

A Mirtola Yatra

Promila Chitkara shares her responses to her recent stay at Mirtola.



How does one capture states in words, states inner and outer, states lived by personality and Self, in unison, in separation? Writing about each hour of the day, or the activities that were done through me, would be a trivializing act of confining my experiences and my reactions, to mere chronology. And writing about my responses to the people who guided me in the daily tasks at the ashram, who have greater exposure to

the actual day-to-day ashram life than me, who both encouraged and criticized me in an effort to make me more aware, would be an act coloured by my conditioning and small wisdom.

Can personality dish out an adequately-cooked and -spiced broth that the inner churning prepares?

At Mirtola, the inner enemies attacked from time to time – they always do. Loneliness coloured some hours each day. It wasn't the same loneliness that makes one crave for company, the loneliness born out of incompleteness of personality. It was aloneness rooted in stillness, asking me to see within. It looked its best whenever I would sit at the takht seat facing the window in the library, the window that looks out over the entrance to the temple and the Samadhi (the beautiful, yet so modest, structure dedicated to the Mirtola gurus). Ears would feel the



pressure of stillness, the head too, and so would the mind. The first day the stillness felt alien, but soon we became friends. Often I would find myself sitting at the takht, either chanting or looking at the leaves behind the screen of the horizontal window, the window whose wide stone sill has an antique oil lamp and Ashishda's khol (the long drum that accompanies bhajan singing). Nowhere else have I experienced that quality and magnitude of stillness and loneliness.

The presence of the Thakurs, the figures of the deities in the temple, so often made me think

of Ma and Gopalda. Deities are not made up of ashtadhatu. They are created and kept alive with selfless love – this is what I learned. These vighraha, these forms, brought out tears of rarely experienced humility, love, and surrender. The samadhis of the three gurus facing the Thakurs balance the scales, so to say. The pivot of refuge, the centre of the Mirtola ashram, are the temple and the samadhi. How prayerful they made my heart, an unprecedented experience.

This yatra to Mirtola was orchestrated by a force that I feel is beyond me, that I can only think of as the gurus. They empowered me with rarely experienced strength, strength to travel alone, strength to live alone and face the darkness of my mind that magnified the darkness of the night and made it scary. The lonely walk at night – after thoughtful and warm conversations – to the library where I slept demanded special courage from me. The source of courage is right there, to the left and to the right, the samadhis and the Thakurs.

It was love that made me make this trip, it was love that sustained me, it's love that will keep me going. As Sri Krishna Prem writes, unforgettably, in a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, quoted in the book *Yogi Sri Krishnaprem*: 'God-forsaken I may be, but Guru-forsaken, never.'