



**Aghoreshwar Baba Bhagwan Ramji**

---

## **GURU PURNIMA CELEBRATION AT THE ASHRAM**

---

The Sri Sarveshwari Samooh Ashram in Sonoma, California, celebrated Guru Purnima on July 9. The celebration began at 7:30 a.m. this clear and beautiful summer day with the annual hoisting of the new Samooh flag. When the flag 'bundle' reached the top of the pole, a cord was pulled by Norma Banducci to free the flag and release a shower of rose petals. Norma was given this honor as a long-time supporter of the center and a devoted practitioner of yoga as taught by Babaji at the Ashram. As these flower petal offerings fell from the flag there was a sense of joy and gratitude shared by those present

Baba Hariji says that it is necessary only to know the condition of one grain of rice to know the condition of the entire pot. It is like this with metaphors of practice at the Ashram: to understand the meaning of a particular practice is to have greater understanding of our being. Often one must eat potfuls of rice to understand the nature of a single grain. This can as well be applied to Baba Hariji's words

Not only on this special day, but every morning and evening, puja is performed at the flag site. Water is used to purify the site. A flower, the offering of one's heart, is placed on the top tier of the 3 tier circular platform that forms the flagpole's base. Incense is lit. One can mindfully circumambulate the flag on a pink slate pathway to consider the meaning of the Ashram, to pray for one's well-being and good works, to feel gratitude for the opportunity to have such a community. Or one may do it simply because it has been done for so long by so many others who seek a devotional way of life. Shoes are not worn on this pathway out of respect, to acknowledge our humility

Even the flowers planted in this garden have special significance or symbolic meaning. There is meaning attached to all of the rituals and many of the practices at the Ashram. There is always another 'petal' of meaning to be contemplated. The purpose of instilling so much meaning into various actions is to catch and focus the wandering mind, to return attention to the Divine, to the ever-present Guru within and to remember the Self. Following the flag hoisting, participants entered the yurt, the Ashram's devotional center, to participate in Arati. A large lei, or wreath of flowers, was draped around the illumined portrait of Baba Bhagwan Ramji which hangs above the altar. Following the Arati hymns, each participant approached the altar to offer a flower, to pay tribute to Baba Bhagwan Ramji and to his disciple, our Baba Hariji. Baba Hariji gave his blessings to each person individually.

**What is the most important thing in your life? What is it in your life that is beyond any compromise?**

Into this atmosphere charged with love, following Arati, Babaji presented the following question for contemplation during the day: What is the most important thing in your life? What is it in your life that is beyond any compromise? With this seed thought planted, the Ashram was filled with chanting led by Laura Bonazzoli.

A feast lovingly prepared by Carol Bojarsky, Isa Jacoby and Peter Humes was served beneath the immense bay tree that offers shade to many of the Ashram's structures. Carol had been busy preparing chutneys and various delights for days in advance. Following a traditional blessing of the food by Jeanette, Baba Hariji again reminded us to think about what was most important to us. However, all were soon lost to the sensations of sight, smell, taste and texture! Following the meal and a period of relaxation, many returned to the yurt for more chanting. Those who remained outside could, because of amplification, hear the chanting. The afternoon was free for wandering the grounds and the well-manicured vegetable garden.

Late in the afternoon, chanting was again resumed by all participants in the temple. Evening Arati was performed, followed by sharing of thoughts by various participants. At this point in the evening, John MacKay, opened a discussion about what the Guru means to you. Many talked from the heart about their love for the Ashram, for this community of practitioners, about their devotion to and gratitude for Baba Hariji as their Guru. The intimacy of, the sweetness of the Sonoma Ashram was extolled by many, and attributed to the teachings and actualization of Aghor practice through Baba Hariji.

Many responded to the question posed earlier in the day by Baba Hariji, What is most important to you? What is the one thing you are unwilling to compromise? Though the responses varied in voice, style and words, and reflected different points along a spiritual path, a common answer emerged: living a spiritually principled life is most important and

not to be compromised. Further, that this spiritual way of life can only be learned through the Guru, the Guru being the Divine spirit or shakti within every single manifestation, within each one of us. Access to the Guru within is provided in the Aghor tradition through the teachings of the Guru. There is the One Guru, the One Guru that we are all manifestations of. There is the Guru that resides within us. There is the Guru that is our teacher. They are all the same. It is what Baba Bhagwan Ramji says, "*Seek not what you want but what you already have.*" Susan Bundschu.

**John MacKay** opened the evening meeting with the following words: On behalf of the Ashram I would like to welcome each and every one of you. I am thrilled this morning to see all the people who are with us right this moment, to see who is here with us filling this yurt to share in the celebration of Guru Purnima, celebration of the Guru, and to deepen that understanding within ourselves, to deepen the relationship with our Guru and to deepen our relationship with each other as we come to learn a little bit about what Guru means to each one of us. You may choose to share your feelings. As we share our feelings, our understanding or some experience from our heart with each other it opens the other person's heart, it opens the other person's eyes and ears to perhaps deepen their understanding and their relationship. So I am hopeful that I can benefit from your sharing of a few words or whatever you feel you wish to share with us.

In 1987 my family moved to Olive Avenue which is two blocks from here, and in the evening I would go out to jog and walk; sometimes I would say a different name of God with each step, sometimes I would think, "I need a mantra." Sometimes I would consider all of the saints that have come to my attention, and other times I would think, "I want one." Shortly after that, during that time, Babaji moved to Sonoma and introduced me to Baba. Then one day I was driving by Shamrock Concrete and at that very moment I distinctly knew that I wanted a Guru. I wanted one beacon in my life, not many. That beacon appeared in the form of Baba and that light grows. I know that the most important thing in my life is experiencing those things that we refer to as virtues. Not only experiencing them in me but able to see them in somebody else practicing them in their natural life. I consider Babaji as my best friend, I love being here at the Ashram, I love doing anything with Babaji because that light shines brightly through his actions and I am very much inspired by his actions. I am very much inspired by the actions of brothers and sisters who are here and witnessing their growth and actual manifestation of that pure light in themselves, in their gestures, in their caring, in their love, in their happiness, in their...when they say, "Hi John" I know there is sincerity. I feel the warmth of the Guru that grows in others who live here and participate here and in my further understanding, I am able to identify that light throughout the greater community. For me it begins here and it is only through the grace of my Guru that those virtues, that presence of Oneness, comes through my actions. I am not bothered quite as much from my own self-centeredness but am able just to be. So I bow to my Guru with eternal gratitude. Thank you for being here with me, so that I can be with you.

---

**Love, Serve and Be there for your Self.**

---

**Guru Purnima address of Baba Harihar Ramji in the Sonoma Ashram:**

On this auspicious day of Guru Purnima, I would like to welcome you and embrace you

with my heart.

If you are thirsty, really thirsty, you know what is the most important thing for you. If you haven't received food for 30 days, you know what is most important to you. Deep, deep, deep within, we all know what is most important to us. We do not want to see the answer face to face because we don't want to deal with it right now.

There was a question posed to a great saint in India: How does one find God? He said, "When your longing for God becomes like the longing of the person who is being dunked under the water and is gasping for air... just like that...ready to come up to take a big breath of air.....the day you feel that kind of suffocation, you will find God in no time."

The question "What is most important to you in your life?" was not posed to make you feel any less than what you think you are. It was presented as a catalyst, just to get your mind thinking about such things. We think of many things during the day. All kinds of thoughts come and go. But really when we take time to think of such questions, and we are there to answer these questions, not just set them aside and let them pass, these moments prove to be very powerful.

That is why this occasion, Guru Purnima, is so important in India. This is the most important day in an aspirant's life. The most important. People take this day off for this acknowledgement and visit their Ashram, or their temple. If they don't belong to any Ashram, they go to some Ashram that they feel affinity with. When we know what is important for us, we set time aside for it. We give it importance. When we set a time aside for it and make a certain effort for it, then it begins to feel like something special. When we acknowledge something special, it begins to enrich us.

It has been a constant search of mine to find a way to cultivate *Bhav* - how to cultivate that deep sentiment, that feeling that one must have towards a spiritual practice, towards the Guru, towards God. I am sure that each one of us has this seed within us. But how to water it, how to feed it, how to nurture it? Various celebrations, observances and daily routines of the Ashram keep reminding us of this wealth of ours. The Ashram provides company and environment for this search. This is why the Ashram is so important to us.

We gather here to find that beauty which resides within us. We gather here to honor each other, to respect each other, to love each other, to accommodate each other, to appreciate each other.

Baba gave the name of Sri Sarveshwari Samooh to his Ashram. He didn't call it a center; he didn't call it a foundation; he called it a samooh. Samooh means a gathering of people, a gathering of people for a specific reason. We gather here for one thing. We gather here to find that beauty which resides within us. We gather here to honor each other, to respect each other, to love each other, to accommodate each other, to appreciate each other. Wherever people gather together for such endeavors, that place is charged by Guru's grace. It is charged with our own love, our own intentions. Whoever enters in that environment is immediately touched. It's not that Babaji is sitting here doing some magic; you are doing the magic, your intentions, your love, your *bhav* that you come with is the magic. We all do magic. We all have that *bhav*.

Last night I was taking a walk around the Ashram grounds. The moon was bright, everyone had gone to bed. The grounds looked so clean, the flowers were smiling. Everything was just so pristine, as if you couldn't do anything more to improve it. This was the feeling. I was overwhelmed with love and appreciation for all those people, those great souls who have worked so hard to beautify the Ashram. There are no words to describe that feeling. Each flower that you see, just think of its journey. Where it came from, who brought it here? What happened before bringing it here. Who prepared the ground? Who put it there? Who watered it? Think... how much energy was put in forth to make it bloom. There is so much love poured in these grounds. That's what each one of us is touched by, by the love that has been poured into the grounds.

In the kitchen, I was looking at Carol, Isa, and Peter today, who rarely come to participate in any of the activities at the Ashram, but when a moment like this appears, they are here with their full enthusiasm and love. So much love goes into that food. It nurtures us all. I am filled with gratitude for their sincere support.

Anyway, I was talking about Samooh. Baba called it samooh, a gathering of people, and that is the worship of shakti. Union is our power, our strength. There is lots destructive energy in separation, in splitting. But the effect of union is even more powerful. The Ashram is a place for that kind of union. It is a powerhouse. There are power plants, but this is a powerhouse. So before I go any further I would like to acknowledge, appreciate and pay my respect to each and everyone of you who is here, who is supporting with their love, caring and mindfulness in the creation of this place.

I came here with a sleeping bag and a bowl - nothing more, and today we have so much. Much has happened here in the last few years. Love is the foundation of this Ashram. Love is the foundation of this family. I like to call it a family. The intention of the Ashram is that as you walk through the gates of the Ashram, you are embraced by that family feeling. At times you come home and you may not receive the loving embrace that you are expecting.

You come in here, and somebody meets you with a frown on his or her face. Accept it eagerly. It's also just another form of love. Some of your family members may get upset at you very quickly. That's also a reflection of love. It is because someone feels safe enough with you to let out his/her pent-up feelings. This too is a gesture of acceptance. If someone really gets in your face, it is real acceptance. It is a gesture of feeling safe enough to do it!

They don't go to downtown Sonoma to a complete stranger to express their frustration.

Someone asked Baba what is the difference between love and hate? "Seeing the Self in the other person is love," he said. Somebody gets upset with you only because they want to see you like themselves. If they're working hard all day long, they may get a little upset with you because you're not working as hard as they are. You expect only from those who you love. They have accepted you. They see you just like themselves.

The first criterion for you to go somewhere to practice is that you feel safe. If you do not feel safe, your practice will not be real. The first motto in the Ashram is to make whoever comes in feel safe. There is no trick to it except love.

When I was with Baba he was not always pampering and praising. Often his words could be very stern. No matter what he said we could feel the love there. Maintaining love in the heart, we can say whatever we need to say. If you have to say harsh words, it's o.k. as long as you can maintain love in your heart. Say it, so the person, who is not really seeing it, hopefully begins to see - but make sure love is in the background of your words.

What is our vision, what do we want to accomplish? The first accomplishment is bringing that love to the self, accepting yourself for who you are. Loving ourselves doesn't mean being self-centered. When we love ourselves we become a person of service. In Aghor teaching, the core definition of service is to think of the good of others. **In true seva (service), my attention goes away from me and mine. It's the same thing with devotion.**

**How devotion works in a true devotee is due to total surrender. When the total surrender happens, I is not there. All those problems that I think are big problems for me have nothing to attach to when the surrender is complete. That's how the science of devotion works. Total surrender is the highest thing in the relationship with the Guru.**

When I met Baba I had a very busy business, lots of responsibilities that I thought were very important to me at that time. But something happened. I posed the same question to myself - What is the most important thing to me? I got a glimpse of that presence, how transitory all these things were that I was giving importance to. And all of a sudden they all lost their importance to me. There was only one thing. I wanted to be next to Baba. I'm not saying this is for everybody. All I can share is my own story. It can be an inspiration or just another story. In this path when we ask this question, what is the most important thing, and you are there to face it, nothing can stop you. The purpose of this talk is not to make you leave your home. You're householders with many responsibilities. But at least give that 10 minutes every day to your practice which is most precious... every day. No compromise of that time. No compromise with that allotted time of 10 minutes, 15 minutes, or 5 minutes. That time is set aside to be in the presence of the Guru.

This day we have taken out to honor that part of our lives. There is that suffocation, there is that thirst, there is that hunger. It may not be as evident as physical hunger, but the hunger is there in each one of us. It manifests in many ways. Until we are in touch with the Guru, that hunger manifests in the form of seeking recognition, seeking praise, fame, fortune and seeking love in the other person. When you see these things in your self, stop for a moment and reflect, and recognize, it's that hunger, it's that thirst of not being in touch with the Guru.

The more we delve into our surface self, the more confusion we meet. One has to be selfless to save oneself from this state. Lose the self in the Guru. Then the surface mind has nothing to attach itself to. The easiest, most practical path is to be of service. Be of service. When we take a step out to be of service, the mind will come in with "Is this really a worthy cause? Is it really worthwhile? What am I getting out of this?" It doesn't really matter as long as your intention is to be of service. As long as you know you are serving. I said to Baba, "This country doesn't need the kind of work we do in India like running leprosy hospitals, and other social services." He answered, "Who are you to judge? Our path is of service. Be of service." He commented as we walked down the street in New York in front of the United Nations Building, "You see all these well dressed people? You think they don't need help? They need more help than those in India. Somehow create a place where people can come to calm down and find peace. That is also service."

The purpose of sharing this with you is to help you develop the right attitude for seva. Everybody needs your seva. A person who is very happy on the outside also needs seva. There may be lots of sadness inside that person. So without judging, we do our seva. And this is our path. Our practice is very simple, very direct, very short, and after that if we have some time or means left, we devote it to seva. We do seva every day, not tomorrow, not only after I have done this or that: every day. You can find your own way to serve. Maybe it will be "I am going to smile at five people today", or "I am going to say very kind words to a couple of people today." Make the effort to do other than self-serving. In seva what is

required is a little effort, and doing it consciously. You don't only have to be in the Ashram to do seva, you can do it wherever you are.

I have seen people who do things grudgingly and then later on say, "Oh, it was seva, wasn't it?" That's not seva. You have to make a conscious effort, take time out for it, and have the right attitude of giving. This is the age that our planet needs seva as much as we are really able to give. Seva is the best way to get away from our own confusions, sadness, our own troubles that we have created by being so self-centered. Seva is the best and simplest sadhana Every day there should be a conscious effort made. Be of service. Seva is a moment of service from which I do not expect anything in return. No acknowledgements, no credits, no praise; then it becomes sadhana, spiritual practice.

What is love? Be there for yourself first. It is very easy to get carried away. Take a few moments each day to acknowledge "I am". Look in the mirror. Take a nice deep breath. Do your practice to get grounded. When you are grounded, every thing flows smoothly. You don't have to jump up to prove yourself in the world. What are you trying to prove and to whom? You need approval from others only if you don't have it from yourself. Take a moment every day to be there for yourself. Then you can be there for seva, you can be there for giving, you can be there for receiving.

Our Ashram is a small Ashram. Not much crowd or pomp and show. It's a very sweet Ashram, a very special place. If you haven't been to many Ashrams, you may not recognize how sweet this Ashram is! It is because you are here. Each and every one of you has participated in creating this place with your labor of love and your precious time. Baba's motto is, "Be a small bush, rather than a tall palm tree. Although small, a bush is capable of giving shade to a weary traveler; whereas a palm tree although very big has no shade for an individual in need. Even little birds can't sit on it. Yes! Often vultures who can fly high, do sit on it. And by chance if a tired traveler stops to lean against its trunk to rest, there is the possibility of a coconut falling on his head." We are content to be a small bush. On this special day of Guru Purnima, I acknowledge the presence of the Guru within each one of us. I feel waves of love coming from your hearts. I bow to that Guru residing within you.



SRI SARVESHVARI SAMOOR, USA  
Sonoma Yoga Ashram

P.O. Box 950 1087 Craig Avenue Sonoma, CA 95476 USA  
PH 707-996-8915 FAX 707-996-0388  
Send email: [info@sonomaashram.org](mailto:info@sonomaashram.org)

© 2004 Aghor Publications, all rights reserved