

An Introduction to Lateral Satsang

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Lateral Satsang is a satsang format where there is no apparent vertical hierarchy and no apparent lead Teacher. There is a host, however, and as in every gathering of beings (each with differing “mileage” on their path) there *is* a natural hierarchy of wisdom in the room. The Satguru in all emerges from this pool, along with a natural hierarchy of guidance and pointing that “bubbles up” to be shared and listened to by all. So, in a sense, this is satsang in “stealth mode”. Brother Wayne Teasdale traces the tradition to early circles of mystics who gathered and, together, “stoked the fire”, each adding some fuel when the time was just right. That is why, after a least a half hour of silence, there is usually a theme to set direction.

An example of one of these themes is below, spoken by me at a recent Lateral Satsang gathering. It’s one of my favorite themes, about the profound simplicity of nondual practice:

“I want to speak briefly about "The Importance of Keeping it Simple". You know, in our busy lives in New York City one of the most important things is, in the morning as we start our day, to get on the right subway line, the right bus, or right commuter train. If we do, things go smoothly and we don't think much about it, things just go well; but, if we don't we suddenly have trouble. I use the metaphor because I think in our busy and engaged lives it's important to remind ourselves, our Heart and mind, of what reality is really like. If we do this as we start the day, we get on the right path, things go smoothly and we don't think much about it.

Well, what is this reality? In all the "direct" or "nondual" paths it is quite simple. There is the space that we are and, in that space, simply what is arising and subsiding. This is really all there is-- the space we are, what is arising and subsiding in that space-- thoughts, feelings, sensations-- and, the question then is what we bring to that. It's an amazing realization when we understand that no matter where we are, now or ever, this will not change. There will simply be the space we are, what is arising and subsiding in experience and what we bring to that, from the Heart.

This also speaks very simply to the question of "what is humankind?", "what is this species Homo sapiens?". We are not the conventional thing we have been taught. That is, we are not just beings sitting here in the headquarters of our bodies looking out through the two windows of our eyes at what is "out there" in an external world. To say the least, it is obviously not only a far more 360-degree, interconnected, panoramic phenomena, but one in which we are actually, strange as it may seem, each The Main Event. In our each being the main event-- each this phenomena of the space which we are and what is arising and subsiding-- what we really are, humankind, is the place or the template in the universe where simultaneously experienced is (i) that which never changes and (ii) that which is always changing. What we are is that reality, or template, where those seemingly hugely different things are the same. We can see that everything is the same, made of the same thing-- there are no differences, not even time. Yet simultaneously we see that, in appearance this Unity is always shifting and changing in appearance-- arising and subsiding, coming and going.

So, if we are Unity, the Main Event, the both of these-- change and no change-- it is hard to have a problem. Or, if the appearance of a problem arises in the appearance of change we certainly have a powerful, artful, tool for meshing "big picture" and "little picture". We can be pretty cool about it, because we are that in the first place.

No matter how the words may sound, these are very simple things to remind ourselves of-- (i) the space we are, what is arising and subsiding in that space, and what we bring to that; and (ii) the simultaneity of that which Never Changes but which always appears as change. Actually, if you reflect on it, is it this dynamic that makes the day to day reality rich and the source of wonder and bliss. This is a simple world view but one that contains everything and contains it artfully. Meshing, unifying, these elements-- the ones the world thinks of as so contradictory-- we can really be like a Parent able cradle all of reality peacefully in our lap.

So, just like we do well each day if we start our way on the right subway line, bus, or commuter train, its helpful to put ourselves on the right way by continually, gently, reminding ourselves of what reality is really about."

Two to three Lateral Satsangs are held per month, free of charge, in New York City private homes. You can contact kurt at kurtjohnsonisd@yahoo.com.

