

# A Season's Harvest

1978

part 1

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Swami Venkatesananda

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## Serve

Gurudev's teachings are condensed into these four words - serve, love, meditate, realise. It is usual to say that they represent the four yogas - karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, and jnana yoga; that is the orthodox approach. Gurudev emphasized that these four should be combined. He was very fond of that and would not allow us to forget. We are not going to be karma yogis, or bhaktas, or raja yogis, or jnanis to the exclusion of the others. He often pointed out that these four were integral, inseparable from one another. That is what we saw His life. Last year we discussed this in great detail - drawing lessons from His life. This time we will also do so, but more emphasis may be on the teachings. It may be necessary to call them karma yoga, raja yoga, jnana yoga or bhakti yoga in order to communicate.

If we do not call these by their names, what do they become? They simply become life. This was the beauty in Gurudev's case, that He taught us how to live and therefore life itself becomes yoga, becomes divine. It is not as though I have to abandon a thing called diabolical life, worldly life, and come to a thing called divine life. There is an inner alchemy which brings about an inner revolution that makes life itself divine. It does not demand a deliberate abandonment of what is natural. This of course is a big thing - what is natural we do not know. It does not demand the abandonment of anything except a funny notion, a funny idea that I have that this is 'secular life' and that is 'sacred life', this is 'diabolical life' and that is 'divine life', this is 'worldly life' and that is 'divine life.' There is a notion in your mind which says that, 'This is worldly and must be given up.' That 'is' given up and it drops away when the divine dawns.

Divine means light, deva means light, and day also means light. So, without trying to fiddle around with the superficialities of our life, can we find the divine in life? Swami Sivananda declared, 'All life is divine'. So, if life is divine, can we discover it? Why do I put it that way, 'If life is divine?' That already suggests a doubt. In Him there was no doubt. Can I become aware of the fact that life is divine? That itself took the form of karma yoga - serve, bhakti yoga - love, contemplation - meditate - and realise.

These are not three or four different compartments, so that I can practise some bhakti yoga, and then graduate, go into the Himalayas, meditate and go into a deep cave and attain self-realisation. Atma-jnana must be attained wherever I am, not in some other place because the Atma is here. The self being here and now, self-realisation must be had now. It is now, wherever you are, not after you abandon something and go there and do this and do that. I would not even say Swami Sivananda encouraged people to go to Rishikesh to become swamis and sannyasis. He also did not discourage. That entirely depended upon your karma. Your karma might be that you must be here, or that you must go away there, that you must lead a married life, or that you must be a bachelor. It does not even depend upon us. That depends entirely upon your karma.

But in spite of all this, can I discover this divine in life in any situation in which I am? That was His genius - unlike some other teachers He did not specify that you must either become a pujaree or a meditator, or a hatha yogi or become learned in Vedanta. Doing whatever you are doing, can you at the same time discover the divine in life. The diabolical feelings, thoughts that arose in the shadow of ignorance disappear. That is all that goes. Nothing else goes. And when the sun of wisdom rises, then the shadow disappears and, along with it, all these diabolical feelings and thoughts disappear. Life goes on. So, in His case, yoga meant life, not a specific form of activity, but life, the life being linked to the divine, re-linked to the divine. The divine in life being rediscovered is yoga. If that is not there, there is no yoga.

We may have to talk about these four on four different evenings. Does that mean that these are different and that there is some sort of gradation, that from service I graduate to love, and then meditate, and then realise? No, I may say 'first', because it comes first. If four of us are walking along the road on a footpath, we go one behind the other, not because one is first, the other is second, the third is third, and the fourth is fourth, but just because we have four bodies. The four bodies cannot walk together, four bodies at best can walk only side by side, laterally or one behind the other. What is meant by going together? You get into me and I get into you? So, since that problem is there, these things are described one after the other as if they come one after the other; but that should not create a misunderstanding in us that these are one after the other, 'I am now practising karma yoga and after some time I will become something else', or karma yoga comes first and then that. It is all together, integral.

For the sake of the talks, we will take up the 'serve' first. The most remarkable thing that we noticed in Gurudev's case is a perfect example or illustration of that beautiful formula in the Bhagavad Gita - yogah karmasu kausalam - yoga is skill in action.

I do not know if the word 'kausalam' or 'kusala' could be oversimplified in the translation 'skill'. It is a lot more than that. As we go on, probably you will discover that. It is skill in a very different sense. It of course means skill in the sense that I am able to operate this tarpaulin skillfully.

There is already another problem. We talk of a skillful doctor, or even worse than that, a skillful politician, or a skillful advocate. By a 'skillful doctor' we often imply one who even when he kills, has protected himself. He has done it so nicely that nobody knows - like a skillful thief. A skillful lawyer is one who can twist the truth so beautifully that no one is able to argue with him. And you know what a skillful politician is? Does skill then mean cleverness? Unfortunately even the word cleverness has been abused. Cleverness now means, 'Oh he is very clever, he cheats people right, left, and centre.' And nobody is able to expose him, to see what is happening. Unfortunately these words have been abused and mis-used, though probably originally the meaning was very beautiful.

To understand this skill in action, one has to turn to the Buddha. We do not know who came first, probably Krishna, yet the word 'kausalam' is taken up by the Buddha who made it an integral part of his teaching. Nearly every Sutra contains this 'kusalam karma, akusalam karma'. There the true inner meaning is brought out. What is 'kusalam karma', skillful action? Skillful action is that which enables you to discover the divine within yourself. If that is not there, it is unskillful action. If what I am doing does not lead me to self-realisation, it is rotten. If it leads me to self-realisation, it is skillful. What is self-realisation? Skillful action. What is yoga? Skillful action. What is skillful action is yoga. So, we go round and round.

Yoga is skill in action and skill in action means action that leads smoothly on to self-realisation, to self-knowledge, to yoga. If it is not there, there is no skill. This distinction, this definition must be borne in mind very carefully, so that, whilst the yogi is active, he is at the same time aware. If there is no awareness, your self-realisation is lost. If there is no inner awareness - 'I am doing this', and - 'I am doing this because I want that', you are lost immediately, however skillful in the ordinary sense of the word your action may be, however good and however noble your action may appear to be on the surface. The action is rotten if this inner awareness is not there, that this is being done by me in order to get there.

If the awareness is there, then it raises immediately a couple of interesting sidelights to this awareness, 'Aha, I am doing this, who am I?' Perhaps you wondered just now, 'I thought you were talking about karma yoga and you are suddenly bringing jnana yoga in.' There is no distinction. While I am doing whatever I am doing, am I aware: why am I doing this, what am I, who am I who is doing this? Unless I know who I am who does this, I will not know why I do this. We all think we are doing marvelous work, 'I am teaching the world and all people are being stirred'. Soup! Unless I know who I am, if I am not even conscious, if I am not even aware of the source of action, 'I am, I am doing this', the source of action, being 'I am', my motive cannot be known. If I am not even aware of this - of course the action proceeds, leaving this process of action, the course of action, I am trying to find out why I am doing this, thus rationalising it.

Such reasoning is useless. Who is asking the question? The mind. And who is giving the answer? The mind, which suggests, 'I am doing this in order to spiritually uplift all of you.' What happens to the tarpaulin then? If all of us are uplifted, we will hit the ceiling. So, it is only when the attention of the mind is focussed upon the 'me' that says or thinks 'I am performing this action', that the motive becomes clear. Otherwise it is not clear. However much you may analyse yourself, however much you may bluff yourself, the motivation is not clear at all, because that which questions the motive is the mind, the answer is also provided by the mind, and the mind does not want to expose itself. When the question arises in the mind, and the mind itself provides an answer, the answer is always beautiful. It is very much like my cooking experiment in Sydney. I boiled my own vegetables which I ate. Who can complain against whom? I was always pleased, very happy. I could not complain. The mind asking the question, 'What is the

motive,' and providing the answer, 'This is the motive,' appears to be entirely satisfactory because the real fact or truth is hidden away. We are not even bothered about it. While I am doing this, if the attention is focused upon the source of this action, then, and only then, the motive is exposed.

It is very beautiful if I can communicate it to you, and this is exactly what we saw in Gurudev. Two things become immediately clear. All actions spring from God or the inner self or life - these three are one, synonymous terms. I do not know what God, or inner-self, or life means. The action springs from there, flows as life from life, from God. This is the essence of karma yoga. Whatever I am doing, it is happening by God's Will. It is happening as part of the flow of life.

The second factor which I also realised at the same time is that, while this action springs, wells up and flows from life, from God, something comes in between and says, 'I am doing this and I want that'. I have this motivation - which is called love, or hate or fear. These are the three motivating factors in our life. We do whatever we do in our day to day actions, either out of infatuation, or hate, or fear. But the action itself is inevitable. You have to do this. Action itself is inevitable. But, while the action flows on, the mind throws up some sort of smoke screen which veils the truth and makes it appear as though I am doing this because I am afraid of that, I feel insecure, I hate somebody, or I love somebody.

Swami Nihshreyasananda often says, 'It is good to be ambitious, go on building this, building that, put up a garden and be ambitious'. Nature or God or life, using your ambition and your desire, cultivates the grounds, and puts up the building - you are not going to take it away. You have enriched the world in the meantime foolishly, or wisely, and the house kicks you out. The garden poisons you and you die, leaving all this behind. Whether you want it or not, you are doing some good for other people. What is it that made it possible? It is that inner self, or God, or life, that makes it possible.

Instead of fooling myself saying, 'I am doing this because I love you, I hate you, I am afraid of you,' why not become constantly aware - remain constantly aware of this inner self or life from which the action springs. Then life flows smoothly, and your mind and heart are clear. In that clear heart God's Light is reflected beautifully. That is skill in action. This is what we saw in Gurudev. And He almost always did what He was made to do. If you gave Him some advice, He looked at her. She gave Him another advice, He looked at you. He looked at her, He looked at you as if to say, 'Now you settle it between yourselves and then finally come to me, tell me what I must do, I will do it.'

Ramana Maharshi explains the expression in the Bhagavad Gita, 'One who does not commence any action at all', by suggesting that the sage does what he is made to do by others. It is not from his own ambition that he does anything, but his actions are prompted by others, by circumstances. This is what we saw in Gurudev. His attention was constantly on 'Who am I', and life flowed on. Such a life is divine life, because life is divine. You discover that, and life flows as divine

life. There is no 'I' to throw up or cook up or generate a motivation. This is the most important part of action, service - the knowledge, 'Not I but the divine generates all this'. Action springs from the divine, from life, from the inner self, not me, not the mind.

But then the action is naturally and normally directed towards somebody or the other. I am talking to you. Now that I have discovered with this inner insight that it is not 'I' that is talking, but the divine energy that is talking, the divine intelligence that is making this possible, one problem is solved. There is no motivation. But what about you? Skill in action demands that both the ends of the stick must be clearly understood. The 'I' must be understood as non-existent. While doing so, the divine becomes clear. But, why am I talking to you and not to other people? If I do not understand what the 'you' is, then again some motivations come up, some value judgments come up. You are good people and therefore I am in your company and I am talking to you. They are bad people, I want to avoid them. Once again the ego has sprung up, and though it apparently was prevented from forming a motivation within itself, it has succeeded in dividing the world into two camps, 'I move only with the good people - they are all bad people.'

So, skill in action demands that there again I must see towards whom this action is flowing. Towards you? What is you? What is he? What is she? Because, if I make some value judgment here, considering you good people and the others whom I do not talk to as bad people, then the ego comes back through the back door and anytime you hate someone, you dislike someone, and you do not want to teach someone, you are going to call them bad. Why are they bad? Because I do not teach them. And why do you not teach them? Because they are bad. A circular argument which makes no sense at all.

So, the awareness that discovered or uncovered the veil of ignorance and revealed the inner truth must also be directed towards the objects of your service, your action, and find the inner essence there, not their superficial form, not the superficial description or designation but the inner essence. The inner essence in me, as also in them, is divine; the essence beyond the I, beyond the me, beyond the ego-sense, is divine and it is that divine that is spread out throughout the world.

This is karmasu kausalam - skill in action.

Must I treat the work as work? Then I am a worker. If you treat the work as labour, even if you dignify it by calling it 'labour of love', it is still labour and you are a labourer. You are doing exactly the same thing. A wife cooks at home and she may also take up a job in a restaurant and cook there. There she is a servant, not somebody's wife. There she is a labourer, here she is doing something out of love; she is a wife and the mother. So, the job may be the same, but the inner attitude may be different. If I do it as service, I become servant of God, and if I do it as worship, I become a worshipper, a devotee, divine.

There is a beautiful verse in the Bhagavad Gita, which means, 'Treat everyone of your actions as a flower of worship which you offer in adoration at the Feet of the omnipresent God.' This is what we saw in Gurudev. He never interfered in the course of life, but He was constantly aware that life springs from the divine - it is divine and it flows on. In its movement itself there was this divinity and there was nothing other than divinity.

Will such a one tolerate what one calls evil? Evil does not arise in His presence. I have seen this many many times. Even if someone was wicked, even if Gurudev did not take any action, they just left and went away. This does not mean again that He would not take strong action. He would. Not He, but that also must come from God. This is the tricky part of the sage's behaviour. The sage or the enlightened being might even appear to be a strict disciplinarian, or chastiser, but it is not he that does it - even that springs from the same god. And even the person to whom this strict action is directed, the sage sees as god himself. That is very difficult to understand. If you set this book called Yoga Vasistha alight, it will burn. Does fire hate it while burning it? No, not at all. Fire may even love it, embracing it in its affection and love and thus burn it.

So, there is some part of the sage's personality which the human mind, the un-enlightened mind cannot grasp. Gurudev could be very strict, very tough, very strong. He himself used to call it Rudra avatara. 'You think I am so soft and kind? If I take rudra avatara, you cannot even stand in front of me.' He would be like fire, blazing fire. But that is not done out of any of these three motivations - love, hate, or fear. That also has to happen. That is life.

From this state of ignorance we must awaken ourselves to the state of inner awareness - Who am I, from where does this action spring? - and see that action takes place in life. That is divine. Towards whom is this action directed? To the same omnipresent God. As long as this temporary feeling of 'I am doing this' exists, so long that temporary feeling must also be fed with the feeling 'I am doing this as an act of worship of the omnipresent God'. This is skill in action and that is service.

## Love

The next word in Gurudev's teachings was the word 'love'. Before we can go into that, we must go back to the discussion on service. When does service become service? I explained yesterday that there is a distinction between work, labour, service and worshipfulness. As a matter of fact, in both Christian and Hindu religious traditions, the word 'service' also means worship. Church service means the worship conducted in the church. In the same way, the word 'seva' used in connection with temples in India means worship too. So, there is no real difference between these two words - service and worship, which implies that service in order to be service must be worship, otherwise it is labour. When will this action that I do become service or worship; when will it cease to be work or labour? Only when there is love; love in the sense of devotion, not in the sense of emotion.

You are doing something, you are picking up a flower and offering it at the Feet of the murthi of Gurudev, or Venkateswara or Vishnu. Does it automatically become worship? No. Does it automatically become service? No. It is an action, that is the best you can say. You can say that picking up a flower from a basket and throwing it on an image of God is an action. That action can be labour. That action can be work. That action can be service or worship. So, if you appoint me here as the pujaree, the priest, and say, 'Swami, you perform the puja here, I will give you 20 cents a day', and I am very religiously picking up the flowers and throwing them at the statue, saying the prayer, there is no devotion at all. It is not service. It is really work or labour. I am not worshipping the image of God, but I am really doing a job in order to get the 20 cents from you. I could be either a labourer or a robber. I may not do it correctly, I may not do it well, and so rob you of your money. But what is it that distinguishes service, in the sense of worshipfulness, from labour or work. It is love when I want to do it, when I love to do it.

This is what we saw in our relationship with Gurudev. Often He Himself taunted us: 'I am sure you did not work as hard even when you were in the Government service'. Obviously not. There we did not love the Government. We were doing something, pushing something here and there in order to get the money out of the Government. In the ashram, when we were with Gurudev, we loved every moment of it. The more the merrier. So, what makes work a service? What sanctifies an action? Love.

Now, can this love be cultivated or expressed, applied? 'Expressed' is an important word. Can love be expressed like toothpaste? When love is expressed, it becomes emotion, movement external. When does this emotion become devotion. The same motion is there, though the letter is changed from 'em' to 'de' - devotion; that is, there is depth. It is not external, it becomes deep, deep within me. Baba Muktananda says very often that you must love yourself, which is very beautifully interpreted by his chief disciple Amma to say that loving the self does not mean becoming selfish, does not mean loving the 'me', the personality, but something far deeper, far beyond. That from which the action arises, at that

point, there must also be love. There is love. The action springs from the Divine, not me. The 'me' merely comes up and pollutes it like smoke. Action comes from somewhere else, from God, from the, Lord. When this 'me' or the self or selfishness is removed, then what manifests there is love. It cannot be expressed. It need not be expressed. What is expressed is only the selfishness that comes out.

So, once again we see that this simple little word 'love' involves deep contemplation, and self-understanding or self-knowledge; deep contemplation which may be called raja yoga, self-knowledge which may be called jnana yoga. This love is realised, not expressed, in mutual service, worshipful service, and therefore karma yoga comes in. It is not merely bhakti or emotion, it is not emotion at all. Love is not emotion. Swami Sivananda showed emotion occasionally, as occasion demanded, but He was not an emotional person at all, even though He was very sociable, and loved to mix with people.

He was not weak either. Emotion is usually weak, or promotes weakness. If you are emotionally involved with me, you are prepared to encourage me in wrong action. That He would never do. One could not take advantage of Him. He might glorify you to the skies, but if you did some mischief, the same love became bitter medicine then. With the same love and affection, He would give you this medicine - 'Stop there, enough'. We have a completely wrong notion of love, completely warped and twisted. In order to see real love in action, one had to go to Swami Sivananda. One who was total love found no need to express it. Only if one entered in the spirit of Swami Sivananda, could one realise that whatever He did was love. Even if He picked me up and threw me outside, even that was supreme love. Because, in His heart, there was no room for anything else.

What is it that distorts this love in our hearts, veils this love in our heart? Selfishness. And that selfishness was completely absent in Him. In our case, it is selfishness that pretends that there is love and it is selfishness that veils love - which means: selfishness is what we are. If it suits that selfishness, I tell you I love you, and where it does not suit that selfishness - 'Well, something has happened, sorry, you are not worthy of my love'. So, in our case, both the propeller as well as the veil of love is selfishness. In His case, selfishness was absent and therefore there was no propelling, there was no restraint. Love flowed. In what manner it flowed, He did not know, you did not know, I did not know. That was the beauty.

So, where are we? What do we do? He gave us a few simple teachings. One - see God in all. See God in every face. How do you see God? 'See God in every face' is one of the most fundamental teachings of Swami Sivananda. If you are able to see God in all, then there will be love. If I see all of you as God, then there will be no selfishness in me. And if I see God, not only in those faces, but in this face, my face also, then there is no selfishness - divine within me and divine around me, everywhere. In that heart, there is no room for selfishness. But how do I see God in all? He has introduced this in the Universal Prayer also: 'Let us behold Thee in

all these Names and forms, let us love Thee in all these Names and forms, let us serve Thee in all these Names and forms'. How?

There are specific teachings too. One such specific teaching is, 'Do not hurt anyone in thought, word and deed.' Do not hurt anyone's feelings. So, when the impulse arises, when you want to shout at somebody, insult or taunt somebody, realise: 'I should not do this', For two reasons - one: Gurudev says you must see God in the other person, and two: Gurudev says there must be love in your heart. When I am tempted to abuse someone, obviously love takes leave of my heart. There is something wanting in my own heart, I must fix that. And at that moment the vision or the possibility of seeing God in the other person is also lost. A double loss. So, I do not want to do it.

'Never hurt other's feelings, be kind to all'. Be kind to all, not because my kindness is going to help the other person, but because that is the way to ensure the discovery of the divine in all. And that is the only key to this love. I cannot love the other person if 'I' am still there, if the selfishness is still there. If selfishness is there and I begin to love the other person, the selfishness will take over, will try to exploit. And if I treat the other person as a person, then again the selfishness will come up and try to twist the love. So, Gurudev left all that completely alone - not fiddling with all that. Try to deal with this problem from a different angle - do not hurt anybody.

When you are tempted to hurt someone, look within and see - 'Where does this come from?' If I am leading the divine life of love and service, how is it that, in my heart, where I am trying to cultivate love, there is this diabolical feeling that I should not hurt the other person? No. Restrain it. And in the course of that restraint you will learn to understand yourself better - self-knowledge, atma jnana. While you are watching and observing yourself, you are practising meditation, and you discover this diabolical tendency in your relationship with the others. You know the usual excuse: 'I want to love all, but then she comes and provokes me, and if I go on tolerating her, she will become the devil; so, for her own good, I am twisting her tail.' Then Gurudev came around and said: 'Bear insult and injury, this is the highest sadhana.' Why must I bear insult and injury? If you want to see God in all, take everything as hid prasad. If you are serious that you want to see God in all, whatever God gives you in that form, take it as prasad - God's gift. You hit me, that is what God gives me through you. Good, very good. Why? Because the self is still there.

I said a few minutes ago that Gurudev could even throw somebody out. It could happen. If you were to do that; it might happen when you have transcended the self completely. But till then, as long as you are aware of the self, the selfishness in you, bear insult, bear injury. As long as there is the awareness of the self, of the personality, of selfishness - bear insult, bear, injury, this is the highest sadhana. Once you have gone beyond that, once you are enlightened, it is possible that you may even wage a war and become a Krishna, a Bhishma, or a Sivananda. Till then, bear insult, bear injury. That is, what comes to you from others is God's

prasad, God's gift, even if it appears to be insult or injury. In this way, it does not provoke. One big excuse is defused. You insult me, you kick me, you boot me around. I have no excuse to retaliate, because you are my God and this is what you want to give me. Thank you, God.

In His life, we saw even this. When He was insulted, He smiled cheerfully. But if we committed a blunder or a mistake or we misbehaved, He could be very harsh. At the same time, if someone else insulted Him, He was completely passive and smiling. Why? 'Bear injury, bear insult, the highest sadhana.' That which is the divine in Swami Sivananda recognises that we needed a certain training, a certain discipline. That had to be administered. He did not do it deliberately, but it happened.

In his relations with the public, He never bothered even to answer a criticism. Bear insult, bear injury. He felt God has appointed Him to insult me.' If he is God, then it is God who is giving me some prasad in this manner. Prasad need not always be sweet meat. Prasad can also be a little bit of bitter stuff. So, this is something bitter, a bitter pill - it may be necessary, only God knows. 'Never hurt others' feelings, be kind to all, bear insult, bear injury, this is highest sadhana,' were His teachings.

When these two can be deliberately cultivated in our relationship, I can check myself, I can ensure that my behaviour is in accordance with these two principles. When I this path not hurting anybody, I find myself slipping now and then. When I slip, I look within myself and see - 'Oh My God, the self is still there,' that is why I slip. That is why the love is not there, something else comes up. Then I enter into meditation to discover where this vengefulness this rudeness, this cruelty, this unkindness arises, and when that is dealt with, there is love. There is discovery of this love. Love has to be discovered, not cultivated.

The motions of love can be cultivated - you can smile, you can fold your palms. All these can be cultivated. But the real truth concerning love, the real love within your heart cannot be cultivated; it has to be discovered. What is the cover? Selfishness is the cover. Attachment is the cover, hate is the cover, fear is the cover. When I remove that cover, I discover this love within me. It is there all the time. Never hurt other's feelings - bear insult, bear injury. When you want to see God in all, when I want to love God in all, what is it that feels happy when someone - the same God - praises me and what is it that makes me unhappy when the same God in some other form says something which is not praise? Even that is God, even that comes from God. When one understands this, then one grows in love. All the other motions of devotion that we engage ourselves in, such as puja, kirtan, japa, and one thing more which Gurudev was very fond of - vibhuti yoga, seeing God in nature, seeing God in the mountains, seeing God in the sun, in the moon, stars, in holy men, in holy places, holy statues - all these are meant as exercises which aid the discovery of God. This is not devotion at all. A statue or a murtha, or whatever it is - these are aids, and with the help of these and of this vibhuti yoga, the vision expands. For the present I see God in a

church, a temple or a mosque or holy places like this, then I realise that essentially what went into the building of the church is also what went into the building of a cinema - brick, stones, cement, plaster, wood. Why should I regard only that as divine, why not this also as divine?

So, there is an expansion of heart. I see a holy person, I bow down, I see God in him. But the other man who is lying there dead drunk, his body and this saint's body are also the same - why not see God in that also? So, gradually the vision expands. Thus all these practices aid or help in the discovery of love. Love cannot be cultivated as such, but these aids can be cultivated. I can cultivate the habit of not hurting others. I can cultivate the habit of bearing insult and injury. These are possible and these aids eventually lead to the discovery of this love within me. Love has to be discovered within oneself, and when that love is discovered, it transforms daily life into divine life, and it transforms all actions, all work and all labour into service or worshipfulness.

## Meditate

The third word which represents the other aspect of Gurudev's teachings is of course 'meditate'. He insisted that meditation is not possible without physical, mental, and moral discipline. Meditation is part of what is considered raja yoga in orthodox terminology. He emphasized again and again that yama and niyama are vital for meditation. There was one big speciality in His case; a characteristic that was unique in Him in that He said, 'Do not wait until you are fully established in yama and niyama.'

I think most of you know what yama and niyama means - a very highly disciplined life. According to orthodox doctrine, yama consists of truth, non violence in thought, word and deed, purity, total absence of greed and the hoarding tendency. In order to be established in all this, the orthodox tradition suggested for instance that you must not have uttered one word of falsehood for twelve years. Then you could say, 'I am established in truth - satyam'. If you have not spoken one harsh word or even had one aggressive thought in you for 12 years, then you could say, 'I am established in ahimsa'. If after 11 years you bluff somebody or you are angry with somebody, all that is gone. You must start all over again, for another 12 years. If you did that, it is quite possible that you may need about ten, fifteen births before you could get established in one aspect of this yama. So, Gurudev said, 'Please remember, without yama and niyama, your meditation is not meditation, it is only an attempt at meditation.' You can sit and close your eyes and think you are meditating - you are not meditating. Your meditation is not effective.

In order to be able to enter into that state of meditation, the heart must be pure and the mind must be still. If these two are not there your meditation is bogus. You can call it what you like. 'Still' does not mean dull - but like the flame of a candle. The flame of a candle is not dull. It is burning furiously, but it is still. We are looking for that sort of stillness. A certain stillness in dynamism, which is karma yoga, is essential. There must be intense dynamism and yet a tremendous stillness, which is possible only if we have rightly understood what we discussed the day before yesterday in service. Is the mind constantly looking for the source of this service, for the Being, the omnipresent Being that I am serving? Then the mind is still. Though you are busily engaged in all sorts of activities, the mind is still.

Only if you have learned to love the divine essence in yourself, and in all, the core or the fundamental being within and everywhere, which we call God, can your heart be pure. Otherwise it is not pure. It is full of attachment, hate, and fear. And even if you are good and even if you do good sometimes, it is only because either you are attached to the person to whom you are doing good, or you are afraid of the person, and therefore you are doing good - or, you hate somebody, and therefore you do good to someone else. All our love, all our affection is based on these wretched evils.

They who suggested that without meditation your heart cannot become pure, took another line of approach. They said, increase your period of meditation, then your heart will become pure and your mind will become steady. I heard it from a very great yogi who says, even if your attention wanders constantly, insist upon sitting in your asana. Do not move. And if your mind is unsteady, sit long. If you feel sleepy, sleep. But do not get up. This is one approach. So they said, merely increase the time of meditation, the duration of meditation, and you will achieve something else. This is basically the hatha yoga approach. Hold your breath for longer periods - two minutes, three minutes, five minutes - and the mind will become steady, still. And by some unknown process the heart will also be purified.

But Gurudev's approach again was slightly different. We can see the beauty of it only if we bear in mind that the approach was totally integral. Sitting in what is called meditation for two and three hours may lead, according to Gurudev, to a state of dullness which might often be mistaken for meditation. I do not think you will either understand or appreciate what I am saying, unless you have been to the Himalayas and seen some of these extraordinary characters. You tend to mistake the expression on their faces for serenity, but it is dullness. They are dead. There is no meditation there.

So, meditation is not dullness. Stillness of the mind must be dynamic, purity of the heart must be in relationship. I can lock myself in my room and pretend that I have purity of heart because I have not told any lie, I have not done any mischief, I have not been aggressive and I am quietly sitting there. But then, how do you know that the heart is pure? If at midnight you switch off the light, you can turn round and say that the room is empty, that there is nothing in the room because you do not see any thing. That is only because you are not 'seeing' at all. It is possible to misunderstand such a state for meditation.

We had a remarkable young man who used sit on a block of stone on the Ganges' bank every day from 4 to 7 in the morning. One day, he happened to get up at a time when Gurudev was still sitting and talking to us after the morning meditation class. He came and Gurudev looked at him - 'Uh, ha, ay, deep meditation?' 'Yes, Swamiji.' He thought he was being appreciated. After a little while, Swamiji said, 'Ah, look at him, sleepy, drowsy, dull - meditating? What do you mean meditating? Look at his face. Is that what you call a meditation.' Then he fired. 'Here, go, go to the Ganges, take two buckets, get some water and fill up our kitchen tank, then you will know what meditation is!' I still remember what he said on that occasion, it was beautiful. 'If you do some real meditation, you could roll up space and pick up the earth and play like a tennis ball. Such power, such energy you will have. You feel so dull and drowsy and you say you have been meditating?'

Quite likely, by the technique that he was adopting, he was relaxed and without much physical or mental agitation. But the mind is not agitated when you are fast asleep; so, what is the difference between meditation and deep sleep? You can

relax your body and your mind by whatever technique of meditation you practise. That is very good, there is no harm in it. But it is not dhyana, it is not the meditation that we are interested in. If you want deep relaxation, have it. Call it meditation if you want, that is your business. If you want to make your mind completely dull, and that is what you are looking for, go ahead.

What is it that Gurudev called meditation? That is quite different. That meditation had to become part and parcel of our life. That meditation is the light that shines constantly in our heart throughout the day, whatever you are doing. In that light, there is tremendous insight. It is as if God within you has suddenly become awake and he is watching your thought, word and deed. Then the miracle is done. You do not have to struggle with your mind and with your evil tendencies, vasanas and evil habits. Meditation really meant awakening this God within, in a manner of speaking.

Then you can instantly see why and how purity of heart and stillness of mind are there. When this insight, this God-consciousness is awake within you, your heart is afraid, ashamed to think of an evil thought and your mind has no motivation at all to get disturbed. It is true that other evil tendencies might be so strong that this does not last and therefore the other meditation practice becomes important. I meditate in the morning and this God-consciousness is awakened. It goes on for sometime during the day, if life is flowing smoothly and there are no serious problems. It is watching, observing my thoughts, my emotions, my life itself, so that it effectively prevents wrong emotions from arising in my heart, prevents psychological disturbance, and mental disturbance, but only as long as life is flowing smoothly. If I trip somewhere and happen to bump into something which is not smooth, then the effect of the morning meditation is lost and the old evil tendency takes over. Alright. Come back to meditation in the evening or the next morning.

So, Gurudev's meditation meant constant vigilance, a sustaining of this inner light throughout the day, and therefore throughout life. When that insight, that inner intelligence, this God-consciousness is awakened within you, then this searchlight dispels the darkness in which wrong emotions or mental disturbances arise. Maybe the insight is not quite steady, but by practice it becomes steady, the past tendencies which give rise to continued wrong emotions and evil thoughts are also weakened by not being repeated.

This is where Gurudev differed from your psychologists who said: 'Go on expressing them and they will go away'. They do not go away! Every time you express, there is an impress also. You are married to me you want to hit me, and the psychologist tells you, 'Oh, no, do not suppress that emotion, let it go, let off your steam.' Alright, you pick up something and hit me on the head. The psychologist has already told me, 'It is only a treatment Swami, please keep quiet and you will be alright tomorrow,' and so I keep quiet. Now you have expressed your anger, but that also has produced an impression within you, which is even supported by my quiescence. You say, 'Ah, I did the right thing, he also kept

quiet.' Tomorrow or the day after you will be even more violent and this violent tendency is formed. It is called a tendency because it is built your tendons, in every tendon, and it is nearly impossible to get rid of it. The way is neither to express nor to suppress, but to allow this tendency to confront this insight. I rouse this God-consciousness or inner intelligence this insight or the inner light - in the morning meditation and keep it steadily burning and every tendency, every thought, every emotion that arises is confronted by this light. If the light is weak, naturally the tendency may even repeat itself. The bad habit might overcome, overpower you, but the light is still there. Never mind. And as it goes on and on, the tendency is weakened and the light survives and succeeds, triumphs. That was his method.

What does one meditate upon? One meditates upon a grass mat or a blanket folded and placed underneath, or a deer-skin or some tiger-skin. But that is only an external seat. What does one meditate upon? Gurudev was Patanjali himself in that respect. He allowed almost total freedom. Why? Because the object of your meditation has to be something which is congenial to you, which your heart is devoted to, which your mind regards as spiritual, sacred, divine. Otherwise the mind rebels. It is as simple as that. Any symbol of God you might choose, any picture, any visual, audio-visual symbol, audio in the sense of being the mantra. You use a mantra and you use a symbol. Can one meditate without these? Theoretically, technically - yes, practically - no. I do not think He ever even talked about the nameless, formless meditation. I have never heard Him really teach somebody, 'This is nameless, formless meditation'. Why did He not encourage or prescribe such practices? For the simple reason that it does not matter what you are meditating upon. That is only a trigger. The object you have chosen to meditate upon is merely a key, a trigger. You may use a key or smash the door and enter the room, why not use the key. But the key is merely to open the door. Once the door is open, you do not even need the key, you throw it away. So, He did not discourage people from using a mantra and a form, He positively encouraged them. If a young boy or girl went to Him and asked Him: 'Swami, I want to meditate, what must I do?' He would say: 'Oh, do japa, repeat a mantra and visualise a form of God within yourself'. I do not think He even specified whether to visualize the form of God in my heart or in my forehead.' Do what comes naturally. And sometimes people even want to know, 'When I am visualizing an image of God, let's say in my heart or forehead, must that God be facing me or facing out?' See what happens. This is only the key. Why are you meditating?

Why are you meditating? You are meditating in order to discover yourself, to saturate your mind with 'Om Namah Sivaya'. Even though you are using this name and form, the object of meditation is to discover the self. What is the self, what does it do, what is its nature in meditation? The nature of the self in meditation is both the object and the subject of meditation. When you say, 'I am mentally repeating God's Name,' what on earth do we mean? Where is 'mental repetition'? What is it made of? It is the self. The sound in the mental repetition of a mantra, the form that you visualize within you is also you - the same self. So,

what is wrong in visualizing a form of God, in repeating a mantra, knowing that it is self, non-different from self? Who is the subject or the meditator? The self again. Immediately you have commenced repeating the mantra and visualizing this form, this enquiry into the nature of the self begins.. What is all this? In order to understand even the question, 'What am I seeing within myself', I sit with my eyes closed. Mentally I am repeating a mantra, and I am seeing an image of God within me. What on earth does that mean?

No effort is needed at all from there on. That question, that quest itself has sufficient energy to still the mind, without making it dull, because I have not answered this question, 'What is all this? I see something, I hear something within myself.' When that question becomes serious, then there is tremendous stillness without dullness, and sooner or later there is a discovery that both the things that I visualize within me and the self that is meditating upon, all this are the same.

There you have discovered the mind, its vagaries, and then you begin to see the world in a different light. I visualized a picture of God, an image of God. It felt very real within me, but when I open my eyes, it is not there any more. I see another figure and another form. Maybe this is also another dream, another illusion. There a tremendous transformation takes place in your attitude to life, to other people. If you feel like bluffing somebody, hating somebody, or being attached to somebody, there does not seem to be much sense in all this. When I close my eyes, I see a different world within myself, and when I open my eyes, I see this world outside of myself. The still mind and the pure heart functioning in this bright inner light inside enable us to see that what was regarded as evil from the orthodox point of view is silly and stupid, and there is no need for it. These evil tendencies drop away, not because you are struggling, or fighting with them, but because they have no motivation. When they drop, all these bad habits drop from you, because they have no value at all. That is real dropping. If you fight and get rid of it, it comes back to you through the back door. Somebody tells you that smoking causes lung cancer and you give it up. Five years later, there is another new research; and they say, no, with a filter it is even healthy, and then you go back to it with a vengeance.

So, when the mind, the heart, or this insight, sees that in all these there is no value at all, they drop away, without leaving a trace. Since there is no value in all these, even in idleness, or in selfishness, you become unselfish. You become dynamic, not because you want to achieve something, but because there is energy. So, the meditator is pure at heart, and he is dynamic without motivation. That was Swami Sivananda's meditation. Such a life is divine life.

## Realise

The last of the four words is 'realise'. If you go to some great yogis, swamis, they might tell you that God-realization, self-realization means you see God in front of you. It may be right. And if you are talking about self-realization, they might tell you that, in meditation, you will see yourself as a kind of form, a kind of light, a kind of sound or whatever it is. But in all this - 'I' am still seeing an 'object', whereas from what we have been discussing so far, the reality is one, indivisible. Only when the division that is assumed to have arisen in it is abolished, is there love and unselfishness.

As long as the self is, there is a division - I, you, he. And as long as the I, you, he division is there, there is no love and there is no service. Even meditation can be hallucination. Meditation can be either 'jada samadhi', that is - you are sitting and sleeping very nicely, or hallucination, day-dreaming, night-dreaming. How does one totally abolish this thing called the self? When that self is abolished, then the reality is. That is called real - ize, real - is. To realize is to real - is. There is nothing else.

Can I abolish the 'I'? How do 'I' abolish myself? In order to eradicate selfishness or egoism or the vanity which says, 'I am sitting and speaking here.' I have to see it clearly. When I see it clearly, it becomes an object, not the 'self'. It is not the self, but the object. It is not the subject, but the object. I make it an object, in order to deal with it. It is the same thing as the world. Now I am telling you that I am a great swami; later I feel that, 'Oh, no, that is vanity, that is egoism, it is not right. Ahh, I see my vanity'. I close my eyes and meditate; that vanity or the egoism or the selfishness or that self has somehow become an object. Then I put God or some other image, some other idea there, and tell myself - think: 'No, I am not doing anything at all - God does everything through me.' The same vanity has come back. You are even more vain now than before. At least in the first instance you were saying: 'I am a great man, I am speaking'. Now you are saying that, 'God is great but even he has to work' through me.' So, this thing called 'realize', God-realization, self-realisation, is declared to be indescribable.

yato vaco nivartante aprapya manasa saha

This is a mantra from one of the Upanishads. Strangely enough, we go on repeating it every day without meaning. What does it mean? 'From that reality or the self speech returns, turns away along with mind, unable to reach.' That is the literal meaning. When you want to express it, speech turns away from it, along with the mind, unable to express it. Even the mind cannot approach it, because what the mind approaches, it turns into an object and the self is not an object. According to Yoga Vasistha, when the notion of an object arises in the subject, that is called the object, the world.

So, that is the mind. For this reason Gurudev never talked about it. It seems obvious. In all those years I have never heard Him speak about it in private -

person to person. Occasionally He might have introduced such ideas in talks or discourses or lectures. As a matter of fact, He lectured very rarely. In the ashram, it was usual for Him to tell young swamis, 'You give a talk on 'Brahmavidya', and the poor man would squeeze his brain out. And there He would sit nicely listening to it. I do not know if I am being uncharitable. Perhaps He thought that visitors have come from all over the world, all over India and all over the world thinking that Yoga Vedanta is something which can only be learnt from swamis and gurus and so on. Right. And there are all these young swamis here who are itching to talk , so, put them together. Someone wants to hear and someone wants to speak. Perhaps Gurudev thought: 'Go on, go ahead'. It is a game, play it. Why should I get involved in it?' But even when He spoke of Brahman, He used completely different expressions, revolutionary expressions, expressions which might knock out pandits. There was a great saint called 'Sada Siva Brahmendra', and he had composed a song in sanskrit: Sarvam Brahmamayam Re Re, 'Sarvam Brahmamayam ...

Afterwards He had His own words, His own expressions. Gurudev picked up the first refrain and wove His own magical ideas into it. He used to sing that song usually on December, 31st, just past midnight. During 1945, 1946, 1947, till 1952, He was so young, so energetic, that He was more energetic than all of us put together. He used to keep awake very easily at night. The 31st of December was the last day of the sadhana week, and so there used to be a drama or some kind of entertainment, music, drama, dance. Swamiji used to wind up the whole thing about midnight; He would come on stage and sing, dance: 'Chidanand , Chidanand - Agada bham, Agada bham.' Everybody used to 'wake' up, even if, they were dull. Then He used to sing this Sarvam Brahmamayam - Jagat sarvam Brahmamayam ...

So that you may not misunderstand that He is talking about a nameless, formless absolute, He would add, 'Sarvam Shaktimayam ... Do not think that God is a male. Sarvam Shaktimayam Jagat - Sarvam Shaktimayam ... In the place of 'Shakti'', he would add 'Rama', 'Vishnu', and so on. Already He had created enough enlightening-confusion. He started with 'Sarvam Brahmamayam', went on, 'Rama, Krishna, Siva, Shakti,' all that. He would go on, 'Mapita Brahman, Larkaladiki Brahman', 'Your father and mother are Brahman, son and daughter are Brahman'. You do not go back to goad your children and say, 'Look, Swamiji said yesterday that father and mother are God, you must treat us as God.' You cannot do that because He also said at the same time: 'Larkaladiki Brahman' - your son and your daughter are also Brahman. So, no misinterpretation is possible. You think, 'Ah, alright, even this seems to be sensible, because God pervades all of us'. Dud dahi brahman tandai lemonade brahman - milk, curd, dal and lemonade are brahman. Tandai is usually a prepaation in which bhang is used. Bhang, almonds and sugar candy and other things mixed together with a little milk, and that is called tandai. Where are we now? 'Sarvam Brahmamayam' and you have come right down to tandai - lemonade Brahman; Garma garam chai Brahman - hot tea is Brahman ... Ah! And then He used to turn round if there was some harmoniumvala, tablavalala He would add, harmoniumvala Brahman,

tablavala Brahman, everybody, including the musicians who played the harmonium and tabla are Brahman

'Sarvam Brahmamayam Jagat - Sarvam Brahmamayam ...

This is one attitude. That is, do not try to describe Brahman, or the reality or truth. It is indescribable. Even your mind, the highest intellect cannot approach it. The intellect being born of the self, will only function in terms of dualism. It cannot approach the reality. When the self, or rather the notion of a separate self dissolves, self is there. Who is there to comprehend, to describe the totality? So, do not make this stupid error. 'But then, shall we give up?' No, you cannot give up because this realization is the very foundation on which the other disciplines are built. If the reality is not realized, then you are not practising yoga, your action is not unselfish, and you do not know what the self is. You do not know how to get rid of this self and therefore all your actions are selfish, however much you may pretend they are not. However much you may think you are loving, you are only thinking, you are not loving. You may pretend, you may bluff a million people, but still there is no love when the self is there, when the ego is there, when the vanity is there, when the selfishness is there. It is already divided and even if it loves, it will love selectively - 'I love some and I hate some'. That is not love.

So, realization is vital and yet it is something which is beyond comprehension and description. Now what do I do? Then He came round to the 13th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. He was very fond of this. How do I discover an unselfish state? I cannot do that. But I can and I should recognise the activities of self and vanity constantly. Whether it comes in the guise of a swami vanity, or a yogi vanity, or a director, or whatever it is, that must be recognized. As long as this vanity 'I am so and so' lasts, so long the reality is only a concept, an idea, an object. It is absurd. So, can I be aware constantly - 'Even this is vanity, selfishness, ignorance, delusion. And there is no realization in this. When I am meditating, I am only thinking I am meditating. When I am serving, I am only thinking I am practising karma yoga.' 'I am practising karma yoga' is already rubbish. 'I love God'.' Rubbish again. This God is the creation of your own mind. The mind being rubbish, what is created out of this rubbish is more rubbish. So, all this is not only defective but dangerous. So, He never spoke of this. Watch, watch, watch like a hawk to see when and in what form and how the self manifests itself in you, plays tricks with you.

amanitvam adambhitvam ahimsa ksa ntir arjavam acaryopasanam saucam  
sthairyam atmavinigraha - XIII-7

Humility, unpretentiousness, non-injury, forgiveness, uprightness, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control

indriyarthesu vairagyam anahamkara eva ca  
janmamrtyujaravyadhiduhkhadosanudarsanam - XIII-8

Indifference to the objects of the senses and also absence of egoism, perception of (or reflection on) the evil in birth, death, old age, sickness and pain,

asaktir anabhisvangah putradaragrhadisu nityam ca samacittatvam  
istanigtopapattisu - XIII-9

Non-attachment, non-identification of the Self, with son, wife, home and the rest, and constant evenmindedness on the attainment of the desirable and the undesirable,

mayi ca 'nanyayogena bhaktir avyabharini viviktadesasevitvam aratir  
janasamsadi - XIII-10

Unswerving devotion unto Me by the Yoga of nonseparation, resort to solitary places, distaste for the society of people,

adhyatmajnananityatvam tattvajnanarthadarsanam etaj jnanam iti proktam  
ajnanam yad ato nyatha - XIII-11

Constancy in Knowledge of the Self, perception of the end of true knowledge - this is declared to be knowledge, and what is opposed to it is ignorance.

Are these qualities enumerated in the 13th chapter in me or not? If they are there, then it is possible that the heart is becoming purer and purer. And in that pure heart, it is possible that one day the light of God will shine. The self, which has become transparent, extremely thin and weakened by that time, may have a glimpse of this reflection of the Supreme in that pure heart, and collapse. That is the penultimate vision the Truth - you see that and then the whole game is over.

We adore the Guru as God, because he has come to that point where that self, dying to self, has had a vision of the vision of the Cosmic Being, and it dissolves. When that is dissolved, I still see Swami Sivananda, but it is not Swami Sivananda as such, or doctor Kuppuswami as such - it is the gift of God - He Himself. It is He Himself using that form in order to communicate this truth to us. If that was not there, there would have been no teacher. If every time a seeker or a yogi has his vision of the ultimate reality, in that pure heart, through this transparent self, that person dissolved, then what about us? Who is going to teach us? So, it is the Divine, out passion and mercy, that somehow descends, enters into and re-activates that body in order to teach us. And therefore we feel that the Guru is an Avatara of God. What was there before, the tapasvin, the sage, the seeker, Dr. Kuppuswami or early Swami Sivananda, is completely dissolved. And what arose out of that, is God himself in that form. Therefore he is an Avatara.

So, in order to 'realize' I must constantly bear in mind that whatever there is, is God. Father, mother - God; son, daughter - God; milk, curd, tandai, lemonade - God; hot tea is Brahman. But why is it that I do not have the same feeling? Watch, observe it. So, there is some problem within, you solve it. And at the same

time you have this list of noble qualities listed in the 13th chapter of the Gita. I observe within myself these qualities are not there. And I see the self is there. It is playing all the time in diverse manifold ways. Sometimes I think the self has gone - 'Oh, I am free!' That is another trick of the self. Because if it is not there, if there was only one indivisible totality and the self was an illusion, what thought that something had gone away? That is also a trick of the self. So, that a man of self realization does not go about saying. 'I have attained self realization'. That would be a contradiction in terms.

So, when we enter this path of self realization, Gurudev asks us to do this one thing with this twofold approach. The one thing is constantly to be aware within ourselves: 'When God alone pervades everything, why is it I am seeing differences, I feel differences, my attitude towards everything in this world is full of difference. I like, I do not like, I love, I hate.' Secondly - am I truly unselfish? Have all the ideas of self, the egoism, the vanity, and all the evils that arise from this egoism, from this vanity, from this selfishness become less and less? Am I still being preyed upon by this selfishness and by this vanity? Constantly to be aware of this, to be vigilantly watchful - that is all Gurudev meant by self realization. When this goes on and on, perhaps unbeknown to yourself, your heart becomes pure, because, if you are aware your heart is becoming pure, it is impure. If you think: 'I am a great yogi', you are the worst rascal.

Today I went to Kabir Mandir, Swami Ramsarupdas told me a beautiful verse from Kabir. It says the great man does not even say, 'I am great', just as a sparkling diamond does not proclaim its value. It is somebody else who says it is a beautiful thing. It lies there like a stone. If even the thought arises in me that I am somebody, there is some error, some trouble, some danger. If one is constantly aware of the truth in this manner, it is possible that one day the heart becomes pure, and in that heart the light of God is reflected. One day, the mind, which has been constantly observing itself, becomes still and steady, and there is enlightenment.

## Yoga Asanas and Integral Living

There are two views in regard to the practice of yoga. I am talking about the practice of yoga asanas. First, that it is most important, and that is all that there is, that yoga means yoga asanas. There are many teachers, many great yogis in India who adopt that view. If you are able to do a paschimottan asana for three hours at a stretch, you see God. Or in any case, whatever you see will be God - put it that way. I heard it from a great yogi in Rishikesh that if you do the headstand - sirshasana for two or three hours, you will get great siddhis, psychic powers, and you will get enlightenment. This is one view. There is another view, which is also held by great saints and sages, yogis and particularly again, Rishikesh in the Himalayas: you should never do any asanas, no postures, because the yoga postures are physical and the more you indulge in these, the more you will be body-conscious, whereas real yoga is forgetting the body and going into the transcendental realm. Both these are right. There is nothing wrong with either of these view points, as long as you realise that they are both view points.

My Guru, Swami Sivananda, had another viewpoint - the middle view point: both these are right and so, take something from each and make a kitcheree of your own. Kitcheree is something which is neither pure rice nor pure dhal, but a mixture of these plus some vegetable. Can we have a vision of both these together? Which means you must practise yoga asanas, you should not neglect the body, you should not neglect your health, because as my Guru often said, without good health you cannot achieve anything in life, and you cannot attain God-realisation. But if you take it too far, then again you become neurotic. Why do you want to be healthy? Do you want to live forever? It is not possible. You want to be always healthy? That also is not possible. You can do all sorts of things, keep yourself in tolerably good health, but nobody can stop the ageing process. And some sorts of mosquitoes, bugs and spiders, nobody can arrest. Once in a while, there is bad weather, and you are subjected to it. Once in a while, there is some epidemic and you are subjected to that, and occasionally some sort of ill health is also inevitable. I am not a pessimist, but I see these things are facts. So, you must practise yoga asanas and pranayama and meditation, without losing sight of these simple truths, that the body is a perishable thing. It is here today, it will go away, it will abandon you one of these days.

What is the end of Life? Death. That is what this havan ceremony means. This little girl was a bit worried that instead of throwing nice halva into the mouth, she had to throw it into the fire. The truth that is illustrated in this havan is that, if you go on eating that halva, you will become fatter and fatter. It is not a problem except to the feet and the legs that have to carry all that fat. It is not a serious problem, because eventually you are going to return all that fat to this same fire. You can either put this fat straight into the fire now and be done with it, or put it into your mouth and store it in your body and afterwards put it away in the cemetery. There, there is a havan and your whole body will be offered into that havan, it is the same thing.

So you must practise these yoga asanas with this awareness. You are aware that the body is not permanent. Whatever you do, it will die and however much you try to avoid it, it is likely to grow old and it is also likely to be subjected to some illness. If this is clearly understood, then your attitude towards the practice of yoga becomes wisdom. You are not doing anything foolishly, you are full of wisdom, and at the same time your attitude to life also changes.

You have been hearing all these readings, sayings from great men. What do they mean by egotism? What is ego? Have you seen the ego? Has anybody seen the ego? Nobody has seen it and yet all of us are subject to this ego. What is it? It is merely confused belief that 'I am the body'. It is because you think 'I am the body' that craving arises. All these - lust, anger, greed, hatred and jealousy - spring from this one wrong idea that 'I am the body'. If the wrong idea is not there, there is no lust, there is no anger, there is no greed, there is no hate, there is no jealousy, there is no fear. It is so simple. You cannot fight with hatred. If you are jealous, you are jealous, you cannot fight with it. If you are afraid, you cannot fight with that. You must see its own source. Its source is this ego. What is ego? Ego is not some kind of demon or something which is stuck in the left side of your heart, it is merely this idea 'I am the body'.

What is the body made of? This thing that you put into the fire - 'svaha', the same thing, when you put it into the mouth becomes your body, and somehow the same halva, when it is put into your mouth becomes your body, and tomorrow it says: 'Hey, look at me.' What is there to look at? Halva. All this is halva. If you had put it into that fire, it would have become ashes right now under your nose, right in front of you. And you would have seen that is what happens to the food that is eaten by you, it will happen later, but in the meantime a lot of mischief is done by this halva. Halva is eaten and processed into the body, and the body is mistaken for 'I am the body'. That's all. That is the ego.

Should I now say that 'I am not the body'? No. The body is there, and there is also an idea at present that there is some connection between you and this body. You do not know if you are the body, you do not know if the body is yours, but there is some connection, which means, if there is a headache you cannot think properly. So, look after the body, avoid the headache, but not for its own sake. If you think 'I am the body and therefore I am looking after it', all the other things will come: lust, anger, greed, vanity, hatred and jealousy. If you see the body for what it is, that it is made of halva, the food that is eaten, then you realise that there seems to be some connection between 'me' and this body. If something happens to the body, you are not able to function properly, that's all. So, I look after this body, practise the yoga asanas, have a proper diet, proper work, proper sleep, proper rest. A disciplined life. Disciplined, not because somebody else tells you, but because all these things are conducive to health, physical and mental health. All these things are conducive to peace of mind. You are able to function better. That's all. If this aspiration is kept, that itself will decide what should be done and, what should not be done. You will also discover that, apart from yoga asanas, apart from proper food, rest and all the other things, even your thoughts

and feelings and emotions seem to have something to do with your health, especially mental health. Also physical health. When this awareness is generated in the body, in the mind, then your whole life takes on a certain discipline This discipline cannot be explained. It is not a discipline which can be noted down and hung on the wall. 'Do this, do not do that'. It is something which results from an intense inner sensitivity. Cultivate that sensitivity, all the rest follows. Then you are able to practise yoga in the proper light. You can practise your asanas, you can practise your pranayama, you can even at least pretend to meditate, you can do all that, and you can live a good life, a disciplined life, moral life, ethical life. A life which will be edifying both to yourself and to the society in you live.

## The Way to Non-division

The word yoga means union. Where there is division we bring about a non-division. I think most of us are familiar with this. While you are driving a car, what is the mind doing? You are not observing the road. Somebody is talking to you, you are not only listening to them. In addition to that, something else is going on. There is what is beautifully called the internal dialogue. The only time during the day when this does not happen is in sleep. There is a totality in connection with the sleep. When you wake up and you recollect the dream, or the sleep, your present intellect - your waking intellect - suggests, 'Both in dream and in sleep I was helpless. Being human I must be able to control myself now, when I am awake.' That is where the split happens.

'I must not be helpless, I must not let myself go, but I must control myself.' When you decide, 'I want to enjoy myself', 'I want to please myself,' an 'I-myself' split' has taken place. When this 'I-myself' split remains, all action that proceeds from that split is wrong action. If there is to be an intelligent approach to life as opposed to an instinctual mode of living, then the intelligence must become aware that the split is not there. Whereas the animal blindly follows its instincts, you and I must live - life being total, it should be without a division. The animal is unaware of what it is doing. I am aware of what I am doing. In the case of the animal, it is like a sleep state, in my case, there is an enlightened state. The animal is guided by its instincts, and I am in an enlightened state and therefore I become aware of the instincts themselves, aware without creating a split. If I am aware of myself, there is a split. Then you divide it into the higher self and lower self, and think that the higher self chases the lower self. When the lower self becomes more powerful, you somehow elevate it to the higher self.

Until awareness arises this split cannot be repaired. When this 'I-myself' split is seen to be a danger, then that awareness which becomes aware of this factor acts as the monitor - self monitor - without motive. The awareness itself is awareness and therefore it is not blind. The awareness is aware only of the split. You are sitting and doing your japa, you are not aware of 'I am aware' - that is a split. But you are aware that 'I am still hearing the mantra' and the attention is still wandering away.

So they say, first become completely aware of the mantra without becoming aware of anything else. If you are capable of doing that, then you have achieved a state of concentration of mind which is applicable not only to this meditation or japa, but to everything that you do in life. Is it possible for us, to begin with, to achieve concentration, which means I do exactly what I am doing. This is only half the battle. When this awareness is awakened, it becomes aware of the arising of desire at its source at once, not afterwards. Inside myself, the split is still there, but I am aware of that. There is a craving inside, of yourself. If you want to yield to it, you are aware that you are doing it. Then if you are intelligent enough, you may be able to see that a certain bad habit is a lot stronger than your intelligence. Once that episode over, then the urge or the tremendous push, the drive, is no

longer great. That is the reason why the saints prescribed immediate repentance and atonement and all the rest of it.

At that time if you sit and meditate or pray, then it is possible to strengthen this intelligence, to strengthen this awareness against a future onslaught. It is then possible for you to go a little deeper into yourself and see how this craving builds up, from where it has come in the first place. It is possible in that moment of repentance or regret for this ego to collapse. There at-one-ment, atonement takes place. The ego which was saying, 'I want it', has come to the understanding that, 'Because I want it I am suffering now.' The intelligence sees it and this 'I want it' is prevented from arising in the future.

This pure awareness in which there is no split, the awareness which does not split the intelligence between the higher self and the lower self is aware of whatever is happening. Then there is no craving. Natural life goes on and that life is free from craving, hate and anger. There is intelligence, a constant awareness. In that constant awareness there is an awareness of the potential rising of lust, anger and greed. Since the body and mind are there and still functioning, life goes on. There is no struggle or effort here, but the awareness which is even aware of all the happenings of the past, is very vigilant. If one is constantly aware of the workings of the mind, then that life becomes blessed. And what happens from there on is right action. In such a life, lust, anger and greed will be totally absent.

And what about the ego? Ego is nothing but lust, anger and greed - what else is there? If all the likes and dislikes are removed, what is called the ego is also gone. They caution you that as long as the body is there and the mind is functioning in relation to the body, it is possible for the ego to arise again. And how will it rise? It can rise only as lust, anger and greed. If this awareness is monitoring all the time, they do not arise. First you become aware of it and thus consciously eliminate it and then let the awareness shine and thus prevent the recurrence of the old problem.

## The Simple Birth of a Great Divinity Krishna

Today we commemorate the birth of Krishna. The birth story is narrated in the Bhagavatham and I will only take up the last part of it. Krishna's parents had been imprisoned by the king Kamsa because he was afraid that Krishna, Devaki's eighth child would kill him. Some ethereal voices had warned him. So he put the couple in prison and killed all the seven children, Kamsa was already a sinner, according to the Shastras, but the crime of the criminal is taken to its climax. They say that this Kamsa, the demon, who had killed so many others and done so many other crimes, had to do this in order to rouse the Divine - he must also be guilty of killing babies at birth. So seven of them were killed. The time had come for him to suffer and he tried to defy destiny.

We do that very often in our own lives. It is clear that something is going to happen and whether we know that this is going to happen or not, we struggle hard to avoid getting into that situation. You try your best to avoid getting into trouble, but you know it is right on your path, you cannot avoid it. You mind is there constantly.

In this case it is slightly different. First by putting this couple in prison and destroying all these babies, and then when the baby escaped by panicking and once again having the children massacred, he added to his accumulation of sins. It did not work, because the Divine is not capable of being understood by the human mind. This is what one has to understand right in the beginning of the Krishna story. I may pretend that I know my destiny, but the Divine is incomprehensible. However clever you may be, the Divine has its own way, and it is not possible for us to know it, leave along fight against it.

Krishna was born in the prison. Perhaps those of you who have studied the Bible might find a parallel there with Jesus Christ, who as a descendent of King David had to take birth in a manger. Why do the scriptures tell us these things and go to this detail? For instance, neither the Bible nor the Bhagavatam mentions the name of the midwife, or whether there was a doctor. Why do they want to specifically mention that Jesus was born in the manger and Krishna was born in prison? Merely to inform us that when the Divine takes birth, it I need not be under extraordinary circumstances, it could be in a very humble style. It need not be something spectacular - suddenly the cloud bursts and the lights come down. God can incarnate himself in the normal way as any other baby is born, and even there it can be in a very humble situation. We are not looking for something extraordinary in the birth stories of Krishna or Jesus, but rather something quite simple.

Then a little bit of an extraordinary element is introduced here. As soon as the baby was born, it had to be spirited away. Krishna who could destroy demons and demonesses when he was still an infant, could also have killed Kamsa. The time was not yet; there was something else to be done. So, Vasudeva, the father, is instructed to take this baby Krishna to a nearby village and leave it there near

another woman who had also given birth at the same time to a girl. They say that that girl was Durga, this fact is also mentioned in the Durga Saptashati. The heavily locked prison doors open of their own accord and the hefty guards - very-strong and powerful men - fall asleep as though drugged. Vasudeva takes this Krishna and goes out. Wherever he goes, everything is asleep, silent and quiet. It starts to rain and the baby is somehow protected. The father had to cross the river Yamuna, and the Yanuna parts and gives way. Then he goes to Gokula. Sure enough he finds the mother with the new-born infant. He places Krishna by the side of this mother who was still asleep, and strangely enough, the story tells us that she did not even know whether the child she had given birth to was a boy or girl. Leaving this baby there, he picks up the girl and walks back. As he enters the palace and the prison, the baby starts screaming waking up the whole world, the Yamuna reunites again and the doors lock themselves. Maybe this did happen, maybe it did not happen, we do not know. The scripture says so, it is quite possible.

There is an interesting philosophy here. If you have Krishna in your heart, in your arms, in your hands, then all the inner doors open: everything opens, your heart, your mind, your intellect, your intuition. The devils that are in your mind and heart - lust, anger, greed - fall asleep. You can come to a satsang, and sing, 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna', and you can go on for the time being they are asleep. Then they are no obstacles at all. If there is a shower of rain, there is an umbrella which comes and protects you. You may have some troubles and difficulties in life, but you also have enough protection.

Then you stand baffled on the bank of a river, you cannot cross it. Such situations occur in our lives quite often. It is not a matter of a drizzle and a fear that you might get wet, but there is a serious obstacle. When you stand there baffled, something happens so that you are able to cross. Whether miraculously the river itself becomes split in two or not, we do not know. This example is given in the Yoga Vasistha and some other scriptures too. Life is like a river. It is both an obstacle and an aid. You see the beauty of especially the river. As you are going there, it obstructs your path, but if you have a boat, it is the very river, the very water that carries the boat across to the other side. That which seems to be an obstacle, itself proves to be a tremendous aid, if you know how to use it. Somehow with Krishna in your hand, in your heart, even though you find obstacles on your path, you are able to cross the sea of life, the river of life. Vasudeva goes there, places the child near Yashoda, and picks up the little girl, Maya. You pick up Maya and come back to where you were - the world wakes up - all this lust, anger and greed. Then you come in, all the doors are shut and once again you are imprisoned in your own prison of ignorance.

As long as you are alive, both these things will go on. As long as there is a body and a mind, this pendulum swinging from wisdom to ignorance and ignorance to wisdom will go on. The mind is what connects the body with the consciousness, that generates the notion or the feeling that 'I am this body'. If there is some pain 'there' - pointing to a girl's head, it is not my head that is aching, it is her head.

Only if there is pain 'here' is it my headache.' What is it that brings about this misunderstanding, even though we all know that intelligence cannot be limited, that consciousness cannot be limited, that that body and this body are made of the same substance? No one knows, except that that factor which brings about this confusion is called the 'mind', and as long as the mind functions in this body, the danger of swinging back to ignorance cannot be ruled out.

The story goes on. Krishna destroys all the demons. When you read these stories you cannot help feeling that Krishna will incarnate again and again in order to destroy all the wicked people, and protect the good people. I do not know how we get into this mess, the wicked people are always 'they' and the good people are always 'we'. What guarantee is there that I am considered good in His eyes? It is not enough if I consider myself good, of course all of us consider ourselves good. It is not even enough if you consider me good. I can bribe or threaten you. He has to consider me good. How do I know what will make Him think I am good? Unless He thinks or knows I am good, I am finished.

There is another mystery in Krishna's life. Krishna granted salvation to so many people. The Gopis became enlightened and all his devotees - Vidura, Akrura, Arjuna, Udhava - became enlightened. However, really the first person to be redeemed or liberated by him was Putana, a woman who came to kill him. The Bhagavatham says very beautifully that by merely offering a tulsi leaf or a flower someone gets moksha. This woman nursed him, suckled him, and so was redeemed. Now the confusion begins. The person whom the scripture itself describes, defines as diabolical, is granted moksha first. Then there is a long list. Krishna did not kill anybody at all. Why? Anyone whom he touches, is redeemed. You cannot be touched by God without being redeemed. You and I think that even if we have a vision of Krishna, which may well be a hallucination, we are redeemed. Those people saw him face to face.

There is also a rather interesting theory that during the Mahabharata war, when Krishna was on the side of the Pandavas, the Kauravas who were facing him, fighting Arjuna, too got salvation first. When they died, they died looking at him. The Pandavas were behind him, they saw only his back. Krishna himself says in the Bhagavad Gita that whatever your mind contemplates at the time life leaves this body that is what you attain. How is it possible for these demons who died looking at him to have gone too hell? So they got salvation, liberation, redemption first.

That is also specifically hinted in the Bhagavatham. Whatever your role or occupation in this life may be, if somehow you bring God into this life, you are redeemed. You do not need any other qualification. Gajendra was not educated and Vidura was a half-caste; the one thing they all had in common was that they had brought God into their lives.

The scripture even went so far as to say that your feelings towards God may be anything. You may even hate. We do not do that. We run after something else.

We run after this Maya. If we can even hate God with all our heart, that is a great thing, but nowadays that is completely out. I do not think there are many people who have hatred for God or even for good people. If there are some good people, some sadhus and so on, you quietly ignore them. You do not care either to kill them or to feed them. This indifference shows that we are not interested in this at all; the mind is not after God at all - neither in a positive way as love nor in a negative way as hate. That is an unfortunate position. Whether we love, or hate, or fear God with all our heart - whatever be the relationship - if there is a relationship, that will redeem us. The example given there is fire. Whether you hate, or fear, or fall in love with that fire, it will burn you. Just because something is burning, and you say, 'Ah, beautiful, I love that fire', the fire is not going to say, 'Alright, I will give you a long life'. No, it will still burn.

In the Narada Bhakti Sutras there is a beautiful expression. You can attain God-realisation if you can be totally devoted, totally in love with Krishna, like the Gopis of Brindavan. Then in the next Sutra a doubt is raised and answered. The Gopis did not love Krishna knowing that he was God Almighty. They loved his form, his features, they loved him as a boy; he was their boyfriend. They were not aware of the divine glory of Krishna. This is presumed, I do not know if it is true. Even that is immaterial. They were devotee, to Krishna, and that was enough. Your ideas of God are irrelevant.

The mind is the factor which makes you think, or feel that 'This is my body, this I am, I am imprisoned in this body, I am caught up in this body'. Since that factor is the mind, transcendence of the mind destroys the whole of the game. Whether you are in love with God or hate God or are afraid of God, whatever be the attitude, you reach the Supreme.

In the meantime, life goes on. I wanted to say, 'Life has to go on', but that is an absurd expression. Who are we to say that life has to go on? It goes on, and one sees that this ongoing life involves all manner of activity, some which tradition and the individual mind regard as desirable or good action and some as not so good action. We may write books and shout at the top of our voice. 'Ahimsa, ahimsa, non-violence, nobody should hurt anybody else', but war will go on and probably you will also go and fight. That is what Krishna pointed out. In the Durga Saptashati there is a beautiful expression. 'In your heart there is great compassion, you are all love, but Oh Mother, when it comes to hitting, you hit hard.' So, even that may have to be done.

Krishna points out in the Bhagavad Gita the two things from which one should free oneself, lust and anger, or love in the sense of attachment, and hate. These are not in nature at all. These are shadows which are cast on the mind by the cloud of its own ignorance. The sun shines and when the sun shines over a sheet of water, the water evaporates. Because of the sun's rays, the vapour goes up and forms a cloud which hides the sun and casts a shadow on the very water from which it came. It is crazy but true. So, even though God is light, supreme light, somehow on account of that supreme light, all the manifestation takes place, like

the cloud arising. In spite of the sun there also arises the shadow. On account of this sun, this light, this knowledge, this consciousness, somehow the shadow also comes into being. How, we do not know, and it is that shadow that takes the form of attachment and hate in our minds, in our lives.

If it is possible, overcome these or direct them also to God. This is another trick given to us in the Narada Bhakti Sutras. If you have pride, be proud that you are a devotee; if you have great attachment, be attached to God; if you hate, hate Krishna. Then the cloud is dispersed. Be devoted in the sense of being God-conscious all the time. Whatever be the manner, your station, your position, or your occupation in life, let all these be turned Godward and then there is no problem. You may have to marry and raise a family. You may have to do things which society regards as not desirable. Alright, that's also part of the game of life and you may do something marvelous as a very virtuous man, very good. Direct all your emotions towards God himself. Turn all these Godward by enthroning the Lord in your heart. That was the special and unique message of Krishna's life.

## The Perennial Light Within

I think most of you know the stories connected with Divali. One is the story of Rama, how he went to Lanka, destroyed all the evil forces there, and came back. On the day he returned to Ayodhya, he came towards the evening. That was the last day of the 14-year period he had been in exile, and Bharata had said if he did not come back when the time expired, he would commit suicide. And so, as it was the last day of his exile, he returned to Ayodhya, even though it was late in the evening. When the people heard that he was coming, they lit earthen lamps and illuminated the whole city. That's one legend.

The other legend is found in the other Puranas. There was a demon called Narakasura, who was a great killer, and had killed all sorts of princes, princesses and kings and collected all their queens - 16,000 of them. He had imprisoned them in his palace, and Krishna was made to fight with him. The fight is described very beautifully in the Bhagavatham. It sounds as if they had some sort of tanks and planes and bombers and so on. Eventually, Narakasura was killed, and Divali is supposed to be in commemoration of the victory over evil.

When this demon was killed, his own mother approached Krishna and said something very interesting: 'I am happy that you killed my son.' They say that this attitude prevailed in Rajasthan among the medieval princes, namely that, if I am your son, and I become very wicked and vicious, and somebody comes and kills me, you are happy. So Narakasura's mother approached Krishna and said, 'I am very happy that you have destroyed him, because he was a wicked boy, but I am also happy that he died at your hands. It is a great honour, a great blessing.' And then she sang the praises of Krishna, and Krishna said, 'Alright, I am very pleased with your devotion, ask a boon.' And she said, 'May people commemorate this event for all time to come'. This shows that there was still a trace of attachment. That was why this particular Chaturdarshi - day before the new moon - is known as Naraka Chaturdarshi.

Once again, when you look at the name Narakasura, you see that Naraka means hell, and the whole story relates to the day of the new moon. It is in fact the darkest day, the darkest night. So, what is Naraka? Naraka is total darkness, absolute darkness. It is quite likely that there was a demon called Narakasura, and Krishna killed him. It is quite possible that the whole story is literally, historically true. But it is also true when you look at the whole scene that it was Naraka that was destroyed. Naraka is associated with dark night. Remember this, remember this. When you are sunk in darkness, you cannot save yourself. You cannot even kill that darkness. When you are completely and totally confused, without a ray of hope, what are you going to do? You cannot get rid of that darkness. You are in a strange place, and that place is utterly dark, you do not even know if there is a light in the room. You do not even know where the switch is. When we are in that situation, absolutely nothing can be done by one's own effort. One can collapse. That is where grace is needed. It is only the Divine that can switch the lights on. No amount of beating your breast and yelling and

howling can do that, nothing. One might say that at that time one should realise the light within. But that is possible only for Yajnavalkya, not for us.

There was a great sage called Yajnavalkya, whose story is narrated in one of the Upanishads, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. A woman sage enters into a debate with him, and she says. 'Yajnavalkya, tell me, what is the light in which people function?' 'Sunlight,' was the answer. And she says, 'Alright, you are clever, but when the sun has set?' 'Moonlight'. 'Ha, you are still clever. And when the moon is not there, or the moon has set and the sun has set?' 'Stars.' 'And when there are no stars?' 'Fire, a flashlight.' You must observe this technique very carefully here. He does not suddenly jump in and say, 'Atmajnana'. To make a right statement at the wrong time is destructive, is meaningless. So, when you keep repeating 'God, God, God,' all the way through, you are not only wasting your time, even worse, you are creating a misunderstanding. This young man comes to you and says, 'I have got a little headache, what must I do?' Do not tell him to pray, now. First make him take a cold shower, offer something else, all kinds of remedies - and only when all these have been tried, suggest prayer. Then his prayer will be genuine, it comes not only from the bottom of the heart, but also from the bottom of the toe. So, the technique these Upanishadic sages evolved was to lead you from truth to greater truth. From grosser reality to subtler reality. Step by step, from the obvious to the not-so-obvious.

And so Yajnavalkya finally gives the answer: 'Atma; there is a light within that gives the answer; there is alight within that guides you.' And at that point it becomes absolutely clear, because we have gone from what is totally obvious, superficially obvious, grossly obvious, into the subtle, into the more subtle, into the subtlest. One can say that even when you are in total darkness, this inner light is there, and that inner light will guide you. But that is good only for Yajnavalkya, and not for you and me. I must first become a Yajnavalkya, and then it is possible for me to find that inner light in times of such crises. So one has to depend upon God. Only God can destroy that total darkness. So, your Vedas also pray - asato ma sat gamaya tamaso ma jyotir gamaya. I am surrounded by this darkness, I am sunk in this darkness. I cannot find my path. I cannot find my way out of this. Only that realisation is possible - and for that you need God's Grace, otherwise you go to a bottle or some drug, or some other totally irrelevant thing. You are standing near the edge of the forest and there, in a state of panic, thinking that you can save yourself, you start rebelling against that darkness, and fighting it, and you think you can conquer it. All the time you are running deeper into the forest. Again, our famous favorite theme: when you are in such a state of confusion, stop, freeze, and pray.

You do not know the direction - it is total darkness. And you are both frightened and confused. At that point you do not know which way to go - sit down and pray. It is better to collapse there and fall, than to start running, because it is quite possible you may run into deeper darkness,

There is a puzzling mantra in the Isavasya Upanishad. It says: 'They are sunk in

deep darkness who are devoted to ignorance, or worldliness. Into even greater darkness enter they who are devoted to knowledge,' - which means, if you think you are clever, you are running into even deeper darkness. Do not think you are clever and you can push the darkness away. In that panicky confused situation, if you start running, it is quite possible you will run into deeper darkness. Instead wait, Stop. Freeze.

That is the message. Pray - pray for the light, because at that point no human help is of any avail. It is not merely that I cannot help myself - you cannot help me either. We are all sinking. It is not a gospel of impotence, 'I do not want to do anything. I recognise that, in this situation, no human effort is of any use.' When that becomes a realisation, then there is Divine Light. Krishna comes and destroys the demon. Today we commemorate that event and this truth.

There are two problems here First, who is going to remind us of the reminder? We build a memorial, or we evolve a festival to commemorate this truth, this story, and we observe this thing regularly every year. Every year we observe Divali, every year we observe. Christmas, whatever it is. Who is going to tell us what it means and what it should mean to us? Even if we are reminded now, later we are only interested in these sweetmeats and fun and crackers and nice new clothes. Who is interested in the light? Who is even aware that we are in this terrible darkness? When we are unaware that we are in darkness, we see a perverted light. This is the fun. This is what they call 'maya', and this is what the Isavasya Upanishad ironically calls 'vidya'. You do not know yourself, and yet you understand the world, you understand other people, you understand who I am - all that knowledge is only a deeper darkness, a perversion or misunderstanding. Without self-knowledge, I am trying to understand you. I am trying to understand this world, and I think I know who I am too. All this is a kind of knowledge which is worse than ignorance. And so, hanging on to this knowledge, we go deeper into the forest of darkness.

The foolish man who knows that he does not know, might somehow stumble upon the truth by God's grace, but the idiot who thinks he knows, is finished. He goes from darkness to denser darkness. So, when we are in darkness, is it possible for a commemoration like this Divali to remind us? Is it possible for us to remember this commemoration, and remind ourselves at that psychological moment that this is the darkness, and now I must collapse? 'Hari Om tat sat - Bhagavan, please. help.' So, when these great sages evolved festivals like this, Divali, Christmas, Rosh Hashana, their intention was that by celebrating this annually, regularly, we would remind ourselves of this spiritual truth, because this seems to be so difficult. What we usually do is, we make merry, we convert it into some kind of celebration. The truth is completely forgotten, totally abandoned. Those who are aware of this truth do not need the remembrance day at all. They are aware of it all the time. So, unless you are aware of it all the time, you are not going to be aware of it in a crisis. It is very simple, isn't it? If you are not aware of a simple truth all the time, in a crisis you are not going to be aware of it at all. A very great saint of South India, composed a beautiful prayer. 'At the

time of death, when I am struggling for breath, and my throat is choked, how am I going to remember you, O Lord?' When I am healthy and happy and peaceful and prosperous, and everything is going on fine, even then it is difficult for me to remember God, and you want me to believe that at the time when my throat is choked and I cannot even breathe, I am going to think of God? Nonsense. So, better remember now. 'Lord, better take my heart now, so from now on let the remembrance be continuous, otherwise there is no hope.'

We have two categories of people. First, those who are continuously remembering the truth or God; for them there is no problem of darkness at all. They are walking in light. And secondly, the others who are too far gone, who therefore will convert all these festivals of light into fanfare. As far as these are concerned, all your memorials are useless, hopeless. So, the perpetually vigilant person does not need all these memorials, and the stupid one does not deserve it. It is only in the case of some people who are half awake, who are on the fence, not quite this side, not quite that side, for them these festivals and memorials may be of some help. And if, by God's Grace again, it so happens that on the eve of getting drowned in this darkness, you and I happen to pass through a satsang like this and remind ourselves of the truth, it is possible that we might act wisely and sensibly; otherwise these memorials are of no use at all.

So one has to remember this truth. Only if, one day, on one of these Divalis, we suddenly realise that this is the message, that life itself is potential calamity and that I need the light of God, and only God can give me this light, then there is humility, prayerfulness, contemplativeness. Then the purpose of the saints and sages in instituting the Divali will be of some use.

## The Significance of the Avatar

Watching the tv-celebration of Satya Sai Baba's birthday, I was reminded of the historic All-India Tour of Gurudev Sivananda. On returning to the Ashram at Rishikesh, I had the good fortune of writing a 600 page report of the tour. In the introduction to this, I remarked that it was as if we were in the days of Rama and Krishna. When I showed the draft of this to Swami Sivananda, He asked me how I could compare Him to these incarnations of God.

When it comes to the definition of an Avatar, we read in the Bhagavad Gita. 'God incarnates again and again in order to re-establish Dharma'. The sign of an Incarnation of God is that He touches, transforms lives.

I am not a total optimist, nor a total pessimist, but being half optimist, half pessimist. I call myself a realist. Look at the story of Rama and Krishna. How many people recognised their real divinity? In the case of Rama, there were only two or three people who knew him to be God. Visvamitra did not come to him for instruction; on the contrary, he told Rama what to do. Ahalya was merely glad to be restored to her former beauty by him, and Sabari was pleased to have seen him. That is all. Even in the case of Krishna, not many recognised his divinity.

You may say that you recognise Satya Sai Baba's divinity - that is surely why you sing Kirtans and celebrate His birthday. Remember that God incarnates to re-establish righteousness. How many of you participate in that mission? After that fantastic tour of India, when millions had seen and heard Him, Gurudev said, 'Lecturing to thousands is useless - better go from house to house and conduct a little satsang - that may leave a lasting impression'. We may disagree with Gurudev here, for even this mass communication is not without its own benefit. The master sows a seed, and either in this life or in the next birth, it will germinate and produce its fruits. It is possible that in every one of the thousands of people who sing the glories of an Avatar some change takes place.

Do you recognise a divinity in your midst? 'I incarnate again and again to protect the good and destroy the wicked', said Krishna. That is as much a warning as a promise. Whenever I hear this verse from the Bhagavad Gita, I feel like trembling. Supposing God were to come in front of us right now and say: 'I will protect all the good and destroy all the evil'. Where would we be? To me this statement is a warning to be careful. How many of us are prepared to act upon this warning? I will leave you with this question - not the answer. The answer must come from you.

During morning meditation, we recite a sloka: 'The Guru's form is to be meditated upon, the Guru's feet should be worshipped, we should regard the Guru's word as gospel truth and the Guru's Grace will redeem us'.

We meditate on the Guru's form, why? I have a picture of Krishna, Rama, Venkatesa, but I have never seen them. I can visualise them according to the

image drawn by someone else. There may not be complete rapport with such an image. So, as a preliminary to meditating on such an image, I contemplate my own Guru whom I know, have been with, and can talk to. Then, turning the mind within becomes very easy. I am not talking merely to an image made of stone, bronze, or paper, but I talk to my Guru, a living presence, and He can tell me from within - 'Sit straight, your mind is wandering'. It is a person-to-person communication, and that is a tremendous help. In the Ashram in India we used to worship Gurudev Sivananda almost every day, although in the beginning He objected to this. This was a sincere, not a mechanical worship, and was of great spiritual importance, purifying the heart, and generating devotion to the Guru.

'Te Guru's word should be regarded as gospel truth'. Very few people are prepared to accept this part of this mantra - we think the first and second parts suffice. What is the use of being half saved? Would you be satisfied to be half shaved? If you do not want to appear in public only half shaved but want to be fully shaved, it is also better to be totally saved. The third aspect of that mantra stresses the need for acting according to the Guru's teaching. We are not all saints, but to the best of our ability we must act according to the Guru's instructions. Are we doing what he said? Have we the devotion to do this? Out of all Krishna's followers, Uddhava was probably the only serious disciple.

The pull of worldliness is so great. The body is part of this earth, and it is sustained by food. The mind that dwells in this body is worldly and is tempted. It needs superhuman effort to pull the mind away from worldly distractions and towards God. The Guru can help us here. With His Grace, it is possible for us to make rapid progress, thus justifying His incarnation.

'Te Guru's Grace will redeem us'.

It is not enough to say that God exists. The very fact that you come to satsang shows you have spiritual tendencies. But we step hesitantly, instead of plunging in whole-heartedly. If we are sincere, then this Grace will bring us close to liberation. We are taking one step further towards God-realisation all the time. We are moving towards this goal. That is the significance of the Avatar. Our life must be a reflection of the purpose of the mission of the Divine Incarnation - to allow our lives to be transformed.

## Who Cuts the Grooves?

Today we were discussing this business of habit. What is the place of habit in our life? Why do we form habits at all? What happens if we do not have a habit? You can see that the tendency to form habits is there in the system - in both the body and the mind. From one point of view you may say that it is natural to form habits. The habit of getting up in the morning and going to sleep in the evening, or the habit of driving a car almost automatically without having to think of it all the time. What is it in the personality that demands the formation of habits, that forms these habits and how does it benefit by it?

One can immediately see that there is one great advantage - the conservation of energy. If you have learned to drive a car properly, you do not have to think about it all the time. When you are typing, you do not have to pick out the letters on the keyboard. When there is some freedom from the compulsion to concentrate on the job in hand, your mind can switch off to something else. Then the repeated application of the mind for that particular work does not involve strain or concentration or expenditure of energy. That could well be why the body and mind seem to develop this tendency.

In the same way the body also develops a tendency. You go on eating one type of food and the whole system gears itself to the digestion of that food. But the system is capable of doing something else too, and one must recognise this fact. If you are habituated to sitting down cross-legged, when you begin sitting on a chair, there is a certain funny feeling inside the calf muscles. Then you begin sitting on chairs; when you sit down on the floor again cross-legged, there is a different type of funny feeling. It is possible to go from one to the other and back to the first one, there is no problem.

I must recognise that there is some advantage in forming a habit-pattern. When that action is carried on automatically, even if not mechanically, the mind or the intelligence is free to attend to something else. I am not suggesting that you can dream of a totally irrelevant activity. One person who is an eye-trainer objects to this sort of behaviour. She says that if you are looking at something and then you try to remember somebody or something else, you are defocusing the vision. She does not think it is a very healthy practice. Her argument is that the eyes feel cheated. Though the eyes are looking at something, the mind is elsewhere.

The same argument can also be brought in psychologically. An example, if while driving a car, instead of concentrating on the job, you make the driving mechanical or automatic and the mind is allowed to think of something else, would it also result in some kind of a split? Then you are habitually absent-minded. That may not be. If you make this automatic, then the energy is released. It does not mean that the energy should be deviated to something completely different. Even for a deeper understanding of that very action you may use that energy. That is one reason why I can sit down at the typewriter and type an article or whatever it is straight away. The typing is mechanical, so that the mind can

dive deeper into the subject, rather than be worried I about the keyboard. Then it is not mechanical. The motions are mechanical, automatic, but the intelligence goes deeper. In that way I am making use of the mind's habit-forming habit and not becoming absent-minded, or distracted. It is concentration, but concentration in depth, not superficial concentration.

I thought it might be of interest to us first to understand the habit-forming mechanism and then to utilise it. Avowing that the mind is going to form a habit - whether you call it a good habit or a bad habit - whatever you do. The mind works only on the basis of habits. You change this habit; for a few days it is uncomfortable and then that becomes the habit. You start shaving your head and continue for some time; it is uncomfortable, funny, but then that becomes a habit and if you change, if you grow hair now, that becomes uncomfortable. Do it for a week or ten days and that becomes the new habit.

Without losing the advantage of habit-formation, can I go a step farther and deeper into it? What I think is very important to us is the philosophy behind what Gurudev often used to emphasise - the formation of good habits. Habits as a rule are not very desirable, for the very simple reason that you are living a mechanical and blind life. If you recognise that habits are inevitable, then you form good habits. There is also a possibility that by using these good habits you can go further by making an in depth study of the mind and its functions.

The second step is even more important. What happens if you detect that a certain habit is undesirable? You might persistently run into some relationship problem. You have some habit and all of the others do not like it. Every time you come into contact with them, they bring up the same subject, 'You should not do it'. Or it can also be the result of mental distress; it brings you pain. You are doing something habitually and you realise that there is a lot of unpleasantness involved in that habit, not necessarily related to others but in yourself. Such may be a habit like drinking whisky or coffee, it does not matter what it is.

I see the craving building up. Every time I do not have a cup of coffee, a craving builds up and the craving is definitely painful. That I am able to satisfy that craving is another business, but the craving has to be fulfilled. You are no longer the master of your own house; it is a compulsion either external or internal. You have to do it. That 'have to' is painful. Since it gives me pain and generates mental discomfort, restlessness and therefore unhappiness, I see that that habit is undesirable - whether it is good or bad we are not going into at all. Restlessness and depression are the same, one follows the other. You are getting restless for some time. This cannot go on for ever, so it comes down to depression and once again it builds up.

Here there is a slight difference - there is no conservation of energy. The habit of coffee-drinking is not formed by the mind or the body because it saves energy. A groove is being cut. The groove may even be physical. For example, someone may feel that if he does not have a cup of coffee in the morning his bowels do not

move. It is not entirely mental or psychological. The nerves, the body are accustomed to that stimulation.

Who cuts the groove and how is it cut? It can be anything - coffee drinking, gambling or running around with boys and girls. The habit may have been formed by the action being done once and then repeated. Isn't that when the groove is being cut? Maybe you were already predisposed to it - for instance, the famous smoking habit. You do not have to smoke but you look at the others who smoke. They seem to be very civilised and it seems to be the thing to do. The first thing they pass round at all the cocktail parties and even at weddings is a cigarette. The mind, which was a total stranger to this smoking, suddenly gets an idea that perhaps this is important. It is at that point that a predisposition to mischief happens. Till then there is nothing, you are completely innocent. You see somebody else doing it and you do not even know whether that person is happy or unhappy with it. You do not even inquire. The mind begins to form a judgement. First of all you see that the others are doing it and therefore it must be good. When I do it with the idea that it must be good, the mind looks for the good points only. The first time I smoke, it is a strange experience and maybe it is not so pleasant, but you are not aware of the evil, the discomfort, the undesirability of it. Then you begin to repeat it, and as you repeat it, the same prejudice becomes what is called value-judgment. It is good - not that it must be good - it is good. And as this value-judgment cuts a groove in the mind, so you are hooked.

There is a saying in Tamil which explains this phenomenon of habit-forming in a very beautiful, picturesque manner. You think a rock is strong and firm and that an ant is of no consequence in relation to the hardness of the rock. The proverb says that if ants persist in walking on the rock for a long, long time, a groove will be cut. Ants' legs are not so strong and the rock is firm and terrible, but as time goes on, you will find one of these days a nice little groove on the rock formed by the lotus feet of the ants.

Naturally the mind is also clouded. An evil habit must have its own consequence, whether it is a habit like eating or drinking or any personal relationship. You develop an intensely friendly relationship with someone, but you do not at one point see that this relationship is clouding your intelligence. It is a self-fulfilling nuisance. The mind looks for something good in that wicked experience and for the time being only that exists. You are not aware of the other, undesirable aspect of your personality. You only feel the pain. Then when the real source is clouded, you try to blame somebody else or something else for your problem. It is a really serious thing, and it is a vicious circle. I see the unhappiness, but I do not see the source of that unhappiness. I see also that you are somehow involved in this, in my unhappiness. Why? I see this as something good, and you do not like it. I am fond of somebody whom you do not like. This somebody may be causing a lot of trouble to me, but because I am fond of that person, I do not see this. Even the craving to be in that person's company is already making me miserable. Now I want some reason for this unhappiness. I see that you also do not like the other

person, and you are telling me to keep away. So the unhappiness is attributed directly to you. It is a strange mix-up.

The problem is not seen because it is dark inside. You do not want to look there. If I am able to look at that, then of course the cloud will disappear. Instead I look where it is convenient for me to look, without observing whether the problem is there or comes from there. We go round and round. I like this person and since you are not fond of that person, I hate you. I have still not solved my problem, I have only complicated it further.

Then, through Satsang or God's Grace, Guru's Grace, or through what the Yoga Vasistha might call accidental coincidence, you discover that he cannot be my trouble, something else is my trouble. Accidentally you wake up to the real source of the problem. It is me, it is within me. Let me work that out. One great help in working this out is the understanding that I was there before this problem came into my life and I will probably be there after it has gone. I was not born with a cigarette in my mouth and hopefully I will not die with one in my mouth. I was there before this relationship of love or hate developed - both these, raga dvesha, are exactly the same, and I will continue to be there even after this relationship comes to an end. Now, where is the problem? Suddenly I realise that there is a craving and that craving itself causes it.

Whenever I think of something as an object of pleasure or enjoyment and therefore desirable, a contact is made. When the psychological contact is made, whether the object is present or not, a craving arises. At that point I am the craver, I do not see it. It is not as though the craving is something away from me, that I am independent of this craving. This is what one of those children in Perth said very beautifully. 'Why don't you realise the earth is spinning on its own axis?' 'Because you are not only on it, you are identifying yourself with it, you are the earth.' Therefore you are completely unaware of the fact that the earth is spinning.

When that craving or the fulfillment of the craving is frustrated, you fly into a temper, or you hate. Whenever there is an infatuated love, there is a corresponding hate somewhere; it is universal, it must be there. If you are deeply attached to vegetarianism, you hate everybody else who eats meat. And so we go on and on, never for a moment stopping to think that the problem is in me, not in anybody else. The suffering is not in the person whom I love, and not in the other person whom I hate in consequence - it is in me.

The whole process can be reversed easily. The clue is given to us towards the end of the 3rd chapter of the Bhagavad Gita.

III.42 - indriyani parany ahur indriyebhyah param manah manasas to para buddhir yo buddheh paratas to sah

Of course the senses are very powerful. When do they become so? When the habit

has been formed, when the groove has been cut. Then of course the water flows automatically along that groove, which means you have an irresistible temptation. I have heard of at least one friend who even resolved quite a number of times to keep away from alcohol, but he could not. If he even drove within half a mile of a pub, from there something took over. He did not realise that he was going in at all, and he did not come out, he was carried out. That's it.

Even there one realises all is not lost, because there are moments of clarity. That is, I am drawn into the temptation, which means there are moments when I am not drawn, when I am not craving. This applies to human relationship also. We may be drawn to each other tremendously, but I realise that when you are absent or I am absent from your company, there are hours and hours or days and months when I do not think of you. What happened at that time? If I can get hold of that this time, I would actually see the sequence of events described in the 2nd chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. How I begin to think of it, and the moment I think of it, the whole conflagration starts. It is because we do not pay attention to the valley that we are always caught up in the crest of this temptation. If however you wait for some time till you experience the trough which is natural, you will see that you are not craving all the time, whoever you are, however mad you are. In this trough I wake myself up and become intensely aware of this cravingless state. That feels good. Of course, the other enjoyment - a glass of whisky - also felt good. But here there is no craving at all, there is no problem.

There is a risky practice here, in Swami Nihshreyasananda's words, what I am going to describe right now is fit only for heroes; a bit of inner strength is necessary. While still in the trough, can you dramatise within yourself the arising of the craving? Visualise yourself in some nice company and having a nice time. Then perhaps you can also see the whole thing objectively. You are deliberately injecting into your mind the trigger that usually sent you spinning. While doing so, you are wide awake and therefore, for example, resolutely avoiding getting up and opening the fridge or the bar. I am merely dramatising the whole thing within myself to see how a craving arises, how it reaches its peak and comes down into the trough again. That needs a bit of strength.

Otherwise you keep in the trough experience without allowing the mental equilibrium to be disturbed. Then naturally, because of the groove that has been cut, the craving must arise, probably the next time you come into close proximity with the object of temptation, whether it is a thing or a person. If you are very cautious there, you can see the craving beginning and you can immediately say, 'Aha, you are the trouble.' When the craving is absent, there is no distress, no trouble. Why not keep there?

Krishna points the way. Naturally when these habit patterns are formed, the senses seem to be terribly powerful. No doubt, but you have something in you which is more powerful - the mind. It is the mind that really forms these grooves, thinking constantly of the object of pleasure. Why does the mind form this groove and not that one? Something within you has judged this to be pleasant. That is

the buddhi. The buddhi is the determining faculty, and the mind works in the light provided by the buddhi, on the determination of the buddhi. So, Krishna says, 'Look a little bit deeper; you yourself have decided that this is desirable. You then desire it and then you suffer.' What happens if you switch off the whole thing? Do you see the fun here?

You can easily take these three or four steps back and yet there is one more step. You can reverse this whole process, because beyond that buddhi or the discriminating power is He. Here the ego is not mentioned at all because ego is something which arises in the buddhi itself, as a reflection. So, instead you take one step further back from the buddhi; there you are in Him, in God. Viewed from that point the whole thing looks silly and simple. The habit that was causing a lot of distress drops away; it is not even drooped and a new habit is formed.

## The Mystery of the Soul

*om saha navavatu  
saha nau bhunaktu  
saha viryam karavavahai  
tejasvi navadhitamastu  
ma vidvisavahai  
om santih santih santih*

*Om, May He protect us both - the teacher and the taught - together - by revealing knowledge.*

*May He protect us both - by vouch-safing the results of knowledge.*

*May we attain vigour together.*

*Let what we study be invigorating.*

*May we not cavil at each other.*

*Om, peace, peace, peace.*

How does one understand? For instance, we three are sitting on the platform. You are sitting under us. And if you stand down there, you will be understanding us - standing under. Where is the mind? In the head. That is what we think. So, what is done up there can not be understanding. And what is under the head? The heart. And so, if it is possible for us to open our hearts for this half hour to be in love with each other, then it is possible to bring about an understanding and that is why the prayer was offered in the beginning.

As a matter of fact, one of the members of your staff sent a rather long question concerning what is called the soul. What is the relationship between the soul, and the ultimate being, and what happens in that relationship during what the Hindus call transmigration. Let us approach it from the simple point of view of children, of students - I am also a student.

If you have no ideas already about this, where will you start? First of all, I would start to question why does this question arise at all? Why does the mind look for a thing called an ultimate being? The answer I am sure you will agree is: because of one terrible factor in life which we call death.

When I first came to Mauritius, most of you had not been born. If some of you come to me singly, I would ask you a very simple question. Let's say, your date of birth is the 1st of July. Where were you on your last birthday? You know where you were - in your seaside cottage or at home. Where did you celebrate your birthday six years ago? Probably you were in France or in England. And if you are, let's say, 12 years old, where were you 12 years ago on your birthday? In the hospital, next to your mother. Where were you 15 years ago on the 1st of July? Perhaps you reply: 'I was nowhere.' My God, that is a fantastic answer. Could you also say that it is possible that last year I was nowhere? When you say 'I was' - I am talking plain simple English - the 'I who was' had to be somewhere. 'I was where' is the question. You cannot say, 'I was nowhere'. You were not born. Now

that is where the whole problem begins. I was in bed in the nursing home with my mother 12 years ago. Before that I was a foetus in the mother. And before that?

Let's say you have a mango. Where did you get that mango fruit from? From the tree. How did the tree grow? From the seed. Where did you get that seed? From the tree. So, there seems to be an apparently beginningless beginning. When you grow up, you can go much further than this into the analysis of the molecules, the atoms and the energy that is contained in the atoms and so on. For the present we are only concerned with this simple problem.

If I am asked where I was 60' years ago, I would probably answer similarly as you have done. Instead of saying 'I was nowhere', I would have been a bit more honest and said, 'I do not know'. You are young and so tremendously optimistic, and tremendously dynamic, aggressive, and so you say, 'I was no where'. I would have very honestly but more humbly said, 'I do not know'. Someone might ask me, 'Where do you hope to be in the next few years, Swami?' I might say, 'In Mauritius.' Then, if you ask me, 'After 20 years'. Then I would reply not that, 'I would be nowhere', but 'I do not know'.

Now, in between these two punctuation marks - one called birth and the other called death - we seem to be - is that right? I am. That nobody will deny. I think I know I am, or I think I am or I know I am. If I do not know what I was before this first punctuation mark and where I will be after the second punctuation mark, what is going to happen to me? There is a being now which is not ultimate in as much as this being which is sitting here and talking to you will cease to exist. Therefore I am looking for an ultimate being.

What is the relationship of this being with that one? The framer of this question has used the words ultimate being and so I go on with the simple word 'God'. But please remember God is a word. I used the word mango. You heard the word mango and if you love the word mango, probably your mouth started salivation, but you would still not taste the mango. If you have a mango in your hand and put it into your mouth, you will taste it. So, between the word and the fact or the truth, there is a big difference. God is a word. Why do I want to believe in this ultimate being or God? I know that this being that I am seems to have no permanent existence. You must have seen babies at home or around within a week or so after birth. They are tiny. That is what your mother gave birth to - you were so beautiful and so charming, so delicate, so fragile. Now some of these boys have moustaches, some of these girls are grooming themselves - great young men and women. Where did you acquire all this mass? Not from your mother or father, but from the food that you ate. As a matter of fact, even the newborn baby is nothing but well processed food eaten by the mother. Now is that the being I am talking about, the personality I am talking about when I am talking about my personality? Please remember very often we confuse the personality with the body. He has a magnificent personality means he has a beautiful, handsome body. I am sure you mean something else also.

If I understand what this being is, then I might also understand the relationship this being has with the ultimate being. Though this body is made of food, it is still possible that this body is me, so that I might be able to agree with her that 60 years ago I was nowhere and 60 years later I will be nowhere also. When she said 20 ears ago she was nowhere, what she really meant was that this body was not in existence 20 years ago. When I call myself Swami Venkatesananda, am I referring to this body? Often we do, this is the tragedy. I am beginning to wonder now whether what is called the personality is not the body but seems to live in this body.

If so, what is it that lives in this body? When you see a dead body, once again you begin to wonder, what was there in that body which has now left it? Life has left the body so that it is no longer functioning the way it used to. It does function in a way; it decomposes, but it is not living. So, life is fundamental. Life is ultimate in comparison to this physical body.

Whereas this physical body composed of food changes, life is ultimate in comparison. Do you know what life means, what a living being means? We use millions of words. I once heard a brilliant scientist in India who talked to us. He was a deeply religious man and he said, 'People often demand when a religious man talks of God, 'Show us what god is, otherwise we will not believe, describe fully what God is. I am a scientist and if someone were to ask me, Dr. Krishnan, what is electricity, I would have to answer, electricity, my friend, is electricity.' You may show its functions but you cannot show 'this is electricity'. Even so we are unable to demonstrate or show what prana or life means. We know living beings, how they function, how this life makes me function, but we do not know what life is.

The problem here is ignorance. I am a living being, a living personality, and I say I do not know who I am. It is not life that says, 'I do not know', but the living being. Once again there is a puzzle. 'My god, I do not know'; but you must know, life itself must know. We see again that this ultimate being which is the source of life, which is life itself is also all knowledge, perfect knowledge, perfect intelligence. Then we look at this dead body again. It does not know that it is dead. In that dead body, there is neither life nor intelligence as you and I see it to be. Therefore we think that there was a soul in that body and that soul was all life and intelligence. It is that soul which is in me, in this body, which lives and is able to think, to know, to reason, and to understand. That is the soul even now.

From there on one can adopt any view one likes. Even if you ask me to describe it in terms of Hinduism, I would still fumble because there are as many schools of thought in Hinduism as there are religions in the world. There are any number of speculations. I will give you one view point that I like. I want to emphasise though that this is not the only view point even of Hinduism. It is quite simple. The soul that dwells in this body and which at some time decides to leave this body is life, and that soul is pure intelligence. It is because of that soul that I am

living and that I am able to think and speak. It does not have a form, it does not have a limitation, it is not limited to this body. It does not have male-female characteristics. It does not even have animal-human characteristics. It is life - it is intelligence. It is, it was, and it will ever be. It is very much like water vapour in the world; you have water vapour everywhere, even in the deserts. If you look at a cloud which is about to rain, you see there a mass of water vapour and yet it is homogeneous, it is one. In a few minutes it begins to rain, the whole cloud does not come down like a lake, but it comes down as individual droplets. That is the mystery of nature. In the same way I might see that altogether, all the living beings in the world together constitute this ultimate being called God. We are small beings like one of those raindrops falling from the cloud down onto the earth, once again to evaporate and go up.

I would say that the soul is a cell in the body of God. Just as your body has billions of cells, each apparently performing an independent function, even so, all of us, all the living beings in the world are cells in the body of God. Each cell is called a soul. Till this understanding is brought about, we undergo changes like rain. As long as we do not have this knowledge or understanding, we go from one form to another, not necessarily one body to another, till the inner purity is achieved and the soul is reabsorbed in the ultimate being.

Question: Where was the soul before you were born and what happens to it afterwards?

Answer: Where was that drop of water before it rained? In the cloud. Cloud is a word but it is still moisture around the earth isn't it. Do not look at it as a small piece of cloud. The whole atmosphere around the earth is full of moisture and it is everywhere. Somehow at some stage that droplet separates itself from the cloud and drops down. That is how I understand even the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Eve is what the Hindus call Jiva. They called the male counterpart Adam and the Hindus called it Atma. Where were these? They were there everywhere. At a certain point this one atom of existence, this one atom of life assumes this form and it says, 'I do not know what I was. It starts functioning as an independent living being till this ignorance is given up and along with that all the sinful tendencies, wickedness, evil is also given up. Then when there is purity of heart, God's light is purely reflected in that pure heart and in that there is knowledge and there is no more going or coming.

Question: How is it that if there is a god, there is so much evil in this world?

Answer: As a matter of fact, it is because we are so wicked that we think there must be somebody who is good and therefore god. I do not see much difference between the two words good and god. Good minus god is O - zero, which means between good and god there is no difference. Have you ever been naughty, wicked, or angry with your schoolmate, or bluffed somebody? For some time after that there is no peace at heart. If you lose your temper with somebody, if you scold somebody, if you are rude to somebody, you cannot sleep. When you are

wicked, when-you have done something wicked, something deep within you rebels and says, 'No, I should not have done that'. There must be something which is greater than my individual personality which is not involved in this ignorance, in my wickedness. It is in a state of ignorance of god that I, the individual, fall into error, and when this ignorance goes, that wickedness drops away or, after the wickedness drops away, the heart becomes pure and God is reflected in it.

Question: What about the mind?

Answer: The mind is a confusion between the soul and the body. It is the mind which says, the soul is the body. Do you know the distinction between the soul and the body? The soul is pure intelligence in which there is no evil at all. The body is pure potatoes in which there is also no evil. Even though I have been saying all through this talk that the soul is distinct from the body, if you cut me, if you hit me, I will cry because in ignorance there is the confusion that the soul is the body. So one has to resolve that confusion and only then your question can be properly answered. Who is angry - the soul or the body? First this confusion should be resolved. Obviously it is not the body that is angry. You are never angry when you are fast asleep. When I am dead, I will not be angry with you at all. You can ask me the rudest question you want, I will still smile. There is a confusion now and it is the confusion that creates all these problems.

## The Reflecting Mirror

Meditation is not something extraordinary. It is the ability to pay attention completely and totally, whether you are sitting and listening to a talk on yoga or you are in a classroom listening to a lecture on what Mauritius looks like. When someone stands here and talks to you of what Mauritius looks like, what is your reaction? Do you turn to look out of the window? Can the mind or the attention be totally focused on any one thing without being distracted? If you can avoid that distraction, you are in meditation.

I think you have some idea of yoga already, and it is that idea that prevents you from knowing what yoga is. If you want to see the wall and the shadow of my hand is on it, are you seeing the wall? Obviously not. You see the shadow of my hand obstructing the vision. What would you do in order to see the wall? Can you remove that shadow? No? Then, you cannot see the wall. If the shadow is removed, you can see the wall, but how do you remove it? I have to remove that shadow and yet the shadow cannot be removed because it is not real. It is not like this shrub which can be pulled away from the wall.

Can you explain to me something which is, but not real? How can something be, and yet be not real? You chanted that prayer just now. 'From the unreal lead me to the real.' In the very expression of this sentence, there is a problem. Can you show me something which is unreal? If it is, it is not unreal. If unreal, it is not. What do I mean by something which is, but which is unreal? How can something which is, be unreal? How can something unreal, be?

I have to observe, and as I observe I see something. I am not contradicting the famous prayer, but I am only giving you another point of view. We are not moving from the unreal to the real, but we are examining what is seen as if it is real. Have you ever looked at your face in a mirror? What do you see? Your face? The reflection of your face? Do you see something in the mirror or not - whether it is a reflection or your face? I see something in my pocket - it is paper. I can tear it up or give it to you. Can you similarly take that thing out of the mirror and give it to me? Why not? If it is there, it can be taken out, you can handle it. Would you call whatever you see in the mirror - whether you call it your face or your reflection of your face - real or unreal? If you say it is real, then you can give it to me. If it is unreal, then I am going to take you to task, you are seeing a ghost.

When you talk of the real and the unreal, what are you doing? You have your eyes open, you are looking at the mirror. Does the mirror or whatever is in the mirror come and tell you, 'I am a reflection', or 'I am unreal', or 'I am real'? What is happening at that moment. when you are looking at the mirror? A thought arises in your mind - not in the mirror. 'Ah, I see.' And then another thought arises. 'I see a reflection in the mirror'. You begin to think, 'I think' - and then you think that you are seeing something in the mirror. The mirror or what is in the mirror does not say, 'I am', or 'I am real', or 'I am unreal'.

So, in order to know what is real, one has to go beyond thinking. If one does not do so, an error arises. You begin to say, 'I see my face in the mirror', and somebody questions you, 'Do you?' You are puzzled. Or you say, 'I see a reflection in the mirror', and if someone asks you, 'Is it true?', you are puzzled again. If I ask you another question, you may be even more puzzled. Have you ever seen a mirror? Can you look at a mirror without a reflection? When you are looking at the reflection, you are not looking at the mirror. Is it in the mirror, on the mirror, or above the mirror? Are you looking at the mirror or at the reflection in the mirror? If you are honest, you can only honestly answer that question in a roundabout way. The swami is standing here and you see him 'there'. You know that he is not there; he is only here. Then you begin to question, 'How is it that though the swami is standing here, I see him there.' 'Ah, it is a reflection, and therefore there must be a mirror there.' Because we are so used to this phenomenon called mirror, all this takes place in one fifth of a second and you do not realise the truth. No one has seen the mirror. You only see the reflection. Now if you put these two things together, you realise something very beautiful and you have understood all that there is to be understood in regard to yoga.

I cannot see what is unreal, because the unreal does not exist. If it exists, it is not unreal, it is real. I see something and something in me tells me that it is not, that it is a reflection, an imagination, a fantasy, a thought process. That something is seen by whom? By me - we will come back to that later. You look at the mirror, but the mirror is not seen, only the reflection is seen. The reflection is seen as if it is in the mirror. You are still looking at it. To me, still looking at it means you are still and looking at it. You are still physically and mentally looking at it. What are you seeing? The mirror is not there, the face is not there. I do not know what reflections means, it is a word or a thought that arises in the mind. When you are still, that thing that obstructed the vision, the shadow that was there preventing correct understanding, correct knowledge of what is, is gone. There is no shadow of thought. When the thought is not there, you are still, the mind is still. Would you still see the reflection or would you see the reality, the truth? You will not see the mirror, and therefore what is called unreal, or the medium in which the unreal is reflected - in Vedanta that is called maya. It is something which appears to be, but which does not exist. It is a mere reflecting medium.

As reflecting media, we are all there. I am reflected in you, you are reflected in me, we are all being reflected all the time in one another. The image falls on the eye and is taken through the iris of the pupil and the pupil turns the whole image upside down. You are told that the brain in you is really seeing the upside down image of the swami which is formed on your retina. You are not seeing me at all. As far as you are concerned, I am not standing here, I am in you. We are all images in each other.

Now the question arises. When the whole world is seen in me, is there a reality other than the intelligence in which it is reflected? I do not exist, except to the extent that this image is formed by you within yourself. Our friend suggested that this man standing here is a swami. If someone else who did not like me, met me,

he would probably say this man is a crook, a hoax, and a hypocrite. Maybe he is right, maybe the other man is right. Maybe nobody is right. Supposing I walked into a zoo and unknowingly happened to enter a lion's cage. The lion is hungry and it looks at me. Would it look at me as a swami who is a respectable man or as a nice breakfast? So, what is real and what is unreal?

This is where the yoga sadhana or the practice of yoga starts. If you understand this, probably your whole life will undergo a revolution; there will be a complete change in your relationship with one another. Our relationships are corrupted, polluted by assuming that the other person is 'my friend' or 'my enemy' etc. All these assumptions get a violent shake. Is there such a relationship? I am seeing him as 'my friend'. Is that real? That is where you begin to question. You are not taking anything for granted. You are not saying that this world is either real or unreal. There is an appearance and I want to know what it is, what the truth concerning this is.

If this investigation is not there, there is no yoga. Even in what is very prestigiously called hatha yoga, there is also this same factor. This is what yoga means. There seems to be an appearance - what is the reality? Without dismissing anything as unreal, the yogi goes from one reality to a greater reality. That is what the prayer means: 'Lead me from what I have taken without question to be the reality, that is the unreal - the imagination, the reflection, the appearance - to the reality.' You have taken the body to be absolutely real, to be yourself. You are not even looking at this body but only at this shirt. You do not see anything called 'Swami Venkatesananda' here, you see a long orange shirt, with a head, two hands and two feet sticking out. In the same way I say 'I am standing here'. What is standing here? Now I am beginning to investigate the body. What is it made of? However beautiful or ugly the body may be, it is merely twice recycled garbage. The garbage is first recycled into vegetables and then it is recycled into the body, The hatha yogi does not want to neglect the body, because it is there. Whether it is real or unreal, you do not see me as the bag of potatoes but as a person, as a swami.

When you say, 'I see him in front of me', you are using a wrong expression which is equal to your saying, 'I see a reflection in the mirror'. In the same way, when I say, 'I am here, I am standing here', the reality is not expressed. The appearance is expressed and that appearance is taken to be the reality. You do not say, 'Ah, the body is unreal, throw it away'. You cannot throw it away. If it is unreal, what do you throw away? Thus, working with this apparent reality or the appearance, you gradually proceed towards the understanding of that which is, the intelligence which is able to observe, that becomes aware of the thinking process - that is the reality.

Go back to the mirror. When you stand there, you suddenly realise 'I am not seeing the mirror at all.' I am seeing the reflection, but the reflection is not a reality in itself, it is not a thing that exists in itself, by itself. It is only an apparent reality, an appearance. There is no reality called mirror because you have not

seen the mirror without reflection. Then you realise that it is not true to say that your face alone is real because there is a reflection 'there', you are seeing something there. Suddenly there is the realisation that the two are really one. The two have become one as it were, because the two had never been two. There has never been a thing other than this face, neither the mirror nor the reflection; but in the mirror a reflection of this face was apparently seen - a reflection and the reality.

When it comes to living, suddenly we create complications. I exist only because you think; that is, 'this' is reflected in your mind. I am neither your enemy nor your friend, neither a swami nor a bag of potatoes. I do not exist as an outsider - the world does not exist outside of yourself. If this small girl here holds that big mirror and stands close to it, the whole mirror will reflect only her face. If you take it upstairs or on top of the church tower and hold it there, it will reflect the whole of Curepipe.

In the same way, the mind is capable of reflecting individuals as well as the entire universe. All the people who are involved in your life as well as the entire world are within you. It is that which is in you that sanctions, that gives them the validity. Previously you used to consider so-and-so as your friend, and some one else as not your friend. When you realise that all these things are in you, you may still use these words. You may say that this is the left eye and the other is the right eye, even though there is no distinction between them. They are both equally vital parts of your body. In the same way, if you realise that the person whom you consider good and the person whom you consider evil or bad are both parts of you, born of you, non-different from you, then those distinctions go away. You may still use words like happiness and unhappiness, good luck and bad luck, but in your own mind, in your own heart, in your own understanding, in your own intelligence, those distinctions have disappeared.

There is a sutra in the vedas which describes the creation, and mentions that 'God created all these, both what is true and what is false, and He entered into them all.' When this intelligence enters into all these, what is considered unreal becomes real, the appearance is seen to be an appearance of the real. The appearance is no longer separate from the real, but the appearance is seen, or realised as a reflection of the real. At that moment, yoga is born.