

# Divine Music Springs From the Soul

By Pandit Amarnath

The word *riyaz* has its origins in *riyazat*, which implies *ibadat*, *bandagi*, *bhakti* or devotion. If *riyaz* is performed with a spirit of devotion, the exercise becomes *ibadat*. But while *riyaz* is rather mechanically equated with practice or exercise, the all-important difference is one of spirit. *Riyaz* is to achieve that which has not been achieved so far. For that, the student has to struggle with faith.

In the initial stages one might be less than sure whether one is correct in what one is doing. But that is the struggle! In the absence of faith, one's *riyaz* will be filled with doubt. Faith is of great importance in *riyaz*. Practice with a doubt-ridden mind will achieve little.

The first step in *riyaz* is to concentrate on the supremely soothing notes of the *tanpura* that connote *sruti*. This is followed by *kharaj sadhana* or practice of *Sa* with a deep breath. Gradually, one moves to the exercises or scales suggested by the guru — *sargam* (each note named and sung), *aakar*, *eeakar* and *ookar* (aa-wise, ee-wise and oo-wise). From here one moves to intricacies such as *gamak*, or swara applications producing the heavy effect. All this should be done with *laya* or tempo in mind and, if possible, with *tabla* accompaniment.

*Riyaz* is an everyday activity, a daily prayer to the God of Music. When one arrives at the stage of *raga* and *gayaki*, one becomes aware of what is weak in one's music and attends to it. At times, the *raga* might not seem satisfactory, or the *bandish* may not lend itself to easy rendition in *laya*. At times, one's *riyaz* could focus on one aspect and neglect another. But a stage would arrive when one can judge what should be practised at a particular time.

The Guru, the beacon, provides direction. It is important to be able to feel a sense of improvement during practice. That means one's *riyaz* and its method is

basically correct. Or else, one should seek the help of the Guru, our music doctor!

I have often observed students 'performing' like strutting peacocks during *riyaz*. In his excitement, the student is prone not to listen to his guru. Before his guru completes his sentence, the over-eager student interrupts with his own views, without giving his guru a chance. Is this not a sign of restlessness or overambitiousness? Every second student displays such signs.

Another commonly experienced problem in the initial stage is that of feeling dull with one's music. Here one has to practise for mood. One should not sit down mechanically for *riyaz*. In such times, one should ideally listen to good music to recharge oneself.

Mental *riyaz* is exceedingly important. Music is deeply understood when one thinks and reflects about it. The music that then emerges is close to the soul. Once one immerses oneself in *sadhana* for a very long time, one's *swaras* will begin to leave a deep impression.

One should always be regular in *riyaz* — whether vigorous or not. If one discontinues *riyaz* in old age, the muscles become dull, hard and inactive. The mood for *riyaz* should never go away. Even a wrinkled face can produce music of great emotion! In fact, every action in one's music becomes more meaningful. The vigour of youth might be less in evidence, but to make up for its lack there is maturity and richness of texture. Whether a small or big phrase, each is charged with the power of the whole music, because the grammar of phrases and sentences is not its sole element anymore.

It is now all a matter of soul. One's music is now the true picture of one's soul.

(Excerpted from the book 'Conversations with Pandit Amarnath' by Bindu Chawla, to be released today, on the occasion of the eighth barsi of Pandit Amarnath.)

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