

Guruji's Love

By Vini Lanka

Jai guru datta! I remember riding in the car with my parents at the age of eight, looking out the window at the beautiful spring trees just budding, thinking, "I am so lucky to have such a wonderful life", when suddenly a strange fear took hold. It felt like a wake-up call. Thoughts surged into my mind; this earth, this life, none of it is real, I cannot stay here, I am on a journey and I have to travel alone. I don't know where these thoughts came from but they terrified me. I had millions of questions. If I am not me, then who am I? Where did I come from? Where will this journey take me? What is the truth? I recollect explaining it to my mom, letting her know that I would not be able to cope if anything were to happen to the people I loved. My mother explained to me how attachment in life is never good, how the end of one journey leads to another. She explained by losing one thing I'd always gain another. She told me that even though she wouldn't be able to accompany me in my journey, God would. She said "Love Him more than anything else."

It was two years later that I met Sri Swamiji at the Durga Mandir, when He came to New Jersey in 2000. My waves of panic had only grown in the past years, but once I met this magnificent mystic from Mysore, the waves of panic lasted for shorter periods of time. I remember Him sitting on the beautiful asana; He had this air of wisdom that made His presence holy. He was playful and childlike in a mysterious manner. I remember Him saying, "I don't know why my beard is black, but if you want to know why, go ask Swamiji's incorporated and they might be able to tell you." From the time I met Him I knew that this Swamiji wasn't meant to help me but I didn't understand what or who he was. I knew he wasn't human and was beyond any god. I decided He was my Thathaya, or grandfather, who had passed away at a young age.

A few weeks after Swamiji's departure, I overheard my parents, aunt, and uncle talking about how one's relationship with the Guru can be seen in the way they address Him. For example my aunt called the great mystic Appaji. To my ten-year-old ears it seemed that because I called this mystic Swamiji, He really wasn't my Thathaya. What I overheard bothered me very much and I began calling him Thathaya, but it didn't feel right, so I meditated upon it and realized that He might indeed be my Thathaya, but I have to build that relationship and earn the right to call him that.

One Friday evening, my mom was on the train, on her way home from work, reading *Wonders of the Holy Master*. She suddenly stopped reading and looked at Swamiji's picture on the cover and asked, "You have shown so many people such miracles, can you not show me one too?" My mother immediately stopped herself and thought, "No Swamiji, I don't want any miracles, you'll give me problems and then solve them with a miracle. My life's good and I don't want any problems or miracles." That weekend at bhajans, a gray powder began sprinkling

out of the old Native American medicine rattle I was playing. Surprised, my aunt suggested I stop playing the rattle. A family friend of ours recognized the powder and decided to taste it. To our surprise, it was vibhuti! My cousin tried playing the rattle, but nothing came out and each time I played the rattle, vibhuti began to flow from it! After a while, the vibhuti stopped and there was just enough for everyone at bhajans and a little leftover for a family that was moving away. During the time the vibhuti was flowing, I felt Swamiji's presence greatly; it seemed as though it was coming from inside me!

As the weeks went on, I began talking to Appaji within myself and experiencing His presence. But I doubted it and each time in some way or another Appaji would remind me that He was still there. Sometimes He would answer my questions in a dream or through other people, and after a while He began just plain answering them, not in any voice, not in any body, but just by His presence, which was very strong. I came to depend on Him to always be with me, and He would always answer me. He was truly my grandfather so I began calling Him Thathaya. That summer, in 2003, Thathaji came to New Jersey once again. On the night of His arrival, a small program was held at Srinivas Chundu uncle's house, where He was to give a short address to the NYC, NJ group. I was sitting in the front row with all the other kids thinking "Welcome home Thathaya, I love you so much." Appaji immediately turned around and looked at me and mouthed the words "I love you too!" As the days went on, each time I was in Appaji's presence, I was able to meditate with ease. It was a deep meditation where I could feel Appaji within me; it lifted and refreshed me. I don't know when it started, but I suddenly realized that the waves of panic lasted barely for a second and were followed by this sense of peace, oneness, happiness, bliss and so much more that can't be described. As Appaji's visit drew to a close, I was upset because I felt like Appaji hadn't talked to me since the first night, neither physically nor otherwise. I was scared that perhaps after He left He would stop talking to me. But that day when I went to receive prasad from Appaji, He said "Don't worry, I hear, I hear, keep talking!" The next day I got to ride with Appaji in the car and when I addressed him as Thathaya, Prasadi uncle corrected me and told me it wasn't Thathaya, it was Thathaji. It was very foolish of me when I think back to it, but at that time I was greatly upset by this. I thought, "He is my grandfather and I will call Him what I want!"

As days went by, my Thathaya began teaching me lessons about life and the one true real thing, which is all existent and all knowing. I started feeling that Appaji was definitely not human, beyond God even. I started realizing that He was beyond Thathaya. Then one day my family went to watch the India Pakistan match of the cricket world cup. Because of the time difference, the match took place at night. The next day was very busy and by the time night came, my parents were extraordinarily tired. Before going to sleep that night, my mom for some reason felt Appaji's presence to be very strong and asked Him to look over the house. That night the fire alarm went off at about 1:30 in the morning. When we got downstairs, my mother realized she had forgotten the yogurt she was

making in the oven. If the oven had been closed it would have exploded and the house would have burnt down in seconds. If the oven had popped open under pressure, the flames would have poured out and set the whole house on fire. To our surprise, the oven was only slightly ajar, just enough for the smoke to pour out and set off the fire alarm. After this incident, I knew that Appaji was that always existent, all pervading energy force that would always be with me. He was my Thathaji.

On Thursday July 14, 2005, I visited Appaji in Ohio. At that time, he talked about the meaning of a Guruji as a state at which you realize, feel, and see the relationship between a guru and student is beyond any human relationship. It is the state at which one realizes that a guru is beyond any god or saint, he is Om, the life force of every being. Upon hearing this speech, I knew this was the state I had to work towards. On Wednesday, July 20, 2005, the day before Guru Purnima, I was in Datta Retreat Center in West Sunbury, PA. That night during bhajans, I experienced a wave of panic; it lasted barely a millisecond followed by an inner peace. Slowly the peace escalated to a state where I looked down on everything that was happening. I was above it all, Guruji was there, and I was a part of Him. I have never felt such happiness, peace, bliss, joy, love and fulfillment, yet it's all I have ever been and always will be. All that I saw taking place below me was just so beautiful. It wasn't real, it was nothing but me; it was that Om. I felt like all I had to do was push this curtain of beauty aside and I'd find the only thing that exists, the truth.

Today is July 27, 2005. Since that evening, the feeling returns many times a day and it is only growing more and more beautiful.