

Life Stories of Shibendu Baba – 1 : Instruments for enquiry into the inner world

Stories of Lahiri Mahashaya, Tinkori Baba, and Satyacharan Baba have long been shared as messages. This is the first of a series of messages on stories from the life of my father, Shibendu Baba. Each story has been lovingly contributed by Kriyabans offering glimpses into their personal experiences and moments spent in Baba's physical presence. These stories are not meant to entertain but to serve as an invitation - to reflect deeply and discover what these stories may reveal within your own life and spiritual journey.

Story 1 - A Mother's lesson in Alertness

A beautiful story was shared during the Kumbh Retreat in January 2025, illustrating the *fire of alertness* and its importance in our daily relationships - as a mirror for *swadhyay*, the understanding of the ways of the 'self'.

In his childhood, Shibendu Baba would often accompany his mother, Renuka Devi, to the nearby Garudeshwar temple in the lanes of Varanasi, where many Shiva-lingas were enshrined. Every morning, the temple bells would echo through the quiet air as Renuka Devi carried her *kamandal* filled with sacred Ganga water. Handing it to young Shibendu, she would gently instruct, "Putee" (as she affectionately called him), "offer just two drops on each Shiva-linga - no more, no less."

The little boy would carefully tilt the *kamandal*, watching each drop fall with full attention, ensuring it was exactly two. His mother would watch quietly, her eyes reflecting both tenderness and precision. Though she had very little formal education, Renuka Devi possessed a deep wisdom born of awareness. She knew that true spirituality is rooted not in rituals alone, but in the alertness of every act.

In this simple daily practice, young Shibendu was unknowingly being trained in the *fire of alertness*: that every relationship, every gesture, every moment can become a mirror for self-understanding when approached with alertness.

Story 2 - Be a detective of 'Truth'

A young couple visited Satyalok in Varanasi to seek blessings on their first wedding anniversary. To their pleasant surprise, Shibendu Baba was present there during their visit. As they arrived, they met Baba wearing a simple *gamcha* (a thin cotton towel wrapped around the waist) energetically chasing mischievous monkeys on the roof top with a stick. The scene caught them off guard, as it didn't match their mental image of a Guru. A little later, as Baba sat in the verandah shaving, he engaged in conversation with them - and with a few others - speaking with warmth and loving touch.

As the couple prepared to leave, they expressed their wish to receive Kriya initiation and asked Baba when they might return for it. Baba told them that since it was February, they should come back in July to attend the next program. Eager to make the most of the intervening months, the husband earnestly asked if Shibendu Baba could recommend any books to help them prepare for initiation.

Baba looked at them intently, as if seeing beyond their words. After a moment's silence, he said softly, "If you are truly eager to prepare, read stories of the famous detective *Sherlock Holmes*." The couple was taken aback by this unexpected suggestion. Seeing their surprise, Baba laughed gently and then shared a memorable teaching they would never forget.

He said, "Our individual spiritual journey is like a deep investigation, fact-based, and like a detective, one must inquire and see 'what is' directly for oneself. Do not merely believe what is written in spiritual books or what is preached by gurus, mahatmas, or maha-mandaleshwars. The phenomenon of life is to be lived and understood first hand, not borrowed from another's experience. Only through one's own investigation can one discern what must be questioned, what must be negated, and what is truth." Baba continued, "Sherlock Holmes is a detective

par excellence—thorough, alert, and unrelenting in his inquiry. Read his stories and learn to investigate life with the same precision and clarity. Become a detective of truth.”

His words touched the couple deeply. In that moment, they knew they had found their Guru.

Perceptions

Humanity has achieved extraordinary progress in one direction - the outer world of technology - where the mind seems to hold boundless potential, reshaping life, and society in countless beneficial ways. Yet in another direction - the inner world of the psyche - despite thousands of years of evolution, we remain anxious, unhappy, uncertain, hypocritical, dishonest, corrupt, violent, burdened with suffering, mindless, careless, indifferent, and brutal. This inner disorder keeps us in constant conflict within ourselves and with one another and has pushed humanity to the edge of self-destruction. Inner disorder inevitably manifests as outer disorder - the chaos we see in the world today is a reflection of our inner confusion. The crisis is not in the outer world, not the nuclear war, climate change, the division and brutality we see all around today. The real crisis is within us, in our consciousness, in what we are and what we have become.

So why is it that we have neglected the inner world, the world of consciousness? If we can go in one direction, the outward direction, with such extraordinary vigour and energy, why are we incapable of going into the inner world with the same intensity? What can we do about it? How do we approach the inner world? The inner world is perhaps far, far more important than the outer world since the inner world dictates our outward activity.

Thought - the very tool we rely on for inquiry – is inadequate

For learning in the outer world, thought is used for accumulating knowledge, ideas and concepts – to learn a new language, a new skill or solve a problem. Our brains are used to that pattern of learning. We then apply the same pattern to learning in the inner world by accumulating knowledge from spiritual and religious books, institutions, religious leaders and those who say ‘I know’. We surrender ourselves to ideas, concepts and conclusions and hope there will eventually be inner transformation over time. But this pattern has not worked for us. We are still what we are and perhaps getting worse.

To understand why this pattern does not work, we begin our enquiry into the inner psychological world, the world of consciousness and ask what is the content of our consciousness? It is our beliefs, opinions, experiences, illusions, superstitions, gods, fear, pleasure, jealousy, anger, loneliness, sorrow, grief, fear of death and so on. And that is what we are – the content of our consciousness. This content is put together by our thought right from our childhood and stored in our memory as psychological registrations. And thought also divides this consciousness into various parts, invents a super consciousness, a thinker to look at these parts – but it is still part of our consciousness. Having created the limitations and problems in our consciousness, thought then tries to solve the problems and so increases the problems further. When you try to analyze your inner conflict using thought, you are using the very thing that created the conflict. That’s why confusion persists. This is the part of the Swadhyay teachings we share in Kriya Yoga initiation programs.

Thought is a blunt, worn-out tool. It may be clever in solving technical problems, but it is hopelessly inadequate for resolving the inner turmoil it has itself created. Unless we discover a new instrument of inquiry, there can be no radical transformation of the human psyche.

So, is there another tool for inner inquiry? What is its nature, its quality, its structure?

Alertness & Investigation – tools for inner inquiry

Enquiry into the inner world begins with alertness - a heightened sensitivity free from distortion that thought creates.

When we look at anything, can we watch without the intrusion of words? Look at a flower without immediately naming it or saying I have seen it before. Look at your fear, sorrow, or loneliness without naming the feeling with the word. In your relationships, look at someone without all the images, words you have accumulated about him or her from the past – like you would look at a person on the road you have never met before. When you look at something or someone without words, thought does not interfere because thought cannot operate without words.

In that silence, thought no longer stands between you and what is being observed. Then, direct perception becomes possible - seeing *what is* as it truly is. To look without the word requires tremendous alertness.

Similarly, when we listen to another, we rarely hear what is being said directly. Instead, we distort it to fit our own theories, preferences, comforts, or past knowledge, or dismiss it by saying, "*someone else has already said this.*" If we carry an image or conclusion about the speaker, that very image also prevents true listening. But when we listen without background, without images, the brain becomes extraordinarily sensitive, alive, and alert – a quality rarely present in our day to day lives.

In this kind of alertness, there is no choice. There is a no centre created by thought and where there is no centre, there is no circumference, no boundary that breeds resistance and division, and 'I like – I don't like'. In that alertness we are enquiring with a free mind, not the baggage of past knowledge and memories, belief systems.

We can then begin to explore the inner world with alertness, much like a detective solving a mystery. In this kind of investigation, we don't rush toward answers. Instead, we stay with the question itself, examining it from every angle - not to resolve it quickly, but to understand it deeply. A question held without seeking an answer becomes a mirror, reflecting the mind that asks it. In such investigation, questions are not mere tools for collecting information. Their true value does not lie in the answers they produce, but in their power to open gateways to insight.

Usually, when faced with a problem, we instinctively chase an idea we have of the solution or avoid the problem since it causes discomfort both of which are really an impulse to escape from the problem. This impulse to fix or flee prevents us from truly understanding the nature of the problem. Instead of escaping, if we begin to understand the nature of the problem, explore its roots, its implications, how it came to be, in that very process of investigation of the problem the solution begins to unfold naturally. This investigation is like shining a spotlight on the problem. When fully illuminated, the problem loses its grip, dissolves, and does not return. It is not the answer that liberates us, but the clarity born of sustained attention.

This kind of investigation is like a serious game - played with joy, curiosity, and a mind eager to discover, not driven by motive. If there's a motive, then you are not playing the game properly. But when played properly, it opens us to the wonder of consciousness, the vast, extraordinary existence of life that we often reduce to the narrow confines of the little "me".

And perhaps, during this investigation, something unexpected may happen and as the mystic poet Kabir once said, "*You don't have to run after Hari (God), Hari will run after you.*"

Jai Guru