cult. It was men like Dattatreya who helped to make this possible. Three of his close disciples were kings, one an *Asura*, and the other two both belonging to the warrior caste. Dattatreya himself was regarded as an avatar of Maheshwara (Shiva), but later was claimed by Vaishnavas as the avatar of Vishnu. Not such a sectarian claim as it appears: Hindus regard Shiva and Vishnu as the same, or as manifestations of the Absolute taking form.

The teachings of Dattatreya during his lifetime were probably adjusted to meet the needs and understanding of the the disciples. We have an example of this in the case of Parasurama, a Brahman who became a disciple of Dattatreya. In accord with the Guru's correct assessment of his stage, he was first initiated into the rituals for the worship of the Mother Goddess (Shakti) in her form as Tripura (Destroyer of the Three Cities or Gunas). In time, Parasurama developed to understand the higher teachings, where his opportunity for understanding might have been lost in confusion if it had not been done gradually. Parasurama is a great story on its own, and will be dealt with later.

The gems which can be described as the higher teachings of Dattatreya (often used in a shorter form as Datta) come to us in many ways. The least obvious and most important was the way in which he lived. If chance had not given him several disciples of an unusually high level of understanding, there may not have been any other medium through which we could know him.

Another is the scripture or wisdom texts which record their teachings. They are found in several ancient Upanishads, one a Tantrik text known as *Haritayana Samhita*, a work of three sections. The last section, *Charya Khanda*, or section on conduct,

has been lost and some believe destroyed. The other important works are the *Gitas* — the *Jivanmukti Gita* and the *Avadhuta Gita*. The latter is a wonderful, complete compilation of the highest thought given to and recorded by two disciples, Swami and Kartika.

The Upanishads describe Dattatreya with glowing praise, and enumerate his great qualities. Typical of most dropouts of the ancient Pagan world, he lived completely naked. This was a great spiritual era when all world renouncers were mostly naked, or near naked. The Sanskrit idiom used to describe this condition was *digambara*, having a literal meaning of ‘clothed in the sky’ or ‘sky as garment’, but also an idiomatic meaning that the sadhu was one with his environment. This was the world of Shiva-Shakti where the way of life of Nature was the highest ideal. Civilization and cities had already by this time appeared, but men knew that only artificial men could live and be produced in them.

The manner and way of life of these ancients was something beyond words and explanations, yet sufficient in itself. Brahma-Vidya had no meaning if theory was not put into practice. Academic and theoretic knowledge was helpful toward realization, but alone it could not reach the goal. Physical patterns were considered vital and essential to help overcome the past conditionings of the mind. Before the soul could be free, the mind must be made free; before the mind could be free, the body must be made free. While we are forced to accept that nudity are a regular part of sadhu practices, the true and fuller meanings might not be so obvious. There may have been important factors well known in the past, but lost to us today.

A vast number of religions have had forms of religious nudity. Even the Old Testament records an incident where David, the King of Israel, reverted to an older Pagan custom and danced naked before the shrine of the Lord in the temple. It could not have been a sudden, spontaneous act, but a practice rooted in ancient tradition. Even in India it is only a few years ago that people visiting the famous ice lingam at Amarnath were only permitted to enter the cave completely naked.

Today, most sadhus dress and some overdress, and a few even display themselves in costly silks. But in the ceremony of Sannyasa Diksha, or initiation into Sannyasa life, the candidate is required to walk at least seven paces completely naked to where the Guru sits. He then receives and repeats the *Praisha* Mantra. Many sects still require a sadhu to be naked if he does puja of his Guru or Sect Guru, or when meditating if he has passed beyond the relative stage of worship.

In some religions, it might have been an expression of going before God impoverished, or as a simple, innocent child, or in one’s natural primordial state. Yet there is still some subtle aspect which may be beyond these. Today it is one of the best spiritual “shock tactics” to make people wake up and start a chain of thought. This, however, could hardly apply in very ancient times when nudity was common.

Shiva or Maheshwara and his Consort were always considered and described in texts as being naked. This might have served as a pattern of life for those who desired oneness, and were prepared to make it possible.

Dattatreya left home at an early age to wander naked in search of the Absolute. There is no room for doubt that he was an historical figure, and seems to have spent most of his life wandering in the area between and including North Mysore, through Maharashta, and into Gujarat as far as the Narmada River. One scripture refers to a

disciple finding Datta meditating on Gandhamadana Mountain. He attained realization at a place not far from the town now known as Gangapur.

Legends about his birth are many and varied, and the place he died is unknown. It is stated that he was born on Wednesday, the fourteenth day of the full moon in the month of Margasirsa, but of year and place there is no reliable information. Scholars speculate it must have been not less than about four thousand years ago, or even earlier.

In spite of legends which made him to be the son of a Brahmin couple, it would not appear that he had much time for them, and further more he avoided any concepts of caste distinction. More often his teachings denied any importance being attached to the caste system in true spiritual life. He did not suggest that in worldly relationships the caste system was needless or defective, but tried to show that there must come a standard of understanding where they had no meaning.

Those who look for analogies with Christian ideals will find none; nor the meaningless precepts and platitudes which entangle most Western thinking. He taught no concepts of the brotherhood of man, non-killing, or love one another. They were for people which loved to live in the crowd, but feared it. Instead, he taught men the essence of wisdom which would disentangle them forever; the way one must think and live if the expression “dropout” was not to become only a meaningless gesture.

I am avoiding the use of Sanskrit texts, and even single Sanskrit words, as much as possible. A few are unavoidable and must be explained, but the English medium on all levels is quite capable of conveying any relative concept known to mankind. Those who do not understand Sanskrit only find Sanskrit shlokas like udders hanging on a bull, a useless ornament. Those who do know the Sanskrit language can revert to the source, and need no help from me. This is only an effort to express a difficult teaching in simple words.

## **Pratibha, Sahaja, Samarasa**

The search for the Absolute, the Supreme Reality, is not one where we will ever witness mass realization. Only a few any age have the karma and mind impressions from past lives to make it possible. This does not mean that realization and liberation are reserved for a tiny select minority. It is a supreme attainment from which none can be excluded, but it must be conceived as a process which continues through many lives and rebirths, over countless periods of time.

The safest guide an individual or guru can have of one’s stage in the long process is the sincerity and intensity of the individual as it manifests in the present incarnation. What has taken hundreds of thousands of lives to develop might still be very difficult to mature in only the one present span. This means that all spiritual life is a matter of investment in those values and yogas which will one day come to maturity. The punishment for neglect is not the wrath of God, but countless lives of misery, pain and frustration. The reward for the diligent is to escape entirely from these things, and attain the only true bliss of the Supreme Reality.

There are three Sanskrit words which form much of the essential structure upon which realization and liberation depend. They were used much by Dattatreya, and constantly repeated in the Tantrik or non-Vedic Agamas. Oddly enough, they are rarely

used in Hindu life today, though they exist as words in most Indian dialects. None of the three can be easily translated into a single English word, but fortunately the language is rich enough to convey the meanings with even greater intensity.

The three words are *pratibha*, *sahaja*, and *samarasa*. Each must be explained separately, perhaps developed in the future. They not only have a unique beauty and charm of their own, but they also represent three great stepping-stones to the Absolute Reality.

**PRATIBHA:** It means vision, insight, intuition, inner understanding, unconditioned knowledge, inner wisdom, awareness, awakening. In Zen, they use the word *satori*. It should not be confused with enlightenment or realization. Patanjali in his wonderful theoretical textbook of varied yoga practices known as *The Yoga Sutras*, sees *Pratibha* as the spiritual illumination which is attained through yoga discipline to enable the disciple to know all else.

It is then the insight or illumination which is the open gateway to the final goal. It is the inner transformation which enables the aspirant to distinguish Reality from the sham. In some way, it can be visualized as a bridge between the mind and the Real Self. It produces changed people and clarity of thinking, as well as being an infallible guide in all undertakings.

Some few people are born with it, but seldom to more than a small degree. Even this can eventually be obscured by social life and its conditioning. It cannot thrive in a world where we permit others to do our thinking for us. The more it is used, the more it increases in intensity.

*Pratibha* is not related to careful thought or deliberation. It is instant in operation, and spontaneous in manifestation. For the average Zen student, this was regarded as sufficient attainment. Only those who seek Buddhahood and Enlightenment go further. But this is also a stage, which if once reached, requires no further guidance from a guru or master. Sometimes it is even spoken of the *Pratibha-Shakti* — the power of illumination. It is most easily developed by meditation or contemplation, and it independent of all religious patterns.

*Pratibha* is not even exclusively a spiritual concept. Those who have developed this faculty are more likely to succeed in the material world than the other. Modern Japan claims that most of the big names in industry and commerce today were once successful Zen students. Datta uses the word frequently in the *Avadhuta Gita* to show that the difficult ideas and the puzzles not easy to understand are cleared away instantly for that disciple who has developed the inner faculty of insight illumination known as *Pratibha*.

*Pratibha* is the real *Divya Cakshus* — the Third Eye which has so much captivated the mystical aspirations of the West. It is not really an “eye” so much as a miraculous vision or knowledge capable of plucking the gems of mystery and wisdom from the immaculate universe. It is the Philosopher’s Stone which has the divine power to transmute the sordid world of base lead into a molten mass of wonder and harmony. But only when you *really* want it can you get it.

**SAHAJA:** When we review the vast procession of naked, ragged, and unkempt dropouts who illuminated the dreary passage of history to leave wisdom on which

lesser minds could ponder, have we not great cause for wonder? What is it that made these men so different from the men of the mass-produced vulgar rabble who populate the earth? The answer is that the former had *Sahaja!*

Man is born with an instinct for naturalness. He has never forgotten the days of his primordial perfection, except inasmuch as the memory became buried under the artificial superstructure of civilization and its artificial concepts. *Sahaja* means natural. It not only implies natural on physical and spiritual levels, but on the mystic level of the miraculous. It means that easy or natural of living without planning, designing, contriving, seeking, wanting, striving or intention. What is to come must come of itself.

It is the seed which falls in the ground, becomes seedling, sapling, and then a vast shady tree of wisdom and teachings. The tree grows according to *Sahaja*, natural and spontaneous in complete conformity with the Natural Law of the Universe. Nobody tells it what to do or how to grow. It has no *swadharma* or rules, duties and obligations incurred by birth. It has only *svabhava* — its own inborn self or essence to guide it. *Sahaja* is that nature which, when established in oneself, brings the state of absolute freedom and peace.

It is when you are in your natural state, in the harmony of the Cosmos. It is the balanced reality between the pairs of opposites. As the Guru of the *Bhagavad Gita* says, “The person who has conquered the baser self, and has reached to the level of self-mastery: he is at peace, whether it be hot or cold, pleasure or pain, honoured or dishonoured.” Thus *Sahaja* expresses one who has reverted to his natural state, free from conditioning. It typifies that outlook which belongs to the natural, spontaneous and uninhibited man, free from innate or inherited defects.

In all the Golden Dharmas, *Sahaja* flourishes. In Taoism, it was the highest virtue (*teh*). In the earlier Zen records, it is the main plank of training along which the disciples had to walk. The masters demanded answers which were *Sahaja*, and not the product of intellectual thinking or reason. The truth only came spontaneously.

*Sahaja* in Chinese became *tzu-jan*, or Self-so-ness. Taoism openly lamented the loss of the peculiar naturalness and unselfconsciousness of the child. Lao Tzu saw that Confucian ethics, which have their counterpart in the modern world, crushed the original natural loveliness of the child into the rigid patterns of convention. Retirement from such a society, as the dropout of modern times, became the outer symbol of freedom from the bonds and bounds of conventional society. Taoism, as did Brahma-Vidya and Zen, saw retirement or renunciation as the only possible way for people to recover *Sahaja*. Thus the greatest quality of children again became recaptured by saints and sages.

***Artificial clowns throng the world;  
Only children and saints know Sahaja.***

Dattatreya tried to teach mankind that if they had *Sahaja*, there was no need to do anything to prove it. It manifests only by the way one lives. Sukhadev is the great naked Mahatma who expounded the *Bhagavat Purana*. When a young man, he stood naked in the presence of his father, the sage *Vyasa*, to be initiated into the Brahmin caste with mantra and sacred thread. This was a moment such as we have just mentioned

when the natural unspoiled boy was to be ushered into a world of concepts, ideas, and obligations, and all naturalness would be lost.

Sukhadev decided to keep his *Sahaja*. Taking to his heels, he ran from the house and took to the path which wound itself along the side of a river and into the jungle. As he came to the river, some young women were bathing naked in the water. They took no notice of Sukhadev, and he only glanced as he ran on. Vyasa, the father, was hot on his track, and was following the young man to induce him to return. But as Vyasa approached the river, the young women there screamed, rushed for their garments, and covered themselves as the panting Vyasa grew near.

Having observed their complete indifference when his naked son ran past, and this modest but demonstrative display at his own approach, Vyasa could not help wondering at the contrast. He stopped by the now covered women, and asked for some explanation of such widely different behavior toward his naked son and his decorously dressed self. One of the women explained, "When your son looks at us, he sees only people, and is not conscious of male and female. He is just as unconscious of our nakedness as he is of his own; but with you, Maharaj Vyasa, it is different."

Sukhadev had *Sahaja*, and the women knew it. He knew it and never lost it. His father never caught up with him, and he never returned home. He became one of India's many great saints, not living in any fixed place, but only in the fullness of the immediate present.

The three Sanskrit words, *Pratibha*, *Sahaja*, and *Samarasa* are related even in meaning, interlocking with each other and together to form a "Holy Trinity" of Liberation. The third, however, is the greater, and by far the most interesting for it is the one single magick word which contains the Absolute, the Universe, and the World.

SAMARASA: This unique word, completely absent from Vedic texts, is found again and again in Tantra, Upanishads, and all the best of non-Vedic literature. In one short chapter of the *Avadhuta Gita*, it occurs more than forty times. This whole Gita would be impossible to read and understand without the knowledge of this word.

One of the unique but mysterious features of the Sanskrit language is how many words can be used as three separate and distinct levels of thought. Even whole verses have this remarkable feature. It is one of the factors which has made translation into other languages to difficult.

The difference presupposes three groups of people. First, there is the literal meaning intended for the householder or worldly man as a guide to better thought and action. The second is the meaning on a higher level intended for the *mumukshu* or hungry seeker for God. Here the same words take the reader from the mundane level to the higher level and the implications implied. The third is the meaning intended for the soul who has attained, or is nearly ready to attain, liberation.

This play of words is not unknown in other languages. "A dog's life" would have a different meaning to Diogenes of Sinope than it would to a harassed householder, and an even different meaning to a dog itself. There is little wonder that the sages warned against public reading of many scriptures, and confined them only to disciples or near relatives. It is also one of the features which has made the Sadguru indispensable to the sincere disciple.



The Tantrik or non-Vedic teachers used the word *Samarasa* in its mundane meaning to suggest higher truth. *Samarasa* can mean the ecstasy attained in sexual intercourse at the moment of orgasm. Using this, as they did of many other worldly things — to draw an analog between the moment of sexual bliss and the spiritual bliss of realization — men and women, it was thought, would understand absolute concepts better from the examples of relative life.

Going higher, it means the essential unity of all things — of all existence, the equipoise of equanimity, the supreme bliss of harmony, that which is aesthetically balanced, undifferentiated unity, absolute assimilation, the most perfect unification, and the highest consummation of Oneness.

To Dattatreya, it meant a stage of realization of the Absolute Truth, where there was no longer any distinction to be felt, seen or experienced between the seeker and the sought. Gorakshanath, who wrote the first texts of the Nathas, explains *Samarasa* as a state of absolute freedom, peace, and attainment in the realization of the Absolute Truth. He placed it on a higher level than samadhi.

*Samarasa* implied the joy and happiness with perfect equanimity and tranquility, maintained after samadhi had finished, and continued in the waking or conscious state. In this sense, it is a form of permanent ecstasy and contemplation which the saint maintains at all times.

Zen maintains the same concepts, but nothing comparable with *Pratibha*, *Sahaja*, or *Samarasa* are found in any of the Black Dharmas of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Tantrik Buddhist school which existed for about three hundred years between the 7th and 10th centuries C.E., *Samarasa* and *Sahaja* held a prominent place, and were also adopted by Tibetan Buddhists. The Siddha and Natha sects used *Samarasa* instead of the work *Moksha*. In this way, the word became used to express the highest ideal of human life. It is much elucidated in the Agamas of the Shiva-Shakti tradition.

*Samarasa* is not just a matter of outlook or adjustment of ourselves with the world and its innumerable divisions, or an attempt to adjust the world to ourselves. One ends in greater conditioning, and the other in frustration. *Samarasa* must be regarded only as the culminating point of real Yoga. The true yogi does as Dattatreya did — sees himself in the world and the world in himself, the most perfect harmony of mankind and nature.

Pagan India was never a world of universal spirituality. Although it was the cradle of the highest spiritual concepts, the spiritual truth seekers were always, as even now, only a minority, and its great saints and sages existed in even smaller numbers. Most people sought the world and worldly things, but did, at the same time, accept the authority of teachers and gurus. How many then could possibly understand the ideas of *Samarasa* and *Moksha*, and who could be truly competent to be regarded as authorities on the difficult-to-understand concepts of realization and liberation?

The answer was their acceptance of the wise authority of those liberated souls who had won the goal. It was not mere blind faith, but the faith born of confidence in those who had undertaken the Yoga, and attained the goal. There have always been these great souls, and there will be in the future. Most of them live and die in obscurity. The true seekers will always find them, even if the worldly public has never hears about them.

Side by side with these great yogis, hidden from the world, are the wisdom texts and traditions of great yogis who have gone before. This is the medium by which the real seeker develops the enthusiasm to find the living. Of the ancient past, Dattatreya rises above them all. But even he, the greatest of men — the public has consigned to the inferior position of an object of worship, and the resort of those who seek favours.

Students of Tao and Zen will see deeper into these lines. Speaking of the Absolute Reality, Dattatreya says:

***“It is not pervading,  
or that which could be less pervading;  
there can be no place for it to rest,  
nor can there be the absence of such a place.  
It is something as well as being nothing.  
How can it be explained?”***

Then the play of words, but still leaving the problem defying intellectual answering:

***“Break that distinction between broken and unbroken:  
Do not cling to the distinction of clinging or non-clinging.”***

This level of conception is far beyond ordinary conventional thought: like koans used in Zen monasteries. This Dattatreya becomes the boat which carries us “Beyond, Beyond.”

Dattatreya aimed at the negation of ‘*the thought behind things and ideas*’ because conflict exists, not so much in the things and ideas (such as words), but in those meanings with which we associate them. The simple naturalness of *Sahaja*, and the supreme ideal of *Samarasa*, must never be lost in meaningless and petty wrangles between philosophies, concepts, and mere human ideas.

On to the great platform of the greatest of all controversies, and one which still rages today — the Dvaita and Advaita and Non-Duality concepts; he declares both are true and both are wrong. Since the Absolute is beyond all classification or expressions, neither term can be applied to it. But what proceeds from the Absolute as creation or manifestation cannot be entirely a delusion, but must have a relative reality. Creator and creation imply duality, so in this sense, it is correct. But also if there is a perfect unity, even identity between creator and created, then to speak of non-duality is also correct. It is not actually so important to solve these problems as to be able to stand aside from them completely. When one truly realizes oneness, then duality and non-duality are only meaningless words, and the symbols of delusion.

What more do you need to know?

# INTERNATIONAL NATH ORDER

This edition of Shri Gurudev Mahendranath's THE PATHLESS PATH TO IMMORTALITY is one of many projects planned by the not-for-profit International Nath Order. The International Nath Order itself is based upon the fundamental principles and inspiration set forth in Shri Mahendranath's *Master Pattern of the Nath Order*, TWILIGHT YOGA trilogy, and other writings. The three manuscripts which comprise the TWILIGHT YOGA Trilogy offers the building blocks with which to construct a more fantastic way of life. The International Nath Order strives to realize these aims through practical action and was conceived and constructed to serve the needs of many. Our primary concerns are the dissemination of higher wisdom, the construction and maintenance of places of meeting and worship, plus the activities related to continuing a spiritual transmission or initiation lineage which has its roots in a distant past, but continues to burn brightly even today. The International Nath Order seeks to fan this spiritual flame and make available to many the ideas and basics on which to develop a more expansive spiritual experience and fantastic way of life.

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