

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

The Nisargadatta Song of I Am

(Edited by Jerry Katz)

I Am That is a book of talks with Nisargadatta, a late-20th-century Guru of the Nath sect. From the book's Introduction: "Uneducated though the Master is, his conversation is enlightened to an extraordinary degree. Though born and brought up in poverty, he is the richest of the rich, for he has the limitless wealth of perennial knowledge, compared to which the most fabulous treasures are mere tinsel. He is warm-hearted and tender, shrewdly humorous, absolutely fearless and absolutely true -- inspiring, guiding and supporting all who come to him."

Quotes specifically referring to 'I am' were excerpted and grouped into four parts, the first two being introductory and the last two relating to ways of knowing 'I am' and to the nature of 'I am'. A fifth part was later added; it includes portions of text that were originally left out.



Part One

Go deep into the sense of 'I am' and you will find.

...focus your mind on 'I am', which is *pure and simple being*.

Take the first step first.

All blessings come from within.

Turn within.

'I am' you know.

Be with it all the time you can spare,
until you revert to it spontaneously.

There is *no simpler and easier way*.

Before all beginnings, after all ending -- I am.

All has its being in me, in the 'I am',
that shines in every living being.

On a deeper level my experience is your experience.

Dive deep within yourself

and you will find it easily and simply.

Go in the direction of 'I am'.

Part Two

When I met my Guru, he told me:

"You are not what you take yourself to be.

Find out what you are.

Watch the sense '*I am*', find your real Self."

I obeyed him, because I trusted him.

I did as he told me.

All my spare time I would spend
looking at myself in silence.

And what a difference it made, and how soon!

My teacher told me to hold on to the sense 'I am'
tenaciously and not to swerve from it even for a moment.

I did my best to follow his advice and in a comparatively short time
I realized within myself the truth of his teaching.

*All I did was to remember his teaching,
his face, his words constantly.*

This brought an end to the mind;
in the stillness of the mind
I saw myself as I am -- unbound.

I simply followed (my teacher's) instruction
which was to focus the mind on pure being 'I am', and stay in it.

I used to sit for hours together,
with nothing but the 'I am' in my mind
and soon peace and joy
and a deep all-embracing love
became my normal state.

In it *all disappeared* --
myself, my Guru, the life I lived,
the world around me.

Only peace remained and unfathomable silence.

My Guru ordered me to attend to the sense 'I am'
and to give attention to nothing else.

I just obeyed.
I did not follow any particular course of breathing,
or meditation, or study of scriptures.
Whatever happened, I would *turn away my attention from it*
and remain with the sense 'I am',

it may look too simple, even crude.
*My only reason for doing it was that
my Guru told me so.* Yet it worked!
Obedience is a powerful solvent of all desires and fears.

There is no sense of purpose in my doing anything.

Things *happen as they happen* --
not because I make them happen,
but it is because I am
that they happen.
In reality nothing ever happens.

When the mind is restless, it makes Shiva dance,
like the restless waters of the lake make the moon dance.
It is all appearance, due to wrong ideas.

...in whatever role I may appear and
whatever function I may perform -- *I remain what I am:*
the 'I am' immovable, unshakable, independent.

When I say 'I am',
I do not mean a separate entity
with a body as its nucleus.
mean the totality of being,
the ocean of consciousness,
the entire universe of all that is and knows.
I have nothing to desire for I am complete forever.

Words betray their hollowness.
The real cannot be described,
it must be experienced.

I cannot find better words for what I know.
What I say may sound ridiculous.
But what the words try to convey is the highest truth.
All is one, however much we quibble.
And all is done to please
the one *source and goal* of every desire,
whom we all know as the 'I am'.

Just like the sun is reflected in a billion dew drops,
so is the timeless endlessly *repeated*.

When I repeat: 'I am, I am',
I merely assert and re-assert an ever-present fact.

You get tired of my words because
you do not see the *living truth* behind them.
Contact it and you will find
the full meaning of words and of silence -- both.

...I trusted my Guru. What he told me to do, I did.
He told me to concentrate on 'I am' -- I did.
He told me that I am beyond all
perceptibles and conceivable -- I believed. ...
You may choose any way that suits you;
your *earnestness* will determine the rate of progress.

Part Three

First of all, establish a constant
contact with your self,
be with yourself all the time.
Into self-awareness all blessings flow.

Begin as a centre of observation, deliberate cognizance,
and grow into a centre of love in action.
'I am' is a tiny seed which will grow into a mighty tree --
quite naturally, *without a trace of effort*.

Establish yourself firmly in the awareness of 'I am'.
This is the beginning and also the end of *all endeavor*.

Hold onto the sense of 'I am'
to the exclusion of everything else.
When thus the mind becomes completely silent,
it shines with a new light and *vibrates* with new knowledge.
It all comes spontaneously, you need only hold on to the 'I am'.

Refuse all thoughts except one: the thought 'I am'.
The mind will rebel in the beginning,
but with patience and perseverance it will yield and keep quiet.
Once you are quiet,
things will begin to happen spontaneously and quite naturally,
without any interference on your part.

Just keep in mind the feeling 'I am', merge in it,
till your mind and feeling become one.
By repeated attempts you will stumble on
the right balance of attention and affection
and your mind will be firmly established
in the thought-feeling 'I am'.

Whatever you think, say, or do,
this sense of *immutable and affectionate being* remains
as the *ever-present background of the mind*.

To know what you are
you must first investigate
and know what you are not.
And to know what you are not
you must watch yourself carefully,
rejecting all that does not necessarily

go with the basic fact: 'I am'. ...
Separate consistently and perseveringly the 'I am'
from 'this' or 'that',
and try to feel what it *means* to be,
just to be, without being 'this' or 'that'.

Give up all questions except one: 'Who am I'?

After all, the *only fact* you are sure of is that you are.
The 'I am' is certain. The 'I am this' is not.
Struggle to find out what you are in reality.

Cling to one thing, that matters,
hold on to 'I am' and let go all else.
This is sadhana.

In *realization* there is nothing to hold on to
and nothing to forget.
Everything is known,
nothing is remembered.

...just remember yourself.
'I am', is enough to *heal your mind* and take you beyond.
Just have some trust.

Stop searching, and see --
it is here and now -- it is that 'I am' you know so well.

You cannot meaningfully say 'this is what I am'.
It just makes no sense.

'I am' is first-hand and needs no proofs. Stay with it.

Be content with what you are sure of.
And the only thing you can be sure of is 'I am'.
Stay with it, and *reject everything else*.
This is Yoga.

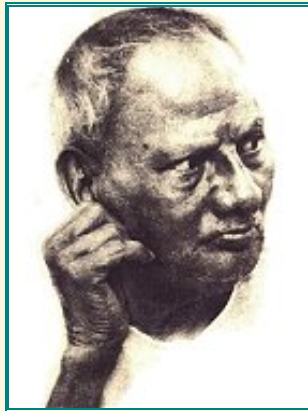
Go back to that state of pure being,
where the 'I am' is still in its purity
before it got contaminated
with 'this I am' or 'that I am'.
Your burden is of false self-identifications --
abandon them all.

Don't you see that it is your very search for happiness that makes you miserable?

Try the other way: *indifferent to pain and pleasure*, neither asking nor refusing, give all your attention to the level on which 'I am' is timelessly present.

Soon you will realize that peace and happiness are in your very nature and it is only *seeking* them through *some particular channels*, that disturbs.

Give your heart and mind to *brooding* over the 'I am', what is it, how is it, what is its source, its life, its meaning.



It is very much like digging a well. You *reject all that is not water*, till you reach the life-giving spring.

The '*I am*' that pursues the pleasant and shuns the unpleasant is false; the 'I am' that sees pleasure and pain as inseparable sees rightly.

Those who practice the sadhana of focusing their minds on 'I am' may feel related to others who have followed the same sadhana and *succeeded*.

You need not worry about your worries. Just be. Do not try to be quiet; do not make 'being quiet' into a task to be performed. Don't be *restless* about 'being quiet', *miserable* about 'being happy'.

Just be aware that you are and *remain aware* -- don't say: '*yes, I am; what next?*' There is no 'next' in 'I am'. It is a timeless state.



Part Four

On *waking up*, was it not the sense 'I am' that came first?

The sense 'I am' is always with you, only you have attached all kinds of things to it -- body, feelings, thoughts, ideas, possessions, etc. All these self-identifications are misleading. Because of them you *take yourself to be what you are not*.

What is mine is mine and was mine even when God was not. Of course, it is a very tiny little thing, a *speck* -- *the sense 'I am'*, the fact of being.

The light by which you see the world,
which is God,
is the tiny little spark: 'I am',
apparently so small,
yet the first and the last
in every act of knowing and loving.

Without the 'I am' there is nothing.
All knowledge is about the 'I am'.

Outside the Self there is nothing.
All is one and all is contained in 'I am'.

Give it all up and be ready for the real to assert itself.
This self-assertion is best expressed in words: 'I am'.
Nothing else has being.
Of this you are absolutely certain.

Instead of seeing things as imagined,
learn to see them as they *are*.
When you can see everything as it is,
you will also see yourself as you are.

It is like cleansing a mirror.
The same mirror that *shows you the world as it is*,
will also show you your own face.
The thought 'I am' is the polishing cloth.

'I am' is ever afresh.
You do not need to remember in order to be. ...
At present your being is mixed up with experiencing.
All you need is to
unravel being from the *tangle* of experiences.

Once you have known pure being,
without being this or that,
you will discern it among experiences
and you will no longer be misled by names and forms.

...the 'I am' in movement *creates the world*.
The 'I am' at peace becomes the Absolute.

In the immensity of consciousness a light appears,
a tiny point that moves rapidly and traces shapes,
thoughts and feelings, concepts and ideas,

like the pen writing on paper.
And the ink that leaves a trace is memory.
You are that tiny point and by your movement
the world is ever re-created.
Stop moving and there will be no world.
Look within and you will find that
the point of light is the reflection
of the immensity of light in the body,
as the sense 'I am'.
There is only light, all else *appears*.

The 'I am' is at the root of all appearance
and the permanent link in the succession
of events that we call life... .

Human beings die every second,
the fear and the agony of dying
hangs over the world like a cloud.
No wonder you too are afraid.

But once you know that the body alone dies
and *not the continuity of memory*
and *the sense of 'I am'* reflected in it,
you are afraid no longer.

People differ,
but all are faced with the fact of their own existence.
'I am' is the ultimate fact;

'Who am I?' is the ultimate question
to which everybody must *find an answer*.

Delve deeply into the sense 'I am'
and you will surely discover that
the perceiving centre is universal,
as universal as the light that illumines the world.
All that happens in the universe happens to you,
the silent witness. On the other hand, whatever is done,
is done by you,
the universal and inexhaustible energy.

Before the mind -- I am.
'I am' is *not a thought in the mind*;
the mind happens to me, I do not happen to the mind.
And since *time and space are in the mind*,

I am beyond time and space,
eternal and omnipresent.

...you are not this, there is nothing of yours in this,
except the little point of 'I am'

'I am this, I am that' is dream,
while pure 'I am' has the stamp of reality on it.

You have tasted so many things -- all came to naught.
Only the sense 'I am' persisted -- unchanged.
Stay with the changeless among the changeful,
until you are able to go beyond.

When the 'I am myself' goes, the 'I am all' comes.
When the 'I am all' goes, 'I am' comes.
When even 'I am' goes,
reality alone is...

Part Five

What do you love now? The 'I am'.
Give your heart and mind to it,
think of nothing else.

This, when effortless and natural, is the highest state.
In it love itself is the lover and the beloved.

Before the world was, consciousness was.
In consciousness it comes into being,
in consciousness it lasts
and into pure consciousness it dissolves.
At the root of everything, is the feeling 'I am'.

The state of mind: *'there is a world'* is secondary,
for to be, I do not need the world,
the world needs me.

Everything is a play of ideas.
In the state free from ideation (*nirvikalpa samadhi*)
nothing is perceived.
The root idea is: 'I am'.
It shatters the state of pure consciousness
and is followed by the innumerable sensations and perceptions;

feeling and ideas,
which in their totality constitute God and His world.

The 'I am' remains as the witness,
but it is by the will of God that everything happens.

In my world *nobody is born and nobody dies.*
Some people go on a journey and come back, some never leave.
What difference does it make since they travel in dreamlands,
each wrapped up in his own dream.
Only the waking up is important.
It is enough to know the 'I am' as reality
and also love.

As it is natural for the incense stick to burn out,
so it is natural for the body to die.
Really, it is a matter of very little importance.
What matters is that I am
neither the body nor the mind.
I am.

Don't identify yourself with an idea.
If you mean by God, the Unknown, then you merely say:
'I do not know what I am'.
If you know God as you know yourself,
you need not say it.

Best is the simple feeling 'I am'.
Dwell on it patiently. Here patience is wisdom;
don't think of failure.
There can be no failure in this understanding.

That which makes you think you are human is not human.
It is but a dimensionless point of consciousness,
a conscious nothing;
all you can say about yourself is: 'I am'.
You are pure being, awareness, bliss.
To realize that is the end of all seeking.

You come to it when you see all you think yourself to be
as mere imagination and stand aloof
in pure awareness of the transient as transient,
imaginary as imaginary,
unreal as unreal.