

Volume X

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

On the Wings of the Swan

Volume X



SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

1923~2023

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

On the Wings of the Swan

Volume X

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger, in 2022



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

On the Wings of the Swan, Volume X

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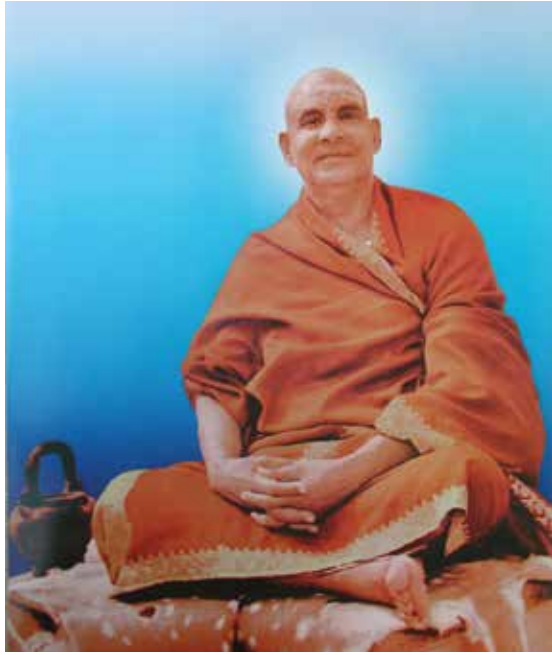
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

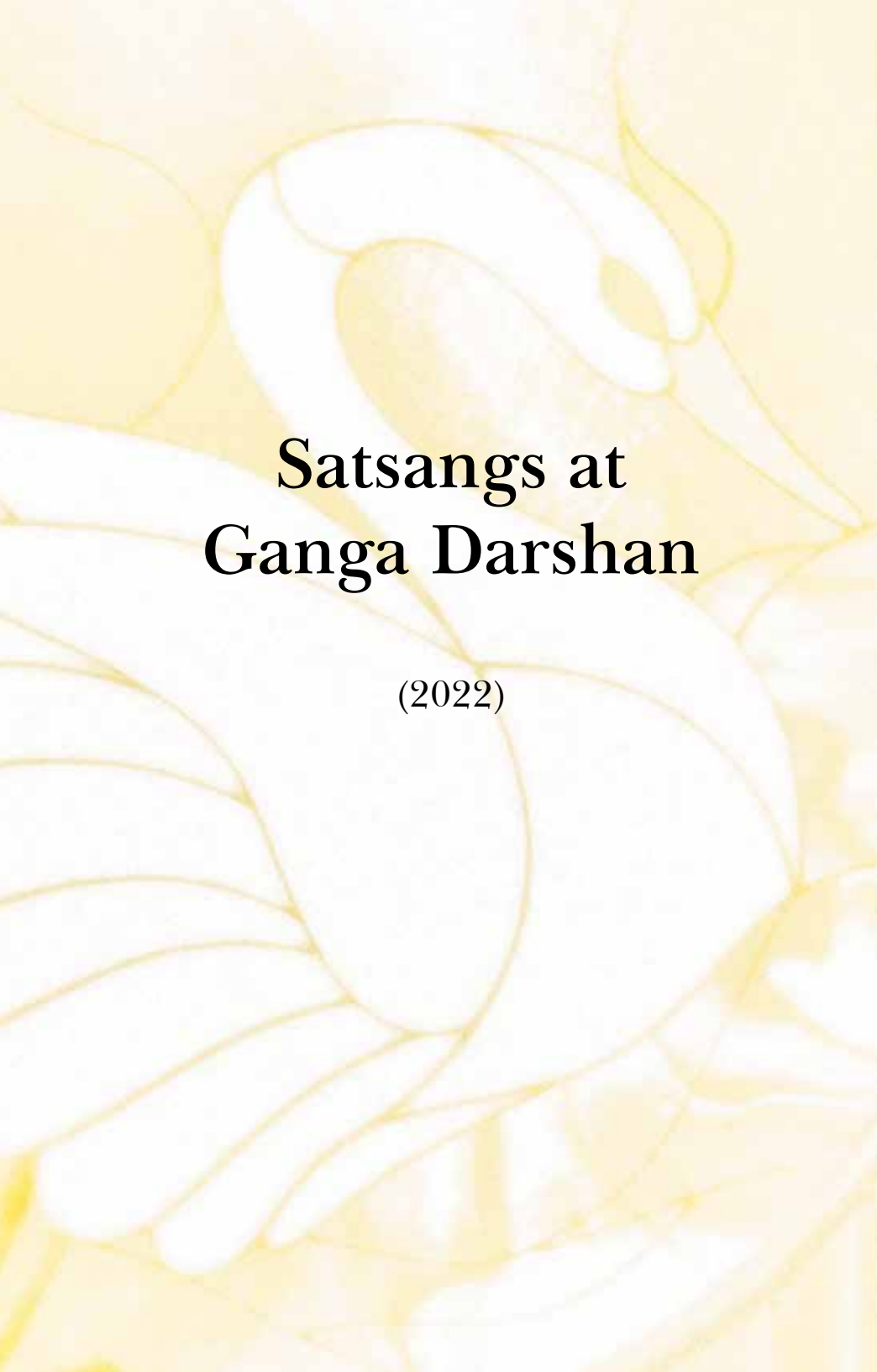


Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

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Satsangs at Ganga Darshan

(2022)



NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

Greetings for the New Year from Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth in the City of Yoga, Munger. Munger is the karmabhoomi of our master, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, and it is our Yogabhoomi, the land of yoga. On New Year's Day we chant the *Hanuman Chalisa* 108 times to invoke the grace of Hanuman, especially in this challenging time when we are facing difficulties, conflicts and the pandemic which are disturbing our life, our society, our aspirations, plans and hopes for the future. This year, a message comes to you from the land of yoga, and this message is in seven parts or sutras.

The first part of the message is that we should look after our own health, which is not only physical, but also mental, emotional and spiritual. When we are able to regain total health of body, mind, emotions and spirit, we can call ourselves healthy. Till then we have to struggle to find our health, either at the physical level or psychological level. Let us make an effort to focus on the cultivation of health this year.

The second sutra is awareness. Cultivate awareness and be aware of the environment and the surroundings in the family, in society, and contribute in the most effective and positive manner by becoming aware of the shortcomings and the needs in your immediate environment, and also reach out to help people who are in need.

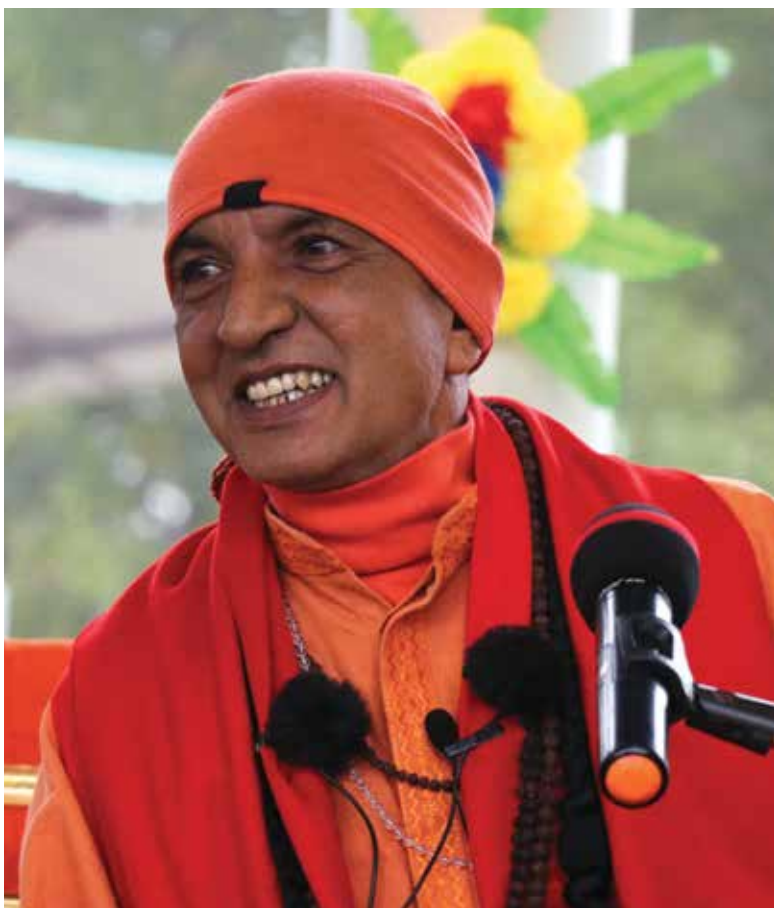
The third sutra which is much needed is personal or self-discipline in life, which we call *sanyam* in yoga.

Personal discipline is a must in today's environment in order to maintain positivity, hope and optimism in life. This discipline is also essential to be able to contribute effectively and efficiently, in a positive manner, in making our home, our family and society better. This can be achieved with personal discipline, with awareness and with a focus on our health.

The fourth and fifth sutras are respect and humility. People say we are hungry for love, yet I do not believe that. I believe that we should learn to respect everyone no matter what their shortcomings are, no matter whether they are literate or illiterate, intellectuals or non-intellectual, recognizing that each one has a place in human society. If we can respect each individual, then love also will flow all around naturally.

Along with respect, comes humility. In the biggest storms and tempests, the trees which stand upright and tall, often break. The trees, plants and grass, which bend with the wind and tempest, always survive. In the same manner, humility is an antidote to arrogance and ego. Humility is an antidote to aggression and misbehaviour which hurt other people and create differences and distances between groups of people. Humility is an important quality of life, and not only spiritual but also a human quality of life, which has to be cultivated to manage the eccentric ego behaviour.

The sixth and seventh are, *kartavyaparayanta*, zeal to perform one's duties, and *nishtha*, commitment. These are the sixth and seventh sutras of the year. Complete everything that you undertake; don't leave anything unfinished. Spend a little bit of time, yet complete the chore, the action, the job which you have taken on; that will free you and give you more time to do other things. Remember, the commitment to do the right and correct thing in life is what makes us human. It is our commitment to do the right thing which make us into a human being and therefore, we should fulfil our commitments and obligations, not only to others but also to ourselves.



These are the seven sutras, which, if we can adopt this year, will help us to go a long way in dealing with the challenges that we are facing in society and in our life today.

I wish you well from the Yogabhoomi, from the Samarpanbhoomi, from the Karmabhoomi of our master, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, with prayers for your peace, wellbeing and prosperity.

Hari Om Tat Sat

—1 January 2022

SIVARATRI

Sivaratri is a well-known time. It is celebrated throughout the Indian subcontinent, not only as a religious festival, but also a historical fact about Shiva buried in ancient times. Some people say that on Sivaratri night Shiva was united with Shakti. They were recognized as an inseparable part of each other, as husband and wife, as *ardhanarishwar*, together as man and woman. Throughout the country, Sivaratri is celebrated with the fervour of a marriage ceremony.

It also has another more remote source. It is stated in the most ancient scriptures that in the beginning when there was nothing, no world, no creation the potential emerged in the form of Vishnu and in the form of Brahma. From nothing, they became the medium through which the creation of the world took place. At one point in their life, after they had been created and when there was nothing else, they questioned themselves. Brahma would question, "Who am I?", then would look at Vishnu and say, "Who are you?" The same thing happened with Vishnu. He used to look at himself and question, "Who am I?", and then look at Brahma and question, "Who are you?" They also asked who was more superior, senior and who had more power.

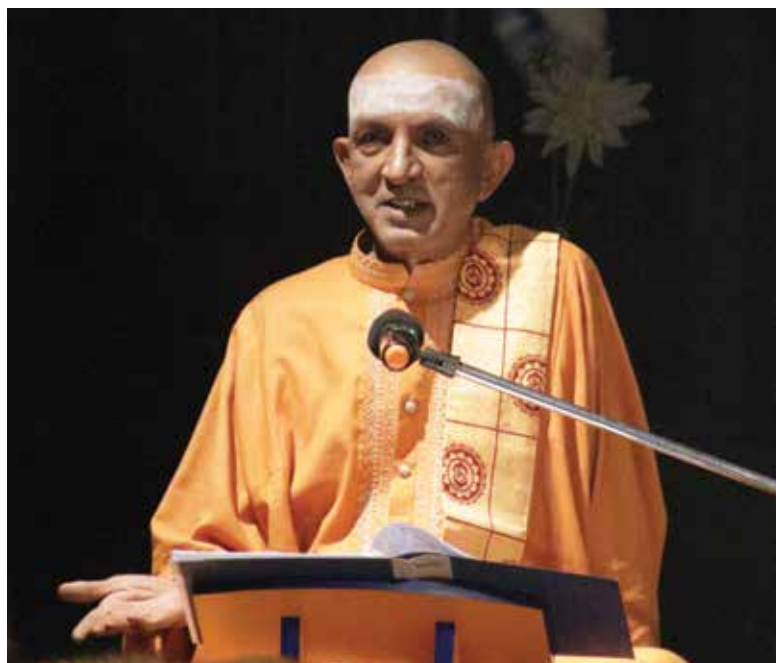
While they were debating this, in the dark night of space a pillar of fire emerged between them. That pillar of fire was the first manifest form of Shiva. The day when that pillar of fire appeared was later on known as Maha Sivaratri, as at that time there was absolute pitch darkness. There were no suns and no moons. There was no creation. There were no worlds. There were no beings, devas or asuras. There was nothing. That time, that place and moment, when there was nothing and Shiva appeared as a *tattva*, an element, the first manifest form, is known as Sivaratri. It was in the dark space, in the dark night that Shiva emerged as the pillar of fire. Sivaratri begins from that time onwards. Every dark night of every month, *amavasya*, and the period after is known as Sivaratri. But Maha Sivaratri, the absolute dark night, happens only once a year.

If you look at your own life and the spiritual connection in your life, you will see that the story has a relevance. Our mind, our spirits live in the dimension of night, not in the dimension or time of day; they live in the time of night. Therefore, one is unable to see the light or even know that objects exist in the dark. It is only in the light that you can see different objects. If you turn off all lights, will you be able to see who is sitting next door to you, in front of you, beside you, behind you, on the floor or on a chair? What are the objects around you? What are the colours around you? You will not be able to see anything. The absence of light does not make them disappear, the absence of light prevents you from seeing what is there. That happens in our mind, in our heart and in our spirit. We flounder in darkness and we invoke the Shiva-element. When Shiva emerges as luminosity within us and we are able to witness, experience and live it, then that becomes the real Sivaratri.

It is the connection with luminosity, warmth and light that represents the Shiva nature. When that connection happens, the marriage of our soul with the higher soul takes place, the individual soul with the cosmic or the god soul. Here even marriage is relevant, however connection to luminosity is the first step. Marriage is the second step. For us, it is the discovery of the luminosity within that we have to aspire for, and that will be our experience of Sivaratri.

On this holy day, I wish you all the best and all the blessings of Shivaji. We pray that we are able to do justice to the grace that we receive daily in abundance. We do not do justice to the grace that we receive daily. We look for *kripa*, *anugraha*, for grace. We are like a fish which lives in water and says, "I am thirsty, I am thirsty, I am thirsty." Who would believe that? Only another fish would believe it. A human being will not believe it. In the same manner, we too have to become aware and make the effort to realize that divinity is not far away in heaven, it is within us.

That was what Swami Sivanandaji used to say, "Live the Divine life. Live the good life. Live the positive life. Live



the creative life. Live the joyous life. Lead a pious life”. All spiritual traditions throughout the world ultimately say that live your life and remain connected to the luminosity of God, whether you are a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu, a Sikh or a Buddhist. Everyone states the same thing, ‘Live a happy life, a joyous life, a good life. Believe in God. Trust in God. Have faith’. That awareness brings out the best in everyone.

It is the connection to luminosity which has to be our aim and effort. This is the blessing of Sivaratri. You are in the sun. Know that you are in the sun and you are experiencing the warmth and light. You are basking in the luminosity of the sun. That awareness will lead to a deeper connection with the Shiva element, the higher element, the element of luminosity within us.

Hari Om Tat Sat

—1 March 2022

HOLI

How do sannyasins celebrate Holi? There is a beautiful poem by Sri Swamiji which says:

I will smear you in the colour of bhakti and dip you in the water of sadhana.

The colour of bhakti and the water of sadhana are different. What is the colour of bhakti? The happiness, joy, contentment and peace that you feel within, the balance and harmony that you feel within, the strength and conviction that you experience, the positivity, optimism and hope that you live with, the purity of intention and emotion – that is bhakti. It is this colour which we have to put on the drab colours of the mind.

In 1970 when I travelled out of India to Europe with Sri Swamiji, I encountered a totally different world. It was a colourless world. In India we had an ocean of colours. In the West, I only saw people in their grey and black suits and white shirts. Hardly anybody wore colours. When I went to Austria, everybody was in their grey suit, white shirt and black hat. That was the colour combination that Europe was using at that time. We sannyasins used to stand out like fire flames. Wherever we went, it was just like two flames, three flames, four flames of fire walking down a grey and dark world. I am not joking. That was the situation.

That is the state of our mind too. Our mind is a dark and drab world. The dress of our mind is dark and drab. Every morning at home when you wake up, you think, ‘What am I going to wear today?’ Here we wake up every morning, and something defines how we are going to act during the day. That influence is internal. Some anxiety, irritation, foul words will create a mood controlled and governed by one of the six friends. That will be the dress you will be wearing for that day, without even realizing that you are wearing that colour. People who follow the spiritual and sannyasa path of renunciation, of leaving behind the unnecessary, and *tyaga*,

learning to accept the positive, benevolent and beneficial, and not rejecting or rebelling against it, experience *samarpan*, surrender.

We have the ability to change our mood. The moods with which we have to colour ourselves are: 1. creativity, which is karma yoga; 2. purity, which is bhakti yoga, and 3. the wisdom to act according to the situation, which is jnana yoga. The combination of these three brings the experience of the colours of bhakti, not in form of devotion, but in form of expansiveness which allows the eyes to see every colour. The eyes are not myopic which only see black, white or grey; they are able to see every colour. That is the colour of bhakti.

To access the colour of bhakti, you have to dive into the water of sadhana. If you want to use and apply Ganga mud on your body, you have to go inside the water to collect the right mud, not the mud along the shore, and then you will be benefited. You do not use the mud where everybody walks and tramples on and does many other things which are unpalatable. In the same manner, when we dive, we have to dive deep. We cannot go to the shores of the mind and say, 'Okay, this is where I do my change.' The shores of the mind are totally trampled upon, and everything there is impure. It is the path that you take every day for your morning and daily walks, full of seething anger, full of frustration, anxiety, depression, full of neurosis. Therefore, sadhana has been given importance in yoga.

Patanjali says that sadhana is something that one cannot perfect instantly. Sadhana has to be done for an extended period of time. It cannot be broken, there has to be continuity. It is not just a mechanical practice; you need to have conviction in what you are doing. In this manner, the dissipations of the mind are filtered out, so that the mind can focus in sadhana. Only when the light of the torch which spreads in all directions is brought together to a point, does it become more potent and powerful. It becomes like a laser beam.

The outcome is that you colour yourself with the colours of bhakti and dip in the waters of sadhana. Paramahamsaji continues to say:

I will intoxicate you with the Name and wash you in the waters of His memory.

Any person would say, 'This is like a religious statement – to remember God and wash yourself in His memory'. In spiritual life, you have to go through that purification process. There is no-thing as God; it is an abstract concept. You can speak about it, I can speak about it, yet we do not have the experience. However, I have the experience of change within me. You can say, 'God has one eye, He is a Cyclops.' I can say, 'God has a thousand eyes.' Who is there to accept or deny it? You say, "God made us in His image, so therefore He must have two arms." We can also say, 'He made us in His image, but He has a thousand and we have only two. He may have a thousand heads and we only have one', as it stated in the *Purusha Suktam: Sahasrashirsha purshaha, sahasraksha, sahasrapad*.

The statement 'immerse in His name and wash in the memory of His name' indicates an inner realization of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram. We see a flower, we are attracted to it, but that attraction is momentary. Just imagine encountering an unforgettable beauty, would you want to leave it? Immeasurable beauty, would you want to leave it? You would be totally immersed in it. That beauty pulls the mind to itself. A beautiful object, a beautiful painting, a beautiful flower, a beautiful person or object will always attract the mind. That universal omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient beauty is going to drive us mad. When physical beauty can drive people mad, just imagine what that overpowering experience of beauty will do? You become 'mast' in that stage.

The sect Mast was started by Meher Baba during the time of the British. *Mast* meant intoxicated. When that group used to move through villages and towns, it was like an infection

going through the village and town. Everybody used to become happy and joyous, start dancing and laughing as an expression of sharing, giving and compassion. It was a beautiful movement. This is the connection with inner purity and positivity, so that the mind does not deviate from that connection, and it lives that 24/7/365. The experience goes on and on.

This is the internal aspect, as you are simply going deeper into that experience. There is also the practical or outer aspect. Paramahamsaji says:

I will wash you with His memory.

You may question, that if you are experiencing Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram, and you are in that state, how can there be a separate memory of it? How can there be separate memories when you are immersed and dissolved in that state? Logically speaking, there should be no memory, just an experience of being there. Paramahamsaji says no. Whatever you may be feeling inside is your experience. It is not what you are living outside. When you open your eyes, when you are hungry, have to go to the bathroom, or do other chores the body needs to do, what happens at that time? Are you in that state or are you thinking about your diarrhoea or constipation?

Even in this state, there is a split because the body brings your awareness back and makes it mundane and material again. It connects you back with the world, with the senses and with yourself. There is an up and down, up and down effect, which pulls you when you are physically free of all attention and awareness of a physical and material nature. Then you can sit down, close your eyes and immerse yourself. The experiences of diarrhoea, dysentery, constipation, hunger, thirst will drag your connection from Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram back to the material body. Then you will feel that you are disconnected from everything.

It is an experience which many spiritual aspirants have. They feel disconnected from the world and this

is the reason – coming from a pure dimension again into an impure dimension; from an unconditioned state back to a conditioned state. Therefore, wash the dross of this awareness with the purity of His memory. How will you translate the memory into performance, action and realization? Through atmabhava. If you are a spirit with a unique nature, personality, behaviour, raga and dwesha, you are also a unique ishwara in your own right. That is what Samkhya says all the time. There are many ishwaras, not one. Each individual, each unit is an ishwara in your own right, with your eccentricities, limitations, abilities, qualities due to the conditioned environment. However, in each one that ishwara is seen, when you cultivate atmabhava.

Paramahamsaji used to say that *ishwara*, God, is an ‘experienter’ along with you. If somebody is thirsty, it is not only the person who is thirsty, but also the God-presence in the person which is feeling the thirst. That God-presence is connected to the experience of the individual. If somebody is hungry, the God-presence in you feels that hunger as well, not only your stomach and you. If somebody is in pain, the God presence inside you feels that pain too. It is not only the individual which is suffering because of his karma. That might be an understanding, yet it is not the final one. In the final understanding, it is the whole individual, spirit, mind and body which is suffering.

When you haven’t had anything to eat for many days, it is not only the body, the mind and spirit also feel that hunger. You do not have the sensitivity to experience the hunger of the spirit. Your sensitivity can go from body till mind, not beyond. That is the range of your mental radar – twenty kilometres. Ten of this body, ten of the mind, not beyond. The memory that you are also the Divine, and that whatever is lacking in you is being experienced by the Divine as well, should be rectified for you to become happy and for the God-presence inside you to be happy. That is the memory, so that you are able to experience the same beauty, the same auspiciousness and truth which you experience up

here, down here as well. Then the spiritual and material connection takes place, not before.

That is the Holi of Paramahamsaji. He says, 'You have had the Holi that colours the body – colouring the body, throwing colours on each other; now colour your mind and see the fun.' With this statement of Sri Swamiji, we wish you a happy and blessed Holi.

Hari Om Tat Sat

—18 March 2022



AKSHAYA TRITIYA

Akshaya Tritiya is a peculiar day. The word *akshaya* means imperishable, something which cannot be destroyed, and *tritiya* means three. What are the three things that cannot be destroyed and which always exist? They are the three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. Even if we do not survive, the gunas will continue. There is the trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. We may die, yet the generation, organization and destruction process will continue eternally. They are another imperishable, indestructible set. The individual, life and the world are also three constant realities that we confront every day. Life is a game of three items coming together. This is the philosophy of Akshaya Tritiya.

At the same time, it has been given the form of a celebration, an invocation and worship. The invocation is of the Mother in the form of the Das or ten Mahavidyas. The father was invoked in the form of Narayana; and then there is the Invoker, us, their offspring. So, mother, father and offspring is again a trinity and a reality which is permanent.

There are different ways to celebrate Akshaya Tritiya. Some fast on this day, some feast on this day. Some worship on this day, others buy some item similar to gold and keep it at home or give it to other people as a symbol of prosperity. There are many ways that different generations and groups in society celebrate Akshaya Tritiya. Our idea is simple for we have to connect with that which is internal, transcendental and permanent. What is internal, what is transcendental, and what is permanent? In our life it is the realization or the connection with the higher reality, and we seek this connection through the invocation of the mantras. It is this connection which brings purity of intention and purity of heart. This purity helps the spiritual aspirant to progress in life.

It is not important how many hours of meditation you do during the day, but how pure your heart is, how pure your mind is, how pure your intention is. In spiritual life, in any aradhana we seek that purity



Akshaya Tritiya is also considered to be a day when any pious, positive and creative thought, performance or aspiration will pave the future path of the individual. People are also encouraged to think positively, act appropriately and behave constructively and respectfully. This change in attitude is a positive change. If you can maintain it, it will become a quality in the course of time, and it will be the gift of Akshaya Tritiya: a positive character, a positive understanding and positive living.

—3 May 2022

BUDDHA POORNIMA

Today is a special day. It is full moon, and the full moon of this month is celebrated as the enlightenment day of Buddha. It is known as Buddha Poornima. The story of Buddha is interesting. He was born as a prince in a kingdom in Nepal called Lumbini. He was isolated from society since the time of his birth, because of a prediction that he would either become a recluse or a great emperor. The father naturally wanted him to become an emperor and made sure that this little prince would have minimum contact with the outside world and live in the royal court with all the luxuries and facilities that a court of a kingdom could provide. This is how the young prince grew up. He was named Siddhartha. In the course of time, he was married to a princess called Yashodhara. They had a son, Rahul.

One day the young prince Siddhartha expressed the desire to see the kingdom. During these journeys through his kingdom, Siddhartha came upon a young baby who was crying, then he saw a sick person who was suffering. Then he saw a dead person who was being carried to the cremation ground. These images that he saw during his travels made a deep impact on his psyche, and he started to question, "In life, do we all suffer? In life, do we all die? From the beginning till the end, we live in an environment of suffering. Can there be relief from this suffering?" He started to ponder on this question and eventually a time came when he said, "I cannot find the answer to my questions where I am. I need to leave all this and find the truth behind life."

So he left his kingdom in the middle of the night, without informing anyone. He left the boundaries of the kingdom, gave away his clothes and horses to the servant who had accompanied him, cut his hair and took on the robes of a sannyasin. He met different sannyasins and started to travel with them, learning about spiritual life, learning about sadhana, learning about yoga, and interacting with different seekers of truth.

In the course of time, he sat down to meditate. In his mind, he was going to do tapas. He sat down with the determination that through hard austerities, he would discover the truth of life. History says that he became absolutely *nar-kankal*, which means a skeleton body, from all the hard austerities and fasting. So much so, that one day he fainted. When he fainted a lady came with *kheer*, milk pudding, and gave it to him. Buddha ate the kheer, nourished his body, sat up again and said, “Extreme paths are no good. Follow the middle path, where you are not abusing or misusing yourself, but you are able to utilize the faculties of the body to attain your aspiration and goal.” He attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, in the city of Gaya. Today is the day of his enlightenment.

This is the story. What did Buddha discover as the truth of life? People have to think about that for the actual experience and realization of Buddha lies not in the philosophy of Buddhism, but in what he experienced during the process of self-transformation. While he was going through the process of self-transformation, he had to confront his mind, his senses, instincts, *samskaras* and *karmas*. Due to the character that he had and the strong-willed and determined person that he was, he was able to transform and transcend all the obstacles and barriers created by the senses, the mind, the *samskaras*, the *karmas*. He became free from them. This freedom, he called *nirvana* – to be free from the obstacles and bondages, restrictions and limitations of the senses, the mind, the *samskaras* and the *karmas*. The idea of *nirvana* became the focus for his followers who said, “This is what we need to attain and experience.”

Buddha’s philosophy is based totally on understanding the cause of our suffering and limitation. Since it is a progressive method to self-transform and self-correct, he did not speak much on the subject of abstract philosophy or God. Today people think that Buddhism is a philosophy that does not believe in God, and they say it is a *nastik*

dharma. *Nastik*, meaning not believing and *dharma*, meaning religion or philosophy. These interpretations of people who came after Buddha are incorrect. For Buddha there was no need to speak on God. He was instructing people on how to overcome their suffering.

Remember, there are two aspects. One is faith and the other is fate. Those people who believe in religion, connect with it by faith. Those people who do not believe in religion, believe in fate, and fate becomes the cause of disturbance and destruction in life. We are unable to understand it and deal with it. Therefore, we say, 'What can we do? It is my fate to be like this.' Buddha said, 'No. There is another aspect of your fate, and that is *purushartha*, the effort which you can make to change the detrimental aspect of your life and improve that quality.' Buddha did not speak on faith in God as the solution to the problems that we face. He emphasized the role of *purushartha*, self-effort, to transform the present condition which we believe comes from our fate. From this perspective, Buddha did not openly advocate or speak about God. He openly spoke about what one can do to improve one's lifestyle.

In the early days when Sri Swamiji was developing yoga in Munger, he would never speak of God; he would only speak of the yoga practices. For thirty years, people believed that Swamiji was a non-believer, as he never spoke about God. That is the perspective of an outsider who does not know the intent or the intention of the individual, and what they are trying to achieve and tell people. We derive our understanding from the preconceived notions and ideas imposed upon our mind. A mind which is imposed upon by ideas and is conditioned by them, cannot understand how a free mind can function. Therefore, there is always confusion in understanding the teaching of the masters which comes from a free mind, and not from a conditioned mind.

The sentences or teachings of the Master can be interpreted in thousands of ways because of individual mental conditioning. None of our interpretations of the teaching

reflect the true teaching which the Master has lived and experienced. The same thing happened with Buddha too. What he realized, what he experienced, what he saw, was his personal experience. No one else after Buddha has had that type of experience.

So one thing is clear that in the quest of finding the solution to overcome suffering, Buddha came to some conclusion. Why is suffering caused? Because of *maya*. *Maya* is the illusion which hypnotizes us and connects us to *prakriti*, the world. We see *prakriti* as something to be used for our personal gain, that is *maya*. When we act for personal gain, the power of *maya* is intensified, and that becomes the cause of suffering. Involvement with *maya* becomes the cause of suffering. How to overcome this? Get out of the influence and the gravitational pull of *maya*. Once you get out of the gravitational pull of *maya*, you experience freedom, and that freedom is not enlightenment. Enlightenment is different, freedom is different. Buddha spoke of freedom, not enlightenment. Buddha spoke of *shoonyata*, nothingness, where no impressions exist. He said achieve that *shoonyata*, zeroness, where nothing that can disturb you exists. He came to nirvana by the path of *shoonyata*, nothingness.

There is another path also, which leads to *prakash*, enlightenment. *Prakash* comes after *shoonyata*. To go towards luminosity of the self, there is another *sadhana*, and to manage the mind is another *sadhana*. Buddha focused on the first aspect, manage yourself. Don't worry about enlightenment, learn how to deal with those situations which affect you now and find your peace, harmony and equipoise. That has been the message of Buddha. I am not talking of Buddhism. Buddhism is a different matter. Buddhism is a collection of the thoughts of many other people believing that the sentence spoken by Buddha means 'this'. Buddha did not create a philosophy. He created a system to discover oneself.

Today was the day when Buddha realized that extremism is never good; therefore, follow the middle path where you are in control of the reins of your own horses. This allows you

to guide them, you can ride them with confidence. That is what one has to achieve. This was the teaching of Mahatma Buddha.

Today is also the birthday of an important person, Swami Dharmashakti Saraswati, the first disciple of our Guru, Sri Swamiji. It is Buddha's day and Mother's day for us. It is good, as the mother nourishes and Buddha guides. I was thinking whether philosophy always remains a philosophy or does it translate into something different. I came to the conclusion that everything translates into lifestyle. What Buddha said, what Swami Sivanandaji, Swami Satyanandaji, Krishna and anybody says in the form of any teaching, eventually comes down to lifestyle. In the *Ramacharitamanas*, there is a passage:

*Jap, tapa, niyam, yoga, nishtha, dharma,
shruti, sambhav, nana sukh karma,
gyan daya tab teertah machan,
jahan lagi dharm kahat shruti sajjan.*

These are two lines of the choupayi. The meaning is that *japa*, repetition; *tapa*, austerity; *niyam*, discipline, and *yoga* are the individual dharmas. People follow the appropriate action as defined in the scriptures with wisdom, compassion and restraint and they also visit *teertha*, locations where the cosmic energy is high. These are all different aspects of lifestyle.

Japa is the way to disconnect from maya. For twenty-four hours of the day we interact with maya. When you sit down with your mala and do your japa, for that period you disconnect from maya and connect with the cosmic, the divine nature, the God concept in you. You connect with the faith within you for those fifteen minutes. So, for twenty-three hours, forty-five minutes of the day, you are in maya, and for fifteen minutes when you do your japa, you are separate to maya. It is part of lifestyle.

Tapa, austerity is always done to overcome a limitation in life. If you try to overcome a weakness and convert

that weakness into strength, you will have to struggle with yourself, you will have to fight with yourself, you have to overpower the weakness within yourself. That is your austerity. If you are successful, you will realize the fruits of that austerity. If you are not successful, you will again slip back into the rut of maya. Austerity means a concentrated effort of mind and senses to achieve transformation.

Niyamas or conditions that regulate your life have to be cultivated. That is the niyama. The aspects that are mentioned in the *Ramacharitmanas* indicate different components of lifestyle. Just thinking about a philosophy is not enough, until it translates as part of your nature and becomes part and parcel of your lifestyle. Therefore, saints have always inspired us not to do something mechanical all the time, but to become a witness of the change that we experience when we go through a process. Then we allow the flowering of that change to become better, optimistic, hopeful, constructive and creative; we become harmonious, balanced, happy and peaceful.

This is the learning from the life of saints and sages, keeping aside the idea that what they have said is religion. No, what they said is not religion. People made their statements into religion for their own benefit. These are universal teachings to help every individual of every caste, tradition and social strata to discover the beauty within oneself. That is how we look at the life of sadhus and saints, and the teaching that inspires us to transcend our own limitations.

On the occasion of Buddha Poornima, our good wishes reach out to all of you with the hope that one drop of the teaching can be soaked by your mind. If that one drop of teaching can be soaked by your mind, you will become a mini Buddha.

—16 May 2022

SATSANG

Do not think too much about focus. If the mind dissipates, let it, for you cannot control the mind in one go. You cannot bring focus into a life of distraction and dissipation just with will. Even when you focus, the holding span is very short. The mind dissipates and then again you come back to focus. Do not struggle and try to fight to be focussed. Instead develop a better conditioning of the mind. To develop the conditioning of the mind, you have to start gradually.

When I came to the ashram, I was addicted to sleep. I used to sleep so deeply that my guru brothers would pick up my chowkie and put it out of the ashram gates and out on the road. I used to wake up with a cow staring down my mosquito net, a scooter honking, a rickshaw-wallah honking, and motorcycles and scooters whizzing by. It used to get embarrassing, yet that was my nature. I said, 'How can I change my nature?' For example, I would wake up at 7.00 o'clock. So for one week or four days, I put the alarm at ten to 7.00. When I was accustomed to waking up at ten to 7.00, it became twenty to 7.00 for the next four days. Then 6.30, 6.20, 6.10, 6.00. The clock started going backwards until it came to 4.00 o'clock. It took me three, four, five months; it was a slow conditioning. You cannot fight a habit and nature that governs you. Your nature is not the same as mine, mine is not the same as his. Everyone has a different nature, yet we forget that we have a nature which has to be re-conditioned, and we try to copy.

Many people come to me and say, 'Swamiji, I want to develop my kundalini, I want to do this, I want to do that . . .' They even want samadhi. When I look at their nature, I know that they are never going to be able to do it, as it is not in their nature. They can sit for eight hours banging their body left, right and centre, yet if it is not the nature of the mind to experience something or be sensitive to it, then no kundalini, no samadhi. I have also seen that people do not want to acknowledge their nature. Anybody who is a

human being, ordinary normal people and sannyasins across the world do not acknowledge their nature. If anything is pointed out, people get irritated or avoid talking about it, and they believe that they are not like that.

If this is the nature of your life experience, how can you derive any benefit from your efforts without modifying your nature? If there is no positivity in the mind and no transformation of the negative within you, how will you experience that quality which is positive, constructive, creative, transcendental or even divine? People waste their life in this manner, for they focus on ambition and competition.

Ramana Maharishi attained his realization by questioning, 'Who am I?' Can you? Can anybody? Everybody may think, 'Oh, jnana yoga is nice. I should try it.' And everybody will ask, 'Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?' You can even answer, 'I am atma and paramatma and Brahman, I am spirit. I am holy, I am . . . 'Does that make you like Ramana Maharishi? You cannot develop his nature. You can only question yourself. The answer which you give to yourself is not even half-baked. This is the most difficult part of spiritual life. You can learn anything – mantra, tantra, yantra, yoga, bhoga, you can learn anything in life. Go to vipasana, a yoga centre, go to Tibet and to the Himalayas, live with a sannyasin and sadhu for three, years, ten years. Yet what is the ultimate attainment?

I have seen people write books and claim, 'I was a monk for three years, therefore I am all-knowing.' People say, 'Oh, you were a monk for three years. You must be realized.' They may not know that that monk may have spent his time as a monkey in the ashram, jumping from one state of mind to another state of mind, to hate, greed, jealousy, to love, compassion, kindness, and back to depression, anxiety, suppression. How much can you attain in three years? Can you become all-knowing in three years? There are people who say, 'Yes!' This is just a hypocritical state of being.

People like to live that life, for they do not want to confront their nature and they depend on practices to give

them an experience, which they cannot have due to the covering of their nature. You can practise shavasana and do anything, the mind will be dissipated and distracted. Instead of fighting and saying to yourself, 'Focus on your left big toe,' or 'Focus on the jyoti,' become aware that you have lost it and come back again. When you become aware that you have lost it, bring it back, a thousand times if necessary, a million times if necessary. Develop the conditioning to do that, and eventually you will be able to do it. That is the secret of life.

I am saying this because my own life has gone through those phases. I have been in the ashram since the age of four. Knowingly or unknowingly, I have been a witness to myself and the changes that happened within me. I have also been a witness to how much other people are able to perform and not perform. I can definitely say that very few are able to experience spirituality. Out of the thousands that experience spirituality, very few live a spiritual life. Out of the thousands or the very few who live a spiritual life, very few modify their life. So you start with one million, yet you end up with numbers that you can count on one hand.

This is said by Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* as well, 'There are many who want my grace, but few make the effort. Out of the many that make the effort, very few are able to come to me. And out of the many of the few, very few are able to experience me.' In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna tells Arjuna that it is very difficult to change one's *swabhava*, nature. Ambitions, expectations and efforts can change when you desire, as they represent your *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion, in life. However, for the change of *swabhava* or the nature of life, one has to be really observant and work towards it. I feel that those who are able to walk even a few steps in that direction have grace.

It is stated in the *Ramacharitamanas* that only a fortunate few are blessed with satsang. Most people only hear discussion and are usually caught up in confusion. Moreover, few are able to understand the ones who give satsang. When the boundaries of appropriateness are crossed the behaviour,

thoughts and perspectives also change and that change is pretence. It is not backed up with either experience, wisdom or sadhana. Any sustainable change is only possible when one walks the path of dharma and respects the boundaries of appropriate conduct. Mere knowledge and following some practices does not lead one to change.

Changing the basic nature

What you see is not what you experience. The experience of transcendence and spirituality does not happen with knowledge or by reading books. Experience of divinity and goodness does not happen by reading books. It is only a sensorial activity, nothing more. It is like saying, 'Oh, I have had darshan of my Guru.' I have seen the image, yet it is only a visual experience. He is there while I am here; there is still separation. If I see my Guru in me, then that is a different nature. People talk of five vrittis – *pramana*, *vikalpa*, *viparyaya*, *nidra* and *smriti*, evidence, imagination or illusion, change or rearrangement, disconnection and memory. People say, 'Transcend these vrittis and become without vritti.' You cannot become without vritti ever, no matter who says it. Vrittis can be converted, and the final vritti is *brahmhi vritti*, the vritti of spiritual awareness. The five vrittis, *pramana*, *vikalpa*, *viparyaya*, *nidra* and *smriti*, are material.

Nobody and no scripture has said to transcend these five vrittis and attain *brahmhi vritti*. No commentator has written that, for they do not have the experience. They have the knowledge which they are interpreting, yet they do not live it. It is not possible through knowledge or sadhana. You can sit, focus, concentrate, struggle with your mind and when it goes away you pull it back again and again. You may even be successful, still you have only become a practitioner of a technique. You have not changed anything within you.

People who meditate for many hours during the day have they been able to control their vrittis? Have they been able to control their responses and reactions? Have they been able to alter *the kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*,

ghrina, raga, dwesha, desire, greed, infatuation, arrogance, envy, hatred, attraction, repulsion? No. So what is the use of meditating when you cannot change the basic nature of yourself. You are just under self-hypnosis, while meditating for so many hours. People demand siddhis. People demand awakening of kundalini, yet if the basic nature does not change, what is the attainment?

This is not something that a teacher can tell you, because they do not have the experience. It is something that only a guru can tell you – to look at yourself. Then there is another problem as nobody listens to the guru because nobody wants to look at themselves. They listen to the guru as long as their needs are fulfilled. When they are given advice to change and become something different in life, they do not heed it. Instead they feel, ‘I am being demeaned by somebody telling me what my flaw is.’ People do not want to look at themselves or acknowledge that they are like this. There is always a feeling of competitiveness and ambition, thinking, ‘Another person is able to do it, why can’t I? I can also do it. I am better than the other person.’ That is competition.

If I awaken my kundalini, I am sure many will think, ‘If Swamji can do it, I can also do it.’ That is competition. There is ambition, but they do not see their nature. They do not even realize that they are being propelled by their ambition or competitive desire. They just want to go one step beyond, believing that they can do it and depending on techniques. You can become a practitioner, a teacher of a technique, yet there is no experience. You can sit for meditation and do your mantra for four hours, six hours, without moving and be happy that you did it. It has not taken you anywhere for the basic nature is still there.

Maintaining the tradition

Competition and ambition do not allow either sadhana or knowledge to fructify in life. The only thing that helps is the tradition, which is gradually getting lost. However, it is being maintained by us, we are trying to maintain it. My guru

maintained it. He developed it. He said, “My successors have to follow it.” What he told us was *tapasya*, austerity. To give us an understanding of what *tapasya* is, he did *panchagni* for nine years. Before he left his body, he told me to continue with the *tapasya*. I have done it for ten years now from 2013 to this year. Initially, I used to think, “I am sitting in between fires and I am able to tolerate it.” That was the first reaction, “I can do it!”

Then I realized, I could possibly tolerate the fire which were outside, yet the training for me was to learn to manage the fires of my own nature. If I can tolerate eighty degrees during *panchagni*, can I tolerate the fifty degrees of my anger? Not one hundred percent, I am only saying fifty percent. Can I tolerate fifty percent of my fear and anxiety, and all those six friends, *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*? Can I then make the effort to do that? *Tapasya* is not just putting your body through extremes; it is also bringing about a change in your own *swabhava*, in your own nature.

The longest period of *panchagni sadhana* was from January to June. In heat like this you sit in the sun with the temperature reaching forty, forty-two, forty-five degrees. Then you light four fires around you, and each fire is again like eighty, ninety-degree heat all around you, what happens? The temperature soars. At that time, that heat is transferred to a different level of experience. If the transfer does not happen, the body will not be able to tolerate it. So one has to change the *swabhava* through *tapasya*. The outer heat becomes the catalyst to tell you how to deal with the inner ones.

In 2009, my Guru gave me the instruction to establish *Sannyasa Peeth*, which was established in 2010, and where many people are living now. He also told me, “Your life of yoga propagation is over.” I had been travelling from 1971 to 2007, for nearly forty years and it used to be an intense program and intense routine. Many people who have travelled with me to different parts in India and other places

know how intense our activities and programs used to be. This is nothing. This is purely rest and relaxation. We have lived a hectic life.

From 1971 to 2007, my address used to be Swami Niranjan: On the Road, and the country that I was in at the time. Then Sri Swamiji said that, “You have done enough. In fact, you have done more than me, because I did it for twenty years, you have done it for double of that, nearly thirty-seven, forty years. Now you focus on your sannyasa. You have just lived like a sannyasi in the ashram; you have not experienced sannyasa. The experience of sannyasa will happen with tapasya.”

In 2013, I started the panchagni sadhana and it continued till this year. It is for me to realize my sannyasa and who I am, how I can deal with myself, how I can live with myself and how I can develop a higher awareness. It is also meant to teach others how to live a better, proper, correct life where there is balance and harmony. Not twenty-three hours in the rut, and one hour trying to relax, focus, concentrate and become healthy. That has been the activity of Sannyasa Peeth – to make people aware of lifestyle, of a different idea that one can live constructively, creatively, positively and harmoniously. Definitely there is struggle in it, for we are not used to living constructively, happily, positively, creatively. Our nature is different. Each one has to struggle at an individual level. I also have to struggle with my own transformations and changes, which is expected by my Guru and the direction he has given me.

—30 July 2022

SRI KRISHNA JANMASHTAMI

Today throughout India, people are celebrating the birth of Sri Krishna. Krishna is a historical figure, who has had a big impact on the human psyche and specifically the Indian psyche. People consider him to be an incarnation or manifestation of love and bliss. If you read about his life, you will not find a single moment when there was an expression of pain, suffering, sadness, anxiety, fear, anger, greed, envy or jealousy in his life, or on his face. Never! He had a special character and trait which made him into a superbeing, an avatar. What were his most salient traits? There are many, but I will just tell you five today. What are those traits?

He was capable of hearing an infinite number of insults and abuses, and not react to them. Not like us. If somebody accuses us or abuses us even once, we get fired up and are ready to hit the person. But not Krishna. People could hurl abuse at him, people could say anything about him, and he would be totally non-reactive. At least a hundred times you could abuse him, I don't know about the hundred and first. But definitely, hundred times you could. If you went beyond the boundaries, then of course you had to face the consequences. One hundred times was accepted by him. So you can imagine, when you cannot stand even the first round of abuse and are ready to fight, imagine how much patience he had and not be affected by it.

The second trait was that he was one of the richest persons, leaders in India. Dwarka was famous for its riches. It was a very prosperous place and he was the leader of Dwarka. His best friend was Sudama, the poorest person of the land, and he was the closest friend. So Krishna was the richest and Sudama was the poorest. In our case, if we get some money, we will definitely not hobnob with people who are poor; we will try to ascend the ladder to rub our shoulders with the rich, the affluent, the prosperous and the mighty. However, though Krishna had everything, the entire riches of Dwarka,

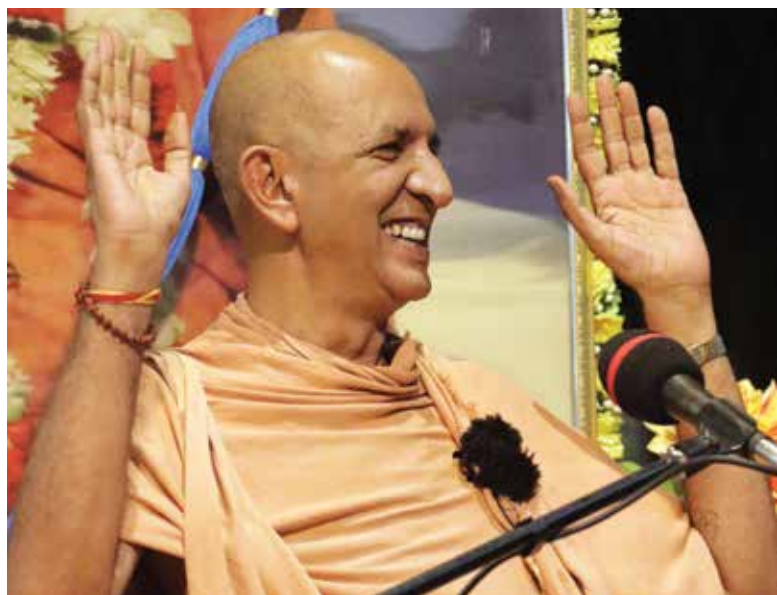


yet he was the closest friend of the poorest person. That was the second trait.

Third, he had the most potent weapon, *chakra*, the discus, yet he never displayed it. The only thing that was ever displayed in his hands was a flute. Chakra is the instrument of death, and flute is the instrument of happiness. So though he had the power to take away life, he made everyone dance to the melodies of his flute. Even his enemies danced to the melodies of his flute, and not to his political wit and wisdom.

Another trait was that he was all powerful, he was really all powerful. Yet he chose to become the charioteer of Arjuna. Like the most powerful person of the planet becoming your chauffeur! I mean, can you imagine that? The most powerful person of the planet becomes your chauffeur. Something we cannot even conceive of. That is what he did. He was the charioteer of Arjuna for the duration of the Mahabharata war.

These are the traits that set him apart as a person who was in command and had mastery over the lower nature of the individual. While the lower nature of an individual is always destructive, the higher nature of the individual



is always uplifting. The lower nature is more selfish, the higher nature is more selfless. Krishna lived a life which was totally selfless. His only intention and desire was to establish and define the parameters of *dharma*, righteousness, and his teachings reflect that. Dharma is not a religious belief. Dharma is cultivation of the positive in life. And therefore, one of the definitions of dharma is *Dharayete iti dharmaha* – What you hold onto in your life is dharma. The goodness that you hold within you is dharma. Krishna wanted to establish this dharma, to bring out the goodness and the piousness in each one, so that there is harmony and peace within the individual and in human society. That is the life which he lived and he is an inspiration to many who want to learn how to live a happy, joyous, love-filled and bliss-filled life. When you sleep tonight, reflect upon this and allow the good to be born within you. The good that will be born within you today will be the grace of Krishna.

—19 August 2022

GURUKUL AND SANNYASA

People from different parts of the world have come to participate in different programs and trainings that are being conducted at Ganga Darshan. Right now there are four courses taking place: one is the *Sannyasa Training* and another one is the *Sannyasa Experience*. Both are being conducted under the aegis of Sannyasa Peeth. There are two more trainings: *Yoga Chakra Experience* and *Ashram Life Experience*, conducted under the aegis of Bihar School of Yoga.

These programs and courses started in the month of July. Until now there have been morning classes of asana, pranayama, mantra, relaxation, concentration; these are the classroom trainings. I always insist that you do not learn yoga in a classroom. In the classroom, you learn practices of yoga. These practices are external, physical and psychological. Asana, pranayama are physical practices; pratyahara, dharana are mental, psychological practices. You can practise and learn them in a classroom environment, yet that is not yoga. That is learning the different techniques or practices of yoga. Yoga is a lifestyle which you do not learn in a classroom.

To understand the yogic lifestyle, you have to go beyond classroom and into your daily routine. The classroom yoga is for physical and mental benefit. Spiritual yoga is realized and understood when you are able to train and tweak your mind to move in the right direction. Therefore, I want to make it clear that the spiritual life of yoga is not for everyone. The physical and psychological component of yoga is for the whole of society. The spiritual component of yoga cannot be practised by people who live in society, with the same mind-set, with the same desires and ambitions that they have always had. Although you practise yoga, you are not spiritual. Spirituality does not come through meditation. Spirituality does not come not by having visions of the Divine. Spirituality comes when you are able to harness the

dissipated energies of the mind and give them a focus and direction.

Yoga and ashram

Yoga is one stream that is found at Ganga Darshan. People confuse yoga with spirituality and therefore people think that even by practising asana, they have become spiritual. That is fallacy, wrong understanding about oneself. No, you are just a physical practitioner. Like you go to a gym, in the same way you go to a yoga centre. In a gym you lift barbells, in a yoga centre you do your asanas. By virtue of doing asana and pranayama, you do not become spiritual.

To become spiritual, even thinking about God or singing His name is not good enough. That is hypocrisy, for spirituality is an expression of your pure inner self. It is not an expression of a desire and ambition. Once purity happens inside, spiritual awareness dawns. The idea that you have become spiritual because you have started to practise yoga is nothing but hypocrisy. That is one aspect. You have to look into the other aspect, not the physical or psychological, but the spiritual aspect.

Another aspect is the gurukul or ashram life; this is also quite interesting. *Gurukul* means the family of the Master, the family of the guru. In the olden times when there were no private schools, government schools or any other type of college or school, people used to come to the guru for education. They would stay with the guru for twelve years and be trained in sixty-four different arts, from administration to the daily needs of society. Even a cobbler and ironsmith was trained in gurukul, for in the ancient days gurukul was the school of today.

After completing twelve years of education, people would go back to society and take up their responsibilities. However, out of this group maybe one or two percent of people, maybe a maximum of ten percent of the group, would show their interest in experiencing spiritual life, questioning, 'What is Brahman? What is this world? What is

my role in it? What is my destiny? What is my nature? How do I realize the higher nature?’

When this type of thoughts would arise, they would again consult the guru and ask where they could find the answer to these questions. Then the guru would tell them, ‘Your questions relate with your spiritual life, your real life. To experience your spiritual life, your real life, you have to release or renounce your old nature, your old habits, and you have to take a rebirth in spiritual life.’ Rebirth means come back with something new. After all what is rebirth? Body changes, mind changes, associations change. Everything changes in rebirth.

So the gurus used to say, ‘You have to take a rebirth in order to experience the spiritual.’ And to take rebirth without dying, without suicide, without murder, you deal with that aspect of yourself which keeps you bound to the material plane. The aspect that deals with yourself, and which keeps you grounded to the material world, is the mind. So harness the dissipated energies of the mind. Tweak the mind and transform the behaviour of the mind. Only when the mind is transformed and is not attracted to the material objects and material desires, can you allow the spiritual consciousness to dawn.

So the ashram became a place where people would come, not to the gurukul which was like the school. The ashram became like the college where people would come to work with themselves, change the habit, the *swabhava*, the nature, behaviour, attitude, perception, outlook, the restrictive mentality into a broader mind-set. The education of ashram totally depends on self-awareness and self-correction. Until and unless you are aware, you won’t be able to see yourself. Just as today nobody is able to see themselves. Until you are aware, you will not be able to overcome the flaws of personality.

So awareness and self-correction become important in the ashram. The ashram rules also relate to that. How much people follow them is another matter. I always say, ‘Don’t



fight!’ but everybody fights. Nobody listens to the guru any more, they all listen to their own mind. I say behave nicely, and definitely, sure and certain, the person to whom I say behave nicely, will behave in the most obnoxious manner with the other person. I see this every day. This is because we are unable to look at ourselves. Forget self-correction, it does not happen. We want other people to correct themselves, we do not want to be corrected. In ashram training, self-awareness and self-correction are of prime importance.

When the participants of *Ashram Life Experience* receive their instructions, they are told not to gossip about it. Asking other people, ‘I got this. What did you get?’ shows a low mind-set, at least in my dictionary. Comparing is a low level of mind-set. ‘What do you have? What have I got? I will also follow and add the instruction given to you.’ That is the worst type of mentality which will never help a person to evolve or progress in life. Your whole attention is diverted to

‘What did you get?’ You are not even looking at ‘How can I do what I have been given?’ You are more interested in what the other person has received as instruction.

I oppose that mind-set. I do not like gossip. There are people who chase other people to talk. I don’t like it as that defeats the whole purpose. If you can make the effort to focus on yourself, you will be the right person. That is the ashram system and ashram education.

Sannyasa

The third aspect in this ashram is sannyasa. Sannyasa is an ancient tradition for people who wished to renounce the society and the world either because of a problem, difficulty, challenge or for a spiritual purpose. For many sannyasa is escapism from responsibilities and duties and for many sannyasa is a vocation to experience spiritual life in total. People who escape from the sufferings of life come to sannyasa not with a spiritual aspiration, but with a desire and ambition to be respected, wanted, supported, elevated, adored and worshipped.

In my lifetime, I have seen thousands of people come and go. Sannyasins come and go, because they want to follow their own personal agenda, not the agenda of sannyasa. They want to wear the geru to become part of the club and that’s it. Even many yoga teachers say, ‘Oh, before going back from the ashram, I want to take karma sannyasa. So that when I give the classes, I can sit like a sannyasin, and people will respect me more.’ It is a petty mind-set. It is a rotten mind-set. For selfish gain, you are trying to live a hypocritical life which is not meant for a selfish gain.

Swami Sivanandaji made a daring proclamation. He said, “I want my sannyasins to be able to read, write, type, lecture, cook, clean, everything. They should be well versed in everything, not only the shastras to gossip about.” And he gave that training. He said, “The foundation of my ashram is karma yoga.” He said that to everybody who came, including Swami Satyanandaji, our guru. “Work hard and you will be

purified.” He did not say meditate, do this mantra or do this yoga. He said, ‘Work hard and you will be purified.’ Now if I say to you, ‘Work hard and you will be purified,’ you will never believe me because your mind is moving in a different direction. You want to sit and meditate, close your eyes and have all the divine experiences that you have read about in the books.

Your first attempt will be to shun karma, avoid action. That is what most of the sannyasins do. They avoid action by saying, ‘I have become a sannyasin. I have renounced everything.’ They won’t cook for themselves because they have renounced it. If they have renounced it, why are they eating? They want someone else to serve them. They want someone else to do their work for them. They live a regal life or want to live a regal life, where there is no effort, only gossip about scriptures, which is only half-baked in their own brain.

Swami Sivanandaji did not encourage this type of sannyasa. He used to say, ‘If you cannot adjust to this ashram, go and find some other ashram where you can live your life. In this ashram this is how you have to live, and this is what you have to focus on.’ He gave a new dimension to the whole aspect of sannyasa which was based on effort, observation and correction. Self-effort, self-observation and self-correction.

Then in the next generation, Swami Satyanandaji said that there are many people who want to live a spiritual life while living in society, fulfilling their obligations, commitments and duties to society and to family. They do not have the opportunity or the time to follow the spiritual path as much as necessary. To them he said, ‘You can take karma sannyasa, live a normal life in society with family, yet you live with the awareness and attitude that you are a sannyasin.’ He brought in the component of karma sannyasa, which became accessible and available to all those who wanted to experience spiritual life while living their normal life.

Poorna sannyasa is, of course, a rarity. Everybody is not a poorna sannyasin. There are many students who go to a chemistry class or a physics class. They learn about it, yet they don't become a chemist or physicist. They just have the understanding of what it means. To become a chemist or a physicist, you have to dedicate your life to it. To become a mathematician, you have to dedicate your life to it. To become an archaeologist, a doctor, you have to dedicate your life to the subject.

There are few sannyasins, who dedicate their life to discover sannyasa. There are many people who take sannyasa and then begin to think, 'How will I survive in my old age? Who will look after me? I don't have a boyfriend. I don't have a husband. I don't have a family. What will happen to me?' The worry about the future begins and the present is gone. Out of the millions of sannyasins who exist there are very few who actually live the sannyasa life. The remaining millions live their ambition, their selfish need and desire.

The *Sannyasa Experience* and the *Sannyasa Training* are based on the teachings of Swami Sivananda and Swami Satyananda. The whole idea is to cultivate a new mind-set, a new mind structure, a new vritti. People who study yoga say that there are five vrittis as they have read it in Patanjali's *Yoga Darshan*. The vrittis are pramana, viparya, vikalpa, nidra and smriti. There are not only these five vrittis. For the purpose of raja yoga, Sage Patanjali chose to describe the basic compartments of the mind in form of vrittis, however there are thousands of vrittis.

The mood that changes you is also a vritti. How many times do you change your moods during the day? Every time you change your mood, you are living a different vritti. If you are angry, you are living the anger vritti. If you are fearful, you are living the fear vritti. In this manner, every change of mood reflects the emergence of a new vritti. As long as these vrittis dominate the sannyasa aspirant, sannyasa can never be realized. India is a land of paradox. You will find sannyasins of every hue and colour, yet you will find maybe only five or

ten real sannyasins in the entire nation, who have committed and dedicated their life to discover the source of goodness and the divine.

Developing sannyasa

So yoga, ashram and sannyasa merge in Ganga Darshan. It was the vision of Swami Sivanandaji and Swami Satyanandaji that all three components have to be realized according to our need. Our need is not defined by what we desire, but by the process that has been established to re-educate the mind. Sannyasa is not just renunciation and initiation. What do you renounce anyway? You can renounce your family, home, yet that does not mean anything. If you can renounce your own desires, vasana and kamana, then you can say that you have left behind everything. You can renounce vasana and kamana even while living with the family. It is difficult but possible. If you can do that, you are a sannyasin. Even by living in an ashram for all your life, if you cannot extract yourself from the pull of the wants and desires which are external and which are for self-gratification, then there is no sannyasa.

Sannyasa, my Guru always said, is the path of freedom. This path of freedom is the path of freedom from vasanas and kamanas, from what binds us and makes us who we are right now. It is not freedom from discipline and systems of society, an organization, the law or the rule. People take it in that manner, saying that they have become a sannyasins and don't have to follow any rules or laws. Those who believe in this idea are the most duped group of people. Sannyasa does not say, 'Rebel against society and the, restrictions of society.' Sannyasa says and advises, 'Manage your wants and desires, and become free of that.'

The five aspects of sannyasa begin with seva, swadhyaya, satsang, sadhana and samarpan. *Seva* is service, and this service is selfless service, not for self-gratification but to become part of the mission or the vision of the place and the Master. *Swadhyaya* is self-study. Swadhyaya does not mean to



read, that is *adhyayan*. When you have to read something, that is *adhyayan*. When we say *swadhyaya* it means self-study. So while you are in *seva*, study yourself. Both ways – study and steady. Study is self-study and steady is being firm.

I saw this in the life of my Guru, Swami Satyanandaji, when he was in Sivanandashram. He was a firm and stable person. There was no swaying from here to there, there to there. For him his mission, his connection and his faith in Guru was final. Today people do not have faith either in the connection, mission or the guru. There are people who come and ask me, ‘Swamiji, I have this problem. What can I do?’ I give them some advice. Then they go to twenty other people and say, ‘I have this problem. What do you suggest? Swamiji has told me to do this.’ That shows the mentality of people. They do not want a solution to anything; they want everybody to know what their problem is and to worry, ‘Oh, you poor little thing. You have such a problem.’ *Swadhyaya* leads to steadiness in life and a steady mind.

Then comes the third aspect, *satsang*, which is a connection with positivity and correctness. Satsang does not mean spiritual discussion. Satsang means proper interaction. There are people who will criticize another person. 'Oh, this person has said that. The person is not good, and he does not listen to what I say. He does what he wants to; and nobody bothers about me . . . ' This kind of criticizing happens. Instead of that, can you not think, 'How I can improve my connection and communication?' Rather than go into a zone of self-pity saying, 'Nobody likes me. Nobody talks to me. Nobody looks at me. Nobody smiles at me.' This becomes the subject of debate and discussion, 'In the ashram nobody looked at me. In the ashram I am not wanted. In the ashram I was made to work hard.'

Such mind-set does not understand satsang. People think of satsang as spiritual discourse, and that is an incorrect understanding of satsang. *Satsang* means connection with your own positivity, where you are not affected by the behaviour of other people. It is immunity not to Corona virus, but to Corona people and we are all Corona people. We just like to talk bad about another person. We never have anything nice to say about the other person. We are quick to criticize and slow in appreciation. The people who are quick to criticize are connected to the negative mind. The people who are quick to appreciate are connected with the positive mind. Inspiring talk can happen rather than criticizing somebody. Satsang means to remain connected with the positive in you, not a spiritual discourse.

Sadhana is self-correction and self-improvement, followed by surrender, *samarpan*, where you say, 'Now my boat is in the middle of the river. I have no control. Only the boatman knows to which shore to take me. So, let me just relax and let the boatman do all the work.' That is samarpan. People who are backseat drivers are not samarpit people. You know, there are backseat drivers who sit in the back and say, 'Go here, go here. You've made the wrong turn. You should have turned there.' No.

These are the five components of sannyasa: seva, swadhyaya, satsang, sadhana and samarpan. This is the progression. Many of you have been involved in seva, which is still half-hearted. It is not yet with clarity of mind, but it is accepted. I don't think anybody has done swadhyaya. They would prefer to read a book, rather than try to tweak the negative within themselves. Satsang, I don't think anybody does it. Only once have I seen satsang being done in this ashram by people. I am sure that none of you have done that ever in your life.

There was a group of young people who came to the ashram, and in the evening they would sit in the room and say, 'Today we learnt this. How can we improve tomorrow? Today Swamiji said this. How can we implement that tomorrow?' It was always a positive, constructive talk. That is satsang. Not that three people are sitting in a room and have the freedom to talk about anything in life, whether it be food, woman or wealth, nothing. So even satsang is out; swadhyaya is out; seva is half. Sdhana is also misunderstood, as sadhana for everybody means they should be able to awaken their kundalini in the first round and attain everything that they desire; and samarpan does not exist. Surrender is only an idea, nothing more. There is no effort made to surrender.

There is a big gap on the path of sannyasa by people who wish to follow that path. This has to be understood and rectified. Do not expect one hundred percent success, yet be inspired to begin your journey afresh every day.

One guru called ten of his disciples, gave them a banana each and said, 'You eat this in private where nobody is watching you.' The ten disciples walked away. Later on Guruji called them back and asked, 'Have you had your banana?' Out of the ten people one said, 'Yes I have had my banana'. 'Did anybody see you eat?' 'No, I ate it in the confines of my room. I had the door and window closed. I ate the banana and nobody saw me eat.' Another person was asked 'Did you eat your banana?' He said, 'I tasted it; it was

green so I gave it to someone else.’ Another swami was asked, ‘Did you eat your banana.’ He said, ‘I still have it in my bag I haven’t had time to eat it yet.’ Another person replied, ‘Oh yes, it was very sweet.’ ‘Did anybody see it?’ ‘No! I ate when nobody was watching it.’

In the end Swamiji called Swami Niranjan and said, ‘Did you eat your banana?’ I said, ‘No!’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because I could not find any place which was not seen by you or God. If you are watching me, then how can I be alone? If God is watching me, how can I be alone? If both of you are watching me then how can I eat my banana? I cannot go anywhere without two pairs of eyes looking at me.’

God is always watching and Guru is always watching. That has always been my conviction. If they are continuing to watch me all the time, why should I try to make any mistakes? That is another thought. I should not try to make any mistake, for I will be observed by them and taken to task by them. This is samarpan. This is an example of samarpan. Samarpan or surrender does not happen to an individual, it happens to a collective which is ‘me, my Guru and my God’. If people say, ‘I have surrendered,’ in my mind I always say, ‘You are a hypocrite.’ What have you surrendered? You have not even accepted the role of guru in your life. You have not even accepted the role of God in your life. So how can you say you have surrendered?

The choice is yours. If you want to live your life as a hypocrite, you are free to do so, but then leave the ashram. If you want to live and learn about how to live a proper life, then make the effort to change. You can dig gold out of the mountain, yet you cannot use it in that state. To use it, you have to clean the gold and purify it in fire. That fire is so hot, that it can separate the gold from the muck. So do not say, ‘I am a nugget of gold.’ It does not mean anything. To become valuable, you have to go through the process of purification and conversion from bad to good.

—21 August 2022

GANESH CHATURTHI

Ganesha has a peculiar birth and what he becomes is also peculiar. Mythology says that Mother Parvati put ubtan on her body. *Ubtan* is a paste which we use on our body to remove all the dead skin and dirt. It is better than soap. With the paste which she had put on her body she created the figure of a human child, and gave prana to that figure. The human child came alive. He had no name and was given the duty of guarding the door of the Mother's palace.

When he was guarding the door, the servants of the palace tried to enter, and he refused them entry. So they went to Shiva. Shiva himself came and tried to enter the Mother's palace, but he was blocked by this child. At that moment, Shiva could not recognize who the child was. This is the twist in the story . . .

Shiva could not recognize who the child was and he had a fight with the child. During the fight he cut off its head. When Mother Parvati came to know that the child she had created was lying lifeless on the ground, she became furious and took the form of Shakti, her transcendental form, ready to destroy the created universe. Shiva pacified her and Parvati said, "Bring back my child. Give him life." Shiva said, "It can only happen on one condition. I will need the head of a baby who was born exactly at the same time as this child."

The emissaries went around the world to see which child was born exactly at the same time as Parvati's child, and they discovered that one elephant had given birth to a small baby at exactly the same time. So, they cut the head of the baby elephant and brought it to Shiva. Through micro-surgery, Shiva put the head of the elephant baby on the body of the child. Then Shiva called him by the name of Ganesha.

The secret and essence of Ganesha lies in this story. Shakti is the power of action and Shiva is the power of cognition. Action and cognition are Shakti and Shiva. Ganesha was born from the waste product of the paste that Parvati had put on her body. So it was an impure element. Parvati gave birth to

a child, a human child; she invoked life into the form which was that of a human child. Shiva recognized that this child was born as a human boy from an impure paste. Humans are not pure. They are too caught up in their *indriyas*, senses, and the pleasures that they derive through their senses. Shiva said, "If this child is going to be the Cosmic Mother's child, the nature, the trait and the character has to change."

What is the quality of a human being? What is the nature of a human being? Humans are guided by the functions of their mind. That's it. Theoretically and philosophically, people say that there is *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. But what do you apply the most in life? It is not *buddhi*, you do not apply intelligence. If you applied intelligence, you would be a better person. You only live in the dimension of *manas*, acting and reacting, acting and reacting. There is no intelligence in that. Intelligence here represents the wisdom to know the difference between the correct and the incorrect. Although humans have the component of *buddhi*, they rarely utilize this component. They utilize more the functions of the mind. There is no wisdom in life, there are only reactions in life.

You can see that in your life on a day-to-day basis. You know what is to be done, yet you follow your mind. That is the biggest folly of a human being. *Chitta* is something abstract, we do not derive any learning from our experience. There is never any learning from the mistakes. We commit the same mistake again and again whatever may be the reason, either out of spite or ignorance. There is no learning from past experience. *Chitta* is the storehouse of memories and your memories are accessed by the mind in order to fulfil its cravings, desires and needs. The memories are never extracted to learn from them and to correct oneself from the past experience. So the components of *chitta* and *buddhi* are dormant in every individual.

Manas is the predominant factor in a human being. This *manas* is supported by the negative side of *ahamkara*, the ego, which is gross, material, mundane and which is only controlled by the gratification of the senses. There is

no awareness of the higher ahamkara of one's own nature. There is always awareness of what one desires and how that desire can be fulfilled. This is the biggest folly of human life or human incarnation. If you consider that you access your mind eighty percent of the time, then you access your intelligence ten percent, your chitta five percent and your ahamkara five percent, the rest is only manas – acting and reacting. That is the ratio in which we live.

So Shiva said, “No. If this person is the product of Shakti, and if this person is going to be called my son as well, the gross nature has to be removed. The *mal*, the impure nature, has to be destroyed. That is the meaning of cutting off the head. The elephant head represents the greater mind. People say that elephants have the biggest memory. The memory or the chitta of the elephant is the highlighted component in the elephant. Just as manas is highlighted in human beings, chitta is predominant in elephants. They have long-lasting memories. Shiva gave the head of the elephant to this child. This became the means of overcoming the impurities of prakriti and experiencing the luminosity which he was, as the son of Shakti and of Shiva.

Then he was called Ganesha. The word Ganesha is composed of two different words: *gana* means followers; *isha* means Lord; Lord of the followers. Lord of all that is living, created and experiencing life. Each and every life form is a *gana* and Ganesha became the Lord of all life forms. He had a special boon which was given to him: only Ganesha, the Lord of all existing, created beings could create and remove obstacles from the path of an individual's growth and development in life. If there are negative intentions, Ganesha will block those negative intentions. If there are positive intentions, Ganesha will create the path for the positive intentions. So, he is known as *vighnaharta*, remover of obstacles, and *vighnakarta*, one who creates obstacles. This can be interpreted in different ways. For the negative and destructive people, he creates obstacles, so that they cannot do the negative and the destructive, whereas for the positive people,

any blocks, barriers, obstacles that they find on their journey towards luminosity are removed by him so they can experience the goal which is the transcendental nature of life.

There is another aspect of Ganesha. He is the deity of the mantra *Om*. When you say *Om Namah Shivaya*, you think the deity of this mantra is Shiva. When you say *Om Namah Bhagavate Vasudevaya*, you know this mantra is of Krishna and the deity of *Om Rama Ramaya Namaha* is Rama. The mantra *Om* represents the transcendental nature of Ganesha. The scriptures state that when there was nothing, no creation, only the sound *Om* existed. As it says in the Bible too: In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.

Here the 'Word' is the mantra *Om* and this mantra was with God, the transcendental Ganesha. Ganesha is the deity of the mantra *Om*. This mantra exists even when there is nothing. Scientists have been able to discover the sound created by the Sun, and that is the mantra *Om*. They have also heard the sound that emerges from the Black Hole, and that is also the mantra *Om*. When everything is being sucked into the Black Hole, the only thing that remains is the mantra *Om*; and this mantra becomes again the cause of re-emergence of creation.

This form of Ganesha is known as the *Mahaganapati*, the Great Ganapati, Lord of everything that exists. According to mythology, this transcendental Self, promised that he would always be born in the same form as Ganesha. All incarnations of Ganesha are the same: the tusk, the elephant head, the small boy. He is never born as a human figure or in any other type of life form and he is always born only to Shiva and Shakti. He is considered their son. What a beautiful trinity we see here: *Om*, Shiva or the power of cognition, and Shakti or the power of action. These three together represent the entire universe.

Ganesha is something which one can experience in life too. It is not just an idea; the experience is a reality. Ganesha also represents the transition from the lower mind to the higher mind. There is much that can be said about him,



however the nature of Ganesha is something which human beings cannot understand. When we cannot even understand ourselves, then how can we understand Ganesha? Ganesha is the realization which yogis have when they have transformed the lower nature of their Self. After they have transformed the lower nature of the Self, the transcendental nature which is experienced is that of Ganesha.

Ganesha has been the most loving form of divinity. Ganesha is a power, Ganesha is an experience, Ganesha is a reality which we can access when we have overcome the bondage of manas, experienced buddhi, derived jnana from our chitta, and realized our oneness of the individual self with the higher Self. This is the spiritual journey of every aspirant.

According to mythology, he was born on this day. This year it happens to be 31st August, and that means that even in your life, he has to be born today. So when you go to sleep at night, before sleeping, practise one mala of the mantra *Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha* and pray to Ganesha that all obstacles on your journey to luminosity be removed. If you are sincere in your prayers, and if you are sincere about wanting to walk the path, he will remove them. If there is any shade of insincerity, know that there will be many more obstacles for you to face in life. That is the trial and test of our commitment, sincerity, faith and devotion.

—31 August 2022

KARMA YOGA

It has been almost two months since I have been here trying to adjust, adapt and acclimatize with the ashram culture. Sometimes things, people and work don't make a lot of sense. I get upset and irritated at times. Then I start questioning my own decision and, whether whatever I have learnt here will help me progress or grow in life. Is it normal to feel low at times and that I am not even aware of it because it happens so quickly? The whole day gets disturbed and then I start automatically noticing all the negatives in my life and surroundings, and past memories also start bombarding me. How to manage all these things and how to create balance within?

It is a good question. There are different components and aspects that one has to consider. The first part is the work or duty, and that is always there. You can come and go, yet the work and duty will continue. Even at home, you are engaged in work and performance of your duties. You can go out of the house and come back, and again reconnect with work and duty. That is something which is constant and it does not change. Then what changes? Our understanding, our response and our reactions.

Everyone is not perfect and everyone begins their journey from the point of understanding and evolution where they are. Some may have greater evolution; others may have lesser evolution. Some may have greater understanding; others may have lesser understanding. Some may have better management of their ego, and some may have less management of their ego. So it is the individual's participation and response which bothers you, not the karma or duty.

An example like sweeping one area – that is karma, duty, and it will be done for years to come. You come here for one month or two, three or four months or one year, and you are given the duty to sweep. You are doing the work, then

your in-charge comes, who may be more evolved, who may be less evolved, who may be more understanding, who may be less understanding, and tells you, 'Hey, you are not doing it right.' How you react to that is 'you', not the karma nor the duty. The in-charge tells you, 'Sweep here, sweep there'. How you react, that is you. It has nothing to do with karma or duty.

Atmashuddhi

Your participation, evolution, understanding plays a major role. This happens throughout life. Even at home there are things that you may wish to avoid, and there are things that you may wish to engage in. What you avoid does not disappear, it remains. Your participation, involvement and commitment is what determines what you want to avoid and what you want to engage in.

One has to observe the reactions; that is the whole concept of karma yoga – *Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatmashuddhaye*. It is stated in the *Bhagavad Gita* that yogis or spiritual aspirants perform action with the purpose of attaining inner purity. This inner purity is the outcome of participation, understanding and awareness. If there is no participation, no understanding and no awareness, there is no purity, no harmony and no balance inside you. That is the concept of karma yoga.

There was a saint in Tibet. His name was Milarepa. He went to his guru, Marpa, for spiritual learning and education. Marpa said to him, 'You will not join any of my classes, you will not participate in any activity with our students. While you are here, you make a stone hut for me at the base of the mountain.' So, every day Milarepa used to carry rocks, put rocks on top of each other and make the hut. When the hut was complete, his guru, Marpa, came and said, 'Listen, I don't like this location. The scenery is not nice. Change the location but use the same rocks that you have used in this building. Piece by piece, take it and reconstruct the house in another location.'

Milarepa continued to do that. He did not get irritated. He did not say, 'What is the purpose of making the house if you are not going to use it? You are just bugging and bothering me.' He had no ill-feeling towards the instructions or the person who was giving the instruction. He said, 'This is a karma, this is a duty which I have been given. I have to accomplish it to the satisfaction of the person who has given me the instruction.'

The guru came again and said, 'Listen, I don't like this hut under the mountain. I want my hut on top of the mountain. Carry the rocks from this house at the bottom of the mountain and reconstruct it on top of the mountain.' Again Milarepa started to dismantle the house rock by rock and carry those rocks on top of the mountain and construct it there. One day Guruji came up to the mountain and saw Milarepa carrying the rocks. The guru said to him, 'You lazy person! Do it faster!' And he gave him a push. When he gave him the push, Milarepa fell down the mountain. As he was falling, an invisible hand came and supported him. That invisible hand again brought him back and placed him in front of the guru. At that time Marpa said, 'Milarepa, you have outshone me.' This is an example. It is a true story of Marpa and Milarepa in Tibet.

Why did I tell you this story? To tell you three points of karma yoga: *Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvaatma-shuddhaye*, the spiritual aspirant or yogi performs the karma, setting aside attachment, likes and dislikes for the attainment of inner purification. In the life of Milarepa, we saw that. The guru told him to shift the house many times. He never questioned, 'Why are you engaging me in useless tasks?' He never said, 'I am being bothered by you.' He was aware that he had been given an instruction, and he had to accomplish and fulfil that instruction, as per the wish of his Master.

Immunity and expectations

The second concept of karma yoga is to develop immunity from action and reaction. We are all affected by what other people tell us; and what is affected in us is our ego, not intellect. If buddhi and viveka were there, many of our responses would be balanced and channelled. Without even realizing it, interactions and responses always go through the door of the ego first, and logic is the last door. Although people say that they try to understand, but that is not the reality. It is the doors of ego that open up first, and not the doors of buddhi, logic or discriminative understanding.

As the doors of ego open first, we always respond and react. There are few people who do not react, but try to do things with clarity and positivity. The majority react and reaction makes them rebel and think the negative and detrimental. Once that negative mood sets in, it is very difficult to extract oneself from that mood, until another event occurs and your ego is pacified, patted and told that you have done well. If you are told that you have not done well, the ego will flare up even more. As long as there is response of ego in karma, there is no *shuddhi*, no purity; there is no harmony, balance and equilibrium.

The third aspect of karma yoga is *Karmanye vaadhikaaraste maa phaleshu kadaachana*. Sri Krishna says that work is your birth right, karma is your birth right, not the expectation of the result or fruit. The result can change. When the result changes, the outcome, the fruit, the gain will also become different. That will either elate or depress you. If you get the right result and the right return, you will be elevated and elated. If you do not get the right result, the right fruit, you will be depressed. Sri Krishna says, we live in this world of karma – karma is our birth right, we cannot ignore, avoid or shun it. To desire and expect a result, a fruit, an outcome to your satisfaction is incorrect for that is a demand or expectation of the mind, of your *kamana* or *vasana*, desire. It has nothing to do with karma. So perform karma and ignore the fruit, that is the statement of Krishna.

Ashram culture

Ashram culture is based on seva, swadhyaya and sadhana. People give priority to sadhana, not to swadhyaya and seva. These three things balance each other. Swadhyaya is, in my dictionary, more important than sadhana, for sadhana is a defined process and you are taught that. *Swadhyaya*, the ability to look at yourself, is not a sequential or defined process. You can choose a type of sadhana. I can do one hour, two hours, three hours on daily basis, or half an hour regularly. You cannot choose a time for swadhyaya, self-observation and self-correction. That has to happen continuously, on a moment-to-moment basis.

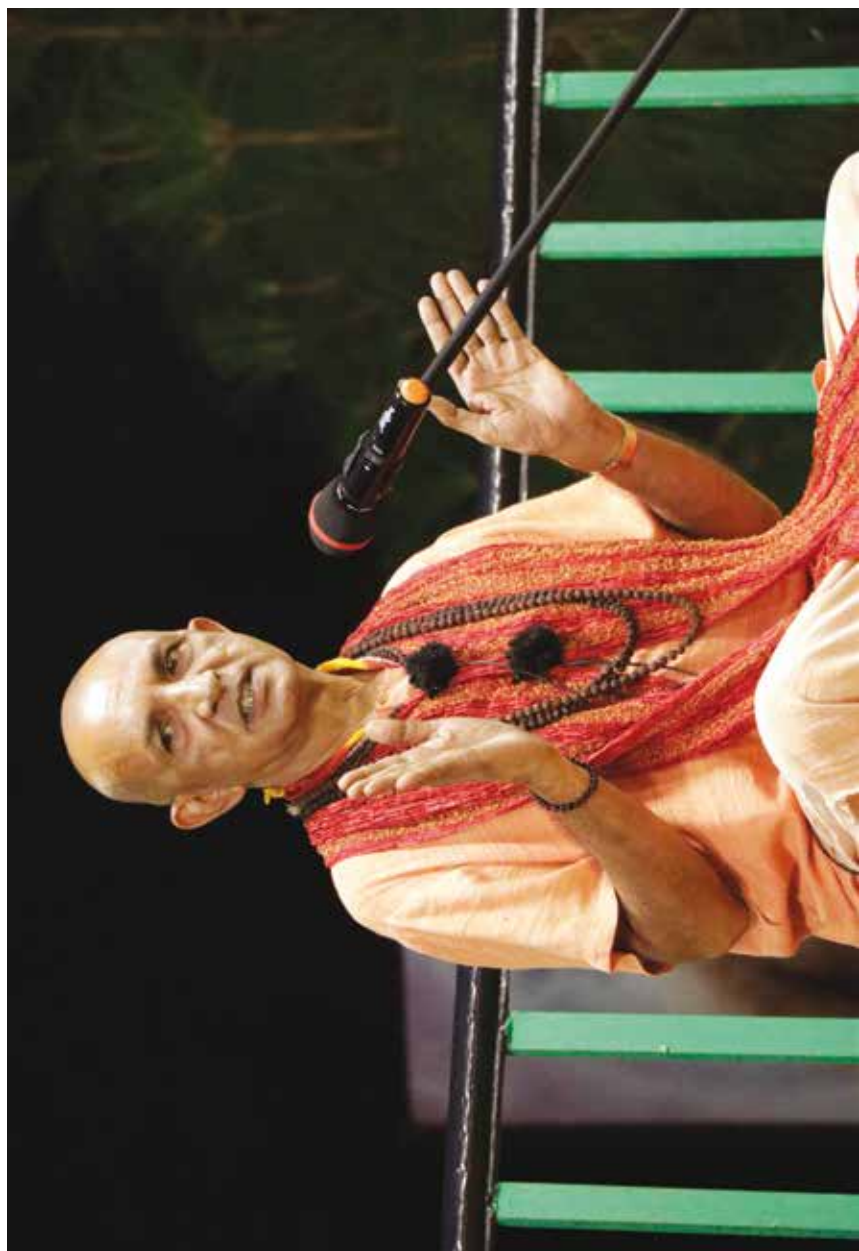
People cannot be aware of and hold on to their positivity all the time because that is not the nature of the materialistic mind. The materialistic mind does not have the *brahmi vritti*, the higher vritti, rather it has the *tamas vrittis*, *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion; *krodha* and *bhaya*, aggression and fear, and all the other nice things that we live in the course of our day and life which do not allow awareness to guide our actions and life. Therefore, all our life is nothing but reacting to this situation or to that situation.

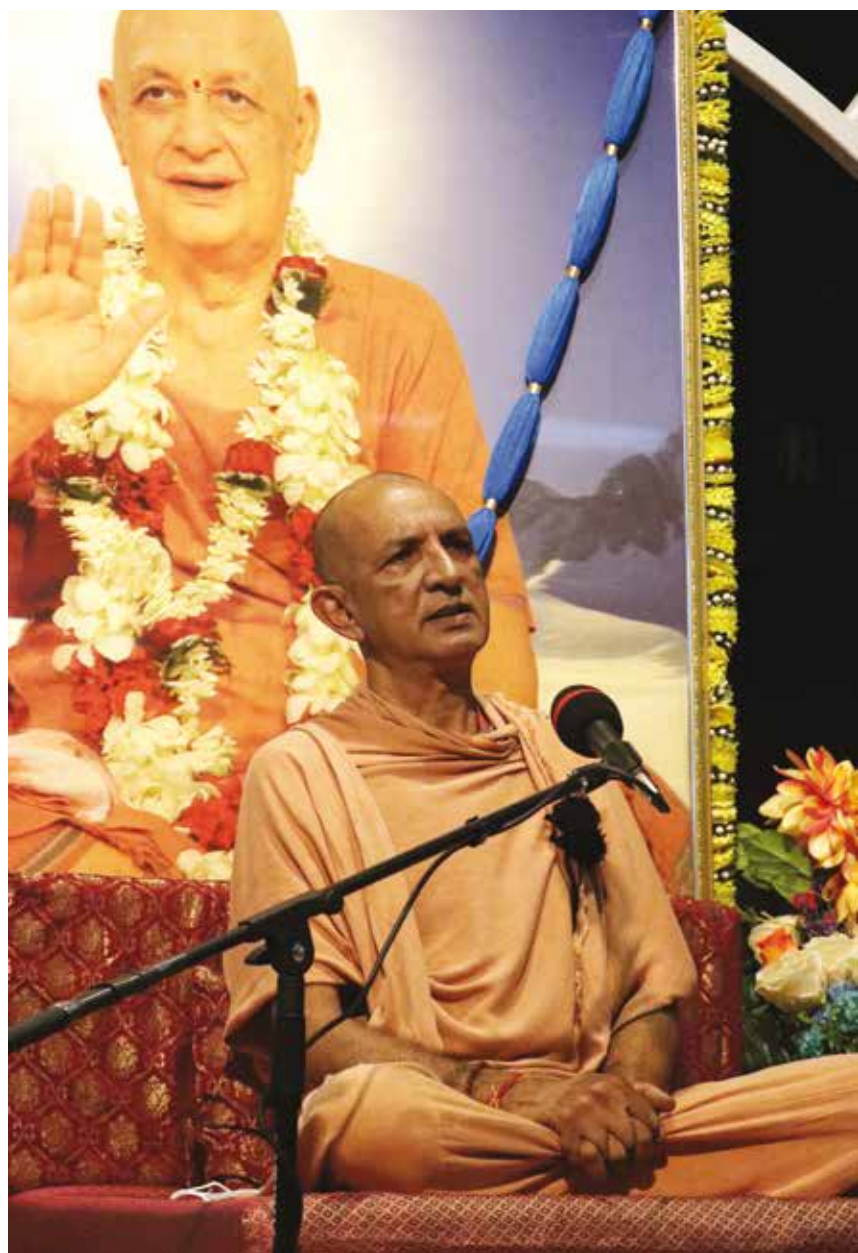
We are unable to live with awareness, positivity, conviction and faith. Rather, one is always either struggling with oneself or struggling with other people; fighting with oneself or fighting with another person. There is always inner conflict due to the nature of the mind; it is this mind which has to be managed. This management of mind and of self happens when you are observing yourself. Observation is the key. Awareness is the key.

Apart from this, there is another aspect; one cannot avoid the karma, yet people avoid the *parishram*, effort. People run away from effort, not from karma. In the morning, people are cleaning different areas of the ashram; there are some people who do jharu sweeping for two minutes in one place, then they leave, go to another place for two minutes, then they leave and go to some other further place; and they just avoid the effort. Ultimately they land up in their room

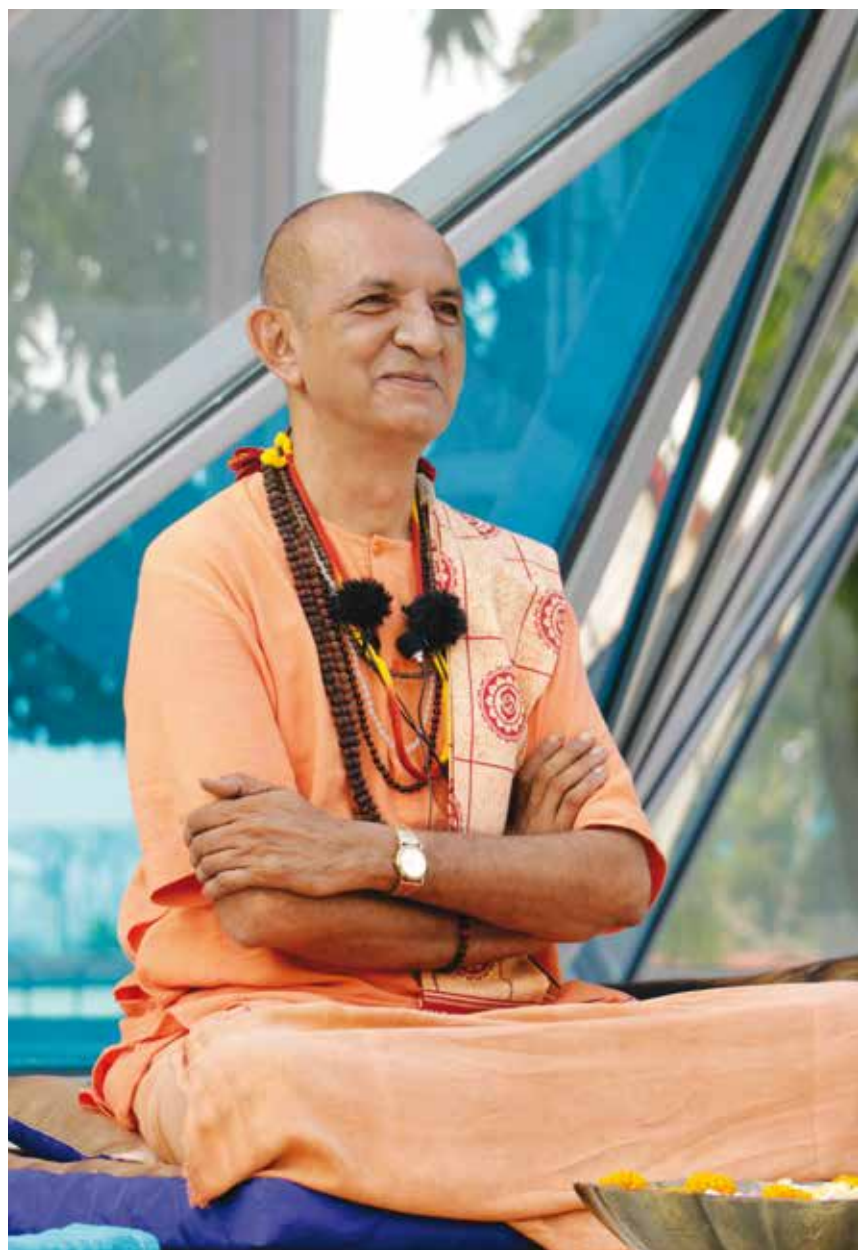




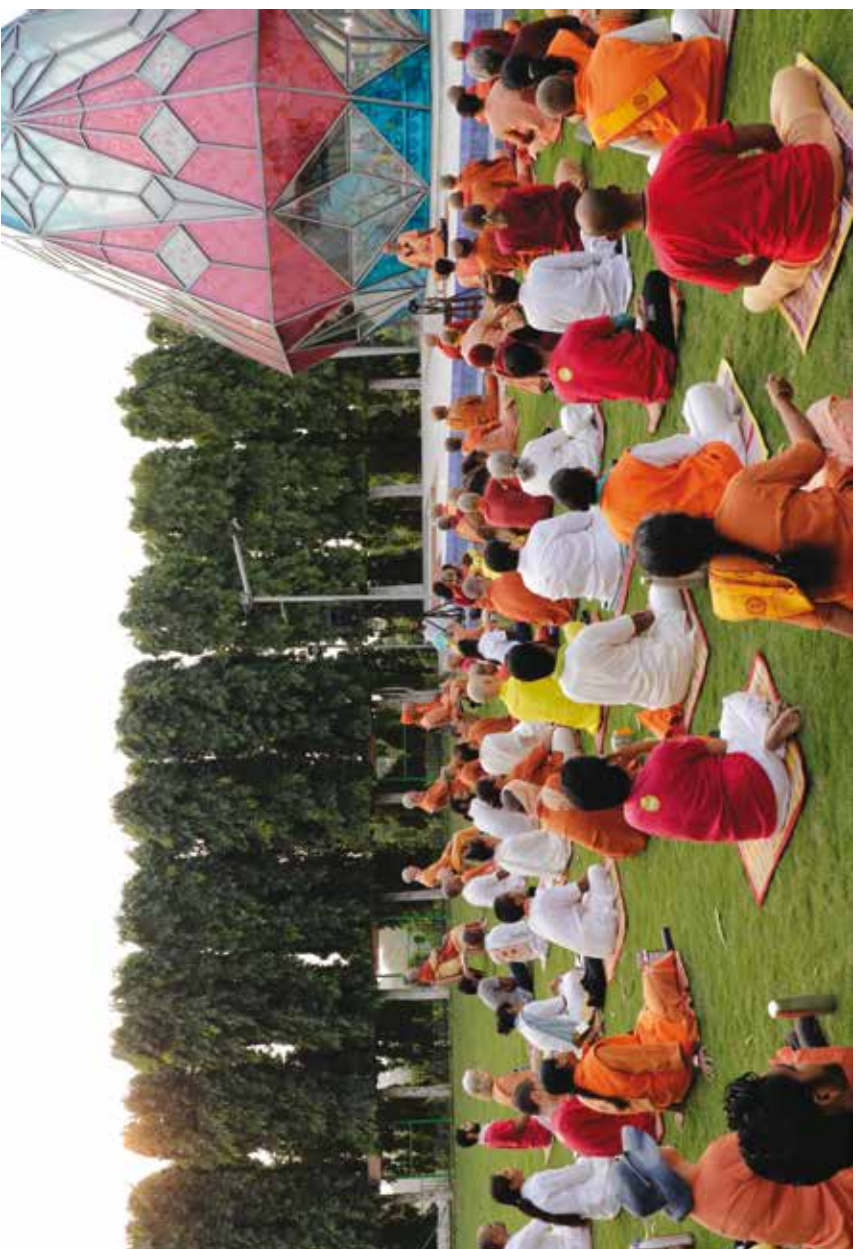












and lie down in their room. Too much work! They have not avoided the karma, but they have avoided the *parishram*, the effort, to accomplish the karma. This is everybody's nature – to avoid effort.

To expect the result but avoid the effort happens on a regular basis. If this is the nature of the individual, how can one expect total participation? How can one expect clarity of mind? Clarity of mind does not come through meditation. Clarity of mind comes when you are confronting the unclear and disturbed environment. Like in the battlefield, Arjuna lost his clarity of mind. He forgot his dharma, his duty and went into depression. So, Krishna had to intervene and give him the clarity of mind as to what his dharma and duty was, regardless of the outcome which was death and destruction. This is one important point that people miss. We avoid parishram, we avoid effort. We cannot avoid karma.

Ashram provides a ground where you can see and confront yourself. You are not the only one; everybody is going through that process, even your in-charge. The administration tells the in-charge, the in-charge tells you and you tell somebody else. That is the sequence. You are disturbed, the in-charge rants and raves, and when things do not happen, the administration rants and raves on the in-charge. This is a vicious cycle that goes on all the time; you cannot avoid it in any industry, organization or ashram.

In these non-physical entities like organizations or ashrams, individuals come and go, but *anushasana*, discipline, remains. We have to be reminded of those anushasanas or disciplines again and again. People think that discipline is bondage and restrictive; in my understanding, discipline is not restrictive or bondage; it is a way to free oneself from preconceived notions and ideas and to develop another perspective in life.

The Sanskrit word for discipline is anushasana. *Shasana* means to rule, to govern, and *anu* means the subtle components. So when we are able to realize and master the subtle responses, we attain discipline. Discipline is not a rigid

condition of life; discipline helps to overcome the rigidity of mind, something that we are unaccustomed to. There is something that we are or have been avoiding, but now have to do it. Discipline means to regulate one's speech, behaviour and performance. The yogic tradition says clearly that through discipline one can attain *sadvichara*, *sadvyavahara* and *satkarma*, good thoughts, good conduct and good actions. Without discipline, none of these can be attained.

Ashram is a place which presents us with the opportunity to confront our own nature, mind and habits. If we are committed to spiritual life, we can observe our nature, behaviour, mind, and improve them. Therefore, let me make it clear: the ashram does not need you, you need the ashram. You can go tomorrow and this ashram will continue for another fifty years in the same style, in the same manner. If you think the ashram needs you, you are mistaken. Yet you need the ashram, we need the ashram as it is a place where we can gain the ability to look at ourselves, observe, tweak and correct ourselves.

When this is understood in the light of the spiritual ideas conveyed by Krishna and the gurus who come to inspire us to embark on the journey of spiritual life, these questions will not even come up in the mind. Human nature has to be moulded according to the spiritual nature. Right now, humans try to mould the spiritual nature according to their mental nature. When you try to mould the spiritual according to your mind, you are restricting yourself. You are not looking at the bigger picture. You are just trying to satisfy yourself and your ego once again by believing that you are comfortable, happy and spiritually evolved. This applies to everything in life.

I have seen people who claim to be meditators for many decades, yet have not been able to control even the slightest reaction of their arrogance, insecurity, fear or anxiety. Yet they claim to be meditators. If you claim to be a meditator, is it you who is claiming it, or is it your ego that is trying to highlight that you are 'something'? The mind is still in the

same rut, affected by anxiety, anger, fear, insecurity, like and dislike. What is the use of developing a false awareness that you are a meditator and spiritually evolved, when nothing has changed in your material life?

The concept of *atmadeepo bhava* – become a light unto yourself – is connected to purity, not to ego. When you are free from the effects of the tamasic and rajasic nature, luminosity emerges. All spiritual sadhanas inspire you to transcend the limitations of ego and the gross tamas of mind. So there has to be more awareness and understanding to do everything in the best manner possible, and not allow the in-charge to come and bug us by saying that you have not done your job properly.

Since the time of the vedic culture, India has always had a GPS system. GPS today means Ground Positioning System; it tells you through satellite where you are on the ground. Before this technological GPS came, we were already using GPS, the Guru Positioning System. Guru used to tell us where we were on the ground. People who would follow the guidelines of the guru, knew exactly where they were in life. That also applied to the use of buddhi and viveka.

Today people use GPS to go from one road to another, from one town to another. They become totally dependent on the mechanical voice which tells them, ‘Right turn after 300 metres, go forward, straight for 1.5 kilometres, then make a left . . .’ We are simply following the instruction. Today people are using GPS for everything, even for going from their home to the market, for they have not observed the road. When there was no GPS, I went around the world many times and never once was I lost, as I had to use my awareness and intelligence: If I am going this way, then what are the signs which will guide me to return? This blue house in the corner, this mall on my left . . . so when I return it will be on my right, the name of the road. With observation one could go and return. Nowadays, people have little awareness in this technological world. They think GPS will guide them, and they are not even paying attention to the instruction of GPS.

Everyone has become dependent on technology. Even children have forgotten maths and they use the calculator. They do not even remember the tables anymore. With dependence on technology, the brain shuts down. With technology, awareness shuts down. After one generation, if there is some type of devastation in the world and technologies shut down forever, people will go back to Stone Age for they have not learnt anything. They have become dependent. They have not used the faculties of their brain and mind. They will have to relearn $2+2$ is 4; $4+2$ is 6. Today they do not know that; they have to look at the calculator. When technology shuts down, they will have to use their brain, yet they are not able to, so there will be regression of human life and intelligence.

If we learn how to apply our buddhi, if we learn how to apply our awareness, we shall never get lost in life. If we become dependent on external factors to remind us, then we cannot do anything when left alone. Yoga always says, 'Apply yourself, maintain the awareness, maintain your positivity and creativity, and be in *maryada*, within the boundaries of the self, so that there is no upheaval in your own nature, and you are not affected by the negative traits to which you succumb so frequently'.

Therefore, such questions may come, yet remember that they are not connected to karma. They are connected to you and your desire to make or shun the effort, your likes and dislikes, your expectation and ambition.

The simple answer to your question is that if you cannot adjust here, you should plan on going back. If you are unhappy here, go to a place where you are happy. Happiness or unhappiness are self-created from our limitations and high expectations. If there is an awareness to transform and develop, there is no better place in the world than the ashram, which gives you the opportunity to have a look at yourself.

The ashram system was created in the vedic culture for people to work out their karmas and samskaras, so that there is natural progression towards spiritual life and sannyasa. What if one is stuck at a particular stage or ashrama due to unfortunate circumstances, and not able to move forward in life? In other words, even at the age of sixty if one hasn't been able to work out desires and karmas of previous stages, what should one do?

The real answer is tough luck, for this shows your short-coming and your inability. If you are unable to accomplish the goals set in the ashrama, then life in the ashram is not for you. As simple as that! Your desire is something and your ability is something different. You desire spiritual life and emancipation, yet your ability, conditions and situations do not allow you to follow that. You have to choose one. Leave the ashram and live in the environment where you have continued for so long as now you are conditioned to that. Otherwise, whether you are sixty or eighty, it does not matter. If the sankalpa shakti is there, age is no factor. If sankalpa shakti is not there, then at any age you will be dissatisfied.

It is the individual's will, desire and effort which can take you forward. People hold onto the tree and say, 'The tree has held me and it doesn't leave me'. People hold the world and say, 'The world has sucked me in and it doesn't leave me.' No! The people who think that they are being held by the tree and the world are not aware of their own *lakshya*, target and goal, or their own *samarthyā*, strength of will. I do not believe or agree with the question. I feel anybody who makes the effort, will attain the result for which they are making the effort. However, if you do not know how to make the effort, then even when opportunities are there, they will be missed and ignored.

When there is a conflict between compassion and duty, which needs to be followed?

Compassion is your expression, and duty is what you have been given to accomplish. A soldier has the duty to protect and defend. If the enemy is shooting, will the soldier say,

‘I feel compassionate so I am not going to fire back.’ If the soldier says, ‘I am compassionate, I am not going to fire back’, then his compassion will make him die, because he will get the bullet. The best example is the *Mahabharata*. Arjuna developed cold feet. He said, ‘What will happen? I don’t want to fight. I feel compassion for all the people who are standing there.’ Sri Krishna said, ‘If you feel compassion, be ready to lose everything. Don’t demand a kingdom. Don’t have any choices, likes, wants or needs. If you think of your duty to establish righteousness in life, you have to ignore compassion.’

Compassion is separate from duty. You can feel compassion. For example, in war you can shoot at everyone who is considered to be your enemy. When you are not in the field, put your gun aside, walk into the field and nurse all the soldiers who have been hurt. That is accepted. If you do that, you will be known as Florence Nightingale, who went out into the field to help and heal people.

Duty is duty and there is no mixing of anything with duty. Compassion is compassion and there is no mixing of anything with compassion. If you think that duty and compassion can go together, you have not realized what your duty nor what compassion is. It is like day and night. When day is around, night is not there, and when night is around, day is not there. They don’t mix. There is no night during the day, and there is no day during the night. They both represent a specific behaviour of nature. In the same manner, duty and compassion represent a specific behaviour of our nature.

When a surgeon operates on a person, he cuts the person, that is duty. No matter how much hurt the other person may feel, or be in bed for months or years to come. That duty is not guided by compassion. Doctors are told that they cannot treat their own people, as their compassion and attachment comes in. Doctors cannot treat or operate on their own family members. Someone else has to do it for duty is separate, and compassion or attachment is separate.

—28 August 2022

VIJAYA DASHAMI

Vijaya Dashami was the day when Sri Rama was victorious over Ravana. Ever since that decisive victory, we have been celebrating the festival of Vijaya Dashami in this land. However, Sri Rama had defeated Ravana in Treta Yuga and yet in the present age of Kali Yuga, there is a Ravana in each home. We are all like Ravana for even we have ten heads.

The biggest head is that of our *ahamkara*, ego. *Kama*, desire, is one head, *krodha*, anger, is another head, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*, greed, infatuation, arrogance, jealousy are the other heads which makes it six. We have taken birth in the form of *shadaanana*, the child with six heads. Then four more have been added: one is Facebook, another one is Twitter, Instagram is the third one and the fourth one is WhatsApp. *Kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada*, *matsarya*, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp are the ten heads that each person has and without which they are unable to live.

Are you able to live without them? Can you live without checking your Facebook account incessantly? No one can live without Twitter; no one can let go of Instagram or WhatsApp. None can live without *kama*, *krodha*. These are the ten heads which are forever with us. This means that we are all Ravana for we are unable to live apart from our selfishness and there is little goodness to be seen in ourselves, in others or in society.

The real significance of Vijaya Dashami is fighting with and vanquishing these ten negative elements in our life. We always look upon Vijaya Dashami as an external event, a historical or mythological event. It is not incorrect to do so since this particular event did take place; however, instead of limiting it only to this context we should also make the effort to introspect and discover which demons are living within us. Is Sri Rama living within us or is Ravana reigning there? If we discover that Ravana is living within us, we should make the effort to vanquish that quality and put an end to it.

The day we are able to win over the Ravana within will be the day we can celebrate our Vijaya Dashami. Until now, we have been celebrating Sri Rama's Vijaya Dashami; our victory is still to come. Our Vijaya Dashami will dawn on the day we vanquish and eliminate these ten companions who continually incite us to walk the path of negativity. On this auspicious day of Vijaya Dashami, we can all take a small sankalpa to take a good long look at the Ravana seated within us and make the effort to free ourselves from this detrimental influence.

Before Vijaya Dashami, we observed the Navaratri anushthana in a very beautiful manner. This Navaratri has been a special one. For most people this period has been a festive time and many have observed it as an anushthana. However, for me this has been a time of a special spiritual journey, of introspection and looking within. It has been an undeniably powerful period when I received many insights which I did not have before. It is for this reason that I consider the sadhana to be successful.

During this period of Navaratri, the invocation of the Narayanastra has been an integral part of our anushthana. In the Indian tradition, our rishis discovered powerful weapons of many different kinds which used to be in their safekeeping and were not stored in the armoury of kings or rulers. It was only in times of war that these weapons were bestowed upon kings and rulers by the rishis for their victory. Once the war was over, these weapons would return to the custody of the rishis who had discovered them during higher meditative states.

The community of rishis from the vedic times is known as the scientist class today. A scientist is one who is endowed with the knowledge of science and a *rishi* is someone who has divine insights, some who 'sees'. Here the reference to sight does not relate to the faculty of the eyes but to being able to divine deeper mysteries on karma and its effect. A person who has knowledge of the past, present and future and uses this knowledge for the welfare, benefit and evolution of humanity is called a rishi.

Weapons and gunas

Rishis researched and developed many different kinds of weapons. I will give you one example. There is a sloka in the *Bhagavad Gita* (15:3):

Asangashastrena driddhena chitva

. . . firmly cut asunder with the strong axe of asanga

What does this mean? *Asanga* refers to one who is not attached. Someone who does not need anyone or anything, who is independent and merely a witness and who is not personally embroiled in any interaction or activity. If this attitude is adopted and used as a weapon to cut the bonds of attachment, infatuation and illusion, it is called *asangastra*, a medium to eliminate bondage. This is a deceptively simple idea. Generally, people interpret *asangastra* as being a weapon, yet Sri Krishna or Vyasa use *asangashastra* as the concept of a condition, quality of strength to depict a particular state of mind. After attaining this state or attitude, a person becomes free from the clutches of *lobha*, *moha*, *maya*, greed, infatuation, illusion, and the bonds of attachment are broken; a person becomes truly independent and free. In this context can we call *asangastra* a weapon used to kill others? Or is it a method by which we can attain a state of purity and goodness in life? Anything which destroys the *tamasic*, restrictive, conditions in our life can also be called a weapon.

Such spiritual ‘weapons’ were discovered by the rishis and they also described the means to develop such weapons. So spiritual weapons refer to the means and methods which can be employed to free oneself from the shackles of mundane life. We often see images of gods and goddesses bearing a variety of weapons. Why is that? Are they only used to kill *daityas*, *danavas*, demons, or does this indicate something more subtle?

If you study the text of the *Durga Saptashati*, you will notice that there are only three *vinayogas*, appropriate

applications, of a particular method to achieve the desired aim or goal. Though there are many chapters, there are only three viniyogas, which relate to the tamasic condition or behaviour, where Devi takes on the first pair of Madhu and Kaitabha, who symbolize *raga* and *dvesha*, attraction and repulsion as well as *kama* and *krodha*, desire and anger. In this first viniyoga, Devi is victorious over these two demons, *raga* and *dvesha*, *kama* and *krodha*. The second viniyoga relates to *rajoguna*, rajasic qualities, and there is no mention of any demons. In the third viniyoga, which is connected to *sattwaguna*, the qualities of *sattwa*, a plethora of demons appear. Devi battles against Shumbha-Nishumbha, Raktabjia and several other demons. It is interesting to note that while Madhu-Kaitabha were fought in the tamasic section and there were no demons seen in the rajasic state, to gain hold in the state of *sattwa* innumerable demons had to be fought and vanquished by Devi. Though this text is read by many people, most of them do not really understand its subtler truths.

Whenever a study is made into the scriptures, more often than not people come up with incorrect interpretations. They question why so many demons abound in the *sattwic* state. It is definitely something to think about so that we can begin to understand why this is so. The attempt to attain the *sattwic* state necessarily involves battling with and destroying every manifestation and form of negativity. Therefore, the demons who appear in the third viniyoga are symbols of myriad obstacles that have to be overcome along the path towards attaining the *sattwic* state. They represent all the different states of *vikara*, impurities, which have to be eliminated. Eventually, Shakti is victorious because everything that is negative and restrictive is destroyed in order to establish a state of purity and effulgence.

In the final analysis, it is the establishment of purity and effulgence within and all around which is the true aim and intention of all *aradhana*, worship. Generally speaking, people undertake worship with a *mannat*, a wish, to attain

something as the fruit of their invocation. One can say that they keep on withdrawing funds from the bank and the more they perform *sakama aradhana*, worship for a specific material result, the funds in the bank become more and more depleted. You have to pay the pandit, buy sweets, flowers and many other items. All this involves spending at an external level, and at an internal level, we end up depleting our spiritual wealth as well.

Someone had once asked our Guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, why he does so much japa and sadhana as it does not seem necessary for him. He replied that he was giving money to the bank. He was not withdrawing funds from the bank, rather he was adding to the funds. Whatever he was 'earning' was going into the bank so that God could spend it on people. This is the essential difference between *sakama*, selfish, and *nishkama*, selfless, aradhana. In *sakama aradhana*, we pray to God to give us whatever we are asking for, whether it is a child, happiness or peace. We keep withdrawing funds until not only our bank balance is over, even God's bank is emptied. Then what will you do? A sadhu is the only person who does not ask for anything and tells God, "As the fruit of whatever sadhana I am doing, may your bank balance increase so that you can help others." This is the most beautiful expression of *nishkama bhava*, selfless attitude!

It is this inspiration which guides and motivates the aradhana here. I cannot speak for all of you but I can certainly say that for myself this is my inspiration. This has been the bhava or feeling with which I have performed this aradhana and anushtana. What do I need for myself? My guru has given me everything. Without begging, we have received funds. Without having to beg, food is available. Without asking for it, the love of people has come in abundance. Without having to beg, I have received a beautiful place to stay. Without begging, I get two rotis twice a day. What more do I need? So when I have got so much without ever asking for anything, what will I do with my

‘earnings’? I keep putting them in the bank. If God wishes, he can give loans to people in need so that he has enough funds to dispense to the needy. He can say, ‘Okay, my son. Here is what you need. You can return it with interest.’ However, no one pays back the loan with interest, they simply declare themselves bankrupt!

Mantras

Mantras are true spiritual wealth. The mantras which our rishis have spoken about awaken and empower our spiritual strength. Rishis of our tradition used to employ several means to attain and secure peace and prosperity at the individual, social, national and universal level. To attain peace and prosperity, they sought to strengthen the spiritual as well as the material aspects of life. The efforts to empower the spiritual matched the effort made to enhance the material. To fructify their aims, they realized or divined special mantras which helped to cut one restrictive bond after another and advance one step further along the path of liberation. It is the power of these mantras which also helps bring humanity closer to the Divine.

These mantras have to be perfected. In Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga and Dwapara Yuga, aspirants were able to liberate themselves from the bonds of karma by perfecting these mantras. In present Kali Yuga, people have forgotten these mantras. What was the reason that they were forgotten? It was due to the Mahabharata, which was a war of such magnitude that even all the intellectuals of the time went into hiding. If you think about it, this makes sense. If you were a supporter or ally of the Kauravas in the hope that their patronage would bring you wealth, security, protection – just imagine how many thousands would have just pledged allegiance to the Kauravas! Before the war started, when the two armies faced each other on the battlefield, the Kauravas had eleven thousand akshauhunis or battalions on their side and the Pandavas were vastly outnumbered. This gives an indication that though the

Kauravas had many more supporters than the Pandavas, they had Sri Krishna on their side who was the embodiment of Narayana, one of Narayana's ten avatars.

In the course of the war, when the Kauravas were facing imminent defeat, their supporters fled from the scene to save their lives. They must have feared the fierce reaction from Bhima and Arjuna for having supported the Kauravas and knew there would be no escape from their fury. So all of them fled for their lives. This marked the end of Dwapara Yuga and a new society took birth based on raga. It also marked a period when people lost their position, wealth, knowledge and security at the material and spiritual levels. The age of darkness that followed is called Kali Yuga.

No one knows these mantras in this age. Brahmins and pandits receive dakshina for performing Sat Chandi yajna or havan and chanting of the Rudri. *Kathakars* or narrators of the *Bhagavatam* are called for programs and also get some dakshina. Nowadays all that takes place are intellectual debates, discourses on the scriptures and mantras which are heavily influenced by tamasic attitudes and tendencies. Everything is undertaken with an eye to ulterior, selfish motives and gains. But this was never the intention with which the rishis embarked on and made their spiritual discoveries through which this vast body of wisdom and mantras were revealed to them.

When we received the mandate for the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth from our Guru, he had said the intention of creating Sannyasa Peeth was to serve the causes of *sadhu*, *samaj* and *sanskriti*, saints, society and culture. We can understand that 'sadhu' relates to those persons seeking to further their own spiritual growth; the relevance of 'society' is also easy to understand since it involves guiding people along a creative and positive path in life. However, 'sanskriti' or culture is not always clearly understood. Culture is often limited to merely dance and music. Cultural programs are held with much fanfare and everyone applauds the singers and dancers for their performances. Do only dance and

music define culture? Or is there a much broader and deeper meaning to this term?

Sanskriti

Sanskriti means wisdom, that vast storehouse of knowledge gleaned by our ancestors, and the path along which we walk is what is called sanskriti. *Samyak kriti iti sanskriti*, it is knowledge which confers balance to all life's activities, when everything is done in a well-adjusted and poised manner. That is when life is said to be cultured. Our rishis and sages emphasized the aspect of knowledge because they did not have any material benefits in mind. They carried out their research and study with the purpose of finding the right balance between worldly and spiritual life. It was through the sadhana of mantras that they attained this state and experience.

When Gurudev gave us the mandate for Sannyasa Peeth, I had asked him how we could aid in developing and promoting the evolution of culture. He replied, "Your ancestors, the rishis and sages, have left you a valuable foundation which has got lost in the mists of time. Search for it and revive it." We often say that we have been left such a rich legacy by our ancestors, but when asked anything more about it, we have nothing more to say. We are unaware of this legacy and foundation. Have you received any samskara as their legacy which is invisible right now and cannot be seen? Have you received any vritti which is invisible right now and cannot be seen? What exactly is this foundation or legacy that you have received from your ancestors according to which you conduct your life? Today no Indian is able to tell you what they have received from their ancestors. They only say, 'We have a rich heritage.'

When Gurudev instructed us to revive the legacy which we have been endowed with by our ancestors, a lengthy search commenced through scriptures and ancient texts. After identifying the practices that we could adopt without too much difficulty, we commenced our journey into this

cultural treasure by initiating the process of invoking three divine *astras*, weapons. One is *Brahmastra*, the other *Narayanastra* and the third is *Pashupatastra*. In Kali Yuga, these mantras were heard for the first time in Munger, Bihar, after a lapse of 5,300 years. As well as the *Sudarshanastra*, that make it four. These four mantras were heard again after ages.

Let me make it clear that we are not invoking these divine weapons to destroy anyone. There has been a question in the minds of a few people; “Why is Swamiji invoking these weapons? Is he going to war with anyone? With China or America?” The answer is, ‘Of course not. We do not wish to fight with anyone. Rather we are attempting to vanquish negativities within ourselves and in order to accomplish this, we require strength as well as weapons. That is the reason why we are invoking these divine powers.’ These four mantras were discovered in our attempt to glean something from the wealth left to us by our ancestors and were chanted for the first time in Kali Yuga at this place.

Astras

At specific times of the year, we conduct various aradhanas, anushthanas and invocations. During the period of Navaratri, the Narayanastra mantra was part of our anushthana. When the Narayanastra had been invoked and used in the Mahabharata war by the Kauravas, it went on a rampage and no one was safe from its fury. The Pandavas ran to Sri Krishna, begging him for guidance to save themselves and their army from this powerful weapon. Sri Krishna said that if they wished to avert being decimated by this weapon, they should drop all their weapons, remove their armour, become completely naked and lie flat in front of this weapon. This was the only way they could save themselves from the Narayanastra. As long as there was any shield, armour, helmet or protection on their bodies, this weapon would seek them out and kill them. They did just that. Dropping all their protection and clothing, they lay flat and prostrated themselves in front of the weapon.

This is the story, yet what is the spiritual significance behind it? As long as humans are stubborn and arrogant, they will be destroyed and defeated. However, the day all defences are dropped and abandoned, they will be safe and secure. Why are people stubborn and arrogant? Due to their ego. Bhima said, 'What can this weapon do to harm me? I am the strongest warrior.' He did not take off his armour, yet under the onslaught of the weapon, he was so badly hurt that Sri Krishna himself had to go to his rescue and forcibly take off all his armour. Otherwise, he would have been killed. The Narayanastra is invoked to overcome and destroy the ego; this is the spiritual meaning and intention. When the ego is vanquished, all problems cease to exist.

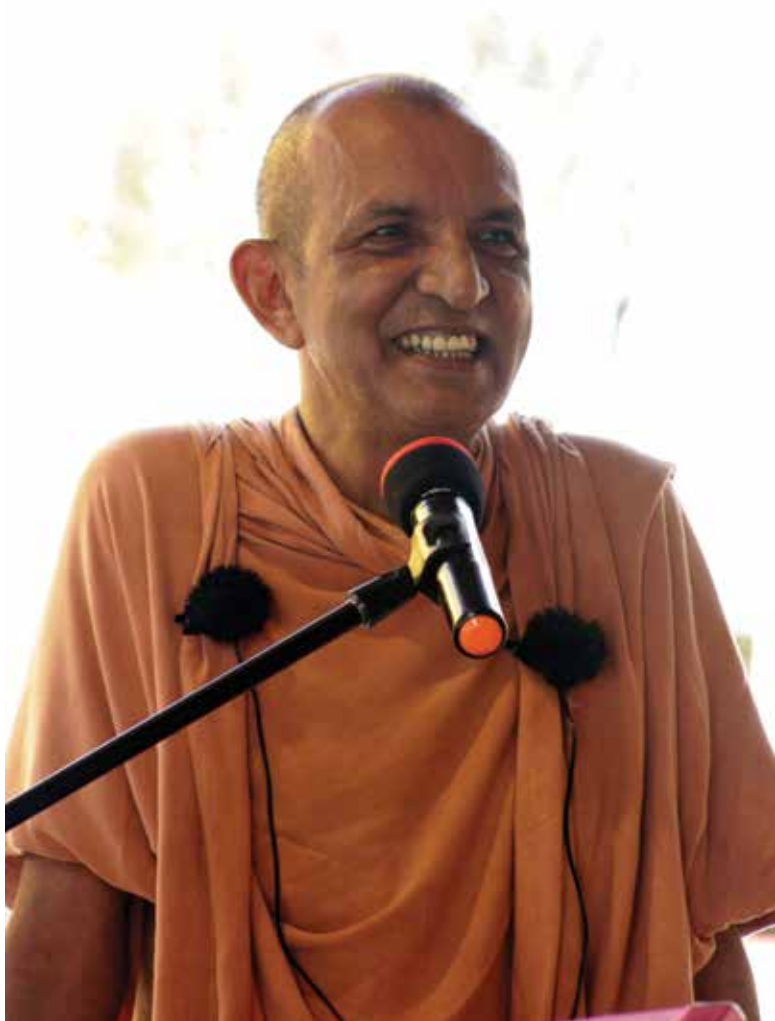
Similarly, the Pashupatastra is also invoked. Shiva used this weapon to destroy *Tripura*, the three satellites, from where the demons wreaked havoc upon humanity. What do these three satellites indicate? Where are they located in our physical body? They exist in the form of *granthis*, knots, as Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi. Brahma granthi is situated in swadhisthana chakra, Vishnu granthi is in manipura chakra and Rudra granthi is in ajna chakra. We live through these three *puras*, cities, all our life.

Under the influence of Brahma granthi, desires dominate our existence and we are under the spell of all our wants and selfish desires. When Vishnu granthi is activated, there is a great drive to attain power and position, to dominate others and be seen as someone great in their eyes. When the Rudra granthi is powerful, the person loses mental equilibrium. There is a desire to leave the material world and yet it is impossible to let go. There is a conflict between attachments, illusory and material existence and the divine spiritual path. One is reduced to tears at the prospect of cutting ties with maya and yet the spiritual journey beckons inexorably.

The purpose of invoking the Pashupatastra is to be able to free oneself from the influence that these three granthis have in our lives. This is a sadhana, not just the mere

chanting of mantras, not an anushtana. This Navaratri has been a spiritual journey which has revealed many hidden truths. It has been an absolutely incredible journey.

—5 October 2022



CYCLE OF INSPIRATION

Diwali is the festival of lights. *Sada Diwali sant ki, barah maas basant . . .* yogis say that every day in the life of a yoga aspirant should be Diwali, and every day should be like the first day of spring. Spring represents rebirth and Diwali represent illumination. Rebirth and illumination is the focus of every yogi, every day.

Swamiji, can you please tell us how you have evolved as a person over the years, and what keeps you going on the right track all the time.

I was just a small child, six years of age, when I came to the ashram. Then I left the ashram to travel around the world at the age of eleven. I came back at the age of twenty-three and took over the charge of the yoga movement and I continue to progress on the path that I have chosen for myself. The first thing which I recall that helped me is awareness. Awareness has not been something difficult for me to develop, as from day one, I started to become aware and observe. Along with awareness and observation, my focus in life was always my guru. Yoga was never my focus. I did not come here to learn yoga. I came to live with my guru. Yoga was never the centre of my life; my guru was the centre of my life. It did not matter whether I learnt yoga or not, that was on the side-lines, like a game. My connection, my desire and my choice was to be with my guru, and because my focus was my guru, I never became friends with anyone.

Even today, I do not have friends. People call me their friend as that is the language they understand and acknowledge. I do not see myself as a friend of anyone, and I do not believe in friendship either. I have seen so many incidents of friendship, the behaviour of friends and the influence that people have on each other as friends, and it does not attract me at all. Today, having friends has no meaning. Previously, before social media, we used to have three or four good friends who used to be with us for life.



Today, due to social media, we are always trying to increase the number of friends and followers. They are people whom we have never seen in our life, and never are going to see except their name on the screen. This type of looking for friends and followers is something which I cannot understand or even digest.

I will give you an example. One person said to somebody after complaining about something, 'You are not supporting me. You are not my friend'. So the other person replies, 'You want me to support your negativity, or do you want me to correct you when you are wrong?' The first person said, 'If you don't support me, you are not my friend'. So when I see these examples of friendships, it is just negativity and criticism which connects two people and they are known as friends. Whereas a person who is trying to give a positive input is doubted. Why?

There is no recognition of their aspiration or goal in life. I have seen this type of thing happen for the last fifty years. Thousands of people have come and gone, and I have not seen what you can call perfect behaviour by anyone. People always become negative as that is their nature and mind-

set. That is also an indication that your focus is not on the positive in life or the guidance of guru in life. The focus is not the guru; the focus is not spiritual life. The focus is always to influence somebody in a manner to cast a doubt upon other people.

When I was young, I used to play with Swami Gorakhnath. We have grown up together. I never call Swami Gorakhnath my friend and he never calls me his friend. If you ask him, 'Do you know Swami Niranjan? What is your association with him?', he will give you an answer; but that answer will not say 'He is my friend.' If you ask me, I clearly say, 'I have no friends.' People can call me their friend, yet I have no friends. I do not waste my time in enforcing the negativity of a person, trying to cast doubts in the mind of a person or try to stop the other person from developing a positive relationship with the Master.

What does this mean? My focus was always Paramahansa-ji, so along with awareness, I went with the wave and in the swing of satsang. *Satsang* meant being in the company of the positive and my guru was the most positive. He was helping everybody despite people casting aspersions on him. When the nature is not to seek friendship, but to support and help another person, that becomes satsang.

Satsang is seen at different levels and in different dimensions. First is the external association. It is clearly stated in the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* that if your father or mother, brother or sister, aunts or friends, uncles and cousins, whoever may be the relative, if they are negative, one should have the courage to shun them. This is the statement of the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*. It is a scriptural reference. This means since time immemorial, spiritual aspirants have been aware of their interactions and relationships with people who are detrimental to their growth and they have tried to avoid any connection with them. They have associated with people who can uplift them, inspire them and encourage them to become the best in life.

Think of your association and your friends. What do you talk about? The talk between friends is never positive or constructive. It is always criticism. It is always trying to define the nature of different people and find a flaw in them. So there is no satsang, there is no company of good people.

Before he left the ashram, Paramahamsaji many times had said that no sannyasin is a spiritual person. "The only spiritual person is me, whether you like it or don't like it." No other person is spiritual because they are all caught up in the web of their own nature, behaviour, thoughts, ambitions and mind. Therefore, nobody is spiritual, no sannyasin is spiritual. This was his statement. Why did he make a statement like this? He saw that the desire is only superficial and is not coming from the depth of one's being and soul. One is still caught up in the web of one's own mind, talking bad about this, that and everything in life.

People do not have *viveka* and *vairagya*, discrimination and detachment. Even in the ashram, when you come, you are always trying to latch onto somebody whom you can call your friend. You associate with that person, talk to that person, spend maximum time with that person. You consider that person to be your guide, friend, helper, everything. That is because you do not have the discrimination to see the difference between the positive and negative. You do not have the strength of *vairagya* to say, 'I will detach myself from this person who is negative and who talks all nonsense.' You do not have the focus of spiritual life or the guru. When somebody says anything about the guru, you believe it. You believe the person and you do not believe the guru.

I have been protected from all this nonsense that goes on in your heads, by the association which I have with my guru. In that association with my guru, I learnt about satsang, the external associations. Even today I do not speak to people who are negative in the ashram. They may have been here for many years, however my only relationship with them is asking, 'How are you?' Beyond that there is no other talk. They can come, go and do whatever they like, I don't even

mind. I know that a lemon will always remain a lemon. It will not become an orange.

So this is about the three things have been important in my life. My journey started with awareness; my focus was satsang, my guru; and my behaviour was viveka and vairagya which continues till today. Therefore, I am where I am, it is as simple as that. Human life comes with the potential to express the positive and the best. We want to develop the positive and the best potential, yet our natural expressions are negative and destructive.

In yoga, it has always been said that the spiritual journey begins with a connection with the positive. It does not begin with a choice of the mind, but a deep desire to connect with the positive and to be uplifted in life. I feel that is important as external associations can create a nature of either positivity or negativity in the mind, constructiveness or destructiveness in life. There is no sense of truthfulness or sincerity within one's heart. Even in my meditations or reflections, my only thought is my guru.

You create an association according to your choice, ambition and need, which is self-centred. You just want confirmation of your behaviour, you do not want to alter it. For me friendship has no meaning. For me satsang has meaning, as it has given me the focus of the positive. For me viveka has meaning, so I am able to discriminate between the influence which I am receiving from other people and how I can separate myself from that. If there is any possibility to correct the person, I will do it. If there is no possibility to correct the person, I say, 'Hari Om Tat Sat. You live happily, I live happily.' And that's it.

This is something which one has to develop and understand. It cannot be given in a talk with a few points. So many points are always given in satsang or a talk, yet do we ever apply them in life? Or do we keep bleating like a goat, '*Mai, mai, mai, mai, mai. Mai* meaning, 'I, I, I, I, I.' We are all goats here, who just keep on bleating, '*mai, mai, mai, mai.*' I am grateful to my guru for he took away the habit of my

bleating, ‘*Mai*. He gave me a focus for I had that connection, I had that trust. It is that connection and trust that keeps me going all the time.

The mind is always split in two – one part which desires and one which part does not desire. Management of the mind has helped me along with the awareness, focus, viveka and vairagya. The mind is split in two parts, the desiring mind and the non-desiring mind. When you think, ‘I want to become peaceful,’ who is saying it? Your mind is saying it. When you say, ‘I am under stress,’ who is saying it? The mind is saying it. When you are under stress, you say, ‘I want to become peaceful and relaxed.’ At that point, the mind is acknowledging the stress and giving an indication that it needs to relax.

Karma yoga

So there are these two minds, one which is observing and one which is experiencing the stress and the anxiety. The part that is observing says, ‘I need to do something about it.’ One aspect is anxiety and frustration, mental illnesses or distortions. The other aspect is the *drashta*, the witness. You have to focus on the mind which is peaceful and quiet. In one hand I can lift up a stone and hold it, and the other hand is empty. Now my right hand is heavier because I am holding a weight on it, and the left hand has nothing. One is the stress of life in the mind and the other is the *drashta* of the mind which says, ‘I am free’; and it can help to make the weight less. The moment you put the left hand underneath the other hand, the stress and the weight affecting the right hand suddenly is reduced by half.

Karma yoga is when you engage all aspects to balance the negative and develop the positive. It is the heavy mind or the stressed mind, which is always negative and the *drashta* mind is always positive. The *drashta* mind is constructive and creative, and the stressed mind is negative and destructive. In karma yoga, this has to be managed. The negativity has to be balanced with positivity. You cannot eradicate the

negativity, yet you can lessen the weight, the heaviness of the stressed mind by fifty percent, if you bring the other hand underneath the heavy container. And why karma yoga? Karma yoga is an action which you do to find that balance in every activity of life. Therefore, the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* says, *Samatvam yoga uchyate* – balanced action is the highest yoga. In this balanced action you are able to observe the mind through your drashta mind which is interactive in negative stress. If you are able to manage the negativity of the mind, you attain the state of purity. *Yoginah karma kurvanti, sangam tyaktva atma shuddhaye*. Self-purification happens as you are observing, eliminating the negative and making the effort to reduce the negative. Then peace and harmony settle in the mind.

People avoid effort. Why? They avoid effort due to routine and boredom. You can follow a routine for some time, then you get bored. This bored condition of mind makes you stop every type of effort that you know should be done. You want to do it, but you say, ‘I am doing this every day, every day.’ This is one of the obstacles of spiritual life, according to Swami Sivanandaji. Swami Sivanandaji has given a whole list in his songs and kirtans of the obstacles of spiritual life that you have to be aware of and avoid.

People do not look at that. People only sing, ‘Serenity, regularity, absence of vanity’ – something which they can never do. If you look at the obstacles that have to be avoided and you make the effort to avoid those obstacles, then serenity, regularity and absence of vanity will be natural. You do not have to make the effort to acquire them. You have to make the effort to overcome the obstacles, and the rest falls into place.

People do not want to look at the obstacles; they want to look at what can be achieved. They go for achievement rather than clearing the obstacles. When you go for achievement, these obstacles will come again and block your path. You will come to me and say, ‘Swamiji, I have been trying for so long, but I don’t think I have progressed



anywhere.’ How will you progress? You are chasing a mirage. See what are the obstacles that you need to overcome. Swami Sivanandaji has given all those points. Make the effort to eliminate the obstacles and avoid the boredom which restrict the effort.

There has to be more focus on the effort. When there is focus on the effort, there is more awareness. More awareness, more satsang. More satsang, more viveka and vairagya. More viveka and vairagya, more clarity of mind. More clarity of mind, more awareness. More awareness, more focus. It is a cycle that goes on. I am caught in that cycle. I have not been able to extract myself from this cycle and to be truthful, I love every moment of it.

—23 October 2022

DIWALI

Yesterday's heavy rain was the grace of god. We had made a lot of effort in cleaning and preparing for Diwali, and the shortfall was made up by god, especially the beautiful rangoli drawn on the ground which was totally washed off in ten minutes. This is a lesson for us that nothing is permanent in this world. If you do good, it is washed away and if you do bad, that is also washed away. To break free from the bonds of 'good' and 'bad', rain is necessary.

Similarly, to wash away the *doshas*, flaws, of good and bad in our lives, we need the grace of god. However, do not perceive grace as a miracle. Generally, people interpret grace as miracle; that is not correct. They say, 'With the grace of god, a miracle took place.' Grace is one thing and miracle is something else altogether. While a miracle bedazzles people, grace endows a new perspective, a new way of seeing and experiencing. When we are able to see something in a new manner which attracts us, we are drawn towards it.

This is the reason why Maya is seen in the form of maya, illusion, and also in the form of yoga. One form of maya is that which takes us away from the divine and another form of maya brings us closer to god. The form which separates us from god is called Mahamaya and the form which unites us with god is called Yogamaya. When Yogamaya brings you closer to god that is called grace. When Yogamaya gave darshan to Kamsa, it was an act of grace. She gave an indication to Kamsa that he was going to have *mukti*, liberation, for the one who would free him from this life had taken birth. Would you not call it grace if you were told what the future had in store for you?

Kamsa was a better person than us. He used to be the doorkeeper of Lord Vishnu in a previous incarnation. As Jaya and Vijaya he guarded the royal court of Vishnu. They had committed a mistake and had been cursed to either incarnate as ordinary devotees for seven lifetimes before being readmitted to the divine realm or spend three lifetimes

in the form of *daityas*, an enemy of the divine. Jaya and Vijaya thought that seven lifetimes was too long to be away from their Lord and so they chose three lifetimes. Even though they would be *daityas*, they would attain liberation faster. They had been assured by the Lord that in those three lifetimes as 'bad' persons, the Lord himself would become the cause of their liberation. What more could they want? So they agreed to become *rakshasas* and incarnated as Ravana, Kamsa and Hiranyakashyapa with sure faith that the Lord would gather them back into his fold.

Though we are human, we run far away from the light and we even like to sleep in the darkness away from the light. When you sleep at night, do you leave the lights on or do you switch them off? Everyone prefers to sleep in the dark for if the light is burning all night long, sleep will not come. People prefer darkness to light for then no one can see what they are doing, though everyone has their eyes fixed on those who are in the light. Look at the lives of sadhus. All disciples have their gaze upon the guru. 'What is our gururji doing now?' For twenty-four hours their attention is on the guru, wondering what he is doing.

This is an example of the fact that we spend our lives in the womb of *tamas* and when we see the light of *sattwa*, we climb the ladder of *rajoguna* to try to ascend out of the depths of darkness towards *sattwa*, light. A person who makes this attempt to move towards the light is referred to as a spiritual person. All the different festivals in our culture emphasize this aspect. If you understand this and alter your lives accordingly, you will surely attain the grace of god; if you are able to move towards the light, you will definitely receive the grace of god.

Diwali brings us this message not just to illumine our own lives, but also to brighten society, the environment and Nature with the energy of the light. Make an effort to see Nature in the right light. It is because of the light here that we are able to see each other. If the light is switched off, though everyone may still be here, no one will be visible.

We will not be able to see anything, the people, the colours, the beauty of nature, nothing. So despite being present, in the darkness we cannot see anything. If you take away the darkness, we will all be able to see one another again.

Sri Rama's return to Ayodhya indicates the establishment of *maryada*, following appropriate boundaries and behaviour in life. Ayodhya is an analogy for the physical body; it is a city with nine gates. Two gates are the eyes; two are the ears; the nostrils make up two; the mouth is one, and the two lower openings make it nine. *Navadwarepure dehi*, the body is a city with nine gates and this is called Ayodhya. Sri Rama was to be crowned the King of Ayodhya, wherein he would reign in the form of enlightened, higher consciousness, but Kaikeyi put an end to the plans of coronation. She had been granted a boon by Dashratha and she cashed in her chips, so to speak, to ensure that Sri Rama was banished into exile instead of being made the king. Sri Rama obeyed his father and left Ayodhya along with Sita and Lakshmana for a fourteen-year exile. When Rama left Ayodhya, peace, joy and contentment also vanished and all the people were sad, forlorn and without hope. They wept at their fate and longingly awaited Sri Rama's return.

When Sri Rama returns to Ayodhya in the form of *Maryada Purushottama*, the excellent one who embodies appropriateness in every manner, *Rama Rajya*, the rule of righteousness is established where each person follows the righteous and appropriate manner in thought, word and deed, and lives within these boundaries. This reflects a balanced state of life where neither thought, behaviour nor interaction transgress the norms of positivity. Nothing is negative, aggressive or opposing, everything is creative and uplifting. It is in such a situation that one can experience the luminosity of pure light which translates as the experience of joy and happiness that pervades every state of life.

This experience of all-pervading joy and happiness endows one with a glimpse of the divine and the presence of god becomes a living reality. For god is joy; god is happiness.

The world is full of sorrow and strife and with the advent of Sri Rama, when maryada, balance and understanding, enters our lives, we are illuminated by the glory of light. It is this light which also brings the experience and expression of contentment and prosperity.

It is a beautiful and auspicious moment and we should remind ourselves that the purpose of our lives is not merely to be born in the world, study, work, have a family, retire with a pension and then die. This is what everyone does the world over. Is it not possible to give our lives a new turn, a new perspective where we can truly know ourselves before we leave our bodies and die? Those who know themselves before they die are called *siddhas*, *mahatmas*, enlightened beings, and those who leave their mortal coil without discovering their true selves are called *bhogis*.

These two terms, *yogi* and *bhogi*, describe two kinds of people. If one is a *bhogi*, one is faced with a life full of sorrow, strife, darkness, dissipation and indiscipline along with the unavoidable trials of illness and old age. If one is a *yogi*, one becomes a beacon of understanding, equilibrium, creativity and positivity as these qualities flower and flourish in life. Our gurudev, says, '*Yogi ho kar ja mein jeena; Jagadishwar ban sab ras peena.*' Everyone is a *bhogi* in the world, yet if one can live in the world like a *yogi*, then everything that the world offers is experienced, and all the different flavours of life are savoured to their fullest.

Thus, Diwali is a symbol of the spiritual journey in life. Not only Diwali, but also all the festivals in our culture are much more than the mere rites and rituals that are followed. They also guide us towards deeper spiritual goals and emphasize that spiritual balance is an absolute necessity while living in the world. Let us all make a resolve to reflect upon how we can bring a spiritual balance into our mundane, everyday reality of worldly life.

—25 October 2022

AVIDYA AND ASMITA



Just as the body has two legs which it uses to walk, life also has two legs, known as avidya and asmita. This is mentioned in the scriptures. *Avidya* means ignorance, non-connection with *vidya*, knowledge; *asmita* means arrogance, self-assertion. From the traditional point of view avidya and asmita represent the two legs of life. We are under the influence of these two components right from the moment of birth till the moment of death. What we study in life is intellectual study and analysis. It is not experiential. As long as knowledge is not experiential, it is considered that you live in the state of avidya. There are people who are knowledgeable. There are people who can recite scriptures, Vedas, Upanishads, *Srimad Bhagavata*, *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* for they have memorized it. This does not mean that by knowing these scriptures, one has overcome avidya, ignorance. Only when knowledge becomes experiential, can one say that one has come out of the state of ignorance and

has experienced something greater than ignorance. Along with avidya comes asmita, self-assertion, self-arrogance, ego. We are continuously under the influence of these two and they affect the mind.

Paramahamsaji has always said that our life is nothing but an expression of our own mind. What we think, what we believe, what we desire, determines how we act all the time. One is never free from the influences of the mind in real life. Everything that we do is only an expression of the mind. Our life is an expression of our mind. This mind is influenced by avidya and asmita. There is a statement by Sage Kabir:

*Tu kehta kagaj ki lekhi,
Mai kehta ankhiyan ki dekhi.*

What you speak is what you have read in books,
and what I speak is what I have seen with my own eyes.

If you can understand this difference between reading and seeing, you will understand where avidya ends and where vidya begins. Avidya is in reading and vidya is in living what you have read, and what you know. If you go into the aspect of living, then even asmita, self-assertion, self-arrogance and ego, become less powerful, less intense. An openness of heart and spirit is experienced where I am not the centre of the universe. I am just a participant and a contributor in creation that goes on continuously. These are conditions of life which cannot be changed or altered, yet you can improve through your *purushartha*, through your effort, to live in the right manner, and not only to know how to live in the right manner.

Avidya and asmita influence the mind and create different conditions in the mind. These conditions represent the maturity of the mind or the evolution of the self. Not all people think in the same manner. Everyone lives a particular condition of mind. Some people live an optimistic condition of mind. Some people live a pessimistic condition of mind. Some people are always critical, negative. Some people

are supportive, positive and constructive. Some people are totally selfish. Some people have traits of selflessness in them. Some people are continuously irritated, angry and insecure. Some people are always happy, content and balanced.

Each mind is a different mind. Each mind expresses a different condition according to its nature, according to its evolution. For example, not only happiness or frustration, even sloth and lethargy represent conditions of mind. If you are lethargic and you are asking how can you become more dynamic, nobody can answer that because you are caught up in this condition of mind which is making you feel lethargic. Unless you can change this condition, lethargy will be the natural state which you will be living all the time.

Similarly, evolution is dependent on the nature and behaviour of the mind. If you are in a slothful, lethargic state, then do not expect evolution in life. If you are too self-centred, too self-contained and selfish, do not expect evolution in life. Evolution in life means going beyond all those limitations which have held you back. It means you have to change each condition of your mind and nature, as you become aware of them. If there is sluggishness, laziness in life, it is a mental condition which has to be changed. If there is negativity in life, it is a mental condition that has to be changed. All these mental conditions fall either in the category of rajas, tamas or sattwa. Any nature can be classified under one of these three gunas. It is no use asking how to overcome lethargy. Rather, you have to see what is the tamasic condition which is the condition of lethargy. Do not treat lethargy, treat the cause which is in tamas.

This effort is part of overcoming the condition or the state of avidya which means absence of knowledge. You can call it absence of knowledge, ignorance at a personal level. I am ignorant. You are ignorant. People are ignorant. However, absence of knowledge and ignorance are two different things. They are not one and the same. You know what is right and wrong, yet still you do the wrong thing. You cannot

say you are ignorant of the result, yet you can say that when you were performing the act you were devoid of knowledge. You did not apply that knowledge.

All mental behaviour and conditions are guided by *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. Each *guna* gives birth to a different expression, attitude, idea, behaviour and understanding in life. If you are in depression, the world is gloomy. Your thoughts, ideas, your behaviour and thinking is gloomy, depressive. Your energy is depressive. Your mind is heavy. If you are in a positive state of mind, then everything feels lighter; you are out of the gloom.

Yoga and the spiritual masters always advise to observe the mind, to observe one's own self, and to manage those limiting conditions which inhibit our development and growth. Over-thinking represents distractions of mind; if there were no dissipations of mental energies, there would be no over-thinking. If the mind is dissipated and distracted, then definitely you cannot focus on anything. When there is no focus, thinking goes into hyper-drive which becomes over-thinking. There is no gain from over-thinking, except that you tire yourself. This only happens due to dissipation, distraction and fluctuation of the mental processes. If you want to reduce over-thinking, you have to consider ways to disconnect yourself from those sense objects which create dissipation and distraction, and learn how to focus.

Focusing is actually attention in awareness. When you shine a torch, the light beam falls on one specific area which is illumined and you can see that area clearly. That is known as attention, looking at one specific place which is illumined. At the same time, you are aware of the darkness around it. Awareness is peripheral and attention is central. If I am looking at you, my attention is on you, not on an image I am seeing through the corner of my eye, or a person I am seeing through the corner of my eye. When you enter a room at night, you are aware that you are entering a room, all the items and objects are in the room. You are aware, yet when you shine the torch, awareness becomes focused. That

focused awareness is known as attention which has to become the condition of mind.

In the West there is something called mindfulness, which is not a yogic concept. The yogic concept is 'mind-emptiness', not fullness. Mindfulness is the primary step where we learn how to focus on what is happening now, and to see the present action, participation, involvement. This is necessary as there is so much of distraction and dissipation that the attention span in everybody has reduced drastically. Some people say the attention span has become five seconds now. People cannot focus on something for more than five seconds without drifting away. So you can imagine how distractions have reduced or lessened our ability to remain focused. Therefore, when people practise mindfulness, they are becoming attentive to a process and they are observing that process.

I will give you the example of a real story: A person lives in a city and walks to his work from home every day. He walks through the whole street, and there are trees, houses and everything. This person never looked at the trees or the houses. After attending a yoga seminar, the person wrote to us and said, 'After this yoga seminar, I have become so aware that when I walk from my home to my office, I am seeing the trees, buildings, homes, the road, the flowers, the plants. For the first time I am realizing how beautiful the trees are. I have lived in my home for forty years and I have never appreciated or acknowledged that such beauty exists around me.'

So, you have been living there for forty years, yet you never realized it. Why? After one week of yoga, you suddenly begin to realize the beauty of things around you. Why? The answer is simple: previously you were distracted, now you are more focused. Therefore, lessen the distractions and dissipations of the mind, develop better awareness, focus and concentration, change the conditions of the mind and get out of avidya and asmita.

-11 November 2022

SRI SWAMIJI'S BIRTHDAY



During Satyam Poorima, on the full moon, we celebrated the birthday of our guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji. That event happens here and in Rikhia. On the full moon of December, whatever day it falls on, we celebrate Satyam Poornima, Sri Swamiji's birth according to the lunar calendar. According to the solar calendar, the full moon in 1923 fell on 23rd December. So that day becomes the solar birth date. Satyam Poornima is a public event and 23rd December becomes a personal event.

Not many people may understand what I am saying when I say personal event. My association with my guru has been a totally different one from any other person's connection. People come here with expectations to learn yoga, to have a breakthrough and then to go out and become something. I came here with no expectation. Yoga was just a game for me and I had no ambition. The only ambition I had was that I wanted to live with my guru, that's all.

From birth till the age of fifty, I had a Golden Jubilee of physical presence and connection with my master. That is

something few people can claim as the maximum connection that anybody can have is for twelve years. When the twelve years are complete, all the surrender, belief and philosophy of the aspirants goes down the drain. They go out to make their own life and become gurus in their own right. They never leave their ambitions and aspirations in life. They can be disciples, yet they are not the ones who have surrendered. They are not disciples whom the guru knows in and out.

People say, 'Guru knows everything' for they do not want to tell the shortcomings. How will the guru know what is going on in your head and what have you done? He is not omniscient to read everybody's mind and know their future and past and destiny. Guru becomes a rubbish bin for everyone; all the problems, traumas, anxieties, frustrations are told to the guru. God and Guru are the two most mistreated people in life, as nobody tells them anything nice. They only tell them what the difficulty and problem is; they want their problems solved for them and not take their own responsibility. It is with this funny mind-set that people come to find a guru.

I did not have that type of mind-set. I used to be open with him; he was aware of all my flaws, efforts, achievements, weaknesses and strengths. I was open with him; I did not hide anything. I never hid anything and he guided me because of that. He corrected me because of that. He was able to sculpt me in the manner that he wished me to be. Not just a yoga teacher but a person who can understand something, realize something, make the effort to achieve something in life. That is my relationship and connection with him. For me it is not only the birth of somebody, who was a nice person. For me it is an emotional matter, living with him from the day I was born until the day he left the planet – a period of fifty years.

Sri Swamiji was definitely an extraordinary person. His accomplishment was not only yoga and yajna. He gave yoga and yajna as tools for people to explore their inner nature and contribute in the outer world. Yoga became the medium

to explore the inner nature, how to deal with the spikes that come up in our own mind and emotions, our life, our health and wellbeing. He also gave yajna as the means to connect with people all around and to help people externally, not only spiritually, but also materially. He provided both ways to help people, the material assistance and the spiritual, yogic assistance. His achievement was to be a person who knew what the needs were and to organize and inspire people in such a manner that for decades the inspiration could continue to flow without any obstruction or barrier.

I also believe that along with him the destinies of some people were also born, including all of us, for we have been exposed to his teachings. However, I have been exposed to his life. People have been exposed to his satsangs and lectures, I have been exposed to his personal and private approach to life. My perception is not that he is a good guy, a yoga teacher, a saint, a siddha. He was all that from your perspective. From my perspective he was multifaceted and a master of everything that he did, without any iota of self-projection. He used to say that people like to have a high profile, yet sannyasins should have low profile, even better, no profile. He stopped me many times from making the wrong decision. He used to say, "That's not right. Come back down ten steps and stay there." He was a man who had experienced the world, life and people. Therefore, he was able to guide each one individually, independently to fulfil whatever their aspiration and hope was for their life.

His second birth took place in Sivanandashram as Swami Satyananda. The first birth was the birth of the body, and the second birth was the birth of the person we know. We are connected because of the second birth, not because of the first birth.

Our connection is with his second birth. That connection in a disciple's life should always be of remembrance, *smaran*. Remembrance of the connection, remembrance of the company, the guidance, the knowledge imparted and the inspiration given. Remembrance of the encouragement to go

beyond one's own limitations, and to change and transform from the self-created cocoon into a free butterfly.

Remembrance is part of memory. Everybody has memory. You have memory, I have memory. You have good memories and you have bad memories. The good memories always make you smile, make you feel inspired, and bad memories create negativity and ill-will towards one and all. Smaran is a connection with the good memory, something which makes you happy, inspires you, motivates you and guides you. If we keep thinking of the bad memories, we are the losers. We can think that we are getting our revenge, yet who is the loser? Wasting that much of effort, time and energy, in thinking ill, wanting ill, desiring ill to happen, creating division and doubts, taking people away from the inspiration, as well as the need or the drive for self-projection.

These are human traits and they are negative traits. I do not see anything positive in them. It is the smaran, remembrance, of the inspirational times, which have prompted me to step beyond my own limitations. That remembrance encourages me even today and gives me direction how to deal with the next block or barrier.

Perhaps many of you may not feel what I am feeling, or what other sannyasins may feel as they have their own connection. Some connection of sannyasins is five years, ten years, six months, eight months, yet it is never an intimate connection. People could stay in the ashram and never meet with Paramahamsaji. It is time even for the people who think that they have some connection with their guru to reflect on how much of the inspiration given to them by their guru they have been able to follow, to frankly acknowledge where they have failed and make the sincere effort to live that inspiration again with sincerity and not as a joke.

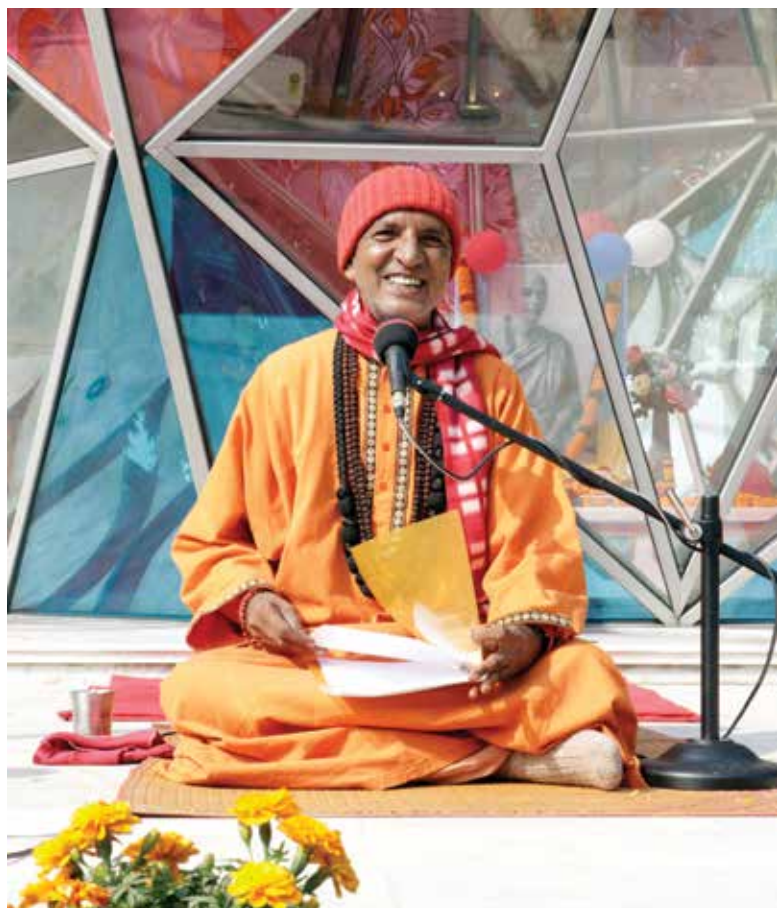
There are people who eat to live and there are people who live to eat. Which category do you belong to? If you live to eat, you can be in geru dress, yet you are not a sannyasin. If you eat to live, then you are a sannyasin. To be selfless and to be selfish are traits that can hamper the success in

a sannyasin's life. I have never seen selfish sannyasins grow even a millimetre. They are stuck where they were twenty years ago; even today they are in the same place. They have aged, nothing more than that. They will be the ones who will say that they did not get anything for they are stuck. They are unable to look at themselves for they believe they are right, despite all the indications, instructions, guidelines and encouragement given – to look, learn, change and become a real person.

Everyone has their way of thinking and connecting. Everyone has their ambition within which they see their connection with the guru. Think about it today, for it has been a part of your destiny. How do you want your destiny to develop? Positively or negatively, constructively or destructively? If you want the destiny to develop positively, become positive in thought, word and action.

If you want to remain crying all your life, 'I am the victim of society, pressures, tensions, anxieties, ambitions', then continue to cry for you are not making any effort to change it. You are just seeking sympathy and dumping your problem on somebody else's shoulder. To become selfless is to acquire inner strength; selfish people are the weak ones. They want things to be given and provided to them. Selfless people reach out to give and provide for others. That was the trait which Sri Swami Sivanandaji lived, the trait which Sri Swami Satyanandaji lived, and we are part of that tradition. I am making an effort to live like that. Are you? Positively, creatively, constructively? Or do you still carry ill thoughts, critical thoughts, destructive thoughts, hateful thoughts, anxious thoughts? Are you swimming in the sea of these thoughts?

For me Sri Swamiji's birthday is an emotional matter. It may not be the same for you, yet this is my connection and I live that connection. I am grateful and thankful to whoever organizes destinies, whether it is the transcendental or the self-created God, they have done wonders for me in this lifetime to have given me the opportunity to live in a time,



when people like Swami Sivanandaji and Swami Satyanandaji lived. Otherwise they would be part of history books and we would be wondering one day, 'Did such people actually live?'

So, thank God, I do not have to think about those questions. That is the gratitude I have for this life. I have lived at a time when I was fed from all directions by the gurus and never starved. They are feeding us and we have to appreciate what we are receiving.

—23 December 2022

CHRISTMAS EVE

There are two Christmases. One is the Christ or Jesus Christmas and the other is the commercial Christmas. Throughout the whole world it is the commercial Christmas with the Christmas tree, the gifts, decorations and lights. These are traditions which came much later and were added to the celebration of Christmas. The real Christmas is welcoming the Son of God in the form of Jesus.

In the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, when we travelled around India, there used to be chai shops and paan shops on every corner. In every chai and paan shop, along with pictures of Lakshmi, Durga, Narayana and Shiva, there was always a photo of Jesus on the wall. Many times when I used to ask the paanwallah or chaiwallah, 'Who is this person?' they would say, 'He is a saint.' The picture which was seen in India was the one of Jesus with his sacred heart. People used to say, 'This saint has a very pure heart.' This was the statement of the common people in India in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. That was my first introduction to Jesus, through pictures, and through the sentiments of vendors and sellers who used to display the pictures.

Then I went to Ireland, and there I was travelling around the different cathedrals and churches. At one place, one priest caught hold of me, when he saw me in this geru dress walking through the cathedral. I was only ten and he wondered who this strange little boy was. So, he called me into his office and I went. He wanted to know about me, where I had come from and if I knew anything about Jesus and the Church. In his office, in the cathedrals and churches, I saw the crucifix image of Jesus for the first time. I had never seen it before in India. In his office, behind the desk was the chair, and behind the chair was the Cross with the image of Jesus.

We sat down and he asked me, 'From where are you and what do you do? Why is this geru dress? What is your background? Are you a religious person or not? Do you

know about Christianity? He pointed to the Crucifix and said, 'Do you know who that is?' I said, 'No,' because that crucifix image never came to my mind in relation to Jesus. It was always the man with a pure heart. He said, 'Well, his name is Jesus and he was born two thousand years ago. He died because of your sins.' I looked at him and said, 'But I wasn't even born at that time. How can he die for my sins if I was not born?' So, he explained to me, 'No, it is not you the person, it is the whole of humanity. What do you know about Jesus?' I said, 'I don't know anything.'

So, he said, 'Well, He was the Son of God. The name of his mother was Mary. The name of his father was Joseph.' I said, 'First you say He was the son of God, then from where did Joseph come?' He said, 'He was the immaculate conception.' I said, 'How many immaculate conceptions are there?' He said, 'Only one.' Then we continued talking, sometimes it was funny because I used to come up with answers as I was only a little kid. This meeting inspired me to read the Bible about seven times in one month, and to know everything that was in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and what these people were talking about. How did Joseph get in the picture, if Jesus is the Son of God? Why is He not called the son of Joseph? I had all those questions and I started to think about the answers.

Today, when I reflect back on those memories, I would say that immaculate conception is a common concept in the Asian culture. It is nothing new to Indian culture. The creator god, Brahma, had mind-born sons, sons born of his mind, and not because of union between male and female. Some of them became householders and some of them became ascetics. The concept of the immaculate conception is nothing new to India or Asia. Rama was born because of the result of a yajna, not because of physical union. All four brothers were born due to a yajna. There are many ancient and even modern incidents. We have the concept of *manasputra*, the mind-born son. This happens not to everybody, but to people who have a special role and destiny;

they are extraordinary from birth. Jesus was an extraordinary child. By the age of twelve, thirteen, fourteen, he used to go to the temple in Jerusalem to have discussions and debates with the rabbis and the priests. This means that he had a sharp and keen intellect. He could question them about religion and God and he could answer their questions. He could enter into a debate with them at that young age, which showed that he was not an ordinary child interested in games and window shopping. He could understand the truths that we find difficult to understand and find incomprehensible.

Right from his childhood we see his search and thirst for knowledge. This quest for knowledge defined his childhood, which is totally different to the condition, situation, environment in which other kids were growing up, sometimes with more affluent families, sometimes with poorer families. The conclusion that Jesus came to was that he needed to understand more. Jesus was not a Christian; he was a Jew. Christianity came much later, after the death of Jesus, when the first church was established in Constantinople and the first conclave was held by the disciples of Jesus. That was the birth of Christianity and Christians.

Christ only rebelled against the commercialization of religion. Many times even you rebel against it when you see the commercialization of religious ideas, precepts, principles, events, stories. The search for knowledge led him to wander around the world. There is the ancient Hemis monastery in Ladakh, dating back to about two thousand years. In their records they have described the visit of Jesus to that monastery to study Buddhism. There are paintings on rocks of eight buddhas sitting, and one buddha standing. This standing Buddha is the image of Jesus in a two-thousand-year old monastery. Many researchers have come to this monastery to investigate whether Jesus really studied Buddhism there or not. German, French, British scholars and authors have written papers and books on their findings about Christ in India.

After studying Buddhism for a few years, he came to Varanasi where he studied Shaivism. Then he came to Puri and studied Vaishnavism and bhakti. In Kashmir he studied Kashmir Shaivism. At the age of thirty, he returned to Israel. In the book, *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ*, indications and stories of his journeys in the quest for knowledge are given. The statements, so strongly worded for the western mind, were common statements of the vedic times in India. *Aham Brahmasmi* – Me and my Father are One, which is the meaning of the mantra; I am That; He is me. There is a record of a discussion between King Shalivahana and Jesus when he was in Varanasi. King Shalivahana asks Jesus, ‘Who are you? What is your name?’ He answers, ‘My name is Ishu. People call me Son of God.’ These discussions are written down in the ancient Puranas, the ancient history.

When he returned, his ministry in Israel lasted three years because suddenly they found a person who had come back with a much broader vision than what the orthodox religions had. Orthodoxy and fundamentalism state that ‘This is the *only* path,’ whereas the broader vision says, ‘This is *also* a path.’ Those who say ‘This is the only path’ are people who do not have a broad vision. ‘This is also a path’ indicates people who have a broader vision. When Jesus said, ‘The way to the kingdom of Heaven is through me,’ he did not mean that he was an orthodox or a fundamentalist person and that it is only possible through him. You have to understand the state of mind he was in at that time. Was he an ordinary Israelite or was he an enlightened Israelite? There is a difference in the thinking of a common person and an enlightened person.

Once a saint said, ‘In order to know who I am, don’t look at what I eat, how I dress, how I live. Look at how I think, how I act and how I behave.’ If you look at the life of Jesus for how he lived, how he thought, how he acted, you will find that it was along the principles of *dharma*, to do the correct thing. It was to establish peace, harmony and balance, not to disrupt anything, rather to make people aware – “There

is this way through which you can experience peace and harmony. I have experienced that way, therefore the way is through me, meaning through my teachings and my own learnings.”

When I think of Jesus today, it is always the memory of the statement made by the paanwallah that comes to mind. Something which was said fifty odd years ago, ‘He is a saint with a pure heart.’ What a beautiful thing to say. Today we are grateful that such people come. Today we respect and honour them; we see the luminosity that they brought to humanity. Today we bow our heads in respect in front of that luminosity.

Therefore, if we wish to follow the mandate of enlightened beings, it is better to become positive, constructive, discover peace within and make the effort to be at harmony outside, rather than to put a label that ‘I belong to this religion, cult or belief’. If we can do that, then that will be the fulfilment of the vision of these enlightened people. Otherwise, we are only using them for meeting our own ends, riding on them for our own gain, without any connection or feeling for the beautiful gifts that they have given to humanity. If a paanwallah and chaiwallah say, ‘He is a saint with a pure heart’, then let us try to experience that purity, even if it is one percent.

This also reminds me of a story of Sri Swamiji. All kinds of people used to become his disciples, many times including people who were rejects of society. When people would ask him, “Why are you helping this person? He is such a horrible, bad person? He will give a bad name to your effort and work.” Paramahamsaji used to laugh at them and say, “Listen, a person is a person. Some have a thousand bad qualities and one good quality. Some have one hundred bad qualities and nine hundred good ones. Everyone is different. Even if you say this person is full of bad qualities, there is always one good quality. If we can extract that good quality out of the web of bad qualities, his life will be made.” That is the way a pure heart reacts; it does not create an opinion. It

reaches out to everybody to bring out the best in them. That is Christianity, yoga, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

Bring out the best in you. That is the whole purpose of the teaching and training which the sages and saints give us. They do not talk of division; they talk of unity, yet we divide and do not allow unity to happen. We have to understand their intent, we have to understand the teachings, if we want to live a better life. A person who can live that better life, lives the Christ Consciousness. A person who lives that better life, lives in the state of *sthithaprajna*, firmly established in calm and steady wisdom. A person who lives a better life is an *atmajnani*, an enlightened being.

—24 December 2022

CHRISTMAS DAY

Yesterday was the announcement of the birth which took place at night. Today the world has come to know that somebody is born who is called the King of Kings. When you think of King of Kings, you think in terms of politics and a ruler of a nation, yet in spiritual life ‘king’ does not mean that you are a ruler of a nation, but a ruler of the heart. There have been many kings who have ruled the hearts of men and not the nation. These people who have ruled the hearts of humankind have been spiritually enlightened beings. The socially empowered beings rule a nation, a group, a community, while spiritually empowered beings rule hearts.

To become the King of Kings, Jesus had to become the Christ. Christ is not the name of Jesus, because the word ‘Christ’ literally means one who is risen. Some people can say he rose from death, that is the common story, however to rise spiritually is not a small thing. After all, we are also making an effort to rise spiritually, yet how far do we succeed in our spiritual journey? Some walk a few steps, some cover a bigger distance, and very few reach the end of their journey. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna says, “There are many

people who think of me, but few who aspire to find me. Out of the few who aspire to find me, very few people find me. And out of the very few who find me, very few understand and realize me. And out of the few who have understood and realized me, there are very few who become one with me.' You cannot become Christ because you are too caught up in your mundane conditionings of the world. Somebody who is free from the conditionings of the world is able to transcend the material dimension and material desires, and become One.

There is a story of Jesus who performed austerities; he fasted for forty days. At the end of that austerity, the devil appeared before him in the guise of a good person and offered him the riches of the world, which were rejected by Jesus. The same story comes in the life of Buddha. He was also offered the riches of the world and he rejected them. That is the last test for every spiritual aspirant. In Hindi there is a saying:

*Chaha gayi, chinta miti, manva beparvah;
Jaako kachu na chahiye, vohi shahenshah.*

All desires are gone, all worries are over, the mind is carefree

The one who needs nothing is truly an emperor.

If we apply this principle, whether it be Jesus Christ, Gautam Buddha or any other spiritual person, you will discover that this trait is the prominent trait in them. Put yourself in their shoes. You will not be able to fast for forty days without the help of a doctor and saline water. If somebody comes to offer us riches, we will jump for it – I want the latest Mercedes car, I want a good home, I want riches, I want prosperity, I want name, I want fame. You will be hypnotized by the material, no matter what your intentions are. You can read the history of everyone who has been hypnotized. Those who have been free from it become the realized beings. Jesus transcended the body, the mind and he became one with spirit. Buddha

transcended the needs of body and mind. He was given the title 'Buddha', and there have been many buddhas, not one. He is Gautam the Buddha, but there are many other buddhas as well. In the same manner, he is Jesus the Christ, and there have been other Christs also in this world, the risen ones.

In the Christian tradition, we find many saints who have completely identified with the spirit, and stigmata was seen on their body, on their hands and on their feet. That is the state of union. Otherwise how will this stigmata form on the body, if there was no union, connection and oneness? When the mind fuses in spirit, that is the state of Christ. When mind fuses with spirit, that is the state of Buddha. It is the ultimate goal in spiritual life. You may call it samadhi, mind fusing with spirit. You may call it moksha, nirvana, any name can be given. Sugar is always sweet, whether you package it in China, America, Europe, Australia, Africa or Asia. Names can be different, packaging can be different, yet the essence is always the same – sweet.

In the same manner, spirit is one. You can give it different names and different packages to present that spirit. You may call it Allah, Rama, Krishna, Jehovah, Christ or Buddha. They are not different people presenting a different idea to discover the spiritual life. They are people who have followed the same path, they have discovered and connected with the same reality. It is our memories, our vocabulary, our conditioning and our society that eventually translates the transcendental reality into some tangible and understandable words. These words can be different, according to language and culture, yet reality cannot be different; it is always the same.

There are also similarities in the experiences of people who have had a vision of God. Moses had the vision of God twice. First as the burning bush. The bush was burning, yet it was not burning. Flame was there, fire was there, but the bush was intact. The second vision was of the pillar of fire, at the time of parting the Red Sea. These are two clear indications in the life of Moses where he had a glimpse of the

divine. Similar stories also appear in Arunachalam, India, where the pillar of fire appeared and was seen by two people. That pillar of fire was the presence of God. Here God identified himself and named himself Shiva, just as in Israel, God identified himself and named himself Jehovah. In both places the experience of God was in form of fire. That was the first experience. Later on we started to visualize God in our own image, and the vision of God changed. Now God looks like us with two arms, two legs, one body, one head, two ears, two eyes. We created that concept and image of God in our mind to understand the transcendental reality. However, the transcendental reality has no form, no image, it is only an experience. To a novice or the uninitiated that higher experience is like a miracle. To a person who is experiencing it, it is a reality of life, a reality of having attained a merger with the transcendental experience.

The first form of God is fire and fire has only one job. God has only one duty. What does fire do? It consumes everything and turns everything into ash. From the ashes, new life is born again. That was the symbology of a pillar of fire, which was seen in Israel and India, and I am sure in many other parts of the world too. That experience of God can only happen if people are in tune with that reality. One cannot experience God by thinking about it, Him or Her. One cannot experience God by looking at a painting of an imaginary person. However, one can realize God by connecting to the spirit. That connection with the spirit is Christhood, Buddhahood.

It is a beautiful journey of spiritual life for those who are able to renounce the attractions of the material. Those who cannot renounce the attraction of the material may make all the effort, yet they can never be true bhaktas and there can never be true surrender. Only when one is a bhakta and is able to surrender completely will that energy overpower you. When you go to sleep at night, you surrender yourself completely. Your senses are surrendered, your mind is surrendered, and in that state of letting go of all associations

with the senses, you go to sleep. In the same manner, when you let go of all your associations with the senses and the sense objects, all the desires for senses and sense objects, all the other desires that you may have to attain name, fame and prosperity . . . when everything is surrendered, that divine energy takes over, just as when everything is surrendered, sleep comes to you.

In the same manner, God comes to you when you surrender everything. Therefore, association with God has always been with a true devotee, not with everyone. Only devotees are able to experience it, for they are able to let go of what everyone holds dear in life. There is no intellectual or emotional devotee. Some people begin to cry, shed tears and say, 'Oh, I am feeling this emotion.' That is not devotion; that is an emotion. Those who cry are not devotees. Those who surrender to the higher will are the true devotees. Those who believe, 'Let Thy will be done'.

*Jahi vidhi rakhe Ram, Tahi vidhi rahiyo;
Sita Ram, Sita Ram, Sita Ram kahiyo.*

Live in whichever way it is that Rama keeps you;
Chant 'Sita Ram, Sita Ram, Sita Ram.'

That is when you become a devotee. Devotion is not a process of intellect or emotion; it is not even a feeling. It is a state, a condition which flowers when we want to destroy, alter and change the karma of the material into the spiritual. What we do in temples and churches, mosques and other places of worship are rituals, *karmakand*. These rituals are performed without *jnana*, knowledge, or the correct purpose or intent. It is a mechanical process. When we know the intent, the purpose of the ritual and perform it with knowledge and understanding, then that opens up the heart and connects us with the process of coming closer to the divine. Along with ritual, there is also the understanding which has to come.

Once understanding comes, rituals become redundant, as you live in that energy and spirit for all times to come.

That is the Christ Consciousness. There have been people who have attained this Christ Consciousness, who have experienced the wounds of Christ on their own bodies. They have experienced the passion of Christ in their own spirits, and they have become one. This is the journey of spiritual life, not the journey of a religious life.

There are many ancient and new religions. Many more will come in future. The most important thing in all these different forms of religions is the connection that you have with the divine. The divine always represents harmony and peace, wisdom and creativity, and that is the path that we need to walk. Each spiritual tradition has given a set of yamas and niyamas, which can help change the behaviour of the mind and guide the mind into a positive direction. For example, the statement in Christianity, 'If somebody hits you on one cheek, turn the other cheek also.' Of course, nobody does it, even Christians don't do it. What does that mean? Yogis have said *ahimsa*, non-aggression. The concept of ahimsa is to turn the other cheek. It is not a physical act; it is a transformation of the mind. When the mind is transformed, becomes pure and positive, then everything is alright. As long as the mind is impure and negative, even the best advice and guidance is useless, for they will never be adhered to or followed.

To become a bhakta, one has to surrender and the example of surrender, to do the will of God, is what we see in the life of enlightened beings. We cannot become that. We are just kindergarten people in front of these enlightened beings. At least we can learn the a-b-c-d, and learn how to make words and form sentences. That is an indication of our wisdom. Wisdom is what is required today in the world, not emotion. If there is wisdom in the world, there will be peace on earth. If there is no wisdom, you can cry your heart out saying, 'Let there be peace on earth', nothing will happen. Cultivate wisdom, become positive, balanced and peaceful within yourself, and allow that spirit to descend within you. That will be the fulfilment of our purpose in life.

Sri Swamiji used to say, “I have not seen Jesus, but I have seen Swami Sivananda. In Swami Sivananda, I see the form of Jesus and in Jesus, I see the form of Swami Sivananda.” We have not seen Jesus nor have we seen Swami Sivananda, but we have seen Swami Satyananda. Reflecting on this today, a saint with a simple and pure heart was Jesus, and a saint with a simple and pure heart was also Swami Satyananda. So, we can say that we have seen the Christ Consciousness, the divine consciousness in the enlightened beings who have guided us, either physically in the present or in the past, and who will continue to guide us in the future whenever they appear.

To be a recipient of their grace, we also need to prepare ourselves. When you have a cup upturned, you can fill it with water. If your cup is turned down, water will flow over it and won't fill the cup. Our cup is placed not with the face up, but with the face down. So, nothing gets in here. Whatever grace comes, it just disappears. We need to change the position of our cup, so that grace can fill that cup. To change the position of our cup is the sadhana of our life, no matter where we are, no matter whom we follow. The sadhana of every individual is to have the cup clean. If the cup is clean, showers of grace will fill it and showers of love will fill it. If cup is turned upside down, no matter how much shower of grace, love and compassion there is, it is not going to make any difference, for it will all just flow over your head and disappear. Nothing will be retained. The sadhana of every person who wants to be a bhakta is not only devotion, it is also making the effort to clear the cup.

That is the message of Christmas, which I believe is the appropriate one, at least for me. If you think it is appropriate for you, adopt it. For me it is the most appropriate one, as it keeps me free from all the hassles of this or that, of which is better or faster. I am not focusing on the journey. I am focusing on preparing myself. That is the sadhana that we all need to understand and follow.

—25 December 2022

YEAR END PROGRAM

Today is the last day of the year 2022, and tomorrow we begin 2023, a new year. All over the world these two days are celebrated in the form of festivity and as a form of entertainment for the mind and senses. In spiritual life, how do we celebrate the passing of the old year and the coming of the new year? The passing of the old year is quite important. We do not know what is going to happen in the New Year. What is going to happen tomorrow, day after tomorrow, one week later, one month later, six months later is unknown to everyone until we come to the end of 2023.

However, the year that we have lived has given us the ability to confront and face situations. It has given us the strength to deal with different situations. It has given us a glimpse into the positive and the negative that we encounter. If we cannot derive any learning from that, then living is useless. Last year has given us many opportunities to grow, through pain and pleasure, through suffering and happiness. We have to look at that and understand how it has affected our growth, our evolution, sentiments, minds and emotions, and weigh the positive with the negative. We have to become aware of both but focus on the positive.

When you focus on the negative, it should be with a wish and will that those mistakes will not happen in the new year. When you focus on the positive, do it with the wish and will, 'I am going to cultivate the positive more and more, from the wisdom, from the understanding, from the lessons learnt and derived from the past year.' So, at night when you go to bed, reflect upon what this year has given to you, as your personal strength, as wisdom and understanding in your life, and strengthen that tomorrow for the coming year. That will guide you and take you joyously and happily through turbulent times, until another new year comes again.

Tomorrow we celebrate the new year with the chanting of the *Hanuman Chalisa*. So, live in the ocean of positivity,

in the ocean of joy and happiness, and let that become the foundation upon which you will develop in the coming year.

Project – seva

During Satyam Poornima, we have started the year-long project of seva to commemorate the birth centenary of our master, Sri Swami Satyanandaji. Satyam Poornima which was conducted in the month of December marked the 99th year of Sri Swamiji. Satyam Poornima which we will celebrate in 2023, will mark the 100th year, the centenary of his birth. Sannyasa Peeth and Yogapeeth are not going to celebrate anything as a festivity. Of course, every day is a festival, yet the focus is on spreading the teachings of our Sadguru, Sri Swami Sivanandaji, and the teachings that Sri Swamiji gave to all of us around the world, for it is through these teachings and lessons that we can progress in our life.

Many different projects have been conceived in the ashram, within the country and in countries around the world. When you go back to your country and your city, see what you can do to spread the message of health, happiness and harmony and the message of ‘Serve, Love and Give’ to your immediate society, according to the guidelines given in these programs.

The more we are able to serve our fellow beings on the path of luminosity, the happier our gurus will be, as that was their mission. Not party and festivity, but uplift humankind from self-created miseries and experience peace and harmony. Once we experience peace and harmony, then without question, everybody walks the luminous path. If there is no peace and harmony in life, there is no walking on the luminous path. The path is always dark, full of struggles and difficulties.

The slogan for this year from Munger is *Jyotirmaya path par chalo* – Walk the Luminous Path. This is the message that will spread from here. The centre of this message and the heart of this effort is the new Centenary Park, which we shall unveil and dedicate tomorrow. It is not a monument, we are



unveiling our dedication. We are unveiling our honour and respect, which is covered by the dross of the mind. So, let us go through the process and as we unveil that, maybe we will see a distant light shining bright, calling us to walk the luminous path.

—31 December 2022

Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger.

The teachings contain a wealth of wisdom applicable to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and inspiration for living a harmonious life. A yogi from birth, Swami Niranjan's approach combines practicality, empathy, compassion, warmth, humour and penetrating insight. No matter what the subject, Swami Niranjan lends it an ease unique to him, bringing together an ancient spiritual tradition and an understanding of the current way of life. With each topic, he takes us right into the heart of the matter and provides a fresh perspective on it.

On the Wings of the Swan, Volume X consists of satsangs given in 2022. Swami Niranjan uses the various auspicious spiritual celebrations observed at Ganga Darshan to explain their origin, meaning and the relevance they have for spiritual aspirants of the twenty-first century.



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