

Volume IX

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

On the Wings of the Swan

Volume IX



SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

1923~2023

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

On the Wings of the Swan

Volume IX

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Satsangs given at Ganga Darshan, Munger, in 2010 and 2011



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

On the Wings of the Swan, Volume IX

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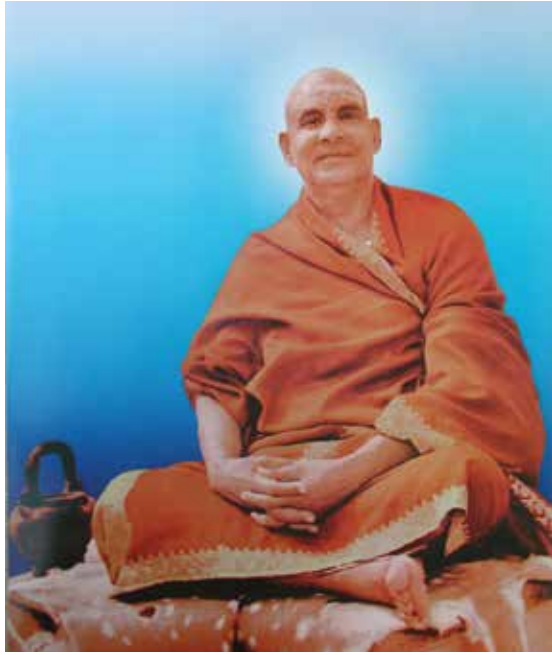
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2023

ISBN: 978-93-94604-41-4

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.sannyasapeeth.net
www.satamyogaprasad.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

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

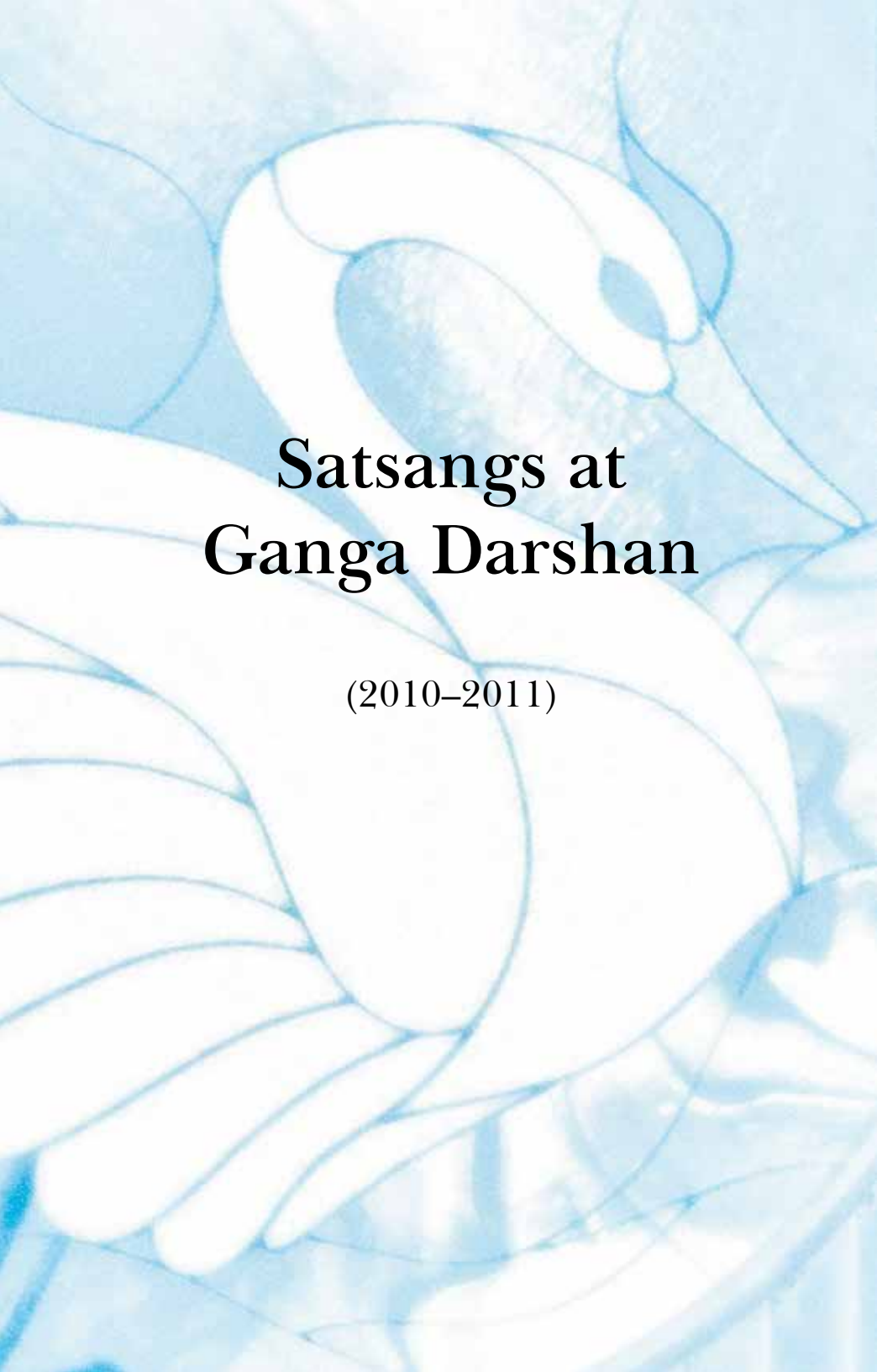


Dedication

*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

(2010–2011)

2010

ADDRESS TO FOUR-MONTH YOGIC STUDIES PARTICIPANTS

You came here expecting four months of hatha yoga; six hours of asana in the morning, maybe a few hours of study and a few hours of loafing around, but the entire approach was different.

At Ganga Darshan, you were exposed to three things. Although you came for yoga, you were also exposed to the ashram and to sannyasa lifestyle. The combination of these three gives a complete picture of how one can move forward and aspire to acquire excellence in life. For me the biggest learning that I have received from yoga is this.

Yoga

Understanding asanas and pranayamas, I can do whenever I wish. Sleeping and meditation, I can also do at any time, yet something that goes with me through life as a result of yoga, what could that be? I find it to be an understanding of life and an acquisition of excellence, perfection and completeness in everything I do. For me, that is the attainment through yoga; something practical, substantial which can carry me through life.

As far as realization is concerned, I do not know if anyone is qualified for that or not. If it was that easy then anybody who tried would be self-realized, but that process

of removing the dross from the mind is an ongoing process. Life is like an onion: you remove one layer and you see another, you remove that layer and there is the third, you keep on removing layer after layer. How many layers are you going to remove? As many as necessary, but how long will that take? We do not know, so realization is not the goal.

My goal is the acquisition of excellence and the ability to remove the layers, and this understanding comes through yoga. If you want to discover your own potential and nature, yoga as a practice can lead you to the cultivation of this awareness. Even asanas and pranayamas help provide the foundation and necessary preparation for you to explore and rediscover yourself. The method of teaching yoga followed these principles.

You were not focused on one thing at any given time; many things were given to you, for ultimately it is the food you eat that nourishes the body, mind and spirit. For the body, asanas; for the pranic body, pranayamas; for the mental body, pratyahara; for consciousness and emotions, the vijñanamaya body, dharana and mantras. Different applications of yoga were used to nourish different areas of your being. If you continue with this pattern, then the yoga experience becomes complete. The aim in teaching yoga here has been to give a glimpse of yoga as it can be applied for personal growth, and in various areas of society.

Ashram

Ashram was the second area of exposure, and of course initially it was difficult to understand the concept of the ashram. The original concept was that this is a community where people aim for spiritual emancipation. Yet remember that a hospital is not the place for healthy people, a hospital is the place for sick people to attain health. Similarly, an ashram is not the place for spiritually-enlightened people, but for people who are trying to discover something in their own lives. Everyone who comes here, whether for one month, one year or one lifetime, starts from the basic level of the

mind. They have to work through their own inner stuff, so they are also trying and striving. In an ashram we find a collection of people who are at different levels and they are all trying to discover something substantial within themselves which can give them happiness, tranquillity and joy. Hence it becomes a place where activity is constant.

Sannyasa

The third area you find here is sannyasa, a lifestyle that accepts many things and which denies many things. It is a life of finding a balance, and those who can find this balance in their sannyasa become true sannyasins, and those who do not are at least making an attempt in whatever way they can.

You have gone through a process of experiencing that understanding in whatever way you could. Six months or one year after your departure, you will realize the value of the learning that you have received here. As you encounter different situations in life and you face them, you will discover that you have been exposed to that situation before here in the ashram, and you have already gone through your head-trips. Therefore, your thoughts will be clear and your decisions will be better. You will be more clear and objective in your analysis of situations, circumstances and people.

People come here with different intentions. Some people come just to spend time here. Some people come to overcome certain traits and they struggle hard. Some people come to learn and practise yoga. Different types of people come with an intention to get something from yoga, and we recognize their effort and their commitment. Whether they succeed or fail, that is another matter, yet the intention and effort is there.

With this in mind, there are some people who did not receive their certificate, however, I have asked the authorities that they should not be denied their certificate as they have the best of intentions in their heart and mind. We hope you will carry the best of intentions with you so that eventually, one day, you can excel in yoga. To those people who did

not receive their certificate, we shall be giving you words of encouragement to instil hope in your lives so that you can continue to move forward.

—January 2010

Maha Sivaratri

Today we are celebrating Sivaratri and there is an interesting history associated with Shiva and Sivaratri. Once upon a time, there lived a man who was a great yogi. We address him as the first yogi. His name was Shiva and he lived a reclusive and isolated life in the mountains and jungles. He was immersed in the discovery of his own nature. He was a *sadhaka*, a spiritual aspirant, all his life. He was a spiritually-enlightened person, and society recognized him as a great spiritual personality. He was the first teacher, the first exponent of yoga and he taught to his wife Parvati. The asanas, pranayamas and other yoga techniques that we practise today were taught by him.

When he got married to Parvati, it happened under very unusual circumstances. He was an ascetic and she was the princess of a kingdom; Sivaratri celebrates the day they got married. In today's society people identify that event as the merger of the individual self with the higher self. Parvati, represents the individual self; who yearns to unite, to come together with the beloved – that is the nature of the individual self. Shiva, the ascetic, the observer of everything, remains aloof. The transcendental self is all-pervasive, everywhere. We as individuals always search for some experience, a glimpse, the grace of that transcendental self.

The vision of light that people have is a glimpse of that transcendental self. The feeling of all-pervasive peace is an experience of that higher self. As individuals we are always looking to the higher self to receive the beneficial qualities that are useful for us to develop in life.

Tantra uses the imagery of Shiva and Parvati to represent the male principle and the female principle, the

transcendental self and the individual self. The process of coming together is known as *yoga*, so this is the day when in the darkness of our soul we encounter the divine light, radiance and luminosity. On this day, the energies around the planet are said to be benevolent and beneficial for the upliftment of human nature. Tonight in India, practically everyone is going to be staying up until midnight, and the yogis meditate on this cosmic energy.

The sanyasins use this day to go deeper into their meditations. The party-likers, the *bhogis*, play loud music and drink a lot of intoxicants. The religious groups go to different temples to offer their worship. You practise your yoga with comforts and pleasures also. Different people, according to their liking and inclination, celebrate Sivaratri in different ways but everybody celebrates it. No matter who they are, the virtuous ones and the sinners, they all believe that the grace is going to descend in their life. It is a question of faith. If they believe I am sure they receive it.

Rudrabhishek is a tradition that is followed by sanyasins. *Rudrabhishek*, is the offering of water and other items to the higher consciousness, to Shiva. Water and liquids represent life, and it is life which is the extension of consciousness. So Rudrabhishek represents the union of consciousness and life. Today the children are going to perform Rudrabhishek. It will be their first time this year, and it will be done with a special chanting of *Namakam* and *Chamakam*, which are the most ancient of the mantras, dating back many thousands of years. Throughout history the intonation, the pronunciation, nothing has changed. These are the original vowels and consonants, and if you listen to them with your eyes closed, I am sure you will also feel the energy of the mantras.

—12 February, 2010

Bhagavad Gita

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one book in the history of humanity that has withstood challenges by any critic or any person anywhere in the world. Many great people have come and gone and they have left their writings. Many great people have come and gone, and their lives have become books. From time to time, different people come up who challenge the philosophy, beliefs or statements of a culture or tradition. The entire global history has been riddled with such situations. Ideological wars have taken place because, ‘I do not believe in your ideology and you are trying to impose it on me’, or ‘You don’t believe in my ideology but I will impose it on you’. Wars have taken place, and when the wars stopped, everybody was criticized, every philosopher, leader, politician, or prominent person, whether they were spiritual personalities or not. Everything that they have written has been criticized, yet one book that has withstood criticism is the *Bhagavad Gita*.

It has stood the challenges of time, and it has maintained its purity and the conviction of its philosophy. For this reason, we call the *Bhagavad Gita* the divine word, the divine revelation, *deva vani*. In every chapter you read about this divine revelation. Its revelations are compared to the Upanishads, as they are teachings between guru and disciple, Krishna and Arjuna. This revelation is compared to *Brahmavidya*, not empirical knowledge, not material, gross, or intellectual knowledge, but the highest knowledge.

If you applied the principles of the *Bhagavad Gita* in your life – if you apply one sloka a day – in seven hundred days you would be enlightened, yet nobody has the ability to do it. It is called *Brahmavidya* because the application of the thoughts of the *Gita* in life would give you the highest knowledge, no matter who the person is or from which tradition.

Naturally, if it is revealed from within and is a divine revelation, then how can the intellect challenge that? Intellect can challenge only that which is created by another

intellect. A revelation is not given or discovered by the intellect; it is the truth and the reality of life which you see happening. Traditionally people say that many thousands of years ago on this date, at this time approximately, on *Ekadashi* in the first fortnight of December, the message of the *Gita* was given to Arjuna on the battlefield, and the entire discussion took about one hour.

We have read the entire *Gita* in one hour, forty-five minutes, so it is not an impossible feat to give such an exposition in a short time, though people do question how this great revelation could be told to Arjuna on the battlefield. To understand that you need to spend time in an ashram; at least one week or eighteen days. If you just listen and think of one chapter per day, you require at least eighteen days to understand the *Gita*. Arjuna was a different type of personality. You cannot compare yourselves to Arjuna. If you can do in eighteen lifetimes, what Arjuna did in one hour, that will be your achievement.

—10 April 2010

Can you speak on the science of mantras?

I remember one research that happened in 1976 or 1978. It was conducted by the Government of India, and it was research on mantras. In the scriptures it is written that through mantras one can generate heat, one can create fire, one can create rain, one can change the climate. To investigate the validity of these statements, the agencies of the government decided to conduct a research experiment.

A special kutir, an earthen-house, was constructed, and it was thoroughly checked to ensure that there were no flammable materials in it. Scientists came and they put different gauges and meters to monitor the environment inside the kutir. Police came and formed a protective cordon around the kutir so nobody could enter without their knowledge and permission. Then a group of knowledgeable pandits came, held hands, surrounded the house and

started to chant mantras to generate fire. Time passed. As the mantras were chanted and the chanting intensified, the monitors inside the kutir recorded a rise in temperature. About three hours later the temperature in the room became so hot that the mud-house caught fire and it burnt down completely to the ground. This research validated the science of mantras.

Yogis have always maintained that mantras are vibrations that never decay or die or dissipate or disappear. Even the letters of Sanskrit are known as aksharas. *Akshara* means imperishable. According to the science of mantras and nada, these sound vibrations do not die. When we chant the mantras, the combination of different vibrations and sounds creates an effect which can be channelled, directed and guided.

The vibrations and energy of the Mahamrityunjaya mantra are directed for the wellbeing of people, for their physical health, for their mental wellbeing, for their emotional health. People are helped by the subtle effects of the mantras. That is shown by the increasing number of requests to chant the mantra, whether for physical health, material prosperity, inner peace or spiritual upliftment. These requests come not only from local people but from all over the world. People have realized that mantras and the power of mantras do intervene in life to create a positive change.

When it is very hot and the outside temperatures are soaring to forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine degrees, if you happen to pass by a room where air-conditioning is running you suddenly get this cool breeze touching you – it is such a pleasant, comfortable feeling. In soaring temperatures, suddenly a cool breeze comes, touches you, caresses you and relaxes the body. That is the effect of mantras. People who write to us are often not even aware when it is being chanted. They know that it will be chanted on Saturday, yet many times they are sleeping or doing some business in another part of the world. They are confronting the heat of the sun, yet suddenly when they sleep, meditate, charge their

mind and mental antennae, they receive the vibration of the mantra and it fills them, it heals them mentally, emotionally and physically.

Mantras are an important aspect of one's life, and we believe that by practising mantras one can attain every kind of peace and prosperity in life, including health. Mantras have survived in India and are a part and parcel of the faith and belief that we all carry – the faith that on a hot day, the cool breeze will soothe away the aches of the body.

—3 June 2010

Why are people dressed in different colours here? Doesn't it bring us back to a hierarchy?

Practicality in life and theory in life are different, even in spiritual traditions. The philosophy is what you aspire for, and you apply the disciplines of that philosophy to create a condition, a foundation, a habit within yourself. Once that habit is cultivated, you can overcome the lower habits and try to cultivate another set of higher habits.

In spiritual life, philosophy is one thing, and initiation is another thing. You are adhering to a philosophy as an initiate. As a non-initiate, your understanding of philosophy is different. As an initiate, when you are making the effort, step by step, to move forward, you need to use the manifest, the *sakara*: form, colour, identity, discipline, system, location.

If everything leads to the same, then why do we even come to an ashram? The same we can do at home. Hierarchy is a label given by society. Here we do not call it hierarchy, we call it 'systems of life', and you progress through different systems of life over a period of time. You progress through different conditions in life, a mature or immature understanding in life. There are times when you cultivate the bad and the negative qualities, there are times when you cultivate the good and the positive qualities.

The initiations in the ashram that the colours geru, yellow, white refer to are systems that one has to go through,

as these systems help the maturing mind understand the stages of spiritual life. When you come to the *avadhoot* stage, then you are beyond systems and rules.

—28 July 2010

Farewell to the French group

It has given us a lot of happiness and pleasure to see you in Rikhiapeeth and in Ganga Darshan. Both these places represent the mission of our guru, Sri Swami Satyananda, and these two places are places of pilgrimage for those who want to develop themselves in yoga and in spiritual life.

In Ganga Darshan the subject has always been the dissemination of yoga. Right from the beginning, Sri Swamiji called this place a school of yoga, not an ashram of yoga. Since 1963, all the yoga work that has happened in Munger has been through the school and university of yoga.

In Ganga Darshan you will find four different institutions working. The number one institution, the mother institution is the Bihar School of Yoga. That was the original institution established by Swami Satyananda in 1963. Bihar School of Yoga has become the medium to propagate the message of yoga and has been successful in bringing yoga to society at large. Apart from the normal classes and teaching of yoga given here, a lot of work happens outside in different cities, industries and corporations.

The Bihar Yoga Bharati is also located in Ganga Darshan. It is the first yoga university in the world, and is recognized by the Indian government. In Bihar Yoga Bharati we give yoga education in yoga philosophy, in yoga psychology, in applied yoga and in yoga ecology. Many people have received their master degrees in yoga here. We have just finished construction of the new university campus. That will be the future place for teaching the academic aspect of yoga.

The third institution which is housed here is the Yoga Research Foundation. This institution coordinates activities and research with other hospitals and research centres in the

country. The fourth institution on these premises is the Yoga Publications Trust. All the books about yoga that you read are edited and published by Yoga Publications.

Rikhia houses the service-oriented organizations, like Sivananda Math, Sivananda Ashram and Rikhiapeeth. These two locations, Munger and Rikhia, represent the establishment of the individual in their spiritual life. Different spiritual traditions mention that first you work on yourself to discover the inner purity, and after you have discovered the inner purity you connect with the world and see everything as a divine emanation. Realization of that divine or transcendental emanation, and recognizing that we are part of That is ultimately known as self-realization.

In the yogic process we cultivate and expand our awareness. The practices of raja yoga's ashtanga yoga – the sequence of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi – all represent the process of working with one's own mind. They are practised in the process of discovering the weaknesses and the strengths of the mind, the process of discovering the blockages and the flow of energy. Yoga, it seems, allows the mind, the energies and the senses to settle down.

Many people find peace and happiness when the mind, the senses and the pranas settle down. Through pratyahara, dharana and meditation we are expanding and developing our awareness more and more in relation to ourselves; knowing what our problems and hang-ups are, what our aspirations are, where we find happiness, where we find suffering, which situation pulls us down, which situation pulls us up. Hence, yoga is a process of self-understanding, self-reflection and self-transformation, and with this self-transformation we begin our journey of spiritual life.

The beginning of spiritual life is the cultivation of positive and virtuous qualities. The person who is spiritual has to be like a farmer: planting the right seed at the right time, protecting the seed from external imbalances, the external risks, giving timely nourishment and allowing the

plant to grow. One big problem that spiritual people have is that they want instant change in half an hour of meditation, and that does not happen at all to anybody. That is like planting a seed in the ground and taking it out every day to see if it has sprouted. You can plant the seed and take it out every day all your life and nothing will happen. Plant the seed, look after it and forget about it, then in the course of time the seed will sprout. It is in this manner that one becomes a farmer in life. First manage the fluctuations of mind, the *chitta vrittis*, and then in the state of calmness and inner purity plant the seeds of the appropriate qualities and virtues. Allow those virtues to flower in your life, and that is the flowering of our spiritual life.

—30 July 2010

What is shravana?

Shravana happens in the month of the heavy monsoon, and throughout India people worship Shiva. They conduct pilgrimages carrying the water from the Ganga to one of the twelve main temples of Shiva, the twelve Jyotirlingas. If they are too far away, then they go to some prominent Shiva temple.

There are pilgrims who walk for days carrying water on their shoulders and following a hard discipline; no shoes, bare feet, minimum clothes, just orange shorts, a t-shirt and a bamboo pole on the shoulder with water containers hanging on both ends. In Bihar people carry water from Sultanganj, from the river, and walk all the way to Deoghar. They are called *Kanvarias*, and their mantra during this three-day journey is *Bol Bam*. Everywhere, from Sultanganj to Deoghar, you will see millions of orange ants carrying water on their shoulders to bathe Shiva at the Baidyanath Dham temple in Deoghar.

The worship of Shiva during this Shravana month is considered to be the most auspicious and wish-fulfilling. Monday is considered to be Shiva's day. For this reason, we

have decided that today, being Monday, we shall also do a Rudrabhishek, a Shiva worship, which is not part of the ashram culture, or a part of yoga.

When you come to Ganga Darshan you encounter three areas. One is yoga training: hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, kundalini yoga, mantra yoga, nada yoga, asana, pranayama, yoga nidra, pratyahara, dharana and so on. The list is quite long. That is the yoga training. The second area that you encounter here is the gurukul environment. In the gurukul environment it is the connection that one has with the inner guru, the spirit, that is most important. All the residents here, no matter whether they are short term, long term or yoga trainees, all contribute to the environment through their positive and constructive participation. If you can find the right tuning with that environment, it will nourish your spiritual life.

The third area is the sannyasa tradition. Some of us are sannyasins and some are trying to be sannyasins, trying to understand what it is, trying to apply it and to live it. How successful we are or are not, depends on our effort and response to different situations, positive or negative. After all, we are normal human beings with the same samskaras and karmas that everyone else has. The difference is that we are people who are trying to follow the sannyasa path.

Thus in Ganga Darshan you encounter three areas: yoga training, the gurukul ambience, and the sannyasa tradition, and these areas are different. Sannyasa is a personal lifestyle that we have chosen to live. Some choose it for a certain period of time and some commit their life to it. There are a few who commit their life and there are many more who choose to live this sannyasa tradition for some period of time – ten years, fifteen years, twenty years – until they have a breakthrough in life.

This Rudrabhishek is part of the sannyasa tradition, not as part of a religious activity, rather it is part of the process of understanding the human connection with the divine. The attempt of sannyasa is to understand the human connection

with the divine. Ultimately, one has to come to this point, and the symbolic representation of that coming together with the divine is contained in the Rudrabhishek.

—2 August 2010

Why are people afraid of death and what can be done to conquer this fear?

In the *Mahabharata*, the yaksha asks Yuddhisthira a question, *Kim ashcharyam* – what is the greatest *ashcharya*, wonder, in this life? Yudhishtira replies that the biggest wonder is that everybody dies, yet each person does not want to die, but wants to live eternally. Every day we see people dying. We see our own family members die. Yet we do not want to die. We want to live a long life. That is the biggest wonder.

If you think about it, this is a true statement. Naturally, people are afraid of death as they identify with the world of the senses. You believe in what you see, what you hear, what you smell, what you feel and touch and taste. You do not believe in what you cannot see. If you are going to believe what cannot be seen, then there has to be an element of faith.

You have never seen God, yet you have faith. You have never seen Yamaraja, death, and so there is fear. For God there is faith, for Yamaraja there is fear, as you think you can experience God in this body, through your five senses; your eyes, skin, ears, nose, mouth. When people close their eyes and they see light they say, “Oh I have seen God.” How do you know you have seen God? You have only seen light, yet you say you have seen God. How did you know that? Because you believe in something, and therefore you project it in that manner. Who knows, maybe God and Yamaraja are both one and the same person, and you actually see God when you die.

You want to see God in your meditation. God meets with you when you go into eternal meditation, *Ram Nam Satya Hai*. Now how to explain this? Nobody has spoken like this,

only Swami Niranjan is speaking like this, everybody says, “Atma, atma, atma.”

When you are born you become aware of this world, this universe, this cosmos. When you are sitting in this room, you are aware of this room. When you go out of this room, you see another world unfolding before you. The world is not this room only. In the same manner, when you are alive, when you take birth, you are only here in this room observing this whole room. Death is like going out of the room. When you disconnect from the room, you leave the room and say, “Okay, now I am going to go to another building.” When you leave this room, that is death; when you leave this body, that is death. When you step out of the boundary and the confines of the room you have a new vista opening up before you. It is the same with death.

Here is another example of death: you know that you die every night. Sleep is a form of death. The only difference between sleep and death is that in sleep you are breathing, your heart is beating, the blood is circulating. In death that is not happening, yet the mental state of unconsciousness is exactly the same. The same feeling that you have at night when you go to bed and sleep, is the feeling that comes at the time of death. When the soul leaves these confines, it encounters another dimension, another type of life.

What is the meaning of your life in this three-dimensional world? In infinite time, your whole life is just a blink of an eye, maybe eighty years. What is eighty years of somebody's life in relation to infinity? Yet in that short span you become so attached to this body of senses that you don't want to leave it. For millions of years you have lived in different bodies, in different places, in different dimensions. It is like somebody going to Singapore for a holiday and saying, “Oh I am going to live here, I am not going back to India. I'll migrate.” We have migrated here for eighty years of life, then we will go back. Just as people migrate in relation to their profession when they are transferred to different cities, we have come here on transfer to live as human beings, and after that we

will be transferred to some other location. It is as simple as that.

How can we integrate yoga sadhana into our life?

I met a person once who claimed he was a jnana yogi, a follower of Ramana Maharshi. The theme of Ramana Maharshi was to ask oneself, “Who am I?” Of course, Ramana Maharshi was a person with a different samskara and of a different calibre, and everyone is not of that calibre or samskara. So, I asked this person who claimed to be a follower of Ramana Maharshi,

“What do you do as your practice of jnana yoga?”

He said, “Oh, every morning at the breakfast table, before eating my breakfast, I think for few minutes, ‘Who am I?’ and that is my sadhana.”

“What do you think?”

He said, “I think, ‘Who is this person eating breakfast?’”

I said, “Wonderful, have you received any answer?”

He said, “Not yet.”

“How many years have you been asking yourself this question?”

“Oh, about eight, nine years.”

“And still you don’t have the answer?”

“No.”

“Well, I’ll tell you the answer: it is you who is eating the breakfast!” Whatever your thought, idea, character or temperament may be, whether you are bhakti or karma-inclined, or meditatively inclined, sadhana is the foundation. You have to see how you can adjust or incorporate sadhana in your daily routine.

In my opinion the best form of sadhana is the three mantras in the morning upon waking up, then a regime of asana and pranayama, then during the daytime, practising yoga nidra as relaxation. Finally, at night before going to sleep do your mantra, practise meditation and then go to sleep. Spread your sadhana throughout the day. When you need to harness the energies of the body, then morning is

the time to do asana and pranayama. When you need to harness the potentials of the mind, morning is the time to practise the three mantras. When you want to de-stress yourself, afternoon is the time to practise yoga nidra. When you want to go to bed and forget the world, then night is the time to practise mantra and meditation. In this way you adjust a routine in your life.

Along with this daily routine, if situations permit and if you are so inclined, you can incorporate a weekly routine as well. Do Mahamrityunjaya mantra, one mala every Saturday night, with the entire family or people you live with, in the ashram or in the community. You can also follow a monthly routine; do different chanting at different times to evoke a different mood and a different energy, to connect with different parts of your being.

Add a little bit of swadhyaya; when time permits, read some good spiritual books, scriptures or texts which will deepen your understanding of what you are doing and what you are trying to achieve in life. What is the thought that propels and motivates you? Understand that. Swadhyaya then becomes a part of a weekly routine. Satsang can become part of either the weekly or monthly routine, and in this manner you gradually fine-tune your daily routine, your weekly routine and your monthly routine. At times you can even incorporate practices of hatha yoga into your monthly routine like kunjla, neti or laghoo.

When you do all of this, this constitutes sadhana. You have to do it regularly, and in this manner. Look after your physical health needs; look after your needs of mental stability; look after your emotional equilibrium; look after your spiritual awareness needs. Through sadhana, you can incorporate discipline into your life. That will allow you to cultivate a deeper spiritual awareness.

Should we pray to God for anything either for us or for others, when we know that God will take care of everything?

Do not ask whether you should pray to God for anything or not; discover if you need to express your sentiments and feelings. That is the important aspect. If there is a need for me to express my sentiments and feelings, then I will pray. If there is no need to express my sentiments and feelings, I will not pray. Why do you have to drag God into everything? First look at yourself and your sentiments. If they are pure, and if they are coming from your heart, it will become a real prayer. If you do not have the sentiment and it is only an expression of your frustration, then it will only be lip-service, which has no meaning. It depends on what you feel and how you wish to express yourself. Whatever is spontaneous, that is the best.

How can we abide by nature's laws with a conditioned mind and with our karmas?

You can easily live nature's law with your conditioned mind and karmas; you cannot live the natural law with your greed. Learn to live with nature without greed, and you will overcome every karma and every type of conditioned mind. Don't worry about nature, see how you respond to different situations, for it is you who is interacting with nature. Nature is interacting with everyone equally, yet each one is responding differently. Some people can adjust with nature, and some people cannot.

Those who live with nature or follow the principles of nature, do not have any plus or minus. If you are asking such a question it means that there is either a plus or a minus in your life in relation to nature, your understanding and perception of nature, even your response to nature. You have to discover what it is. What do you fear in nature? The struggle? The difficulty? The uncertainty? The climate? The temperature? The heat? The dust? The cold? Nature is a big thing. The entire creation is nature; the entire creation is *prakriti*. What is it that you do not like about it, or that

you want to adjust with? First discover that and then ask the question.

When is it destiny that decides our life? Why should one make the effort to go into spirituality?

It is destiny that brought you to spirituality and motivated you to make the effort, so do it. As long as it was not your destiny to go on the spiritual path you never bothered about it. When it was destined you came, and you came because you made the effort so continue walking. It is like asking, 'If my destiny is to go to Kolkata, why do I need to get on the train?' What a funny question. In order to go to Kolkata, which is your destined place, you have to get on the train as that is the destined transport. In the same way, effort is the destined transport on the spiritual journey. Understand this carefully: effort is the destined transport like the train. Without effort you cannot go to the destined place, and without the pull of destiny you cannot even make the effort because there is no inclination or motivation. Effort is very much part of destiny. Not laziness, not inaction, but action is part of destiny.

All of us have desires and vasanas. How to overcome them without suppression?

The answer comes down to meditation, reflection, restraint and discipline. That is the only way. Recognize what your desire is: see the negative fallout and the positive fallout. Deal with the negative fallout, harness the positive fallout, ignore what is not needed, grab on to what you feel will help you objectively, and in this way select the vasanas you want to fulfil.

It is no use saying there are plenty of vasanas. Of course there are plenty of vasanas, yet you have the ability to be selective. Be selective. When you go to a restaurant you get a menu. A thousand and one items are written there: they are all your vasanas, each one is available for a price. Out of the thousand items on the menu you select four, five, six and you

live those vasanas and forget about the other ones that you have not selected. They are on the menu and you can select them at any time. So enjoy your present meal.

How can one identify one's guru or does the guru come into the life of one who practises sakshi bhava?

That is one question to which I do not have an answer. Does the guru find the disciple or does the disciple find the guru? How do they find each other? I have no answer and I am not going to speculate on the subject.

There are certain things that simply happen. Why do you get hungry? Why do you crave happiness? Why do you crave some form of enlightenment? Why do you want to discover the unknown? There is a drive, a motivation in every individual. In some it is dormant, in some it is awakened and, according to the degree of wakefulness, one becomes aware of different needs at different times in one's own life. There is a time when learning is easy, the intellect is developing and we go to school, we educate ourselves. Then there comes a period in life when we become professionally active and our expressions are creative and constructive. At that time the mentality is different. Success or failure in life provides a different mentality to individuals, different ways of seeing the world, different ways of relating with the world.

In the same manner, the drive for happiness and security, many times at the external level, many times at the internal level or emotional level, leads to the development of some connection with somebody who eventually becomes the guru. There are no written documents which state that the disciple finds the guru or the guru finds the disciple. It is a different experience for different people. Although my guru found me it does not mean that the guru finds every disciple. Simply because I found my guru, does not mean that every person has to search for their guru.

Each one relates in a different way according to their destined path. After all, how do you find your husband or wife? Nowadays you find them on the internet. Parents do

not even know about it. On the internet you can select who is going to be your future boyfriend, girlfriend, partner or husband. How does that happen? Circumstances put two people together and if the circumstances and intentions are right, then a supportive person does appear in your life. I believe the same thing happens with guru.

When circumstances are right and there is a yearning, a craving in the life of the prospective disciple, then it is like a magnet. The disciple becomes a magnet and the guru is a magnet, and the magnetic attraction pulls them closer and closer. That is how I see it, yet it is an individual and personal experience, not common to everybody. It is unique to each one individually.

When a person who practises sakshi bhava, sees his own death, is it moksha?

If I see my death in a dream is it moksha? If one sees one's own death in meditation is it moksha? No, it is just an awareness of *abhinivesha*, the fear of death that is ingrained in the life of everyone. There are five kleshas and *abhinivesha* is the fifth klesha, the fear of death and instinct for survival, not to be destroyed, not to die. That is the last instinct to manifest in the life of any individual. When you see yourself dying, whether in a dream or in meditation, you are confronting your own *abhinivesha*. It is an awareness of a particular state of mind. Just as you can be aware of greed, you can be aware of love, of anger, or *abhinivesha*, in the form of a dream, in the form of a memory, in the form of a fear, in any form.

In spiritual evolution we shouldn't suppress our feelings, but due to society and our community we are always having to suppress feelings and so we live in a fear that is hard to handle.

Even in spiritual locations you are asked not to openly project your feelings. You see it is not a question of letting go, it is not a question of releasing the suppressed, it is about

learning, observing, realizing and channelling. Observing, realizing and channelling happens with *sanyam*, restraint.

After all, if you are the rider on a horse and the horse is bucking all the way and trying to throw you off, you do not know how to ride. As a rider you should be able to control the horse. In the same manner, as a meditator, an observer, a sadhaka, an aspirant, you should be able to control, manage, guide, channel and harness the *vritis*, the mental and emotional modifications. If there is a surge of anger, it is a vritti. If there is a surge of passion, it is a vritti. If there is a surge of hunger or anxiety, it is a vritti. Whatever you experience is a vritti. When you release yourself, you are releasing your own vritti. When you let the water out from a dam you have to let it out slowly. You cannot open all the flood gates and drown the surrounding countryside of your mind, your character, your personality by being unrestrained. That is where *viveka*, *discrimination*, plays a major role.

How can one know whether bhakti marga, yoga marga or karma marga is suitable as the spiritual path?

No one path is suitable. You cannot have salt alone for lunch. You cannot have hot water alone for lunch. You cannot eat green vegetables for lunch and then shake your stomach and say, 'Mix and cook'. You put the right quantities together, cook it on the stove and then you eat. In the same way, you are an expression of the qualities of head, heart and hands, and the three have to be integrated. The predominance of a particular tendency or character does not mean that you negate the other behaviours of your personality.

Expression of head, expression of heart, expression of hands – these three areas have to be covered through yoga, and the intention of yoga is that. Yoga does not say, 'Practise karma yoga and that is enough for you.' Yoga comes with an integrated approach. A bhakta may say, 'Practise only bhakti yoga.' A jnani may say, 'Practise only jnana yoga.' A hatha yogi may say, 'Practise only hatha yoga.' You may learn from the teaching of a particular person who is excelling in a

particular field, yet your understanding and your approach has to be integrated in relation to the human personality. Head, heart and hands – know about them and then choose one to develop in your life according to your natural inclination. However, begin with integrating all the three together.

How to implement the energy we get from kriya yoga practices effectively and to integrate it into our daily life?

By good, hard work. Do not be lazy at home and do not be lazy at work, that's all. Keep yourself engaged, keep yourself busy, physically and mentally, and you will be more active, creative and focused and things will flow with greater ease.

If you try to use the energy in meditation, you will get imbalanced. Psychic energy has to be used through physical exercise. The energy which you develop in kriya yoga is psychic, and that has to be used up through physical work, physical involvement, through mental involvement, and external involvement. If you only use that energy to deepen your meditation you will build up more energy and at some time it will explode mentally; then you will be fit to be a psychiatric case. Therefore, I am repeating that kriya yoga energy has to be managed through physical activity. When you do your kriya, on that day you should become more physically active. If there is not much physical activity, go for a long walk – one hour walk in the evening, half an hour or forty-minutes' walk in the morning. Move the body, move the body, move the body.

—11 August 2010

What is prana vidya?

Prana vidya is an interesting subject and it goes much beyond the so-called Reiki. There was a wave of Reiki and now nobody even speaks of it. For five or six years everybody was trying to become a Reiki master, and people who propagated it made a lot of money.

There are some healers in the Philippines who do pranic healing. We have seen how they do it and it is interesting: they put the hand inside the body and remove everything that has to be removed, then they pass the hands over and everything heals. Not even a scar is there, but what they have taken out is living proof that something was taken from the body. When there is mastery, when there is perfection, then prana shakti is not only a concept, it becomes a vibrant energy and you can use it, you can experience it either physically or mentally; through sankalpa shakti if it is mental, or through ichchha shakti if it is physical. Healing over distance can also happen.

NASA is conducting one experiment with Spanish universities and this whole project is funded by the King of Spain and the European Community. There are five hundred people involved in this project and I am one of them. These scientists have developed a machine called 'Quantum Therapy'. At present there are only five hundred machines like that in the whole world, and each of these scientists has one machine, and I have one machine.

The purpose of this machine is interesting. When astronauts live in a space station or go on extended trips to the moon and eventually even to Mars, they are not going to carry tons and tons of medication with them. How do they know that six months later they are not going to have a heart attack? How do they know that in a closed environment they will not have bronchial problems? How do they know that in zero gravity they won't have high or low blood pressure, or headache? How will they diagnose and treat these conditions?

How will the people monitoring them from Earth diagnose and treat those astronauts? They cannot send them medicine; it would take about three months for the supply ship to go. So if the astronauts are sick, do they have to wait three months for the medicine to come? If they are feeling sick, vomiting and have a splitting headache because of zero gravity, and there is nothing there, what are they supposed to do? They are dehydrating, getting dizzy and cannot work,

and their vomit is floating all around the space station. What will they do in that situation?

This machine copies the entire body energy system parameters and then they go into space for six months. Three months later, they start getting recurring headaches every day. They tell the scientists and through the computer, the corresponding frequency will be transmitted to overcome the headache. Scientists are saying that by the year 2025, just as we all have laptops, we will all have this mobile-type gadget which we can set to our own frequency. We will keep it in our pocket, and if one day we say, 'Oh, I am feeling a bit of pain here in my lower back', after one hour the pain goes away. Or 'Oh, I am having high blood pressure', after one hour my blood pressure will come down. That is the next generation of therapy coming into the world: pranic, electromagnetic, bioplasmic.

We do the same thing in prana vidya without the equipment. Those people who do not have sensitivity towards prana and do not know how to channel it, need to have equipment through which they can focus the electromagnetic waves.

How can we stay connected with Bihar School of Yoga as an individual sadhaka or devotee, a yoga teacher or a yoga centre?

Bihar School of Yoga is a place of education, and the best way to maintain your connection is to keep in touch so you know of the different programs that are being conducted. When time and inclinations permit, come to one of the courses and be proactive. The activity becomes an excuse and the activity becomes an education.

We are ready to work hard, and are working hard, but we are not able to achieve success. How to dissociate from the fruits of one's actions?

When people think that they are working hard and they are not getting their due, it means that their eye is on the result.

That is a straight, clear fact. Whatever is your due, it is going to come to you, so focus on improving your performance and your creativity. Apply the concept of karma yoga – whatever activity you are undertaking, it is for the first time and the last time and therefore give it your best shot, even though it may be something that you do every day.

Every day as part of your routine, you go to your office and look at the files, yet you should also have the conviction that each day you are living that moment for the first time and for the last time. This is not a modern concept; it is an old concept. There is a saying:

Kal kare so aaj kare aaj kare so aab, pal me parlay hoagi bohuri karega kab.

What you were going to do tomorrow, do today and what you are going to do today, do now.

That means you have to involve yourself in the karma, and that involvement has to lead you to perfection and creativity, not to expectation. Expectation is always there, you cannot negate or deny the expectation, however do not be obsessed about it. When you know that you are going to get your due, then you simply involve yourself, channel your energies on the work front. When you begin to think in an obsessive manner, 'I'm working so hard, I'm not getting my dues, nobody is giving me recognition, nobody is supporting me, nobody is seeing how hard I'm working', then you are disconnecting yourself from your work and you are confining yourself in your own perceptions.

—16 August 2010

NAVARATRI

7–12 October 2010

The ancient spiritual cultures of the world, predating modern religions, had a different perspective and outlook on their relationship with the cosmic power called God. These ancient traditions believed in God as an existing reality in every object – not in the form of an individual who lives up in heaven, but in the form of qualities and potentials that are inherent in every form of life, in every dimension of creation. With this understanding in mind, tantric and other schools of thought developed an understanding of the existence of the cosmic power, the godly power, in the dimension of the senses and sense objects.

Divinity in creation

Science tells us that matter and energy co-exist. Tantra tells us that not only do they co-exist, but consciousness also co-exists with matter and energy. If you look at nature, you will find that to be true. A tree is wood, yet the inherent possibility and potential in wood is fire. Wood is matter, yet the inherent property in it is fire, energy. Grass is matter, yet the freshness and greenness of grass is energy. This energy and matter manifest in the form of prana. Consciousness in matter manifests as perception. I am not saying mind, I am using the word perception: knowing, seeing, recognizing. Consciousness beyond this material dimension is vast, covering all the dimensions of past, present and future.

The tantrics developed a view in which matter and energy, consciousness and energy, consciousness and matter, are all interrelated and consequently, even God is a combination of different qualities. Just as there are qualifications to become a professor or a doctor, in the same manner, even in spiritual life, there is an acquisition of qualifications. You have to acquire qualifications to move into the next level of spiritual life, and the attainment of divinity is a part of that. For the tantrics, God was not a person living

up in heaven but a living reality and one can experience the presence of the positive and the negative aspects of divinity in life. According to tantra, the positive is consciousness and the negative, the conditioning, is energy. They exist together just as fire is inherent in wood, or strength is inherent in muscles. That is one aspect of the existence of divinity according to the tantric perception.

Beyond the senses

The second aspect is that we as individual human beings live in a conditioned environment. Our life is conditioned by the senses, the mind, emotions, desires, by culture, religion and society. In this conditioning we are only aware of the sensorial dimension and nothing beyond it. Anything that can be grasped and understood through the senses is considered to be accurate and factual. What cannot be grasped by the senses we find difficult to accept; this includes everything which is beyond the range of human sensory, intellectual and mental perception.

The more we identify with the evidence presented to us by the senses, the more material we become. When we become aware of the different natures and evidences revealed to us from time to time from beyond the realm of the senses, we become what is called spiritual. The deep identification with the senses and the sense objects makes us material; trying to understand the inputs that come from some other source makes us aware of a higher connection. We become aware of a higher and deeper understanding that exists between the individual and the cosmos, between the individual and nature, between the individual and the dharma of the individual.

When we are aware of nature, our dharma and the cosmos, these three things together make us enlightened. Only having the experience of God does not make anybody enlightened. If there is no knowledge of our dharma, or if we cannot connect with nature, with the transcendental, then it is incomplete, and we cannot consider ourselves spiritual.

To cultivate spirituality there has to be a connection with nature, *prakriti*, with the cosmic, divine, transcendental godly force – and there has to be an understanding of our dharma, the commitment to life and existence as a whole. Only then it is possible for us to become spiritual, otherwise we live in a world of fantasy and imagination, trying to replace the images of demons with angels and going into a deluded fantasy of mind, ‘I can see light and colours, I can hear sounds, and I have become spiritual’. That concept of spirituality does not exist in the ancient traditions. Ancient traditions have been practical in their approach to life and God.

Understanding Shakti, the evolutionary energy

The ancient traditions looked at God not only as a masculine or plus symbol but also as a feminine or minus symbol. Plus and minus here do not represent the positive and the negative connotations which we carry with us. They are seen as two poles: with and without, light and darkness. Plus and minus both co-exist in the cosmic realm and it is the conditioning power which has to be understood.

Shakti has to be understood, not consciousness, as consciousness has only one desire, one aspiration, one direction, and that is growth. Energy, *shakti*, has come down from the transcendental to the gross by limiting itself continually at every stage. An example is the chakra system: the first chakra represents the raw energy, the pure nature, and the last chakra, *mooladhara*, represents a very tiny part of that raw energy which is confined and contained in one particular element. All the different chakras represent the step-down process of that transcendental energy into gross energy.

The Shakti aspect has to be realized. It has to be developed and experienced as both the expansive energy and the confining energy. In life we experience the Shakti aspect more than the Shiva aspect – more energy and less consciousness. Energy is what controls and directs human life

and its responses. Actions, behaviours, thoughts, a mentality are guided by the conditioning of this energy. This energy in the benevolent and sattwa aspect is known as *Saraswati*. When you were young, you were known as a boy or a girl, when you grew up you were known as an adult, and when you grow old you will be known as an old person. You are the same, yet at different stages of life you are identified differently. Similarly, Shakti in the benevolent aspect is known as *Saraswati*, in the nurturing aspect as *Lakshmi*, and in the transformative aspect as *Durga*. *Saraswati* symbolizes *sattwa*, effulgence, understanding, wisdom, knowledge, also the arts and sciences. She symbolizes mastery over all these.

Lakshmi represents fulfilment, attainment and the absence of any want in life. *Durga* represents the change and transformation that come after you decide to break a conditioning. The thoughts that we are unwilling to change, the ideas and concepts that we are unwilling to change, are modified by the *Durga* power.

It is these shaktis that become active and dynamic in the process of creation. Consciousness remains aloof and unaffected. The soul represents consciousness. Can you experience your soul? No. Mind represents consciousness. Can you experience the mind? No. Only one part of mind, the thought process, is identified as a mental activity. Yet so many other things happen there and we do not even know about them. Mind and consciousness represent a perception that is unchangeable. Energy, which is the cause of conditioning and the process of becoming free of that conditioning, changes the perception depending on its involvement with the sense and sense object.

Attributes of Shakti

This Navaratri sadhana is a sadhana which has been prescribed in the tantras for the spiritual upliftment of the individual. The tantrics did not believe in God as a person, or form or an individual, rather they saw God as an energy with different attributes. The shaktis represent the different

attributes of that cosmic power, the cosmic nature. *Shakti* itself means the primordial nature, energy, and is seen as having three attributes. These three attributes have been given different names in order to understand them. In the sequence of creation, first comes Saraswati, then Lakshmi and then Durga. Durga or Kali – either name, it does not matter, as we are only trying to identify a particular quality of this divine nature. Yet in our sadhana Durga comes first, Lakshmi next and Saraswati comes third.

The reason is simple – the Durga attribute of the divine is a purifying attribute. This shakti cleans the environment, prepares the ground, the mind, and human nature to be the recipient of cosmic awareness. Imagine that you have a garden and you are going to plant some flowers in it. What is your first effort? Clear the land of all the unnecessary objects. Before you can go into creation, you first have to change or destroy the existing environment. If you want to have a nice garden you have to first clean the land, and in cleaning the land you have to work hard, strive and make the effort. That is the Durga component, the Durga Shakti. It cleans and prepares the ground and inspires you to take the next step after cleaning.

After Durga, shakti comes in form of Lakshmi to bring contentment, positivity, optimism, prosperity, happiness and fulfilment. She removes all the absences from life. The third attribute is Saraswati, the one who is absorbed in wisdom and bliss. We all want to be absorbed in wisdom and bliss, however our mind is gross in nature and does not allow us to do that. In our sadhana, as we understand and experience these different attributes of the cosmic power, we can have a glimpse of that completeness in our own life.

Mantra and yantra

During Navaratri the three aspects of shakti are propitiated through mantras, meditations, through yantras and other sadhanas. Mantra and yantra are two powerful tools to awaken the shakti and access the subtle levels of con-

sciousness. The combination of mantra and yantra plays a prominent role during Navaratri. When you begin to chant mantras and focus on yantras, the normal nature of the mind changes. From extroverted it becomes introverted, from dissipated it becomes focused.

When it becomes focused and introverted, you begin observing certain aspects of your nature that you did not know existed before. It is a surprise. Many times you are able to perceive the goodness within yourself, as well as the blocks. Many times you are able to perceive the different traits of your nature and personality which inhibit your progress and growth, or which allow you to move forward with greater confidence, conviction, faith and belief.

Navaratri is synonymous with the concept of 'the dark night of the soul'. The idea is simple: if all the lights go off now and we continue to sit here, we will not be able to see each other. We continue to exist and continue to sit, yet in the absence of light nothing can be seen. When light comes, we not only see ourselves, but everything that is around us, all shapes, forms, colours and sizes – every object can be seen. In the same manner, when the veils of ignorance cover the conscious self, the luminosity of life is not perceived and you feel, 'I am self-contained, I am a unit'. When you remove the veil and the light begins to shine, then you feel, 'I am not contained; I become universal'.

The way to access the deeper layers of consciousness is through visualization of yantras and the chanting of mantras, both of which are important topics in tantra. Mantra chanting focuses the mind, removes the distractions of the mind and internalizes the mind. When a lot of mantra practice is done, the mind becomes introverted, and at that time the inherent nature within us is observed. You become the observer of your nature: the good and the positive, the bad and the negative. Both are contained in the mind, both have to be realized and witnessed. Sometimes with mantra chanting you feel elated, joyful and happy; sometimes you feel gloomy, dark and depressed.

Many people leave mantra chanting when they feel gloomy, dark and depressed, thinking that this was not the result they were looking for, without realizing that they are confronting another aspect of their own nature and mind. It clears after a few days, a few weeks or months, many times after a few years or lifetimes. The mind is resilient. It changes fast, and if you can sustain the effort, then luminosity of the mind can be experienced. You are not able to experience the luminosity of the mind if you are not able to sustain your practice. Mantras are the tools to access the deeper levels of your mind. As the mind becomes more subtle a slight disconnection takes place from the outside environment. The mind is no longer extroverted; it is self-contained.

Yantras are the symbols of mantras and visualizations are performed to manage the disconnection of the mind from the world of objects. Yantras become an integral part of sadhana and are used to maintain the clarity, firmness and sanity of the mind. The use of mantras and yantras enables us to bring a qualitative change in the patterns of energy and consciousness which deepens our spiritual awareness and allows us to become better and excel in all areas and dimensions of life.

Today we have started our first practice with the invocation of the Durga mantras, with prayers to remove all the obstacles that hold us back from progressing so that we can experience inner luminosity.

Chandisthan temple

The Chandisthan temple of Munger is an ancient place. Historically, it belongs to the time of the Mahabharata war. One of the rulers of this place happened to be the eldest brother of the Pandavas, yet he allied himself with the wrong camp, the opposite side with the Kauravas, who were his cousins. His name was Karna. Karna was an adherent of the solar or Saurya tantra, and the Shakta tantra which is the worship of Devi. According to legend, he used to come once

in a while to this temple in Munger from his capital, which is about sixty kilometres from here. He used to practise difficult tantric sadhanas and techniques. At the culmination of those practices, he would give his body as a sacrificial offering to Devi by immersing himself in a pot filled with burning hot oil, and he would be totally burnt. Devi would appear, bring him back to life and give him gold worth the weight of his body as a boon. According to the myth, Karna would then come to where Jyoti Mandir now stands at Ganga Darshan, earlier known as Karna Chaura, and distribute that gold to his subjects as the grace of Devi. This is the link between Chandisthan and Ganga Darshan.

We started conducting the Navaratri satsang programs at the Chandisthan temple about fifteen years ago. It is a beautiful place, wild, primitive, where snakes and scorpions abound. As you sit on the ground you might see a snake or a scorpion near you. They are also listening to satsang. Satsang is for everyone, humans and animals alike. There are many animals in the human category and there are many humans in the animal category. Many times animals do understand what is being spoken. You may not understand as you are using your intellect and you question, criticize and debate. Animals go by instinct and what you understand through instinct is more permanent and remains with you.

Symbols of sadhana

The symbol of Devi in Munger is her third eye which is believed to have fallen here – and the symbol of our yoga movement is *ajna chakra*, the third eye. Here Devi is not symbolized as a female figure, but through the image of an eye. The place is mystical and sacred as the Devi shakti is vibrant, and some abstract form of sadhana was performed here in ancient times.

When you see a symbol, it indicates an abstract sadhana; when you use a definite form, it is a defined sadhana. Looking at one object or one part of the body in order to visualize the whole body, is an ability or an art. Look at the

eye of a person and try to visualize the whole body around it. Look at somebody's nose and then visualize the body around it. Short, tall, thin, fat, with two or eight arms. Ideas are actually abstract in nature, as are thoughts. They only take form when they come into the conscious field, otherwise they are stored as abstract images and impressions, symbols or archetypes in the deeper mind.

Yoga awakens the eye of intuition, so to have the ajna chakra symbol of yoga in Munger, alongside the eye symbol of Shakti is not a coincidence, rather it has happened by divine design. Deoghar is another place of Shakti, where she is represented by the heart, which is her symbol there, *hridayapeeth*. Sivananda Math is also there in Rikhia, and its symbol is *anahata*, the heart chakra, and that was also unplanned. When things like this happen, I begin to believe that there is a divine connection, otherwise such combinations do not occur. It is not a creation of the human mind, but a continuation of work for the upliftment of people, to connect them with the transcendental self.

With or without form

With each civilization, with each generation, the ideas change. When primitive man walked on this earth, what was his concept of God? Today you would call that concept pagan, just as future generations will call our modern concept obsolete, old, outdated and unworthy of practice. Just as we call the ancient traditions which we are unable to understand 'pagan traditions', twenty or forty generations down the line, people will call our beliefs of the 20th and 21st centuries pagan. As far as God is concerned, the concept and idea of God changes with the maturity of human mind, and that is the stark reality.

The ancients said that the higher reality could be experienced in two forms: as *nirakara*, the unmanifest, without attributes, formless, nameless and timeless. God can also be experienced as *sakara*, with attributes, forms, names, and identities. Both concepts of God whether formless or

with a form, were accepted, and the reasoning behind this was simple and innocent. If you are able to realize the subtle nature of reality without having to give it a form, a shape, or an identity, it is nirakara, and that is your attainment and realization of divinity. Those things that can be given a shape and which can be brought into the ambit of intellect, intelligence and mind are considered to be sakara or with form.

Form is not limited only to the external body. Anything which is identifiable has a form. Even a thought or desire that is generated in your mind has a form. The envy, greed, jealousy, and even the love and affection that you experience are mental, yet they have a form. They can be identified as something definite; some abstract thing takes a form, so that you can understand that indefinable quality. Words are forms expressed by the mind to convey something. For example, if you remove the understanding of the word 'love', what remains? Nothing. L-O-V-E: the word is composed of vowels and consonants, yet if understanding does not exist, then how will you identify 'love'? You cannot.

These traditions viewed creation as being both nirakara and sakara: the manifest world perceivable by the senses and the mind; and the unmanifest dimension, which cannot be perceived by them. The only tool that you have to understand the abstract cosmic reality is a limited mind – that is like a single cell torch light in the darkness of the pitch black jungle, at *amavasya*, no moon, with no stars, nothing. In that pitch black darkness of the jungle, if you have only a single cell torch, what area can you illuminate with it? A tiny, miniscule part. In the same way, how can that cosmic and universal reality be understood and grasped by this monkey mind, which does not even understand the basic principles of a human relationship? Such a mind is trying to comprehend the mysteries of the universe; the unfathomable concept of the universe.

It is not possible to grasp the nirakara. You have to access the nirakara through the sakara. Nirakara, the

unmanifest, is the top of the roof. You need to have steps to ascend. You cannot just take a flying leap since you are not Superman. You need to use steps to go up and they become the medium for you to reach the terrace. In the same manner, the manifest forms become the medium to access the unmanifest. In our tradition, God is neither masculine nor feminine, it is just a state of being. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali describe God as someone with special attributes, certain attributes which normal human beings do not and cannot possess. God is defined as *vishesh purusha*: a special nature which is free from suffering, the bondage of birth and death, and from changes that occur around it. That is the state of Godliness according to the *Yoga Sutras*. Yoga is an ancient subject, not a modern one that originated only 2000 or 3000 years ago.

God in tantra

All these ancient systems of thought developed different concepts of God. Let us start with tantra. Tantra says the nature of God is *Shiva* and *Shakti*. Shiva and Shakti combined together are identified as God. What is this Shiva and what is this Shakti? Consciousness and energy together are identified as God.

What is the meaning of the word God? The word God is composed of three letters: G-O-D. 'G' stands for generation or creation; 'O' stands for organization or nurturing; and 'D' stands for destruction, transformation and change from old to new. These three qualities of generation, organization and destruction together make up God. When you say 'God', you are not referring to a white bearded man sitting up in heaven, but to something, some force, or power which has inherent within it these three potentials.

When you say 'God' you are referring to these three attributes, identifying the three natures which combined together indicate the quality, or character of the supreme consciousness. The tantrics have seen God in the form of Shiva and Shakti. Kriya shakti, jnana shakti, sankalpa

shakti, chitta shakti, manas shakti, prana shakti, everything is shakti. Many shaktis combined together make up one God. You identify your body as being constituted of a pair of legs, eyes, ears, lips, two rows of teeth, one nose and so on. There are so many organs and parts of the body which create the body together. Do you refer to yourself as head, eyes, arms and legs, or do you refer to yourself as a person? Do you refer to yourself as the brain, the nervous and the circulatory system, or as a whole person? However, there is a mix of so many different organs functioning together to make you experience life as an individual human being. In the same way, there is a collection of many shaktis, each with a different role to play.

In the unmanifest form, everything is seen as shakti. To understand this, you must resort to the manifest form of that shakti. For example, how is *jnana shakti* identified? In the image or form of Saraswati. How is *kriya shakti* identified? In the image or form of Durga. How is *ichchha shakti* identified? In the form of Lakshmi. If there is desire and it is fulfilled, that is the ichchha shakti of Lakshmi. Kriya shakti, changing from one place, moving onto the next, or the transformative change, that is the shakti of Kali or Durga. Jnana shakti, which allows you to realize the world and your life, is the shakti of Saraswati. Therefore, the manifest forms of these shaktis become devis, and the unmanifest forms of these devis are regarded as specific shaktis. That is the tantric view.

God in other traditions

Samkhya is more miserly in defining God, and says that there is only one purusha. What is the meaning of purusha? Samkhya says, '*puri shete iti purushah*' – the power that is dormant in every individual is *purusha*. Which power is that? The dormant power is consciousness. The active principle is identified as *prakriti*, the one who performs the action, who is dynamic. In tantra you have Shiva and Shakti; in Samkhya the concept of God is Purusha and Prakriti. There are hundreds of purushas and there are many levels of

prakriti: causal, subtle and gross. The aim of Samkhya is the realization of the higher self, which is identified as Purusha.

Similarly, in Vedanta the higher Self is identified as Brahman and Maya. *Brahman* means expanding reality. There is always scope for expansion. There is no stagnation, and that which is continuously expanding and enlarging is Brahman, which in English is translated as the Supreme Self. *Maya* is defined as the deluding power, that which makes one forget one's real nature. When you put on different clothes and ornaments to cover your real body and perfumes to hide your real smell, that is Maya. Maya is the power that deludes, and also the power that awakens you.

According to Jain philosophy, God is a state of existence endowed with thirty-six qualities. If these specified thirty-six qualities are in you, then you can be God. Normally, as human beings you have only four qualities, yet with those thirty-six qualities you are a God, which is a state of being, or living.

This is how the understanding of God developed and existed until about five thousand years ago, the arrival of Kali Yuga. When Kali Yuga came, what used to be an understanding and an experience took the form of religion. Religion is an idea that says that if you have to move from point A to point B you have to cross point C. I will give you an example. I want to go to London from Delhi and somebody else wants to go to London from Singapore. A third person wants to go to London from New York. A fourth person wants to go from Cairo. From different countries people have to take different routes, different approaches to reach the same destination. I write down my travel experience from Delhi to London, I outline the route I took and what hotels I stayed in, everything on the journey. I write it down in a travel guide. The person who travels from New York to London writes another book called 'My Journey from New York to London' with maps, instructions and guides. The person who travels to London from Moscow will write another book called 'My Journey from Moscow to

London'. Those of us who have written such travel guides come together and say, "Let us compile it all together and present it so that no matter where you are on the planet, you can travel to London."

If somebody says, "No, let us make a rule that whoever wants to go to London has to go via 'X' place," then if I want to go to London from Delhi, I have to go via 'X', and if someone from New York has to go to London they also have to go via 'X'. Then in order to go from point A to point B we all have to cross point C. That is religion: the idea 'This is the only way', and no matter where you are in the world, you have to go this way. Religions came into existence with Kali Yuga. Prior to that there were no religions. There was only a way of life, a way to experience and a way to understand. According to Indian calculations, Kali Yuga begins after the Mahabharata war, which happened about 5,558 or 5,564 years ago.

Over the course of time, the concept of God in Christianity developed into a stern enforcer of justice: we are all waiting for the Judgement Day to see justice done. This idea and image of God as a father figure is social, not spiritual. The Bible says that God made man in his image. He must have also made an ant or an ostrich in His image. If everything that was created was made in the image of God, then every life-form is in God's image. Since He is the maker, He became the father. It is a paternal relationship, but with a father who punishes the wicked.

Similarly, Islam speaks of one God only. Islam says there is no form, that God is only light and luminosity, nothing more than that. He is the source of everything, benevolent, peaceful and beautiful, and you have to realize that. God is formless, and even prophets have no form. They are seen as light. In Buddhism there is no God. Buddha says the Self is what actually experiences everything, so you have to make an individual effort. In this manner, everyone developed their idea about God.

Devi

Navaratri is worship to access the shakti aspect through the sakara form of Devi. Where will you fix the mind when you close your eyes? If you concentrate on breath, that is also sakara, as you are holding on to something that is definite. If you chant a mantra, that is also sakara, as you are holding on to a definite sound. Look at the sun or moon, visualize a star, flower, cloud, or person – you are holding onto an image, and that is also sakara. No matter what you do, your journey will begin with form, *sakara*, something manifest, something you can hold on to.

To awaken this shakti inside, which is the universal, transformative and transcendental part of our mind and consciousness, we need to identify with the switch, which is outside. After all, the switch for this light bulb here, is someplace else. In your room the switch is near the door, however the bulbs are placed in different parts of the room. In the same manner, to access the unmanifest we have to go through the manifest, which is located at specific points in your life. We begin to identify with them in the course of time, when it becomes our need.

There are different views on Godhood, different traditions. God is a changing, evolving reality. When we look at the ideas of development and transformation contained in each system, I would say that the ancient ideas about God are superior to the concepts present in modern day religions. The ancient cultures saw God as the pure consciousness and energy, responsible for our experiences and expressions in life, not as a governing authority that punishes the guilty and uplifts the just.

Navaratri is a practice in which we utilize ancient symbols, images, mantras, yantras, the *swaroopa* or image form of Devi to understand the intricate behaviour of shakti within ourselves, and to harness the power of that shakti. Therefore, Navaratri can be taken as a religious practice, yet what we are practising here is beyond religion.

Quality of the divine energy

When different life-forms were created, they were all given different duties by God. 'This is your duty, this is your karma yoga, this is what you have to do.' After receiving their duty from God, all the life-forms left heaven and came to earth. At that time only the mosquito was left in heaven. So the mosquito went to God and asked, "What is my duty?" And God looked at his karma yoga list and saw that every duty was already taken by other life-forms. So there was no duty left for the mosquito. God said, "Sorry, no duty for you." The mosquito said, "How can that be possible? After all you have created me. You must have created me with a reason, a higher purpose for my life. Please tell me, what is the higher purpose of my life?" God thought and thought and said, "Yes, there is something you can do. I will give you the job of genetic transfer. You suck the blood from one life-form and inject the same blood into another life-form." The mosquito became happy with this duty.

Over a period of time different cultures have developed their own understanding of God. The meaning of God in different languages is also different. The word God encompasses or indicates the three qualities inherent in that divine nature, and those three qualities are the qualities of generation, 'G', organization 'O', and destruction 'D'.

The tantrics perceived God in the form of consciousness and energy, or Shiva and Shakti. The Samkhyans defined God as Purusha and Prakriti. The Vedantins defined God as the evolving reality and the power of illusion, Brahman and Maya. Yoga defines God as Ishwara, that special being who is free from the bondage of suffering, and the cycle of birth and death. In this manner it seems that the old civilizations of this planet saw God not as a person or a ruler, but as part and parcel of their life. They realized that they were experiencing life, and God was inherent in that life, that God is in me and God is all around me, all-pervasive. God is viewed in two forms: consciousness and energy, both of which are complementary.

Kali Yuga

Five thousand, five hundred and sixty-four years ago, when Kali Yuga began, the concept of God changed. Approximately six thousand plus years ago, when creation took place according to the biblical account, the concept of God changed. Prior to that, God was part of life as spirit, consciousness and energy. Even the ancient civilizations in the Americas, whether in South America or North America, who lived five thousand years ago, described God as the Great Spirit who descends and organizes everything for people. That Great Spirit descends with other attributes, associates, forms, who are helpers. In the concept of the Great Spirit and its helpers, we see the concept of consciousness as the Great Spirit and the helpers as the shaktis.

In the course of time, the unmanifest became manifest and there was an affiliation to the manifest form, which became a sect. Some people started identifying with one nature, quality or state of being; they were attracted to it. They became followers of one image, and sects or *sampradaya* evolved. From this supermarket you go and buy one product. If hundreds of people buy the same product, you become a club. You can have your own fraternity: 'We are the people who have bought this particular item'. You identify yourself differently from other people who are buying different items. You as a group are then identified as a sect. For example different groups, fraternities or sects identified with Narayana, Shiva, Ganesha, Surya or Shakti.

All those sects still belong to the same greater belief structure. In India we do not have religions, we have sects which are all part of one greater structure called *Sanatan dharma*, the eternal dharma. These sects can change at any time. The ideas can evolve and change, the sects can change, the affiliation can change. In this part of the world when the unmanifest, transcendental consciousness was identified as having a form, quality and role in life, individual affiliations took place and sects were developed.

Then five thousand years ago, there was a change in mentality, where everything was seen as part of divinity. Nature was seen as a reflection of that divine agency and divine power. Everything was seen as having the presence of divinity in it: trees, mountains, rivers, plants, stones and rocks, everything. The weather, thunder, storms, the sun and moon were all labelled as cosmic spirits. These cosmic spirits became the *devas*. In the last five thousand years, a multiplicity of gods has developed therein every culture. If in Greece Zeus was the King of the gods, in Italy, it was Jupiter. In Sweden they had Odin as the King of gods, here in India we had Indra as King of the gods, as well as separate gods of thunder, lightning, water, fire, air, trees – the presence of the divinity was seen in every created form.

Today we give different names to such affiliations. We are giving names for our understanding, not because we have understood what the founders of those schools of thought desired. Nature worship was practised in China, Japan, India, Greece, Italy, Egypt, Scandinavia. The Celts used to worship nature in the form of spirits. Prior to Christianity and Islam, God had many roles to play. In the last five thousand years, God changed from being consciousness and energy, and became identified with the created dimension

Evolving concepts of God

Then the concept of one single God, monotheism, came in with the Jewish religion, and with the establishment of Christianity and Islam. Over fourteen hundred years ago after Prophet Mohammed, the theory of one God spread further. This theory of one God is an Advaita theory, which means that everything merges into One, which is a valid concept. Nobody denies these schools of thought. They are valid and accepted by everybody globally.

People were also getting tired of not knowing whom to propitiate and whom not to. In the *Illiad*, if Poseidon was not offered sacrifices before ships set sail, there would always be a storm at sea and everybody would drown. If

some other god was not worshipped before starting any kind of job, some catastrophe would always happen. Are these only stories, imagination or fantasies? Or did things like this actually happen? I believe they happened. They were not coincidences. Oracles would invoke different gods and predict what would happen while undertaking a journey, or performing a task. We call those kinds of incidents mythology, for we cannot understand them. Today we say Rama was a mythological figure, and in ten thousand years, people will say Christ was a mythological figure, who never existed. Today we know that he existed, due to the continuation of history. Ten thousand years later, will anybody believe that a person like Christ existed? Christ will become a myth. Some other figure will be superimposed on the Christian belief system.

This is how the concept of God has evolved. Not only the concept, but the way of understanding God. Different people in different times have developed an understanding of God in different manners. The two modern religions, Christianity and Islam say God will judge us at the end of our days, punish the wicked and give the pious a place in heaven. A large number of people subscribe to this idea. That is one idea of how to interact with God, 'When I meet God, I have done so many bad things in my life, that He is going to get angry, punish me and send me to hell', or 'When I meet God, I have done so many good things in my life, that He will be happy and take me to heaven'. These ideas give birth to a school of thought which people follow, and that is how religions developed over a period of time.

Jesus Christ was not Christian; he was a Jew. Christianity was established as an identifiable religion many years later after the death of Jesus. Buddha's traditions developed into that particular school of thought in the course of time. Buddha was not Buddhist; he was a pure Hindu. One of his disciples made the teachings of Buddha into a religion after his death. When things become organized and when people begin to accept and adopt those ideas and thoughts,

they also incorporate their own beliefs and never believed in ghosts, demons and other beings. Today if you look at Tibetan Buddhism, it is full of that. These are local traditions incorporated into Buddhism to make it acceptable to society. Even the basic teaching of the master is changed by the disciples later to suit their own needs, to make the teaching more acceptable to society and the public, and to identify it as something unique and wonderful.

Relationship with God

The relationship that one can have with God has also evolved according to the prevalent understanding. Some relationships are based on guilt, 'I am doing the wrong thing, and I hope I will be forgiven'; the feeling of guilt becomes the medium to develop a relationship. The feeling of love can also become a medium to develop a relationship. The Indian school speaks of nine *bhavas*, sentiments.

Das bhava is a relationship like Hanuman had with Rama. He never considered himself equal, but always considered himself to be subservient to Rama. Today the mentality is that everybody is equal. I consider myself equal to and as powerful as God. You can cultivate a relationship with God according to the prevalent sentiment in you. What are these sentiments? You can be a servant of God, and have the sentiment of *das*.

You can be a lover of God, and have the sentiment of prem, like Radha had for Krishna. This sentiment of love is incredible; Radha associated with Krishna only during their youth, yet we call them eternal lovers. After Krishna left Vrindavan and Gokul, he never met Radha after the age of sixteen, until he was eighty and Radha was about ninety-six, yet the love between them was eternal.

A relationship develops with God according to a particular bhava, which is prevalent and predominant in the mind. Paramahamsaji spoke clearly about it in the *Bhakti Yoga Sagar* books. He said, "I had to establish a relationship. I did not know how. Ultimately I had to discover what my

relationship was going to be. Whether I was going to be a friend to God, whether I was going to be equal to God, whether I was going to be a lover of God, an enemy of God, or a servant of God. I settled myself when I identified myself as the servant.”

Once you have identified your bhavana, then your relationship takes a form. If you are a servant and God is the master, what is the role of the servant? To obey the command of the master. To obey the will of God. That is what Paramahamsaji did. If you become a lover of God, like Radha, what is your dharma? You awaken the intensity of love more and more, so that there is eternal union and physical separation does not matter. It is not the physical association which is identified as love, but a heart connection. You can see a person only once in your lifetime, at a distance, and love and remember that person until the end of your days, with affection, feeling, reverence and respect. That person has never been your friend, husband or wife, yet the intensity is so strong, that the person becomes part of you and you are part of that person.

There is one sect of the Vaishnava tradition which sees God as a person. Once a year Lord Jagannath comes out of the temple in Puri, gets into a chariot and is taken three kilometres down the road to another temple, where he stays for three days, and then returns to his temple. When Lord Jagannath, who is a wooden statue, goes from his temple to the other temple, and on the journey he falls sick. He develops a fever, so the devotees put him in a bed in the other temple. The bed is prepared, his blood pressure is taken, medicine is given. That wooden statue of Lord Jagannath is looked after as a living being. He is fed, given water, medicines, a bath, he is sponged and dressed every day, like a sick person. After three days he gets well and says, “Now I am well, fit enough to move back to my home.” This is a relationship; it is not madness. When the British first came and saw this happen, they said people were mad, for they had never seen such an interaction, where God can fall

sick, where he has to be treated. That is one type of feeling or sentiment, and an entire sect developed out of this bhava. You can go very far, or you can just remain on one side. It is up to you how deeply you want to develop your connection. The choice is left to you.

The best understanding of God that I can perceive and accept as an aspirant of spiritual life, is that the experience of God is possible by sublimating the gross nature of the mind and by connecting with the higher nature, where the influence of birth, old age, disease does not exist and you can be in a state of permanent bliss. That is the best concept. If there is a heaven or hell, it is all inside you. You can choose to live in hell or you can choose to live in heaven during your lifetime. If you choose to live in heaven during your lifetime, equip yourself with the necessary qualities and virtues that can allow you to live in heaven. That should be the sadhana and the aspiration of people.

Living in harmony

The music we just heard was beautiful and meditative. At the same time, so many different components were coming together in harmony. That is how life has to be lived. Different people making a different beat, playing a different tune, yet they live in harmony. That is the lesson that life wants us to learn, and the answer that yoga provides. During this Navaratri, you may have imbibed and absorbed many thoughts, ideas, concepts – and many might have flown over your head as well. Many things might have created some curiosity and answered some of your questions. The most important aspect of this time together was the development of an understanding.

At first I thought this exposure to ashramas and sampradayas might have been too strong for students, who came thinking they would be doing a few hours of asanas, hatha yoga to limber up, become flexible and come into certain poses which normal people cannot do. Instead they had this exposure, where many ideas might have been

challenged and changed. I saw the look on their faces, of not knowing what they were doing, yet experiencing a peace within themselves, for they were trying to understand these things from their perspective. They went through the process of jnana yoga.

We have all gone through that process of jnana yoga. How do things apply to ourselves and to our connection with the higher self? That higher self cannot be attained without proper preparation, just as you cannot construct a house without first digging the ground and creating the foundation. When you dig, dirt comes up. You have to have a solid foundation, so that the structure can be strong and healthy. If we are able to create a solid foundation in the middle of the dirt and remain unshakeable in all conditions and situations, then that is perfection in human life.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (12:13–20), Sri Krishna tells Arjuna, his disciple, about the qualities of a person who is liked by everyone and by the Higher Spirit or God. In this description Krishna begins by saying:

*Adveshta sarva bhutanam maitrah karuna eva cha
Nirmamo nirahankarah samadukhasukha kshami
Santushtah satatam yogi yataatmaa dridhanishchayah.*

The first quality that a human being should attain according to him, is *adveshta sarva bhutanam*, seeing the same spirit in everything. I am not different from you, and you are not different from me. We may have differences in our bodies, thoughts, culture, belief, religion, lifestyle and diet, yet those differences do not deter our internal connection. Our internal connection is pure. People say, ‘I am talking to you heart to heart’, which means that I am not utilizing my brain. You believe that and open yourself up. We are having a heart-to-heart talk. In the same manner there is spirit-to-spirit talk. When this spirit-to-spirit talk happens, everything opens up.

All limitations and boundaries are crossed and dropped. When there is heart-to-heart talk, you can drop many of the

preconceived boundaries, inhibitions, limitations and fears. There is development of more confidence and you will speak your heart out, without holding anything back. In the same manner, when you try to connect spirit to spirit, many things drop away. The difference that exists between you and me, created by the mind, finishes, and that is the state of *advashtha*, not seeing duality, towards *sarva bhutanam*, all creatures.

The elephant in Munger market

There is a story of a sannyasin, Suryadeep. He had come because he wanted *atmajnana*, self-knowledge. I asked him to define self-knowledge. He replied that self-knowledge meant knowing oneself, and seeing the all-pervasiveness of God in every aspect of creation, in every life-form, and he wanted a specific sadhana. I told him to practise some mantra, like *Om*, but he wanted something bigger. Out of a book of mantras, he selected *Aham Brahmasmi*, which means ‘I am the higher consciousness’. He sat down in his room and began repeating the mantra. He did not come out of the room for nine days.

Then one day suddenly the doors opened and out he came. Suryadeep exclaimed that he had attained the final realization, that he was Brahman and everything around him was also permeated with Brahman. I heard about it and asked him what had happened. He said, “Swamiji, I was repeating this mantra, then suddenly I felt that my body dropped away. My body had become weightless, my mind became weightless and my heart opened up. It started to love everyone, it started to feel the presence of divinity in everything. I can see that divine power in the other sannyasins, in the trees, animals, birds and in a speck of dust.”

To bring him back to earth, I told Suryadeep, “Right now vegetables are important. You first go to the market to buy some vegetables. When you come back, we will continue our discussion.”

Suryadeep went off to the market and saw the radiance of divinity in the scrawny dogs. People walking on the street

were golden beings. The whole world had become luminous, filled with golden radiance. He reached the market deep in contemplation. There he saw everybody running desperate to get away. He stopped a person who told him, “A mad elephant has come into the market and has started to break things and trample people. If you want to save your life, you should get out of the path of the elephant”

Suryadeep said to himself, “Well, people are running away because they are unable to see the divinity in all beings, but I can see that divinity inside the elephant. When a mad elephant came in front of Buddha, ultimately it kneeled in front of him. I am the enlightened one now, and this mad elephant is going to bow down to me, because it will recognize that I have attained.”

He boldly stepped in front of the elephant. The elephant started coming closer. The elephant was not enlightened like him. It still had a gross mind like every one of us. It saw Suryadeep as an insect to be trampled, and crushed him mercilessly. The poor man was rushed to the hospital, bandaged, and then came hobbling back to the ashram on crutches.

When I got to the Main Gate, I saw a white mummy bandaged from top to bottom. From behind the bandages, I heard a groan. “Swamiji it is me, Suryadeep.” I asked what had happened to him and after he calmed down, he started telling me the whole story.

After listening to his sad tale, I told him, “God actually sent you a warning to run away, through the person you stopped at the market. You disobeyed him because of your arrogance about your so-called enlightenment. Initially, you were *adveshtha*, beyond duality, when you went out, but at one point you became *dveshta* and had double vision, and that is why you are now suffering. If you had continued to see single, then the man who had warned you about the elephant would not be different from you, he would be your own Self, and you would have immediately run away from that place.”

Human perfection

The concept of *dveshta* is the duality that binds us to the world. When Krishna tells Arjuna about how to become a good human being. He says, 'Stop seeing duality in people. See everybody as equal in spirit, nature and character. They may be different externally, socially, but in spirit they are one.' That is what you have to look at. Paramahamsaji used to say the same thing, 'Cultivate your awareness to such an extent where you can see yourself reflected in others, and others reflected in you.' If you can do that, then you can see the reflection of God in yourself and God can see your reflection in Him. This is the concept of *atmabhava*, seeing oneself in others. That drops duality and you become established in *advheshta*, singularity, which is seen in everything and everyone, *sarva bhutanam*.

The second quality is *mitra*, friendship, the third is *karuna*, cultivation of compassion. Fourth he says, 'Be free from the identity of *nirmamo*, mine.' The fifth is to be free from *nirahankara*, ego, arrogance and guile. Sixth he says, '*Sama-dukhha-sukha*, be balanced in pain and pleasure' and the seventh is to be *kshami*, forgiving. In this manner, he speaks of twenty qualities that indicate a state of being which is balanced, pure, harmonious, content and fulfilled.

In this state of contentment, fulfilment and harmony, the senses, mind and spirit merge. As long as there is a split, the senses will pull you in one direction, the mind will pull you in another direction, and your spirit will pull you in a third direction. You will be torn between them. Yoga means the fusion of the senses, mind and spirit. That is the concept of union. Not the union of the soul and the supreme soul, *atma* and *paramatma*, the individual soul and God. We are far away from that realization. How can we know God, when we do not even know our own nature, mind and character? How can we know God when we cannot even control or manage an internal behaviour, response or reaction?

We do not know ourselves and we are trying to understand something beyond the grasp of the human mind. It is

a big paradox. Before you try to know God, know yourself, this is what the sages have said. When you know yourself, you know the Supreme Self. It is as simple as that. The fusion of the senses, the mind and spirit is the real meaning of yoga, so that all the three can work in unison and harmony, through the process of evolution. We keep on evolving in an integrated form, not in fragments, this was the message of this Navaratri. Cultivate the faculties of head, heart and hands to experience the fusion of the senses, the mind and spirit, and keep on progressing and evolving.



What is the teaching of Jesus?

Jesus was an ordinary person born to a humble family, and right from the beginning he faced difficulties in life. So much so, that after his birth in Bethlehem, the family had to flee their country. He grew up in Egypt and only later came back to Judea. This ordinary carpenter's son was a chosen one, a gifted one. He was able to bring about a revolution in human thought and perception, and created a shift in the mind of society at that time.

As a young boy, he was guided by and received instruction from different masters and wise people. Under their tutelage, Jesus was able to manifest the potential gifted to him by destiny. When he fulfilled the potentialities of his life, he became the Christ. The word 'Christ' is a title. It is not a name; it is a title like the word swami. In Greek, Christos means the enlightened one. When he was able to perfect himself and bring forth his own potential, he was baptized. During baptism, the higher consciousness unfolded itself in the body of Jesus and he became the enlightened one, Jesus the Christ.

His teachings and life continue to guide human society and civilization even today, and bring hope, joy, peace and purity into people's lives. Later, history made him into somebody special and he fully deserved that status. In his own lifetime, he was known as the Son of God by his followers. After his crucifixion and the subsequent impact of his teachings on the civilization of his time, he was recognized as a prophet by many.

Jesus Christ represented a way of thought that was radical, for in those days, the way to God was controlled by priests who had political power. Jesus advocated a way to experience God by expressing love, compassion and by being a good Samaritan, a good person. If you look at the essence of his teachings, then to be good is to be a true Christian.

Being good is not easy. One can don the garb of being good and pretend to be good, however to be good internally is difficult. Only those people, who have been able to douse

the fires of their tamasic nature in life, can become good. We can be good temporarily, for half an hour, one hour, one day, one week, then our mind pulls us back into our original state and nature. Therefore, we may experience and express goodness for a limited time only; it is a fleeting experience, not permanent. Goodness can be ultimately attained when we are able to eradicate the tamasic nature in life. Jesus embodied that state of goodness. He was able to overcome all the negative and tamasic tendencies and vrittis, and fixed his awareness on the Father, God Almighty. That is the state of a siddha mind, which is known as the Christ mind, or the Christ Consciousness.

The impact of Jesus' teachings has left its mark in history and we observe this day as his birthday. It is the inspiration of his life that continues to guide and inspire millions across the world even today. The love, goodness and compassion which he embodied inspires millions of people to tread a virtuous path. Christmas is a day of rejoicing and reflection.

Many people try to cross the waters of samsara. Some people have the strength to do it, some do not. We can also become the recipient of God's grace, for it is always possible to cross the river of life. Some swim five kilometres, some eight, some nine, and then return. The potential, strength and ability is in each one of us to bring about a change in our life through *sankalpa shakti*, determination. If we are able to awaken the sankalpa shakti in our mind and life, then grace always descends, there is no doubt about it. If there is no sankalpa shakti, then no matter what you try to do, at one point, you will feel struggle and tension. You will feel that you will fail. Therefore, to have the correct resolve or determination to excel and be good in life should become the sankalpa for each one of us.

Swami Sivananda used to say, "Be good. Do good." He used it as a slogan for defining what divine life is, knowing fully well how difficult it is to be good and even more difficult to do good. Yet he made these two sentences the goal of every spiritual aspirant. It is the eternal message of the

unwritten and unspoken religion. No religion says the same thing in the same manner, yet the underlying message that is unspoken and unwritten is to be good and to do good, as that is the human dharma. This was also the teaching propagated by Jesus Christ, so that we can open our hearts to receive the light of God. Our Christmas today is the Christmas of reflection. We can also try to overcome our limitations and connect with goodness which will lead us to the Divine.

—25 December 2010

What is the meaning of Jesus and Christ?

Christmas can be seen in two forms: the birth of the person Jesus, and the birth of Christ Consciousness in Jesus. These are two different events. There are people who are born with a specific destiny which is never known until the person has completed their role and departed from Earth. Only then do we realize what kind of role that person played in the fulfilment of his destiny. The same happened with Christ who lived in difficult times.

Jesus was born into the humble family of a carpenter in Bethlehem. According to recent research in genealogy, he descended from a line of kings in Judea, starting with King David who subdued Goliath. Archaeological findings show that David was an ordinary shepherd who became the king of Judea province after he slew Goliath and became a hero. His lineage is known as the lineage of David. He was a warrior who was able to vanquish a powerful enemy. The word 'king' was only a metaphor to indicate that he had done something great, it did not mean that he came from royalty.

Joseph was born in this lineage of David, and he was betrothed to Mary. Our concept of virginity is related to sexual activity. If one is not exposed to sexual activity, one is a virgin. The concept of virginity is different in ancient scriptures; it is this same concept that Paramahamasaji has defined as *kanya*, which means virgin. From that tantric

perspective a girl is a virgin until her menses begin. At the same time, a person is called a virgin if the mind is pure and has not gone in search of frivolous pleasure. We believe that Mary was a virgin, and that her marriage must have taken place at a very young age before she started her monthly cycles. Jesus was conceived during that period.

She had many premonitions and visions, and saw an angel, telling her that the Son of God was in her womb, and that she was to be his mother. This revelation laid out the course of Jesus' life. At the time when he was born in the manger in Bethlehem, there was a civilian crisis in the kingdom, and the family fled.

Some scholars say that the entire family, Jesus, Joseph and Mary, migrated from Bethlehem to Egypt, and lived there for some time. Jesus grew up in Egypt surrounded by the Egyptian culture, thought, belief and religion. At that time, the cult of Osiris was prominent in the Egyptian religion, which believed in the afterlife, in karma, in the continuation of life, and in a complex interaction between human beings and gods.

When Jesus was around the age of fourteen, the situation became more balanced and peaceful in Israel, and the family returned to live there. In Israel, Jesus was exposed to a different culture, and he was inquisitive due to his Egyptian background. He would question the priests about why they did things in a certain way. He would enter into debates from his previous understanding of how things should be done. Jesus used to say things to the priests that were contrary to their tradition, and they tried to convince Jesus about the value and validity of the Judaic systems.

At that time, a group of ascetics called the Essenes lived around the Dead Sea. They were an old group of ascetics who had renounced society and were involved in contemplation, meditation and prayers to the highest God, the one God, the source of all, Jehovah. They took Jesus into their care and taught him the sciences of meditation, contemplation, prayer, connection. They saw in Jesus a

person who had the potential to create a change in the existing social environment. They groomed him in the art of mysticism and when they felt that they had taught him everything they could, they told him to travel, go to different countries and learn from different cultures and civilizations. Jesus left Judea with the intention to become a seeker.

There is a missing period of twelve years in Jesus' life. The Church cannot tell us what he did, where he went and how he did what he had to do. In the beginning of the 20th century, documents were found in Varanasi, Ladakh and Kashmir, which talk about a white person who called himself the Son of God. Documents found in Puri, Orissa, indicate that a person called Jesus had a discussion with the Emperor of India at that time. The Emperor, looking at his colour and garb, asked him, "Who are you?" He said, "My name is Ishu, and people call me the Son of God." The Emperor asked Jesus many other questions about Judea, spiritual life and God. His scribes wrote down the discussion that took place between them, and this document was later found.

Around the same time, German scholars travelling in Ladakh came upon a famous monastery where they found writings describing the arrival of a person from far-off Judea to learn about the Buddhist traditions, teachings and systems. According to one document, Jesus stayed in the Hemis monastery in Ladakh and the Kashmir region for seven years and perfected the art of Buddhist meditation. Then he came to Varanasi, the oldest inhabited town on this planet, where he learnt the vedantic tradition which does not see any difference between the individual and the divine. His statement, 'I and my Father are One', is the vedantic statement, *Aham Brahmasmi*, 'I am that atma, I am Brahma'. 'I and my Father are One' is the English version of that statement.

The 'missing years' of Jesus were spent in Varanasi learning Vedanta, in Ladakh learning the principles of Buddhism, and in Puri, learning the precepts of the bhakti movement. Then there is another reference of him living in

Kashmir where he learnt about tantra. Two thousand years ago, Kashmir tantrism was the purest, most classical and developed form of tantra in the world. All these documents tell the story of Jesus in India and about his travels in Afghanistan, Burma and the Middle East.

Around the age of thirty, Jesus returned to Judea, and on the banks of the river Jordan he was baptized and anointed by John the Baptist, who was the reincarnation of Elijah. With this baptism, John declared him to be the Christ. John the Baptist himself was one of the leaders and prophets of the Essenic tradition. Just as mantra or sannyasa initiation is given, in the same manner John the Baptist initiated Jesus into the secret of mysticism. At the time of initiation, the Spirit descended into Jesus and he became Jesus the Christ, the anointed, enlightened, initiated one. Then Jesus began his mission which he carried out for three years before he was crucified. Jesus worked for three years in society.

There is another story and another set of documents which proclaim that Jesus survived his crucifixion and was taken down from the cross on the day he was supposed to have died. He was taken into a cave and monks of the Essenic tradition healed his wounds, brought him back to life, and told him that Judea was not safe for him anymore. Hence, Christ, with his mother Mary and his disciple Mary Magdalene, left Judea and travelled to Kashmir. Today, there is a tomb of Christ in Kashmir.

After Jesus left Judea incognito, his disciples had to carry on with the propagation of his teachings, and they started to spread all over the world. The apostle Peter went to Rome and eventually established the first church there, fifty years after the crucifixion of Jesus.

In the meantime, another apostle, Saint Thomas, came to Kerala which in those days was the main port of the country. He came to India for he knew Jesus had some connection with this land. There he established the first Christian church forty years after Jesus' crucifixion, and ten years before the Church in Rome came into being. India was so isolated that

the news did not travel, whereas the Roman Empire was at its peak as a global power and supported Christianity. From the political point of view, Rome is considered to be the first church, but from the point of view which focuses on the real teachings of Christ, the church in Kerala is supposed to be the first true church of Jesus.

This is the story of Jesus as documented by various scholars. There are two aspects in the life of everyone: the human aspect and the mission aspect. The mission that you are all searching for is there, but unknown to you. Just as you have a mind, yet you only experience the mind when thoughts, desires, emotions and feelings come. You believe that there is a spirit inside you, yet there is no direct cognition of it. In the same manner, there is a purpose, a mission in everybody's life that is unknown. Until we realize that mission we keep on taking birth again and again. Earth is like a school where we come to educate, enlighten ourselves and evolve. Until we pass this test, we cannot progress.

Earth is not a stepping-stone or a resting place in the eternal journey. It is a school. This Earth school has a syllabus which is a blend of the material and the spiritual: a creative life filled with peace, bliss, contentment and prosperity, without greed, hatred and jealousy. Until we come to this point of learning and understanding, we shall keep on returning to the same class.

Reincarnation is a reality, whether philosophies believe in it or not. In the first conclave of Christianity in Constantinople, the word 'reincarnation' was removed from all Christian texts for political and social reasons. However, the teachings of Christianity do speak of reincarnation in the Bible itself. Christ himself has said that John the Baptist, his master, was a reincarnation of Elijah. If you leave aside the socio-political views, the knowledge and understanding of recycling the soul has been there in all ancient traditions and cultures.

Professor Stevenson of the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, did some interesting research on rein-

carnation. He has documented about 15,000 cases of reincarnation in Asia, Europe, North and South America and Africa. He mentions in his book that people in Europe and America with Christian backgrounds do not accept the concept of reincarnation due to their religion. Such experiences of past life are often suppressed as not true but imaginary, yet those who have been able to express their past memories fully understand that this life is nothing but a continuation of the last life.

The tantras and yogas have said the same thing. Sri Krishna has said in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4:7–8):

*Yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanir bhavati bhaarata;
Abhyutthaanam adharmasya tadaatmaanam srijaamyaham.*

*Paritraanaaya saadhoonaam vinaashaaya cha dushkritaam;
Dharma samsthaapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge.*

Whenever there is a decline of righteousness, O Arjuna, and rise of unrighteousness, then I manifest Myself!

For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness, I am born in every age.

Life is an evolving journey, a continuing journey. In this continuation we have to discover the beauty, strength and inspiration that life has to offer. Then there is no fear of death. We look forward to the next life where we can continue with our onward journey. Shankaracharya said:

*Poornarapi jananam, poornarapi maranam, poornarapi janani,
jatharai shayanam.*

People are born and die innumerable times; they keep returning to the womb of their mother to be reborn. It is this coming back again and again that makes realization possible in life. Realization is like graduating from school, you transcend the material dimension of life. Later you receive your degree and you can establish yourself in the spiritual

life. Establishing oneself in spiritual life is the doctorate degree that one is looking for in this life. Paramahamsaji has said that the purpose of life is to cultivate spiritual awareness. The more you perfect this, the more mature, balanced, harmonious, peaceful and tranquil you become. Until we can do that, we keep on coming back again and again. Once that spiritual awareness is attained, it is known as the Christ Consciousness, a different consciousness which does not see the material or the physical form, but the essence. We find this in the life of great luminaries.

Shankaracharya was a great luminary of India and we follow his tradition. He is the founder of our sannyasa tradition. In the early days he did not believe in the concept of Shakti. He said that Shiva was the ultimate reality and Shakti was only *maya*, illusion. He used to propagate his philosophy and views, until one day he came upon a dead body lying on the road. He saw the wife of the person who had died, sitting beside the corpse and wailing. Rudely he told the wife, "Remove the corpse from the road." The wife looked at him and said, "This corpse is incapable of doing anything without Shakti." This statement alone created a turmoil in the mind of Shankaracharya. He realized his mistake that he had negated the whole concept, the whole principle of Shakti without which the body, mind, spirit and even the world cannot move. The entire philosophy of Shakaracharya dramatically changed at that time, and he wrote the *Saundarya Lahari*, verses in praise of Shakti. The first verse is that Shiva without Shakti is only a corpse, which was the message he had received from the woman.

The concept of Shakti has been recognized as something unique in tantra and other systems, though our personal understanding of Shakti may only be superficial. This *Shakti*, this power, is known as *Yogamaya* in the tantras. It depicts two different conditions: *yoga*, unity, and *maya*, delusion. Both conditions coexist: *yoga*, realization and *maya*, illusion. In the word *yogamaya*, yoga reflects the spiritual aspirations, and maya reflects the material, sensorial participation.

We are caught in the realm of *maya*, identifying with things that are not permanent, trying to satisfy the needs of the senses and mind. You feel thirsty and there are ten glasses on the table, one with plain water, the others with various drinks. Each person will pick up a different glass according to their identification with the senses and environment, which create a particular thought and desire in the mind and makes you act in a particular manner.

We are always trying to manipulate the environment to suit ourselves. This adjustment and accommodation is more for the senses, mind and personal needs, than having a bigger picture. Until we are able to develop this picture through consistent effort and *sadhana*, Earth is our school. Until we come to the point of realization of the spiritual powers inside, we continue on this path, in this school. After realizing our spiritual nature and strength, we are free to leave this school and go on to another higher school in the universe.

This concept of a school has been defined as the *lokas*, the *chakras* and the *patalas* in the tantric tradition. Below the human dimension there are seven other dimensions, *patalas*, above the human dimension there are seven higher dimensions, *lokas*, and within the range of the human dimension there are seven different levels, *chakras*. There are twenty-one dimensions of consciousness. Right now we are in the eighth dimension of consciousness. After so many thousands of years we have only come to the eighth class. If we go on like this, it will take many more millions of years before we come to the twenty-first class. The twenty-first class is *satya loka*, the dimension of Truth.

The dimension where we are now is *mooladhara*, connected to the *bhuh loka*, the material dimension where there is identification only with matter. Effort has to be made to transcend this level of consciousness. Then, beyond the dimension of matter there are further levels of experience.

Christ Consciousness represents the twenty-first level of consciousness, where nothing but truth prevails, and in that

truth there is beauty, *Sundaram*, auspiciousness, *Shivam*, and truth *Satyam*. Attainment of these three qualities of the spirit represents the dawn of Christ Consciousness, which Jesus was able to attain. He became a symbol of how far a human being can go in spiritual attainment.

The lives of all great people indicate this. What makes anyone great? The resources, comforts and luxuries? The money? What makes a person great is not the number of cars and homes, not the bank balance, but the conviction, 'What I am doing is the right thing'. If they are able to follow their conviction, they become great. Even a thief can become renowned if he follows his conviction to rob, and not be caught. Then the police are unable to catch him. He can create havoc and nobody can pinpoint who did it.

It is conviction and creativity combined that make a person great. What makes you great is the conviction that you can achieve, and the creativity you apply towards what you wish to achieve. In the lives of enlightened people, we see the blend of these two qualities: conviction and creativity. In the life of Swami Satyananda, Swami Sivananda, Buddha, and Jesus we see conviction and creativity. If you want to develop a higher consciousness, then develop your power of conviction and creativity. That represents the spirit of Christmas to me.

—26 December 2010

Swamiji, do you have a message for the New Year?

Today reflect on what has taken place in your life during this whole year. Forget about the broken promises, broken hearts, dissatisfied minds and aspirations. What was the learning, month by month? In the month of January, how did that learning help you improve and become better? What was the learning in the month of February? Like that, come to December. You have to know that the time which has gone by is not going to come back. Do not be pessimistic about the bad that has happened to you. Focus on the learning that

you have derived from each lesson. How has it helped you become more mature, responsible and better in life?

If you want to be happy and content, you have to see life as a learning process. Do not see yourself as a victim, a governor or controller, rather as somebody who is a student in this school of life. Think about and analyze your learning, and that analysis of the whole year month by month has to happen today, on 31st December.

Do not look at the mistakes or the gains that you have made. Think of the learning that you have received and decide which part of yourself you need to explore in the coming year. This will become your *sankalpa*, or New Year's resolution. We can say goodbye to the old year and prepare for the coming new one by using this moment to develop more understanding about life.

Hanuman

Tomorrow, the *muhurta* or time of invocation of Hanuman is at noon. There is a beautiful story about the life of Hanuman, which I like very much. Somebody once asked Hanuman, "What is your relationship with Rama?" Hanuman replied, "Well, when I see myself physically, identify with the body and see Rama as a person, then he is the master and I am the servant – *deha buddhi dasoham*. In my body consciousness, I am his servant. Then in my consciousness and awareness, he is my friend and I am his. In the spiritual consciousness, there is no difference between me and him; Rama and I are one." This story indicates the three levels of identification between the aspirant and the higher self, Guru, God or Paramatma.

When we are confined to body awareness, then we experience the world through the physical organs of the senses. At that time, we are instruments, puppets, which are being guided and played by some unseen force. We do not know what awaits us the next moment. We are completely subservient to that force. At the mental level, the confidence, trust and faith-building measures, bring us closer to equal

identification, to friendship. In friendship, nobody is superior or inferior. There is an understanding without the need to speak, one simply knows. There is mental oneness in friendship.

At the spiritual level, there is also the feeling of oneness. We cannot have that feeling of oneness easily as it is beyond human grasp, yet the essence of that oneness is inside everyone. Just as the essence of water pervades and is contained in every drop, in the same manner, the transcendental nature pervades the entire world. This awareness and identification is called spiritual awareness.

These three statements of Hanuman represent the aspirations of a spiritual seeker, for Hanuman was a seeker himself. At the gross level, I am a follower, aspirant, disciple. At the internal level, I have faith, trust, belief, understanding, wisdom, friendship, compassion and unconditional love. At the spiritual level, 'I and my Father are one'.

Hanuman comes from the monkey tribe. He is depicted as one, yet he is not a mere monkey. In our life too, we live the tribal consciousness. We live in the 21st century, yet our mind-set is tribal, primitive. We have an immature mind, easily influenced by situations, circumstances, events and people. It is easy to form opinions without having direct understanding or perception. This type of mind-set is primitive, swayed by emotions, expectations, desires, ambitions and selfish needs, without their gratification we cannot feel happy. Rising from this level of mind to a transcendental level is what Swami Sivananda calls the attainment of the divine life, where *Satyam*, *Shivam* and *Sundaram*, or truth, auspiciousness and beauty become the foundation stones for our performance in life.

—31 December 2010

2011

What is the meaning of Navaratri?

The Chaitra Navaratri program ends with Ramnavmi, the birthday of Rama; he was born at 12 noon, midday. The Ashwin Navaratri in autumn ends with Rama's victory over Ravana. Both Navaratris are connected with the history, the presence and memory of Rama. Shakti and Rama are the feminine and masculine aspects of divinity. Shakti was born out of the minds of the gods to do their work. This is described in the first five names of the *Lalita Sahasranama*:

Om srimatre namah

Om srimaharajnyai namah

Om srimatsimhasaneshwaryai namah

Om chidagnikundasambhutayai namah

Om devakaryasamudyatayai namah

The meaning is that the Mother, the Empress of the Universe, the one who sits on the throne of lions, manifests from the pit of the mind in the form of a flame, ready to do the auspicious work of the gods.

According to mythology, that is how Durga manifested. As always, once upon a time, there was, a mega-war between gods and demons. The story has been happening since eternity until today. In that war, the gods got a good beating and the demons were victorious. The army of the gods, the *devas*, led by their commander Indra, retreated in shame and distress to

their military headquarters, where Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva were the chief commanders monitoring the war. This trinity was furious about the defeat of the army of the devas.

According to myth, the anger of this trinity and each of the devas was projected from their foreheads in the form of a flame. The frustration and anger of each of the defeated soldiers of the gods also emitted a jyoti. All these jyotis converged into one, and the form of Durga emerged. Durga is therefore a creation of the mind.

If you try to understand it scientifically, you will admit that mental force is a strong power. A person who can awaken that mental force can apply it for anything. Durga is the application of that mental force to bring about transformation and change. The form of Durga represents *sankalpa shakti*; the purpose for which Durga manifested represents the *ichchha shakti*; and the method that Durga used to bring about the transformation represents the *kriya shakti*. She came forth for the re-establishment of truth and dharma, for the awareness of human responsibility.

This Navaratri is also linked with Rama. If you look at the character, nature and personality of Sri Rama, you will find that the purpose for his coming was also the establishment of dharma, nyaya and maryada. *Dharma* means the awareness of responsibilities in relation to the individual, society, the universe and the divine. *Nyaya* means justice, and *maryada* means living within certain defined parameters to maintain an appropriate order or system. Therefore, if we combine the aspects of Devi and Rama, then four things emerge at the personal and social levels: adherence to truth; a clear definition of the parameters within which an individual should function; upholding justice and the law of nature, and following one's dharma.

These four points become the message of Navaratri. Mother worship is one of the most ancient traditions in the world. It is the oldest form of worship, performed by the primitive cave-dweller, prior to the advent and development of all religions. Worship of the Cosmic Mother, worship

of the mother figure represents the beauty that life has to offer. The father represents firmness in life and the mother represents the beautiful expression of maternal qualities of love, compassion, sympathy, caring, nurturing, giving – all the good qualities that one can aspire for. To soften the hardness of the heart, to connect with that cosmic, maternal, creative energy, to soften the gunas and sentiments, is the purpose of sadhana during this Navaratri.

—12 April 2011

How does yoga nidra work?

My guruji used to put me to sleep. And while I slept, he would read books on science, physics, chemistry, scripture, languages, everything. The next morning when I would wake up, he would give me the book and say, “Read it” and I used to tell him, “I know all this. I don’t have to read the book.” It was in yoga nidra that he educated me.

If you do yoga nidra and then you do your studies, you will retain a lot of information. Everything that you studied will be retained because yoga nidra works on the mind, not the brain. When you are studying you are using your brain, right? You are thinking, you are thinking . . . this, this, this, this, this. However, when the brain is relaxing and the mind is awake, any information you give to the mind will be remembered. Therefore, for all of you, it is a very good practice, and you should also include a good amount of visualizations. You can also experiment with a textbook. While you are doing the yoga nidra, the textbook is read and you will find that your memory will improve a lot.

What about older people?

Above the age of 40, there are other things for one to do. For children under the age of 16, yoga nidra is effective but after that, we need to go into some pranayama, some asanas. As the hormones change in the body, then a different practice has to be adopted.

One research was done in America on the question, “Why do people in old age lose their memory?” Physiologically, they found that it was dead brain cells which, when not removed, block the transmission from one brain centre to another and that is the cause of memory loss. They came up with a hormone whose function is only to remove the dead cells from the body, but the cost is very high. In those days, I’m talking about ten years ago, the cost of one injection used to be about \$1,000. And you needed to take a course of injections, like ten injections every twenty years because they say that every twenty years, there is a hormonal change in the body. For example, youth settles down at the age of twenty and then after forty, there is a change, and after sixty, there is a change. It’s a twenty-year cycle of hormones.

From a yogic point of view, during that period, when the hormones are changing, you have to do pawanmuktasana. Pawanmuktasana ensures the circulation is there continuously to each and every joint, each and every part of the body. The more circulation there is, the cleaner the pipes will be and the blockages will be removed. So, there is either the injection option or the pawanmuktasana option.

How can we be sure children are taught appropriate yoga practices in school?

That is a major problem. Previously, I used to advocate bringing yoga into schools; now I am saying, “Don’t bring yoga into schools.” I was in an assembly in Madhya Pradesh, they had called me and I was the chief guest. They were talking about yoga, “We are doing this, and we are doing that.” When my turn came to speak, I only asked one question, “Who has made the syllabus?” Generally, what happens is people take ten yoga books and one clerk sits down and takes one practice from here, one practice from there, another one from another book and the minister signs it. The clerk has never practised yoga, the minister has never heard of yoga and they are the ones who are making the syllabus. I oppose that.

I told them that the government of India has officially identified four yoga centres. One is Vivekananda Kendra, one is Sivananda Ashram, one is the Bihar School of Yoga, and one is Kaivalyadhama. My suggestion is that anybody who wants to make the syllabus should get help from one of the four institutions, for they have the experience, they have gone through long-term teaching. We are going to complete our fifty years very soon, fifty years of experience compared to somebody who comes with no experience, that makes a big difference.

Even so, eventually a lot of thinking has to be put into it. You see, things have to be organized. For instance, when medical science was organized, the quacks were separated and doctors had to take a five-year course before they could actually qualify. In future, the same thing will happen with yoga. Right now, organization is in its infancy and everybody is saying, “Very good, very good,” but then, systems and structures have to come in.

In Bihar, when the government put yoga in schools, they officially sent 2,000 teachers to us in groups of 200 every month. For one month we gave them training, not to become yoga teachers, but to teach yoga in schools. We made a syllabus, and that syllabus is being followed in Bihar schools. It is possible for teachers only need to know what they need to teach children; they do not have to know everything. They do not have to have a doctorate in yoga, yet even to teach the minimum to children, it takes one month and there has to be a basic background understanding of the body and hormones so you know what you are dealing with. There was somebody last year who said, ‘Can you give TTC certificate in a week, because we want many teachers?’ I said, ‘Sorry.’

—24 April 2011

What is sannyasa life for you?

For nearly fifty years of my life, I have been involved with yoga. It was an active participation: coming to the ashram at the age of four, travelling from the age of ten, and being part of the whole original movement of yogic propagation. When we started to propagate Satyananda Yoga, society did not know the word yoga. Nowadays, everybody speaks of yoga, yet in those days, it was unheard of. Swamis and sadhus were also looked upon as recluses and renunciates who were not part of civilized society. In those days, when we started to work for yoga in the 1960s, it was hard, and nobody knew what the outcome would be.

It was in those times that Paramahamsaji and his disciples worked to bring yoga into society. We were the people who actually planted the seeds in the farm, and today the yoga teachers who are harvesting that crop are not the original planters. The modern yoga teachers, whether it be in India or abroad, are only harvesting the crop of our hard work.

In 2009 Paramahamsaji said to me, “Your active involvement in the yoga movement and propagation should come to an end, and from now onwards you have to think of your sannyasa life.” In the years 2009 and 2010, I took time off for myself. No work, no activity, no reading, no writing, nothing. I just rested and looked at the lives of the luminaries of our tradition like Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda, Shankaracharya and other great masters, to see how they had lived their lives.

Inheritance of sannyasa

One thing became clear – the inheritance that I have received from my guru, is the inheritance of sannyasa. People think that the institution is the inheritance; it cannot be so. An institution is governed by its own by-laws and by its committee. Committees are free to elect anybody and in future, the institution will carry on with its work. So an institution cannot be an inheritance for anybody. The inheritance that I have received is the inspiration to live

sannyasa in its true sense. Many times Swamiji jokingly said, “If anybody asks what you have received from Swami Satyananda, tell them that you have received his ‘kaupin’ and not the ‘sansthan’.” *Kaupin* means the loin cloth, and *sansthan*, the institution. Although he said that as a joke, it is true.

What is my obligation as a sannyasin? I do not have any obligation towards any one, let me be clear about that. You are here because you want to improve yourself. Even if you are not here, I will still continue. If you come or go, I will still continue. Even you do not have any obligation towards me. If you try to impose yourself on me, you will find me a hard nut. If you try to demand anything from me, you will fail. If you think I can fulfil any need of yours, you are misguided. I am only a sadhaka, an aspirant. My first and only commitment is to my guru and the direction given to me, the path he has told me to walk on. My commitment is not to anyone else.

Therefore, for two years, I have thought about and looked at the lives of Swami Sivananda, Swami Satyananda and other luminaries, and tried to see what kind of routine and lifestyle they lived to perfect sannyasa in their own lives. I started to gradually add one item to this new sadhana.

Sadhana: pravritti and nivritti

Sadhana is not as easy as people think, that we can just close our eyes and sit for eight hours of meditation, oblivious to everything around us. Those are all misconceptions about sadhana. It does not necessarily indicate the proper system of sadhana.

Swami Sivananda used to say, “One hour of meditation equals eight hours of hard work.” So if you do eight hours of meditation, then how many hours of hard work? Calculate yourself. Now when somebody of that calibre is saying one hour of meditation equals so many hours of hard work, it means that it is necessary for a balanced state of mind. A monkey mind that has been jumping up and down for fifty years will find it difficult to become quiet. This will not occur

immediately and this gradual quietening of the monkey mind only happens by following a process, in which you are involved in doing things other than the normal routine ones.

There are two paths in life; one is the outer or external, and one is the internal. In the outer or *pravritti* path, we are involved with friends, society, institutions, work, profession, interactions, enhancing our own creativity, serving others. In the internal or *nivritti* path, these outer connections have to be cut so that the mind becomes free. Paramahamsaji did that. When he left Munger he said, “Don’t come to see me.” For many years, he did not see anybody. He was only setting an example, a guideline, a method of how to disconnect. By choice, I too would not be here today. I would have left the ashram and Munger in 2009 itself, if I had a choice. My guru said, “No, you cannot leave, you have to stay in Munger.” I asked, “Why? You left and you want me to continue there?” He said, “Yes, I am asking you to live in Munger, I am not asking you to live at Ganga Darshan. You do not have to live at Ganga Darshan, yet continue to live in Munger and develop and cultivate your strength in sannyasa life.”

In sannyasa life, the first effort is the eradication of karmas and this can be observed with the reduction of the ambitions in an individual. If you think about it, you will find that you all have certain ambitions. Today, I cannot pinpoint any remaining ambition, for I have experienced everything. I cannot say I want to learn flying; I know how to fly a plane. I cannot say I want to learn driving; I know how to drive a car. I cannot say, I want to travel, I have travelled to every place and seen everything. I cannot say I want to be recognized, have name, fame and prosperity. I have gone through all that.

At this stage, what do I want for myself? What is my ambition? Is it an external, social ambition? No. If I search deep within myself, I cannot find any ambition that I would like to fulfil now, for all has been fulfilled. If at all I have any ambition it is that I want to live away from people – living in a mud hut beside the river, carrying passengers back and

forth across the Ganga in a boat. I do not know if you have read the book *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse, I identify with that character. If you have not read the book, read it. Then you will understand a little bit about how I feel.

When there are no such ambitions left, and when there is no further involvement or activity in social life, the only direction that is left is to go in and internalize. For this there has to be a proper balance. As per Swami Sivananda's instructions, I would have to balance this week of daily eight-hour meditations by working hard physically for the next five days. Why such a rule? To develop the ability to deal with the mind. This year is a year of adjustment for me, because to change from an active lifestyle to a passive one, to create a system and a routine for that, and to be able to effectively interact and deal with other important things, is a challenge.

If I was in some other place, locked away, nobody would even bother. They would say "He is doing his sadhana." As I am here, everybody thinks, "Why is he not meeting us?" It is not that I dislike you; the reason is I have to make adjustments for at least one year to follow a routine, in which all other activities can be incorporated and integrated comfortably. Too much internalization also makes one sleepy, and then it is not that easy to maintain the alertness of the mind.

Therefore, my routine varies between different activities. I have to live with my routine which I will continue to develop for the next fifty years. Just as a plug has to be unplugged from one socket and inserted into another, in the same manner, I am pulling out my plug from the social socket and trying to put it into the spiritual socket. When I pull the plug out from the social socket, there is going to be separation and distancing from everyone. That interaction, that involvement, those channels of communication will be drastically reduced, until I become stable and firm on the other path.

—1 May 2011

What is the difference between asana and physical exercise?

Physical movement, exercise and other things are not asanas. What defines an asana is awareness of the body, the breath, specific chakras and mantra. These four things together define an asana. While performing an asana you are aware of the body movements. Along with the body movement, you are aware of the pattern of breathing. Along with the movement of breath, you are aware of concentration on the areas of the different chakras. Along with concentration and focus on the chakra, there is repetition of the corresponding mantra. These are the four components which are combined in an asana. Any asana performed without breath awareness, without physical awareness, without chakra and mantra awareness is only a physical movement, an exercise.

The second point is that the yogic scriptures say one should not sweat or feel tired while performing the asana. Whenever there are symptoms of sweating or tiredness, relax, calm down, and then start your practice again. While exercising and in other aerobic movements the opposite is followed. You have to sweat it out. People say, 'No pain no gain.' That is the theory of exercising, the gym and aerobics, every other kind of physical culture. While performing asanas, the focus is on no sweating, no tiredness, always maintaining a balanced state in the body, conserving prana shakti.

These two points should illustrate the difference between physical exercise and asanas. The same thing applies to pranayama. It is said in the yogic scriptures that when you practise pranayama, the person beside you should not even know that you are breathing in and breathing out. The breath should be noiseless, gentle, not forceful.

Which asanas should be taught to children?

From the yogic perspective, one has to know why one wants to teach yoga to children. Is it according to the need of the children or one's personal wish that they should practise yoga?

From my perspective and according to our tradition, yoga begins from the age of eight. From eight to twelve, children should only do a limited practice of asana, pranayama and mantra: surya namaskara, nadi shodhana and Gayatri mantra. Anything beyond these three practices will affect the growth of the body, its hormones and other growth patterns. From twelve to eighteen, a middle group of asanas should be taught. This group of asanas will give stability to the child's personality and bring balance and steadiness to the hyper-active and dissipated trait of their nature. They should not practise asanas like the headstand or wheel pose or other types of advanced yoga practices which people like to teach children.

If children like to do certain asanas because they have seen somebody do them, that is fine, but they should not be taught in a sequence or system by you. Children may be flexible and able to do the wheel pose, yet it does not mean that you encourage them to do it every day, as it will be detrimental to their growth. From the age of eighteen onwards, young people can do any kind of advanced asana.

When we conducted the BYMM research in 1990, only five asanas were practised, not fifty. In their ongoing classes, BYMM do not practise more than three or four asanas for months at a time, without being allowed to change them, and you should follow the same system. This understanding and system comes into play once you are able to understand the process of yoga. You should not teach yoga to children just because you have a whim, and then ask for guidelines or a syllabus. People who ask are incompetent, have a whimsical attitude and their request is without sincerity of intention.

—19 June 2011

Welcome to the Teacher Training Course students

The majority of Teacher Training Course (TTC) students have come here for the purpose of becoming a yoga teacher; becoming a yoga teacher should not be the end of the yogic journey. Believe me, any idiot can teach yoga and we're all idiots. Living yoga, however, very few people can do. Everybody wants to be a teacher. Sometimes I wonder, if everybody is a teacher, who will be the students? Yet today, it is the need of our society to have good, qualified, sincere, and committed yoga teachers.

Yoga is going through a transition phase. Just as trained doctors are the qualified ones; the untrained doctors are the quacks. The same thing is happening with yoga today. There are some qualified teachers and there are thousands of quack yoga teachers. Many have not taken training anywhere; they have just picked up a book and started their commercial journey with it. So, yoga is going through this transition phase and in the course of time, just as the quack medical practitioners were rejected by society, in the same manner, the quack yoga teachers will be rejected.

Right now, people don't know what yoga is. Their only exposure to yoga is the media, however, yoga in the media does not represent the actual spirit of yoga. The spirit of yoga is defined by those who live yoga, not who teach yoga, and yogis are people who live yoga. Learning to become a teacher is a minor thing in my dictionary.

What then is the progression of yoga? The first stage of yoga is yoga practice. Through yoga practice, you can either become a teacher or you can apply yoga to benefit yourself to attain mental, physical, spiritual wellbeing and upliftment, and you can also teach the same thing to other people. As per your commitment to yoga after you have become a yoga teacher, you need to live the yogic principles too. If you can live those yogic principles and not only be a teacher of physical exercises, then yoga takes root in your life. Otherwise, you can live your entire life just being a physical hatha yoga teacher and then it is not yoga anymore, it is more like aerobic exercise.

After this first stage, the serious-minded yoga aspirants should move into living yoga in their life. What is 'living yoga'? You don't have to spend hours and hours practising your asanas, pranayama and meditation, they are just practices; the ideals of yoga have to be lived and these ideals involve observation of mind as the primary focus.

Mind is energy. Mind is not matter; it is energy. Just imagine that you are compressing the electrical current of a wire into a small ball till it becomes a ball of energy. In the same manner, the cosmic consciousness has compressed itself into a small ball and that has become the mind. The manifest mind is *shakti*, energy, and because of that, we are able to achieve things in our life: plan things, do things, think things. If the shakti was absent, the mind would be dead. In living yoga, it is this mind that has to be fine-tuned. How do you manage your emotions? How do you manage your aggression? How do you manage your fears? How do you manage your thoughts? How do you manage your own behaviour? When you begin to live yoga and you come to the point of balance and harmony, you are known as a yogi and then whatever you do is an expression of your yogic creativity. This is the journey of yoga.

By joining a Teacher Training Course, you are only taking the first step. It is not the end; it is the beginning of your journey and the choice is yours whether you want to take the full journey or finish a couple of stops before. The intention of this ashram is not to churn out yoga teachers, but to make you aware of the value of yoga in your life, and how it can be used to enhance your abilities and your creativity so your potential can be awakened and you become a better quality human being. Look beyond your previously conditioned mental concepts of yoga and allow new experiences to happen.

If you want to succeed as a yoga teacher, then you always have to remain a student. The best yoga teacher is that person who is always a student. If you think that after receiving your piece of paper you have become a teacher,

then that paper becomes the cause of you shutting the doors to spiritual awakening. When you receive the paper, it should not close the doors of your understanding and learning. If you remain a student, you will be a good teacher. If you think you are a teacher, you are stuck.

What are the qualities of being a good yoga teacher? What is the nature that a yoga teacher should have?

Learning is the biggest qualification of a yoga teacher. And what nature should a yoga teacher have? That is a struggle you will have with your ego, for I feel the nature of a yoga teacher should be based on understanding. In order to cultivate the ability to understand the needs of other people, you need to go below the ego level a little bit and not believe that, 'I know everything.' Rather, 'I am also learning in the process of helping others.' Understanding and learning – cultivation of these two qualities are important for a yoga teacher.

What is the meaning of diksha? Is diksha necessary to get mukti?

I feel that diksha is necessary to keep a balanced frame of mind, a peaceful state of mind, a calm and creative state of mind. Whether it helps us to attain mukti or not, that I do not know and I do not give any guarantee or assurance about it.

If we practise the mantra, it definitely helps to clear the clutter in the mind and gives new injections of positive sankalpas, affirmations, convictions and samskaras. It uplifts the perception of life so that everything is not dark and dingy, but there is also the sun and blue sky in life. Mantra therefore, is a tool which is used to transform the negative tendency of mind and make it positive. That is how the mantra should be understood and practised; not as a way to attain mukti – that is a religious attitude. The psychological change is that the negative tendencies of mind become positive with the use of mantra, and our concern is that.

What is the right time for sannyasa life? Is it when one is utterly bored and disgusted with material pursuits or is it when the thirst for answers to inner enquiry becomes unbearable?

There are different opinions and views about sannyasa. Society says sannyasa should be taken after you have exhausted all your karmas. That means that by the time you are ready for sannyasa, you are at the fag end of your life with one foot in the grave, and that is not the time when you should think of taking sannyasa. Religions have guided social thinking and social behaviours have influenced religious views also. The social and religious view is that sannyasa is to be taken after you have exhausted all your desires for everything; it is not a realistic view.

The spiritual view is realistic. The spiritual view says that everybody comes with their own set of karmas and samskaras; everybody starts their journey at a different station. In order to come to Munger, some people have to start their journey in Mumbai, some start in Pune, some in Delhi, some in Lakhisarai. Everybody starts their journey from a different place to come here, yet at the end of the journey, we meet at the destined place.

The practical and the realistic views say that whenever the samskara, the inclination, the desire to renounce the world and take sannyasa comes, you should take it. Remember, it is people like that who have made a difference to society. If Shankaracharya had waited until he was 75 years old, we would not recognize Shankaracharya for what he is today. If we all had to wait until we were 75, what would we be able to do for society?

There is a statement, 'Whenever vairagya becomes strong, the lifestyle should change'. That is up to the understanding of everyone, how they live their life, what they expect of their life, and what is the purpose of life. Is the purpose of life to take birth, get educated, raise a family, find a profession, retire, and then die? Is there anything more to life than this? We all take birth. We all are educated.

We all find a profession, we all get settled, have a family, we all retire, and we all go – yet there are some exceptions for those who do not feel the need to take that path.

If I have exhausted my karmas and samskaras of marital life, I do not have to start that journey again; I can start where I left off. That is called the samskara of a *yogabhrashta*, one who did not complete the journey before. Evolution is continuous; evolution does not mean a stuck record.

So two views on sannyasa are mentioned here. Society wants to have control over its citizens so they have set a system, yet there is no system to support *vanaprastha*, retirement from worldly life. There is no system to support *sannyasa*, renunciation of the world. There is a system to support *grihastha*, household or married life, and there is a system to support *brahmacharya*, students, studying and learning. The practical, the realistic, and the pragmatic spiritual view is, if you are destined to live a different life, accept it. So, if you are destined to live a different life, then accept it.

In the later days of his life, Swami Satyananda Saraswati seems to have given special emphasis to bhakti yoga. He even proclaimed that the 21st century would be the century of bhakti yoga. Can you please shed more light on this?

There are different yogas. The practicable yogas are hatha yoga, raja yoga, kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, and others. They are the yoga with practices that you do to improve yourself. There are some yogas where you apply your understanding in your interactions and relationships, yogas that can be called ‘applied yoga’. Karma yoga is applied yoga. Bhakti and jnana yoga is applied yoga.

As for Paramahamsaji’s vision of yoga and his mission, he first established the practicable yogas: asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, and all that learning was available. He then brought in the applied yogas: karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga.

As far as bhakti yoga becoming the theme in the 21st century, you have to see it from different perspectives. Until now, human society has given more weight to the faculties of the head. Society is based more on intelligence: Who is more intellectual? Who is more brilliant? All this is cerebral excellence. What is the maximum IQ that a person can have?

In the last twenty years, more strongly in the last ten years and even more now, people are looking at the emotional quotient. Emotions are one aspect of our life which have been neglected; they have been taken as weaknesses in life, not strengths. In my childhood, I heard people say, “Don’t cry. Don’t shed tears; you are a man.” Expression of emotion was never allowed and therefore, people don’t have emotional bonding.

There is a difference in the eastern traditions and the western traditions in relation to emotional bonding. The lack of emotional bonding creates a lot of psychological problems that inhibit and restrict the emergence of the softer and positive qualities of life such as love and compassion, sympathy and understanding. Then you will never experience love and compassion, everything will be sensual, physical, sensorial. Then love will become physical, sensual, sexual, sensorial, it won’t have deeper meaning. Then compassion will become only charity, ‘Ok, you are suffering; here is some money and fend for yourself.’ There won’t be any understanding and society will be deprived of balanced emotional expression.

For a human being to be complete, it is the emotional shakti, the *bhavana*, which has to become more prominent, then there is greater connection, understanding and bonding with people, situations, the environment and society. Look at your own family where you are emotionally bound to 3, 4 or 5 people. Due to that emotional bond, you are responsible for each one. You are not emotionally bound to your neighbour however, so the suffering of that neighbour is not your suffering.

When Swamiji speaks of bhakti yoga, he is speaking of the yoga of managing the emotions. Just as raja yoga is the yoga of managing the mental behaviour, bhakti yoga is managing the emotions. Many people have translated bhakti yoga as the yoga of devotion. That is also acceptable because in devotion you are channelling your emotion in one way, in one direction.

Devotion or bhakti from a religious perspective and bhakti yoga are two different things. The devotion you express to Rama, to Krishna, to Christ, to anybody, that is your religious understanding and faith; bhakti yoga is managing your own emotions and the spikes of those emotions have to be smoothened. That is the meaning of Sri Swamiji's statement, "Bhakti yoga will be the yoga of the next century," as that is one area of our life, the emotional aspect, which even the psychologists and psychoanalysts have not yet explored fully. Emotions actually become stepping-stones to a different state of mind.

Emotions in the Asian environment have been used to actually uplift the human perception and to appreciate the beauty of life, not the intellect. If you read any poem, the poems which express beauty are emotional in nature, they are not intellectual in nature. The way to explore and to awaken the potentials of beauty, grace, love, affection, kindness, compassion, sympathy – all the good qualities that we are searching for in our life and in the life of others, is with bhakti yoga. The thought, 'I am compassionate' does not indicate the degree of compassion in you, yet cultivating sensitivity of the heart, if you are sensitive to the suffering of other people, that makes you compassionate. The 20th century was the century to cultivate the creativity of intellect and it seems society has done a good job with technology, science, medicine, entertainment. In every area, the intellectual ability has expressed itself. Now, in this century, the emotional qualities have to flower.

What is better, expression of anger or suppression of anger?

Everything is relative. There is nothing better, there is nothing worse. You have to live according to the environment, the situation, the company, and you have to follow the path of justice and righteousness. If justice and righteousness demand that you express your anger, you will be able to do it. If justice and righteousness demand that you suppress your anger, you will be able to do it. You will be able to do it, provided you connect with your self and not with thoughts, “Shall I express?”, “I shall suppress”, “Shall I express?”, “Shall I suppress?” Connect with what is right, just and appropriate.

—4 August 2011

Do you believe in rebirth?

Whether I believe in rebirth or not, is another matter. What is the theory, the concept, and the belief about rebirth? You have to know that first, as there are people who accept it and those who do not. The Asian thinking accepts rebirth, whether it be in China, Japan or other Asian countries, including India. As you move towards the Middle East and the western countries, people there do not believe in rebirth, and this has come about because of religious indoctrination. Why? Religion says so, and I am not going to get into that controversy.

We use the word evolution, which is an ongoing process. For example, you go to school and from the first or primary class, up to the last or twelfth class, you have to spend one year in each class. Only when you graduate from one class, can you move into the next, and in this process the system of education keeps going from one level to the next higher level. As you move from one class to another, it is called progression. The same progression in spiritual terms is called evolution. Whether you use the term progression or evolution, it is the same. Ultimately it is the maturity of mind

and development of consciousness which matters in life, not wealth or poverty, not success or failure at the professional or at the social levels, no. It is only the maturity of mind and consciousness that ultimately matters.

One lifetime, with an average span of eighty years today, is not enough to allow the evolutionary process to take place, or to start moving it. No. Just imagine that you have a pot which you have been using to cook in for many months without cleaning it. After this prolonged use, when you want to clean the pot, will you be able to do it easily? No, you will have to really use your strength, use your elbow grease. It will take time to clean it out as there will be many layers of gunk and rubbish stuck to the pan; it is the same in our life too.

We are totally one hundred percent conditioned beings, and evolution represents un-conditioning oneself from these limitations. That is the meaning of evolution – you have to decondition yourself from the conditions which you are experiencing today. You identify completely with the qualities, the limitations, the abilities, the strengths, the weaknesses which you are experiencing today, saying, “This is my nature and this is my character.” You are willing to live your life in this condition until you take your last breath. Fine, that is one way of living life, when you totally accept your conditioning, yet there is another aspect where you can try to improve yourself. Improving oneself represents progression, evolution. The dross that is accumulated in our minds cannot be cleaned in one lifetime. After all, what is one lifetime?

In eighty years of your lifespan, you spend forty years sleeping and forty years awake. So your actual waking or conscious life is only forty years. You have already wasted forty years of your life sleeping, unconscious. Now, in the forty years remaining, one third is spent in eating and worrying about food. If you analyze your timetable at home, in a period of twelve hours, you spend at least six hours or half the time in the kitchen having breakfast, lunch, snacks,

dinner, midnight snacks etc. So in an average household, people spend at least six hours eating and thinking about what they are going to eat next. Twenty years are wasted in growing up, because you do not become active as an adult until you are twenty. So your life is only a span of ten years.

Evolution takes time

In these ten years you want to do everything. You want to go on holiday, on vacation, you want to get your promotion, you want to develop spiritually and become enlightened, you want to be prosperous and happy, you want to be at the top of the line. There are too many distractions and ambitions to fulfil in this ten-year period. How can we possibly remove the conditionings of our consciousness in such a short time, while other things are influencing us continuously and constantly?

I believe that evolution is an ongoing process and when the maturity of consciousness is not attained in this lifetime we come back again. Like when you fail a class, you have to repeat the same class, until you progress to the next one. Only when you reach the apex of evolution in human life, can you migrate to another dimension. That is one acceptable theory because of the evolutionary process that we all have to undergo. You have to attain, let's say, 90% excellence in order to migrate to another dimension. How do we know that we have attained 90%, or 80%, or 100% excellence, and are now ready to move higher? That is another subject, another theory.

The point is that in order to complete our 'study', our ancestors, the saints, have said, *Punarapi jananam punarapi maranam punarapi janani jathare shayanam* – Many times we take birth, many times we die and many times we rest again in the womb of our mothers. This is the theory and if you accept it, fine. If you do not, that is also fine. Your acceptance or rejection of the theory will not deviate the course of progression and evolution. Whether you accept it or not, whether you realize it or not, you are going through

the same process. Your acceptance or rejection is based on your own belief and understanding of the process of evolution. If this is the theory that you are referring to, then yes, I believe in rebirth.

Why should we have the feeling of inner experience and how does it feel?

What do you mean by inner experience to begin with? Your thoughts, the dreams that you see, the emotions that you feel, are all inner experience. They are not sensorial, they are not material, they are not coming from outside. When you sleep, it is also an inner experience. Where are you at the time when you are sleeping? You cannot say you are in your body, because you are not aware of your body during sleep. Therefore, life is a mix of the external sensorial experience and the inner experience, which is of the mind. Nobody can negate that your thoughts, daydreams, desires, all represent your inner experience. After all, where did your desire come from? From outside? Did you buy it in the market? No.

Inner experience means everything you feel at the level of your mind. Outer experience means everything you feel at the level of the senses and the material dimension that surrounds you. Whether you like it or not, inner experience is part and parcel of life. Either you have the capacity to understand it or you don't, that is your strength or weakness.

Life is a mix of outer and inner experience, and this same inner experience can also become spiritual. It becomes spiritual when the mental projections have been understood and transcended. What are mental projections? Desire is a mental projection, and it creates an imbalance in the mind because you are attracted to something. The craving comes in, greed comes in, the drive to obtain or possess comes in. One desire creates so many different imbalances in the normal harmonious state of mind. This is a mental projection, an inner experience, and the desire can become so intense that you can even lose your sleep over it. And if you lose your sleep, it means that your mind is affected.

When you are able to manage the normal behaviour of the mind through the practices of hatha yoga, raja yoga, meditations and other forms of sadhanas, then the spiritual awareness begins to take over. The term is not spiritual illumination, it is spiritual awareness, which means that the conditionings of our life are being transcended, and a greater vision or perspective is being attained about life.

What is life? Does this process go on forever? Are there different yugas, like Kali Yuga, Satya Yuga?

Yugas represent the birth and decay of unique cycles in time. Just as when this body takes birth, it is small and pure during childhood. The purity and innocence remains until you begin to interact with society and the environment. When you start going to school, new thoughts, new conditionings and new inputs start influencing you. So, from being a child, pure in nature, you become an adult, who is a conditioned being. In this state of conditioning, you carry out your karmas: you have a family, a profession, desires, expectations, everything to keep you motivated in life.

Later there comes a time when the mind automatically withdraws from all those things, and you gradually slow down your pace, as you reach your retirement age. You start ageing. Childhood, youth, middle age, old age and finally death are the different changes that we experience in life.

Yugas and manvantaras

In the same manner, in the dimension of time, there is a beginning and end, or birth and death of time. The beginning of time starts with Satya Yuga, where virtues are more predominant than the vices. Vices and virtues always co-exist, remember that. In Satya Yuga, virtues are predominant, for example, let us say, 75% virtue and 25% vice. Then we move into the next yuga in the course of the evolution of time, which is the Treta Yuga. This represents the youthful period of time, where virtues and vices, are equally balanced, 50% virtue, 50% vice. Then comes the

Dwapara Yuga, where virtues reduce to 40%, and vices increase to 60%. Then comes the fourth or Kali Yuga, where virtues decline to 30%, and vices escalate to 70%. Therefore, the yuga concept represents the birth and the end of time which goes through successive cycles, just as this body goes through different phases in life from birth to death.

In the dimension of time, they say that the combination of four yugas makes one complete era or one complete cycle. This cycle is known as a *manvantara*. According to the Indian calculations, we are in the twenty-seventh cycle of creation, and the four yugas have come and gone in each of these eras. We are in the Kali Yuga now, where vices predominate over virtues. At the end of this yuga, there will be what is known as *pralaya*, which is the great dissolution, where everything simply dissolves or perishes. How it dissolves, where it dissolves, when it dissolves – all that is another matter for you to speculate about, and for scientists to discover. It does happen.

Each of these manvantaras corresponds to a period in the series of Big Bangs. Scientists today have discovered with their precision instruments, the presence of nineteen Big Bangs before our one. That means in total they have discovered twenty Big Bangs. They were able to detect the vibration of each, and the waves are still travelling in interstellar space. Who knows, with more sophisticated instruments they may soon discover that there were twenty-seven Big Bangs since the beginning of manifest creation in time. This is another point to ponder. Each cycle in time concludes a chapter, and a new beginning happens. This is the concept of the yugas.

Life and evolution

Life is an accident in this concept of the yugas, yet it has been a good accident, for human life is dependent on time. Humans have defined time as one second, one minute, one hour, one day; so many hours make one day, so many days make one week, so many weeks make one year, etc. To

identify time, they also have an instrument worn on every wrist. This is the human concept of time.

Do you think an elephant has the time concept? Does an ant have the same concept of time that we have? How about mosquitoes and amoebas? From your human time concept, you can say that a mosquito lives for only two or three days, and that human beings have a lifespan of eighty years. Yet from a mosquito's point of view, in two days it does everything that you do in your lifetime of eighty years. So time is not a fixed universal concept applicable to each and every life-form, rather, time is relative. As you grow in stature, the concept of time becomes different for you, and you live longer. A mosquito lives for how many days? An elephant lives for how many years? And humans? Calculate and you will know the answer. This means that the bigger you are in size, the better chances you have of using time to your advantage.

Yes, life does change. It changes. The body and mind may change during evolution, yet the concept and the pattern of life remains the same. Remember, I have used the word *manvantara* in describing the four yugas, that create one *manvantara*. That is a period, an era, a cycle. *Manvantara* means the thinking faculty, the thinking or rational person, not the primitive man. When life is lived at the instinctive level, then the expression and behaviour of consciousness is also guided by instinct, it is not a rational or thinking behaviour. Creation happened long before the evolution of rational human beings on the planet. The thinking man came into being when a breakthrough happened in the realm of consciousness. This breakthrough has to happen. When does a seed grow into a sprout? Only when the shell is broken. When the shell is broken, then you can see the sprout.

In the same manner, we have lived as instinctive beings for many centuries, before we became sentient beings. When did we start to think? Why did this happen? It was the discovery of fire. A major breakthrough took place in

the mental functioning and behaviour of the individual. Human beings learned to use fire for light and to feed and warm themselves. Different realizations happened with the discovery of fire. Another major breakthrough happened in the human consciousness with the discovery of the wheel. That was another jump, a leap, up to another level of awakening. In this manner, you see there have been discoveries which made the human consciousness take a jump from one condition to another, fast. The discovery of electricity was another quantum leap in our own century. It changed the way people live all over the world. The discovery of electricity is as important as the discovery of fire. Computers today have been the cause of a major shift in human consciousness. They have influenced our life in many ways. These experiences have become the catalyst for human evolution. The discoveries of mind allow it to take quantum leaps from one stage to another, and life is a continuous experience of this development in our cosmic journey.

Swamiji, I would like to meet with you privately. How do I get an appointment with you?

Officially I am not here; you see me unofficially. From 1983 to 2008, I was at the helm of management and administration, helping everybody, doing everything, making everybody happy, listening to their problems, putting aside my own problems to solve other people's problems. I played four different roles as the saying goes, '*pir bisht khar bavarchi*. *Pir* means a holy man, *bisht* means a water carrier or giver who quenches thirst, *bavarchi* means a cook, and *khar* means a donkey, which carries the load of everybody. I played all these roles.

One day, as a donkey, I was carrying a big load of cotton on my back, yet it was light. While crossing a bridge, I slipped and fell in the water. When I came out of the water, the load of cotton on my back, had become very heavy as it was full of water. After that I decided, enough is enough – and I threw the load off. From that time, I am engaged

in a different routine and activity. In 2009, my guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, told me to free myself of many other obligations and duties that I had previously, so that I could go on to develop something different.

We have Ganga Darshan Yoga Peeth, in Munger, which is the centre of yoga. It was established by Swami Satyanandaji in 1964. Then in Rikhia we have another establishment where the mandate is not teaching yoga, it is serving the local community, by following the three precepts of Swami Sivanandaji: serve, love and give. That mandate was given in 1994 by Sri Swamiji in Rikhia. Prior to his mahasamadhi he also gave instructions for a third mission, and he has given me the charge of that mission, which is the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth, where training in different kinds of lifestyles can be given as per the sannyasa tradition.

Therefore, I say that I am officially not here, because since 2008 my involvement with Bihar School of Yoga and Ganga Darshan has gradually become less and less. Now I am only waiting to move on from here. While I wait we are developing this new property where the next mission will take place. I am using these five years from 2008 to 2013 to train the next generation in administration and management. You have to remember that anyone new who gets any post is without experience, and they have to be groomed. Just because somebody becomes the President of an institution does not mean they have the qualifications for that post. People are so arrogant nowadays, that they do not want to train themselves anymore. Many things are happening. I am happy that we have wonderful people here, the sannyasins are people who have given their 108% and are ready to do anything and everything that is expected of them. To have such a beautiful team of people is actually a privilege for any administrator.

While I wait on the side lines, I am also preparing myself to have the higher experiences which yoga talks about. I have been teaching since the age of ten. I stopped teaching yoga at the age of fifty. For forty years I travelled and taught

yoga. Now I am experiencing what I have spoken about in the last forty years; now I have time for practice. Previously I did not have time to do even half an hour of meditation. I think for forty years my yoga practice was limited to what I would teach others. I never had time to do anything for myself. Maybe during some holiday, I would take a break and go to the mountains and do my yoga. That was it, maybe one week every year. Now that I have the time, I can experience and feel the effects of the sadhanas and the consequent changes in my mind.

As far as seeing you is concerned, I am seeing all of you now, yet I am not willing to spend time with you to talk about your headaches and head-trips, because that role has passed on to somebody else. What will you talk about if you meet me? You will either say, “I have this physical health problem and what can I do for it?” There are competent teachers and doctors available here for that. Or, “What shall I do to overcome the problems I am having for the marriage of my son and daughter?” Well I cannot help you with that; I myself am not married and I have no experience in that field. If you say, “Help me with my business venture.” How can I do that? I have never ever done any business.

If you have any questions of a spiritual nature, you can always write and ask, and I will give you the answer. Questions about what to do, when to do, how to do, I cannot help you with all that. You have to be the thinker. So for this reason I do not meet with anybody for their personal problems or personal difficulties, for my role has changed. I meet people only for spiritual satsangs or sadhana satsangs now. Whenever you have personal questions, you can always write and ask, not a problem.

What does it mean ‘yoga is not a therapy, yoga is a lifestyle’?

In 1977, an Australian doctor by the name of Dr Ainslie Meyers from the Cancer Society of Australia, selected six or seven cancer patients, and along with the normal

therapies like chemotherapy, he included yoga practices to help manage the psychological state of the patients. He found that these people who had taken up yoga along with their normal treatment were responding in a much better way than the other patients. The energy, stamina, vitality, confidence, clarity, relaxation, everything was increasing in the yoga group. After about six to eight months of continuous daily practice of yoga, he discovered that there was often remission, and over a period of time the cancer disappeared in these patients. He was one of the leading persons who started to experiment with yoga and cancer.

There are many claims, yet Bihar School of Yoga does not go in for any claim. Till today we have not claimed that yoga can help this or that condition; we know that yoga is not a therapy. Rather, yoga is a lifestyle, and we know that if you live the right lifestyle, many of the problems can be managed efficiently and effectively. Most of the illnesses and diseases are the outcome of irregular and imbalanced lifestyles, routines and habits. That's all. Yoga is not a therapy despite the way people project it in society. I can challenge anyone, or even all of you on this point.

The practices that Dr Meyers taught the cancer patients were simple. Pawanmuktasana, nadi shodhana pranayama, yoga nidra and ajapa japa, only these four items. Now what was the effect of pawanmuktasana? Improvement of circulation, reduction in the stiffness and tightness of the muscles and joints, greater flexibility and mobility of the body, less pain, greater awareness of the body and its overall condition. This is what pawanmuktasana did. The pranayama was nadi shodhana, not kapalhati like you may think. It was simple, basic alternate nostril breathing for ten minutes. This helped balance the nervous agitation and anxiety. The brain was more balanced, with more of alpha activity, less of beta activity. They were able to relax with yoga nidra. With the help of the sankalpa in yoga nidra, they were able to overcome their fear of disease and death. With the practice of ajapa japa they were able to focus on the mantra.

While many of the ‘non-yoga’ cancer patients did not survive the treatment, these six survived the full course of treatment, their cancer went into remission, and they became alright because they followed a yoga routine. This was in 1977, and many of them are still alive today with no trace of cancer. Until case studies and clinical research is conducted, under proper medical supervision and our own observation, we shall never claim that yoga can help any particular disease or medical problem.

We have published many books on therapy, too. We have published books on diabetes. I can personally vouch for the programs we conducted, as I was involved in that. We did come to the conclusion at the end of the research, which was done with the help of many medical colleges and many different centres in India, that non-insulin-dependent diabetes can be managed effectively with yoga within forty days. This means, that non-insulin-dependent type diabetes can be cured within forty days. Same with asthma. We did the research nationally and internationally, and the compilation of this research was published in our book *Yogic Management of Asthma and Diabetes*. To prove that the asthma was overcome, the Ventolin Challenge test was conducted on patients, which indicated that the person was free from the last vestiges of asthma or respiratory disorders. We published that book as well.

Bihar School of Yoga has always had this policy that yoga is a lifestyle. If you live your life properly with regular exercise, with regular meals, with regular timings for sleep and waking up, and make the effort to de-stress yourself, to change your mental behaviour, to build your inner strength or immunity, you can rectify many imbalances and illnesses. I am giving you this example, for work has also been done with people who have multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy, and they have definitely been benefited. I am still waiting to compile all the data collected and then do a proper clinical study and research, before a system can be released to the public. After all, how many yoga centres are

there in India? There may be thousands of yoga teachers and there may be hours and hours of programs on television teaching yoga, yet how many people are actually working for the development of yoga? All those teachers are not working for the development of yoga. I am telling you this frankly. They are teaching yoga as therapy for their own personal gain.

Officially, there are only four established institutions of yoga in this country, recognized by the government of India: Bihar School of Yoga, Kaivalyadham, Sivananda Ashram and Vivekananda Kendra. They are working for the development of yoga as a lifestyle, as a science, as a philosophy, as a subject with academic, medical and other aspects. We are definitely not keen on joining the rat race of yoga in the society outside. However, we are keen to have a centre of classical yoga where training in every aspect of yoga and all subjects related to it, is imparted to people who are interested. Therefore, you will never hear of Bihar School of Yoga, Kaivalyadham, Sivananda Ashram or Vivekananda Kendra outside their boundary wall. These are all institutions which are working to ensure that yoga is brought to society through the right perspective, and not with claims or counterclaims without any foundation or substance. Therefore, we have not published any book on therapy unless our data is properly collected and categorized.

We have also done work with HIV patients in Europe and many of them have recovered. However, no clinical trial has been conducted yet, and therefore we cannot make any claim. Thirteen HIV patients from England's Charing Cross Medical Hospital were taken for study. Out of those thirteen patients, seven survived and the others did not, because they could not follow the yoga routine, or they did not believe in doing the prescribed exercises and pranayamas. Many people have done a lot of work globally, not only us. We are still waiting to substantiate many of the practices and theories which we are working with. It will take time, so keep in touch. Society has created a good system

of communication. You can keep in touch through snail mail, you can keep in touch through email, you can keep in touch through web cam, you can keep in touch through internal mail or iMail, and best of all you can keep in touch by spending some time here every year to feel reconnected and recharged.

Connection with guru does not mean that you have to be staring at the face of the guru all the time. Get out and do your thing, yet once every day for at least one minute, close your eyes and just think, “I am in Munger.” If you can do that, close your eyes and imagine that you are in Munger here with us, you will be connected. After all, how do you remain connected to your home when you travel out? Through memories of home and by communication with family members. In the same manner, remain connected with your memories and through communication which is so easily available now.

—7 August 2011

What should we teach when we leave Ganga Darshan?

Twenty or thirty postures are common for everyone, like surya namaskara and the trikonasanas. The perfection of the pranayama techniques requires a lot of practice. We are teaching the simple variation, that’s all. In the texts it says that you should breathe in for thirty seconds, then breathe out for thirty seconds. That means one breath per minute. We all breathe in about eleven times per minute on an average. Imagine breathing once per minute. These are not difficult things, yet they need practice.

Nowadays people do not have time to practise. Even yoga teachers say, “I practise my yoga when I am giving the classes.” You are not practising for yourself, you are practising to teach others, to demonstrate. That is not yoga sadhana. Yoga has to be an ongoing process and the certificate which you receive is only an indication that you have initiated the process of becoming a yoga teacher. It is not the final certifi-

cate, rather it is an indication that you have started learning about yoga, and you are trying to become a yoga teacher. Keep your mind open, keep absorbing everything that you can like a sponge, and apply it in your life.

How does the geometrical design of a yantra relate to its respective deity? What is the significance of making yantras for havan?

First you should know what a yantra is. In the tantras, three things are used for meditation, to go deeper into the mind, and for the experience of consciousness and energy. They are mantra, yantra and mandala. Mantra is a common thing. Anybody can qualify to receive a mantra and to use it to deepen the experience of meditation. Most people stay at the level of the mantras. They are people who live in society, who have obligations, commitments, duties to fulfil, and for them mantra is appropriate. No need to go beyond it. This is also enough for practitioners of yoga.

Then there is one percent of the population who are not practitioners of yoga; they are *sadhakas* who want to understand the experiences that yoga defines as being internal. What is the state of meditation? How do I experience meditation? How do I perceive consciousness: as an activity of which I am only aware at present, or as something much deeper and broader than what I know? How do I experience my *shakti* or energy?

With this attitude, the yoga sadhaka enters another level of practice. There the practices include yantras, together with mantras. Our guru Swami Satyanandaji says that *yantras* are maps of consciousness. They are not symbols, or religious icons which have to be worshiped; they do not represent any deity, god or goddess. Although they may have names like Durga Yantra, Krishna Yantra, Sri Yantra, they do not represent the *sakara* or the manifest form of that power; rather, they indicate the pattern of consciousness and energy corresponding to that state of mind, and to that state of consciousness.

Yantras have always been looked upon as maps of consciousness. You see there always has to be a reference point. My guru, Swami Satyanandaji, used to tell me a story about a bird flying over the ocean, trying to find dry land to rest on. All the bird could see was an expanse of water all around. Its wings were getting tired, and the bird needed to rest. Suddenly, it saw a piece of wood floating on the waves, where it could alight and rest its wings. Once the bird had rested, it again flew off searching for land. However, this time it kept track of that piece of wood, and whenever it was tired it would always come back to the wood to rest, until it found land and trees.

Just as the bird needed a point of reference in the ocean, and a place to rest when it was tired, in the same manner, you also need a reference point in meditation. When you go deep inside into the stillness of the mind, beyond your thoughts, feelings, ideas, emotions, body, and the egotistical, positive, pious, or negative expressions of the mind – then what reference do you have there to maintain your awareness intact? The normal tendency is that when you close your eyes, you fall sleep. Even in meditation people cannot maintain their awareness, they go to sleep and then say, 'Oh I had a wonderful meditation!'

Therefore, meditation is not an easy practice to master. The techniques of pratyahara and dharana that we do, such as ajapa japa, antar mouna, chidakasha dharana or yoga nidra, do not qualify as meditative practices. We are only swimming on the surface of the mind in pratyahara, fighting each wave as it comes. A wave of emotion comes: we observe it, manage it, fight it. Another wave of thought comes: we observe and manage it. Pratyahara is only swimming on the surface of the ocean, it is not meditation. Dharana is learning to dive, you have to come back to the surface to breathe. Dharana can be described as scuba diving. You can go a little bit deeper and admire the scenery, then you have to come up to the surface for air.

Meditation or *dhyana* is like deep-sea diving. There you need to put on your heavy diving gear and go down

deep, three, four, five, or six hundred meters into a pitch-black environment, and that environment is dhyana. There you have a compass to guide you and other instruments to tell you which way is up, down, left and right. You have instruments to tell you the depth, and even how much oxygen you have left. You go equipped with all the instruments needed to keep you oriented in deep waters.

Similarly, the instrument that is used in meditation to keep oneself aware and know where one is going, is the yantra. Yantra is the map, and it is a complete subject and science in itself. Yantras are not only geometrical lines criss-crossing each other and making different patterns, although there is also such an interpretation. Other interpretations of yantras focus on aspects such as the meaning of interlacing triangles, the number of peaks, kutas, and entry points in specific yantras, and in which direction the energy flows in that particular state of mind when observing the yantra. Knowledge of yantras is imparted only to those sincere sadhakas who are capable of going deep into the meditative dimension of life.

Yantras are not religious icons, they indicate an understanding of the interplay between individual energy and the individual conscious faculty, and the cosmic universal consciousness, and the cosmic universal energy. Yantras are a major subject of tantra and a separate branch of study, for it is such a vast topic and one has to understand all the intricate theories of yantras. In samadhi the yantra becomes a mandala. *Mandala* means a thing complete in itself. The whole universe, the entire creation is perceived as the *lila*, the cosmic play, of Shiva and Shakti, the principles of consciousness and energy.

Is the period and culture of the *Rig Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* the same? Which is more ancient? Are both civilizations similar?

The *Rig Veda* is the most ancient, and the *Atharva Veda* is the most recent Veda. Any science, subject or topic takes time

to develop. Even language took time to develop. From the guttural sounds that our primitive ancestors used to make, we have come to use refined words today. It took about two thousand years to develop the language; it was not developed in one generation. It takes about two thousand years to develop any language, and poetry is the culmination of the knowledge of a language. Poetic expression is the culmination and refinement of a culture that has mastered its language, and knows it fully.

When carbon dating is not possible, then how do we discover the age of something? In the Vedas different astronomical constellations have been described which are visible from earth. Different stars and planets have been described in particular positions, which according to their cycle can take maybe a hundred, two hundred, or five hundred years to occur. Based on these theories and calculations it was discovered that the *Rig Veda* developed around fifty thousand years ago, and it is the oldest literature of human kind.

The *Rig Veda* is not a religious text, rather it is a mix of many different concepts and thoughts, such as the concept of shakti, the concept of the cosmic presence, the behaviour of nature, seasonal agriculture, rain cycles, raising animals, breeding livestock, the movement of the sun, the moon and the planets. All these subjects and sciences are described in the *Rig Veda*. It is like the basic compilation of knowledge required for civilized human life to begin. You can even say that the Vedas are the first books in which the kick-start for humanity has been described. They are not merely religious or philosophical books, although they contain these ideas as well.

After the *Rig Veda* came the *Sama Veda*, which is dedicated to music. It is the Veda dedicated to universal harmony, vibrations, music, songs, incantations, mantras, to develop the necessary skills in life. If the *Rig Veda* is considered to be a fifty-thousand-year old treatise, then the *Sama Veda* would be about forty-five thousand years old. It originated approximately around that same period.

Then came the *Yajur Veda* which describes how to live a harmonious and balanced life. It describes the whole process of maintaining a healthy body, a healthy mind, and a healthy life by living in tune with nature and its seasons, eating the right seasonal foods and so on. It also is not a religious treatise.

The *Atharva Veda* is the last, and the most recent one for us. It contains mantras for every purpose, like healing, effecting change in the environment. Everything is given there.

In this manner, the four Vedas have become the four books of life, not of religion. The Vedas are not religious scriptures. They are scriptures which indicate the beginning or origin of life, and how it can be sustained and maintained over a long period. The *Atharva Veda* is the most recent one, yet all these four Vedas come from the vedic era, or the vedic *yuga*.

The culmination of the vedic yuga, the peak of the vedic age came about at the time of Vyasa Deva, who is considered to be the first enlightened human guru. He actually synthesized or compiled the knowledge of the Vedas into four parts. This was in the pre-Mahabharata era. The credit for classifying the four Vedas goes to Vyasa Deva. Previously it was just a mix of thoughts, ideas, subjects, sciences, technologies, and he separated and categorized them group-wise. Until today the interpretation of the vedic knowledge has been more philosophical and religious, for now people do not have the vocabulary, or the comprehension of the language used in them, to understand what is the actual content of the Vedas. They come across certain terms like surya, agni, and associate these terms with their preconceived notions of gods and goddesses. However, a person who knows the language of the Vedas, can decipher that it is a compilation of different subjects, sciences and technological concepts.

What is the concept of havan? What is the effect of using various herbs in the havan?

The fire ceremony is a global phenomenon, not only vedic. Each society, each civilization developed their own understanding of the fire ceremony which they were performing. Zoroastrians are worshippers of fire and they developed their own understanding about their worship. Similarly, in other civilizations and societies, each group developed an idea, thought and philosophy about fire and its usage, according to their bent of mind. The rishis of the vedic times also came to a conclusion about how the fire element can be used to preserve and protect human life, and about how to use fire to purify the environment.

In the vedic times, people were concerned about the ecological state and condition of the planet Earth, and they made many laws and rules to maintain the purity of Mother Earth. They said that the body becomes diseased, sometimes there is diabetes, sometimes is cancer, or a variety of other diseases. Therefore, a diseased corpse should not be put in the ground and buried, as viruses and bacteria of that disease will spread under the ground and contaminate other areas; the body should be burnt, cremated. This is not a religious idea; it is a practical one. It is not a religious custom; it is a social one. However, in the course of time social customs become part of religion. In the vedic age, the rishis thought about maintaining the purity of water and the earth. The only people who were buried in the ground were children, before they attained puberty as their bodies were considered to be pure, and yogis who attained samadhi for their body is also pure. Therefore, children and yogis were buried and the rest were cremated.

Similarly, how do we influence our environment? How do we influence our weather patterns? How do we remove bacteria from the environment? Havan. Havan came about as a means to purify the environment. If you throw a handful of red chillies into the fire, will you be able to stay in that room? No. Your eyes will be watering, you will start sneezing

and run out of the room immediately due to the smoke. In the same way, if you put the right combination of different medicinal herbs into the fire, it cleans the environment, and the air.

In 1982 there was a volcanic eruption in Mount Saint Helen in the USA, and about two hundred miles of forest were totally burned, destroyed and covered with volcanic ash. Twenty years later, when the new trees came up, the scientists there took samples of soil, air and water. They discovered that the soil, air and water in that region, were of much purer quality than in other surrounding areas. Compared to previous samples of the same region, scientists discovered that the purity in the new samples had increased. How? The sulphur in the air and the ash on the ground killed all the bacteria and viruses. In the course of time, when the new growth came up, the plants were much stronger, healthier, greener and better. I am giving you this example of a volcanic eruption, to show that the sulphur from the volcanic gases can clean the environment of all the pollutants.

Yogis discovered that when we put in the right mix of medicinal herbs, they also purify our environment. That is how the practice of havan actually came into being, more as an ecological intervention than religious worship. In order to make it applicable to society at large, they gave it a religious connotation. People were encouraged to continue with their worship, their poojas and other rituals, and to perform havans also. Havans help you intensify your own *shraddha*, feeling, faith, and conviction, and at the same time help purify the environment. Over a period of time this ecological awareness of havan disappeared, and the religious awareness became predominant. Today people think of havans as a form of religious activity, yet in the past they were used to create changes in life and also in the environment. There are stories in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the ancient historical literature of this country, that havans were performed for rain. With the right ingredients, and with the right mantras, rain would fall.

In 1976, the Government of India conducted a research study which was interesting. They came across a mantra which is said to, or supposed to, create fire. To experiment whether this mantra could actually create fire or not, they built a small hut. They swept the hut clean with every instrument, gadget and sensor available at that time. After that, certain scientific instruments were kept inside the hut to measure the heat. The whole area was cordoned off by the police, nobody could go in, throw a match, or light a lamp. Then after that, about fifteen experts of that mantra surrounded the hut holding hands, and started to chant the mantra. After about forty minutes of chanting, the heat inside the hut started to go up. One and a half hours later, smoke started to appear, and after two hours the whole hut was on fire, just due to the chanting of the mantras.

This was an important research experiment to see whether a mantra could produce fire or not. If it is done in the right manner, yes it can. After all, mantras are vibrations. Indians know the story of Tansen. When he used to sing the *Deepak Rag*, the *deepaks*, oil lamps, used to light up and burn automatically. When he used to sing, the raga of the clouds, they used to gather and rain would fall. This is not an ancient story, it is only three or four hundred years old, and happened during the Islamic rule in India.

Mantras and other things which exist on this planet have a lot of power; they are part of the same shakti, which is universal consciousness and which is also within us. They have different properties to sustain, to maintain and to nourish this planet. When we do havan and we put in the samagri ingredients, we are creating a change in our environment, ecosystem, mental behaviour, and in our state of mind. Yogis have used havan for many purposes. For example, Rama and his brothers were born as a result of a havan. Even in the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi and Drishtadyumna were born out of the fire of the havan, meaning that the prasad of havan had so much power in it, that it was able to give birth to life. These are not just

stories told at random, there is definite substance in them. We need to eventually understand this process so that it can be applied to improve our life, our world and our universe. When we put the yantra underneath the havan container, then the lines of the yantra direct the power of the fire to act, and to give a particular result.

Computers were developed by a few aware and intelligent people, but in general computers today are reducing the thinking efficiency of people. Is that true?

It depends how you use your computer. If you use your computer to calculate how much is two plus two, then definitely you are misusing the computer and also your brain capacity. I remember that prior to calculators, we used to know our multiplication tables by heart. Now few people know the multiplication tables, they just check on the calculator, 28×9 equals so much.

Now would you call this blocking the mind? Old die-hards like me, might say yes. Yet, at the same time, I feel that it is also stimulating other areas of the brain and mind, which we have not yet used. Knowledge is a creation of the mind. Every kind of knowledge comes out of the mind, whether it be technical knowledge, spiritual knowledge, material knowledge, or any other kind of knowledge. When one type of knowledge is explored and its potential discovered, then the mind is diverted to explore other areas of knowledge.

This happens in a particular sequence, as part of mental maturity. After all, we discovered fire first. Why did we not discover computers at that time? The facilities were not there, and the need was not there. Knowledge also develops according to the need of the larger mind, yet there is no knowledge in the world, which can be called useless because we do not need it. Every form of knowledge is useful, as it has catered to one aspect of our life, either in the past, the present, or it will become relevant in the future. Therefore, I do not call anything a wastage of human talent. Rather, each discovery, each attainment allows us to divert our attention

to some other area, which can be further developed and enhanced. However, there are people who are stuck at the crossroads in the transition from the old to the new, and they are the people who find it difficult to adjust either here or there. They cannot adjust to the new technology that has taken over, so, they begin to find fault with it, saying, ‘Look that person is just wasting time!’ Yet, many times it is important to waste time, in order to learn.

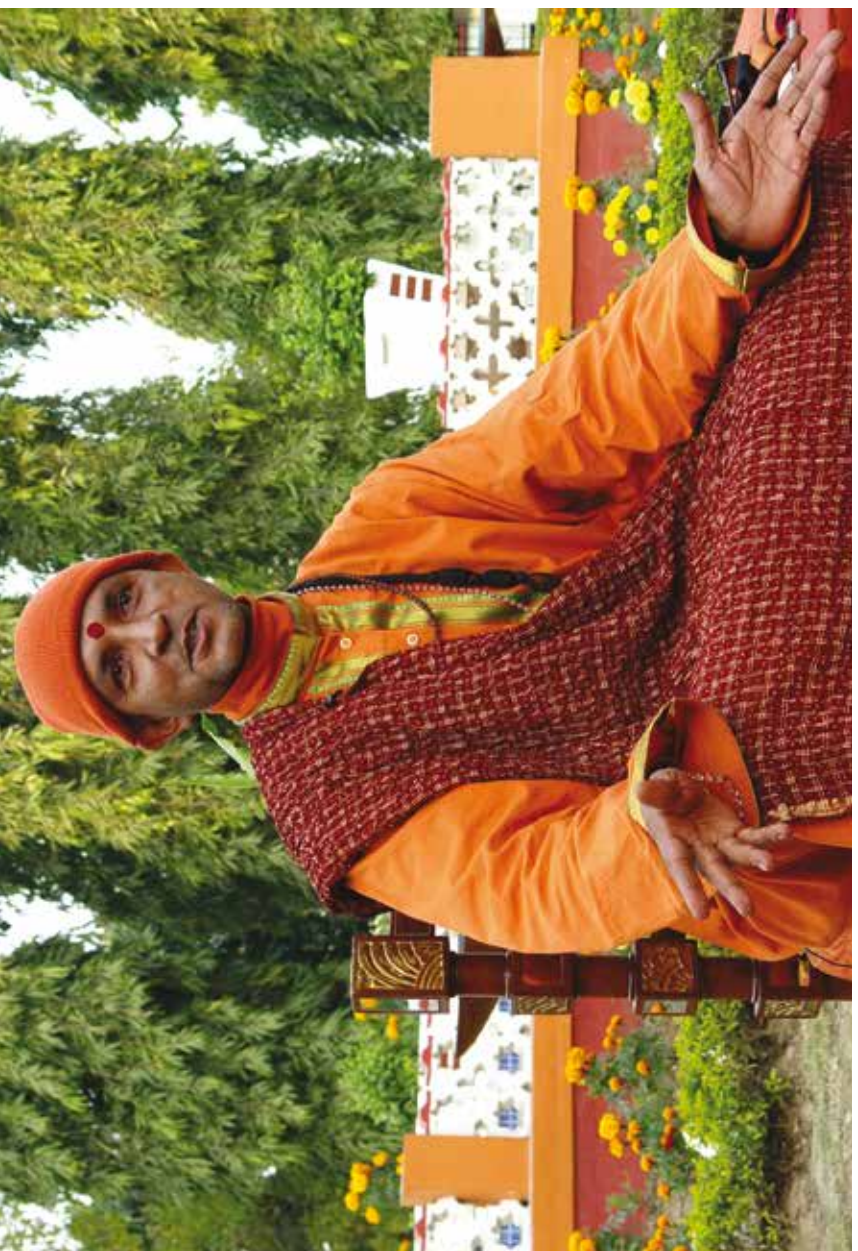
Swamiji, could you say something about ajapa japa.

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai,
Soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahasa ikkisau jaap,
Anahada upaje apai aapa.*

These four lines describe the process of ajapa japa, which in the ancient yogic literature and scriptures is known as *hamsa dhyana*, meditation on the sounds *Ham* and *Sa*. The *Hamsa Upanishad* is dedicated to this practice. The breath is used as a ladder to internalize the mind, and the mantra becomes attached to the breath.

So is the sound of the incoming breath, and *Ham* is the sound of the outgoing breath. If you listen carefully, when you breathe in you will hear *So* at the time of inhalation, and *Ham* at the time of exhalation. The *So-Ham* meditation means meditating on the incoming and outgoing breath by focusing on the sound of breathing. First the focus is on the breath between the navel and throat, next between the navel and the eyebrow centre. Then the awareness of the path of the breath changes to the spine, from the bottom of the spine to the crown of the head. Next the awareness changes, and it becomes circular – breath going up through the spine, down the front, then up again through the spine, and back down through the front. Then the pattern reverses, with the breath going up through the front of the body and then down through the spine. There are different stages of ajapa japa; there is even a nasal variant.

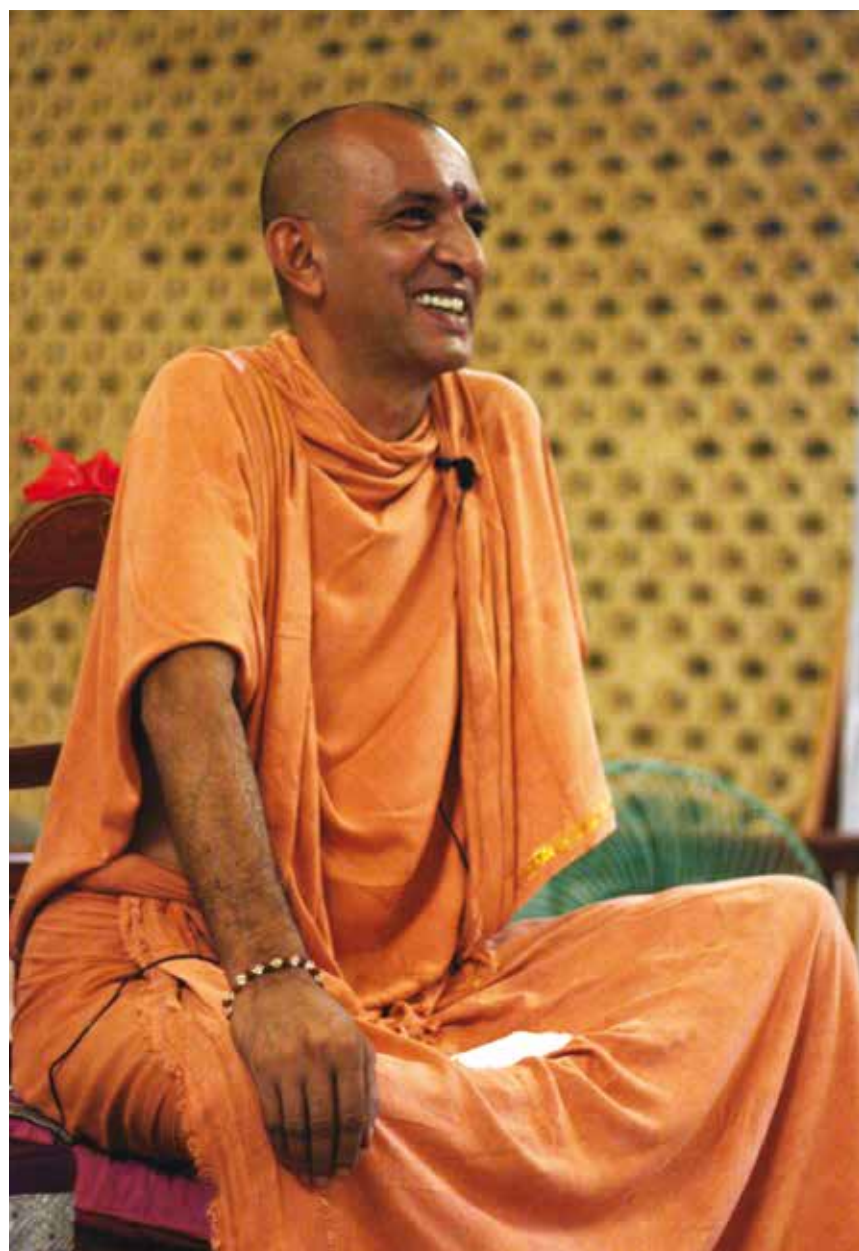


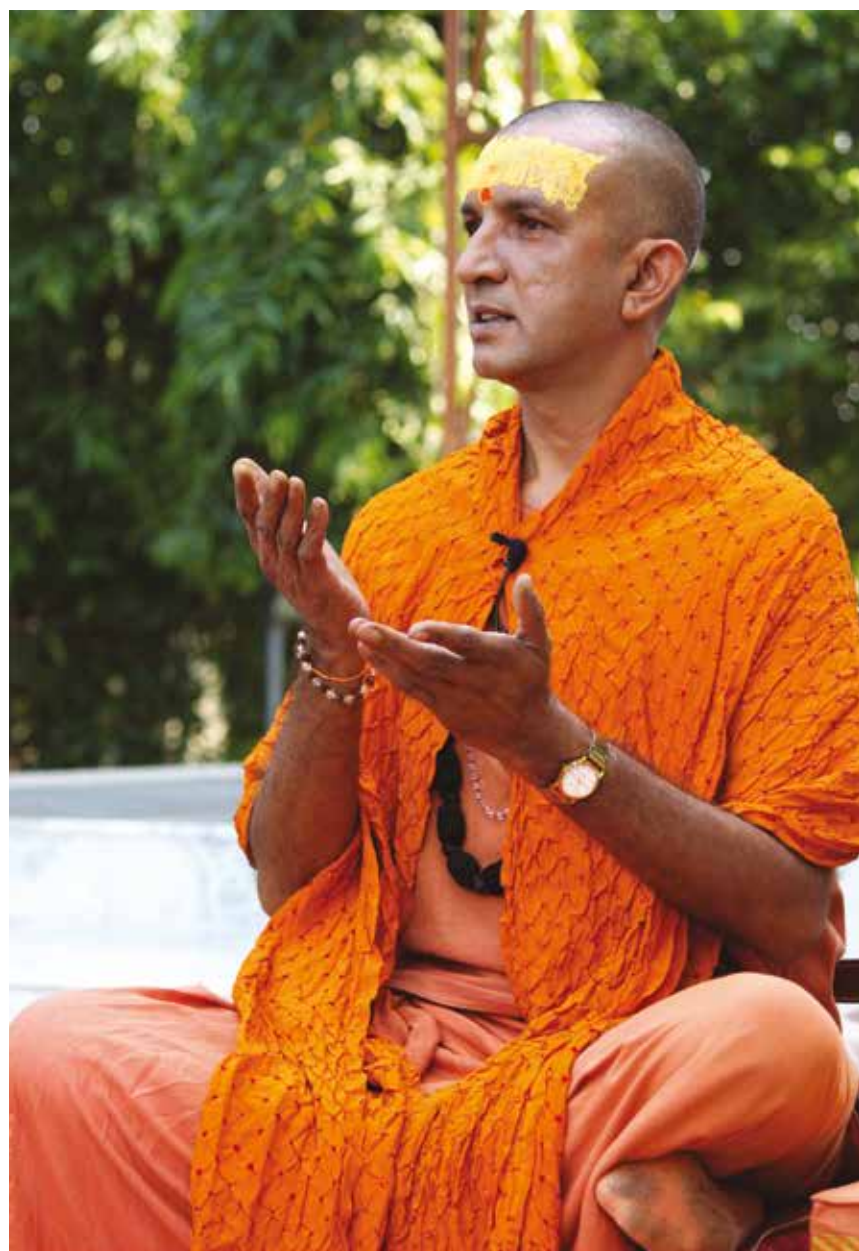














Each of these stages focuses on different areas, and the different patterns of breathing indicate intensive concentration of the mind. In the advanced stage, this ajapa japa is considered to be a practice of the dharana system of meditations, for here we use the breath to deepen our awareness of the combination of breath and mantra. When you merge yourself completely with the breath and mantra, then that is the perfection of ajapa japa. *Ajapa japa* means effortless repetition. The four lines which I quoted earlier are by Kabirdas, and their meaning is: *Aisa jaapa japo mana lai*, focus your mind in such a way; *Soham soham surata gai*, that the breath begins to sing, 'so ham, so ham'; *Chhaisau sahasa ikkisau jaap*, if you can maintain this awareness for 21,600 breaths; *Anahada upaje apai aapa*, then you can hear the *anahada* or unstruck sound. This means that the mind becomes so deep and internalized, that the extrasensory perceptions become active. You hear sounds which are normally inaudible; you see things which you normally would not see; you smell things that you normally would not smell, etc. These extra-sensory perceptions are heightened through ajapa japa, and this is also a pre-meditative state. First you work through the sensorial, then the non-sensorial, and then go into the transcendental dimension.

What are the samskaras that come up at the time of yoga nidra, or when we do mantras? How do these samskaras affect our lives?

Samskaras are impressions which give birth to a mentality, a behaviour, an attitude or a character. In the absence of samskaras, attitude, character and nature are not active; it is a dumb state of mind. Samskaras are the catalysts that connect you with the world, that bring life into you, that give you a unique nature and character. You are good or bad due to samskara. You think positively in life, or you are a pessimist due to samskara. You are a believer or a non-believer due to samskara. You are an angry or peaceful person also due to samskara.

On a blank piece of paper, if you write with a pen, it is called a writing. In a blank life, when something is written, it is called samskara. Samskara is writing on our blank personality to shape it. We receive samskaras from many sources, including our past life. The maturity of the past life carries forward to this life in the form of samskaras. We receive samskaras from our family members as well: mother, father, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, cousins, grandparents etc. We interact with all these people and absorb a little bit of their nature. That is parental and family samskara.

Then there is religious samskara. If you have faith or you don't, if you believe or you don't, if you feel the need to connect with God, or you don't, that is the religious samskara. Whether you accept or reject it, this conditions your life for a long period. Similarly, the culture in which we grew up influences our character, our behaviour, our personality. This is cultural samskara. Countries also have their own samskaras. When we go from one country to another country, we have to live according to the systems of the country we migrate to, so we imbibe some new samskaras. Samskaras are just like writings in the mind, which shape your behaviour, attitude, thoughts, character, interactions, performance, and even your mental state, which may be either happy or sad as a result.

All these samskaras are absorbed by us, and taken in at an unconscious level. Therefore, we are never able to decide whether a particular samskara is the outcome of some understanding in this life or some other influence. 'What is this samskara that I am expressing now?' We don't even know that for sure. In the course of time, with the conditioning of the mind through the samskaras, we become fixed in one specific identity. Children are open to all samskaras, they are receiving inputs from everything, everywhere, all the time. They are open and free. However, as we grow up, and become more and more conditioned due to the samskaras we have imbibed, we are also creating our own character, nature, and personality, which is identified as the unique 'me', or this is what 'I' am.

Now, what is the meaning of *samskara*? It is a combination of two words. 'Sam' means collection of, and *akara* means a form or shape. So, *samskara* means that we are a collection of ideas in a particular form. This character, personality, nature, is a compilation or collection of ideas. It's true that we are always thinking and new things, ideas, thoughts, desires, passions, frustrations, ambitions, etc. are coming up all the time. We are constantly dealing with our own ideas and those ideas shape and govern our life. That is *samskara*.

How do you modify or develop better *samskaras*? Through *sankalpa*, affirmations, positive resolutions. If the mind is not capable enough to make a positive resolution, somebody can even tape it for you. One experiment that I often do with children when they sleep, is that I play a tape which has ten affirmations, such as, "I'll be creative, I'll be happy, I'll be friendly with everyone, I'll always have a positive attitude in life". Like this, record ten *sankalpas* and when they sleep, play them. The sound enters the mind and influences the subconscious, which then becomes active. Many children with bad habits have been helped with this practice. Many adults with seemingly unchangeable habits in life have also been helped through this process of *sankalpa*.

In the early days, I remember one particular person who would change the *sankalpa* every week in *yoga nidra*. Once I did ask, "Why do you change your *sankalpa* every week?" And she said, "Every week I fulfil my *sankalpa*. I used to be a chain smoker. I took a *sankalpa* not to smoke. In one week, the urge to smoke had gone. I used to drink from morning till night. One scotch every hour. I took a *sankalpa*, and now I don't have any desire to drink scotch. If I drink, I feel like vomiting." This person used to say so many things, even about money. "Oh, last week I did not have money, so I took a *sankalpa* that somebody should give me some money and I received some." Peculiar. However, I can understand and believe it, for I have also gone through similar experiences in life, and I've seen others go through similar experiences as well.

Through sankalpa, it is possible to modify and fine-tune the samskaras, to allow the positive aspects of the samskaras to govern human nature, rather than the negative, detrimental aspects taking over. Samskaras and sankalpa, they both go hand in hand. You can also take a sankalpa to become independent from the binding or conditioning of your limited thoughts and mind.

—15 August 2011

Can you tell us what is happening in your life and what you are doing? What has been your experience in this journey since you left your administrative role?

It is an interesting question for me too, and I reflect back to those events which started the ball rolling. In the month of July 2009, after celebrating Guru Poornima in Munger, I had gone to Rikhia for Sri Swamiji's darshan. I was there for a few days. Those few days in July 2009 have been important for my life. In those days Paramahamsaji outlined my life as to how I have to live. He said "Niranjan, I have given you sannyasa. And for forty years, from the age of ten, you have lived and worked as a yoga teacher, managing ashrams, opening ashrams, teaching yoga, working for the development of yoga, doing research in yoga, bringing yoga to every nook and corner where I had dreamt it. You have done that for forty years as a yoga teacher. You have had no exposure to sannyasa, I want you to stop your *parivrajak*, wandering life, your teaching and travelling life, and establish yourself in sannyasa to live the life of a paramahansa sannyasin. Your model has given good service for forty years now it is time to rest and other models of car have to ferry the passengers. Your model of car ferried the passengers for forty years. Well done. Now understand what sannyasa is, live like a paramahansa sannyasin in which tradition you have been initiated."

That was his personal guidance: stop travelling and adopt the sannyasin way of life. Then he gave another

guidance, direction, “While you are living your sannyasa life, establish the seat of sannyasa so that you propagate an alternative lifestyle.” In this manner, he gave the ideas for the establishment of Sannyasa Peeth. The guidance he gave over three days continuously is not something I can tell you in three paragraphs. He outlined a complete blue print for the development of my life as a sannyasin, and for the formation and creation of Sannyasa Peeth as the third mission of Swami Satyananda.

In 1963 he established Bihar School of Yoga, with the specific purpose to propagate the teachings of yoga and maintain the classical nature of yoga, yogic wisdom and understanding. We established in Munger, at Ganga Darshan, the yogic discipline, the yogic lifestyle, the yogic training. People come here to learn yoga. They participate in different courses, programs and classes. The outcome of yoga is a peaceful, tranquil mind. Sadhana has also been a tradition of Bihar School of Yoga, yoga education and yoga sadhana, combined with yoga propagation. For twenty years he worked for it.

When he left Munger and established himself in Rikhia, he brought in the components of *seva* and *samarpan*, service and dedication. The growth of Rikhia has been a festive growth. Events which inspire people to come out of their shell and connect with everyone else – *seva*, *samarpan* and *utsav*, festivals. The environment is such that when people go there, they become intoxicated by *seva*. They become part of the *seva* and they forget their personal hang-ups and inhibitions. The selfless attitude develops and manifests there naturally through service and dedication. All events are festive so there is no place for a sour face, in festivity everybody has to be happy and joyous. In Munger, you can see depressive faces as people come here for relief from their depression, in Rikhia you see festive faces on people who are engaged and involved in *seva*. The ambience is different. This is the opening of the heart which Paramahamsaji used to call attainment of *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself in

others. First attain the quietness of mind, then open your heart. That is how Munger and Rikhia came about. The development of the qualities of the head and expression of the qualities of heart using the three cardinal principles of our Paramguru Sri Swami Sivanandaji: serve, love and give.

The third aspect of Sri Swamiji's mission, Sannyasa Peeth, is giving samskaras, opportunities of satsang to rethink and re-analyze the mind and our aspirations in life – how we live, act and behave. So samskaras, satsangs and *jivan padhdhati*, alternate lifestyle, in which there is a balance of the material and spiritual aspirations. In this way, we cultivate the qualities of the hands, develop different skills, abilities, nature, character by understanding and balancing the external life with the spiritual life and live a better quality of life.

So *yoga shiskha*, yoga education, yoga sadhana and yoga propagation have been the tradition of Bihar School of Yoga. Service, the ability to come out of your shell and express the qualities of the heart, has been the theme of Rikhiapeeth, to experience oneness and union with the cosmos, the divine, your surroundings and people. That is the teaching of Advaita Vedanta, the cultivation of atmabhava, the ability to see yourself in other people just as you see your face in the mirror. Sannyasa Peeth represents the development of positive, creative, constructive samskaras in mentality, lifestyle and understanding. Head, heart and hands – is the combination of Satyananda Yoga.

If Paramahamsaji was here today, he would have started the new chapter of Sannyasa Peeth. The physical body has its own limitations and time frame, so the third vision was passed on to me. It does not mean that I isolate myself from everything. I left the administration of Bihar School of Yoga in 2008, yet I have not isolated myself from my commitments. I continue to work for yoga. Through the satsang series, we are bringing yoga to a level and spirituality to a level where we can understand and apply it and experience it in our own life. I continue to work for yoga and if I have to live sannyasa then I have to experience sannyasa too.

After Paramahamsaji gave the instructions in December 2009, he attained mahasamadhi. For one year I could not do anything. I was engaged in the rituals that have to be completed for a person such as Paramahamsaji, of that high calibre. There was no talk or no thought of what I would do or what would come about. I had taken a sankalpa that within a year of Paramahamsaji's Mahasamadhi the work had to start. I could not delay that work. Surprisingly, things happened in a miraculous way, and within a week, all the legal proceedings for the formalization of Sannyasa Peeth were complete. On 6th December, which was the first Samadhi anniversary of Paramahamsaji all the documents were signed and it was formally established with aims and objects. Another miracle took place that day which was like a confirmation – Yes, this is what I want done.

Last year 6th December was the first day of Sat Chandi Mahayajna and we were all there, participating in this great event. There was a skeleton crew in Ganga Darshan managing the place and they had instructions that on 6th December, the first anniversary of Paramahamsaji, the deepak had to be lit in Guru Peeth, the seat consecrated to the memory of our guru. The deepak had to be lit at the time when he had left his body. That was around 11.50 pm. The swamis who were on duty came, prepared Guru Peeth, and at the designated time, lit the deepak. After doing their pooja, while they were closing the door of Sri Peeth, they heard a sound. It was dark, with a few deepaks burning. They turned to look where the sound was coming from and saw Paramahamsaji physically walk out of Guru Peeth, go to Tulsi and do pranam to Tulsi at the exact time that he had left his body in Rikhia one year before. Then he walked back, entered and disappeared. This whole event took about 40 seconds: coming out, walking, doing pranam, offering prayers, walking back, entering, disappearing.

The swamis who witnessed it were frozen. They were not expecting to see this materialization. I got a phone call about what had happened in Guru Peeth. I said, "Yes,

it is bound to happen, for Munger is Swamiji's sankalpa. It is his place. Just as he spent twenty years in Rikhia he had spent twenty years at Munger. Munger represents the dedication that Paramahamsaji had for his guru's mandate. Paramahamsaji would not want his guru's mandate to fail, this is his commitment and that is what you have seen. He has shown himself to you. It is grace. We are all in Rikhia and you people are fortunate in Ganga Darshan to have had the experience, the vision – to have seen the physical presence of Paramahamsaji, the materialized body.

From that moment onwards my thoughts, mind, ideas, everything was clear. He had given his blessings and his sanction and expressed it with darshan, therefore, people were able to witness his physical presence one year after his Mahasamadhi. From that moment everything went smoothly, not a single hitch, either in my new routines or in the development of the ashrams in Ganga Darshan, in Rikhia and in Sannyas Peeth. Everybody feels the presence of the master, feels connected to the master, has that connection, awareness and feeling of oneness.

After that, I started with my sadhana. I took the sankalpa that this year from 1st January to 31st December, I would conduct for my understanding and development, and to perfect my own sadhana, the Durga Havan and chant 11,111 Durga Sahasranams. You can divide 11,111 by 364 – so many mantras have to be done daily. *Sahasranam* means one thousand names. One thousand names makes one round. With the assistance of the sannyasins I am doing that. That is my private sadhana, which happens early in the morning from 5 to 7:30 am, in Akhara. We have installed Mother Durga to worship her.

To understand my own sadhana and spiritual life, I travel to seek the grace of the divine in different temples and tirthas at different times. This journey to tirthas began for me with the first trip to Rameshwaram at the tip of South India. Rameshwaram has a special connection with Ganga Darshan. It was there that Paramahamsaji had the

vision of Ganga Darshan in 1950. He saw this place as it is today, just as in Tryambakeshwar he saw Rikhia. The vision of Rikhiapeeth that he had in Tryambakeshwar became his home.

When he had gone for darshan to the temple of Rameshwaram with his Guru Swami Sivanandaji, he had the vision of Ganga Darshan. Once it was constructed he remembered, “Yes, this was the vision I had.” When he saw the master plan he said, “Yes, this is what I had seen in 1950. At that time, I did not connect it to my life, now I realize that the vision which I had in Rameshwaram was an indication of my work.”

I went to Rameshwaram to experience the connection and seek the divine blessings for it is the only place that I know where my Paramguru and my guru have been together. I was reliving those moments of 1950 though at that time I was not even born. The sequence of my sadhana started from there and I travelled to many tirthas and had many experiences which I cannot describe. I can say I have experienced samadhi for the first time two months ago when I was in a temple in South India. Four hours felt like five minutes, I was in a different state of mind completely. Through these sadhanas, I am getting glimpses into things that my guru has spoken about and that I have spoken about for forty years of my life without knowing what I was talking about. What is meditation? What is samadhi? What is experience? What is psychic vision? What is connection? I am experiencing all this for the first time this year in my life.

Many indications have come wherever I have been. When I was sitting in the temple in South India going through that experience of consciousness, at that moment a deepak was burning here at Akhara continuously. It had not gone off. The grace is there. I feel proud, humbled and privileged. I can feel that grace in abundance and I do not know what I have done to deserve it – this is only a glimpse. I would have been happier doing my asana, pranayama, yoga nidra and meditation, thinking that I would achieve something in life

with it. This process of sadhana and sannyasa is opening my eyes to subjects that I have spoken about for forty years but never realized. My guru had full experience of it, he was an authority on it.

Today, I am experiencing what I spoke about in my lectures in the past. It fills me with joy that this is true and real, and I have been given the opportunity, time and space to do. This year has been the beginning of my sannyasa life and grace has been felt in abundance at Akhara, the Garden of Satyam, *Satyam Udyan*, the heart of Swamiji's mission. I gave him bhu samadhi in Rikhiapeeth on 6th December and he materialized at Ganga Darshan on 6th December. If that is not grace, then what is?

In 2010, I was going to Rikhia for the celebration of Guru Poornima. Before leaving, I came here, did pooja, lit the lamp and left. Without putting extra oil every day, the same wick, without blackening, burnt for sixteen days continuously, the time I was in Rikhia. If that is not grace, then what is?

A few days ago during monsoon, we lit deepaks all around. There was rain, the deepaks had gone out all over the ashram, except in Akhara in seven places deepaks were burning with rain falling on them. When raindrops fell on the deepak the flame got bigger. The oil was gone, the deepak was filled with water. Swamis who live here have seen it. For two hours there was a dance of flame and water, the monsoon pouring and the flames burning brighter and brighter with every drop that fell on them.

Every 5th and 6th of the month, when we remember Paramahamsaji, we do Rudrabhishek on 5th and Sri Chakra Abhishek on 6th, as the tradition of Ganga Darshan. On those days, miraculous sightings are seen here. Somebody took pictures of Sri Chakra and we saw clearly the face of Paramahamsaji as if he had manifested himself on the Sri Yantra.

Once when aarti was being conducted, somebody took a photo and we saw the ethereal body of Paramahamsaji doing pranam to the aarti. In the picture, with everyone else

sitting and this ethereal form in the exact human form was standing with hands held together and head bowed in front of the aarti while the aarti was being performed to Sri Yantra. When we see these things and are witness to all these events, the conviction, the faith is intensified. This is the result of a connection, if that connection was not there, who would see it?

My journey is that of a sannyasin. This year I have been involved in pilgrimages and anushthana here. From next year, for three years, I shall be fixed in one place and not move anywhere, not even to tirthas. By remaining fixed in one place, I do my sadhana that a paramahansa sannyasi has to do, and at the same time guide the activities of Sannyasa Peeth. As Swami Satyananda's successor I have to be equally responsible for all the three: Yoga Peeth, Rikhiapeeth and Sannyasa Peeth. Despite my isolation I am still connected to all three missions. My isolation is not from commitment, but from those conditions and situations which I do not need to associate with too deeply any longer.

What is an association? It is only discussing problems. When two people meet, what do they discuss? When somebody meets a sadhu what do they discuss? "Guruji, I have this problem, I have that problem." Only problems are discussed with Guru, only problems are discussed with a sadhu. A sadhu is not a rubbish bin for everyone. I played that role and now others have to play that role and carry the ball forward.

For a different learning, samskaras and understanding, you are most welcome. If you want to see me in private for this marital, financial or legal problem or to ask whether you should go to America or marry, you are asking the wrong person. You are the one with experience. You have to face it; you have to carry your burden. Use and apply your wisdom. Everything has been told. I am not retiring from my connection with all of you. I am connected with all of you, as long as you maintain connected with your commitment to spiritual life.

Eventually I have to prepare for panchagni also. This sadhana has been prescribed for paramahamsas. Whether I will succeed or fail that I do not know, I still have to tread the path. When you are walking a new road you do not know where the pitfalls, bumps and curves are. If you fall you have to get up and continue walking. I am observing myself as a sannyasin now. For the development of Sannyasa Peeth, different activities will begin next year. The first one which I have planned is preparing at least 108 sannyasins as an offering of one mala to the Guru Parampara.

In this sannyasa course, the classical, scriptural, scientific, practical and modern education will be given to the sannyasins. They may not become master of any, yet they will be ace of all. That is the hope that I have for the sannyasins. I do not want to prepare swamis who can break. Paramahamsaji said, “I want steel,” and steel is what I wish to offer him.

Those people who participate in this training have to be careful for I can already see there is going to be a large number of dropouts. We come to something out of infatuation, yet when we encounter the systems and the disciplines, rethinking begins. “Maybe this is not for me.” If that idea comes, you will be a reject. Therefore, an effort is going to be made to give an understanding of a lifestyle in which spiritual concepts, ideas and practices can be incorporated along with the modern practical, social lifestyle.

—19 August 2011

What is Sannyasa Peeth really about? What does it mean when you say that it will propagate the ideals of sannyasa, and who is it intended for?

Our paramguru, Swami Sivananda, used to say, “Why is there discontent and disturbance in life and why is there destruction of the social fabric leading to strife and grief? It is all due to an absence of samskaras in our life.” What are these samskaras? They are the building blocks of life.

Our guru, Swami Satyanandaji, said that when we are born into this life, we come with a blueprint. Nothing is manufactured without the blueprint. Before you manufacture a bicycle or a car, you make a blueprint. According to that blueprint of life, we come into this body and live our destiny and our karma. We take birth, educate ourselves, find a profession, have a family, have our moments of enjoyment, frustration and anxiety. Then we retire, become pensioners, and then we die. This is the visible blueprint of the majority of people, and what is seen in society. We see and focus on the structure only and forget that we have the option and right to decorate our building any way we want.

An architect, a builder, can give us an apartment of our choice; the decoration, furnishings, placement of the furniture is our decision. We are free to decorate our apartment the way we want. This is the aspect we overlook in the blueprint of our lives when we say everything is destined, pre-written. If there is suffering which we cannot accept, then we blame God. If we are successful, we thank God for this special grace. The point remains that we have the ability to decorate our life, our home the way we want, and we do not even know how to do that. Everybody is searching: "What is the aim of my life? What is the goal of my life? What do I need to do to feel satisfied, fulfilled and content? How can I discover peace and balance?" By cultivating the right samskaras.

As we get more and more materially oriented and involved, the samskaras become more aggressive, violent and gross, as that is the input the mind is receiving. From childhood, our parents tell us, "My dear, read, write and study well, become an officer, a doctor or an architect, earn a lot, gain name and fame, status and prosperity."

The conditioning of the human mind from birth is towards *kaama*, the fulfilment of ambitions and desires, and *artha*, the drive to acquire those things which give us security in life. Since the drive is only focused on artha and kaama, the mind is directed outward. Gradually the positive

samskaras decrease and the negative samskaras, the desires, selfishness and arrogance start increasing.

We all have them. If you do not have greed, jealousy, hatred, love, sympathy and compassion, this life is incomplete, yet rather than falling prey to the influence of these samskaras, we should be able to guide them. This is the spiritual teaching of generations of all times. Do not fall prey to the negative tendencies of the mind, instead guide and transform them so that they do not influence you negatively, destructively, detrimentally. When you are surrounded by your enemies, you tread carefully; in the same manner, protect yourself from these negative tendencies, avoid the pitfalls and try to be safe all the time. Then you will have the peace and balance that you seek.

The appropriate samskaras which nurture life are the virtuous ones, which enhance the expression of human nature and personality. There are two types of personalities. One type of personality is able to let go of things easily and they become the *tyagis*, the renunciates. Their baggage is non-existent as they have the ability to let go of whatever they receive. They do not cling to something for their safety and security. The other type is the accumulative personality, which likes to collect things. Their baggage becomes bigger and bigger.

Swami Satyananda had that ability to let go. He created all this, and then one day, he simply walked out of the gate as if he was just going for a walk, saying *Hari Om* to the swamis on the way. Nobody realized that he was leaving for good. He had the ability to acquire things and leave them spontaneously and naturally. Who can do that?

We build empires for our own safety and security, for the fulfilment of ambition and ego. The process of acquiring samskaras is different for people having differing personalities or natures. Of the two types of natures, one, the *grihasta*, the householder, accumulates, and the other, the *tyagi*, has the strength to leave behind the accumulated baggage. The people of society accumulate and are surrounded by their own belongings, and that is their life.

For some people, even leaving their family for one week becomes an ordeal of separation. Renunciation is also a normal behaviour for a specific type of personality, a tyagi, who can leave things behind.

For renunciates, we have thought of the three-year sannyasa training course. We will take them through the classical and modern understanding and training of sannyasa. That is only the beginning. In the course of time, other programs will start for children, post-retirement programs for the elderly, pre-death preparations and more, as these are the systems and techniques which allow us to experience a better quality of life. Today when people die, they are bound by their *vasanas* even in death. Why can't you untangle yourself from your *vasanas*, your passions, and experience a greater freedom? Leave behind the *vasanas*, which become the cause of your downfall and experience a different freedom, a different state. Take birth and live your life again. Live and die in the right manner, so that you experience the beauty that life has to offer.

I have seen the *mahasamadhi* of my own guru. He was not lying flat on a bed; he was seated in meditation. He called Swami Satsangi and said, "The time has come. God has given me my return ticket; I have to go now. I have the option to live longer, yet I choose this moment because if I go now, I know I will come back." Seated in meditation, chanting the mantra *Om*, he raised his *pranas* and left. These are things that we had only read about in books. We thought they were impossible, just a myth and existed only in imagination. Now we have seen with our own eyes how a person can wilfully call and accept death without being bound by the *vasanas* which hold us down to this earthly plane. It is not something that only *sadhus* can do. Everybody can do this if they have the right understanding and know how to become free of the *vasanas* and to go with a clear and free mind, and come back with the same mind. If the mind is not clear and free then we again have to work through imprints of *karmas* and *samskaras* on our consciousness when we are reborn.

These different capsules and programs will gradually become visible as Sannyasa Peeth develops. Gururji has given us this beautiful puzzle. Everything needed for the picture is already there, yet it is in a puzzle form. It depends on my ability to correctly pick out and place the different pieces of the puzzle. If I can do that, it will be the continuation of Paramahamsaji's work and mission. That is what I hope to become, an instrument which he can play any way he wants. This training does not mean that everybody will become a sannyasin; people will be equipped with certain skills to use in life, either as sannyasins or householders, to experience the transcendental and the higher, altered states of consciousness, and to live a harmonious social life externally.

—20 August 2011

What do you think about the internet?

As a science and technology of the modern age, it is good and it gives a lot of information, as well as the opportunity for global connection. For everything there is use and misuse, you cannot avoid it. We use and misuse even this body.

So it is not essentially bad?

It all depends how you apply or use it.

What do you think about Multinationals? In France they keep growing . . .

I am not a person who favours a global control of products and resources. I feel everyone should have a choice to interact in the manner they want. This global conglomerate phenomenon should stop. Before the European Union came into existence, every country used to have their farmers selling their produce in markets in the towns and cities. Now everything has to be the same size, the same brand and all over Europe it is the same. All the small farmers are finished. They

cannot do anything, what can they do? How will they survive? So the bigger these multinationals get, the harder it is for the lower strata to survive and when they cannot survive, there is always a revolution against the establishment.

In the Middle East it is happening like that, the Muslim uprising. It has also started in India and the fight between people and the government is quite bad. The blessing is we have not taken to shooting people, we still follow the ahimsa method. Otherwise India could easily have gone the Middle Eastern way today. Even Europe is going through a major crisis, people are not satisfied with the government, which is helpless and cannot do anything. Big businesses, companies, are constantly trying to use every opportunity to keep expanding. Whenever there is an opportunity, they are at the right place at the right time. It is the small people who have to be supported, like the farmers, tradesmen, small business owners and small entrepreneurs, that make up the majority in any society. It is not a good situation, yet there is still hope. To survive there has to be less of political manipulation and an increase in sympathetic understanding that recognizes the needs of everybody. Everything does not have to be packaged in a specific way, branded with the same label all across the continent and even the world.

There will always be something to balance this upheaval. If you get a cut, a boil or a rash, anywhere on your body, you take antibiotics immediately, which is a superficial remedy. If Mother Nature also starts to take antibiotics against humanity, then all the natural calamities and ecological disasters will start happening. All the holes that we have created inside the earth by extracting petroleum and gas, are going to collapse one day. Nature will make sure that the ecological balance takes place.

Our current situation is that we are living on top of the egg shell and sucking the egg dry from inside. In the end we will live only on the empty shell with all the resources gone. That is the picture of earth right now, the trees, the natural resources have been depleted. The oceans and rivers are

choked up with waste. There is no clean air left anywhere in the world, not even in the Himalayas. Everything is polluted, as the latest air sampling shows. Now there is no place left on earth which is free from environmental pollutants. The air is contaminated globally, even on top of Mount Everest. Somehow people never plan for the future, they plan only for the present.

However, there is an interesting theory that even as we are headed towards destruction, there is a group of people which can stop that from happening. This is an old theory about thought and counter-thought. For example, if we were to have a discussion and you said, 'This person is bad,' and I countered with, 'No, this person is good,' then there is a balance between your negativity and my positivity. There will be a balance between extreme negativity and extreme positivity in our discussion. In the same manner, if more people follow the principles of spiritual life, they can counteract the negative aspects or influence of material life. Sri Aurobindo used to say that if half of the population meditates and the other half does not, the meditators can influence the minds of the non-meditators. Everything creates an environment: fear, insecurity, hate, love, compassion. So, material attractions create an environment, and spiritual realizations also create an environment.

The positive thinking will balance the negative manifestations. For now, the positive still has some force, the negative is not that strong yet. Maybe twenty or thirty generations later, if we do not look after things now, the negative will become so strong that the positive will seem like a dream. "Oh I wish I was loving, compassionate and kind." Now everything is 'me', 'mine', and this mad self-centred, egotistical rush is going to increase, unfortunately, and therefore a balance has to be maintained between spiritual and material life. How that will happen is what we all should think about.

It is this balance of good and evil that has sustained humanity through the ages. Despite fighting, wars, problems

and calamities, it is due to this balance which has been maintained that we are surviving today. Ultimately, it all comes down to application. Nothing is good or bad in itself, it depends on intention and application. You may have a knife in your hand, with it you can kill a person, that is a negative application. With the same knife you can save somebody's life by doing a small operation and sucking poison out, or using any other positive application. So the knife itself is not bad, what is important is the intention behind its use.

So materialism itself is not essentially bad?

Definitely not, it is the artificiality in materialism that destroys the balance, as it uses everything in excess.

One metaphysical question . . . Do you think there is some force, some kind of consciousness behind that overuse? Is it just a process or is there something unified behind it?

It is an interesting question and I have been thinking about this for some time. Everything is an individual event, that is definite. For example, as you all walk out from here on this path, your eyes will all look at different things. None of you will see the same thing, although the view is always the same. She will look at one plant while you will look at something else. Then she will look at something else, while you look at the wall. For each individual, the event is independent and self-created. That is point one.

Consider the imprints of things on your mind. It is like connecting the dots as you move through life from one experience to another. These experiences connect, overlap and with this connection you gain maturity. You start to understand things better. For example, you can see how your actions have created problems for somebody, or how the actions of other people have created problems for you. That understanding begins to take place as one dot is linked to another, then another and another. This leads to mental maturity, and as these dots are linked a figure emerges. That

form is your character, your personality, which indicates how you perceive, how you react, what is your response, what you think about, what your desires and ambitions are. When our character or personality is negative and self-oriented, then the tendencies that manifest make us greedy and our only focus is on acquiring things like money, security, stability, comfort. The same personality can develop in a different way also, and you can express softer qualities rather than the hard, rigid ones.

When you are inclined towards the negative and destructive side, religion defines this as demonical, satanical, or destructive behaviour. The other approach is defined as godly, divine or transcendental. The human personality is actually a combination of vices and virtues, with vice on one side and virtue on the other. If vices are predominant, then it encourages devilish, negative, destructive, restricting behaviour. If virtue is predominant, then the behaviour is divine, uplifting, transforming and elevating. We have to consider what is predominant in our life: is vice stronger, or is virtue the driving force? If we are inclined towards goodness, then we always try to cultivate more virtues, which are mental states and patterns of behaviour.

—24 August 2011

Can you tell us about the yoga taught at Bihar School of Yoga?

From our understanding, yoga is a process of awakening and integrating the faculties of head, heart and hands. For us that is the aim and purpose of yoga. Therefore, at Ganga Darshan, we do not adhere to one specific aspect of yoga, like hatha yoga, raja yoga or any other yoga. We practise and teach an integrated form of yoga. This tradition started with our grandfather guru Swami Sivananda, it was further developed by our guru, Swami Satyananda, and the same tradition is being carried forward by future generations.

When you come to this ashram you will find three traditions. One is the tradition of yoga, the intergrated

yoga we call the Bihar Yoga tradition or Satyananda Yoga tradition. The second aspect that you will encounter here is the ashram tradition and the third aspect is the sannyasa tradition. These are three independent traditions, yet some people combine all the three. The people who combine the three are the residents and sannyasins of this place. People who adhere to the yogic tradition are the students of this place, for they come to learn yoga.

Yoga, ashram and sannyasa

Yoga has to be seen as a combination of different practices. When you cook, you have one kilo of vegetables, you put in maybe two litres of water, half a teaspoon full of salt and one quarter teaspoon of other condiments. When the ingredients are in the right proportion, the vegetable has a good taste. If you decide to put one litre of water to one kilo of vegetable and one kilo of salt and one kilo of condiments, the taste would be horrendous, and nobody would be able to eat it.

The same principle has to apply with yoga: we need the right percentage of hatha yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, and other yogas to make a nice tasty concoction. Only then we can practise and apply these principles of yoga in our life in the right quantity, and derive the real benefits of yoga.

This is a process of learning. The emphasis in learning is practice, and it is up to you how much you can practise. If you are not able to practise everything, at least learn about it so you have a clear concept and idea of what yoga stands for: the integration of the faculties of head or the intellect; heart or the emotions, and hands or performance. At the same time, we are working with the body, the mind and spirit to promote wellbeing. You will get a comprehensive learning in yoga. Let this be a journey for all of you to experience yoga as it has been envisioned by the masters of our lineage and tradition.

Secondly we have the ashram tradition. Many times people say ashram is like a community; yet we differ from that concept, for us it is a family. You should be able to

feel for the ashram just as you would feel for your home. If something is wrong in your home, you take the necessary steps to correct that wrong for you belong to that place, your home. In the same manner, if all of you want to understand ashram life, the ashram systems, structure and discipline, you have to belong; you are not a participant or a student, you belong to this place and are equally responsible for the ashram as we are. Together we can make an environment which is conducive to our spiritual development, mental peace and personal harmony.

The ashram structures and disciplines can be challenging at times for those who are not used to it. We are stiff due to our mind. If the mind can be made a bit pliable and flexible, then adjustment and accommodation becomes much easier. To derive the full benefits of the ashram, be flexible in the mind, learn to adjust, accommodate and accept the different situations and disciplines.

The disciplines and situations are geared to make us aware of ourselves. For example: we practise silence at mealtimes and from six in the evening to six in the morning. People wonder how they can remain without speaking. Try it and I am sure you will enjoy it. People who are not habituated to remain quiet and silent find those periods difficult as they are used to having verbal diarrhoeas; if you want to control the verbal diarrhoea practise mouna. That is an example of the ashram discipline. There are many other little things that are incorporated in ashram life and its structure.

The third aspect is the sannyasa tradition. Sannyasins have devoted and dedicated their life to the development of their own nature, to the promotion and propagation of yoga and to experimenting with the spiritual precepts in their own life, in whatever way they can. Seeing the sannyasins, who look nearly all the same with shaven head and geru clothes, do not think they are holy. We all come from the same background, culture and society. We all have our own natures, idiosyncrasies and habits. At the same time, there

is a yearning, an inspiration to discover the spiritual self and to commit ourselves to the realization of that spiritual nature. The sannyasins are making the effort to realize their own natures in whatever way possible. They have a different routine, lifestyle and system to what you will be exposed to during your stay.

Water the roots

Your focus has to be the learning of yoga. Through yoga you have to water the roots of your life which cannot be seen. When I was young, around the age of eight or nine, I had come to the ashram of my guru, Swami Satyananda, and he gave me the duty to look after the garden. After giving me the duty, he left the ashram for a tour lasting about ten days. At that time, the ashram was small there were only about three or four sannyasins living in the original ashram. Every day I used to go around the garden with care and consideration for all the plants, trees and shrubs. I used to spend practically all my day in the garden with the plants and trees.

After about ten days when my guru returned, he looked at the garden, and called me, "Have you looked after this garden as I had instructed you?" I said, "Yes." He said, "But everything looks a bit sick." I said, "I don't know why." He asked me, "How did you look after your garden?" I said, "Every day I would go with a cloth, clean all the dust from the leaves, broom the trunk of the tree, vacuum it, shine all the fruits until you could see your own face on the surface of the fruit, smell the flowers and if they had no smell put some scent on. That is how I looked after the garden, and see how shiny the fruits are and how smelly the flowers are."

He asked me one question, "Did you ever water the plants?" I said, "Is that necessary?" He said, "Yes, you do not have to do anything else. You do not have to clean the leaf, you do not have to shine the fruit, you do not have to put scent on the flowers. All you need to do is water the plants regularly." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because the roots are

under the ground.” I said, “What roots? I cannot see them.” He said, “You cannot see them because they are hidden under the earth yet through the roots the plant gets its nourishment. If you can water the roots properly the plant will be green, strong and healthy. The fruits will be good and sweet. The flowers will be nice and bright. If you do not water the plants, the tree will die.”

What he said to me at the age of eight remains with me until today. Every day I remind myself: water the roots of life. Yoga becomes a method by which we can water the roots of life to keep our life healthy and strong. This is the message of yoga that is given here.

I often have this yearning to come to the ashram and renounce, but still I have this attachment to home and family. I wondered how can I help to make this inner renouncement when I am at home?

I do not agree with the word renunciation; what exists is adjustment. Whether you are at home or not at home, you have to adjust with the new environment and situation. If you are able to adjust properly, you can say that you have renounced something and are well established in something else. Adjustment is more important than renouncing.

Secondly, there is no need to leave anything behind. Create a balance between your social obligations and spiritual inclinations. Live in the family, live at home, and from time to time come to the ashram to learn something more and receive further inspiration, then go back and apply what you have received in your home. In this way, you cultivate a balance between the external, social, material life and your spiritual inclinations.

According to yogic principles, wherever you are, cultivate the attitude of witnessing – at home as a mother, a working person, a wife or husband. What are my obligations as a mother? What are my obligations as a wife? What are my obligations as an individual? Be a witness to all and perform your duties and obligations in the spirit of karma yoga. The

spirit of karma yoga is doing everything for the first time and the last time. There is no repeat situation. When you do everything with the understanding and attitude that it is for the first and last time, you are giving your best to everything you do. The best care, the best affection, the best love, the best sympathy, the best service.

With the witnessing attitude, you will also come to a point where you can be free of the personal, emotional and mental attachments to people and different things in the world. That detachment is not aloofness, it is not even distancing yourself from sources of attachment, rather it is knowing your own obligations, commitments and duties without personal involvement, like a doctor who treats many patients with the same sentiment. Therefore, there is a rule that doctors cannot treat their own family members as their attachments will come into play. If they can remain objective and bring out the best of their creativity, everybody is helped. That is the attitude one should have. Fifty per cent home, fifty per cent spiritual life. Cultivate the witnessing attitude which will lead to detachment from obsessive emotional and mental attachments. Realize your commitments and duties and bring in the concept of karma yoga to fulfil those obligations.

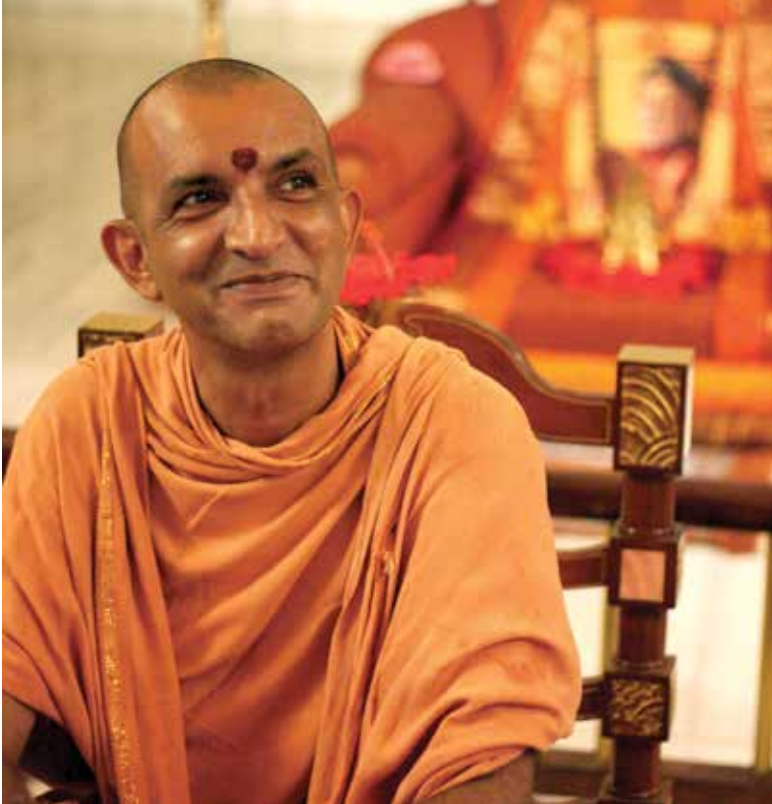
Swamiji, could you speak on the three-year Sannyasa Training course that will start in 2012?

Sannyasa is an old tradition of this country where people are inspired to discover their spiritual nature. Sannyasa training is not a classroom training, although we are also going to give such training. Sannyasa training is based more on the guru-disciple relationship. Sannyasa recognizes that we all begin our journey at different stages of evolution. We are not at the same level of evolution, not a single one of us is at the same stage. As human beings we are unique and in the evolutionary process too we are uniquely placed.

Therefore, there is no official syllabus. In this training of sannyasa, we shall be working through the various branches

of yoga, learning about them, perfecting them. Relevant yogic and spiritual scriptures will be studied and an attempt will be made to understand them. The different traditions of India such as tantra, Vedanta, Samkhya will also be looked into. It will be a comprehensive course, not with the intention to make you a master of one, but to make you an ace of all. Tantra is definitely part of our studies as yoga is part of tantra. In society people only know of the *dakshinachara* and the *vamachara*, the right and left hand path of tantra. Apart from these there are many other aspects of tantra such as *siddhantachara*, *samayachara*, *vedachara*, *yogachara*.

—25 September 2011



NAVARATRI

28 September to 4 October 2011

The Durga energy, responsible for change and transformation, is divided up into many different classifications.

Kali

The first vision and manifestation of Durga' is Kali. Kali represents the state of *tamas*, darkness, ignorance, the conditioned self, the self who is subject to causality, time, space and object. Kali is limiting the transcendental nature of being into a recognizable identity of name, form, object and idea. Kali is the power of time in which eternity is perceived as past, present and future. We, as individuals, are subject to the Kali time effect. Time is not only in the watch, but also exists in the mind. The experience which you have now, after a few days will become an experience of the past. Time exists in the mind as the present experience and past experience, and the future, projected experience. The *Kali Gayatri* is:

*Om kaalikaayai cha vidmahe, shmashaana vasinylai dhimahi,
tanno aghoraa prachodayaat.*

This is a mantra of the power of time. Though from a religious perspective people say Kali is part of a religious belief system, the mystical traditions of tantra define Kali as the mistress, the controller of time, *kaala*. Kali is the experience of limited time, of the impermanence of everything; nothing is permanent in this life. We age from the time we are born until the time we die. Our bodies change, our mind changes, our perceptions change, our attitudes change, our behaviours change, our associations change, our understandings change. This is the Kali effect where the permanent state of equilibrium and bliss is divided into momentary experiences; eternity is perceived as past, present and future.

The impermanence of everything is defined as *shmashaana-vasinylai dhimahi*. *Shmashaana* means cremation ground, where

everything is burnt. At the end of life too, the body is burnt and becomes ashes. The body is not permanent. Where the impermanence of life is recognized and understood, there the mistress of time resides and is *aghora*. *Ghora* means heaviness, and *aghora* means not heavy, lightness. The mind is heavy, the expectations, the desires, all weigh a lot on the human mind. It is this weight that we carry in our life from the time we are born until the time we die. Removing weight from the mind and making us light and free from the associations of the sensory world and sense objects is the Kali power, the Kali effect.

Mantras are words of power, words of vibration. Vibration has a deep and subtle influence on the human psyche and we feel vibrations from many things. Even when we interact with each other, we pick up vibrations from each other. When you are passing somebody on the road and they have high and strong energy, you can feel that energy as you pass a stranger.

The human mind is like the antenna of a radio. There are radio waves in the air yet we cannot see them. With a radio we can pick up a channel, a frequency, a station, and listen to the radio which actualizes the invisible radio waves into sound. In the same manner, the mind is like a radio. Mantras act like a tuning fork for the mind. When the right mantra is chanted, the right vibration, frequency and pitch are created. That right vibration then harmonizes itself with the cosmic frequency. Mantra becomes the link between the vibrations that exist in the mind and those that exist in the cosmos. Mantras act like a bridge. When we chant the mantra, we are actually coming out of the shell of the mind and trying to access the cosmic energy, shakti. Mantras are an important part of each Navaratri.

Symbols

The Chandisthan temple, whose symbol is *ajna chakra*, the third eye, has a special connection with the yoga movement and Ganga Darshan in Munger. The shakti is represented as the all-seeing eye. Some people say that the Indian belief is

ritual and idol worship, and they do not accept the concept of idol worship. There has been lot of debate on this subject. The prevalent belief in India has been that you can see divinity in any form you choose. You can perceive the cosmic power, consciousness, in any form – whatever form you identify with, develops an association with it.

Once upon a time, Swami Vivekananda was visiting a palace. The king, in the course of discussion with Swami Vivekananda mentioned to him, “I do not believe in the so-called idol worship. I believe it to be a total waste of time, and society is deluded by such practices.” Swami Vivekananda listened with great interest and he asked the king, “Do you have anything that you identify with or worship in this palace?” The king said, “No, I am against all that. I do not believe in faith. I do not believe in religion. I do not believe in God. I do not worship God in any form.” Swami Vivekananda said, “Fine it is your choice and others have made their choice.”

Then, Swami Vivekananda pointed to an oil painting hanging on the wall of the palace and asked the king, “Who is in that oil painting?” The king said, “He is my father, and the oil painting beside him is my grandfather, and the third oil painting beside that is of my great grandfather. We have come from a long line of illustrious kings.” Swami Vivekananda took the king closer to the paintings. He said, “Do you really see your father, grandfather and great grandfather in these paintings?” The king said, “Yes.” Swami Vivekananda said, “This is only a canvas. How can it be your father? Some colours are splashed on the canvas, and you identify that splash of colour and the figure emerging as your father, grandfather and great grandfather.” The king said, “Right.”

Swami Vivekananda said, “Deface these images.” The king became angry and said, “How dare you ask me to deface the images I respect and whose memory I cherish?” Swami Vivekananda said, “All that is in front of you is a piece of canvas with colours painted on it. You are identifying it

as something you associate with, remember, respect and honour. You identify with what you see in it. A third person, who does not know who these images represent will have no respect for them. For you these images have a meaning and purpose. In the same manner, when people are able to witness the existence of divinity in every object, whether it be a tree, a stone, themselves, or an image up in heaven, they develop an association, an identification with that form which they have perceived, and they honour and respect that form.” The king said, “Yes, you are right, you have opened my eyes to wisdom.”

You perceive reality as you need to see it at a particular time. When you see that reality in the manner you wish to see, you develop a kinship, an affinity, a relationship and that image comes alive. This is a statement of quantum physics: How can you energize a stone? The answer given is, if you carve a statue, a figure out of this stone, it will always have a place of honour in your home and hearth. If you just leave the stone on the road, it will be trampled upon by many. The stone out of which you carve an image of your liking has a place of honour and you derive satisfaction, pleasure and happiness by seeing that image.

Durga

The Durga energy also is the power of *tamas*. Durga is the *shakti*, the expressive power of *tamas*, which indicates a positive and a negative attribute. Of the powers and attributes of *maya*, the cosmic power, *kalaa* is number one. *Kalaa* means ‘creative expression’. The creative expression *kalaa* is used as a veiling power over the creative abilities of the individual’s consciousness and limits or restricts the freedom of action. You may wonder why a creative thing restricts the freedom of action. The purpose of a door is to shut things in, not to open but to shut. If the purpose of a door was to remain open, you would not need a door.

Is the door good or bad? It is fulfilling a purpose, a role. In the same way, the *kalaa* aspect fulfils a role – it shuts down

the unlimited capacities of the consciousness to limited abilities which we can utilize to survive in this world of senses and sense objects. It is described as 'creative expression', for when you are functioning in a limited role or area, then whatever you do, you try to do it in the best manner possible. You try to increase that limited creativity into maximum creativity.

The five *kanchukas* or aspects of Shakti are: *kalaa* limits the power to do all; *avidya* limits the power to know all; *raga* creates like and dislike; *kaala* creates the notion of time; and *niyati* limits freewill. These *kanchukas* have beautiful names, yet they all restrict the expression of energy and consciousness and make it usable. It is like restricting the mega wattage of electricity to a usable form of 220 volts or 110 volts. The transformers restrict the input and output of power: 11,000 volts comes into one transformer and it is restricted to 440 volts. The 440 goes to another transformer and is restricted to 220. The 220 goes to another transformer and again it is restricted to 110. Is the transformer good or bad? You need a transformer to use the 11,000 watts that is being supplied from the generating station in your home. Durga represents the power of the manifest dimension and the experiences that you go through in that dimension.

Swami Sivananda asked "Why is there suffering in life? Why is there suffering in the world? Why is there suffering in society?" The reason is bad habits which cause strife, anxiety and tensions in life. I do not mean bad habits in terms of smoking, drinking and indulging in other pleasures. They are natural expressions of life. 'Bad habits' means the conditioned qualities leading to expectations, as the non-fulfilment of those desires results in responses of elation, depression, anxiety, frustration, tension, conflict, confusion. This is created by Durga as we interact with our life and the world.

You do not have to plant weeds in the ground to grow them. Wherever there is soil, there is going to be a weed,

whereas you have to make an effort to plant grass. You do not have to make any effort to plant weeds, they will grow naturally, but you have to give care and protection to grass. In the same manner disturbances, distractions and distresses arise automatically in life. We fall prey to their influence, and the head, heart, behaviour and actions are disturbed. That is the Durga involvement in the world.

Only when you feel yourself to be drowning in the water of distress and tension, do you cry out for help. When you cry out for help the positive aspect of Durga takes over, the *sankalpa shakti*, the will to come out of that grotty and difficult situation. You make the extra effort to come out of that situation and become more stable and firm in life.

Durga is the creator of obstacles and one who allows you to become free from obstacles. Durga is the creator as the personal nature and the environmental nature is her power, expression and manifestation. If everything happens systematically, then there is happiness. If the seasons of the world come and go in time, everything will be perfect. If there is discrepancy in the coming and going of seasons, nature will be affected. If in the mind there is the right time to experience happiness and right time to experience suffering, everything is fine. When these two try to superimpose and enter into conflict with each other, further tension is created.

Therefore, Durga represents the energy of *tamas*. The *sadhana* while we celebrate the Durga *shakti* has to be of transforming the limiting qualities of life to develop immunity from negative tendencies that express and manifest in life. Can we become immune to the influences of hatred, jealousy, anger, frustration, love, affection, sympathy and compassion? Or will they forever continue to pull our mind first in one direction, then in the other direction, again and again?

Durga is the power, the force of the conditioned self. This transformation to develop immunity from the influences of situations, circumstances, emotions, ideas and thoughts is

the trademark of Durga sadhana. We practise eradication of vices, difficulties and distresses which are naturally inherent in life by developing awareness, contemplating through meditation, and mantra. Then we access the peaceful self and not the disturbed self, heaven is within and hell is also within.

Whether you live in heaven or hell, depends on how much rent you are able to pay. If you have good money, you can stay in five-star hotel or heaven. And if you have no money, then you stay in an empty hovel or hell. The sadhana of Durga is dedicated to awaken and tap into the Durga power, to eradicate vices and develop immunity from circumstances, situations and ideas which give birth to the negative traits of personality.

Reforming habits

Habit is conditioning which restrains and limits the expressions of the individual. In the conditioned state of being, eventually stagnation takes place as nothing new is being generated and developed. The doors of the brain and perceptions shut and one enters into deeper *tamas* – despite having knowledge and understanding, one enters into deeper *tamas*. This is a statement of the *Ishavasya Upanishad*: *Andham tamaha pravishanti*. Those people who are ignorant, they are in the darkness anyway, but those people who know and after knowing shut the doors of perception, enter greater darkness. And this conditioning manifests in the outer life as habit.

Habit is something that you cannot change easily. The word habit is written, h-a-b-i-t. If you take out the letter ‘h’, ‘a bit’ remains. If you remove the letter ‘a’, ‘bit’ remains. If you remove the letter ‘b’, ‘it’ remains. So no matter how hard you try to eradicate a habit, a conditioning, ‘it’ always remains. The greatest danger of life according to the *Ishavasya Upanishad* is that you fall into a deeper pit.

Visualize a plot of virgin land, where no construction has taken place; no growth has taken place, no human effort has

ever gone into developing that land. You will find different plants, shrubs, trees, everything will be there. On the ground, instead of good green grass, you will find patches of weeds and thorns.

When you have not worked the earth, the natural output from the earth is weed and thorn. The seeds of weed and thorns are contained within the soil itself. The seed of grass is not there – this you have to plant. Then if we do not cut the grass for six months, weeds will eventually replace the grass. If we do not look after the garden, weeds will come. Just as weeds and thorns are an inherent part of soil, the limiting tendencies, in form of ‘kalaa’, restricted actions, become part of your life experience. The five functions of maya then regulate the soil – thorns and weeds come up, bacteria germinate and spread as that is the condition of tamas.

When you make the effort to change the quality of the soil, you first have to clean the space. You have to pull out the weeds and thorns. You have to kill them. You have to destroy them. In this process of removing and destroying the weeds, you have to fight against them. You have to pull them out while they try to retain their grip on the ground. There is struggle between you and the weed. The weed does not come out just because you desire it to; you have to yank it out. Sometimes the roots are so strong that you pull out only the top green bit and the roots remain.

We have to recognize that there are impediments, restrictions and weaknesses in life which do not allow us to discover the state of creativity and peace, to develop, expand and grow as we are destined to and would like to. With this recognition, an effort is made to change our basic character, nature and quality. The positive application of our energy to fight against the negative is the appropriate use of the Durga element.

There are two theories: One says, “Accept everything that comes to you.” If you become negative in life, recognize that you have become negative in life and accept it. Then the problem is that you remain negative all the time. Acceptance

is fine, provided you are willing to sacrifice your optimism and positivity to remain negative. However, when you recognize that negativity is coming up and you make yourself immune to their effect and maintain your balance, positivity, optimism and clarity, then you are actually creating a barrier between yourself and the negativity; it does not affect you. By cultivating greater strength, you will be able to pull out the negativity from its roots. That is the Durga power, the transformation of tamas, the transformation of conditioned habits, nature, behaviour, attitude, mentality. This is how we have to work on tamas in life. The conditionings have to improve. Do not try to eradicate them, but try to make them better.

Lakshmi

Once you have pulled out the weeds and the unnecessary stuff, you have to prepare the ground to plant different seeds of small plants, large plants, flowers, fruits and grass. You can make that piece of land beautiful by planting the appropriate seed in the garden. The plantation of right seed is the Lakshmi energy and trait. She bestows wealth, happiness and prosperity. Durga is for change and Lakshmi is to bestow prosperity and plenty.

To attain prosperity and plenty, you have to apply the right tools, you have to plant the right seed in the ground, the right sankalpa has to be taken, the right attitude, perception, understanding, acceptance, knowledge and clarity has to develop. When the grace of Lakshmi comes, the mind has to take a rebirth from what it was before to what it should become. The land which was barren in the beginning, takes on a new birth, the desired shape you have visualized. It is the rebirth of the land.

In one remote area, one hard-working farmer acquired a piece of land which was barren. He worked hard and converted that land into a beautiful garden. The fame of that beautiful garden spread far and wide. Many people from different parts of the country came to see how this beautiful garden was created out of nothing. One day, a priest came to

see the garden, and he was so impressed by the beauty of the garden that words tumbled out of his mouth, “How beautiful is the Lord’s creation!” The farmer who was showing the priest around says, “No. This is my creation. You should have seen this piece of land when the Lord owned it. It was barren. He had left it to its original shape and condition, without trying to make a beautiful garden. He left nature as it was created.”

In life we are living our nature as we are created. If we are willing to accept that, no need to come to yoga, spiritual life, ashram or religion. No need to develop any thoughts, philosophies, ideas – just enjoy yourself, yet if you want to beautify this piece of land which you have been given, you have to apply the power of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati.

Lakshmi is the deity of planting the positive, uplifting, virtuous, benevolent and creative seed in life. How can I become a better human being? How can I excel in what I do? How can I overcome the limitations and conditionings when I want to excel in something and they become overpowering? See the faults and cracks in the mind, and try to repair, then the right sankalpa has to be taken. When the right inputs are given, consciousness evolves.

Nobody can make the choice for you. The choice which you make will make you comfortable. When you go to the shop to search for creative and positive seeds to plant, choose the best ones and plant them as thoughts, sankalpas and ideas which will develop in the course of time. After planting, protect the thought, idea, attitude, understanding, belief and know each plant. They are still tender and small. Until they grow big and strong, you have to protect your intention. You have to protect your sankalpas, from the influence of friends, family, environment, society and culture. Maintain awareness and watch the growth of that seed into a small plant.

Until the seeds sprout from the barren ground, you are in the grace of Lakshmi. The flowers and the fruits will come. When you are ready to reap the benefits of your past efforts, then Saraswati begins.

Lakshmi is the bestower of prosperity. People consider prosperity to be material, yet it is not a permanent attainment in life. In material prosperity, even though you may be a multimillionaire, you will always live in the fear of an income tax raid. Therefore, it has to be understood that in the process of attainment of material prosperity, people always make mistakes.

Material prosperity is not what Lakshmi gives to us, as it would be creating more tension and problems in life. If you acquire spiritual prosperity first, every other form of prosperity will naturally come to you. If you acquire material prosperity, other prosperities will not come to you. You will not have mental and spiritual peace. The grace of Lakshmi will come naturally provided you have attained spiritual prosperity first.

To attain spiritual prosperity, we have to make the effort to cultivate positive, creative and uplifting samskaras. Samskaras are cultivated by planting the right thought and impression at the right time in the mind. You can only plant seeds in certain seasons. We do not plant any seed in mid-winter, it is not going to grow. You plant the seed when the climate is appropriate for the growth of the root and shoot. In the same manner, the sankalpa in life has to be planted at the right time. It is not something that you can do any day and every day. If you want to eradicate vices and cultivate virtues, there has to be the appropriate time, the right climate and season in the mind and in relation to influences that come to us from the stars.

The last mantra in the *Lakshmi Ashtottarashat Namaavali*, the 108 names of Lakshmi, is *Bhuvaneshwaryai namah*. *Bhuvaneshwari* means 'She, who resides in the world'. The grace of Lakshmi is palpable and receivable. It is not abstract. This grace of Lakshmi can be attained when we are able to observe, analyze our own limitations and weaknesses and we try to improve our personal character, behaviour and mentality. That is the Lakshmi sadhana.

Before sleeping, think of something positive and creative to cultivate in life, as your aspiration, not as a mere thought,

but as an inspiration. We take many resolutions during New Year, yet within one week we have forgotten what resolution we have taken. That happens because intensity is not there. It is only a floating thought that crosses the mind. When you are able to have intensity in thought, it becomes inspiration, motivation, and something you truly desire enters your life as a process of becoming and being. Initially, you have to make the effort to become, and at the end you are what you worked to become. Start the process today. Take a positive thought and develop intensity and let that thought become an inspiration and motivation to improve your life.

Saraswati

Durga comes in as the power of *tamas* to cleanse the ill effects of *tamas*, remove the weeds and thorns from the ground and prepare the ground for planting new seeds. Once she has completed the job of cleaning the land, the Lakshmi power comes in. She plants the seeds in the ground and protects the seeds from outside influences and destruction. When the seeds sprout and become a plant, the Saraswati energy comes in. She represents bliss, peace, knowledge and the understanding that everything has gone well and all the right plants are now coming up. With this knowledge and understanding, there is greater peace in the minds of people.

Saraswati is also considered to be the goddess of learning, wisdom and speech. When you speak the appropriate words which uplift another being, that is the effect of Saraswati. When you speak the improper, critical words, Saraswati is not there in your life. The word *Saraswati* is composed of two different ideas, *sa*, meaning with, *ras* meaning taste and *vati*, the feminine power which is full of the taste. What does this indicate?

Every experience in life is a taste of life, pleasure and pain, happiness and difficulties. The understanding we derive gives us an experience, an impression or the taste of life. Whatever we experience should lead to further development of knowledge. One should learn from mistakes

to ensure that those mistakes are not repeated again. People keep on making the same mistake over and over again due to a closed mind. When you make the same mistake over and over again, it is the lack of grace of Saraswati. When you can learn from one mistake and ensure that it is not repeated, that is the grace of Saraswati. Learning and knowing has to convert into wisdom. You know many things, read many things and study a lot, yet how much of what you know are you able to apply in your life?

You can have a vast source of knowledge in your mind, yet if you are not able to apply that knowledge and understanding, knowledge remains knowledge only. When knowledge is applied and becomes part of your expression it is called wisdom. This is the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is to know; wisdom is to apply what you know.

Saraswati is the goddess of learning, wisdom and communication. She is the goddess of all arts, science, music, dance, intellectual subjects. Anything that we go through, the process of knowing is the Saraswati effect. In our life the sadhana of Saraswati is to convert what we know into action, convert knowledge into wisdom. If we can do that then we can derive the full benefit of the Saraswati effect.

In one pond there were three fish. They were like the patriarchs of the pond. One fish was called *Ekbuddhi*, meaning one intelligence. Another fish was called *Shatbuddhi*, meaning hundred. The third fish was known as *Sahasrabuddhi*, thousand. It indicated the level of their knowing. Ekbuddhi knew one subject, Shatbuddhi knew one hundred subjects and Sahasrabuddhi knew one thousand subjects.

One day, as they were lazily swimming on the surface of the lake, they heard the fishermen say, "Tomorrow we are going to cast our net here in this pond. The fish look big and ready to be eaten." All the three fish called their tribe together and said, "Listen, we have heard that tomorrow the fishermen are going to cast the net. So it is time that we make ourselves safe."

All the fish asked Ekbuddhi, the single-skilled fish “What are you planning to do to save us?” He said, “Well, my belief is that if they are going to cast the net we are going to get caught. So I feel that we should move to some other part of the lake tonight itself and become safe.” Shatbuddhi, the one with a hundred ideas, said, “Listen, we don’t have to worry about the net. I can find one hundred ways to save ourselves. There is no cause to worry. Let us live our life happily.” The thousand-buddhi fish said, “Don’t worry, the nets cannot harm us in any way. I know one thousand ways in which to escape the net. So everybody go to sleep in peace.”

The verdict was two against one. All the fish said, “All right, the two patriarchs have much more knowledge than the single-buddhi fish. Let us all go to our cove and sleep.” All the fish went to their niche and closed their eyes for the night. This single-buddhi fish was worried. He said, “Why do people not listen to me? Anyway, since they have decided that they are going to stay, it is time that I make myself scarce.” He swam away to another corner of the lake, all alone.

In the morning the fishermen came, cast the net and all the fish were caught in the net. As they were dragging the net onto the boat, the single-buddhi fish came to see what was the fate of his friends and family. The hundred-buddhi fish was doing one hundred pirouettes, trying to come out of the net but was unsuccessful. The thousand-buddhi fish was going through a thousand pirouettes and could not come out of the net. Everybody looked at the single-buddhi fish and said, “How come you are free?” Single-buddhi fish said, “I applied my logic, understanding and knowledge.”

This is a story yet it indicates that you can become knowledgeable about many things, however you need to apply one item of that knowledge and convert it into wisdom. Ultimately, it is the wisdom which saves the individual, not knowledge.

There is another story. There was a boatman who used to ferry people across a river. One day, a learned person came

to the shores of the river and said, "I want to go across." The boatman started to row the boat. A little distance from the shore, a big thunderstorm came up. It built gradually and while it was building, the boatman and the passenger were having a discussion.

The learned man asked the boatman, "Have you studied scriptures?" The boatman said, "No, I have not studied any scriptures." The learned man said, "Well, by not studying any scripture, you have lost twenty-five percent of your life." A little while later he said, "Have you studied any sciences?" The boatman said, "No, I have not studied any science. I am a simple boatman." The learned man said to the boatman, "Well, you have lost another twenty-five percent of your life. That means fifty percent of your life is worthless. Now tell me, have you learnt any trades or skills like painting, art, poetry, all that?" The boatman said, "No, sir. I am a simple, uneducated person. From where will I get the resources and the time to study?" The learned man said, "Well, you have lost another twenty-five percent of your life, seventy-five percent of your life is totally worthless."

In the meantime, the thunder grew in strength and intensity and the boat was rocking, left and right, as if it was going to capsize. The boatman saw a big wave coming towards the boat and knew that the boat was going to capsize, so he asked the learned man, "Sir, do you know how to swim?" The learned man said, "No, I don't know how to swim." The boatman said, "One hundred percent of your life is gone!" He jumped in the water and swam to safety while the learned man drowned.

The moral of the story is, 'Apply what you know'. This application is the grace of Saraswati, the blessing of Saraswati, whereby you attain mastery over vidya. During the last three days we have observed the *aradhana* or worship of Saraswati which brings learning, wisdom, creativity, intuition and establishes us in the state of *sattwa*, the pure state of mind, consciousness.

Adishakti

The common word for God in Hindi is Bhagavan. *Bhagavan* means the energy that is inherent in all the five elements of creation. *Bha* represents *bhumi* or the earth, *ga* represents sky or *gagan*; *va* is air, *vayu*; *a* is *agni*, fire; and *n* is water, *neer*. The word Bhagavan in Hindi means the presence of energy and of consciousness in all the five elements. It is in that spirit that Navaratri is celebrated.

All the mantras chanted, the 108 names of Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga during Navaratri, contain the all-pervasive nature and quality of the divine. Mahadurga, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati are the three aspects of Adishakti. The divine nature is all-pervasive. Just as air is all-pervasive, there are no defined boundaries of the air, it surrounds the whole world, the whole planet Earth and it is a universal element. In the same manner, Shakti is a universal element pervading, permeating the entire creation and we live in that. There is a beautiful statement in the *Ishavasya Upanishad* (Mantra 1):

*Isha vasyamidam sarvam yatkincha jagatyam jagat,
Tena tyaktena bhunjeetha ma gridhah kasyasvid dhanam.*

All that exists in this ever-changing universe is the abode of the Lord (in which the Lord resides). Enjoy whatever the Lord gives you. Do not covet, for whose indeed is wealth?

This world is the abode of God, all the pleasure and all the pain is created by God, therefore live happily and enjoy the creation. Whether you are in happiness, contentment, pleasure, enjoy that state. Whether you are in pain, suffering, conflict, enjoy that state, knowing that each state is only temporary and it will pass. Therefore, continue to enjoy your life, accepting it as a gift of God.

This statement of the *Ishavasya Upanishad* illustrates the pervasiveness of that divine energy which we are trying to experience in our lives, through invocation of the three

inspirational forces which can ferry us across this ocean of life. The power of transformation is Durga, the power of contentment and wellbeing is Lakshmi, and the power of wisdom and purity is Saraswati. If we can strive to awaken these three aspects, these three skills within us, we become the recipient of divine grace.

With that belief Navaratri is celebrated all over the country. The eighth day, is supposed to be an important day. People who follow the Navaratri anushthana and sadhana stay up the whole night doing their sadhana, as tonight is the most important and auspicious day.

The last day of Navaratri coincides with the samadhi day of our guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji. He was a unique individual. That uniqueness was seen at the time of death. One can be knowledgeable, great in life, recognized and achieve a lot of name and fame, the mind-set with which one lives indicates one's character in life, yet for a yogi, the final ascent in life is the samadhi state.

We have heard in the past of yogis who could raise their pranas in the state of samadhi and merge with the higher consciousness. Ancient rishis and yogis, in their last moment, used to sit in a meditative posture, breathe in, pull up the pranas and take out the soul from the top of the head, consciously and wilfully. We had not seen such an event happen in the last two, three centuries; in the life of Paramahamsaji, our guru, we experience this final state of samadhi.

On 5th December 2009 at ten o'clock he made a phone call and said, "I am going to leave my body today." When people went to his room they saw him sitting in meditation and he talked to them normally, "Now the time has come for me to depart." In meditation itself he breathes in, chants his mantra, pulls the pranas up, and is gone. The most beautiful, the most serene and most high state of death is *mahasamadhi*.

That was on 5th December 2009 and then on 6th December 2009, we placed him on the lap of Mother Earth

who received him with joy for she was also truly blessed to receive such a person in her fold, who had lived the precepts of yoga and who had lived as per the traditions of rishis and sannyasins of the highest calibre. Therefore, Shiva, consciousness, and Shakti, energy, are invoked and worshipped on 5th and 6th of every month.

The *Sri Yantra* represents the process of creation, as conceived from the tantric perspective of the Shakti tantras. Each level represents one dimension of existence, one dimension of perception, one dimension of knowledge. Each triangle represents an activity of the energy in the manifest and in the unmanifest world. That energy contains both aspects: the *ghora*, the intense, and the *soumya*, the benevolent. The power of Shakti when it is intense can become destructive, limiting and from our perspective, negative. What we think is negative in relation to our knowledge and understanding may not be negative from the cosmic point of view. Therefore, we do not call it *kharaab*, bad, we call it *ghora*, the fearsome, intense aspect of the Shakti, which can churn up a lot of things and be quite an intense force to clear the mind.

Whenever you have to clear something, whenever you have to clean something, first you raise a cloud of dust. When you are sweeping, you are raising a cloud of dust. When you are cleaning a pot in which food has been cooked for a long time, all the black comes up first. At the time of cleaning all that is gross comes up, and that is the *ghora*, the detrimental, the negative aspect. Once it is cleaned, what remains behind is the pure and the clear, the *soumya* aspect. Every manifestation of energy, every manifestation of consciousness has these two aspects: *ghora*, the intense, and the *soumya*, the gentle. We have to move from the *ghora* towards *soumya*, from *tamas* to *sattwa* and that is the journey of life as per the views and understandings of the sages.

Today we have done *abhishek* with five colours, with five items to Devi. First Ganga water, for Ganga has always represented the energy or source of purity. Indians believe

strongly that by bathing in the Ganga, sins are washed away. This is an intense faith, an intense belief that they feel. If the feeling is intense, then maybe what they desire also happens, we don't know. Ganga water represents purity; *bhasma*, ashes, represents the transient nature of the world; sindoor, the red colour, represents the power of shakti; turmeric, the yellow, represents the healing power of shakti; and orange, represents the radiance of shakti. These five items have been used to propitiate the Adishakti.

Dashbhuji temple

In the *Dashbhuji temple*, the image of Durga has ten hands. In tantra, there is an interesting idea that when Devi has to combat the tamasic tendencies and vrittis, the number of her arms increases. If she has to grace the sattwic vritti, the number of arms reduces. It is symbolic. According to the tantra shastras, to overcome evil, destructive and negative tendencies in life, Shakti acquires sometimes twelve arms or sixteen arms. The twelve and sixteen-armed Devi battles the evil and destructive tendencies of life. The twelve arms or the sixteen arms of the Devi each represent something which eradicates a negative, destructive and evil tendency.

To inspire one to grow in life, to push the individual sadhaka in the right direction and to manage the rajasic condition of life, Devi is generally seen as having either ten or eight arms. To grace the sattwic nature and enforce it. Devi is seen with four or six arms.

The figure of Durga in the temple is thousands of years old. According to myth, it is the figure which King Karna used to worship in his tantric practice. It is not only a figure of Devi, the entire symbology connected to it is incredible. There are many dimensions and levels in that statue.

The first level of the statue which is underground is actually a serpent made from rock. *Ananta*, the serpent is the representation of Shakti. Even in our body Shakti is symbolized as kundalini, a dormant serpent in mooladhara chakra which has to be awakened. When kundalini awakens,

she pierces and passes through the chakras to come to the crown of the head, sahasrara chakra, and there union, realization and illumination takes place. In the course of the journey of kundalini from mooladhara to sahasrara, the gross and material nature of the mind and consciousness is transformed into a luminous nature. Therefore, the serpent is representing Shakti, the illusive power and the primordial energy as well.

The Bible begins with the story of the serpent. When Adam and Eve were created they were placed in the garden of Eden and they were told by God, 'Enjoy this garden. You can eat of any tree, you can drink any water, you can live anywhere in this garden, however, there is one thing that you should never do – do not eat the fruit of that specific tree.'

The serpent comes and entices Adam and Eve to eat the fruit by saying, "God knows that if you eat the fruit of this tree, you will develop another understanding, another perception of what is good and bad, right and wrong. You will become mortal. Therefore, you have been prohibited from eating this. As long as you do not eat of this tree, you shall always live in the state of bliss, *ananda*, in the proximity, companionship and the protection of God." God does not want you to become mortal, yet the joys of life are experienced in mortal life, not in eternal life. The struggle, pain, suffering, the happiness, joy, contentment – all the different tastes of existence are in the mortal life. In the eternal life you are always happy. You appreciate happiness when you are sad. If you are always happy, happiness has no meaning." So the snake enticed Adam and Eve to become mortal. And when they became mortal, they were chucked out of the Garden.

The understanding has to develop that the true experience of life happens when there is duality. Your positive or negative strength is brought out when you are confronting duality. If the strength is negative, there is downfall. If the strength is positive, there is upliftment. The serpent or Shakti's role is to divert the attention of every

individual from God to material life. Otherwise why create all this? No need to eat, no need to sleep and struggle. It would be a boring world. I am not defending the serpent; I am defining the symbology of the serpent.

So, in the Dashbuiji temple, above this serpent symbol, there is a solid piece of rock in the shape of a lotus flower. The lotus symbolizes awakened consciousness, the *Shiva tattwa*. The serpent symbolizes the Shakti tattwa. That lotus is open and the awakened consciousness is on top of Shakti controlling Shakti, the serpent. Along the petals of the lotus, stand the sixty-four yoginis.

Yoginis are adepts in yoga, they are the siddhas. Yogis are male sadhakas, yoginis are female sadhakas of yoga. Those who have attained the highest state of yoga have soft hearts. Those who have attained the highest state of illumination are sensitive people, they have gentle hearts. The saints in the Christian tradition are full of compassion, love and affection for everything. Saints of the East from China to Asia to India, who have attained a higher state of consciousness, are people who have expressed the best qualities of their heart. They have been selfless, not selfish. When the heart is soft, people become selfless, when the heart is rigid, people are selfish. Yoginis represent the soft quality of life.

God has these two attributes: the attribute of witnessing, the Shiva aspect, and the attribute of acting, the aspect Shakti. You are able to witness what you do and you are also able to act. When you are witnessing, observing something, you are a passive person. When you are thinking about something, observing yourself, your thoughts, when your consciousness is being used, you automatically become a passive person. When you are acting, performing, involved in something, there is dynamism, action and something is happening. That is the Shakti.

Shiva and Shakti are the two aspects of one identity, one *tattwa*, one element. The hardness of sentiments is in the male aspect. The softness is in the feminine aspect. In spiritual life, we try to cultivate the soft nature. We try to

eradicate the hard, rigid nature. We try to acquire the gentle soft nature. Yogis become females, not physically, but in their sentiments, attitude, perception, their expression of sentiments and emotions. The body can be anything, yet their inner self becomes feminine.

In spiritual life, every male becomes a female if they are true spiritual aspirants. We all try to cultivate compassion, love, sympathy and sensitivity. The 64 yoginis represent the sixty-four schools of tantra which cultivate that understanding and awareness of the transcendental reality. These soft yoginis are protected by two *bhairavas*, the aggressive form of Shiva.

When farmers sow the seeds in the ground, they stand guard over their farm with sticks and to any animal that comes they say, "Don't enter, get out!" They protect what they have sown. In the same manner, the two *bhairavas*, display the Shiva aspect and protect the soft nature that has been cultivated and developed.

Above the lotus flower is the buffalo demon, Mahishasura. Buffalos are famous for their rigid mind. Dumbness is a demon! Dumbness of mind restricts your growth and development. If you are dumb, you remain dumb. There is not even desire to change. Shakti is killing this Mahishasura, the demon of dumbness, with her trident. A trident has three prongs, which represent *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. So, with the use of effort and force, *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*, dumbness has to be destroyed. When the dumbness in life is destroyed, genius sets in. You cannot be a genius if there is dumbness in life. To become totally creative, the stagnated mind, the conditioned mind has to be transformed.

Interestingly enough, when I go there and pay my respects to that image, I ask a question, "What do you want me to speak about today?" I heard a voice in my head, "Speak about me." So when I went to give the *satsang* there, I spoke on the symbology of the statue which is there in the temple.

According to the tantric traditions, there are many different forms of Durga. To an uninitiate, every form looks

the same, as the name is the same, for the initiate, the person who knows, every form has a different name. The ten-armed Durga is known as *Kaityaayani* in the north, and in south she is known as *Kanyakumari*, generally translated in English as the virgin goddess. There is this incredible temple at the tip of south India of this virgin goddess, Kaityaayani. She was born from the fire of the mind according to myth. The power of mind of all the different devas came together, and from that power emerged this shakti. It is a beautiful place.

The feeling, the energy in Dashbhuj temple is totally different to the feeling in Chandisthan. The vibrations in Chandisthan are dynamic, going towards aggressive. There is a lot of activity. In Dashbhujisthan it is passive and the figure radiates peace. The features are totally different. They are carved maybe four, five thousand years ago. One solid piece of rock. Those features radiate comfort, peace, warmth. When you go inside the temple, the feeling is that you are creeping onto the lap of mother and you just want to put your head down and go to sleep. It is a *shaant* feeling, a peaceful feeling.

Bhakti

I went again to Dashbhujisthan and as I bowed before the image of the Devi, the ancient statue, I asked her, “What should I speak on today?” The answer that came to my mind was, “Speak about my sister.” Do you know about Devi’s sister?

Devi is known as *maya*, because in this dimension the transcendental Devi has taken two different forms. One is of prakriti, the creator of everything. The father’s role in the birth of a baby is limited; it is the mother who carries the baby in her womb for nine months, and at the end of the period, the baby is born. The mother plays a major role in the process of creation. God or the father is only an incident that helps the process of birth.

The transcendental shakti has taken two different forms. The subtle form is the realm of prakriti where through action, ideas and thoughts have actualized. We are part of

prakriti, nature is prakriti. The created universe is prakriti. Everything that is created is prakriti.

The second part is the gross aspect of Devi, the maya. When we come into this realm, we are hypnotized and deluded by her. In our dimension, Devi is known as the *mahamaya*, the great elusive power. If in our dimension, Devi is mahamaya, then her sister also has to be equally strong and comparable to her in strength, character and nature.

I had heard a story long ago, that in one village, two sisters lived. One was called Maya, the other was called Bhakti. Bhakti was beautiful and glamorous. She would wear the latest fashion clothes, she would wear the latest jewellery and put on the latest make-up. As she was so beautiful, nicely dressed and decked by jewels, people used to follow Bhakti everywhere. The other sister, Maya, wore old, stained, dirty, clothes, so although she was also beautiful, people would look at her once and then continue to follow Bhakti, who was in a glamorous dress. As Bhakti was receiving all the attention of everyone, Maya became jealous. She said to herself, "I am as beautiful as Bhakti, yet she is recognized more because of her dress and ornaments. She glitters more than I do. She is more radiant and attractive."

One day, the two sisters went for their daily bath to the pond. They removed their clothes, went in the water and frolicked for some time. Then Maya told Bhakti, "Listen I have to go and do some work, so I am going to get out from the water." Bhakti said, "All right, I am going to be in the water for some time." Maya came out, put on the glittering robes and jewels of Bhakti, and went away. After about twenty minutes, Bhakti comes out of the water and starts to look for her clothes which Maya had taken. Bhakti was forced to put on the dirty and tattered clothes that Maya had left behind. Since that time, Maya is wearing the glittering robes and ornaments of Bhakti, and Bhakti is wearing the tattered and dirty clothes of Maya. So everybody started to follow Maya. People look at Bhakti and then they go their own way. They acknowledge the presence of Bhakti, yet they follow Maya.

Bhakti and bhakti yoga

Maya is the force that separates you from your real self, and bhakti is the force that brings you closer to the real self. While both are equally powerful, the glitter is what attracts the individual and not the simplicity. Therefore, Maya has more influence on people and Bhakti has little influence on people. Bhakti has the capacity to invoke the divine in one's life. *Bhakti*, in English, is known as devotion, and maya as delusion. Devotion has the power and strength to invoke the transcendental self in this dimension. The masters have also said that in the age of Kali Yuga, bhakti is what will ultimately free you from the attractions of maya. Bhakti will lead you to the higher dimension in life, whereas maya will take you away from that higher dimension in life.

When people think of devotion, they think of religious devotion, according to the mandate of religions. That is the wrong concept of bhakti. The wrong concept is that bhakti is part and parcel of a religious belief system. It is not. It is a process by which you can cultivate and nurture the virtuous aspects which bring you closer to your real, transcendental nature.

People translate bhakti yoga as the 'yoga of devotion'. If you study bhakti yoga, there are nine stages of transformation. Just as raja yoga has eight limbs: yamas, niyamas, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, in the same manner, there are nine limbs or stages of bhakti yoga.

The first is awareness of personal association, and the last, the ninth, is union with the transcendental reality. If you look at the first one, becoming aware of our associations in life, and if you look at the last one, unity with the transcendental nature, the progression you see reformats our life system. Through reformatting the life system, life process and life experiences, you move towards union. Therefore, it becomes a progressive process, path, and system of sublimating the mind from the clutches of maya and establishing the mind in higher experience. This is the idea of devotion that yogis have conceived.

Devotion begins by understanding our surroundings, environment and association with each and every individual. In the *Yoga Sutras*, an indication is given (1:33):

*Maitreekarunaa muditopekshaanaam sukhaduhkha-
Punyaapunyaavishayaanaam bhaavana atashchitta prasaadanam*

Be friendly with those who are happy and content. Be compassionate towards those who are suffering. Be happy for those who are pure, pious and virtuous, and ignore the crooked, who cannot be changed.

This statement of the *Yoga Sutras* is talking about association – how one should associate with people. Bhakti yoga also talks of association as the first stage of bhakti. Associate with people of a balanced mind, so that you can derive inspiration and strength from them and their company. In this manner, you go from one stage to the next, until you come to the final stage of union. The final stage of union is what religions have described as religious ecstasy.

God comes to you through bhakti

Another principle of bhakti is told in a story. Once upon a time, there was a king who had two wives and one son from each wife. The younger wife was beautiful. The king favoured the younger wife and her son more. The elder wife, was also beautiful, a pious and simple lady. She did not have a materialistic nature. She was simple, pure and innocent, and happy fulfilling her duty and role as queen. Her son's name was Dhruva. The other queen, who was young, beautiful and glamorous, had eyes on the throne for her son. According to the rule of the land, the elder son would take the seat of the king, so the younger queen used to ensure that the elder son would not come near the king too often. Her own son would be in the presence of the king maximum time, playing with the king, tickling him, pulling his beard, twirling his moustache, and all types of naughty things that children do.

One day, Prince Dhruva, when he was about ten, came to the king's apartment and saw the stepmother with her son there. This young Prince Dhruva, in his innocence came running to the king, gave him a big hug and said, "I want to sit on your lap." The stepmother, who was there with her little son, told Prince Dhruva, "No, you cannot sit on the lap of your father. His lap is reserved for my son. Get out of here." Prince Dhruva was depressed and dejected, and came crying to his mother, "Why does the younger mother not allow me to sit on my father's lap?" The elder queen knew. She said, "It does not matter; she may not allow you to sit on the lap of your father, so don't you go and sit on the lap of everybody's father?" She said this to divert the attention of the young prince, who took it literally, "All right, I shall go and search for that one, who is father of everyone and I will sit on his lap. Where does he live?" The mother said, "I don't know. You have to go and find out where he lives." So the young prince said, "All right, I'll go and search for the Great Father."

He left the palace, in search of his father, walking through the town, going into the jungles, forests, crossing the rivers, calling out, "Father, father, where are you? Come to me!" searching for the father in every nook and corner. Sage Narada looked at this boy and felt pity. Such a young boy searching for the Great Father. He came down to help him. "My son, where are you going?" The little prince said, "I am searching for my Great Father." Sage Narada said to him, "You don't have to search for him anywhere. Sit down quietly and call out to him, he will hear you and he will come to you." The little prince said, "What is the name of my father? I don't know. I know he is the Great Father, but what is his name?" Sage Narada said, "The name of the Great Father is Narayana. Call him by saying *Om Namo Narayana, Om Namo Narayana, Om Namo Narayana.*" In this way Sage Narada initiated the little prince Dhruva into mantra.

The prince sat down, happy that he knew the name of the father. He sat down under a tree and started repeating

the mantra *Om Namo Narayana, Om Namo Narayana, Om Namo Narayana*, again and again. He became totally absorbed in the repetition of the mantra. The intensity of emotion was, “I want to see my father, I am calling out to him, he has to come, he will hear me.”

Due to the intensity of his faith, God appeared before him, “What do you want, my son?” Dhruva started to cry. God of course knew what was happening; Dhruva broke down. No words came out of his mouth. He was ecstatic, looking at this beautiful figure of his father, Narayana. He was filled with love and immense joy. This immense love and joy brought tears to his eyes. He stood there, with tears streaming from his eyes, speechless. God picked him up, made him sit on his lap and said, “Your mother is worried about you. Go back. I give that kingdom to you, as your father, and you rule that kingdom for me on my behalf.”

The moral of the story is that we are searching for God here, there, everywhere to have that experience, understanding, knowledge and awareness of the resplendent being in our life who is God. In bhakti, you get the ability to invoke God. God comes to you through bhakti. You do not have to search anywhere. Sit quietly, do the mantra and follow the nine steps of the path of bhakti. God will manifest before you.

What is the meaning of Diwali?

The first reason we celebrate Diwali is astrological, the second reason is mythological, the third reason is social, and fourth reason is spiritual.

In the astrological concept of Diwali, different planets align themselves in a specific way from time to time, and with the alignment of planets, there is a certain influence on the human mind and human consciousness. Our ancestors, who have investigated and researched the influence of the planetary bodies on the human psyche, have said that the human being is like a radio and the karma of a human being is to tune their radio to the appropriate frequency.

‘Appropriate frequency’ can mean many things to many people. Those who have a religious bent of mind may think that appropriate tuning means an encounter with divinity. For those who have a spiritual frame of mind, tuning to the appropriate frequency represents something different. You have to see how you understand this tuning. How do you tune yourself?

Imagine a radio. We do not see radio waves, yet we know they exist around us, and with the right instruments we can tune into and listen to different stations. In the same manner, the mind is capable of tuning itself to the higher frequencies of the universe and nature yet we have never applied our mind to tune itself and become the recipient of these higher waves. We have only applied the mind to become the recipient of the waves around us that we receive through the senses. Beyond the senses however, there is still the possibility of becoming the receiver of higher frequencies. When the planetary alignments are proper, they exert an influence and change the quality of the human mind. They make it more sensitive, more receptive, more spiritual, or sometimes more gross and material. Diwali is the day when the mind is very receptive for psychic discoveries and psychic experiences. It is for this reason that since ancient times, the tantrics have said that the night of Diwali is considered to be the most auspicious for any kind of psychic or spiritual attainment. Any sadhana, any practice, anything that you do on Diwali day is bound to bear fruit, is bound to bear results. This is the astrological concept.

We also celebrate Diwali for mythological reasons. This was the day that Rama returned back to his kingdom after vanquishing the terrorist king, Ravana. When Rama returned, the whole kingdom celebrated his return by lighting *deepaks*, candles, and oil lamps. So many lights were lit that night became day, and day and night became one. Diwali is the festival of light, Diwali is the festival of love, Diwali is the festival of invoking and attaining prosperity in

life, and Diwali is a time to celebrate an emergence of higher consciousness in the material dimension, as symbolized by the return of Rama to Ayodhya about 10,700 years ago. That was the night the whole kingdom was lit up to welcome him. And that was the mythological beginning of Diwali.

Diwali is celebrated for social reasons. People enjoy partying – they like to get together; they like to exchange ideas, views and thoughts. On this day, positive and optimistic thoughts come to mind as there is the feeling of a new beginning. And what does a person want in life? Peace and happiness are symptoms of having attained material and spiritual prosperity. When you attain material prosperity, you are content and when you attain spiritual prosperity you are content, in bliss, and due to this feeling that today something auspicious and beneficial will happen, the thoughts of people change also.

Many people who are celebrating the first Diwali in their life, have been thinking about Diwali since morning as it is something new that is going to happen. It is that optimism, it is that feeling of looking forward to something beneficial, something uplifting, something nurturing, something positive which brings in different trains of thought in the mind. These trains of thought help in understanding what our aspirations are for the future.

In the social concept, along with partying there is the commercial angle – fire crackers. You are hearing them now and in a little while there will be so many that we won't be able to hear each other. Fire crackers are more for children and also grown-ups participate in it for it makes us remember our childhood, we become as playful and as innocent as we were when we were a child and we forget our own inhibitions, we forget our own hang-ups, we forget our own limitations.

After the social aspect comes the spiritual part. It is not important, necessary or compulsory for you to be a participant in that, if you wish you can come and join us in the Akhara, sit quietly and just imbibe the vibe.

This is in brief, the four aspects of Diwali – the astrological which is quite astronomical as well, the mythological the social and the spiritual. Once again, we wish you a very happy Diwali and wish you may light a candle of light in your own life.

—26 October 2011

Construction not change

I have spent all my life in an ashram environment. I have spent all my life involved with yoga and I have seen not hundreds, not thousands, without a doubt, a few million people have crossed my path in my life and I have interacted with them. I see them coming from different backgrounds, with different aspirations, with different ideas, different thoughts, different ambitions, different needs, and different sufferings. I found that each one is asking only one question, ‘In which direction should I go?’ They expect an answer from me. ‘What should I do? In which direction should I go?’

The expectation is not really in terms of searching for direction, but in satisfying their own need. If I affirm and confirm the ideas which they have, they are satisfied. If I deny, negate and contradict the ideas which people have, they are dissatisfied which makes me again think, are we really looking for a direction in our life or are we only looking for confirmation of what our ideas are?

I am a seeker, although people call me a guru. I do not have the white beard of the gurus, although that is developing slowly as I mature in life. As a seeker, when I encounter such situations, I think about them, ‘What is the solution ultimately?’ The solution can’t be the same for everyone. Nobody is starting the journey from the same station; we all begin our journey at a different level of evolution. We all begin our journey at a different station.

We all have a defined aspiration, ambition, desire and need in our life, which governs our character. Our involvement with external life, is one hundred percent.

We identify with our family, with our friends, with our environment, with our home. We do not interact too much with strangers or with people whom we do not know, so we have already defined our world. Our total participation and involvement is externally guided by our desires, ambitions and needs, so even the spiritual quest at that time represents a desire, an ambition. And this desire and ambition for a spiritual quest, for spiritual realization, diverts one from the path of spiritual knowledge. There is already a condition, 'I want to experience light. I do not want to see darkness; I want to experience light.'

We condition ourselves into believing in something that is alien to our real nature. Twelve hours of social, externally focused, and extroverted interaction in life creates twelve kilos of rubbish, as an example. In a half-hour meditation, you want to clear the rubbish collected over twelve hours? If you want to become a doctor, you have to spend five or six years studying medicine as a student before you can become a doctor. If you want to become an engineer, you have to spend the necessary amount of years to study. You cannot pick up a book, read it in your own time and leisure and say, 'Today I have become an engineer for I know the subject.' No, you have to go to the right teacher, right school, right college, go through the syllabus from basic to advanced, before you are considered a master. This is the rule in society everywhere; this is the rule of life. However, when it comes to spiritual life we want to become prophets or saints overnight, 'From today I have become spiritual as from today I started my meditation, from today I have started my yoga nidra, from today I have started my ajapa dharana. I have progressed. From today I have started kriya yoga, I am definitely much more advanced.' They are all self-deluded thoughts. Without any education and without any understanding, how can one become saintly overnight? Impossible.

When you study medicine for example, how many hours do you spend in the hospital and in the college classroom?

The whole day. That means you study at least for fourteen to sixteen hours a day for x number of years. How much yoga do you practise? You go to one class per week and in that one class of one or two hours you become the saint overnight. 'I've had this fantastic experience; I saw flashes of light.' Good for you. May you see many more. We are deluded, misguided about the results we expect from our efforts to discover our own spirituality. Therefore, for me practice is not important. In the last fifty years of my life, I have come across millions who have learned practices, yet out of those millions I cannot pinpoint even ten people who have applied those practices. You who apply the practices are the true sadhakas, otherwise you are wasting your time. Initiation won't change anything. Your conviction is what will change you.

Spending time in the ashram won't change anything, your conscious efforts will change you. Ask these people how much they have changed over the years they have spent here; ask me how much I have changed. I can give you a correct answer for myself as I have no hang-ups about myself. Ask these people who have lived here for years. There has been a basic flaw and it is a basic human flaw. We try to change, and that is where we slip and fall, everybody, the entire humanity. The flaw is that we try to change and the actual thing we should try is to construct. Do not try to change; try to construct! Constructing anything takes years, months. Destruction is fast, use dynamite and this building will come down in 5 minutes, but to construct a building like the Main Building will take three or four years. Ultimately in life, it is construction that counts, not change. What will you change into? If you construct, you can live in that construction. That becomes your home.

What has to be constructed? Samskaras, qualities, mentalities, behaviour, responses – these are the important things, not how well you can do your headstand. Each yoga has a purpose, the outcome of yoga is not the perfection of a posture, the outcome of yoga is not the awakening of kundalini. The outcome of yoga has to be a rightly

constructed personality. You have to think about how you can construct your personality. Everything has been given, everything has been told. There is no use learning a hundred things; perfect one item. This perfection of one item is the construction of character, construction of nature, construction of life.

The basic thought is that our whole approach has to change from trying to transform something to constructing something very basic from the beginning. As sannyasins, we should be able to construct the right thing to help us on the path of sannyasa. As social people, we should be able to construct the right quality to take us forward in society. Construction is important, change is not. Think about it.

To construct, you have to apply your time properly for this is not something where you can say, 'Every day for one hour I will sit down to construct my building.' No, it has to be a continuous onward process. I am trying to live the guidelines that my guru has given. I am trying to apply that and if I can apply it, I know that only good will come out of it. If I cannot apply it then that is my failure, I failed the class. Think about yourself in these terms. Try to apply, try to construct; that has to be the aim of life and the purpose of living, then no matter where you are, what profession you are in, you will be complete, socially and spiritually.

It is the proper application of time which is important. Analyze the time that you spend in different activities. How do you spend your free time? Watching television, partying with people, gossiping, entertaining yourself, entertaining other people? Out of the free time that you have, how much do you apply for yourself? You are wasting every moment. I am not saying do not gossip, do not party. Do all that, then out of that free time also use a certain part to construct the right character for yourself. If the intention to construct is not there, then no matter what you do, even shakti path is self-delusion. Nothing will happen. You might get a momentary tingling of your spine, beyond that your life won't change, not even half a percent. If you want to feel a

tingle in your spine, it is not a big thing, you do not have to awaken kundalini for it.

Think about how you can construct a better you, rather than change yourself. Change is not possible, construction is. And believe me this is true, with half a century of experience behind me.

—29 October 2011

Swamiji, could you please tell us how to deal with sweetly spoken lies as opposed to the harshly spoken truth, which may be unkind or hurtful.

The question is wrong. There are no sweetly spoken words and there are no harshly spoken words. We react according to our mind. If we have the ability, strength and courage to face the truth, then it can be both sweet or bitter. If we are weak, we hide behind pleasant words. It is not a question of who says what. What matters is how they say it, whether they tell an unpleasant thing in a sweet way or in a harsh way, we have to know how we react, how our ego reacts, and that is the difficult bit.

As far as communication is concerned there is a saying in Sanskrit, *satyam bhruyat*, speak the truth, *priyam bhruyat*, speak that which is pleasant. *Na bhruyat*, do not speak, *satyam apriyam*, the unpleasant truth. So, speak the truth pleasantly, and not in an unpleasant or harsh manner.

Once an astrologer was called by his king, and he was shown the king's astrological chart. As soon as the astrologer saw the chart, he held his head and said, "Oh King, all I see is death and destruction. Your kingdom will be destroyed, your family will be destroyed, and you'll be out on the road begging for survival". The king got angry and he threw the astrologer in prison. The astrologer could not figure out what had happened, as he had only read the chart and was being truthful about it to the king.

One week later another astrologer was called. Again the king showed him his chart. However, this astrologer

was clever and he said, “Oh King, you have the best chart. You have a long life, and you will outlive everyone in your family. You will see changes happening in your empire for the better.” He gave such a rosy picture of a difficult chart, that the king gave him a lot of money as a reward.

As the saying goes, in the modern age, diplomacy is the best answer. However, I still do not agree with this question, for everything is a reaction of one’s own mind. How you perceive the truth, how you perceive a conversation, how you perceive another person, what is your mood at that time, what is your mental state at that time, all these reactions depend on many factors. Therefore, to analyze which is better, the pleasantly spoken lie or the harshly spoken truth, is the wrong approach.

What is the basic purpose of gurukul education? How does the style of teaching in a gurukul differ from that of state schools? Would graduates of a gurukul be able to stand their own ground in the competitive world of today, particularly if they upheld yamas and niyamas?

In ancient India we had gurukul education. *Gurukul* means community of the guru; this ashram is a gurukul. People come here for fifteen days, one month, four months, one year or one lifetime, and become part of the gurukul. In a gurukul the system of education is not social education, it is learning and knowing about life. In this process of knowing about life, all the relevant subjects which can help us progress in life, whether it be maths, history, geography, the sciences, commerce etc., can also be included as skills to develop. Along with those skills you learn about your life; when to apply the yamas and niyamas and when not to apply them, when to turn the other cheek and when to give the other person a tight slap.

This understanding has to come by knowing about life. We try to imbibe this understanding by reading books, yet in reality we never follow what is written in the books anyway. Christians do not follow the precepts of Christianity, Hindus

do not follow the precepts of Hinduism, and Muslims do not follow the precepts of Islam. Yet, we all hide behind those ideas, theories, beliefs and philosophies, which are stated in our religion.

Religion is far from our life. Belief is not religion. The word religion comes from the Latin root *religare*, which means to reconnect or to tie together. This connection, this unification is an individual process. Even in your own family, you connect with different people in different ways. Then how can there be only one way to connect with God when there are different ways to connect within your own group, in your own family. How you connect with each person in the group, how you relate to each person in the family, is decided by you. In the same manner, the connection with God, also has to be decided by the individual.

Paramahamsaji used to say, “Define what your relationship is with God first, and then build on that relationship. If you believe God to be the master, then you become the servant; if God is your husband, then become His wife; if God is your brother, then become His brother – and actually live the relationship you have chosen. So, the point here is different. The application of knowledge is known as wisdom, and such wisdom has to be resilient. Knowledge is not resilient, knowledge is merely a fact; wisdom is not a fact, wisdom is appropriate and applied knowledge according to the person, the event and the time. Knowledge has to be converted into wisdom. This is the learning and training that we receive in a gurukul.

How do we apply what we know in practical ways in our personal life and in our society? A wise person can survive by living the yamas and niyamas in the world. You may not be able to, as you do not know the way. You do not apply your wisdom; you only go as per the written sentence. If I were to tell you, you would not even understand, for your wavelength is different from mine. The fact is that resilience of wisdom is what carries us forward, knowing when to act in a specific, particular, appropriate or inappropriate manner. This resil-

ience comes when you begin to know and understand your life.

The modern schools are not gurukuls, they are job-oriented, skill-training institutions and organizations. You want to have a job, you want to develop certain skills such as that of a financial consultant, business person, carpenter, tradesperson, engineer, doctor, then you go to the relevant school and college. In which school or college, have lessons been given about living life? From primary school to university, whence we graduate with a degree, we have never been told about life and how to deal with the difficulties, problems and stress that we will encounter in our involvement and participation in life.

Therefore, you cannot compare gurukul with a state-run primary or secondary school, college, or university, for the entire approach is different. Society accepts job-oriented education, and the subjects taught are therefore job-oriented, in the fields of arts, sciences, commerce etc. and you have to fit into one of these three categories. Gurukul does not fit you into a category, it brings out your latent creativity. It makes you realize the strengths and weaknesses of your own nature, and it makes you aware of how you can use your social and mental skills to improve the quality of life at the levels of family and society.

The system of gurukul is lost today with the influence of different cultures and ideas. However, my understanding of gurukul is a better learning option, as it gives you a total picture of life, both the social and the personal aspects, whereas in the social education systems, they only give students a social education, not personal. Therefore, there is a lot of emotional mismanagement in society. Only recently people have started to talk about EQ, or the emotional quotient. About ten or fifteen years ago, nobody even bothered about EQ, everyone was thinking only of IQ, or the intelligence quotient. There are clubs for people with high IQ's, and you can become a member, yet, is that the appropriate approach to life? You decide. The decision

is yours, the understanding is yours, the choice is yours. From my perspective, definitely gurukul training gives better understanding and skills, to deal both with things that happen inside an individual, and also with things that happen outside. Creativity is available in both areas.

As a person with a job and family responsibilities, how can I reconcile the yogic lifestyle with the requirements and expectations of family and society? For instance, I want to take the last meal of the day at sunset, yet in our club dinner is generally served at 9 pm or later.

Apply your wisdom, there is no hard and fast rule. Apply your wisdom, do the appropriate thing at the right time. If today the situation demands that I eat at 10pm, then I will do so, no problem. If tomorrow, the requirement is that I should eat at 5 pm, also no problem. In situations that I can control, I will follow my routine. In situations which I cannot control, I will adjust to the required routine. So, what's the big deal?

Swamiji, you have told us about Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Could you please tell us about the significance of Kali?

The air that we breathe is one and the same for all. We are all breathing in air. Yet, what are the gases and the chemical components in this air, and are we even aware of them? You can say that you are breathing in air, yet what are you actually breathing in with this air? You are breathing in hydrogen, oxygen and carbon dioxide too. You are breathing in all the different gases that are in the air, yet you have given them all one name, 'air'. You do not say, 'I am breathing in hydrogen or carbon, you do not say I am breathing in this or that. If you have to define something, you will say I am breathing in oxygen, for you associate oxygen with preservation of life. In the same manner, we use the terminology of the world or universe.

What do we mean by these concepts? We also speak about creation and created life-forms. What do we mean by

this? In created forms you will only identify things such as animals, insects, reptiles, birds, humans etc., as you are able to see them. Yet, there are also created forms beyond sight, which have an identity. You cannot see the mind, you can experience the mind. You cannot see the emotions, you can experience the emotions. You cannot see the spirit or the soul, yet you are alive due to that spirit or soul in you. So, who are you? Are you the body? Yes, you are. Are you the mind? You are that too. Are you the spirit? You are that too. You are a mix of everything, you are a 'khichari'. This body, this life is like a khichari for all of us, we identify only with one thing – 'I am living in this body'.

In the same manner, in the universe too, there are many different powers, forces, energies and vibrations. All these become the cause for the creation, preservation, destruction or change and transformation of the different universes, galaxies and even of individual life-forms. They have all been given a name. Just as in science, the different energies travelling through space have all been identified as different waves, forces and types of energy. There are x-rays, gamma rays, solar winds up in space. There are so many things up there, which we can't even conceive of, and they all have a specific role to perform.

These energies which have a specific role to perform in the universe have all been identified by a specific name in Sanskrit. They are the different devas and the devis, which have the ability to create, to destroy, or to alter something. In this spectrum of energies and vibrations, in this pantheon of devis and devatas, there are certain major, important and super-important ones, as well as minor or even negligible ones. Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati represent the trinity of three important energies, which are responsible for the continuation of creation.

Kali is another expression of the same energy in relation to time. After all there is some force, some power which governs time, even within our own body. Which energy, which wavelength is that? Why does the decay of

cells happen? What makes it happen, is the Kali tattwa which controls time, and which manages the expiry date of every sentient or insentient being in creation. Just as in the supermarket, all the items have an expiry date printed on them, and all items that have expired are immediately removed. Similarly, we all have come with an expiry date written on us. When we reach our expiry date, that energy of Kali withdraws all items of that particular expiry date and throws it away.

Kali represents the energy of time and governs the flow of time. Saraswati governs intelligence, Lakshmi governs motivation and effort, Kali governs time, Durga governs change, leading to the emergence of something new. These are just superficial descriptions that we can provide for something cosmic and unknowable. Accept them just as you accept all the gasses and bacteria floating around in the air which you breathe. So many bacteria and viruses go in, along with oxygen that you breathe in. In the same manner Lakshmi, Kali, Saraswati, or Dakini, Hakini, Rakini, Shakini, whatever they may be called, are just balancing factors of each other. You can call them positive and negative forces or energies, to understand it better. However, I do not call them good or bad, positive or negative, for they are just like weights on both sides of a scale which keep it balanced, and do not allow the scale to be tilted. They are energies, they are powers, they are waves, they are frequencies.

How to introduce the next generation to the yogic management of life? They generally tend to disapprove of it in order to show that they are ultra-modern. How can we generate faith in them?

The next generation does not disapprove of it to show that they are ultramodern. They disapprove of it as they have not seen the result in your life, in the life of their parents. Parents can be fanatics at times. Parents generally become the judge, the jury and the executioner of their children. Therefore, no child is going to accept its parents' authority

and listen to what they say, no matter how obedient the child is. I can give it to you in writing. Often parents will force the child to do something which they themselves would not do, so why should the child follow the parents' instructions. If you want to train the next generation to become better, be a friend to them, not their judge, jury and executioner. Change your ideas about parenting first, and try to understand the needs of your children. Be a friend to the child, only then can you inspire the child to listen to you.

Swamiji, would you please give some guidelines to those of us who wish to purify our own emotions through bhakti yoga, yet are not devotionally inclined?

There are two distinct paths and people do not understand this. *Bhakti* is not devotion, it is management of emotion. From bhakti comes the word *bhukti* which means enjoyment of the world. Bhakti is not a belief or a ritual, although people think of bhakti in those terms. I have mentioned before that the religious path of devotion is known as bhakti marga. The other one is the transformative path, which is personal, unique to each individual, and that is known as bhakti yoga. Bhakti marga is devotion and bhakti yoga is transformation, and this is what people fail to understand. Even the so-called intellectuals fail to describe this clearly, for they have not had any guru; they have only followed the whim of their mind and the gymnastics of their intellect.

Raja yoga or ashtanga yoga has eight limbs, from yama to samadhi. Similarly, bhakti yoga is a yoga of nine limbs, or nine stages. These nine stages take the individual through a definite, sequential process of transformation, and they begin with observation of the mental mood, our environment and our associations.

The first step or practice of bhakti yoga is to identify with whom you associate, as associations influence the mind and behaviour. If you associate with wrong people, your thinking will be wrong. If you associate with the right people, your thinking will be right. Therefore, the first sadhana of bhakti

yoga is correct association. The second sadhana of bhakti yoga is trying to maintain positivity and optimism in all conditions and situations of life. Even if somebody grabs you by the neck and starts bashing your head, keep a balanced, positive and happy attitude. That is the second stage of bhakti, always trying to maintain a happy, optimistic and positive outlook in life, and trying not to find fault with other people. Never try to justify your own actions, keep an open mind.

In this manner bhakti yoga takes us through different levels of mental and emotional purification and balance. The ninth and last stage of bhakti yoga is *sayujha*, which means oneness with the inner spirit. So, bhakti yoga is totally different from the religious devotion of the bhakti marga.

What is karma and the purpose of life?

You have received something very beautiful – this life. The right application of the individual strengths and qualities in life can make us understand what our goal is to be. The wrong application of the strengths and qualities in life will make us question, ‘What am I doing here?’ Take a look at your own life. Whatever your age maybe, right from the beginning till today, how have you lived your life? Have you achieved your aspirations? If yes, you are lucky. If no, then find out why you are not able to achieve your aspirations. Where was the difficulty, where was the fault, where was the shortcoming?

Where are you today? Are you willing to make the necessary change and sacrifice those things which have held you back? Are you willing to let go of your attachments which have held you back, in order to achieve your aspirations? If you can do that, the pathway will be clear. However, if you do not want to lose anything from the past and carry the same baggage with you all the time, then do not ask the question – as curiosity kills the cat.

Reflect upon and review the entire life that you have lived until today, for sixteen, twenty, forty, sixty, eighty years, whatever you have lived until now. Discover, find out if you

have been satisfied with your achievements or not. Have you been happy and content with your life till today? If not, what was the cause? The reason may be due to family, finances, whatever it maybe, be clear about it.

Once you are clear, accumulations become less. I can tell you this for I have seen my own guru. He came to a point in his life when he would tell me, "You know, try to listen to and carefully understand what I am saying, for I am not going to repeat it again. Once I have said it to you, I will delete it from my hard drive." When I heard this for the first time, that he was deleting everything from his hard drive, I knew that only he could do it. Can you delete the memories, impressions, expectations, ambitions, pain, pleasure, suffering, animosity, greed, jealousy, hatred from your hard drive?

When you suddenly see a person in front of you who abused you twenty years ago, the memory of the past is still fresh. It is not deleted from your hard drive. So, what karma and what samskaras are you talking about? Do not talk about these areas which are beyond our normal comprehension. We cannot even understand what is going on inside our own head, and we want to adjust our karmas without adjusting our own head. What karma can you adjust, when you cannot even manage your own head? Therefore, develop the ability to let go of things and delete things from your hard drive first, before thinking about how to change your karma.

I have said that in the past also; today I want to correct myself. Earlier, as a teacher, for forty years I did say many things. Now, as I go deeper into my own sadhana and see the situations as they are within me, I change my opinions and my views too. We do not know what karma is and we want to change it. So where are we starting from? Therefore, I believe that if we want to become better in life, in every respect, spiritually, personally, socially, globally, we have to take care of the management of our hard drive first. Speed disk it, defrag it, clean it, compress it, delete the old accumulated files in the recycle bin.

Clear the mind of impressions that have given us an experience of either pain or happiness, for pain is something that we do not want, yet we remember it for all times to come. It is a paradox, we do not want pain, yet we can never forget pain. We want happiness, yet happiness is only fleeting, just like cool air on a hot day. As long as you are passing through that current of cool air, you are happy. Yet once you cross into the heat again, happiness is finished.

Is our search for happiness and our avoidance of pain, the appropriate behaviour for an individual? Today, I will say, it is not. Appropriate action is clearing the hard drive of those things which are cluttering the mind, and which are not allowing better things to come up. Therefore, spiritual life speaks of *tyaga*, renunciation and *anasakta bhavana*, non-attachment. These two become the tools to delete the clutter from your hard drive.

What is the practice of ajapa dharana?

It is one of the most ancient systems of meditation, as taught in the Upanishads and in the Vedas. Once upon a time, this ajapa dharana was the main branch of spiritual life in this country. Many saints have written and spoken about it. Many gurus and masters have also spoken about it. Kabirdas who is one of the most famous poet saints of India, wrote about ajapa dharana in one of his poems:

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai,
Soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahasa ikkisau jaap,
Anahada upaje apai aapa.*

These four lines define and explain the entire system, process and benefit of ajapa dharana. *Aisa jaapa japo mana lai* – focus your mind in such a manner; *Soham soham surata gai* – that the breath begins to sing *So Ham, So Ham*; *Chhaisau sahasa ikkisau jaap* – that when this concentration remains unbroken for the 21,600 breaths, that we breathe in

twenty-four hours; *Anahada upaje apai aapa* – the unheard or unstruck celestial music or sound vibration called anahada is heard internally.

This is how the poet saint Kabir begins his exposition of ajapa dharana. Even in the Upanishads and in the Vedas, they speak of this meditative process as being the highest, provided one can perfect it. To attain the highest meditative stage, you first have to have perfection of the lower basic stages. Without knowing A, B, C, D you can't read a book. So, before you attempt to move into the level of dharana, you should have perfected pratyahara. Without perfection of pratyahara, dharana does not mean anything, it only remains a technique of concentration. With pratyahara, dharana becomes a powerful tool to access the deeper and dormant layers of the mind.

You have to work hard to perfect pratyahara for the ajapa dharana to become fruitful. Many people think of yoga as meditation, and they want to learn meditation without having taken the initial steps through yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and pratyahara. Such people will not be able to understand it, for they do not have the experience of the previous stages. In the same manner, you can do ajapa dharana, yet when it comes to applying it in your life, please combine it with pratyahara. Otherwise in the course of time, even this technique will become rubbish in your mind. Filed away in some place, in some corner of the mind, never utilized ever again.

Since you have come to Munger, which is the *yogabhoomi*, or seat of yoga, of Paramahamsaji, this is the message you have to take from here. Only if you are able to apply your learning will it be useful, otherwise it is just another collector's item stowed away in your closet or almirah. Initially, you will open your almirah once a year to look at the notebooks, and then again close it. Five years down the line, when you are clearing the almirah again, you will see the notebook and think that for five years you have not done anything, so you might as well throw it away. All the effort

and time that you had invested will be wasted. Therefore, application is the inspiration of this place, and that is what I wish for all of you. Good luck, not with your learning but in your application of it.

—30 October 2011

Are there indications of progress in spiritual life?

There are indications of progress in spiritual life, yet they are not what you would normally expect. There are people who wake up early in the morning, at 2.30 or 3.00 am to do their asanas, pranayamas and meditation. This is not an indication of advancement in spiritual life. Progress in spiritual life begins with the application of common sense, together with the recognition of the condition of body and mind, and working with their limitations. The moment you cultivate awareness, recognize these limitations of body and mind, and begin to work with them, certain things begin to happen naturally such as greater perception of the external dimension, the outer world. There is more involvement and more objectivity as well.

In spiritual life there is no isolation. With the cultivation of awareness, there is more advancement, connection and objectivity. This objectivity gives birth to a certain understanding about the natures and the qualities of everyone around us and our personal desires and expectations diminish. In the beginning everything is centred around ‘me’ and ‘myself’, and that gradually becomes less. These are some basic indications, symptoms or milestones of spiritual development.

Buddha was once asked the same question, and he gave the same answer. Lessening of desires is an indication, and lessening of subjective participation and action. Along with this, there is expanded awareness and an objective assessment of the situation at hand. These are the hallmarks of a person who is advancing spiritually. This is it in a nutshell.

I work in a negative, gloomy environment, and with colleagues who have strong personalities. How do I not let this situation drag me down?

At such a time, you have to become a yogi. Do your duty as karma yoga, without any expectation and deep involvement. If you can do that, you are free from this problem. If you cannot do it, then this will be the cause of worry for a long time to come.

The obvious answer lies in how you are able to perceive the world around you. On a sunny day, you put on dark-coloured glasses that cut out the glare, and it becomes easier to see. However, when you put on the dark glasses, everything begins to look dark. If you put on yellow glasses, everything will look yellow. If you put on red glasses, everything will look red. The choice of what colour glasses you want to put on when you are looking at the world is yours. If you want to cut out the glare, put on the dark glasses. If you want to see better, put on the yellow glasses. If you want to be noticed, put on the red glasses. This is the skill of being a yogi or a sannyasin.

I have been tempted to put on different-coloured glasses many times, yet I always try to hold myself back. I can wear clear glasses as I have that capability of remaining unaffected and being clear-sighted. There are difficult situations in life, they can be short-term or long-term. The real ability lies in how we are able to manage our environment and ourselves in different situations.

How can we be at peace without letting thoughts like these bother us day in and day out? Bad colleagues, bad boss, destructive and negative environment at work, or even at home, yet I have to survive in it. Why not survive with a smiling face and be happy, rather than cry for years about how to change your workplace or environment. So, use the same principle that people use when they drive in the fog – put on the yellow lights and you will see better.

We know that faith induces one to pray. How to touch this state of prayer when one's belief is that everything is pre-programmed and pre-written? Why should we pray if we cannot change anything?

I do not agree with this statement. Faith is not something which makes you pray. Rather you pray because you do not have faith to begin with. If you have faith you do not need to pray. That is my understanding.

Prayers represent a state of mind which is seeking solace, fulfilment, something that is lacking. Inferior minds pray. 'Inferior' refers to the mind which is subject to the world and its influences. The mind which has faith knows, realizes that me and my Father are not different. When that realization is there, faith becomes a raging fire in which all the weak conditions of the mind and nature are burnt. If you have faith, you can move mountains. If you do not have faith, sit down and pray to cultivate that faith.

Will we learn about the Upanishads, the Vedas or the *Bhagavad Gita*?

Everyone who goes to Greece need not read Homer. Everybody who goes to England need not read the poems of William Blake. Similarly, everybody who comes to India need not read the *Ramayana* or *Bhagavad Gita*. These books are part of a collection which contains certain information about life, lifestyles, nature, behaviour, character, the mind and the soul, interlaced with some stories, historical events, and mythological incidents. And they are also part of a much larger collection of books.

Until the 1950s, the only books that existed in India were these books in the form of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas, in a wide range of literary and poetic forms. Indians were introduced to free writing, novels and sleazy magazines only after the 1960s. Prior to that, the only literature that we had, understood and developed, were these collections of books. The *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, are part of these collections. They are known as *itihasa* or

histories, and many of these books have some information about yoga, lifestyle, and about the sattwic nature and personality, as well as some hints on how to manage the disturbed mind. From time to time they are referred to in satsangs, lectures and writings. Read them with an open mind.

Is there any difference in spiritual progress among different nationalities?

I would say yes. Different nationalities represent different genetic divisions. Each tribe, culture and civilization represents a specific evolution of genes, which give birth to different types of mentalities. There are many common genes, yet there are certain specific ones too. These give birth to a different character, perspective, mentality and understanding. If you look at the different groups in the history of the world, you will discover a specific type of mentality which has nurtured that civilization. Some civilizations are war-mongering, some are introspective, some work with their mind and spirit while others work with matter, something which is tangible and physical. It is a genetic difference, rather than a difference in nationalities.

If you look at the history of Asia and the western countries, you will see different types of mentalities. Since the beginning of time, after the emergence of the first human being and the development of various tribes, empires and civilizations, certain groups have been more aggressive, outgoing and dominant, whereas others have been much more peaceful, introspective and more in tune with nature. Each group experiences and develops a mentality based on genetic conditions, over a period of time. In Asia genetic groups and types from China, Japan, Korea, right up to India, find it easier to introspect. Whereas for other genetic types, such as the Middle Eastern and Western, the outgoing nature is more attractive. These basic differences can give us a different insight, perspective and realization as the mind and consciousness develop.

Do we have one and the same ishta devata in each incarnation, or is it connected with the law of karma in every birth?

It depends on the fashion of the time, on the culture of the age. I mean, do you still wear the tiger suit that your ancestors wore, in this day and age? No, the style has changed. Future generations will also change the fashion. Religions also represent fashions, fads which are attractive for a specific period of time. Philosophies and lifestyles represent fashions. Everything is a fashion, even ishta devata is a fashion. Choosing to live a long-term marital life, or as a single, or living life among many people are also fashions of the mind.

We all live and experience what we are willing to understand. Our spiritual journey is also restricted by these traits of personality. As the personality traits change, the ishta devata can also change. If you are driving on the road, sometimes the mountains come into view, and the woods or the ocean at other times. During your journey you do not see the same view from the beginning to the end. In the same manner, when you are looking at the ocean, Narayana can become the ishta devata; when you are looking at the mountain, Shiva can become the ishta devata, when you are looking at the woods, Krishna can become the ishta devata, on this journey of life.

Ishta devata means a personality or a nature which you can identify with, at that particular moment of time, like friends. In the journey of our life, how many friends do we make? Family members are restricted, friends are unlimited. Each friend becomes an integral part of our life for some period. For three years we may see each other daily, and then for many years we do not see each other. New friends are made and old ones are forgotten. The number of friends we have in our lifetime depends on the situation, need, time, personal communication, interaction and maturity. In the same manner, the ishta devata can and should change. It has to evolve naturally without you making the effort. In my

own life, I have seen it change three times. In my childhood and adolescence my imagination changed, and my ishta devatas were different. Now my ishta devata is different at this stage in life. I have been a witness to these changes, at specific times when the shift has taken place. Each time it is like moving up to another higher level. That has been my experience.

Swamiji, we are going to Rikhia tomorrow. What should we expect?

Rikhia will be an interesting journey and experience for you. Rikhia is another creation of our guru, Swami Satyananda; as an institution and in purpose, it is totally different from Bihar School of Yoga. The purpose of Bihar School of Yoga is the propagation, development and teaching of yoga, whereas the purpose of Rikhia is to live the three cardinal principles of Swami Sivananda: serve, love and give. It is situated in a village in a tribal area. Indian villages have a defined mentality, and with tribal communities it is even more so. The ashram is working to provide the necessary and basic facilities for each person in that area. Necessary facilities to survive in the world, like blankets, clothes, mattresses, bedding, grains, pots and pans, cooking facilities, bicycles, three-wheelers, cars, to empower people of the weaker sections of society.

Our guru, Swami Satyananda, started a tradition that once a year, all the inhabitants of the region, who number about 60,000 people, families from about 80 villages, are provided with the basic necessities of life. This is done not as charity work, yet with prayers for their peace, plenty and prosperity, by invoking the divine to intervene in their life to make it better. For this purpose, he chose the medium of Chandi yajna, the ancient tantric ritual of Shakti worship, with which people in this country identify quite easily, as it is deeply ingrained in the culture.

You will be going there to experience another dimension of your yogic experience. Intensity has to be there, without

that there cannot be growth. The hard shell of the seed has to be broken for the soft sprout to emerge. In the same manner, the hard shell of self-contained egotistical awareness has to be broken for a different type of awareness to dawn.

It is possible to experience that kind of awareness through *seva*, service, by serving complete strangers, unknown people who are not part of your own immediate family, yet with whom you connect, to help make their life better. It will definitely be an experience, maybe a tough one, because of the limited facilities and strict rules of the place, which are necessary due to its location in a totally isolated rural area.

You will love every moment of it, as that is also the place where our guru, Swami Satyanandaji, performed many years of sadhana, without ever moving out, so there is a lot of high spiritual charge or energy in that place. Just be open in mind and heart, and experience whatever comes your way.

—9 November 2011

Why is it a special day today?

Today is 11-11-11 so there are six ones; the next time another such combination of ‘ones’ will happen is in November 2111. According to numerological definition, the number six represents the feminine power, Shakti. The day of Shakti, the cosmic feminine power is Friday, and 11-11-11 is also falling on a Friday when normally we have Shakti chanting in the ashram.

Every festival has two purposes. One purpose is the outer, or social get-together, having a good time doing something constructive and positive, not idling or whiling away the time. Time is constant, it is we who are fleeting, transient events in the continuum of time. Time is constant, it is we who are moving. You know, people often say how fast the time has flown. They should correct this. Time does not fly, it is constant; we have a fleeting existence in this infinite time.

How many drops are there in the ocean? A collection of drops makes the ocean. Similarly, the collection of life-forms

gives birth to the experience of life in this constant time, and that experience is like a spike on a graph. It goes up and it comes down: it takes forty years to go up and then forty years to decline. That is the spike in the graph of life. This is governed by the cosmic feminine power, Shakti.

When there was nothing, the Big Bang happened according to the scientific theories, and from that Big Bang everything was created, everything evolved. If there had been no Big Bang, there would be no source or place where all that energy is condensed and kept alive. You would not be the result of that explosion. We are the product of this condensed form of energy, Shakti. From one, it became many, in the form of the Big Bang: many universes, multiverses, many *brahmands*. Many types of life-forms came into being and evolved, from minerals to vegetables to plants to trees to insects to bacteria to amoeba. Everything from a single-cell amoeba, to a complex life-form like a human being and perhaps even more complex forms can be found in this universe. The tantrics call this creative potency Shakti.

Yesterday was the full moon night in the month of Kartik, known as *Kartik Poornima*. It was the night Krishna danced the Rasa Lila. In the life of Sri Krishna, when he was about sixteen years old, he called all the gopis or village milkmaids, and they went into the jungle on this full moon night and danced the Rasa Lila. *Raasa* means nectar and *lila* means an enactment, through which all the gopis were able to experience the ambrosial nectar. Their consciousness went so high that they became one with the transcendental reality, Krishna, for that period of time while they danced.

This particular Rasa Lila was enacted by Krishna on the full moon night in the month of Kartik, which usually falls in November when the air is cool and crisp, just before winter sets in. Krishna, the supreme consciousness, or the purusha principle dances in the freshness of that season with all the gopis, who are his powers. Creation comes forth through this dance, like a wheel moving with its spokes connected to the hub in the centre. When the spokes move and rotate together

connected by the central hub, motion is created, and this energy in motion is the beginning of creation.

Rasa Lila, the day of cosmic consciousness, was yesterday, and today with the unique date 11-11-11 is the day of Shakti, the cosmic feminine energy.

—11 November 2011

What is the difference between karmas and samskaras?

Samskaras are nourishment for the karmas. There is a clear distinction between karmas and samskaras, and karmas represent the final outcome. For example, if you plant a mango seed, the outcome will be a mango tree, not an orange tree. So, karma determines the character, the nature of an individual: what we can or will become; and samskaras are the nourishment or fertilizer that we use for the roots of the karmas. Through the samskaras, the karmas can become more intense and more powerful. If we give the right compost to the plant, it will grow into a healthy specimen, if you do not give the right compost to the plant and let it grow on its own, it may not be so healthy. Therefore, think of karma as the tree, and samskara as the nourishment which we give to the tree for its proper development and growth. That is the concept of karma and samskara.

Karma determines the nature or the character that is going to develop in our life, according to the unique blueprint that we have received as individual souls. For everything there is a blueprint. Before you make a car, you have to have a blueprint; before you construct a building there has to be a blueprint. Similarly, there is a blueprint for each soul before it comes into this life. Our life develops according to the blueprint which we have never seen, yet it is always there, directing the course of our life events. You do not see the blueprint of the car which is made in the factory, you only see the car which you drive. In the same manner, our life also has a blueprint, which we cannot see, yet we

can and do experience life. Life evolves, grows and develops according to this cosmic blueprint, that is karma.

Each one is a unique soul. Every individual is different from each other; no two people are the same. No two people have the same features, the same thumb print, or the same eyes, each one is unique. Samskaras are the nourishment and if we imbibe negative, restrictive or bad samskaras, then our life is being nurtured in the wrong manner. Our mind then becomes negative, pessimistic, destructive. If we are nurtured with the right samskaras, then our life can be more fulfilling, happy and whole.

Bhakti yoga is the path of refinement of emotions and bhakti marga is the path of devotion. Would it be true to say that the ritual of worshipping the manifest form of the deity unites these two paths of bhakti?

No, do not look at the outer ritual, look at the latent meaning and the purpose behind it. Rituals are supposed to create an ambiance, an environment which is conducive to sensitizing your own inner nature, and they do influence the mind, they alter the brainwaves, they alter the perceptions. The symbol which can be seen, which is being invoked, actually represents an aspect of your own consciousness and brings a change within it.

Now the thing is that very few people are able to describe and define the purpose of rituals. For them a ritual is a religious act and if it begins with this pre-conception, it does become just a mechanical process, a mechanical activity or procedure which emphasizes that first this has to be done, then that has to be done, until they are satisfied that they have done their good deed for the day. However, if there is an understanding of the ritual, then you become aware of more subtle things that underlie that process, you become aware of the energies that are being moved with the ritual as it affects the ambiance. Rituals alter, change and affect the environment, both the mental or inner aspect, and the outer one.

It is not only rituals; any act which can completely absorb the mind will alter the condition of the mind. If you go to a rock concert, just by listening to music your mental state and mood will be affected. If you listen to classical music your mental state will change accordingly. There is a distinct difference between an active, agitated mood and a passive, relaxed one. In the same manner, mantras and rituals take the mind away, or cut the mind off from outer connections and increase your awareness internally. Ritual is a step by step process by which you can further internalize the mind.

Meditation can be considered to be a ritual too as you are following a sequence to internalize the mind; it becomes a mental ritual as there is no physical activity taking place. The same meditation can become a physical act when outer rituals are being performed. We do havan and other different activities while our program is being conducted; they all help to focus the awareness, the attention, intention and aspiration of all the participants. A lot of these mental energies also combine with the outer act of the ritual, that becomes the sadhana. That is bhakti yoga.

Bhakti marga is the path where outer rituals become an indication of your attempt to seek divine intervention in life. Here you participate in the external ritual without the knowledge, awareness, understanding and sensitivity, that this process is also happening inside you simultaneously. The ritual remains an outer, symbolical act without understanding. Bhakti yoga is the path, in which the understanding develops that you as an aspirant are also part and parcel of the same process of the evolution and growth of consciousness.

Is it good for children to participate in sports? What about martial arts?

Children should be exposed to all kinds of sport, including martial arts. Why not? They need to develop physical strength, stamina and coordination, as well as the physical pranas, and to channel all this in the right direction. These

energies which are predominant in the life of a child have to be properly directed for their positive expression and outcome. Therefore, definitely sports are good for them; not computer sports, not mobile finger sports, or thumb sports. Now in the digital age, with computers and mobiles, we are seeing a trend where children are isolating themselves more and more from their own friends and interacting with their peers and others online. They prefer to spend time alone in a room in front of the computer, playing their own games. They are losing the skill to interact, communicate and cooperate with other people, and these are the lessons we learn naturally when we play games or sports.

So definitely outdoor activities are important for children to develop their bodies and their communication skills, sense of coordination, cooperation and team-spirit with other children. It is important that they learn to develop healthy relationships with other people, rather than isolating themselves and living in their own imaginative, virtual worlds online. So, whether it be martial arts, yoga, football, cricket, tennis, badminton, swimming, jogging, or any other thing, group activity is definitely a must and it should be encouraged for children.

Swamiji, you have differentiated between intense desire for spiritual life versus just idle curiosity for it. Can you explain this in the context of the initiation?

Intense desire or superficial desire has nothing to do with initiation. Initiation is a separate matter altogether, and your aspiration for it is different. There are many people who take initiation and then do not care about it. Ninety percent of people are like that. You are aware of the process of initiation. You are here now and are exposed to that situation and environment day after day. Yet once you go back home, for the first few weeks you will remember your mantra and do your japa. However, after a month your daily japa will become weekly japa, then after sometime it will become monthly japa, later it can even become yearly japa and

perhaps even be forgotten altogether. That in fact is the state of mind and life of the majority of aspirants. Initiation has nothing to do with intensity of desire, rather there should be clarity of intention and regularity in practice.

Once a person came to Ramakrishna Paramahansa and said, "I hear you are a realized person, and have a lot of powers and siddhis. I want you to show me Devi, give me the darshan of God." Ramakrishna kept quiet. The person kept imploring him, "Please show me God. I know you are capable of showing me, so please guide me so that I can see God." Ramakrishna still did not say anything. After sometime Ramakrishna got up from his seat and said, "Look I'm, going for a bath in the river, and you can accompany me if you want." He picked up his towel and went down to the river, with the man following him. The man sat and observed him from the bank, while Ramakrishna was swimming and diving under water.

Finally, Ramakrishna called the man to come into the water and take a few dips. The man got in and as soon as he took his first dip in the water, Ramakrishna jumped on him and held him under the water. The man started drowning and he could not breathe. Mustering all his courage and strength, he jumped up from the river bed, throwing Ramakrishna off his back, and gasping for air. Ramakrishna asked, "What happened?" He said, "I am sorry that I pushed you off my back, I was desperate to get some air into my lungs. I thought I was drowning and going to die." Ramakrishna then told him, "When you feel the same intensity to experience the higher consciousness, then only will it become possible for you to see God, to have darshan of God."

Therefore, if you just think about spiritual life at random, whiling away your time aimlessly, then nothing is going to happen. The intensity of yearning, the intensity of desire, has to grow day by day. It cannot be a fleeting thought, mixed together with every other activity of your waking hours. Intensity means that you are focused on one thing

only, and then the mind becomes powerful. Mostly we are not sincere about any spiritual realization in our life. We just want it to happen in a natural way while we are involved in the world, doing everything, both good and bad. It never happens that way. If intensity or desire is an outcome of your aspirations, then they have to be cultivated, focused and intensified.

Whether or not you have mantra initiation, makes no difference at all. So, do not link desire with initiation. Initiation is only a process, a tool which you are given. For example, if you want to study, you are given paper and pen to write. That is initiation, yet the purpose is to study. Therefore, the desire or intention should be to study, not to have pen and paper. If the desire is to study, then pen and paper will come naturally in due course, as you will search for it, look for it – nobody will have to give it to you. Yet, if there is no desire or intention to study, even if you have a room full of pens and paper, you will never use it. So, desire and initiation do not go hand in hand. Initiation is only a tool which you can choose to use to further develop the clarity and intensity of your purpose.

What is the practical application of knowing about Brahman? How does the oneness of Brahman fit into our lives?

There are different ways that you can look at this, from a theological, religious, philosophical, or any other point of view. If you look at it from the theological, philosophical or religious point of view, Brahman has no meaning. However, if you try to experience that reality in your practical life, then your understanding has to change, and that understanding is not philosophical, theological or religious, rather it is an opening and expansion of one's mind and heart.

Paramahamsaji tells us that the best way to experience God in one's life is to cultivate *atmabhava*, the ability to see oneself in others, and that is the most practical way too. For instance, you have a family, you have children, and if your

child falls sick, you will worry about this child incessantly. If the child has high fever, you will worry about the fever and spend sleepless nights until the child gets better. Your concern is for the welfare, happiness and peace of your child; if the neighbour's child falls sick it does not affect you at all. If other children fall ill it does not affect you at all, for you do not consider them to be your own. When you can consider other children to be your own children, then you have established a connection with them, and that connection is known as atmabhava, or what people call the heart connection.

For example, two boys have gone for a drive, they have an accident and both land up in hospital. One boy is your son and the other boy is your son's friend. You get the news that your child has had an accident and is in hospital, and you rush there immediately. You know that two people had gone driving, yet you are only worrying about one, your child. When you reach the hospital, the first person you go to see straight away is your child, who may have only superficial injuries. The other boy may have broken bones, yet the first person you will rush to see is your own child, for there is a direct connection with him, not with the other boy who had accompanied him.

This first level of connection is atmabhava – I see myself in my child. Paramahamsaji said that if you can cultivate the same feeling, if you can begin to feel the same intensity of emotion for everyone, then only is it possible to realize God, otherwise God is only a concept in the mind. So the practical way to experience Brahman is the cultivation of atmabhava, this gives a tangible dimension to that idea.

In ancient cultures like the Egyptian civilization there was the concept of energies available in nature beyond those known to the commoners, which could be used for physical work. Is there any parallel concept in India?

All civilizations, whether they be Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, or any other group, have developed and evolved their thinking from the basic to the most advanced

levels. When thinking or comprehension begins at the basic level, then you begin to perceive forces at work around you, and you begin to identify symbols that become catalysts to bring about a change in your external environment. The sun, moon, planets, stars, thunder, air, water, all became independent gods in different civilizations and cultures. For example, the god of thunder was Zeus, Thor and Indra in different cultures. These are what we perceive as the forces of nature that govern and control life, and that is at the basic level.

Then you go one step further and begin to think that if each aspect of nature is fulfilling its own particular role, then who is the controller of that nature. Hence, from the previous concept of many gods, comes the new idea of a singular God, the controller, and this concept has existed in every civilization. The Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, Indians have all had it, yet the only thing is that when these civilizations declined, they had not yet come to the point where they were aware of that singular God. Rather, they continued with their ideology or belief that we are all governed by different forces of nature.

The Indian civilization is still alive and kicking, it has not been eradicated, it is not dead. In history we can see that from this basic lower level of identifying different natural forces as the manifest or *sakara* aspect of God, in course of time the other higher idea of God as the supreme controller evolved, in the *nirakara* or unmanifest aspect or form.

Similarities exist in every civilization; the development of an idea takes place only when the culture and influence of a civilization continues for a long period of time. If the civilization dies an early death, the ideology stops developing there, as it happened with the Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, etc. That is my view of the subject.

Swamiji, would you please explain samadhi?

I stand by what I said. My question to you is, “Are you sincerely committed to your spiritual life and how do you live your spiritual life? When you go back to your environment,

your family, your home, your profession, your society, how would you live your spiritual life on a day-to-day basis?" Tell me that. Forget about samadhi, forget about your question. Think about how you live your spiritual life.

Is your spiritual life one hour of meditation every day, and the rest of the time you are partying, drinking, dancing travelling, working, spending time with your family, or caught up in other diversions? If that is your concept of spiritual life, then thinking about samadhi has no relevance for you. One hour of internalization and x number of hours of external diversions will not make you progress in your spiritual life. It can give you temporary peace and a feeling of lightness, it will not give you spiritual growth. For such people samadhi is a distant reality. I cannot understand why they even think about samadhi. In order to experience samadhi, there has to be a complete disconnection from everything that is external and all outer influences.

For forty odd years I used to teach yoga, I used to speak on every subject related to yoga including samadhi, yet I had never experienced it. I used to teach about meditation, yet I had never experienced meditation. When I devoted myself to my sadhanas and withdrew myself from outer participation and involvement, then I started to have glimpses of samadhi, glimpses of meditation, glimpses of this and that, things that I had spoken about for so many years without experiencing.

Are you able to cut yourself off completely, 24/7, from everything outside and just focus on your spiritual development? No. If in your present condition, you experience the meditative state, samadhi, you will not even want it, for nobody is willing to die to the outer life. Nobody is willing to kill the 'little I', the ego identity. Swami Sivanandaji used to sing, "Kill this little I, die to live, live the divine life." As long as you are involved in the world, 'I' is always watching, controlling, guiding you, and therefore you cannot escape the gravitational pull of this 'I'. When you are able to let go of the 'I' identity, then the 'Thy' identity sets in, and that is the spiritual identity – Thy will be done.

Therefore, I am very clear in my mind that in the normal course of life, people can go only up to the stage of dharana. All the people in the world – with their various commitments, responsibilities, involvement with society and family, personal ambitions, hang-ups, limitations, strengths and other qualities; no matter how good, benevolent, pious, or bad and negative they are – external influences will not allow them to progress spiritually. In the normal course of things, you can somewhat tweak the different behaviours of your personality or nature, however you cannot bring a transformation or a new nature into your life. Even if something new starts to develop, you will reject it, for nobody wants to let go of their personal identity, and the awareness associated with it. Frankly or bluntly speaking, in the normal course of their practice, people can only go up to the dharana stage. Only those people who are able to cut off from everything sensorial and all external inputs can move into the higher stages of dhyana and samadhi.

Therefore, do not think that samadhi is your birth right and that it is possible to attain it easily. Yes, Patanjali and all the rest of us speak about it indicating that it is a stage to be attained, accomplished and experienced. However, dhyana and samadhi cannot be experienced by anybody until the mind is disassociated from its own seductions. The mind does seduce itself. You see a nice flower, car, girl, boy or anything that catches your fancy, and you instantly want it, and in all these cases, it is the mind seducing itself. However, when you reach the stage where you can have everything and yet you do not want anything, or when you do not have anything and still do not want anything, then that is called *vairagya*.

It is *vairagya* that will allow you to move further into the meditative experience and the samadhi experience. Absence of *vairagya* in life will keep you only at the practice level of asana, pranayama, pratyahara and dharana, just to relieve the pressure from the body and mind, that's all. However, this will not alter the condition, or the quality of the mind by bringing in a higher awareness.

Amongst the sannyasins at Bihar School of Yoga, was the decision to become a sannyasin precipitated by a single event, or was the decision arrived at gradually over a period of years? To what extent does and should a sannyasin maintain a relationship with his or her earlier existence?

I do not know what has been the catalyst for the sannyasins here. I have never asked them, and also I do not want to ask them. As far as the rule of the tradition is concerned, yes there has to be a proper disconnection from our previous social identity, as sannyasa is also considered to be the death of the old 'me'. In India at the time of sannyasa initiation, we conduct our final rites of death, indicating that the previous identity of this person is finished, no longer exists. It is like if I take sannyasa, I will go the graveyard, put my body in a grave and the tombstone will have my previous name and will be dated from my birth till the day of my initiation. In my case, my previous life or existence would be from 1960 to 1964. The new life of Swami Niranjana, starts after 1964, so my future tombstone will be dated from 1964 to . . . Why should I as a sannyasin reconnect with my past birth in this new life?

Sannyasa is definitely the path of renunciation, of *vairagya*, or non-attachment. Sannyasa is also the path of *viveka*, or discriminative ability, wisdom and common sense. If we combine all these things, then there is a natural disconnection from one's past social identity, including the family. Why have attachment to just one family? Just as you do not have any attachment to the families of your past births, in the same way, why be attached to your family in this birth, with whom you lived for x number of years. You died to your old life, and have taken a new birth as a sannyasin. This is something that very few people understand and they all try to keep the previous connection alive, which is not the tradition of sannyasa.

Everybody comes to sannyasa with different aspirations, thoughts and ideas. One of the main requirements of

sannyasa is not to be independent in society, but to follow a path which has been defined by the tradition and by the Guru. Those who can follow such a path become the realized people over a period of time. Those who follow the whims of the mind can be initiated, shave their heads and wear geru, yet there is no surrender, sincerity or commitment. You can see this trend in every country of the world, whether it be religious priests, pandits or sannyasins. There are large numbers of such people, however recognition goes only to those who have surrendered themselves and are sincere as well as fully devoted and committed to the tradition, to the Guru and to the philosophy and system which is being propagated in the mission. There are no companions on the path of sannyasa, it is a tradition in which one walks alone, with allegiance to and surrendering only to the Guru.

—13 November 2011

What will be the three-year sannyasa training course that starts next year?

There has been a good response for the three-year Sannyasa Training, both nationally and internationally. That is going to be a challenging program for sannyasa is a lifestyle, it is a mentality, it is a way of looking at life. The most important quality is being ready to learn – that is the training. One should not expect to become holy overnight, but have the intention to learn continuously; this is the spirit of sannyasa.

Learning happens on many levels. I find that people stop learning after a certain time or their idea of learning changes. I can give many examples. One can have a degree in physics, yet not know the basic things in life. I am not indicating or pointing to anyone in particular. Let us take the example of havan, something that is done here day after day, week after week, year after year. All swamis participate in havans however, when I see a havan conducted, I am surprised. Although they have been doing the havan for so long, they still do not know how to manage the fire.

Sometimes the wood is placed too close together; sometimes it is placed too far apart; sometimes the whole thing burns down to embers before more wood is added and sometimes with a raging fire, wood is continuously added.

When I observe these actions, I wonder when we stopped learning the normal things of life. We can observe something every day yet we are not able to perform that act properly and correctly. Sometimes I try to put myself in the shoes of those who are tending the fire – what do they see? Do they see the ember falling off the edge? Do they see the distance between the wood, whether the fire is picking up and if the wood is catching fire or not, or if the flame is being wasted? Do they place the wood so close that the fire is suffocated and camphor has to be added frequently to light the fire? Something that we have been doing for years, yet nobody has learnt how to look after the fire. I'm giving an example.

Somewhere, there is a block to learning and if somebody shows a method, a way to do things more effectively, this method is not repeated. There is a threat to the ego, 'who are you to tell me?' I find that people block their process of learning. One can become a physicist and not know how to tend the fire; one can become a scientist and not know the practicalities of life, not be able to perceive the difference between the truth and a rumour. One can become a yogi and lose all practical understanding of life too. There is an imbalance in the receptivity of the mind and nothing changes. You can go through ten years of sannyasa training and still be the same Tommy that you were ten years ago. However, if there is the zeal to learn, to observe and to apply the learning, then yes, one can tread the path of sannyasa, not bumbling through, but tread the path.

Observing human nature and how to manage all the different human characteristics of a diverse group of participants is going to be a challenge. It is definitely going to be a challenge, not for the participants, but for me. I am sure that if they are guided to be here, they will do well.

I do feel very strongly that our lack in learning is what holds us back so we cannot progress. One should be multifaceted; one should be able to remain aware of many things and not get lost in certain ideas or feelings or sensations. Those people who lose themselves are not fit for sannyasa. They can live in an ashram, however the light of sannyasa will not shine in them, no. For the light of sannyasa to shine, a different mind has to be implanted, a different mind has to be cultivated. The same mind doesn't work.

If you want to run a medical program in your computer, you need to have medical software. Photography software will not work for medical requirements. For architecture, you need architectural software, for engineering you need engineering software, so for sannyasa you need sannyasa software, and not many people are willing to install the sannyasa software. They just want to keep the computer without installing the software of sannyasa, and simply use the computer as typewriter: create documents and print them out, create documents and print them out. The computer becomes a typewriter, a more sophisticated one, that's all.

What is the Munger Foundation Day?

Today they are celebrating the Foundation Day of Munger and I asked how they decided on this date. And the answer was – it was selected at random as there are so many dates to give credit to. Foundation Day is the day when the foundation stone for Munger was laid.

According to history, the old name of Munger was Mudgumpur, the city of Mudgul, founded by Sage Mudgul. The name Munger has come from Mudgul. Sage Mudgul is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* which means he was a contemporary to Krishna, the Pandavas and Kauravas. In the *Mahabharata*, it is mentioned that he had an ashram beside the banks of the Ganga on a small hill. Actually, where we are is the last hill of the Vindhyachal ranges – we are on the last hillock of the Vindhyachal range of mountains which stretches across India. We are the last outpost and across the

Ganga there is nothing. It is believed that this sage of the *Mahabharata* time had an ashram and later on the population grew up around the ashram.

There was another Mudgul. It is like saying 'Smith' and 'Smith'. There was another Mudgul, a disciple of Buddha, who also came and lived in this area preaching Buddhism. In fact, Munger was the first place Buddha gave his earliest instructions to his disciples on how to be disciplined. The story is that Buddha came to Munger with ten thousand of his disciples, and in those days, the disciples had to stay in the houses of different people. While staying as guests in different homes they ate very much and they all became fat. Thus, Buddha had to give a law that his bhikshus would eat only the food they received by begging, by alms. The tradition of alms in Buddhism started in Munger. Prior to that, anybody could invite the bhikshus, anybody could invite Buddha and give them a feast, give them good food, and it was all accepted. And this Mudgul who was a disciple of Buddha, stayed in Munger to bring the teachings of Buddha. This is a second Mudgul.

If we go back into ancient history, they say that Rama and Sita came to this part of the Ganga. At that time there was a hamlet here, and if it was populated at that time, at the time of Rama and Sita, it means the date would have been pushed back even further for the Foundation Day.

Then Munger was destroyed by the earthquake in 1937. It was flattened in an earthquake and not a single house was left standing. Then in 1937 after the earthquake, Swami Sivanandaji came to Munger and he held akhanda kirtan in the premises of the town hall, and then Munger was re-established. Many people can consider the day of the earthquake to be the Foundation Day of the new Munger.

After that, Munger was carved into a district by the British, and the day the British made Munger District, and it took its place on the political map, the Munger we know today came into existence.

—3 December 2011

Why will we chant the *Hanuman Chalisa* on New Year's day?

We have just completed the havan of Narayana with the purpose of saying goodbye to the year 2011. People generally think of welcoming the New Year, nobody thinks of bidding a fitting goodbye to the old year. To say goodbye to the old year means that you have to be thankful for everything that you have learned, received and gained, accepted and rejected, loved and hated during this last year, for it has given you an opportunity to grow and to discover something more about yourself. All the events, situations and circumstances that you have encountered in the last year, have actually contributed in making you a little better by giving you a new exposure and understanding, a set of new experiences. What we are today is due to the past year that we have lived. Therefore, it is befitting to say a happy goodbye to the old year. This journey continues and the year changes, time changes, and people also change.

If you look at the months and the old traditions of the world, most people celebrated their new year in the month of March, when spring sets in and winter goes away. December is actually the tenth month, not the twelfth; September is the seventh, October the eighth and November the ninth. From every logical point of view, the New Year begins in March, not in the middle of the freezing cold winter, when you are chilled to the bone, and shivering.

The Gregorian calendar which we are living with today, is the gift of the Roman empire. So many Caesars and Emperors have changed dates for political gain or other reasons, and that has affected modern civilization and human society. The New Year comes when the winter is over, and the first green buds are sprouting from the dormant ground, heralding the arrival of spring, new hope, a new outlook, new inspiration and new warmth.

To welcome and usher in the New Year tomorrow, you are going to participate in the *Hanuman Chalisa* path. It will

be a marathon, a mantra marathon, and it will take about six hours to chant this path 108 times. Each chanting of the path is a mantra, so 108 paths equals one mala of the *Hanuman Chalisa*. We chant the *Hanuman Chalisa* for a simple reason, the mind is both a monkey and the king. So, your Hanuman is sitting inside you.

In the story of Hanuman, you will discover that he had all the powers and siddhis. He could do anything and everything right from his birth. He had many skills, talents and special abilities, maturity and understanding beyond his years, and he was full of mischief during childhood. As a child he used to bother the rishis in the forests a lot. When they would be doing their headstands or other asanas and austerities, Hanuman would go with scissors and cut off their *kaupins*, loin cloths. Similarly, when they were in deep meditation he would go with scissors and cut their beards, so he was quite naughty in that way. The rishis cursed him saying that he would forget his powers, skills and abilities until somebody reminded him at a crucial moment in time. That is the curse we are all living with until today. We have all the abilities or potentials, yet they lie dormant within us as we are unaware of them.

Khopadi mein sab kuch bhara hai, lekin kisiko kuch maalum nahin

All the abilities, skills, powers, siddhis, everything is contained in this tight spot, the mind, however nobody is aware of them. Why? You know, the brain has two halves – the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere. The joke is that in the right hemisphere of the brain there is nothing right, and in the left hemisphere of the brain there is nothing left. In this state of confusion people can never discover their true potential. We are all the prototypes of that confusion. That is the quality of Hanuman who has everything and knows everything, yet is unaware of his inherent abilities or powers.

Then somebody had to come and remind him that he had all these skills and powers. This is where the guru comes

in, and Hanuman represents the disciple. The guru comes and tells the disciple, “You are not this body, you are not this mind, you are not the senses. You are the immortal self.” Hanuman is reminded that he is capable of achieving greater feats than everyone else who doubts their own powers, abilities and skills. Endowed with this understanding, Hanuman uses his skills to discover Sita and to reunite Sita and Rama, bring consciousness and energy together. The mind becomes the medium to discover the location of energy and to eventually unite that energy, Sita, with consciousness, Rama. In the awakened stage, the symbol of Hanuman represents absolute mastery or command over everything combined with total humility.

Imagine if you have command over something, do you become arrogant or remain humble? Look at yourself and look at all the people around you. People who believe they know everything, are the most arrogant of the lot. To cultivate and express humility while knowing and controlling everything, being the master of everything, is a rare quality. The individual who does not allow the ego to dominate behaviour and thoughts, is all powerful, yet humble. Hanuman’s one-pointed focus is exemplary, in the form of his complete devotion to his master, Sri Rama.

Somebody once asked Hanuman to define his relationship with Rama. Hanuman gave a beautiful answer, saying that at the physical level or dimension, Rama was his master, and he was his servant; in the mental dimension, they were both companions; in the spiritual dimension there was no difference between Rama and Hanuman, they were both one and the same. This unique relationship with Rama that Hanuman described shows that he had actually experienced and realized it. He gave this answer for he believed it, and had a clear mind, a clear understanding of his obligations, duties and commitments. Hanuman represents strength of character, wisdom, the sharpest and keenest intellect, and the finest mind. He epitomizes humility and perfection, together with total surrender and love

for his divine master. He represents so many things, his qualities are innumerable.

When you invoke that shakti through the chanting of the *Hanuman Chalisa*, that force does descend upon you, which you will experience tomorrow. So keep your mind, head and heart open. Tonight before you go to sleep give a heartfelt thanks to 2011, for all the good and beautiful things it has brought to you, for everything it has made you aware of. You can also give special thanks for the opportunity we had to be here together tonight.

—31 December 2011



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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.

This volume covers satsangs given in 2010 and 2011. Swami Niranjan addresses different groups of aspirants and answers questions on yoga, yogic lifestyle, spiritual life and explains the meaning of spiritual celebrations.



ISBN :978-93-94604-41-4