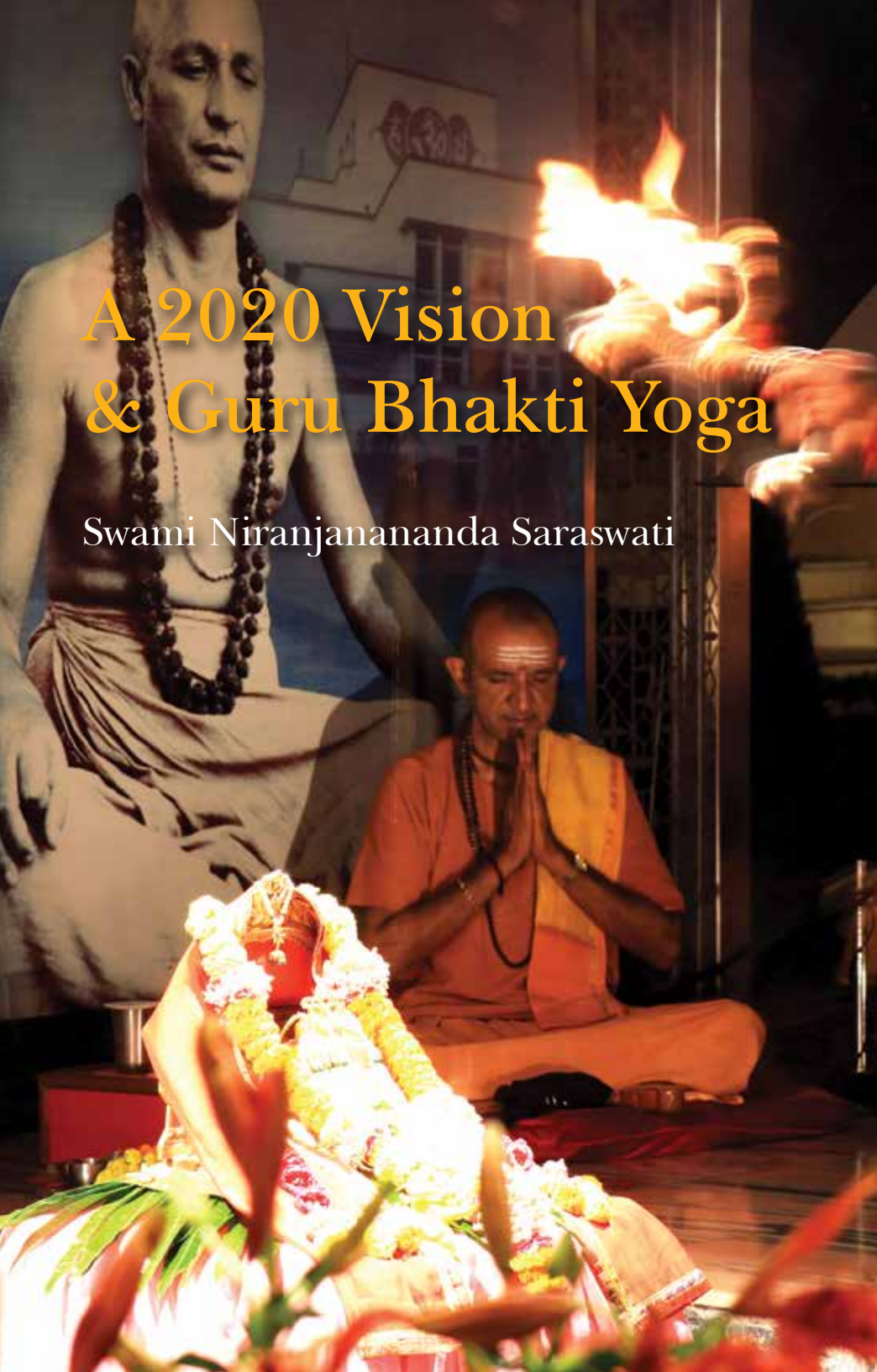




A 2020 Vision & Guru Bhakti Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Night of Gratitude

31 December



New Year's Eve or 31st December is the last day of the year, and it is seen in two parts. One is the coming year unknown to us, and we expect that it will be good. The second is leaving the year that we have lived every moment and derived a lot of learning and experience from. Tonight is a night to say 'thank you' to the year for all the learning and lessons that we have received. It is this experience which is going to guide us tomorrow. If tomorrow is an unknown day, then how can a whole year be known? It is absolutely unknown. We don't know what will happen one week or one month down the line.

To walk this journey during the coming year, we need to have hope and faith. Hope and faith will carry us forward. We have hope that things will be better, that we can manage and face the difficulties of life in a better manner, as now we have one more year of experience. Situations are not going to change, conditions, your home, your stress, nothing is going to change. Only one night defines the change-over from one year to the next. The year changes, but do you?

Faith is the other quality. It keeps us moving forward all the time. We have faith that all will be good. We connect our hope with last year's learning and experience for it will give us a better understanding of our life in the coming days. We have faith that we shall walk the path.

Your sadhana tonight

Today is the day of gratefulness for the year that has gone by. Respect, honour and think of the past decade, and what you have gained each year. Go through each year and what you have gained in every dimension – social, personal, emotional, spiritual. When you complete the decade and come to this year, then review month by month – what happened in January, February until now. See the goodness which you have lived, expressed and shared with everyone. Connect with the goodness that you have lived and recognize that it has brought joy and happiness to you and also to others.

Pain and suffering will always be there. There is only one rose and thousand thorns on the same stem. The thousand thorns will be there, yet it depends on where you look. When you look at the beauty of the rose, thousand thorns make no difference at all, you just have to hold the stem carefully. If you look at the thorns, the beauty of the rose will never attract you. You will always think, 'This thorn is going to prick me'. Look at the good that you have lived, experienced and shared with all, and make that your baseline to develop further. Look at the rose and not at the thorns. Appreciate the beauty, fragrance, colour and glory of the rose for it gives you fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness. Deal with the thorns



in the appropriate manner, either wear gloves or hold the stem delicately. That is the learning which you have to carry forward in your life as well.

2020 is the year of good vision. 20-20 means having good sight. Let us all pray that we may have 20-20 vision next year. Tomorrow we will welcome this 20-20 vision with *Hanuman Chalisa*. Hanuman represents strength and faith, wisdom and determination, *sankalpa*. By invoking these qualities in our life, we shall start our journey into the new year.

2020 – A Year of Hope and Faith

1 January, Morning



Today for the first time, New Year is being celebrated in Sannyasa Peeth. It is a beautiful beginning to start our new year with a spiritual perception, with hope and faith for the coming year. From last year, we carry the experience and the learning, which, if we apply it properly in our life, will ensure a successful journey through the unknown year that waits for us.

We start the New Year celebration with a meditation by our master Sri Swami Satyananda, followed by havan and the chanting of Sundarkand. Then the unbroken chanting of *Hanuman Chalisa* 108 times begins. Today forget yourself in the chanting and the environment, immerse yourself in the vibrations and feelings. Pray for the welfare of all and for everyone around you and in the world. Share your goodwill and good feelings. Spread and radiate your goodwill from yourself, to this environment, to Munger town, to Bihar, to India and to the rest of the world with the feeling of peace, happiness, contentment and joy.



1 January, Afternoon



The whole day, the chanting of *Hanuman Chalisa* went on. The credit of this chanting and organization goes to the children of Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal. They have been singing and singing continuously without break. When they were asked to go for their meal, they refused. Many of the children have not eaten today and fasted. They have just been singing and singing the whole day. This is their strength of character, their belief and faith.



You may think that faith and belief have no place in the material dimension and that they only relate to the spiritual dimension. If you think that, you are incorrect. Faith and belief are important ingredients of the mind. They make up the mind. Just as the body is made up of bones, marrow, muscles, nerves, skin and so much more, the mind is also composed of many different items. Thought is one, sentiment is another, yet the qualities that we live in our life are also inherently hidden in the mind. The strength and clarity that we seek in our life is hidden in our mind. We only have to explore the qualities, expose them and bring them out with faith, emotion and belief. These qualities are related to EQ, the emotional quotient. Some may think of IQ, the intellectual quotient, as the highest. However, there are people with a high IQ who are misfits in society for they have no EQ and no SQ, social quotient.

SQ is the way you relate with people. EQ shows how you understand and express yourself, and IQ is about how you apply knowledge and wisdom in the correct manner. These three compose the human nature and mind.

It is not only intelligence and knowing, which is important in life, but also hope and faith. How do we walk a path, which is totally unknown to any one of us. How do we explore the year, that is coming and waiting for us? Only with hope and faith. We don't know what to expect tomorrow. We don't know what to expect the day after tomorrow. We don't know, what will happen in a week's or in a month's time, yet we have hope and faith that all will be well.

Hope and faith always indicate the path of the future. The path of the past which we have travelled is full of experience and learning – the sweet and sour, the good and bad, the painful and pleasurable, everything is there. All this is part of experience and learning which we have to utilize to move in a new, totally unknown direction with hope and faith.

This is the strength of Hanuman. Hanuman represents strength and wisdom, faith, belief and proper understanding. It is a beautiful nature, which we see in the life of Hanuman. He was the first super hero. You have Superman and Batman, we have Hanu-man. Hanu-man is our super hero who has been eternally with us for he represents the strength and wisdom we all seek, and the faith we all desire. He represents everything that a human being desires in life to become the best.

To begin the New Year with the mantras of Hanuman will definitely inspire and guide you in the coming times. Whenever you feel fear and flounder on your path, he will be there to support you, to give you strength, hope and faith to keep on walking. It doesn't matter, how many times you fall, but always get up again and keep on walking.



Ganesha

4 January



Today is the first Guru Bhakti Yoga of 2020, the year of equal vision. It is also the beginning of a new mala. In December 2019, we completed 108 months of Guru Bhakti Yoga aradhana in Munger. Now the second mala is starting and the first month is the first bead. In this Guru Bhakti Yoga, the first invocation is of Ganesha, the second of Shiva and the third is of Shakti.

Who is Ganesha? And what is the connection of Ganesha with sannyasa, sannyasins and Sri Swamiji? People know of Ganesha as the elephant god. That is the common

perspective, yet traditionally Ganesha is the god of *Om*, the ruler of the pranava mantra *Om*. Ganesha has two forms. In the unmanifest form he is *Mahaganapati*, the power, the energy, the shakti of *Om*, and in the manifest form he becomes the son of Parvati.

When he was born to Parvati, his form was human. Shiva and Shakti represent the purest of the pure elements, the undefined consciousness and energy, the undefined sentientness and the power of action, creation, manifestation. This pure element of Shiva and Shakti have a son, Ganesha, who is human.

And what is the identification of human? The I-ness, I am, I exist, I am this body, I am this mind, I am the senses. The I-ness is the identity of humans, not expansiveness, but containedness. Shiva and Shakti are expansive, yet Ganesha as a human being is contained in the 'I' which develops into ego – me, my ability, my power, myself, my need, my desire, everything connected with me emerges from the ego. Along with the gross manifestation of ego comes arrogance. With exceptions, the majority of people who are powerful are arrogant, egotistical, manipulative. They are too self-contained, and that is the human, the *jiva* aspect, which is not the pure, but the tainted element.

Shiva cut off the human head of Ganesha. That means the ego was cut, and the awareness of I-ness, the I-identity was gone. Then an elephant's head was put to replace the human head. The elephant represents *buddhi*, intelligence, and instinct. The back of the human brain and the brain stem, where the primitive brain enters the cortex, the modern brain, looks like an elephant's head with trunk, eyes and ears. Ganesha represents the instinctive, something that has come with us naturally, and he represents the intellectual, something that one can analyze, control, guide and create. He represents the ruler of both.

He is also the creator and remover of obstacles and hurdles. He creates obstacles for the naughty people, so they don't do too many naughty things, and he removes obstacles



for the good, pious people, so they can spend more time doing good and pious acts.

Ganesha was born human and human beings have ego, the I-identity as their primary state in life. That is not compatible with the pure elements of Shiva and Shakti. Therefore, the ego is eliminated and a wisdomful head is given, combining the instinctive, the primitive, the inherent aspect and the intellectual, the attainable, the acquirable aspect. Ultimately, in order to achieve transcendence, the ego has to be worked with, not the mind. In meditation people work with the mind, but nobody works with their egos. However, after going through the mind in meditation, you ultimately have to work with your ego and settle it for all times to come.



Ganesha and Sri Swamiji

What is the significance of Ganesha's nature in Paramahamsaji's life? When Paramahamsaji describes his first encounter with Swami Sivananda in 1943, he says, "The moment I saw him, my mind became totally empty. There were no questions, no thoughts. Only the awareness, the knowing, that I had found the one I was looking for and I had no need to search anymore." It was this mind-set of Paramahamsaji, which carried him through his discipleship while living in Sivananda Ashram.

In an ashram people of every mind-set come. Not everybody is a good and pious person in an ashram. There are different personality traits that come and stay here for a few months. Others will stay for one year, others will stay for five years depending on what they want or until they have a breakthrough. When they have the breakthrough they leave. As there are so many different personalities and natures, living in peace is a distant dream in an ashram. There is always conflict, clash of interest, personalities, mind-sets, thoughts and ideas. One has to find balance, for in the ashram everybody has to grow together, nobody is an exception.

People in general are unable to confront the many ways of their own ego expressions. If one is free from that ego, then no matter what the difficulties, good and bad times, the feeling is always there 'I belong and it belongs to me' – I belong to this place; this place belongs to me. I am responsible for it and this place is good for me. I belong to my Guru; my Guru belongs to me. I belong to my God; my God belongs to me. I belong to my truth; my truth belongs to me'. That belonging awareness of 'I belong', indicates the absence of ego. As long as ego is there, you will find fault and you are not that. As long as ego is there, there is expectation and desire waiting to be fulfilled, and there is separation from the intention and the person. In his life, Paramahamsaji went through all the difficulties much more than what people go through today. There is much more comfort now. In the difficult and the good times, his ego never once separated him either from the ashram or from his Guru. And he lived that state of discipleship all his life.

Who is a guru? Does anybody declare, 'I am a guru'? If they do, it is their ego which is declaring it. There is no such thing as guru. There is only one thing – proper living. As disciples we try to live properly. That has to be the effort. As followers and aspirants, we have to try to live properly. That has to be the effort, with right understanding, with right awareness and with the right hero. Everybody has a hero. In society those heroes are multimillionaires, film actors and actresses, or other achievers in life. Everybody has a hero and everybody tries to emulate some quality of the hero in their behaviour, action or lifestyle.

When I look at my life and at Sri Swamiji's life, who was our hero? Our hero was our Guru. The hero in Sri Swamiji's life was his Guru, and he became one. The hero in my life is my Guru and I am making the effort to become one. It is as simple as that. That effort, idea and identity of a disciple, 'I am an aspirant, I am a traveller, I am making the journey, following the mandates and the guidelines as given by the tradition of the masters' – is simplicity and staying away from ego.



Without the basic inkling of what spiritual life is, people use the term ‘guru’. In reality guru means the person who is established in the transcendental nature of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram. This is the energy the guru radiates. However, even in that state the guru is always a disciple connected with the inspiration, the master and the aradhaya. This is one quality I have seen in my guru’s life.

As we celebrate Ganesha today, this thought came to me, ‘Who is Ganesha?’ A person who has removed all aspects of I-ness and is connected to higher wisdom. Who is a true disciple? One who is able to remove all traces of ‘I’ and connect with the higher reality, the *guru tattva*, the guru element, the God element, the pure element. This is the beginning of a journey to attain Ganesha’s grace. To become egoless is the beginning of the journey in the life of a disciple. Otherwise, the guru says, “You do this,” and the disciple says, “No, I am not going to do it. I am going to do something else,” yet the disciple still expects the guru to continue to guide. That is not possible or practical. Therefore, Ganesha and discipleship go hand in hand for to become egoless is the first need of the disciple.

Shiva

5 January



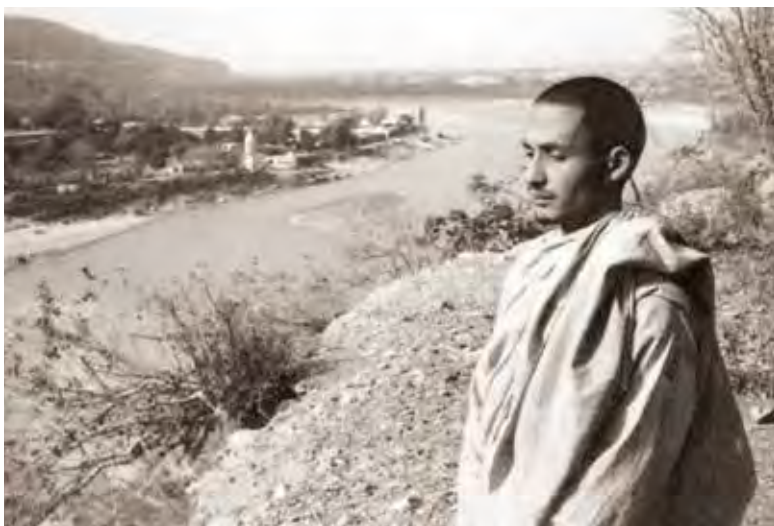
Ganesha in its transcendental form is the deity of *Om*, Omkara, the pranava nada. He also represents the highest intelligence, *buddhi*. The Ganesha that we know in the material form is an evolute of Shakti, not of Shiva. Ganesha is made from the body of Shakti, without any help or intervention from Shiva. Ganesha is purely a Shakti child, it is not a Shiva child. Ganesha is given the human form and this human form is identified by I-ness. Without I-ness there is no understanding of 'me', my body, my senses, my life,

my world. Whatever is mine, the I-ness has to be there. That I-ness is the beginning of the ego principle. Shiva and Shakti are pure elements. A distorted evolute of Shakti cannot represent true Shakti, therefore Shiva cuts off the human head of Ganesha, representing the identity of 'I' or ego, and gives him the elephant head which symbolizes wisdom, intelligence.

Ganesha represents absolute and total absence of ego, which is attainable once you go through the process of surrender, which is the most difficult thing. People like to deal with their mind – 'What I think, what I feel, what I desire, what I like and dislike'. Everything is revolving in the mind. People do meditation on that – 'The reasons of my stress is in the mind. How can I pacify it in my mind? How can I become stressfree?' Everything you do revolves around the mind. However, the mind is only one aspect of this I-ness. In the *Yoga Sutras* and yoga shastras it is said that the last thing to go is the *asmita*, the I-ness, even if you attain samadhi. One of the final stages of samadhi is *asmita samadhi*, where the I-ness completely dissolves and after that comes the *ananda samadhi*, the blissful state.

As a yoga aspirant you deal with the mind, yet as a yoga sadhaka, it is not the mind but the ego, the self, that has to be confronted. For householders, the mind is all right. For sannyasins it has to be the self, for once you go through that process, you are able to reduce the 'I' identification. There is more humility, faith, understanding, belief and more knowledge. Everything increases manifold.

It is this surrender that I have seen in the life of my Guru. It is not just a concept. It is what you live on a day-to-day basis, in your interactions, relationships, performance, work, in your understanding and belief. How would a person who thinks, 'Let thy will be done', live and act? By letting everything happen as per the will that is happening around. Swami Satyananda represented that until the last of his breaths. Even in his final prayer before mahasamadhi, he thanked Swami Sivanandaji and he prayed that he be his



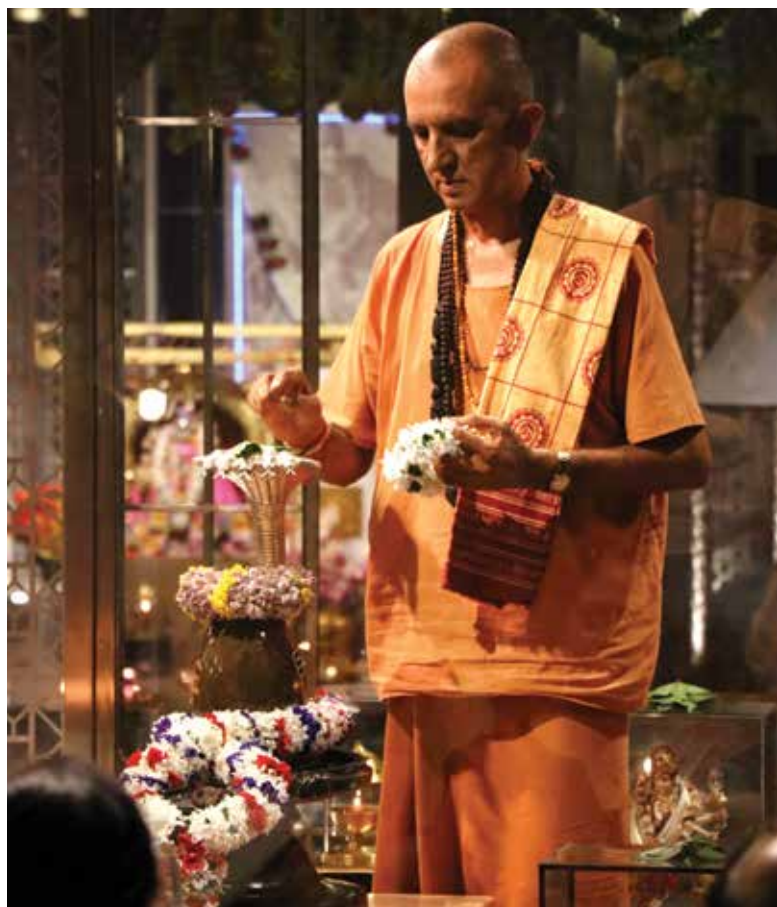
Guru again at the next opportunity. That is discipleship, not enlightenment. If you say, “I have seen God,” I-ness is there. Therefore, it is not a complete experience as it is associated with I-ness – I have seen God.

The first thing that is important in the life of a disciple is learning to surrender. It happens when there is a feeling of belonging, when there is trust and faith. Sri Swamiji exemplified these three qualities.

Tantra

Today we are celebrating Shiva. What is the association of Sri Swamiji with Shiva? People can say that Shiva is the God of sannyasins or renunciates; or Shiva represents consciousness. These are only intellectual mutterings of the mind. So, what is Shiva? Is it a person who lived in Kailash many thousands of years ago and whose picture appears on the coins of Mohenjodaro or is he a concept, an idea, an understanding, an aspiration, a goal? Or is Shiva God? To know Shiva, you have to come to the tantras.

In tantra, Shiva is the Self, without any label, not higher, not lower, not infinitely expansive, not limited, but Self



which is all-pervasive. This Self is imbued in auspiciousness, goodness. After all, you are also a self of your body, and you want everything that you receive to be good and auspicious. In the same manner, this Self and the nature of the Self is good and auspicious.

This Self has five powers: omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, bliss, *ananda*, and eternity, *sanatanta*. These are the five powers of God. You call it Shiva where all these five powers exist as potential, experience, conditions and states – omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, bliss and eternity.

When all of these are together, then three aspects emerge of Shiva – *Satyam*, the real, devoid of the unreal and imaginative; *Shivam*, the transcendental good, not what you perceive to be good from your mind; and *Sundaram*, the inherent outcome, the beauty, the *saundarya*. Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram denote the nature of this Cosmic Self, the Shiva *tattva* or Shiva element. Shiva has to be free from any kind of distortion in its nature. It is totally aloof from the world which people enjoy, therefore Shiva is depicted as a recluse who is not participant in the world but is self-contained in its own nature, and as consciousness is observing itself. That is the idea of Shiva. Shiva is the self-contained consciousness or space.

Here is an example: Do you see your face? No, you don't. You don't see your own eyes, your nostrils, your mouth and teeth, or your own ears. You don't see anything of your face. So, how do you know that your face exists? When you look in the mirror, you say, "This is me! This is my face, these are my eyes, my ears, my lips and teeth, this is my nose, my tongue, my frown and smile, my forehead and eyebrow and this is the colour of my eyes." Everything is seen when you see yourself in a mirror. Then you become aware of your form. Prior to that, can you see your face? Then what are you experiencing? You are experiencing space where the face and the head are. You can't see anything; you are just experiencing space. When you look at yourself in the mirror, you see the form which you identify as you. Shiva is that self-contained consciousness, until you look in the mirror and say, "This is me, I identify that as me." This identity of me becomes possible when Shakti appears, for Shakti is the reflective awareness.

You have all been in a lift which has mirrors on four sides. When you look at one side you will see hundreds of you standing in a line. Although there are only four mirrors you see the infinite yourself. That is what Shakti makes Shiva do. Shiva sees his infinite self and Shakti is the reflective awareness.



Satyam Shivam Sundaram

The five powers of Shiva and the three expressions of Shiva – Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram – define Shiva-hood, Godhood. The first realization is of *satyam*, to know and discover the reality behind the appearance. What is the reality behind the appearance of your imported and branded thousand dollar clothes? It is still the same skin and bag of bones. We are all made out of skin and a bag of bones. It is this bag of bones, which becomes happy when it is wearing a ten-thousand-dollar suit. So who is real? The happy one who is wearing a ten-thousand-dollar suit or the bag of bones

who is hidden under the ten-thousand-dollar suit? What is appearance and what is reality, can you identify that? With your logic you will say, "Well the bag of bones; the body is real and the dress is appearance." Do you apply that logic in other situations as well, so that you remain connected to satya? Or is it just a fleeting thought, an awareness of reality, and then again you are caught in the illusion of the world? Satya is a permanent connection to the reality. People think of satya as speaking the truth; no, satya is your connection with the appropriate and right knowledge, with right knowing and right understanding.



Once you have the right understanding, the right knowledge, then everything that you do becomes right, it becomes *shivam*, auspicious, uplifting, inspiring. What is auspicious, uplifting and inspiring is naturally an expression of your creativity, your inner beauty, *sundaram*.

After surrender and letting go of ego, there is identification of satya, there is adherence to shiva and there is expression of sundaram. And when these three happen in a disciple's life, then that is the second stage, the connection to Shiva.

In Paramahamsaji's life I see this happen. Although he faced many situations and conditions, which would normally break even the strongest of the so-called worldly person, he faced them with ease, comfort and joy for he knew, 'What I am experiencing is just appearance, it is not the reality. Reality is something different. What I am doing is going to be good in the coming days for people, so I will not be swayed by what other people say, but I follow my inspiration'.

The gardener who creates the garden creates beauty. One man purchased a barren piece of land out in the woods, where nothing used to grow. He worked and toiled very hard. After a few years, that barren piece of land became a famous garden attracting people from all corners. People used to throng to this beautiful garden to see how this miracle had happened in the desert. One day, a priest happened to come to the garden. The gardener was showing him around, happy, proud and he could see happiness bubbling in the priest's face and eyes, for everything was really exquisitely beautiful. The priest, in his happiness, said, "What a wonderful creation of God this is. It is such a beautiful garden." The gardener intervened and said, "Sorry Father, this is all my hard work. You should have seen this piece of land when God owned it. Nothing used to grow here, it was just a barren piece of land. I converted that barren piece of land into a beautiful garden with all my hard work." And that is true too.

The reality is that individuals can come to experience the Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram through their effort, and for that there is the dharma purushartha and karma purushartha.

In one of my pilgrimages I met a famous sadhu who enquired about Swami Satyananda. When I informed him that he had attained mahasamadhi, the sadhu closed his eyes for a few minutes and then said, "Swami Satyananda is the only sadhu in India who has lived all his karmas and dharmas, no other sadhu has lived all the karmas and dharmas. He has experienced them, he has lived them. Such people are very rare." This fulfilment of karmas and dharmas is possible when there is connection to Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram.

Shakti

6 January



Guru Bhakti Yoga is celebrated every month to connect us with the inspiration, with the teachings of our tradition, starting right from the beginning. From its beginning, any tradition continues through the emergence of spiritual luminaries through the ages. These spiritual luminaries indicate a way to connect with our own transcendental nature. When they speak to us about it, it sounds like philosophy. However, when they are able to attain and live it, they become

an example. The process looks like a path that each one can walk upon. I am not talking of philosophy, rather I am talking of the process. The parampara to which we belong is a parampara of tapasvis, who have undergone that process and who have attained certain experiences which sets them apart from normal people.

Progression

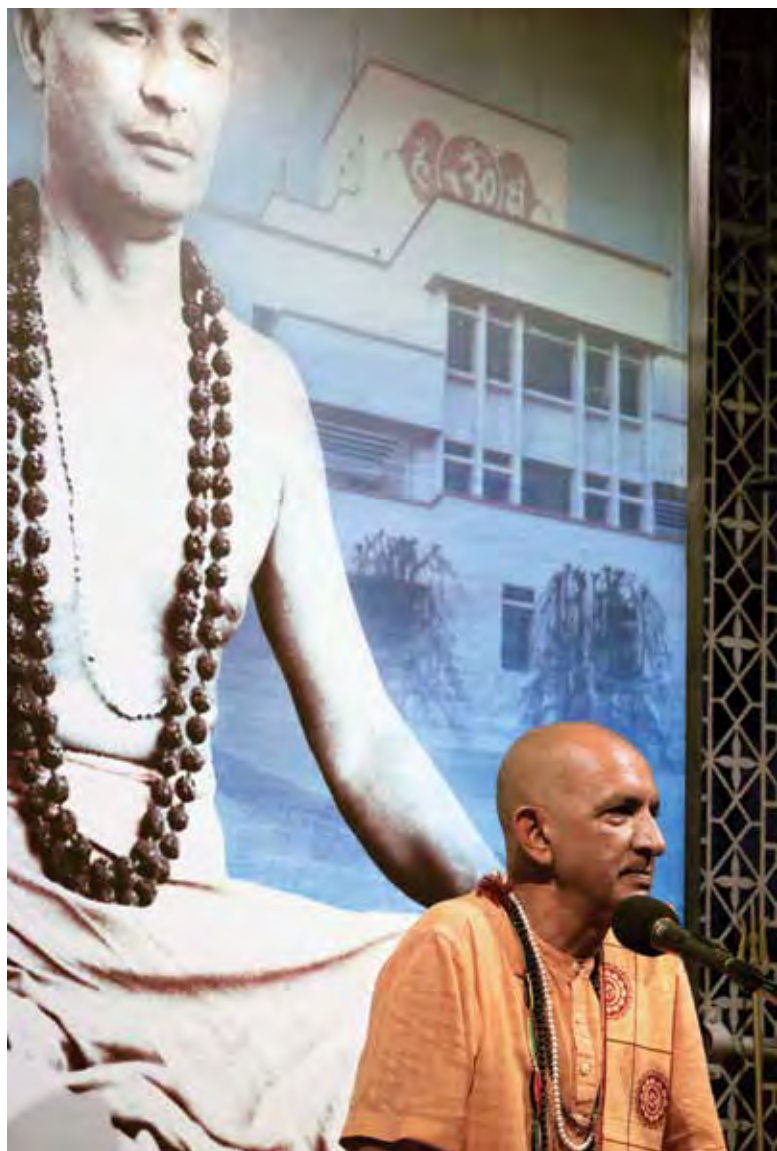
I give you the example of Swami Sivananda. Just before his departure from the body, he was in a state which medical science calls coma. The spiritual term for this state is samadhi. After seven days, he came out of that state just to say one sentence, "God is real. Trust in Him." Then he closed his eyes and left the body. During the seven days he spent in samadhi, which medical science describes as coma, he was in a state of experience or communion with the divine. It is next to impossible for a person to come out of a coma, say a coherent sentence, bid goodbye to everybody and close the eyes again.

When Swami Sivananda left his body, it began to levitate. His body had become so light, although he was a giant of a man. He was over six foot and had a solid body, yet his body began to elevate. There are pictures which show rocks being placed on his body to hold it down and people holding his shoulders and pushing him down. His whole body was levitating. What does that indicate? Some form of experience which is non-material and subliminally transcendental.

Sri Swamiji willed and invoked his departure, he knew that the time had come to leave the body. He sat down, meditated and did his last mala of mantra. He prayed to his guru for continued guidance in future and prayed to God, "I'm ready to come whenever you call me." He chanted *Om* three times, and in the third chanting of *Om*, his pranas left the body. He was in perfect health. He had a quality departure, something that we only read about in scriptures of the saints of yore, who were able to leave their body at will and who were able to commune with the divine.



If I did not have these two examples in front of me, I would say this was all belief and philosophy. Having seen these two luminaries in my life and spent time with them, I can say it is an experience which is attainable through effort, through sadhana, by making oneself the *adhikari*, the capable one. This capacity does not come until you are able to unplug yourself completely from the material world and plug yourself to the spiritual world. It seems that this is one of the conditions. We see this in every tradition, both ancient and modern. To experience the transcendental, you have to unplug yourself from the material. If you are plugged to the material, don't expect the transcendental. Something has to change and this applies to every situation in life.



What are the conditions or the progressions that we see in the life of a disciple? When people come to spiritual life at first, they are a novice, *snatak*. Then, they become *abhyasis*,

practitioners, and then *sadhakas*, people who try to live that. The unplugging takes place after *sadhaka*. When *sadhana* is taking control of life, then unplugging takes place from the material world. Then comes *virakta*, the renunciate. Renunciation is not only a concept, it is a condition or a state of life where you are able to let go of your base of comfort, attachments, likes, dislikes, desires and eventually ego. That is true renunciation.

Sometimes, I don't understand the concept of renunciation that people have. Earlier, in the beginning, we used to come to *sannyasa* by leaving everything. Today people come for *sannyasa* and say, "I'm ready for *sannyasa*. I have left my home, my family, my profession; I'm here." So, I ask them, "Are you willing to let go of your mobile, Facebook and Twitter?" They say, "No." So if you are attached to your mobile, Facebook and Twitter account, then where is the renunciation? If you can drop that, then maybe, in this time and age, for you renunciation may mean something. Leaving home does not mean anything. You leave your home to go and sit in somebody else's home. You left your home to come and sit in your guru's home. You leave one place for another place. There is no renunciation of any type, in any manner, except that of *maya*, attachments, desires, ego and everything that creates limitations to human nature.

Equal, one and the same

Ganesha represents total letting go. After letting go, you have to connect with Shiva – the Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram, the second aspect. Now comes the third aspect. There is a word in Sanskrit, which is known as 'deva'. Deva is a masculine name and when you make deva into a feminine name, it becomes devi. So there is deva and devi. Of course, there is no gender at that level to define something as male and female, like we normally understand. They simply represent the two poles – plus and minus. The plus is deva and the minus is devi, just for the sake of our understanding. They are also known as Shiva and Shakti. Shiva is the plus sign and

Shakti is the minus sign. If there is going to be a plus, there has to be a minus. The opposite has to be there. If there is day, there has to be night. If there is a front, there has to be a back. Whatever the plus and minus or Shiva and Shakti may be, they are complete entities in themselves. They are *poorna*, complete, whole. Don't think of Shakti as subservient to Shiva. She is equal, as powerful and important as Shiva due to *poornata*, wholeness, and they are both the pure elements.

Just as the Shiva element has five powers, the Shakti element has five powers. She is equal to Shiva. Shakti is seeking bliss, which is also the nature of Shiva. Shakti is transcendental and empirical just like Shiva. Shakti is also omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent in the transcendental form, and She is limited in creation. Shakti and Shiva are equal, one and the same, with two different potentials. In the plus sign, the potential of consciousness is presenting itself. In the minus sign, the potential of action is presenting itself, on all levels, not just through the senses.

Shiva and Shakti are one and the same, like parts of the same body. The scriptures on Shiva describe Shiva as being on the right side and Shakti on the left side. That is the image of *Ardhanarishvara* – half male and half female, meaning that both are equal, one and the same, yet they have distinct identities which represent two potentials. The potential of Shiva is self-contained, so his eyes are closed. The potential of Shakti is expressive, so her eyes are open. Shiva is sitting with his eyes closed, self-contained in samadhi. Shakti is sitting with her eyes open, watching everything. Therefore, she becomes the creative power, the knowing power and the active power. Just as Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram represent Shiva, *jnana*, *iccha* and *kriya*, knowledge, will and action, represent Shakti. These three qualities manifest in our life too, however our knowledge, will and actions are limited by our mind-set, our learning, mentality and life.

When Swami Sivananda spoke of cultivating the qualities of head, heart and hands he referred to the release of these three Shakti aspects that govern our life, and this is the



practical component. If you look into the theory, then these three aspects are known in tantra as well. The kriya shakti or action is known as Tripura Bhairavi. The iccha shakti or will is known as Tripura Sundari, and the jnana shakti or knowledge is Bhuvaneshwari. These three qualities represent the three aspects of devi.

The word deva or devi is derived from the Sanskrit root 'div', which means to be luminous. Deva is the luminous being and devi is the luminous being. 'A' and 'i' indicate different functions. 'A' indicates the functions of consciousness, and 'i' indicates the functions which are responsible for creation, manifestation and emergence. Deva becomes the self-contained consciousness and devi becomes the active principle, the reflective principle.

Yesterday I gave you two examples. You are not aware of your face. When you think of your face, you are only aware



of space as you cannot see anything. Once you see yourself in a mirror, you perceive yourself with a particular shape, you see the colour of your eyes, the hair, nose, lips, teeth, tongue. You can keep discovering more and more about yourself, the longer you look at yourself – I have a black head, I have a pimple, I have dry skin. You can go deeper into your own condition, when you are aware of the form. When you are not aware of the form, how does it matter, if there is a pimple on the face, you can't even see it? Something that sees and realizes that 'I exist' happens when Shiva and Shakti see each other.

The other example was of the lift with mirrors. When you look to your right, you see not one image of yourself but images stretching out into the distance, into infinity. That is the perception that Shiva has and it is known as *poorna-aham* – I am all this.

By looking at this poorna-aham or 'I am all this', raga develops in the form of 'I like myself'. The poornata is now limited to *raga*, like. The same thing happens from the other side. Shakti is the reflective power, reflecting the vision of



Shiva. At the same time, she is seeing herself active in Shiva. Both are happening together.

In our human life, we have to start with the Shakti dimension, managing jnana, iccha and kriya. By managing them and by surrendering, which is the dimension of Ganesha, we come to the experience of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram. These three concepts represent the journey of a sadhaka, the spiritual aspirant, the sannyasi.

When we celebrate the 5th of every month, we see the attainment of Shiva consciousness in the life of Sri Swamiji. When we celebrate the 6th, we see the attainment of Shakti, Sri Swamiji being placed in the laps of Shakti, Mother Earth. Then there is also the yogic way of living. Sannyasins live the yogic way to experience this attainment. Swami Satyananda and Swami Sivananda lived the yogic way, and they were able to experience the highest; and that is our inspiration.

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.

