

Reading from Nisargadatta

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Today, we will go on reading from Nisargadatta.

It says: "Your own self is the state which sprouts suddenly and without cause, carries no stain of ego. The state which sprouts suddenly and without cause, carries no stain of ego; you may call it God." This is the hallmark of true awakening, that it is sudden. It is sudden because it is not something that is new. It is whole, it is complete and it is as you are at the moment. The suddenness is its realisation. In the state in which most people live their lives, there is a constant searching for the future, a constant projecting into the future of what could be, of what will be, of what must not be, and so on. And this is what really makes up the core of our illusory life.

Although we are shown constantly that what we anticipated, what we thought would be the case, what we looked forward to as being the case, is never realised in fact, we nevertheless continue to hold these projections into the future as the reality. And awakening is the sudden dropping away of that. It is, in a way, letting go of the future. Our fears and our hopes are all future oriented. It is not "what is" but "what will happen if" that makes us anxious. Once we know "what is" and can let go of "what will happen if", then we get a certain peace no matter how serious "what is" may be.

And he says: "This state which sprouts suddenly and without cause..." There is no pathway to awakening. There is nothing that causes awakening because awakening is already what you are. When one really sees into one's true nature, when one truly comes to awakening, then one sees that indeed there is no awakening. This is often misunderstood, this is certainly misunderstood among the Soto Zen who take this in a literal way. Of course it is a literal statement. It is the dropping away of the future, of this sense that something is missing, that my life is not as it should be, that my life is a mess and so on. And it is true that one's life very often is a mess, but the mess comes from trying to sort out the mess. It's a bit like trying to knock out a dent in a hub cap. You bang out on one side and you get another dent on the other side.

He says: "What is seedless and rootless, what does not sprout and grow flower and fruit, what comes into being suddenly and in full glory, mysteriously and marvellously, you may call that God." This is what we were saying yesterday. One sees into true divinity. It is as he says: "It comes into being suddenly and in full glory". We say that seeing into "Mu" is a bit like if you are in a dark room and suddenly somebody comes in,

grabs hold of the curtains and pulls them across and the light of the sun streams in. This is Joshu's Mu, it is the "Mu" of clarity, the "Mu" of openness and you could say it is the "Mu" of no future. That does not mean to say that when you are awakened, you don't think about tomorrow, you don't plan for an event that is coming up in two or three weeks and so on. That's one kind of future; that's a calendar future, you might say.

But then there is this emotional future, this Shangri-la future, the future that will reveal and confirm and justify it all. One sees what I mean by this future very much in the Christian view of heaven. There is a kind of judgement, a kind of culmination, a kind of stamp of approval that it was all correct and worthwhile. One has the feeling, as you pass through the golden gates, of St-Peter giving you a tap on the back congratulating you on having made it. This is what I mean by this future and of course it is in the practise that one sees this, when one keeps getting that feeling: "Oh! I wish I could come to awakening", "I wish I could get there", "Everything will be alright, once I get there", "It will be alright, things will be different then", "It won't be like it is at the moment", and so on.

And it is that very attitude that one has, that kind of heaven orientation that makes everything that one is doing currently and at the moment insipid, dull, indifferent. One has this imaginary gold and so everything around looks like lead. And it is dropping away this illusory belief in some ultimate complete state. The completeness, the golden quality, the shining quality is not an illusion. Heaven is not in itself an illusion, it is that you have projected it into the future which makes it illusory. We've put it outside. It's "something we have to get" that makes it illusory. It's exactly the same with this notion of God and of Jesus and of the Virgin and all of these notions of this perfection, this love, this wisdom.

We've projected it out. It is not us. How can we know God if we are not God? How can we know heaven if our true state is not already heaven? It's like St. Augustin said: "If you had not already found me, you could not be seeking me." And this is so true. We're not saying that one should give up one's ideals. It's not that one should give up one's notions of perfection, of beauty, love and the rest. On the contrary, but you must see into the source of those notions. They do not come from the beacon in the future but from a welling up in the moment, in the present. It's not that you're going to get to heaven, but that you must come home to heaven.

He says: "It is entirely unexpected and yet inevitable." And this is right. You cannot anticipate awakening. You just cannot do it. And very often awakening comes at a time when one is feeling really at the worst, at the most difficult, it comes out of the sense of being abandoned and lost. It's interesting, this story of the crucifixion and there are two ways in which we can understand the crucifixion. One is that it's the story of a man who was crucified and all the rest. But the other is that it is a kind of parable of going to awakening, coming to awakening. And my guess is that the second is more true than the first. It is very likely that the crucifixion comes out of a very ancient mystery play or drama, and that it was taken over as a historical event.

But be that as it may, you can read it as a parable of awakening. And it is interesting that, right at the end, there is this cry of Christ: "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me." In others words, the God itself had given up. The very reason for being was no longer there, the very sense of utter despair was present. Then, the next is: "Into thy hands, I commend my spirit". In others words, one moment of utter despair and the next a moment of sublime peace and openness.

It is entirely unexpected, and so therefore, let go of your expectations or, rather, see your expectations as the driving force in your practice. We're not saying that you should try to stop this longing for awakening. What we're saying is you should drop the notion of awakening, but keep the longing. As long as you've got this image, and as long as you've got words connected with it, as long as there is some kind of image that you are longing for, you are putting your energies into a cul-de-sac, a dead end. It is true that the longing is an essential ingredient in the practice. Whether you call it longing or questioning or even just a kind of inner groaning, it doesn't matter.

There is, at some level, this profound sense of dissatisfaction. And the thing is, one becomes completely one with that. In becoming completely one with it, eventually, that very longing itself will dissolve. It is not that the longing will be satisfied. As we said, the longing is, in a way, what is obscuring the whole truth of what you are. But as long as you give that longing some kind of goal or end or reason or whatever, then as we say it is continually blocked, it's in this dead end. But if you can become totally one with that longing, then in the end, you'll find that it is, in a way, distorted or concentrated or twisted love. And when the twist or the contortion or whatever are melted out of the longing, then it is just pure love, pure oneness, pure wholeness. These are all words signifying the same, really unnamable, condition.

It is the same with the questioning. The questioning is not followed by an answer. It is not that you're asking the question "Who am I?" and then you get the answer "I am this". And because you got the right answer, you're given the reward of awakening. It is not like that at all. The questioning is just the same as the longing. It is this questioning which is the problem. It is too focused, it is too formalized, it is too much of a conception. We say that one of the ways in which one can really work most effectively is to arouse the sense of wonder, the wonder of being. And truly, when one begins to really get that, one sees how wonderful everything is, even the sound of the crows in the morning or the sea gulls.

There is a kind of wonder in that, there is a clarity, a quality about it which is absolutely indescribable. And one can only be open in relation to that. And that may even be the taste of food or the shaft of the sunlight or even just seeing a flower just as it is. Anything can open up this sense of wonder. And questioning is in a way immature wonder. And so therefore, when one is working with a question, it is all really getting to the essence of the questioning; it is really getting that the question is a real question; it is a meaningful question. And then, one sees into the nature of the question itself: "What am I?", "What is it?" And one stays with that questioning. It is the questioning which is essential. It is not poking around trying to find an answer.

And this is very true if you are working on a koan. It is not quite so true of subsequent koans, although there are certain overtones of this. You should not be sitting, trying to come up with an answer or a demonstration that you are going to give in dokusan. Don't do that! Don't waste your time and my time by doing that! This is not it. We say again that the only real answer to this question "What am I?" or "What is Mu?" is awakening. And you should just put aside anything that comes up as a possible answer. Don't waste your time with it! Just go deeper! Sometimes, we ask you questions in the dokusan room and the responses seem to be not too bad. But in that case, don't remember that response and bring it up again next time, because next time it is no good. It's finished! It is no longer your response. We get people coming in with the same response, the same response, the same response as though they think it is the response that is the factor. But it is the responding which is the factor.

He says: "It is entirely unexpected, yet inevitable, infinitely familiar, yet most surprising." This is so true! You can say: "Oh gosh! It's been there all the time. He kept on saying it was there, and there it is." But at the same time, it is surprising. If you are working on "Who am I?", you could get the situation where it comes: "Oh! My Goodness, I am me!" There is that surprise. In fact, if you are not getting that surprise, then you still have some way to go, because it is surprising. It is astonishing that "I am me" or, better still, "I am". There is an astonishment in that. We try to put it in this world of infinite things, planets, stars, galaxies, islands of galaxies, millions of molecules, umpteen species of animals, everything, trees, birds, vast expanses of sea, ocean and the fish, ... and "I am". How can you miss that? How can you say: "No, I don't see that it's surprising". It's because it's so coated over with it being taken for granted. I am, isn't that surprising? Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that extraordinary? And yet: Of course I am! Everything comes out of that, how can it be other than totally, utterly familiar?

He says: "It's beyond all hope, and yet absolutely certain ...". This is a wonderful passage that he is giving here because it is right on the situation. A situation of hopelessness. It is hopeless. When one works on this question "Who am I?" or "What am I" or "What is Mu?", one must come up to the utter, utter hopelessness of it. It is this that ultimately induces the cry: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is this despair, le désespoir, the loss of hope. And it is that hopelessness that ultimately comes. But the problem is that we don't have the courage to work through that hopelessness. There is a sense that comes with it, a kind of endlessness, of tedium.

We feel, in a way, in a Dante's hell where we are going to walk in a circle forever. One can get like that. It's because the beacon of I, the sense of "I am something", particularly "I am something important, unique", that beacon of illusory light no longer has its power, no longer has its attraction. And, as a consequence, there is a sense of no direction, of being nowhere for no reason. And we struggle against this, we fight against this, we try to find "Well! I've done something wrong!" We panic, we go out and get drunk, we do anything rather than face it.

But it's out of that, that hopelessness, that sense of being bereft that the ineffable arises and, as he says, it is absolutely certain. It does not matter, you see, in one way or another, it does not matter whether you come to awakening or not. It really does not matter, it is inevitable. It is certain, it can't be otherwise. It isn't that, well, we have got to convert this mixture here to that mixture there. It isn't that at all. It's like, in the morning, sometimes there is a mist and you just cannot see through the mist and then the sun comes up and, lo and behold, there is the whole countryside laid out before you. You are already awakened. But the thing is, there is this dryness, this sense of dissatisfaction, and we just cannot sit down and say "Well! Eventually it's going to work out, so why do I have to worry".

If one really, really could do that, at that moment, it would be there, finished, done. In other words, you would really surrender yourself all in one moment. But when we say: "It is all accomplished", "It is as it is at the moment, it is what it is", then people very often have this sinking feeling: "Oh God! Is he telling me this miserable life I've got at the moment is really it? What is he talking about? How could he say that? This is really what I am trying to get away from." What we are saying is: "Yes! Let go of trying to get away from it, really let go of this imaginary world that you are trying to attain."

And you'll see that as Yasutani said: "Even a cracked cup is perfect." You'll see into, truly into, Ummon's dried shit – Remember somebody asked: "What is Buddha?" and he said: "Dried shit". – The utter simplicity, the utter thereness, the utter itness of it, the utter clarity without any kind of adornment. This is what it means when it says that the inanimate things preach the dharma. And the inanimate things preach the dharma far better than any Buddha could ever preach it, any Bodhidharma, any Ummon, any Nansen.

He says: "Because it is without cause, it is without hindrance." In other words, it's not dependent and so therefore it doesn't have to wait in order that certain circumstances are propitious. There are no propitious circumstances for awakening. We said very often that it is preceded by this depression, by this despair, but it doesn't have to be preceded by depression and despair. I'm not saying that if you haven't got despair, you're not in the league. Not in the least! What I'm saying is, if that does come, if that depression does come, if that sense of a lunar landscape arises, then live with it! It won't last. You will surely pass through this, in a day, in two days, in a week at the most. It's not whether you will get through these states. Always bear that in mind. Whatever life has to offer, you'll get through it or you'll die. These are the two alternatives.

And so therefore, the question is not whether you are going to get through it or not, the question is how you're going to get through it. Are you going to use this situation in a very real way? Is it going to be truly a dharma gate and so you can therefore fulfill that third vow that you made so consistently over the years? Is that how it's going to be or are you going to crawl around on all four, grovelling, begging fate or God or whatever to spare you. Like Gurdjieff said: "Do you want to die like a dog?"

He says: "It obeys one law only, the law of freedom." This is it. It is freedom. And again, this is how it is right now. It is because we have selected this as being more important than that, that we're bound. That's the only thing that is binding us. Because this is more important than that, then we have to hold on to this, then we have to struggle against that, and so the game begins.

He says: "Anything that implies a continuity, a sequence, a passing from stage to stage cannot be the real." There is no way to nirvana. Remember there is a forty eighth koan in which it says that a monk went to a master and said: "In the scriptures, it says: in the ten directions, there is one way to nirvana. What is that one way?" And we're saying there is no way to nirvana. And if one can see that and hold that, then one can see quite clearly into the rest of the koan. One master draws a line in the air and another master says: "This fan jumped up to the thirty-third heaven and hit the nose of the deity Indra."

He says: "Anything that implies a sequence, a continuity, a passing from stage to stage cannot be the real." Again, you get people thinking: "What I'm going to do is that I'm just going to sit it out. I'll just keep sitting and, eventually, I'm bound to get there". I'm sorry it's not like that. It is now, it is not in the future. It is now, it can only ever be now. There is no reason why now should not be it. There is no reason why, at this moment, you shouldn't all stand up and walk out the door. Finished. Why don't you? Because there is all this burden of illusion that you feel you just cannot sacrifice and, in that burden of illusion, the most precious part is the burden of your own suffering. "How can I put down that suffering so easily when I've laboured all my life in carrying it? It's silly to say I can do that. In other words, all that past lifetime, I'll have wasted. So, I'm not going to put my burden down. I can't waste my life like that."

He says: "There is no progress in reality. It is final, perfect and unrelated." It is a very remarkable passage. "There is no progress in reality, it is final, perfect and unrelated." Many people think that, in spiritual practise, the spirit is growing, that it is passing through various stages and, at each stage, something is added to it. It grows as a consequence, it becomes enriched or wiser or fully mature or something like that. But this is not how it is. How can you add something to that which is not something? How can you increase something which is not something? It is out of that kind of order, it is out of that level that what we are talking about is known. It is like saying that the more images a mirror has, the more perfectly it's going to reflect. But it does not matter how many images a mirror has, its reflection is neither increased nor decreased. It is neither made more pure or less pure. It is neither more distorted or less distorted.

And then the questioner asked: "How can I bring it about?" After all that! And Nisargadatta says: "You can do nothing to bring it about." Very often, somebody comes and says: "You know, I just can't do this. I really just can't do this. It's just too much. I don't know what to do." At last, something is getting home to that person. At last, there is a truth that's beginning to shine through. And very often as we say, there is that despair and so on that goes with it, because there is the sense that "I've got to do it. I am the only one that can do it. I am the master."

All our lives, we've been making that claim. A poet once said: "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul." But when one sees this "I can do nothing", that does not mean therefore that nothing can be done. It does not mean that. It means now, at last, something can happen, something can be done. We try to bring this home to people by telling them: "Alright, I am going to ring the bell, you're going to stand up and you're going to leave. How are you going to do that?" Of course, one does not know, but that which stands up, which walks, which talks, which sees, that is what is doing the work.

This belief that "I am doing the work" is purely illusory and you will feel that "if I'm not in control, then I will fly out of control." But no, when I stand up, I stand up with just the right amount of energy needed. When I open the door, I open the door with just the right amount of energy needed. When I talk, I use the right words in the right sequence. There are not words flying all over the place. There is a meaning, there is a totality, there is an organisation in what I say and yet I am not saying it. I don't know what I am going to say until I have said it, in fact. In others words, there is, let's put it this way, there is a wonderful, incredible, creative controlling power that is controlling everything and that wonderful creative controlling power is you. Not that sense of "I am this creative, controlling power". Once you say that, then the whole thing turns into a fantasy once more. This is why we want a demonstration, because we want you to let go of your claims, your words and so on, and for you to manifest from the source. In one way, you can't help manifesting from the source, you just cannot help that; all we want to do is to see if we can find some way we can let go of that detour that you are constantly making.

Let go of it, at least sufficiently for you to see that indeed it is a detour. That's it. And then, in subsequent work and the rest of your life, you can strive to let go of the detour completely. But you don't see this "I am so and so, I am this body" and so on, you don't see it as a detour. You see it as the origin, you claim it as the origin, you claim it as the initiator but it isn't. It's a deflection on the way.

Nisargadatta says: "You can do nothing to bring it about, but you can avoid creating obstacles." In others words, one can start letting go of this belief "I'm the doer". Let go. Start seeing into this detour, as we say. We can really examine this I and when we say "I am angry", we really examine that I. What do we mean when we say "I am angry" or "I am walking"? What do we mean when we say "I am the body"? What does this mean: "I am the body"? And so, one keeps seeing, looking into this obstacle, this detour that one is creating, until eventually one says: "Oh yes, I am not it. I am not that. That's not me". There's a whole sense of "I am that", "I am this" and it's a bit like an iceberg calving, a great lump that slides away. There is a sense of something letting go. It's not that "I let go", it's a letting go. But it only comes because one has really, sincerely looked into this question "I am", whatever you want to say.

It's like, if you are with a friend, there is an "I am" connected in that relationship. The same thing happens if you are with your parent or your child, your spouse, or whatever. If you get that relationship, there is a feel about that relationship and in the feel of that relationship there is the I, there is the sense of I in that, "I am this... whatever". And then

one just simply patiently enters into that I, "I am this". One enters into it. For example, you might know a person or have a friend that you always feel slightly irritated by, because of the way they talk or something. Then, get into that irritation, that sense of "I am irritated by her or him". Or there is another person that makes you feel awkward; somehow they put you down.

Get into that feeling of being put down by this person, of this awkwardness. Get the I out of it. Or you're with the bank clerk and you go bombastic with the bank clerk. You put the bank clerk in her place. Get that again, enter into that I that is bombastic, that is putting the bank clerk down. This is much easier when you practise at home than when you practise here in a sesshin. In a sesshin, it is not so easy because the situation isn't so immediate.

And this is why, very often, evening practise has a tremendous value. The day has been full of these encounters, a variety of encounters in which indeed there have been a variety of what you might call I's that have appeared and once one sees there is a variety of I's, a bombastic I, a humiliated I, a friendly I, an irritated I, you say: "Now! Wait a minute. How can we be all these I's". That's one way in which you might work on this. I'm not saying it's the only way, but whatever way it is, one gets to know that personality at work. This is why, of course, it is so valuable, terribly valuable, to be present during the day. During the day, you're actually in the situation. You see yourself walking up to this bank clerk, about to give her a mouthful, for one reason or another. And you can see it, you can see the kind of tensions, the feelings, the way the body in fact is held, and so on. And then later on, you can really see into this. So in other words, what you're doing is, you're constantly looking at this obstacle, at this detour, this reflector which claims to be the source of the light.

He says: "Be present to the activities of your mind, how it comes into being, how it operates." And this is just what we're trying to say now. You're no longer identified with the mind. In other words, that's the moment of transition when you say "I am not that". There's the presence and there is that to which one is present. And there is that sliding away, that release. It is not a decision, it is an observation. It is something which you see into. You may sort of specify it, conceptually or verbally afterwards, but even then, at the time, although you say to yourself "I am not it", it is not a verbal recognition, it is a much deeper recognition than simply words. But again the thing is to get to know yourself as it is in operation. And when you get to know yourself, this personality in operation, then the knowing is no longer identified as it.

He says: "As you stand motionless, only present, you discover yourself as the Light behind the presence." In other words, this is really when there's a kind of what you can call awakening: simply being present is not enough. One has to go beyond that. There is a kind of samadhi state that very often precedes awakening in which the samadhi state is pure presence. It's just as though the world is transparent, as though you can walk through walls, there is no sense of boundaries. It's a boundless world because one is just dwelling in presence. But this itself is not enough. One must go deeper.

He says: "The source of light is dark. Unknown is the source of knowledge. That source alone is." That's an interesting observation. The source of light is dark. In other words, it is unknowable, completely unknowable, but it doesn't mean to say that there is an absence of knowing. It's a bit like the alchemists say: "Our sun is a dark sun." In another words, you mustn't try to see yourself. It's no good looking to try to find yourself in that way. This is what we say: It is the question, it is not the answer. What you are is beyond all knowledge and yet all knowledge comes out of what you are.