

PUJYA BHAI'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Shri Nathalal H. Joshi, reverentially and lovingly known as Pujya Bhai, was born on 4 October 1920 in the town of Junagadh in the Western state of Gujarat, India. Under the loving care and religious upbringing of his parents, he had a happy childhood.

From a very young age, Pujya Bhai was fond of reading books. Even during his college years, he would read at home for hours after class. He found little interest in what was taught at school, but was intrigued by Indian philosophy, and Western philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and others. He was also interested in the modern socio-political writings of Karl Marx and contemporary Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, and other freedom fighters. He used to climb the nearby mountain, *Girnar*, with a stack of books and some snacks in his duffle bag, find a secluded spot, and read until dusk.

Subsequent to graduating with a bachelor's degree, he had completed all requirements for a Master's program at a local college, but when he went to file an application for the final examination -- the very last step needed to earn a Master's degree in Arts -- he experienced something unexpected and life-altering. As he scaled the last few steps to enter the building, he suddenly felt as if his feet were glued to the concrete steps. He could not proceed any further.

What must have gone through his mind in this moment? After spending years on his studies how could he come so close to the final qualifying examination and simply stop? It was as if an incomprehensible force was overpowering his will. Instantaneously and with perfect clarity, he realized that his human will was being set aside in favor of the supremely powerful and all-knowing Divine Will. He knew that to attain true happiness and peace in life, he would have to surrender to God in absolute terms. Years later, he wrote about this in *Amrutam*, his eight-volume collection of writings (Chapter titled Inspirations, verse No. 141; hereinafter, all references to Inspirations are from *Amrutam*, volume 1):

*The attainment of perfect happiness
Is possible only through God.
Because God is perfect,
While the world is imperfect.*

*Expectations are many;
Not all are met*

*There is always a conflict
In the efforts to satisfy desires.
The sting of unfilled wants is felt;
The mind is disturbed.*

*The Presence of God alone is
The highest summit of peace.*

Pujya Bhai now understood the path his life was destined to take. He knew without a doubt that God was redirecting his course. He was not to entertain any worldly ambitions like higher education, or relying on a college degree to earn money to support himself and his parents. He was to live his entire life for a spiritual purpose.

On those concrete steps, without any hesitation, Pujya Bhai surrendered to this unknown Divine Force. He decided to surrender his psycho-physical existence to a spiritual one. He relinquished the opportunity to appear for the final examination and instead patiently awaited for God's direction for the next chapter in his life.

Total surrender to the Divine Will became the corner stone of Pujya Bhai's life and teachings from this point on. Years later, he wrote about the importance of true surrender to God in Inspiration No. 145:

*Only a person who has unshakeable faith in God
Can be meaningfully surrendered to God.
One who is surrendered
Does not retain the ownership of his actions,
Nor does he desire to enjoy the fruits of such actions.
In a state of surrender,
God Himself becomes the sole controller in charge.*

*Surrender to God is the highest form of self-effort.
It is also the ultimate accomplishment.*

On 23 May 1943, 22-year old Pujya Bhai was married to a girl named Ramaben (Pujya Ben), who lived in Gondal, a smaller town 65 km from Junagadh. Years later, he told others that he had a premonition that they were destined for each other even before they met. Throughout his youth, Pujya Bhai had intuitive flashes about past, present and future events and could look into the minds and hearts of people. But he would not accept these flashes unchallenged. He would make every attempt to prove to himself that they were not mere illusions.

In 1946, a momentous event took place in Pujya Bhai's life. He described it as follows:

“On 8 January 1946, between 12:30 and 1:00 PM, I was sitting alone in a room upstairs in my house in Junagadh, when out of nowhere, there was an explosion of Divine energy of such immense magnitude that even the walls of the room shook. One of the dinner plates stacked in the mezzanine fell and rolled along the walls, finally coming to rest against a wall. It was emanating the sound of anklets. A bright light filled the room. My lips turned rose-colored red. Aromas wafted from my fingers for a long time.”

Pujya Bhai heard a Divine Voice proclaim, “I am *Amba*.....Divinity born..... unparalleled Supreme Power of the Universe.” [*Amba* is short for *Jagadamba*, the Divine Mother.]

In that moment, Pujya Bhai realized that the Divine Mother had manifested. Though She was with him from birth, this was the day when the Divine Mother revealed Herself fully as the Supreme Power and confirmed that She had always been with him and that She was indeed within him to stay. Pujya Bhai told a follower many years later, “On that day, Ma declared Herself.”

Pujya Bhai has explained this phenomena of Divine Incarnation in Inspiration No. 137:

*The Divine Incarnation is
The descent of the Supreme Consciousness,
Concretized in a human form.*

*His arrival is a new dawn for the world.
By His sayings and life He offers a new vision;
Brings a message for the present age.
He is a self-illuminated Eternal Lamp,
Lighting up innumerable other lamps.
His aroma of sanctity is ever expanding.*

*He is a transcendent bridge between
Human beings and the Supreme Being.*

Pujya Bhai was later asked, “Were you just like us before and on that day you were transformed into a Divine Incarnation?” His reply was unequivocal: “The Divine Mother wished to remain hidden. On that day, She declared Herself. Prior to that day, I had intuitive flashes but I wasn’t fully cognizant of the dual facets of my existence: human and Divine.” He then added with a hearty laugh, “Otherwise maybe I wouldn’t have got married, and would have lost a golden opportunity to be an ordinary householder man like everyone else!” Otherwise, he would not have had a Divine companion through marriage. They were to live a married life, have a daughter, live in a modest house like other ordinary people living in the community. This type of life was in itself one of his great teachings for this age.

When this unique, mystical event took place, Pujya Bhai had been enduring the most excruciating agony imaginable for almost three years. Within about two weeks after his marriage on 23 May 1943, his body was subjected to *Vayu*, a strange phenomena which is described in the Hindu scriptures as a physical manifestation of the Divine Power occupying a human body. It is a physical process wherein the stomach swiftly exhales a huge amount of air (not gas) with such tremendous force that its stream can reach, and be felt, ten or more feet away. Over the years, numerous doctors have confirmed that this is not a condition that ordinary human beings experience, and that medical science had no explanation for it. It remained with Pujya Bhai continually for his life's remaining 70 years, with brief respites. It required someone to be by his bedside all through the night so that he could be helped to sit up whenever his sleep was interrupted due to a choking sensation, and the pain became excessive.

For the rest of his life from 1946 onward, Pujya Bhai ate very little, only liquid food: a half cup of vegetable and legume soup, and a half cup of tea with milk. He would drink these in spoonfuls so that they would last the whole day. His body could not manage anything more because of the phenomenon affecting him, *Vayu*.

Once someone asked him, "For many years you haven't eaten anything solid. The liquid that you drink is just a small amount, not enough to survive on. How do you get your energy?" Pujya Bhai replied, "Where does food get its energy from?" "From the Sun." Pujya Bhai said, "Who gives energy to the Sun?" The person answered, "God." "Well then, can't the same God give me the energy I need directly?" The person found this succinct explanation highly satisfying. He had been agonizing over this riddle for a very long time.

Pujya Bhai was 22 when this inexplicable phenomena of *Vayu* first occurred. On and off, from this day on his bed became his usual resting place. The first three years were marked by continuous, excruciating physical pain until the Divine Manifestation transformed his body. During those years, his mother and Pujya Ben were constantly attending to him. He was subjected to many medical tests and doctors' visits in order to dispel any doubts in the minds of those close to him that he was not afflicted by any disease, but was experiencing a Divine process, in full accord with the Divine Will. At the same time, he was also showing them by his example that a life lived in total and absolute surrender to the Divine is not a torture but a most desirable spiritual delight. Years later, he wrote in Inspiration No. 21:

*Even terrifying calamities are simply
The compassion-filled openings
In your finite consciousness
Created by the boundless Divine Energy,
So that you become aware of*

The existence and reign of God's Infinite Power.

*That Supreme Sovereign,
By beaming dazzling rays of light through these openings,
Will erase the line of separation between you and God,
And transform your state of prolonged failures into success.*

In later years, Pujya Bhai explained that *Vayu* was not a sickness or a physical oddity, but a concrete form of the Divine Energy residing in his body for the purpose of Divine work. His body was to be sacrificed, undergoing indescribable agonies for the rest of his life so that this Divine phenomena could extend its spiritual mantle over the world and usher in a new age of the worship of the Divine Mother as the Supreme Power. This was to be the *Yug-Sandesh*: a spiritual message for the new age that was dawning.

In order to follow and integrate in our lives this *Yug-Sandesh* -- the message for the new age, Pujya Bhai spoke of three requisites: *Smaran*, *Sharan*, and *Charan*.

By *Smaran* he meant *Nam-Smaran*, unceasing repetition of the Divine Names. This was Pujya Bhai's preferred spiritual practice to be used by all who aspired to the union with God through love. In Inspiration No. 20, he says:

*You are not a pauper.
Only he who is averse to Nam-Smaran of God
Is impoverished and unfortunate.
His deprivation is painful.
In remembrance of God, poverty of all sorts is effaced.*

An essential companion to *Nam-Smaran* is prayer, about which Pujya Bhai has written extensively in *Amrutam*. For instance, in Inspiration No. 100:

*When your helpless existence,
Resembling a raindrop fluttering in the wind,
Trembles in the gust of worldliness,
Prayer will make God, the Ocean of Grace, eager to meet you.*

Further in Inspiration No. 129:

*Prayer is heart's longing for union with God;
Like a sage-blessed mantra,
It is infused with Divine Consciousness.
A stream of thought focused on God is like
A filament of smoke rising up from an incense stick.
Prayer for a worldly need also has a place:
God gives an appropriate response.*

*God showers His Grace upon the soul of
A person who prays for no worldly favors,
And softens various layers of his consciousness.*

*That prayer is best when offered solely
For the union with God.*

Since the practice of *Nam-Smaran* and prayer needed a framework for a new, spiritual way of living, Pujya Bhai spoke of the second requisite: *Sharan*, surrender to God. This can only be partial in the beginning, he said. Through constant awareness of ego's grip on our daily activities and interactions with people, we can begin to surrender to the Divine Will, and open ourselves to receive the Divine Grace. Pujya Bhai explained that surrender to God was not to be a mechanical process. He points to its mystical significance in Inspiration No. 50:

*For someone,
Who is absolutely surrendered to God,
God is the way and
God is the end as well.*

The third requisite, *Charan*, literally means "feet". To take refuge at the Divine feet is to receive the Divine Grace. On numerous occasions, Pujya Bhai had said that our self-efforts are incomplete and finite, while God is Infinite. They are not sufficient in themselves for attaining pure love of God. In Inspiration No. 62 he says:

*Selfless love for God
Is not attainable through self-effort;
It is gained through the Grace of God.*

The mysticism of the Divine Grace, as the means and the end, is hinted at in Inspiration No. 142:

*His divine, unbroken Flow of Immortal Life,
And the comprehension of this auspicious vision
Are dependent solely upon His Grace.*

(Further references to these three requisites are found in numerous verses of *Amrutam's* eight volumes.)

From the Divine Manifestation Day, Pujya Bhai freely shared his Divine attributes: Wisdom, Power and Compassion. He was able to see the past, present and future, and events occurring at, near, or far distances. Once when a visitor had doubted his supernatural powers, he stopped the pendulum of a clock that was in the next room without getting up from his seat, asked the person to

confirm that it had indeed stopped, and then he restarted the clock in the visitor's presence to his amazement.

He once said, "The entire universe is an open book to me because the Divine Mother pervades everywhere. She is in the smallest atomic particle as much as in the universes at large." But he did not abandon his ordinary human qualities and limitations. They were self-imposed in the context of his Divinity. However, he always remained equally true and faithful to both of his facets: humanity and Divinity.

He said that since he was a rational being, he used to check and recheck his state of mind to make sure he was not indulging in flights of fancy when great powers and attributes shone through him.

Over a span of more than six decades, thousands of people -- both true followers and those who came to see him merely out of curiosity -- experienced Pujya Bhai's miraculous powers in their lives. He spontaneously cured grave diseases like cancer and heart ailments, and many found freedom from mental sicknesses and relief from financial or social worries after visiting him. He explained that such miracles are merely the tangible signs of God's Grace and power, and God's love for us. Miracles are meant to make us humble and bring us closer to God. Over the years, many of his followers have written personal diaries, as yet only a few have been published, documenting conversations with Pujya Bhai and about the miraculous transformations brought about in their lives by the power of his Divinity.

More tangible than the miracles, was Pujya Bhai's unparalleled love showered on all those who visited him. His followers would travel long distances, even from overseas, for a life-altering touch of this Divine love and to experience his Divine Presence. Rationality cannot comprehend the transformation in consciousness that took place through such visits. This would transport the visitors onto a higher plane of spiritual experience where a miracle would appear as a mere adjunct to his love for them.

Divinity would at times remain hidden behind the cloak of Pujya Bhai's humanity, and at other times it would be out in front for all to see and experience, and be awed and blessed by it. But Pujya Bhai never implied that such access to Divine Grace was exclusive to anyone. Instead, he invariably attributed everything that was occurring in his life to the Divine Mother and encouraged others to attain the same through a loving relationship with Her. In Inspiration No. 139 he wrote:

*Instantly upon the annihilation of ego
The doors to the realm of Eternity are opened.
Infinite space is unveiled.
A new dawn begins in life.
When anchored in the Infinite,*

*The finite boundaries vanish.
The real breeze of freedom is gained.
The immortal shower of Bliss begins.*

Pujya Bhai and Pujya Ben were setting an example of how to maintain a strong family life under harsh living conditions. From the start of their marriage on 23 May 1943, they lived under extreme poverty. Yet Pujya Bhai never engaged in making money through “spiritual consultations” or being a “Guru”. Once during a conversation, Pujya Bhai told a follower that he was not a preacher, a philosopher, a poet, a religious reformer or anybody’s *Guru*, nor was he a member or an official of any religious group or institution. The follower asked, “Then what should you be known as?” He simply replied, “A spiritual being.” Pujya Bhai has repeatedly said over the years that his path, his teachings are non-sectarian because God is above and beyond all sects and religions.

Pujya Bhai’s attendant handled any offerings that were made by visitors. He took no interest in his own financial matters. Instead, he made himself freely available to all who wanted his spiritual guidance or Divine intervention to resolve their personal problems. He would stay at home, never venturing out. He bound the journalists and writers who came to see him by a promise not to publish any articles, interviews or books about him. Likewise, his followers refrained from publicizing their good fortune, in deference to his wishes. People would come to him as the word of mouth began to spread about his Divine powers. Miracles began to take place in the lives of many, at the physical and spiritual level, without limitations imposed by cast, creed, race or religion.

Soon after his mother had passed away, in 1946 Pujya Bhai and Pujya Ben moved to Gondal. Their daughter, Indiraben, was later born there. In 1962, they moved to a new house named “Shruti”, where Pujya Bhai lived almost all of his remaining life. Pujya Ben passed away on 6 July 1994 in a Mumbai hospital where she had been taken for cancer treatment. Pujya Bhai had traveled from Gondal, despite his poor health, to be by her side in the hospital when she passed away.

Pujya Bhai, having surrendered absolutely to the Divine Will, always accepted the advice of doctors, without any resistance, in the case of Pujya Ben’s or his own health. He used to say that doctors, medications and patients are all manifestations of the same Divine Consciousness and, therefore, the entire process of disease and its successful or unsuccessful treatment reflects nothing but the Divine Will.

On 4 July 2011, Pujya Bhai was transferred for a while to a hospital in Ahmedabad, the largest city in Gujarat, where modern medical facilities were

available. A staff of experienced doctors and specialists took care of Pujya Bhai's health until he left his mortal body on 19 May 2013. He had fully surrendered to the medical team and had given them complete freedom. The doctors felt blessed to be serving Pujya Bhai and were witnesses to many miracles. Even in the midst of excruciating physical suffering, he welcomed visitors to his bedside with his enchanting smile and inquired about their well-being. During his final days, he often was unable to speak to them, because his body was too frail to cope with the strain. But he never complained about his physical condition.

His body was brought to Gondal and was cremated on 21 May on the same spot where Pujya Ben's body had been cremated. There is a small memorial shrine, called *Smruti Mandir*, on that spot adjoining *Shri Jagadamba Temple*.

From 1946 onward, Pujya Bhai relied on the offerings and donations of his followers and visitors to provide for the basic necessities of life. At the same time, he remained faithful and true to his Humanity; he functioned with his body and mind, and allowed himself to be subjected to the laws of Nature. He explained that all Divine Incarnations through the ages, among all religions, were the human embodiments of the same Supreme Being -- God. The only differences between these Incarnations could be explained by the prevailing culture and teachings necessary for the particular age in which they lived. Their human limitations were neither fake nor a hindrance to their Divine manifestations.

After Pujya Bhai moved to "*Shruti*", his life became more "open to the public"; and many more spiritual seekers and visitors sought him, especially for personal conversations. Pujya Bhai never went out to give lectures but he did not hold back his teachings or insights from anyone. Though he mostly spoke in his own language, Gujarati, he was fluent in English and many other languages as well, some through Divine knowledge. For instance, once with a follower from Africa, he held a conversation in Swahili, a language he could not have known. He explained later that the Divine Mother spoke through him.

In 1956, Pujya Bhai set up a charitable Trust named "Shri Bhagavat Sadhan Sangh", which had begun to provide free lodging and meals to the visitors, many of whom would stay for several weeks at a time. No one was ever asked to pay, but if they wished to contribute toward the expenses, they could do so anonymously in a small box placed on a wall in a one-story structure behind "*Shruti*". This was also the place where the visitors would stay overnight and enjoy their communal meals.

Pujya Bhai lived the life he taught. He frequently said that we are to transform ourselves from psycho-physical beings to spiritual beings -- a sentiment he often expressed in his writings. (Inspiration Nos. are shown in brackets):

*Turn off the noise of your mind and the senses,
And with receptivity, listen to the melodious notes*

*Emanating from the depths of your being.
This will create harmony in your discordant consciousness.* (81)

*Keep your path of spiritual practice
Illumined by the lamppost of sanctity.* (88)

*The moment at which your mind turns toward God,
Consider it to be the glorious dawn of your life.
If the same orientation were to continue
During your life's waning hours,
The twilight of your life would also become most delightful.* (90)

*You may have reached the pinnacle of success,
But if the remembrance of God is lost,
It is your life's utter failure.
You may have tumbled down a deep ravine of failure,
But if the remembrance of God is retained,
It is your life's complete success.* (92)

*To believe that God will be impressed
By your intellectual cleverness is delusion;
That God will be drawn closure by your prestige
Is also a great illusion.
Neither will God come running to you
Because of the grandeur of your wealth or
The charm of your beauty.
But if you were to offer a garland around His neck,
Made of the flowers of love,
On which are sprinkled the tears of a pure heart,
God will be highly pleased!* (94)

*If you fix your gaze on
The meditative state of the night
Bathed in moonlight and immersed in complete stillness,
And on the great silence of the sky
Absorbed in a state of trance,
You will arrive at the deepest level of your inner realm,
Where intimate contact can be made with the Divinity
Who resides there incognito, but is ever-awake.* (95)

*Personality adorned with Divine wealth
Is the true mark of honor in human life.
Such celestial life is decorated
With numerous mystical gems,
And its luminous praise-worthy image
Is imprinted in the heart of God.* (102)

Through his own example that a modern human being can emulate, Pujya Bhai showed that the ultimate goal of life is the mystical union with God through a loving relationship based on absolute and total surrender to God.

To help us build this loving relationship with God as our Divine Mother, Pujya Bhai drew our attention to the child-mother relationship. In Inspiration No. 111, first he describes what childlike simplicity is:

*Life's unblemished glow is delightful.
Childlike simplicity is devoid of friction.
Flowers' beauty and fragrance are their essential nature.
Nightingale's song is an impulse of contentment.
In the light of the stars lies their natural smile.*

Then in Inspiration No. 106, he says:

*O Brother!
The clouds of the lunar month of Ashadh,
Bulging with water and bowing low,
Soak the earth and make it fertile and green.

The Divine Mother too,
Carrying Infinite Compassion and bowing low,
Lifts up the children who are depraved, helpless and mired in muck,
And makes them loving and pure.*

In Inspiration No. 53, Pujya Bhai offers advice for enduring periods of indecision or inner conflict, or trying to find a way out of some unsettling situation:

*O Brother!
When reasoning provides you no satisfactory solution,
Instead creates billows of smoke,
Then, like an untutored child,
Take refuge in the lap of
The All-Knowing Divine Mother.*

You shall gain both inner peace and the satisfactory solution.

In order to answer the question, "How can one create a loving relationship with God?" Pujya Bhai writes in Inspiration No. 54:

*Your personal, egocentric self-effort
Cannot achieve God-realization.
For a union with the Infinite Being
Such effort is utterly trivial and insignificant;*

*But your humble, complete surrender
Shall invariably draw God closer to you.*

As we see from all his conversations and writings, surrender to God was the single most important topic. That was the foundation of Puja Bhai's life and teachings, which he emphasized to his visitors and followers as an essential requirement of spiritual life. He was keen on showing the beneficial spiritual effects of surrender to God as well; these were not mere intellectual concepts gleaned from books. As a Divine Incarnation -- one who embodied Divine Consciousness with Its Supreme Wisdom, Power and Love to the fullest -- Puja Bhai could say these things with spiritual authority, as he does in Inspiration No. 125:

*The moments of complete surrender
Touch the Divine realm of Eternity;
Immerse one in Its Infinite Existence.*

*At the juncture of this realization,
Oppressive memories are erased and
The burden of imagined worries is lifted.
This is the flight of the free bird in the light;
The self-revealed song of Consciousness;
The exultant swells of the ocean of Bliss.*

At the same time, Puja Bhai laid out a natural and effective path for achieving a state of surrender and love for God, wherein two things need to occur simultaneously: Self-effort and Divine Grace. He advised us to be receptive to the Divine Grace while trying to acquire basic virtues, since ultimately our progress is through the Divine Grace and not through self-effort. Though our efforts are important and essential, they count for nothing compared to the Divine Grace, which he wrote about in Inspiration No. 62:

*Selfless love for God
Is not attainable through self-effort;
It is gained through the Grace of God.*

Receiving such Grace was called "The Divine Mother's Touch" by Puja Bhai's followers, after which we are to follow our spiritual path with constant vigilance and firm faith. He used to say that all religions have saints, prophets and mystics who can be the lamp-posts on our spiritual paths.

Puja Bhai's teachings on sin and eternal damnation were very clear. He described acts that might normally be labeled as "sinful" as errors of judgment. For instance, in Inspiration No. 19, he wrote:

Every human being is fully entitled to

*The attainment of Divine Perfection.
Sin is not an eternal stigma.
When the drifting clouds of spiritual ignorance disperse,
One regains the awareness of the Inner Self.*

On the subject of religions, Pujya Bhai emphasized that all religions, if practiced correctly and sincerely, lead to the same God. Speaking metaphorically he said, "On a bicycle wheel, there are many spokes but all of them lead to the one and only hub. If you are on one spoke, and someone entices you to come to his spoke because he says it is better, you will need to go back to the circumference and then travel down his spoke. You would have wasted the precious little time God has given you in this life. But if you had stayed on your course, you would have reached the hub sooner."

For this reason, Pujya Bhai was against religious conversions and missionary work with that purpose. He was born a Hindu. To him, Hinduism was a universal religion since it encompassed all paths that lead to the same God, whether God with form or without. Hinduism allows the worship and veneration of all Divine Incarnations, prophets, saints and sages of all religions. However, he never said that Hinduism -- or any other religion -- could claim the shortest spoke to the hub -- God.

All religions, Pujya Bhai said, teach us to cultivate a similar set of virtues. In a benediction at the opening of "Smruti Mandir" on 12 January 2000, he spoke of six virtues: Detachment from worldliness, Compassion, Patience, Tolerance, Generosity and Penance.

These did not constitute a regimented set of rules or practices to be followed, but a practical guide to rising above worldliness, and to making our lives virtuous, pure, loving and suitable for the Divine Mother to establish Herself within our hearts.

In the same benediction, Pujya Bhai showed how one should pray:

I pray to the Divine from the depth of my heart that:

*May we be blessed with those noble qualities;
May we become fully virtuous;
May we spend the remainder of our lives surrendered at Thy feet;
May we become humble, tolerant and endowed with spiritual light;
May we be engaged in relieving the sufferings of others;
May we fulfill the purpose of our lives; and
May we feel the gratitude for life at the time of our departure.*

It is my prayer that such noble sentiments become permanent in our hearts.

Pujya Bhai knew that the spiritual practices often prescribed in *ashrams*, monasteries, or hermitages tended to leave a practitioner devoid of joy of life. Also, due to ethical pitfalls and moral degradations likely to occur in such settings, he disapproved of the establishment of any *ashrams*. But he did not frown upon those spiritual seekers who lived like a hermit in a properly supervised hermitage. He wrote in Inspiration No. 14:

*Intense renunciation and severe austerities
Sometimes make a spiritual seeker
Dull, lopsided and ego-centric.
Tenderness of love and
Humility of true surrender
Annihilate egotism;
Also they bring about sweet balance
In spiritual discipline and life.*

Pujya Bhai also taught by pointing to the journey within. Inspiration No. 13 says:

*If you would search your soul with impartial eyes,
Your shortcomings will begin to fade like the stars at dawn.
This is a powerful means for reaching the ultimate destination.*

And again in Inspiration No. 4:

*If a person drunk with the wine of egotism were
To gaze patiently in the direction of the cosmos,
He would vividly realize his own insignificance.
Whereas, in the lethal moments of helplessness and pessimism,
If he were to glance at the infinite potency of his soul,
His self-confidence and courage would be awakened.*

Pujya Bhai explained the Divine nature of the soul and its relationship to the Supreme Being. He provided clarity on some of the most knotty questions of theology. In several schools of Indian philosophy, a distinction is made between the spiritual practices pursued through the intellect and the heart: the path of knowledge (*Gyan*) and the path of devotion (*Bhakti*). When intellectually curious visitors wanted to know which of these paths was best, Pujya Bhai explained that both are adequate as long as we are prepared to practice them and not just talk about them. He discouraged philosophical and theological discussions where arguments and counter-arguments would inevitably arise with no end in sight.

However, Pujya Bhai's teachings had a clear preference for the mystical practice of devotion. In Inspiration Nos. 60 and 61, he wrote:

*The intellect and the mind can lead a person
Up to the garden of God's temple,*

*But for a glimpse of the Deity,
Enshrined in the innermost sanctum,
A pure tender heart is absolutely essential.* (60)

*The attainment of Divine knowledge
Culminates in deep peace that exists on its own;
Whereas in the mystical practice of devotion to God,
There are ever-fresh, ever-expanding
Ripples of love existing at the mercy of the Beloved.* (61)

In numerous conversations and extensive writings, Pujya Bhai showed that he viewed mysticism as a way of life and a preferable spiritual practice. Mystics of all religions were his favorites. He often spoke about *Meera* (1498-1547), a mystic poetess of Western India, and *Aandal*, a 10th century woman saint of South India. He spoke equally extensively to the followers of other religions about the lives and spiritual practices of their mystics such as *Jalal-ud-Din Rumi* (1207-1273), *Hafez* (1325-1389), St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) and St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), among others.

This is not to say that Pujya Bhai was averse to great philosophers of the West and the East and their contributions to the realm of spirituality. He often talked about Socrates (470 BC - 399 BC), Plato (424 BC - 348 BC), Adi Shankaracharya and others. But his focus remained on concrete steps for achieving loving relationship with God and not getting derailed along the way by mere philosophical and theological discussions. For instance, when asked whether people should consider God with or without form, Pujya Bhai had this to say in Inspiration No. 78:

*The Divine with attributes or without,
And with form or formless --
These are different facets of the one and only Supreme Reality.
The experience is relative to the spiritual seeker's longing.*

Pujya Bhai used to also address the Supreme Reality as *Ma* (the Divine Mother). *Ma* was all there was, and had become everything, whether God was called by any name, male or female. To someone who claimed there is no God, Pujya Bhai would respond, "But you do exist, don't you? And you are getting your nourishment from Nature, aren't you? Thus, you do accept the existence of Nature. But I say, Nature too is God."

God had become the Creation, but was also distinct from it. This mystical concept of differentiation and simultaneous non-differentiation was not a subject Pujya Bhai liked to discuss, since it required the visitor to have existential experience and not just philosophical knowledge. But it clearly shows up in his writings, such as in Inspiration No. 189:

*Oneness is intrinsic in the apparently differentiated multiplicity.
Differentiation is just a state of reality on the surface;
At the core, the reality is undifferentiated Oneness!*

Pujya Bhai rejected the notion that the Creation was an illusion. Instead, he said it was very real, since it too was a form of the Divine. He addresses this in Inspiration No. 142:

*From time immemorial
The flow of life has been continuing
As a pair of opposites.
This Divine Flow is highly mysterious.
God Himself has become the Flow.*

He took interest in all sublime and inspiring aspects of life. He was fond of listening to classical music, both Indian and Western, vocal and instrumental. Among the Western composers, Bach, Beethoven and Mozart were his favorites. His favorite Indian musicians included the maestros of *sitar*, *sarod*, *sarangi*, *veena* and flute, along with several Indian classical singers. He himself was an exceptional singer.

Pujya Bhai also showed deep interest in the scientific and medical discoveries and would discuss them with interested visitors. He had great respect for science and the scientists. He also loved fine art, such as painting and music, as well as poetry. He once said, "Science is the search for Truth. Spirituality is the experience of Truth. Art is the expression of Truth."

Pujya Bhai wrote about the inspired artists of all genres in Inspiration No. 146:

*A poet, traveling on the way to the Supreme Being;
A sculptor, manifesting Divine Beauty from a rough-hewn stone;
A musician, catching transcendent sound of music;
A painter, drawing enchanting scenes from the unseen Nature:
All these are sages sitting on the shore of
The unfathomable ocean of mysteries, and
Living in the mystical experience of
The One who is Supreme Delight.
Abundant sweetness overflows from their extraordinary contentment.
As a result, the world receives immortal creations;
And the absence of an ulterior motive fills the air with a sweet glow.*

Pujya Bhai's love of Nature was exceptionally inspiring because it was always a pointer to something sublime and mystical. Inspiration No. 152 is just one example:

*This world is an immensely beautiful garden.
Beauty drips from the sky-high Himalayan peaks,
And from the gigantic waves of the roaring oceans.*

*Trees, flowers, and fruits: Rich in diversity.
The fragrances, shapes, and colors of flowers are enchanting.
The choral singing of various birds is mysterious;
Each one of them has its own distinct set of notes.*

*Forms, colors, and songs are flowing over the brim.
Sometimes I am enraptured by the majesty of this
All-Pervading Consciousness.
I fully enjoy the taste of these sights, sounds, and aromas.
Aren't Thou the Enjoyer of all this as well?*

Here is one more example, in Inspiration No. 153:

O Supremely Beautiful One!

*The starry night, under the spell of her own majesty
And bedecked with the most precious ornaments,
Is approaching with the splendor of an empress.
To the sky adorned with an assortment of star-studded ornaments,
She bestows a full measure of beauty.*

O Friend!

*Thou art scattering boundless beauty, sweetness, and generosity;
Thou art making us emotional by Thy sweet love;
Thou art bestowing beauty to Nature.
In the midst of this gift-giving Thou art fully adorned with beauty as well.
However, in all this diversity aren't Thou also an integral part?
Isn't this indeed Thy own transcendent play?
Aren't Thou the only One who is partaking all this?*

*Being One, who also becomes Many,
Existing together at the same time,
Are able to make merry.
This state, which is beyond reasoning,
Is the reality pertaining to a higher realm.*

O Infinite, Mysterious One!

What capacity do we have to understand Thee?

Pujya Bhai was not suggesting we worship Nature. Instead, he was pointing out the mystical truth that even this immensely enchanting Nature is just a part of the beauty of the One who is Infinite Beauty! Through these and numerous other

references to Nature mentioned in *Amrutam*, Puja Bhai was teaching us that, “*to dive deep into the mysteries of Nature’s beauty is to annihilate the aridity of consciousness and to profoundly enrich the soul.*” Thus, Nature can also assist us in our spiritual practices by constantly reminding us of the Supremely Beautiful One.

The spiritual practice Puja Bhai taught, *Nam-Smaran*, was based on the unceasing repetition of the Divine Names. This included any Divine Name or *Mantra* that suited the spiritual seeker’s mental makeup. He never initiated anyone or assigned anyone a *Mantra*. When someone once wanted to talk about the pros and cons of different Divine Names and *Mantras*, he immediately responded, “If God can hear the footsteps of an ant, don’t you think He could hear you? And wouldn’t He know that by any Divine Name or *Mantra* you are calling Him alone?” He encouraged spontaneity in our approach to God, a child-like simplicity and letting God guide our steps. He said that if we take even one step toward God, God will take ten steps toward us.

Puja Bhai once explained his teaching of unceasing repetition of the Divine Names by saying, “The Divine Name itself is supremely conscious, because the Name, and the Entity the Name is pointing to, are undifferentiated in consciousness. The Name is a transcendent sound. That sound invariably affects our consciousness, which then results in its integral transformation through sublimation, not suppression. The Name brings down God’s Compassion upon us. His motherly love, His nearness, His Infinite Power begin to unfold and touch us from within. The Name creates Divine vibrations which in turn put an end to our disharmonious consciousness. But for that to happen, we have to have firm faith in the Name. Ultimately, we go beyond the Name; we transcend the Name, and enter into a state of Divine Bliss -- we become one with God through Divine Love. But all of this is dependent upon Divine Grace.”

Puja Bhai never let the most essential element of spiritual practice escape his followers’ attention: surrender to God. In numerous verses of *Amrutam*, spread over six volumes, he repeatedly explained the nature and necessity of true surrender to God. He asserted that surrender is not a concept to be studied, but is a practical way of forming a union with God. It can only be practiced and achieved by a person of firm faith in God and through His Grace.

In Inspiration No. 79 Puja Bhai contrasts surrender to human desires:

*Surrender to God
Is an opening for receiving the Light;
Desires intensify darkness.
Surrender secures union with the Infinite;
Desires raise a wall against that union.
Surrender opens the door to liberation;
Desires create the shackles of bondage.*

*Surrender allows the current of love to flow;
Desires dry up that flow.*

Again in Inspiration No. 128, he strikes a similar note:

*Spirituality is a mark of great beauty in life;
Aversion to God is complete unsightliness.
Life in tune with God is a song;
Existence separated from God is lamentation.
Life in the Presence of God is a dance;
Eclipsed by egotism, it is aimless wandering.
Life centered on God is spontaneous;
Shackled to desires, it is a sickness.*

Total dependence on God is the finest art-form.

As mentioned, Pujya Bhai gave huge importance to having faith. In his writings, firm faith in God is described as the starting point as well as the ultimate step in one's spiritual journey. Inspiration Nos. 51 and 55:

*Faith is the wick of the lamp of Divine Knowledge.
Faith is the treasure of Divine Energy.
Faith is the lifeboat.
It will surely ferry you to the shore of the Infinite.* (51)

*The pride of piety pushes a person away from God,
Whereas sincere repentance by the worst fallen soul,
Who has unshakeable faith in God's infinite compassion,
Brings him closer to God, and even bestows union with God.* (55)

In order to understand the totality of Pujya Bhai's teachings, we need to know what he had to say on the vast and sometimes divisive subject of God. He urged us to go beyond the narrow confines of religious dogmas and theologies that attempt to define or describe the existence and nature of God. Instead he pointed us in a different direction. He explained that Creation is the partial Consciousness of the Creator. There was a difference between Creation and the Creator, and at the same time there was none, as in the case of a burning log and its spark. The universe is created, maintained and finally dissolved by the Creator, as a part of Divine Play, entirely for the sake of Divine Bliss. Giving a metaphor, in Inspiration No. 105, Pujya Bhai wrote:

*The universe is the eternal song of the Immortal Poet.
In its every verse throbs Poet's Consciousness.
In its manifest state or otherwise,
Its music and harmony are never extinguished.*

*If the Creator, with His glance, were to beam Divine Light
On the screen of our soul, we could attain the true vision.*

If one wants to fathom the depth of Pujya Bhai's mystical sayings on the subject of God, one needs to study all eight volumes of *Amrutam*. (The subject is too vast to be dealt with here.)

However, it is pertinent to note that Pujya Bhai's writings and conversations expressed total openness to God's infinite possibilities. He never wrote or said that God was or was not a human being, or that God could have only one Incarnation and no more, or that God could or could not have form or attributes, and so on. In short, he taught that though God was inscrutable and incomprehensible through our intellect, He was available to us to be experienced as an existential, ecstatic experience of a mystic. And yet, God was even beyond all that we human beings can ever experience or fathom. That is why Pujya Bhai directed our attention to the primacy of the heart over the intellect.

Pujya Bhai built a temple to the Divine Mother, *Shri Jagadamba*, in order to provide a suitable place for the mystical practice of devotion to God. Though a specific image of the one and only Supreme Being has been consecrated in this temple, it is not meant to be a Hindu God, it is the Universal God, in the form of the Mother, the Supreme Power of the Universe. This Deity is a physical representation of all other manifestations of God which are limitless and profoundly diverse. Pujya Bhai used to tell the visitors that his teachings were non-sectarian and that they were devoid of religious divisions and dogmas. They embraced all religions, but without any limitations placed on the Supreme Reality. For this very reason, Christians, Muslims and those of other faiths are among his followers.

Speaking of the importance of visiting places of pilgrimage and spiritual beings for their blessings, Pujya Bhai explained, "Surrounding every spiritual place or a spiritual being, there is a spiritual zone -- an aura -- filled with spiritual vibrations. If you go near, it will invariably affect you. If we go near fire, we feel the heat; our cold dissipates. But if we go near a pile of ashes, we only get smeared with ashes!"

In conclusion, a few verses from Inspirations are presented below on the question of how to live. This was often on the minds of the visitors and followers who used to visit with Pujya Bhai in his room. In simple terms, he would teach them how to conduct ourselves while fulfilling their duties within their families and society, and at the same time remain fully engaged in their spiritual practices.

*Do not make your mind restless and impure
By finding faults in others.
The entire world is a Divine Play
Of the one and only incomparable God.*

*In the guise of diversity, that same Supreme Being is at play.
Even in the most despicable character,
The same Beloved is play-acting in a highly strange manner.* (23)

*Any tendency or activity meant to bring
An object or a person under your control
Will make you dependent on something or someone.
If you were to remain dependent on God alone,
You would become fully independent.* (91)