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Lord Dattatreya

MASTER PAR EXCELLENCE

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

**LORD DATTATREYA
MASTER
PAR EXCELLENCE**

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, '**Lord Dattatreya – Master Par Excellence**', comprises a Dattatreya Jayanti message of Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj given in the year 1973.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

LORD DATTATREYA – MASTER PAR EXCELLENCE

Lord Dattatreya is regarded as the visible incarnation of the Supreme Being himself in his aspects as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, which we know as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, respectively. The creative, the preservative and the disintegrating powers of God are supposed to be manifest in the personality of Lord Dattatreya. The name or word 'Dattatreya' is constituted of two terms, Datta and Atreya. In Sanskrit, Datta means one who is bestowed as a gift, and Atreya is an honorific which is derived from the name of a great sage called Atri. The son of Atri is Atreya. A descendent of Atri also is Atreya. One who is bestowed as a divine child on the great Sage Atri, by the Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Siva themselves, is Dattatreya. Tradition holds that he was the divine child of Sage Atri, born to his famous consort, Anasuya. He is also, therefore, known as Anasuyanandana, the darling of the great queen of chastity, Anasuya Devi. The name of Dattatreya, the great sage, is a by-word in all

religious circles in India. In certain parts of Gujarat and in Maharashtra, the worship of Dattatreya is pre-eminent. It is believed by the followers of the tradition that Dattatreya is in flesh and blood even today. He is not merely a dead-and-gone saint and sage of ancient, pre-historic times. Devotees believe honestly that he is physically alive even today and he is supposed to be having his abode in those holy places in the western part of India such as Gangapur in Maharashtra. There is a famous hill in Saurashtra, Mount Girnar, which is dedicated to the adoration and worship of Lord Dattatreya.

Lord Dattatreya is not merely a divine incarnation like Bhagavan Sri Krishna and Sri Rama, but, unlike them, He is held in high esteem as a visible personality, physically available to us for our *darshan*, if only we would have the honesty of belief and devotion at his sacred feet. There are wonderful sidelights given to us of the personality Bhagavan Dattatreya.

One of the symbolic and very significant features of his life is depicted in certain painted portraits which many of you might have seen. In such portraits you will see Dattatreya with a bag hung on his shoulder, leaning, almost, against a cow behind him, with four dogs following him wherever he

goes. Four dogs and a cow you will see always with Dattatreya in all portraits and paintings. What are these dogs? Why does he take the dogs with him, wherever he goes? What is this cow and what is this bag? The tradition is this: Dattatreya is perhaps the most powerful of conceivable sages, almost identical with God himself. For all practical purposes we may say that he has all the powers of God, viz., creation, preservation and destruction, being an embodiment of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva themselves. But, he lives as a fakir. The term ‘fakir’ means a beggar owning nothing, except a bag (a *jhola*, as you call it), and a stick in his hand, which is sometimes identified with the trident. He goes for *bhiksha* or alms, for he lives on alms. The master of all the forces of Nature, at whose command are the sun and the moon and the stars, goes begging for his *bhiksha*! The spiritual reading of this *bhiksha* or alms-begging by Lord Dattatreya is that he is asking us: “Give me all your sins.” He does not beg for rice, wheat and *dal* from us. He asks for the sins of our past lives and of our present life, and this is the *bhiksha* that he wants. He will collect the sins of all people. How many sins have we committed in our earlier lives and up to this time in this life! He can swallow and digest all the sins of all the people. So he goes from door to

door asking for alms. We can imagine the power of the man who asks for the sins of all people. He does not want our virtues and good conduct. We always ask for good things, merits, *punyam*. But, he asks for our sins, *papam* only, and not the merits or *punyam*. He wants only all the evil propensities that are in us. He puts them in his *jhola*, or bag, and walks off and digests the whole thing. These sages are terrible and their powers are inconceivable.

Incidentally, I will tell you a humorous story, to give you an idea of the power of sages. There was a time when the demons were a terror to people. There were two demon brothers. They were carnivorous. Their only profession was to eat human beings. They used to kill them, cook them and eat. But how to get human beings every day? You cannot get people to eat every day. So these demon brothers hatched out a plan. They pretended to be very humble devotees of Brahmins, and every day they invited a Brahmin for lunch. The younger brother was a past master in black magic. He would allow himself to be cut into pieces and cooked. He had the power to regain his life afterwards. The elder brother would cut and cook his younger brother and feed the invited Brahmin, who would not know what he had eaten. After the eating was

over, the elder brother would call out his younger brother saying, “O Vatapi, please come.” Vatapi was the younger brother’s name. That man, through the power of his black magic, would regain life, burst the stomach of the Brahmin and come out. And the poor Brahmin would then be the meal for both. Every day this used to happen. Most of the Brahmins were finished, one by one. One day, it so happened, they had a very bad bargain. There was a very powerful sage by the name of Agastya Rishi. He was a Brahmin. He was invited for lunch. He was like Lord Dattatreya. He was not, therefore, an ordinary Brahmin as the two brothers took him to be. As usual, the younger brother was cooked and given to Agastya for his lunch. Agastya knew this. He thought: “These demons want to kill me and eat me! I will teach them a lesson today.” He ate the meal. As soon as he finished his meal, the elder brother said, “O Vatapi, please come.” Agastya, the sage, rubbed his belly, muttering, “*Vatapi jirno bhava*”: Let Vatapi be digested. Turning to the elder brother, the sage said, “Sir, your brother has been digested; he cannot come out and he will not come out.” Oh! The elder brother was shocked. He thought there was some special power with this Brahmin, and he ran for his life. But Agastya would

not let him escape. He simply uttered ‘Hum’ (a mystical sound) which reduced that elder brother to ashes. I am giving this instance to throw some sidelight on the power of spiritual masters.

Lord Dattatreya was the greatest among such sages. His power to protect was such that Mother Earth herself took the form of a cow and pleaded for succor. She said, “O great sage, thou art the only refuge.” And she, in the form of a cow, is supposed to be under the protection of Lord Dattatreya. The four dogs which we see around him are the forms taken by the four Vedas—Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharva Veda. The Vedas knew the predicament that is going to come upon them in Kali Yuga; they knew that they would be disregarded, insulted and cast aside by people. They, therefore, took the form of dogs, and went to this Sage-Protector for protection from destruction. To Mother Earth and the four Vedas, who thus took shelter under him, Lord Dattatreya gave *abhayam*; he bestowed fearlessness upon them. When we go to Lord Dattatreya for protection, not all the three worlds can shake a hair of our body. This is the spiritual meaning of this beautiful symbol that we see portrayed in the pictures of Lord Dattatreya with a cow and four dogs.

It is also given in a famous scripture of our land, the Srimad Bhagavata, that one day Lord Dattatreya was walking along a street like a mendicant, very happy in his mood and lustrous in his face. His joy was such that he seemed to be bursting with happiness. But he had nothing with him except a bag and a staff. The king of that land, known as Yadu, met him on the way. The king did not know that it was Sage Dattatreya. He took him to be a beggar and wondered within himself: “How is this person so happy, even though he has nothing with him! I am an emperor of this vast kingdom, but I have got so much grief on my head. What is this mystery? How it is that, being a king, I am so unhappy, and this beggar is so happy?” He went and humbly prostrated himself before Dattatreya and asked him, “Sir, may I know how is it that you seem to be so happy? What is the source of your happiness, though you seem to be a beggar? Who are you? May I know your whereabouts and a little of your history?” Dattatreya did not say who he was. He merely said, “I am happy because of what I am, not because of what I have.”

Here is the secret of happiness. We are happy in proportion to what we are, and not in proportion to what we have. While the king had many things,

he was an empty shell inside; on the other hand, Dattatreya had nothing to possess and call his own, but he was everything himself.

The long conversation which Dattatreya and the King Yadu had is recorded in the eleventh book of the Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana. Dattatreya, such a great master, humbly said, “I am a student of Nature.” He did not say that he is a Guru. Nowadays, nobody says he is a student; everybody says he is a yoga-teacher! You never find a yoga student anywhere, for all are yoga teachers! But such a great master as Dattatreya says that he is a student of the forces of Nature.

If he is a student, who are his Gurus? Oh wonderful! You must read this particular chapter in the Srimad Bhagavata. You will find that he was a student of everything. He says, “I am a student of Mother Earth; I am a student of the waters of the ocean; I am a student of the air that blows; I am a student of the sun that shines; I am a student of the moon that is luminous in the sky; I am a student of the honey bees that collect the pollen-nectar from various flowers; I am a student of the fish; I am a student of the vulture.” The king was astonished and said, “O God! You are a student of all these things! What does it mean? How are you a student of all

these? What lessons did you learn from them?” Dattatreya then gives surprising answers to King Yadu, as follows:

“Earth is my Guru, because I learn the lesson of immense, unlimited and unsurpassed patience from the earth. You may spit on the earth, you may defecate or micturate, you may walk with shoes over her or you may kick her. Still, Mother Earth does not complain. How patient is this earth! All the dirt we throw on her face, but still Mother Earth does not complain. How stable she is! I have learnt patience and stability from earth. So earth is my Guru and I am her student.

“Now hear what I have learnt from the waters of the ocean. Whatever be the quantity of water that is poured into or removed from the ocean, neither does it increase nor decrease. The ocean maintains its dignity, fixity and content. Likewise whether people praise me or censure me, whether they talk for me or against me, whatever it be, it makes no difference to me. And, further, I maintain purity of character like the water which is a symbol of purity.

“Fire also is my Guru. Fire burns anything that you may offer. If you offer ghee, it burns; if you offer milk, that also it burns; if you offer dirt, that too it burns. When it burns anything, that burnt

stuff becomes pure. Dung becomes pure when it is burnt by fire. It may be a pure or an impure thing that is offered, it makes no difference to the fire; it turns that thing pure. Likewise, whatever enters me through the sense organs is converted by me into the residue which remains after it is burnt by the fire of knowledge.

“I will tell you what I have learnt from air. I roam about wherever I like, like air. Freedom is my nature. Air cannot be controlled by anybody. You cannot tell the air to stop here or to stop there. Further, purity is the character of air. Wherever air blows, it purifies everything there. *Pavana* is a Sanskrit word which means ‘one who purifies’. *Pavana* is also the term used for air. All infection in the atmosphere is removed by the movement of air. Stuffiness, insanitation and impurity of every kind are removed and the whole atmosphere is turned pure by the movement of air. Similarly, wherever I go I spread the atmosphere of purity, goodness, compassion and mercy, and I am free like air in motion and I do not stick to a particular place. I am not bound by the atmosphere around me.

“I will now tell you what I have learnt from space, which is one of my Gurus. Vast is my kingdom like space. Everything is mine and everything is not

mine also. Everything is contained in space, and yet space cannot be contained by anybody. I do not depend on anything, even as space does not depend on anything. Everything depends upon space for its existence.

“I learnt a lesson from the honey bee. The bee moves from place to place and from flower to flower, collects sweet pollen from flowers and mixes them into a jelly, then blends all these beautiful essences into what is called honey. Likewise I go from place to place, meet different persons and things, get what is good in them, collect the knowledge that is in them and blend all of them into the wisdom of my life.

“A bird also is my Guru. Do you know how that bird is my Guru? It so happened that I saw a bird carrying a piece of flesh in its beak. It was flying, high up in the sky, and a vulture pursued it. Why did the vulture pursue this small bird? Because there was some eatable in its mouth. Oh, the bird went here and there in search of some place of safety, but the vulture pursued the bird wherever it went. At last the bird dropped the piece of meat, and went away free, because the vulture left pursuing it. The vulture was interested only in the flesh. This bird taught me the lesson that possession is the cause of

bondage and suffering. So I do not possess anything. If you possess anything, you are always pursued by someone. I have nothing with me and I go free.

“I learnt a lesson from a poor girl, in a village. Please hear what lesson I learnt from that girl. That girl belonged to a very poor family. They had barely something to eat for a single meal a day. She was to be betrothed to some gentleman. That gentleman, with his father and mother, came to the house of this poor girl to see her. They wanted to know how she looked and what she was like, and all that. People do not settle a marriage without properly investigating into the background of the girl. So they were talking to the girl’s parents. And the hospitality of the country is such that whenever guests come they have to be fed first. And there was nothing to feed them with, except a little unhusked paddy grain which had to be husked for obtaining rice. They were too poor to have any servant in the house. So, she herself started pounding the paddy inside the house, for the sake of getting rice which had to be cooked for feeding the guests. You know, these ladies wear bangles. This girl also was wearing a number of bangles on both the wrists, of course all cheap glass bangles. So when she started pounding the paddy with a pestle, the bangles started making

sound—kanu, kunu. She thought: “Now what will the guests think? They will think that since I am myself doing the work, our family must be very poor and therefore I am not a suitable match for them. Oh, these bangles are causing the trouble! I will remove them.” So she removed all the bangles, leaving only two bangles on each wrist. And still they made a sound—tung, tung, tung. Then she removed one more and kept only one. Then there was no sound. So, I have learnt from this girl that I must be alone. Even two persons are not good. There is a saying: *Ek niranjan; do ghad-bad; theen lath-path*: If one person is there, he is happy; if two are there, there is quarrel; and three means fighting. And in the Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad also it is said: *Ekah sadhu suprayuktah, dvitiam gramamuchyate, tritiam nagaram smritam*. This means that one person is good, two persons make a village and three make a city. I have learnt this lesson from that poor girl, who is therefore one of my Gurus.”

Likewise, Dattatreya gives a list of twenty-four Gurus, regarding himself as a humble student of the whole of creation. He also teaches us the lesson that the higher is one’s knowledge, the humbler is that person. The larger is our wisdom, the smaller we look in the eyes of people. The nearer we are to God,

the farther we appear from people's eyes. So Lord Dattatreya is here before us as a spiritual magnet and a magnificent embodiment of divine power—the powers even of creation, preservation and destruction. This three-faced God, Lord Dattatreya, is regarded as an embodiment of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. He is regarded as the Guru of Gurus and he is specially worshipped on Brihaspativara or Guruvara, which is the sacred Thursday. Thursday is supposed to be the Guru's day and we worship the great Guru Lord Dattatreya on every Thursday. May we all become fit instruments for the reception of the unbounded grace of Lord Dattatreya by following his example.

Lord Dattatreya is not merely a divine incarnation like Bhagavan Sri Krishna and Sri Rama, but, unlike them, he is held in high esteem as a visible personality, physically available to us for our Darshan, if only we would have the honesty of belief and devotion at his sacred feet.

—**SWAMI KRISHNANANDA**



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