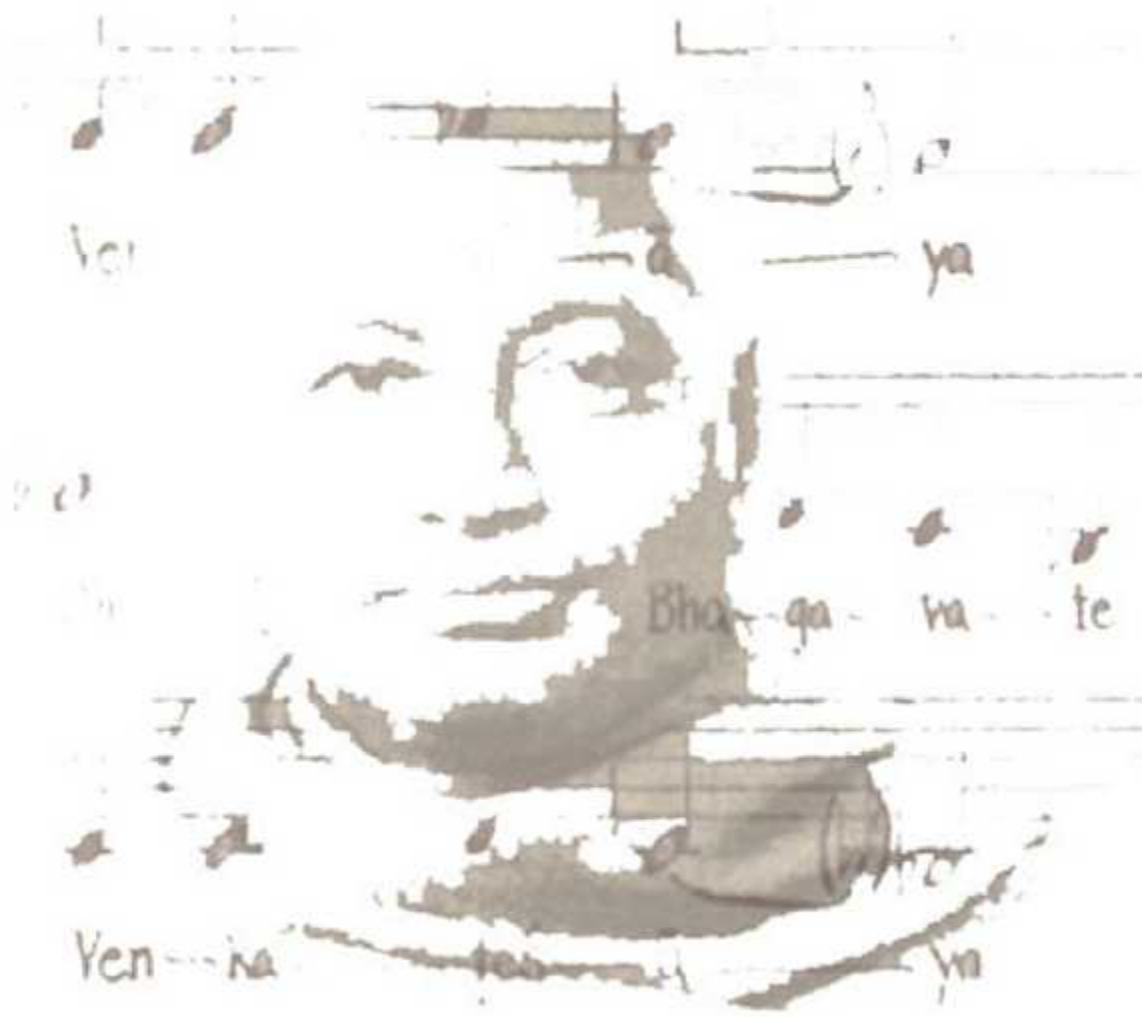


TALKS
to
YOUNG PEOPLE

BY
SWAMI VENKATESANANDA



Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Talks to Young People

Swami Venkatesananda

1972

Queen Elisabeth College
Rose Hill
Mauritius

Talks to Young People

While in Mauritius, Swamiji has, from time to time, given talks to the students in various colleges.

These talks are divided into two series, the first being those given at the Queen Elizabeth College for girls.

Attendance to these talks was voluntary and the audience rapidly increased in size with each succeeding week.

The collection would not be complete without including the talks given by Swamiji in the other colleges of the island. These are grouped together in the Second Series.

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Rivervale

Four things make others progress, like a catalyst, remaining themselves unchanged: a ladder, a boat, a teacher and - lemon pickle. Lemon pickle supposedly remains undigested while helping other food become absorbed.

The difference between a river and a shower is, one flows around you, the other over you. How long can you take a bath in the same river? Not even for one minute. The water flows on. There is continuous change. Even if you and I stay the same person as time goes on, we are not exactly as before. I have more white hairs, lost some eyesight; you are growing. Maybe you are not growing upwards but sideways. Still, there is some growth. What do we mean by 'growing'?

We have not thought about any of these basic factors - no one asks us questions about these. But consider: 15 years ago you were a baby. The essential difference between a baby, a small thing, and a young lady of fifteen is one of maturity. Growing older implies maturation - do we understand what this means? A young man studying civics by postal tuition found in his notes the word 'county'. Checking it in his dictionary he found county meant shire. He did not know what shire meant, and the dictionary said, shire meant county. So he was no wiser. When you say to grow older is to mature, what have you conveyed? More experience. What is experience? Experience is knowing something. To a baby, this ruler is a piece of wood which hurts. But by asking, finding out, going to school, being beaten, teased, tortured, I eventually discover: this is a footrule, a ruler.

Experience is knowledge. What difference does it make if I have this experience, this knowledge? What good is it? It helps me become wiser. But again, what is wisdom? When is someone wise? Learning through mistakes is experience. This growth, this maturity, must make us wise. I am wise when I do the right thing. You can add to this: do the right thing at the right time and place, to the right person. That is wisdom. What is the right thing to do then? You might say: all that is not wrong is right. But who decides 'right' action? Historians judge action by results. Hitler is 'wrong' because he did not win. Had he done so, England would be regarded as unrighteous in that struggle. When you marry, if the partner turns out to be a superman, as you thought, you did right to marry him. If years later you discover that he is a drunkard, you judge him as 'not right' for you and conclude that you made a mistake.

Maturity is the ability to decide what is right action, without being in a position to predict the result. This moment, and not only years later after the actual experience, you must be able to know if this man is right for you. How can you know now, today, that the choice you make is the correct one? To gamble, to act without knowing whether it is good, as a baby does, is not wise, not mature. The baby puts a wrist-watch in its mouth - not on its wrist, the right place - and may, as a result of this 'gamble', suffocate. An immature person is not able to discriminate, know which choice is safe, right. For this, one needs knowledge,

wisdom, maturity. People usually make the same mistakes again and again. Do they not divorce - and then remarry? But with growing older and learning, with experience, we are helped to do the right thing. This means making the right choice. For this I must not gamble - this is dangerous in life. We cannot afford to take a chance in our decisions. We must have the wisdom to make the right choice. When does one choose? When we want to select one of several alternatives. The difficulty that obliges me to choose arises, because I cannot do everything at the same time. One decision leads in one direction, the other decision leads another way. What we call wisdom is this ability to make the choice correctly, to do the right thing. This may become clear only when you get into trouble for having chosen wrongly. When the question arises: must I do this or that, when faced with any such situation, before knowing what the result of either move will be - because I cannot wait for this to show, if I know the right course to choose, I am wise, mature.

What is the most essential thing in me, what must I have, how must I be to make this right wise choice? There is need to concentrate. Learning to concentrate in school helps to concentrate later on, in outside life too. The mind must be absolutely quiet. Faith in God gives you this stillness. The mind becomes disturbed when you do not know what to do - when you have conflicting desires.

Look at all the facts, study the conflicting situation facing you and, with a tranquil concentrated mind, you will be able to come to the right decision - choice.

We saw that what makes for wisdom is right action, and what makes for right action is right choice. When the bell rang at the end of the last lecture, there were two alternatives: to go or to stay. You chose to go. What was the common motive in going away? That you wanted to go - which is a desire. It is true to say that the choice of my particular action depends always on my desire. Maybe you wanted to go, because you live far away and must catch a bus, or because there is a special ceremony or a friend awaiting you, or because you wanted to be at home soon. It is always a desire that determines your action, your choice.

Maturity consists in the ability to handle this desire. Must desires be bad? Some may in fact be good. The million-dollar question is: what do you consider a bad desire? I am not referring to specific wishes, such as the desire for chocolate or for getting married - but what would you consider to be an undesirable desire? You can simply classify desire into two groups: desirable, i.e. unselfish desires - such as wanting to come here to talk to you, hoping this might benefit you - and selfish desires, aimed at enjoying oneself - such as wanting to go to a cinema, a bar, a coffeehouse, not with the wish to benefit others, but with the idea of fulfilling one's own pleasure. This selfish desire is an undesirable desire.

Maturity is eventually the elimination, the eradication of selfish desire. Can you see that I have a lizard in my pocket? Someone said, 'Yes.' Why? Because Swami said so. And she thinks Swami tells no lies. Similarly, if someone tells you that this or that is a selfish desire, you believe it - because he says so. Will you be able to get rid of it? No. Because you have not seen it for yourself. The girl who accepts that I have a lizard in my pocket cannot take it out of my pocket. She cannot remove a lizard that may or may not be there. You can throw it out only when you are sure it is there. This is a very important point to remember. When will you be able to rid yourself of a selfish desire? Not when you have merely my word for it that it is selfish - you may politely agree with me, but you will be able to get rid of a selfish desire only when you see it for yourself. A 'holy' man may tell you not to be selfish - with the intention of getting some money from you for his own selfish purposes. But he cannot enlighten you. This you must do for yourself. That is the most difficult thing.

To do or not to do? This is the problem of life. Should you sit quiet when the bell rings after class, or get up and run? How does one make the choice? When I make a choice which is selfish, merely for my own benefit, is it a mature, right choice? Is this the type of behaviour one would strive for as desirable? It is not a question of 'natural'. If you throw some bread before dogs, they come running. If you throw a cocktail party, people come running. What is the difference then between dogs and human beings?

We have seen that to be a mature person, one must be able to do what is right. And in order to do right action, one must make the right choice. And this naturally depends upon right desire. Right desire is desire from which selfishness

is absent, which does not seek self-gratification. Unselfish motivation of an action is called love. Love and maturity are the same.

Have you seen such love in action? It is very rare. Once I saw such pure love. It is said to exist only between a mother and her child. All other love is inevitably selfish. In India, it is thought a bath in the river Ganges will wash away all sins. A mother and son, who both could not swim, were taking such a purifying bath, when the son's feet got caught in quicksand, so that he was being sucked down. The mother rushed to him, pushed him towards the bank, and was herself carried away - drowned.

Real love exists only when there is not the slightest trace of selfishness - when one is ready to sacrifice one's life. Parents may sacrifice everything for the sake of a child - but even in such cases, there is usually the idea that the child will look after them in old age. Here the mother knew she would die - there was no chance of any profit for her from her self-sacrificing action. That is real love.

Such totally unselfish behaviour is characteristic of maturity. It is extremely rare. We may grow up, but not really become mature. We will not be mature till we can do the right action, based on right motivation. And right motivation is based on true love, on unselfishness.

Suppose you go away now, and have to make a choice, say between going to a party or attending to a younger brother. Is it clear to you how to make the right choice? Not to me. How does one apply the principle pointed out in daily life? You may think that to be unselfish you must pass the answers of the examination - if you know them - to the stupid girl next to you. We have vague ideas about what is 'good' and what is 'bad'. Everyone knows what is right and what is not right. Yet the fun is we cannot help doing what we know not to be good.

The great question is: why were you not able to make the right choice - to get rid of the selfish desire and choose the unselfish action? Because you did not know the selfish wish was there.

Unless one sees the lizard in my pocket, one can neither leave it there - nor throw it out. If there is a disturbing thought or element, one must see it to be able to deal with it. To see this rosary with something written on it, you must come close and stabilise it. It must be straight in front of you, and steady, for you to see it. Your eyes must be open; you need light. To see a problem, to be mature, to be able to make a right choice, you must face the problem - have your eyes open, be steady, and have light. If the choice is wrong, the action is always wrong. I hope this is clear.

I asked a three year old today, whose mother is expecting a baby, 'Do you want a brother or a sister?' He said, 'A brother.' I asked, 'Why a brother?' He immediately changed his reply to - 'A sister.' He was choosing with closed eyes. N'importe quoi. Never mind which. This means you are not actively there - you are acting as if dead. You are not exercising your wisdom, your freedom of choice. There is no life in you. When I am actually dead, you can throw me to the dogs - or into the sea. I have no choice once I am dead. But now I choose - because I am alive. Wisdom consists, as we said, in right choice.

For right choice, we need to see clearly. And for this, one needs the mental eyes open, steadiness of fixation, and light. One may sit in class, hear the teacher drone on ... the body is here, but the mind is elsewhere. One sees no teacher, class, textbook, but something else which is in the mind. That the eyes must be open means the attention must be directed to the problem at hand.

The fundamental problem in life generally, and to students particularly, is to 'be'. If you 'are' here - attentive, aware - you are here. If you are not here, you are not here. If you read a textbook, you read a textbook. Your mind and soul must concentrate on the task in hand. That is Yoga.

In our case, where is the problem? Look at it. You must be able to keep that problem steadily in front of the mind's eye. Very often we do not want to look at it. On seeing a difficulty, we tend to look away, to turn to something else. If there is a difficulty, face it - look at it - and it will go.

The third essential element for seeing is light. The 24 hours of daytime are divided into day and night. 'Day' is called day, because there is daylight in the day. In Sanskrit 'Iswara' means the supreme Godhead, and 'Devata' any form of god. Day and Devata sound alike. You can take Devate to mean 'Light'. I may be blind - then I cannot see you even in the presence of light. Structurally, the eyeball may be all right, yet I cannot see, because of an affection of the optic nerve - or the eyeball and nerve may be normal, but still I may not see due to some damage of the optic centre in the brain. If the whole mechanism functions as it should, when light stimulates the eye. I see light.

To be heard, I must speak, I must make an audible sound - not just open and

close my mouth. Sound means waves - not like ocean-waves, but sound waves. Light also travels in waves. So what you see and hear are waves of light and sound. Because you cannot hear the sound waves with the eye - but only with the ear - the Hindu invented different deities as presiding over the different senses. The tongue is part of the body; it is made of flesh. The tip of the finger is also flesh, yet we are not able to taste with the finger. Again there are different Devatas, deities, held responsible. The Devata that enables your mind to function and to see that problem, must also be there for you to see and be able to deal with the problem. What is therefore required is, first that the mind's eye should be open, second that the problem should be held steadily before the mind, with the mind fixed on the problem, preventing it from running here and there, and third that there must be Light, the relevant Devata.

Concentration means focussing all your attention on the chosen object, on the problem - seeing it and seeing nothing else.

What is concentration? Through transparent glass light passes unchanged. If you hold up to the sun a lens of special glass, able to concentrate the light rays so that they are very bright in the centre, these concentrated rays then burn the paper they fall on. Around that is darkness. If you focus the mind's rays, you get a similar effect. How do you do it? The difficulty is in not knowing what or where the mind is.

When I have learned, through some special exercises, to focus the mind, I can apply this in daily life. To learn the art, the trick of concentration, I use the fact that when we look at some thing we love, the mind is totally absorbed. This is concentration. When the adolescent has the geography book before him, the mind wanders, but when he looks at a girl dancing, he is open-mouthed attention. Here the concentration is due to an external compulsion. The geography book may not be so attractive - so he gets distracted.

Which do you like best in books: philosophy, science or fiction? Because most people prefer fiction, I tell you stories to hold your attention. If I had stood here and merely talked about God, you would have become bored, the mind would have wandered. People criticise the Hindu for worshipping an elephant, a monkey, etc. Yet, if I talked about high-flown philosophy, you would fall asleep. If however, I mention a monkey, you want to know the story - you are interested.

Through stories one can more easily hold people's attention, keep them alert. So the Rishis, the wise men and women of old times, used to tell stories of demons without light, called Asuras, and angels of light, called Devas or Devatas.

The forces of darkness, the Asuras, were shown with many fingers, enormous eyes, and two teeth hanging out, to be frightening. The Devas were portrayed as ladies with two additional hands, etc. - very idealised. In these stories, the angels and devils were fighting each other. As it sometimes happens that even a football team may lose one or two matches, the angels, although more powerful, sometimes lost against the devils. So in the battle between devils - Asuras and angels, Devas, in whose hearts was light, wisdom, sometimes one side won, sometimes the other. But the Devas, as wisdom, make the right choice, whereas the Asuras, without light, cannot choose right.

When the Asuras win in this battle, God Himself takes human birth to redress the balance. Into this story the Rishis wove a beautiful lesson in maturity. God came first in the form of a fish, the first incarnation of Vishnu. If you follow the stories closely, you will see Darwin's theory of evolution illustrated. Also, there is a connection with physiology: a foetus swims in the mother's body before birth - so you can say that you and I were fish before we were born. God was never left in peace for long after having dealt with a troubled situation on earth. Soon after leaving the earth, He always had cause for tears again. In more recent times, there was Hitler to cry over, then Stalin and so forth. After some time, God had to

reincarnate again because of further disturbances on earth.

This time He came as a tortoise, an amphibian that can live in water and on land. It walks on its belly - like us after birth. Born on land, having come out of water, delivered into the world, we also move on our tummies. You can consider this the tortoise state. Then, again the whole story repeats itself. The Devas go to God and pray: 'Please come back to save us.'

So we get the third incarnation: that of a wild boar, like a pig or rhinoceros. This is like our four-legged state. How practical, factual, scientific these descriptions are. Even meat-eating Hindus do not take pork because the pig is supposed to live in dirty places. You are all nice, clean-looking girls, but at about six months or one year, you were in the third stage of evolution - dirty like a pig. Still, this is better than the first stage; at least you were beginning to walk - even if only on all fours.

Again a terrible demon troubled the earth after the boar-incarnation. So, this time Vishnu came to help as a man-lion: half animal, half man. He was on two legs now, with the body of a man and the head of a lion. Thinking was still purely animal. Although upright, with two legs, looking like a human being, in this stage, the inside is still purely animal. Most people in the world are at this level.

Next we pass on to a real human being, but in miniature: the dwarf stage. Fully developed, but only two feet tall. Slowly we are evolving, maturing from animal to human, although not fully grown. This dwarf incarnation went begging to a king - which reminds us that at this stage, man not yet fully mature - is a small beggar and still has to grow into complete manhood.

We left the story of the incarnation of God at the dwarf stage, representative of childhood. What happens after this? One grows up. One should become completely human, without a trace of the animal. This is the aim.

The simple definition of being human is: not being animal. How to achieve this? How many noses have I got now? One. If another nose grew from my face, to get rid of it, we would cut it out. We discard what is surplus, not right. If I find something not human, i e., animal in me, I have to discard it. Animal sacrifice really means sacrificing the animal in me. I want to be completely human, and cannot be, unless I cut out the animal in me. The difference between the 'animal' and 'not animal' stage is connected with what you may call instinct. Whatever we refer to as 'instinct' in us is our animal nature.

An archaeologist and anthropologist digs out skulls, skeletons, etc. and dates them. I do not know how, but lie knows. If you say something improbable yet unprovable, say it boldly: 'This chalk was used by King Akbar 2.000 years ago', or, 'Jesus Christ wrote His Sermon on the Mount with this', or, 'This girl has 17.233 hairs on her head.' When you declare anything vehemently and loudly, you will get away with it and people will believe you. The anthropologist announced that he had discovered how primitive man - like the early avatar - incarnation, who was half man, half animal - lived.

Apparently, a primitive man's first motivation was hunger - the greatest instinct in us being the instinct of self-preservation. The second is that of procreation: having preserved himself, man wants to get married. When these two instincts join, the third one of building and defending his property appears: 'This is my house - do not come near.' Birds live for eating, mating, and building and protecting their nests against intruders. Monkeys have clans; if one dares to venture into the preserve of another clan, there is a big fight - civil war.

As long as we are activated by these three instincts of self-preservation, procreation, and making and defending our home, we are not human beings yet. So long as this selfishness lasts, we cannot consider ourselves human. When we say that these tendencies are natural in us, let us at least admit that this is an inheritance from the animals. Most people, most human beings are animals. We may not like this thought, it may hurt our vanity, but it is true: we are animals to start with. Some of us have reached the dwarf stage. After childhood, man does grow up physically, if he is normal. But mere physical growth is not maturity. There has to be an elimination of the animal impulses.

A great saint had a son who was considered an incarnation of Vishnu. The saint was a Brahmin but, not being a swami or monk, was allowed to marry. His wife was very chaste, pure, noble. For her only one man existed: her husband. She had wonderful powers due to her purity. She used to walk to the river empty-handed, bathe, and then scooping up some mud from the riverbed, would mould it into a

pot by her touch. In this she took water home.

One day she was bathing when some kind of celestial body was flying in the air. As the lady bathed, she saw the reflection of the man in the water and maybe, or maybe not, her mind was disturbed. And when she tried after this to mould a pot from the mud, she could not do it. Her power had been lost, because she had thought of another man. She came home crying, and when the husband asked for water, she explained her failure to make a pot. He reproached her about having seen another man, and ordered their son to chop off her head.

Although the son was an incarnation of Vishnu, he was impulsive in his human form. He cut off the mother's head. The father, pleased with him, allowed him a boon. So he asked for his mother's head back. This was granted. Later, when a king insulted his father, he swore revenge. Although he was a Brahmin and an incarnation, he went round the world and killed many kings in his anger.

Beware of impulsive action. An impulsive person does not reflect, does not give himself time to think, does not stop to find out. When anyone calls him 'fool', he reacts, he gets cross - proving that he really is a fool. This reaction is immature. A man is not fully mature unless he can control his impulse - and anger.

An other incarnation was Rama. In Hindi he is given a title, which means one whose conduct is exemplary. He does not entertain impure thoughts, does not get angry, is humble, obedient, and he is good. Rama was a man totally human, but the best among men, perfect in every respect. We are not fully 'human', because there is still the animal in us. To be mature, these animal impulses must go. Rama came to the world as a mature being.

I would say Rama was not only human, but also divine, perfect. If I want to go on in my animal way, I can erect a big statue of Rama, repeat 'Rama Rama', put flowers at His feet - while I continue leading my animal life. We worship these incarnations as 'God', when we are determined never to follow their the example. Yet I am supposed to do what exemplary person did. It was the same with Jesus Christ, Who asked men to follow Him. What does one do if one decides not to follow Him? One puts Him in a temple. But the purpose for which the Avatar Rama came was to show us how to be a perfect human being.

That He was truly human was indicated when His wife Sita was taken away by the demon Ravana. Rama started crying, raving like a madman, asking everyone, 'Oh, where is my Sita?', behaving as an ordinary human lover would. Sita similarly, while separated from Him in Lanka, would not eat, would not do her hair, nor dress. Rama came to show us how a fully mature human being behaves.

There is a story of a holy man who would not tell a lie. To be able always to stay honest, he went deep into a forest away from people. But one day a Brahmin, with a golden neck lace, running away from a robber with a dagger, passed the sage sitting at the cross roads, saying his prayers. The holy man was asked by the

thief pursuing the Brahmin if he had seen anyone, and which way he had gone. In his insistence on veracity he told him. So the Brahmin was caught and had his head cut off. Next day the hermit died and was taken straight to hell. He protested about what he was sure must be a mistake. He asked to know the charge and was told that a truth leading to murder was equivalent to a big lie - and was counted as falsehood. The mature man acts wisely, not blindly, mechanically, or impulsively.

There are many stories about the Incarnation of Rama, full of examples to show how a truly good man should behave. When Rama was about to be crowned, He gave up the kingdom which was to have been his, to enable his father to fulfill the promise made to his wife, the queen, that his stepbrother should be king. His Brother Lakshman protested first against the impossibility of anyone making a promise on someone else's behalf - what right had father to promise that his son would do something, thus committing him? - second, that the whole procedure was illegal, because a promise a henpecked man makes to please his wife is automatically invalid. But Rama insisted on obeying His father.

These stories are given you to inspire you by the example or good conduct, to help you to good behaviour. But if your mother says, 'Marry this man I have chosen for you', will you, like Rama, obey? One of you said, 'No.' This refusal is due to something in us that makes us feel that one should not be merely because someone tells us so, but that goodness must be based upon free choice. If I want to do something good, I must do it, because I want it. If I do it merely because a teacher or swami said so, I am a slave. If my conduct is determined by xyz - be it friend, parent, master, or husband - I am not in control of my own life. I do not tell you to be wicked, but point out that one must know what it is to be good or not to be good. One must deliberately, personally choose to do what one knows for oneself to be good. Otherwise I am a cabbage.

Although the pundits do not agree, it has been argued that the motivation for Rama's decision was defective. In those days, to be righteous in the eyes of the world was a terrible passion. And Rama conformed to that pattern. Later on in the story, to avoid public criticism, He turned away from Sita, refused to look at her and to receive her back as His wife after having liberated her, and destroyed her captor Ravana. She had suffered very much in her captivity and had yet remained loyal to her husband, she was grateful about her release and expected a joyous welcome from Rama. However, He told her He would not accept her as His wife now, because she had been in the house of another man for so many months. He pointed out that He could not be sure that she was pure and that in the eyes of the people who regarded Him as their King, He must be extremely righteous. There must not be the smallest trace of any doubt. Justice must be done, and be seen to be done. Kings, judges, ministers must visually demonstrate that they are really acting with justice.

The story is wonderful. You can interpret the facts given in any way you like - but beware of judging. Goodness must liberate you. When you do what others expect of you, you are bound to 'goodness'. Really you must be free to do good - i.e. do good because you want to. Then you are happy. If you say, 'I must do this,' if you reluctantly do the good someone else asks you to do, then someone else is good, not you - and you are miserable. Man in the perfect state - God-like - is free, totally free.

The next incarnation was Krishna. He had a happy life - He did entirely what He liked. He knew He was God and said so repeatedly. He took a vow that He would not fight in the war between the good and the bad cousins, limiting His services to the driving of the chariot, when chosen by Arjuna. Bhisma, a great warrior and saint on the enemy side, knew on the last day that he would be defeated and decided to make Krishna break His vow. A master at fighting, he went all out to harass the opposite camp, sending them bullet after bullet. It was literally hell. Arjuna's horse and the men all around him were killed. Finally Krishna became angry and said, 'Give your opponent time to breathe.' He jumped from the chariot, took hold of the nearest object - a wheel of another chariot - and hit Bhisma with this. Bhisma smiled: 'What a wonderful God you are - is it all right for you to break a promise you made?'

Krishna retorted: 'Who are you to tell Me what right and wrong action is? I am God. I know all about 'right' and 'wrong' - and am not bound by any human definitions of right and wrong.' Bhisma later fell on his knees and started praising Krishna.

When one is truly good, one is not tied to any rules. If, in the story we told about the Brahmin seeing the pursuit in the forest, the murderer had come to me and enquired, 'Did you see a man with a golden necklace running away - which way did he go?', I would have said, 'What man?' I have given no agreement to answer all your questions. Why must I answer at all?

A new story is similar to the other one: a Buddhist monk sitting in meditation at the crossroads was asked by a husband searching for his lovely young wife who had run away after a quarrel, 'Did you see a beautiful girl passing by?' The monk denied having seen her. Asked later by someone why he had not admitted that she had in fact come that way, he said, 'Oh, I was aware merely of a skeleton passing by, clothed in flesh. Was it a lovely girl? It could as well have been a dog.'

Why must I be bound by your definition of anything? I must see for myself what is right, must keep my eyes and ears open, and do what I hold to be right. Then I am free. Perfect. Externally the action may be the same - yet there is a great difference between someone not drinking, because he does not want to drink, as he regards it as bad, and someone who has lost his mother a few days ago and is obliged by custom to abstain from the drink he likes for a certain period. If we pass a bar, I will not even notice it, but he will hanker after the alcohol available there. Your goodness must be yours - not someone else's imposed upon you. You must be alert, looking out and looking in, and not bound by 'goodness', by what others tell you is goodness.

Krishna is regarded as a perfect, full incarnation of God. All other incarnations, including Buddha, etc., are held to be only partial manifestations of God in bodily form. Krishna is God Himself. Someone may object that Krishna is supposed to have had many wives. According to the Bhagavatam Scripture, He had in fact 16.108 consorts. These were 16.108 women who had been kept in a kind of

concentration camp by a demon, whom Krishna destroyed. Regarding Him as their saviour because He had opened their prison, the ladies all wanted to marry Him.

When anything told about the life of God or saints seems to tally unnatural, as does this story, look for another meaning. He did indeed promise to marry them all - but to do this, He multiplied Himself, being Omnipotent and omnipresent 16.108 times - and thus had 16.108 marriages.

In the Bhagavatam, this story indicates something beautiful that must be very delicately grasped. The story of the 16.108 girls who, liberated by Krishna after repeated prayers for release, long for and obtain permanent union with their Redeemer, illustrates that in each one of us - in each heart, never mind male or female - is a Krishna, a Divinity.

The girlfriends of Krishna were called Gopis, meaning 'something which is hidden.' In everyone's heart is hidden, real but invisible, a 'Gopi'. It does not refer to a female form. My life is not 'male' life, just as yours is not 'female' life. In Life, Soul, Atma, there is no sex distinction: - 'male' or 'female' is merely a physiological differentiation. We can regard this hidden invisible Reality in everyone as 'Gopi'.

A suggestion is made at times that the difference between the Christian and Hindu viewpoint is that, for the Christian, God comes down to man, whereas for the Hindu, man has to go to God. Whether God comes to me or I go to Him is a silly question. Where is God? In me. Therefore, it is totally absurd to talk of my going to Him or of His coming to me. It suggests that you can sit there, with your cigarette and alcohol, and wait for Him to come.

Both ideas are wrong - neither does God come to you, nor do you go to Him. He is within us already. He is all the time in us. When that God is in this body, it stands on two legs. When He is absent, it stands on at least eight, i.e. four people will have to carry it away in a coffin. It is only a question of whether you want a conscious Realisation of this Divinity in you. Someone asked: is it necessary to know all the Scriptures to obtain God-realisation. Why does one need scriptures? What do they ultimately tell you? What you already know. What do these stories of Avatars, all the Vedas, the Upanishads, etc., convey? That you must become wise, mature. To read all so called scriptures is not only unnecessary, but impossible - you must live 3.000 years - and by then some more may have been added. Just the one scripture of the Mahabharata alone has 1.000 verses. The Bhagavatam, which is Krishna's story, is impossible to read aloud. I am trying to go through it now, a chapter a day, and my hair is turning grey. Unless you want to give yourself a headache, what is the necessity for learning all this? Better become wise.

Last week you had a lovely 'lecture' here instead of mine. I heard the shouting at the Ashram. Why? Because there was a laureate in your school. What is a laureate? Glory. What is glory? Success. Lovely. But what is success? The noun form is 'success', the verb is 'to succeed'. It has two meanings. It can stand for 'following someone', perhaps into a seat that has been vacated because it was collapsing - so you get caught in it. Or it can be used along with failure: success and failure. What do you mean by it?

When a man divorces his wife and someone else marries her, is it success or failure? If one leaves a highly unsatisfactory partner, who later finds someone else to marry, you can call it success-in-failure - i.e. in the first partner's failure.

That brings us to the more interesting part of Krishna's life. What do you know about Him? That He was born in a prison cell, was a naughty boy, stole some girls' clothes? We believe Krishna was God. Do you believe that God can become a man, that He can suddenly appear on earth in human form? Where is God? Everywhere. Can the omnipresent God Who is ever everywhere, manifest Himself somewhere, as someone, at some time?

Look at this pillar and tell me what it is made of - sand, silica. What is a particle of sand made of? When you go on breaking down all substances in it, the ultimate particles are atoms. Keep on breaking even these - you get electrons. When you break this duster - or anything else - into its basic components, you also arrive at electrons. You may not be able to see them - but if am blind and do not see you, it does not mean you do not exist.

If this duster, this piece of material substance can be converted into electrons, why should not God, Who is everywhere - just as electrons can be found everywhere in the universe - manifest Himself from that pillar? Omnipresent electrons manifest themselves in bombs, atom bombs, etc. We are told that all of us are manifestations of God. This girl may say: 'I know what I am - and this fool tells me I am God.' Appearances are different, yet fundamentally all are electrons, everywhere. Everyone is similarly a manifestation of the same Force, Power - God.

A number of girls took the Higher School Certificate examinations, but only one has become the laureate. Have you seen her face? - all smiles, all happiness. Every one says she is brilliant, and she too must think so - when she walks into a dark room, one expects light to radiate from her.

As with every test, one or two did very well, some passed, a few wanted very much and expected to get through, but failed - succeeded in failure. The last are terribly disappointed and may have a nervous breakdown. We talk of 1970 succeeding 1969, but those who took the test and did not get through stand where they were.

All these are girls. What is the difference then? One is the laureate girl - swelling every minute with success and happiness. The second type of girl is carrying on as before, but the third lot, who failed, are in tears and are tearing out their hair. What is the difference among these groups of girls? They are all 'one', but there is an inner and very vital distinction. The last group you do not even want to call 'girls' - they are more like mad persons.

Similarly, among God, human being and rascal, or thief, there is this difference: the avatar - such as Krishna, Christ, Buddha - is brilliant, actually illuminated, so that He can walk into a dark room and give out light. Externally, all three look the same as us, appear to be human beings, but inside there is a big difference.

What is an avatar, an incarnation of God? Incarnation means the assumption of a form, the taking of material substances and putting them together and entering into that form. From this point of view, you too are a manifestation, an incarnation of God. In the case of Krishna, it was different, because He knew that He was an incarnation. He was all the time aware that He was God. You do not know you are God.

But imagine you go to Einstein, the mathematical genius, and while he is deeply asleep, snoring, you ask him, 'What is two and two?' The answer is a snore. It does this mean that he does not know? Nonsense. It just means that he was asleep.

That is precisely what one can say to you. You are God asleep. If you are awake in a spiritual sense - you know you are God. It looks blasphemous to say 'she is God,' or, 'the dog is God' - although the latter is easier to understand because through inversion 'dog' becomes 'God'. If you say God is only in some holy places, in churches and temples, that again sounds blasphemous. God is everywhere. Can there be anything other than God? It is a dangerous question. Even in the smallest pin-point there is God, because He is omnipresent, and becomes manifest as someone, somewhere, sometime.

When the devil asked, in the story of Prahlada, 'Is God even in this pillar?', the answer was, 'Of course.' - and He manifested as Vishnu, half-man, half-lion.

If a small piece of glass or a thorn pricks you and enters your finger or foot, there is immediate swelling or inflammation because it is regarded as a foreign object, an enemy against which the body defends its mechanism, springing into activity at once. A big war is soon going on - in your fingertip. Thousands of cells fighting one another. As soon as you die, the swelling subsides and the battle is finished. While you are alive, anything from outside entering the finger causes a reaction. When you are dead, there is no reaction. The difference is life.

Similarly, when there is a disturbance, a danger to society, the Life-force, God, comes into activity and manifests into human form to overcome the evil in society.

Dieticians say you must leave an interval between meals for digestion. So I am leaving such an interval for you: this is the last time I will see you for now, as I am leaving Mauritius this week. I am at least sixty times as sorry as you, because I have been learning from all of you, while you listened to only one person. While I am away you can digest what we have so far studied.

What is extremely important is that you are not conditioned, that you do not do or say something, just because the Swami told you so. If you see some sandwiches on the table, they are useless if they remain there. If you leave them alone, they will eventually be fit only for throwing out and sweeping away - you will not even be able to touch them. When, however, you have eaten them, they give you rosy cheeks. You must digest the food. This means not merely to change the form of nourishment, but the food must be assimilated - the sandwich must become 'rosy cheeks'. Whatever you hear and learn, must also become a part of you. When I come back in a year's time, this girl may very well be standing up lecturing on what is wisdom. Lovely. I can then learn from her. I do not suggest that you go about denegrating and discarding your teachers. A wise teacher is pleased when the pupil says: 'I can now handle my job better than you can handle me.' We have been as it were part-sharers of knowledge, co-contributors of sandwiches. Now it is up to you to assimilate.

Let us continue with the story of Krishna. He was supposed to have been a naughty boy. A film about deities results from someone having an idea, wanting to present some truth or philosophy, and creating a framework for it - then filling in with padding. What you hear, spoken by the actress playing Parvati, are certainly not the words of 20,000 years ago. When you read any legend, you must realise that what you are told is often merely the invention of a fertile human mind. You can take it as you like. But as you study the story, wherever it sounds absurd, illogical, etc., suspect that it must have a hidden meaning.

According to this part of the story of Krishna, the Gopis wanted to marry Him. They were bathing in the river, nude, when Krishna saw them and thought, 'This is not right.' So he took the clothes they had left by the river edge, and climbed a tree where he tied them to the branches. He was not a monkey - take everything with a pinch of salt. The girls asked for their clothes. Krishna told them to come out of the water first. When they had complied, he asked them to lift up both arms and beg for them.

Everyone tells the story as though it were an actual fact. If Krishna actually had wanted to tease them, to see them naked, there was no problem - they were after all going to marry Him. The whole story seems absurd from start to finish. In such a case, try to get a little deeper, see what is the hidden meaning. Slowly you will see an ethical rule contained. The pure and simple ethical teaching here is a warning against bathing nude in public. Today Krishna takes away your clothes - tomorrow it may be a strong wind.

Deep philosophical teaching is also to be found in it: if you want to approach God, shed all your prejudices. Remember they were the Gopis. Gopi is the soul hidden in me. I too, although a man, have a Gopi hidden in me. Gopi is the soul, sexless, in love with God. What must the soul, the jiva, do in order to be One with God? Discard all assumptions, all conditioning: 'I am a learned girl, a laureate. I am great. With some coins in my pocket, I am the daughter of a millionaire. I am beautiful. I am stupid.' All these qualifications must be dropped. The mind then becomes clear. Only in such a mind will God shine.

Let us consider the aim of life. In French, 'aim' suggests 'love' - 'aimer'. We may consider that the aim of life is to love. It is useful to look at words and their meanings. We do not look at the road, at the scenery as we ride along - people driving do not even look at what is ahead of them. Look at the world around you - and admire. Learn to look and question. Do not take things for granted as we tend to do. We think we know - but do not really know. It is good to look with a fresh mind, like that of a child.

Watch a baby of less than six weeks fixing you with wide open unwinking eyes. As you move a paper in front of it, its eyes move. What does the baby see? We cannot know. To see everything as a baby sees is difficult for us, because we do what the baby cannot do: we remember - what we have been taught, what we have registered before, what we are interested in. We have picked up bits and pieces of what you call knowledge. We recognise the difference between a 'girl' and a 'dog'. A dog bites? I see a girl, and I qualify a 'young beautiful' girl. I do not see as a baby sees, because I remember. My brain is stuffed with all sorts of things and I see that which my brain brings up.

Analyse the word 'remember' - member is part of the organisation - temporarily severed. In remembering that which has been put away from the mind is put back - i.e., one picks the object from the rubbish-bin - the brain, and 'sticks' it together with the other parts; e.g., when you look at my orange robe, you remember what has been previously cut and stored in your brain. Someone says the word 'Swami' - it could equally be 'salami', and the remembering process is set to work.

The baby is the only one who actually 'sees' - because he has no preconceived notions, prejudice, colour consciousness, etc. The Brahmin baby knows no distinctions before being taught them, so it mixes freely with any child till then. Therefore, the baby is the only human being that is fresh, really holy.

On Witchcraft and Superstition

The word 'imagine' equals 'image in'. The 'in' is in the image - introduced in the middle of the word 'imagine'. It refers to the creation of an image within yourself. Can you see me? Can the eyeball see me? You say 'yes'. You say 'no' - like true girls you change your mind. Perception, sight, is in the brain. Therefore, I am an image in your brain. Everything you see is 'image-in'.

Again going back to the baby, the difference between it and others is that the baby has no 'image-in'. It is merely looking, forming the image. If there were a real ghost before the baby, it would get hold of it without fear and ask, 'Who are you?' If you see a ghost, it is 'image-in'. The only way to deal with superstition is to observe and look, instead of imagining.

Quite a big percentage of superstition is mere nonsense. Some arise

coincidentally. For instance, in Bombay about 60 years ago, a boy noticed the night before a wedding that the pumpkin to be used for a sacrificial ritual, after being 'dressed up', was covered with a basket - to protect it against a rat. Not knowing the practical reason for the placing of the basket, he thought it was part of the ritual that had to be observed. So when as an adult he insisted on the basket - covering, those who came after him also included that as a necessary part of the ceremony.

Other superstitions have some value: the fear of a cat crossing the path may be connected with necessary caution to avoid falling over one that is rubbing against your legs. Maybe it is forbidden to comb hair at night to prevent some from falling into the food unnoticed, due to the absence of electricity in those days. Some superstitions have hygienic and/or psychological value. Widows were regarded as inauspicious, because they reminded people of death and could thus put the mind into a negative state.

When you are repeatedly taught - conditioned - that something is inauspicious, it arouses anxiety in you. Since this may make the head feel warm, you are told to drink a glass of buttermilk - which may be helpful. In India, if a guest is outside, you wash his feet before he enters the house - a polite way of saying 'Do not dirty my floor.' He is brought a bucket of water and must remove his socks. Cold water is poured on to the feet, when the head is hot, to cool the brain and calm down the guest - another good precaution.

Learn neither to accept nor to reject - what you do not understand may have some useful meaning. In India, the dot on a woman's forehead is a guide: black is for the unmarried, nothing for a widow, red for the married - this means, look away. This custom helps you discover the civil status of a woman.

There is a beautiful superstition that an Indian woman has to sweep the front of her house before sunrise. She is told that otherwise something negative will happen, i e., adversity. Powdered rice is thrown there to feed ants and insects - which will prevent them from entering the house for food. When this practical injunction became a superstition, it was made an art, and the rice powder was woven into lovely patterns.

On 'Ghosts'

After hunting ghosts from the early age of six or seven, wanted to know what ghosts looked like, investigating God-forsaken places and following up strange noises, I merely concluded: ghosts seemed afraid of me. Late one night near the Ashram in Rishikesh, my head was hit by something which I thought must be a ghost at last located, for in that wilderness nothing was visible and the tree branches were too high above to brush against me. Closer investigation revealed a wire left by a pilgrim who had dried clothes on it.

My point is that most ghost stories have some physical, natural explanation. I do not say that I disbelieve in ghosts. One cannot be sure - but this is certain: I am not this body, which is only curry, rice, etc. When it drops, whatever has been inside disappears. If you do not fear me, why should you fear my ghost? I do not deny that ghosts may be wandering about - even here. But they can do absolutely no harm to me, unless I am afraid. Fear by itself can kill you.

Just as I cannot enter your house unless the doors or windows are open, or weak and easily forced open, ghosts can do nothing to you - nobody can do anything to you - unless you are weak and allow them to. People can exploit you only if you are terrified. In fear you will pay money to someone to say an exorcising mantra. Anyone who is weak can be harmed - but ghosts can do nothing that the living person could not have done. The danger is the weakness, not the 'ghost'. So make yourself strong.

As we saw, some superstitions are based on hygienic principles, some may apply even now, some no longer. Some are aesthetic, some common sense. Long hair was not to be left loose, because it looks untidy and may get into the eyes. Some are old woman's tales - perhaps to teach a child. To encourage me to eat more, my grandmother would warn me that otherwise a terrible demon would come. Because children do not accept adult notions, they sometimes have to be told such stories.

But you are now mature persons. Look at these superstitions, become aware of them, see if there is any sense in them before you accept or reject them. When people criticise any of these ideas, see whether there is any harm in them. For example, if someone recommends praying to God in a temple before working, you may consider that your mind is always calm and that you need not pray or go to a temple. But if the mind is really tranquil, what harm if you do pray? None - so why not do it? On the other hand, if someone recommends cutting a chicken's throat for some supposed benefit, I will not do it - because it is harmful.

On Karma

Student: Is it true that our deeds - good or bad - in this life decide whether we will

be happy in our after-life?

Swami: What do we mean by fortune, happiness, good luck? I nearly married a beautiful girl some thirty years ago, but it did not work out. I was sorry. Is this bad luck? After some time she got smallpox and died. Had she been my wife, I would have lost the one I loved most, and perhaps have been left with a child. One cannot know.

When I look back upon those fifty years of my life, I see it is completely confusing. The whole pattern of life looks like this girl sitting here: something brown, something black, a part is ruddy, here and there is a little white - all these colours make up this lovely face. If I want to be lucky the whole time, it is like saying, 'If only this girl's face were one colour - all brown, or all white.' Looking back at one's life, one is aware of all sorts of events, some 'bad', others good', some 'bad luck', others 'fortunate'. But all these made me what I am now. Both the so-called 'good' and 'bad' luck add up to this beautiful pattern of life. Not wanting ups and downs is like preferring a flat, unicoloured girl.

We invented the Law of Karma, saying that if you do good now, you will have something good later on. If I eat healthy food, my body is healthy. If I get drunk on alcohol, my health suffers later. That is true. The Law of Karma deals with the body, with health and ill-health. But happiness or unhappiness does not come into this. Does the body make you happy or unhappy? What you have heard about the theory of Karma, or the law of cause and effect, does not apply to anything more than the physical being. If you have poked someone's eye out, then in the next birth you will be born blind.

What does it matter. Happiness or unhappiness does not depend upon physical or material conditions - upon the house one lives in, the husband one has or loses. If the present one dies, you may get a better one. Happiness is completely independent of the conditions around you. Very rich people are usually unhappy. Some one may die from losing some money - or from shock on winning a fortune. A poor man may also be unhappy.

But happiness in itself is not determined by the amount of money you own, nor by your physical size, nor by your marital status, nor by the number of children you have. Reflect upon what happiness really is. A man who has a couple of glasses of champagne seems very happy - but in a few minutes he may be in a different state.

I am not concerned whether or not my present actions bring me happiness later, but that a good action makes me happy 'here and now'. We are advised to do charity, to accumulate good Karma, so that we are rich in the next birth. Therefore I give a poor girl twenty cents - in order to receive 20,000 rupees in my next life. I do not really want to part with my money. But giving without one's heart is hypocrisy. Being miserable now, I will be more miserable next time. In India, bad coins which can be recognised by their lead sound are refused in

restaurants - so they are put into charity boxes or offered to the holy Ganges.

We must gradually try to abandon all hypocrisy, all false ideas. When I was a baby, my grandmother frightened me into doing what she felt right. Now I am grown and need not be bribed or put oil by threats. But I realise that in giving, in doing good, there is immediate joy. Only if a 'good' action produces immediate joy is that goodness real. If you force yourself, it is artificial.

A healthy outlook is that any good action is its own reward. I am not afraid of hell - nor tempted by heaven. When I was told that if I do not get baptised or do not change my religion I would end up in hell, I said that it did not frighten me - I would soon grow used to it. After a few weeks it would seem fine - and heaven might soon become boring. One comes to take it all for granted, as the husbands of great stage artists lose interest in their wives' performances, through familiarity. There are nurses, supposedly keen on serving others, who have pained faces when washing dirty children. But whatever I do with my whole heart and being, brings joy there and then. There is no need for any reward later on.

Student: Is suicide sin?

Swami: I do not know if it is sin, but it is considered as such. It is certainly weakness. I must face life, become strong. It is foolish to think I can kill myself - I can kill only the body - made of bananas, etc. The soul is not destroyed.

On Identification & Identity

There is a lovely verse in the Gita which says, 'One who is born must die. One who dies must be born.' A tree is born and so must die. But since the seed is there, it does not die completely, but must come up again. I went away, so you were rid of me for two months - but now I am back again with you.

My Master, Swami Sivananda, once said that I was a good student, but not a good teacher. Today, three of your teachers came to the Ashram and taught me a lesson. We go on thinking and worrying over problems. What is the result? Headaches. And when these have become chronic, we get white hair. As I do not want to see them, I shave them off. There comes a time when problems become as complicated as a tangled mass of thread that has slipped off a reel of cotton. It gets worse and worse until you throw it away, and then you are free. Your teachers who came to the Ashram could be my daughters - being young and patient they tried to help me work out a difficult problem.

Do you know what 'habit' is? To the Christian priest it is a dress. But I refer to another kind of habit - such as smoking, thumb-sucking, nail-biting, etc. It is easier to cultivate the habit than to give it up. It is more difficult to give up cigarettes than to continue smoking. Why do we form the habit at all?

A habit is formed because of a taste - your taste. That is right. If you have no taste for cigarettes, you do not cultivate the habit. But if you try a cigarette and enjoy it, you will continue smoking. Why is the taste different - i.e., she likes it and I do not? A lump of sugar tastes sweet to both of us - to all. Sugar is not found sour by anyone. Yet, when it comes to cigarettes, whisky, rum, even hairstyles - plaiting, bobbing, etc. - one talks of differing tastes.

I am brought up in a certain community and unconsciously absorb the habits of the other members of my society. I see others and blindly imitate them. Even if I do not like the taste of something the others seem to like, I try to do as they do, for I feel abnormal if I do not. The psychologists call me a fool if I do not behave like the other fools. As it is said in a Tamil proverb, 'Among nudists the man who goes about in a G-string is abnormal. I see others around me smoke and drink, and if I do not like to follow suit, I fear there is something wrong with me. Actually it may be the others who are abnormal.

Our whole life is one of imitation. I do not know why I wear boots, but because I see someone else wearing them, I also feel I must. We imitate especially those we admire, whom we consider to be above us. My intention is to be like the one I consider superior and to identify with him. But can I, by merely putting on a teacher's gown, be like her? Or, seeing that he is a big man, I try to do as he does, so that I too shall be a big man. Many young men grew their hair like the Beatles, to appear like them, but still could not sing like them. A poor beggar will tell you

he comes from a rich family; a fool claims to be of the stock of Vasistha, a genius who lived long ago. All right, but what about him?

We are always anxious to identify, to be like someone else. But is this possible? It is this that creates anxiety. We can cultivate a few bad habits: we see the Governor-General smoke - so we do too. But that does not lead to our appointment as Governor-General. We both smoke now - but here the similarity ends. Can I be like Swami Sivananda? No. Therefore, what is one to do in order to abandon this whole process of identification - trying to imitate, wishing to be like someone else and developing habits accordingly?

Can I, instead, find my own identity - my self - i.e., what I am? 'What am I?' I am Swami Venkatesananda. Can I find my true identity? To get rid of anxiety, I try to discover this identity. When I go round the garden, I notice that each flower is beautiful - none wanting to be like another. The rose seems quite content to be a rose and does not desire to be like a frangipani. Contentment means happiness. The French word for 'happy' is 'content'.

'Freedom' is freedom from unreality. But then we have to find out what 'unreality' is. One talks of liberation, freedom from karma, as release from birth and death, but it is only the realisation that 'I' is doing nothing, but that everything just happens.

Zen teaches that the moon in the sky shines without intending to shine, that the water reflects it without any desire to do so. The body is nothing but the food I ate. If I have nothing for a few weeks, nothing will be there. So, keep on enquiring, 'What is this 'I'?

If I want to change a money order or a cheque where I am not known, I will be asked for identification papers. It is when you doubt, when you do not know for certain, that you want proof. When you do not know a person, you require identification. It is only because I do not know who I am that I want to identify myself with somebody. It is really quite simple: a person seeks identification when he is not sure what he 'is'. The famous 'I do not know ' is called avidya in Sanskrit - i.e., ignorance.

One might ask: what does it matter if one does not know what one is? If you observe a mental case, you will know the importance of this. A mad person has lost all sense of identity and does not know at all who he or she is, does not know the difference between head and foot, filth and food, may go about completely naked or with just a dhoti tied around the head. The whole life becomes disturbed. If you do not know whose sister, daughter, wife, pupil you are, there will be complete chaos.

The first principle is: you and I do not know what we are. We are seeking identification. The second proposition is: without finding one's identification, it is virtually impossible to live. Therefore, what do we do?

You may be Miss X now, but should you marry and become Mrs. X, you would feel insulted if I still called you 'Miss X'. Nothing is changed, you are still you - with the same nose, hands and feet, etc., but you have changed only your name, your identification. But you were not really Miss X before - you do not know who you are. Yet one cannot live in this vacuum, so one immediately projects some identification.

All philosophies, laws, rules and regulations, are born of this fear of losing identity. When for a few minutes I realise that I do not know who I am, I start trembling. So I say: 'I am God's child. ' I know nothing. I do not know 'God '. It would be more sensible to say: 'I am my mother's child', as she is the only person we really know. But this is not the answer we are after.

Right from childhood this struggle for identification goes on. You were all babies once - you may not remember, but all small children cling instinctively to the mother, afraid of losing her. We are all in the same boat - do not think I am cleverer than you - we are all struggling after this identification. Is it possible then to find out what we are?

When asked, this girl immediately answered: 'Child of God.' How can she prove to me that she is in fact 'God's child'? - maybe she is trying to bluff me. I myself am not certain that I am God's child. I have lost my identification. That is the trouble. We are anxious, restless, worrying, mad. We say we are children of God, but when challenged for proof, we are bothered, we are not quite sure. If I do not find my real, true identity, I repeat a formula that someone else told me, such as:

'All are children of God.'

If I am His child, I am like Him. When the ice-cream man tempts me, is God tempted too? Does He like ice-cream too? When someone calls me a fool and I get angry, does God also fight? Who knows? If God is All-Wise, why am I a silly fool? I am not negating that we are His children. We may come to the same conclusion - but I start somewhere else. I begin to wonder: I am silly, I failed my examination several times, I am not like my omnipotent, omniscient Father - I cannot even lift this heavy stone. The likeness represented on the papers does not match me in the mirror. So I ask, 'Where is my passport?' Again the same question arises : What is my Identity? How do I discover that?

You are schoolgirls now and your uniform identifies you as belonging to Queen Elizabeth College. In a few years, you may be teachers at Royal College. Your role has changed - you are no longer a student, but a teacher. The old identification is no longer valid. I may say I am Swami Venkatesananda, but a former classmate identifies me not as Swami but as the boy he went to school with. Both identifications are 'right'. Names change tomorrow. I may become a Catholic and be called 'Father'. Names do not represent real identification. What is my identity? How do I find out?

In a sense, one's body is constantly changing every day. Seeing my physical body, one can say that it is ever altering. What is not changing? The soul? How do I know it exists? You cannot give me anyone's soul as you can hand me a tangible object. I cannot see or touch it. If you say: 'This stone is God', you assume that you know what this stone is - and what 'God' is - instead of admitting that you do not know.

What can we be sure of?

We are not arriving at any conclusion - we are merely proceeding.

What is the difference between identity and identification? Identity is what I am. Identification is what I think I am. If I do not know what I am, then I identify myself with something else. I look for an identification card, for a passport.

When I ask what this is - pointing to the arm, one girl says, 'flesh', and the girl next to her says, 'bone'. One says 'arm', another one 'forearm'. In fact I have two arms, but she refers to 'forearm'. One even sees 'ulna and radius' - she has X-ray eyes. What is this? 'Sleeve'? All answers are right. What is this then? You call it a handkerchief - a name you give it it is cloth, material. What material? 'Cotton' You go on like I this - this is how you find the identity. Why must I stop at calling it 'arm', 'forearm'? There is the skin. What is skin? Someone calls this skin, someone identifies 'cells'. It seems simple to ask: 'What is this?' When you boldly identify, when you say 'I know what I am' - you do not know what you say.

Really I do not know what I am. I constantly think I am this or that a boy, a man, with long hair, short hair or no hair. For fifty years I have I thought I am a man, but I may be a dog. What are you thinking now? Nothing. When one realises how thinking can ruin one's life, one is afraid to think. Right from childhood, we have lost the ability to know ourselves - to find our identity - so we are always trying to find our identification.

You can see how confused we can become in the case of the different pigmentations of the skin. I am supposed to be an Asian, she is called an American. From early childhood on, I am being made to identify myself. When asked who are you, I reply, 'A Brahmin'. This means a pandit, priest - but in South Africa there is a special breed of cows called brahmin.

My mother wanted to bring me up in a certain way. She called me a Brahmin. Had you been there, you would have identified me as 'arm', 'skin', 'a collection of cells'. Why label it 'Brahmin'? Why 'Indian'? I was born in India - a dog too was born about the same time in India. Why do you not call him an Indian? Where do Indians live? In America - red Indians. So you see, all the time we heap adjective upon adjective - one identification upon the other.

There is a need, a craving in our minds, for identification, because I do not know what I am. If one does not know, one immediately jumps to identification. The big mischief here is that the moment I identify myself with somebody, the incentive to know myself is lost. Since there is a fixed thought in your mind - as soon as I point to a part of my body, you say 'arm', 'forearm' - you do not want to think further.

It is only a baby that looks at an object without thinking, wanting to know what it is, without projecting any preformed knowledge. When you thought of ulna and radius, you were projecting what you had learned. But I may not have any bones - this may be a wooden arm. It is only for a few months that the baby sees with

such unprejudiced eyes. Soon, the baby too begins to recognise: 'this is my sister, my brother, my neighbour, a stranger,' etc. I believe it is only for six weeks that the baby is absolutely fresh. If you hold anything before such baby, it will fix it with its eyes. As you move the object, the eyes follow. When I asked what this is, the answer was, 'a handkerchief'. But the baby does not see 'handkerchief', nor 'a piece of cloth'. It does not know the difference between a 'cloth' and your nose. It cannot distinguish green from orange. How do I know what the baby sees? We want to produce an answer because a question is asked - but how do we know?

You can try the exercise of looking at a baby less than six weeks old - observing how it looks at you. Ask yourself, 'What does the baby see?' A swami? A man? A human being, as opposed to a donkey, or a dog? By God's grace you have never seen a cobra here. They say, 'A cobra never kills a baby' - there are thousands of stories in India of cobras saving babies' lives. This is so because the cobra responds to the baby's not reacting to it. In the baby's head, there is no distinction, no labeling. It does not identify itself. 'I am a human being and you are a snake.'

Why do we fight? All our problems begin with this identification. If we try to find our identity, the problem dissolves. For the baby that refuses to identify itself, the problem dissolves. Do you think you are very clever? No? - then you are so clever that you know you are not clever - a super-genius. When someone says he has been a fool, it is like saying: 'I am so wise, I know that I am a fool.'

All the time we project, identify. How do you know that you are a fool? Because you know you are a schoolgirl and not a university graduate. Because you know that the higher stage of university graduate exists. You know Bharata dance because your dancing teacher demonstrates it. What does an African know about it? He does not know there is something that he does not know. When you say I am not very clever, you know that there is something more clever - you are identifying again. You must be quite simple, like a baby, which makes it difficult.' Why can I not see the world, see you or me as the baby sees? Because he sees for the first time, whereas we have been conditioned, taught. Both these explanations are right. She is blaming her parents for teaching her - and afterwards may blame me for the same. That is why I do not teach. The baby sees without having been taught.

When you refer to the skin as consisting of cells, I wonder have you seen cells? If you have seen them in the microscope, did you see the microscope or the cell? How do you know it was a cell? Because you were told. That is the basic problem: you are not seeing the 'cell', you are not seeing what the teacher asks you to see - but you see what you have already been told is a cell. Maybe you are not seeing it at all, because it has moved. As I look through a telescope at what someone says is Saturn, it may in fact be focussed on another planet - or I may see the technician's face - and think it is Saturn, because someone has told me it is. You can see 'cloth', 'skin', 'arm', 'ulna and radius' - all these have their value. If I break my arm and you mention the fracture of 'ulna and radius' to the hospital

when notifying them, it will help them to know what stretcher to bring, etc.
All this knowledge is of some use. But here we are concerned with identity.

We have to consider the question what exactly is the difference between a man and a dog. They have different forms - but men too have different forms. A dog has four legs, a man two - but the latter has also four limbs, merely named differently, and the baby crawls on all four. Man can think, reason. How do you know that the dog cannot? The dog has a tail, man has a nose: that is not serious - some dogs have no tails, and some men have a tail. We do not know. We certainly have a bone that is a rudimentary tail. The dog's sense of smell is stronger. Dogs do not start wars. Dogs are more loyal; if you feed a dog once, even if you afterwards throw stones at him for ten days, he will still come running every day and protect and serve you. But if, having fed and adored a man for fifty years, you merely once call him an idiot, he will want to murder you. Man has ambition, dog does not. All these points seem to suggest that a dog is better than man. We are looking for the basic difference. What is the difference between one person and another?

Let us break the question into its own elements. Here is a man, a male body. What is this? Clothes. What is inside the clothes? The body, skin, bones - all that anatomy and physiology teach. There is life. There is, someone says, 'the way you think'. If we look at this sentence, we find 'think', which is one thing, and 'you', which is another. What do these two words stand for: 'you think'? What is it that thinks? The brain thinks, but when preserved in a jar in a museum, it does not think: you can call it 'fool' - it will not respond at all. What is thinking? The mind works - and we call that thinking. So, we have the following suggestions: clothes, body, life, mind.

I am not implying that the soul exists or does not exist, that God exists or not. We referred to man as being a 'child of God.' We are now trying to find out. We are groping to understand better. One person says that thought is the mind working. Another one defines it as 'how I think'. Who is right? Either it is 'the mind working' or, 'I think'. Someone suggests: 'thought occurs when the mind works and makes you think'. Beautiful.

There are two steps in this: the mind works - and I think. What is the mind? When you reply that you do not know, according to what was said, it is the mind working that makes one say, 'I do not know'. That means the mind is something beyond you. Do not be afraid - you may be right. Mind and 'I' are not identical, just as 'my master' does not mean that the master is me. 'Mind' and 'I' are different.

The mind makes me think, say, act, work. Who gave you that answer? Again - the mind. The mind works. As it works, it makes me say, 'I do not know.' The mind knows a lot more than I do.

We discussed body, life, and mind. Body is easy to understand - unless you are blind, you see it. Life is not so easy - it is difficult to know for sure that I am alive. In Disneyland, the first person I saw was Abraham Lincoln. She does not believe me. A swami is not supposed to tell lies. Having got up to deliver a speech, he stood there and adjusted his tie. He was exactly like the original Abraham Lincoln, in wrinkles, dress, and speech. When you say that looking at this - pointing to the body, you see body and life, you do not really see 'life'.

When it comes to thinking, it is even more difficult. What thinks? The mind. What makes you think the mind thinks? The mind working. Only if you understand this correctly you will be able to answer all the questions we have been asking. What are we - children of God or of the Devil? Is there a God or not? Is there a soul or not?

'The whole head consists of brain-cells.' This is a belief. A belief is a silly thing. We are silly, are we not? Lots of things we do are absolutely ridiculous. For instance, some ladies' watches are so tiny that the lady cannot even read it when asked for the time. She must ask you to look at it, if you have better sight. We can have all sorts of beliefs: in God, devil, angels, ghosts. Why do we believe? Because we do not know. If I know, I do not 'believe'. Only what I do not know, I believe. What I know, I know.

What is this? 'Chalk.' You know what it is, because it was picked up from a classroom table. But if it were in a shop-window, you might think it was a kind of cake or a new type of cigarette, any number of things. You could say, 'I believe it is chalk.' Belief is the negation of knowledge. You believe the thing sitting before you is a man. It may not be - it may be a specially trained monkey. What is the difference between a monk and a monkey? - merely the letters 'ey'.

We must understand thought. What makes you think? The mind makes you think. The other things seem, to be equal: the bodies of different people are more or less the same. Some beings walk on four legs - but a monkey may walk on two legs, and can be taught to smoke. He must be careful, as he is hairy, but so must a man with a beard, who smokes. Life is also common to all beings. But thinking does not seem to be common.

How does one know that one does not know? The mind knows that there is something more to know. How do you know that there is something you do not know? The thing that I do not know may not exist at all. By looking at the mind, and understanding it to be a store of knowledge, I know that I do not know everything. Here is a fellow who thinks he knows everything. I know he does not know everything. This thing called the mind has accumulated many things, but does not know everything. So, I approach the mind with suspicion.

How do I know that I know? With the mind. How do I know that I do not know?

With the mind. How do I know that I cannot know? With the mind. Everything I do is with the mind. If I think I believe - it is the mind. If you and I understand one another - it is through the mind. We are caught in a terrible trap. I cannot get rid of the mind. I have to use the mind. I have to live by the mind - and I cannot trust it. We are questioning, enquiring. What is the mind?

Someone has defined mind as a store of accumulated knowledge. Even this definition must be regarded with caution. Is the mind a sort of supermarket where everything is neatly arranged and stacked - or, perhaps, like a municipal dump? I look at this mind, this store of knowledge, and ask it: how do you know that there is something that I do not know?

I ask: do you know what 'soul' is? You speak of soul, but when asked what it is, you say: 'I do not know.' Do you believe in something existing which is not part of the mind, the supermarket? Even when affirming that everyone has a soul, one cannot be told by anyone what the soul is - or one will get impossible answers, which can be neither proved nor disproved. This is like being told that on the other side of the moon live sixteen-legged animals. Since I know you cannot check, I can bluff you. I do not say you should not believe - but having taken a belief as a maxim, go on enquiring.

What makes us believe in God? I do not know. Who says, 'I do not know'? The mind. The mind works and makes me think that I do not know. That is a beautiful statement. Put it along with the definition of mind as a store of accumulated knowledge, and hold these two ideas carefully for a while. You will suddenly discover something wonderful. Drop the word 'mind' and replace it with 'accumulated knowledge'. 'Accumulated knowledge makes me think.' Simple arithmetic. If you have understood that statement, you have understood everything. Both statements come from the class and not from me. I have merely juggled with them, done a little arithmetic. Accumulated knowledge is not everything. There is something more to be done. For thousands and thousands of years I have been told that I am a human being, and accumulated knowledge makes me think this is so. I may not be. If you ask me who I am, I will reply: 'A Swami, an Indian.'

Accumulated knowledge makes me think so: 'I have a shaven head, wear an orange garment - I am a Swami.' How do you know? 'Accumulated knowledge makes me think so.' All the statements of life come to this. This accumulated knowledge is called conditioning.

I am made to think, even when I think that I have freedom, that freedom is no more than accumulated knowledge. One who is truly religious, a student of philosophy, will have an open mind, eager to enquire.

'The mind makes me think'. What is the 'me' then? 'Mind makes me think.' There are two things here: 'mind' can be amplified to 'accumulated knowledge'. What is 'me'? Body? - this idea we discarded long ago. What other suggestions are there?

'Me' is the direct object of 'makes'. 'Me' is soul, Brain, God - why not? 'Me' is like a horse with the mind as rider, making me, the horse, gallop. 'Mind' and I, 'me' are the same. - it is a mixture of all this. 'Me' is the Unknown. How do you know the Unknown exists?

In the sentence 'the mind makes me think', the subject of 'makes' is 'mind'. 'Makes' is the predicate, indicating the action, the function, and 'me' is the direct object. This is a wonderful truth. And it is you who discovered this you are more brilliant than I, with my old brain - it took me a week to digest what you said.

'Me' is something which the mind makes. Since 'the mind makes me', can I call it 'my mind'? Compare it to : 'My mother makes foods'. Does the mother belong to the food she makes? Does the mind belong to 'me'? After some time, in fact, the food does make the mother - i.e., she eats it and it constitutes her. In the case of the mind, it makes me, and after it has made me, I make it mine. I turn round and say 'The mind is mine.'

If you have understood this, you have understood life, the entire philosophy. Take home with you the sentence and the definitions you yourself gave me, and think about them, you will see.

This mind makes the thing called 'me'. Then it turns round and says: 'It is my mind'. If you remember this sentence, you can substitute anything for the two key-words. Instead of 'mind', you can put God, Brahman, Buddha, Christ, Krishna, the Devil, Maya, Prakriti - it will be valid. And you can replace 'me' with soul, atman, jiva, Adam, spirit, man, woman, boy, girl - it will still work.

There is a beautiful interaction: this mind makes me - and having made 'me' turns round and says, 'You are mine.' This is like a girl finding a boy, smiling at him, and later the boy turns round and calls her, 'My wife.' Anything in life is explained by this sentence: The mind makes me think.

When you speak, though, do you say, 'The mind thinks', or, 'I think'? You say of course, 'I think'. The mind, having created this 'me', quietly withdraws into the background, like a mother or father having created the child, sets it down, sees it function, sits back and watches its actions. There is a confusion, because the mind has quietly slipped out of the picture, just as someone starts a game, teaches you how to play it, then watches as you play and defeat each other, etc. That is why it sometimes seems as if the mind is my slave and I am its master, and sometimes it seems as if the mind is boss and I am its slave. What is the truth here? What is the relationship between mind and me?

The Mind can do only one thing: create thoughts. We agreed that the mind creates 'me'. Therefore, 'me', created by mind, is a thought. It does not look like it what is this hundred and fifty pounds worth of 'me'? If I pinch this skin, it hurts - is this real, or only a thought? If you dream about me while you are asleep at home, where am I? Not in your house - but in your mind. While you dream of me, however, that 'me' is very real. When people talk in their sleep, the person they dream about and talk to is not real; you cannot see anyone but you hear the voice of the dreamer - i.e., his talking is real. A thing that is not real can cause a very

real effect. The mind makes me ...' - 'me' is nothing but a thought, but the thought is capable of producing this body and making me feel the pinch.

We started with a question about the difference between a man and a dog, you, and me. You are caught now. Some of you said you dream about me. Have you ever dreamed about a dog? What is the difference between me in a dream and a dog in a dream? The difference is nothing but a matter of thinking. The same brain cells produce both images. The same mind-stuff becomes 'Swami' or, becomes a 'dog'. Similarly, what is the difference between you and me? Nothing but thought. We cannot say that it is real or unreal.

The Indian philosopher says it is Maya. This does not mean that it is illusion, that it does not exist. It only means: I cannot explain. You cannot say that the dream is real - nor can you say that it is unreal. While you are dreaming, it is very real. People can moan, howl, cry, in a dream. And when they wake up, the heart is palpitating, because they had some frightening experience.

They may have seen a robber in their dream - when they wake up, all is calm, there is none. You may say the dream was unreal, but what are these palpitations? Thoughts can be called neither real - nor unreal.

So, what makes the difference between you and me? Thoughts - which are neither real, nor unreal. If you get a bowl full of fruits, you may want to take one to eat, knowing fruits to be edible. On some previous occasion you touched what also looked like fruit, but was plastic. You therefore know that plastic fruits may be quite 'realistic' - i.e, appear real, while not being real. 'Apparently good' means not really good. To know whether it is real fruit, you take it to see: is it plastic or real?

So, in life the difference is only in our way of thinking. These differences may be there - or may not be there. One cannot explain. If someone asks you if God exists, if there is a soul - maybe, or maybe not.

With all these questions, what an intelligent person must do is to enquire. Find out for yourself. It is no use my telling you this piece of chalk is lovely toffee. If you accept this, you are a fool. If there is a difference in taste, in temperament, etc, enquire. What makes this difference? Is it real or unreal? Find out. Go on searching.

That is what we have been doing these past weeks. We have concluded that the difference between man and man is thought and that thought is the activity of the mind. If the mind creates thinking and this thinking creates the difference between you and me, what is one to do? One solution is not to think. That is what the yogi tries to do. But when someone says, 'do not think', he is talking to me. He himself will still think.

So, one must find a way of not thinking personally, selfishly. Allow the mind to

think, but not 'me' to think. 'I' does not think - but let the mind think. As the mind thinks, it can also think 'me'. I like to think that, as there are millions of cells in the human body, all functioning, each doing something or other without our awareness, similarly we are all cells in God's Body. Therefore, one reality.

On Awakening*Royal College, Curepipe*

There is no doubt that around the world, especially among the young people, there is a tremendous awakening. This awakening is brought about by various factors, mainly by what I would call a disillusionment - i.e. a loss of the illusions they had built up.

People are often shocked if you say disillusioned. But you must be disillusioned - the illusions that people formed must be broken. If one has any illusions, they need to be shattered - the sooner the better. Unfortunately the manifestation of this disillusionment seems to hurt those who cling to the illusion - naturally, but unfortunately because this creates hostility, conflict.

As I cling to an illusion, while you are disillusioned, we find ourselves in opposite camps. Naturally, again I think the illusion is the truth - you think what you have found or the disillusionment itself is the truth. I think I have the truth and that you, being disillusioned, are creating an illusions.

Each one feels he has the truth. The young person considers what the elder one professes is nonsense, while he himself claims to see truth clearly, whereas the member of the older generation believes that his own ideas represent truth, and that the young one is in error, illusion. That is the basic problem all over the world.

The young people are awakening from what they themselves call the false values of their elders - in their political ideology, religious faith social and economic structures, etc. The young all over the world say that all these are based on false values, but the people of my age group insist that what they believe and do is right, and that youth is merely rebelling for rebellion's sake, and therefore calling their elders 'fools'.

Now, who is right? Are they right or are you right? Or possibly both are wrong. Both cannot be right. This much is certain. This material is either paper or cloth. If I say it is not this, and you say, it is not that, then it is neither paper nor cloth. It is something else. So, both of us are wrong. Both of us cannot be right. There is a certain other solution. I am reminded of a delightful story told of an Indian King who had a peculiar condition, making him sleep for exactly 12 hours each day for months. During this period he had the same dream nightly: that he was a beggar. In what you would call reality he was a king, but throughout the duration of his own dream he was a beggar. This went on for a long time, and he got confused and wondered what exactly was the difference. What difference did it make to him whether you call him a king from 6 am. to 6 pm., or a beggar from 6 pm. to 6 am.?

In reality, what was he? This was what he asked his ministers one morning as they came to greet him as their majesty. He had just been a beggar in his dreams. How did he become a King within a few minutes? He wanted to know what the reality was - was that the reality or this? If you say: 'No, that is only a dream - this is the reality', one could say no.

Now this is the most important, vital factor here: while one is dreaming, the dream is the reality, and one is not conscious that during another part of the day one is for example King. During the course of the dream, the dream is real, and during the waking state, the working state is real.

So, what exactly is the truth? That you are not dreaming now? There are dreams in which one shouts, sweats, has all kinds of realistic experiences and reactions. Not all dreams are so vivid, but to the King, his beggar dream seemed real, and he wanted to know whether this or that was real. No one could answer him, but for one great sage who said: 'Neither is real.'

When you are wakeful, what you are doing is real, and when you are dreaming, that is real. But neither of these things is ultimately real, because this has a beginning, and that also has a beginning. This comes to an end and that also comes to an end. In the same way, this is one point of view and that is another point of view. And similarly in the conflict between the adult generation and the teenagers also, the older people have one point of view, and youth has another point of view. Both these being nothing more than points of view: who is right and who is wrong? Therefore I am not coming to any judgement, but I am merely stating the fact that there is this awakening. The fact of awakening itself seems to be right.

Now, for instance, in my own schooldays, even if a schoolmaster caught hold of me and gave me a few spanks, I would keep quiet, because in those days the philosophy was that you must respect and revere your schoolmaster, never mind what he does - blind obedience, what you might call blind faith. During the same period, we had this attitude towards religion also. We never questioned anybody. Our parents would go to the temple, church mosque etc, and we did too - our parents would pray in their manner and we did too - we never questioned. My grand father said this is the right attitude. I did what he said - blindly accepting. And now, when I agree with someone who considers this to be the wrong attitude, I am doing exactly the same thing. This is the opposite of awakening.

On one end of the scale we have faith - at the other extreme we have doubt. At one end of the scale we have acceptance - at the other end of the scale we have rejection. Acceptance can be blind, faith can be blind, doubt can be blind, rejection can be blind, too.

The older generation accepted values blindly, whatever they were - personal social, economic, cultural, moral, ethical religious - without questioning. And now the young are rejecting these values blindly, without questioning. You

cannot question while you are asleep.

In order to question, you need both faith and doubt. You do not question silly statements, but you just shrug your shoulders and do not consider them at all. To question something, you must first of all have some faith that there is some truth in it. For instance, I do not accept alcohol - so, there is no question of it. I do not think that drinking alcohol or taking drugs is good. I do not see any value or purpose in it, and so the question does not arise at all. You question only those aspects of your life, those factors, those truths, which have some validity for your life. If someone says there are 100.000 million cars here, I do not question it, because it does not concern my life. It is immaterial whether there are 100 or 100.000 million - it is all the same to me.

So, in order to have the spirit of questioning, I must seek. I must be looking for an answer. And that answer must be of immediate value or relevance to me or my life. If not, I probably will not question. Or it will be only academic questioning - as you question a schoolteacher just out of curiosity. That curiosity shows you are not serious about it, because you have not realised that this has a direct immediate relevance to your life. There must come a time in our own life when we feel that certain factors - maybe religion, ethics, morality, social principles, whatever they are - need to be studied. We have to look into, question some of the values.

In other words: find what is of value to me in life. This spirit of enquiry will be awakened in me only when I am dissatisfied, disillusioned with what I have. Or when I realise that whatever circumstances I see around myself are chaotic, I am not having peace of mind, I am not enjoying my life, I see disharmony, I see conflict in life, I am being made use of. There is discord, restlessness, frustration within me. I am studying, I am going to school, I am doing this and that, I do not really know why. For instance, I know so many things in geography, but in the examination the fellow forgot to question me concerning the subject I knew, and he only asked what I did not know. Then you begin to question what is education, what is examination, what do the certificates and testimonials really testify? And then you begin to question further.

You are a young man, you are to get married and raise a family, because you have been told by your father, mother that you must have a wife, children etc., and that thus you will be happy and peaceful. You do that, and when you suddenly discover that you are no more peaceful than before, you begin to question: what is this?

When you see some conflict between theory and practice - and only when you see this conflict - will you question. This is what I believe the young people around the world have discovered.

Let us take politics for example. Every politician who has waged a war has declared he is fighting for peace. Most of you were probably not born yet when the 2nd world war took place. Churchill declared almost every 3rd day - 'We are

fighting a war to end all wars,' i.e, 'We are going to fight and destroy these Nazis who are devils incarnate and the creators of all this trouble. And once they have been destroyed, and we, the good people, are in power, we will ensure that there is no more war.' Yet, I believe, right after the war, the Allied leaders started to quarrel and call each other names. There was disharmony between them and therefore there were the seeds of war already. There are some who say it is impossible not to have war. The young people say: 'Declare this to be so. Tell us honestly and plainly that we are fighting a war - one of a series. Our grandfathers, our fathers fought, and we are also going to fight. If you do not want to fight, then get killed. Do not come and tell us that we are waging war to end all wars, and then by your thought, deed and word, you sow seeds of further conflict. In the same way they are against organised religion, because there again they see the same conflict, the same contradiction between profession and practice. We go about saying we want peace. But when this gentleman comes to me to tell me he is going to the battle front tomorrow, and he asks me for a blessing, I bless him. How can I? I must tell him: 'No, sorry. I am a man of peace I have nothing to do with war.' When I bless him: 'May you come back victoriously', what I am saying in effect is, 'May all your enemies be killed.' Is this a reasonable, acceptable proposition? When I was in Kuala Lumpur in Malaya, the matron of an orphanage I visited asked me to bless their work. What kind of blessing should I give? That their work should prosper and extend? That means indirectly: I am cursing so many children. May the children become orphans. My honest and truthful prayer would be: may this institution be closed tomorrow - i. e. may there be no more orphans in the community. I understand what the matron, a wonderful social worker, meant of course. But similarly when a priest or religious leader has to bless soldiers going to war or has to conduct in memorial services for soldiers who are dead, directly or indirectly he is participating in the conflict. Every time I decorate a soldier, I am actually encouraging, perpetuating the conflict. Why do I give a medal, especially posthumously, to a soldier's wife - 'What a wonderful man he was, he died in battle.' He would have died in bed. What was the supreme glory of dying in battle?

As a matter of fact, several millions died in battle. You see the hypocrisy, the contradiction here? I am pinning the medal on this fellow's corpse because he fought more viciously than the others. 'But he fought on my side and therefore he defended freedom ... If the same man had belonged to the other side, he would have been a war criminal. When these contradictions are seen, the young people seem to lose faith. They seem to lose faith completely in politics and religion.

What is one to do? I have no business to tell anyone what to do - and they are not going to listen to me anyhow, nor to anybody. When you have a confusion in you, when you have a disillusionment in you, when you are perplexed and you have dropped the prevailing values and are groping for the truth, then what does one do? I begin to grope in darkness. It is not entirely dark, because I am awake. There is that awakening. At that time, at that crucial juncture, we need both of these: a faith and a doubt - faith for accepting the older values for examination, not accepting them blindly, but merely receiving them for inspection, and than

doubting everything - including myself. If these two 'rails' of thought are provided for this movement to proceed, it might be possible to discover some truth.

I believe that this is happening throughout the world. Those of the young people who have strayed into the drug society are in a minority. This is bound to happen in any community of seekers. We all seek certain goals, we all want some happiness. People want to enjoy themselves - they do not know how, some go drinking and dancing. You cannot completely avoid these sorts of perversions. One may or may not approve of taking drugs, but one must be able to see clearly that there is a tremendous fermentation throughout the world among the young because of this disillusionment, and a partial - not a full - awakening.

There are very good, wonderful men and women who belong to this younger generation who have almost passionately and fanatically rejected all violence. This is one factor. They say: 'If you are going to sanction violence, if you say war is inevitable, we will have nothing to do with your society. We will drop out, go into the jungle.' They are building beautiful communes - completely turning away from what you and I call 'society'. They are experimenting. Some of them have said they will build a dollarless society - an economy based on what our ancestors were doing: agriculture and barter etc. They say: 'We will ensure that we produce enough food for the whole community, and there is no need for money'. Money was invented by men at one stage. Man was there before money was thought of, and man will be there after the money is destroyed. There is no real loss. These are some of the major trends especially amongst the young in other parts of the world. And here as elsewhere, people are slowly beginning to think, to reflect.

On Yoga*St. Esprit College, Quatre Bornes*

Religious quest presupposes spiritual hunger. Without this, it is like a man with a full tummy looking at the different religions as if they were different pastries in a bakery - he is not really interested. The question is not of finding satisfaction in any particular religion. The satisfaction is not in the food, but in me - not in anything outside myself. But satisfaction can be found in any religion or cult only if I am hungry.

There is no real connection between 'Yoga' and 'Hinduism'. Yoga can be adapted to any religion, even to agnosticism. If you believe you exist, Yoga exists. Somebody defined a Hindu as someone who turns from Himsa - harming to Ahimsa - harming no one or non-injury, non-violence. Himsa implies a harming, hurtful nature. So, anyone who does not harm anyone else is a Hindu. Jesus Christ said, 'Love your neighbour as yourself; love God with all your soul.' Therefore, a Hindu, and a swami, is a follower of Christ.

Were you born a Christian? Was I born a Hindu? I was born simply a human baby - like you. Why label myself as any thing else - eg., as a Hindu? I am a breaker of barriers - of those that are not there. The real stone-wall before me I cannot break through - but the barrier that men erect artificially between men, I can break. Since fools like ourselves invent it, it is not really there.

True Hinduism, religion, Yoga, all mean love. When I go to a church and see the Cross, I look up to Lord Jesus and ask: 'What is your message?' He says, 'Take my Yoke and follow me.' That is Yoga.

Have you seen a bullock cart? It is unfortunately dying out, even in Mauritius, but you could see here a yoke uniting the two bullocks. The yoke is used also in Hindu weddings: the priest puts it lightly on the head of the bride and bridegroom, and says: 'Now you are like two beasts tied to the yoke and must walk in unison. No longer can one go this way, one the other.' This yoke brings into harmony, unites the two oxen, or two people - two forces - so that the 'cart' can proceed in one direction. What is the meaning of this yoke? Yoga stands for harmony.

To me, the Cross is the symbol of harmony. Jesus tells me, 'Love God.' Where is He? Can one love someone one has never seen, whose existence one is not aware of? So, I ask Jesus again, 'Where is God?' He replies, 'He is above'. 'High in the clouds?' No - not above in the spatial sense, but in the psychological sense, above and beyond, where my mind and intellect cannot reach. 'What is the use of attaining something above my understanding, my grasp?' He says, 'Do not abandon the search. He will not leave you, he will not let you rest.'

He is not only above, but also deep down in my own heart. I carry Him about in

me all day - and may as well get to know Him. That is why one end of the vertical beam of the Cross points up - to the transcendent omnipresent God - and one points down to Him in the depth of everyone's heart. You go to a priest or swami to ask what you must do to find Him. You are advised to pray, meditate in solitude. But Jesus with the horizontal beam of His Cross tells you, 'This is not enough - it is useless without loving your fellow man him on the right whom you know, and him on the left whom you left behind.'

If you say that you love God and do not love your neighbour, you do not really love God, but merely an idea. Who is the neighbour I must love? The story of the Samaritan indicates my neighbour is my friend, on my right side, and also my so-called 'enemy', on my left, the stranger. Him too I must love. That is integration. Otherwise, if I do not love all my neighbours, I do not love God. Then I am not a Christian, nor a Hindu, nor even a human being.

It may suit your comfortable, pleasant life, your business, to 'love' your neighbour. The neighbour, however, must be loved, not because he is Mr. Y or Mrs X, but because of the principle in him that demands your love. Love is not something you do for a reason. 'I love you because ...' - in that case I do not love you, but the cause - because you are rich, handsome, etc. If you love your neighbour only because he is your friend, because you have some profit from him, that is not real love.

Real love stems from recognition of basic unity, which does not allow for 'other'-ness. You and I cannot love one another truly, if we are totally 'other' - different. If you pour two glasses of water into one bowl, the water will be thoroughly mixed. If it is possible to love God, it is because this unity exists.

You all know what primary school children know: that God is omnipresent, everywhere. Does that not show that God alone exists? The Hindu is a clever fellow. You cannot prove to a Hindu the existence of God. He does not say, 'God exists here or there' - but claims God is everywhere.

Chalk is not God - does not exist always as chalk. When you crush it, even the resulting powder is not the 'ultimate principle'. You can reduce it further to elementary atoms, maybe into Consciousness, Intelligence. But the Hindu says: whatever exists, whatever is unchangeable - that is God. We say we form part of the Infinite, but all expressions are defective. All religions proclaim that God is everywhere present, that God is in all, so that man is 'part' of the omnipresent God. In that unity we are all One. If you start at the Centre, radiation is in all directions, covering everything everywhere. To arrive into this awareness of oneness - that is Yoga.

A religious father who had seen me demonstrate Yoga Asanas on TV said, 'You are the one who teaches us to die quickly.' Yoga is often misunderstood. Why do we stand on our heads, why do we twist our bodies? Because the student of Yoga realises that as soon as all talk about the omnipresent God stops, all we know is:

we have a body. So we run home to feed it.

Here too Yoga is integration, balance. There are some who have an enormous head with matchstick body and legs. This is unhealthy, unbalanced. Someone may be unable to digest food because of 'ulcers'. Others become 'Mr. Universe' - but a blank universe, with nothing inside the head. They are fools - but because of their well-developed muscles, one must call them so. There are all sorts of creatures in the world.

The hospitals are full of specialists. If you have a certain pain, you will be sent off to the ENT department, then to the chest clinic, pushed from one clinic to the next, and finally to the dentist. Formerly, a family doctor looked after me - now it is a family of doctors. We are becoming over-specialised, with a 'right arm specialist', and a 'thigh specialist', etc. When are we going to put together all the pieces of the jigsaw called our personality?

When the personality is integrated, whole, it must be harmonised with society, then with the whole universe - and with God. We must realise that only one exists - only then is there true love. Otherwise it is just commercialisation. It is necessary to get an integrated vision of ultimate Truth.

There is a story of a foolish ruler, a raja, who had a witty minister whom he sent to take painting lessons. When the minister noted that a horse was represented by a profile view - with the rest of the face supposedly on the other side, he said he had learned to draw. He thereupon represented an elephant by his tail, claiming the rest of the picture was on the 'other side'.

We must, on the contrary, come to grips with the totality of existence, not with piecemeal views. We must know what mind and spirit are, what enables us to dive deep and bring about the integration of the personality. We need this integration of our whole being, then integration with the people we live with. First harmony inside us, then around us. Then, rising higher and higher in aspiration, we finally come face to face with what we call God.

That is Hinduism. That is Christianity. Love, Compassion in your heart.

Pupil: Do you regard Rama as an incarnation of God?

Swami: When we talk of God's omnipresence, we recognise that It is God Himself who has manifested in the entire universe. We label a certain 'stream' as 'good', another one as 'evil'. There are theological problems here, but life goes on, life's balance continues. In our own body are cells promoting growth, and cells restraining growth; impulses make the chest expand and contract; complicated and contrary movements go on in our body. The respiratory centre in the brain controls expiration, inspiration, expansion, contraction - even in Mr. Universe this is beyond his control. The twin forces of good and evil must be kept in balance. When this balance is lost, it is said that God, the Omnipresent, manifests

in human form.

Water is moisture, which is everywhere. Occasionally it condenses into rain. Water vapour - God - still present everywhere, is temporarily manifested as 'rain' - Incarnation of God. One such incarnation is Rama. His story plays the same role as the Gospel in Christianity, with this difference: to a Hindu, God is Rama, but the Hindu reading the Ramayana will concede that there were other incarnations too.

Pupil: Why do swamis roam about in forests?

Swami: Where am I? You need not worry how the world will carry on were everyone to retire to caves and forests. Firstly, not everyone has the same temperament, tendencies. In India there are many millions of swamis, and only a very small percentage live as hermits - praying, meditating in solitude; that is their way to God. Not everyone will do that. The book, *The Philokalia*, the collected life and sayings of the desert fathers of early Christianity, reveals how some Christians in those days shunned society, fearing they would be lost in it.

If one is really interested in study and knowledge, especially if one is interested in the religious life, one will not become involved in worldly activities - drinking, dancing, etc. But if you feel you are part of society, you have no right to get away from it. The genuine sages who live in forests do not do this to escape responsibility, do not consider themselves part of society, do not depend upon it. They live. On berries, fruits - whatever they find. They need no clothes - they have no needs, no responsibilities.

If you live in society, without consciousness of God, as a social worker, you will relate to your fellow beings through values other than God.

A villager who mistook a railway train for an elephant with houses attached, thought the 'elephant' would not move because he had no ticket for his bedstead. He felt that since he himself had paid, he was the elephant's responsibility, but that his unpaid for bedding - his luggage - was his own responsibility. He felt obliged to carry it on his head so the train would go. 'The train is carrying me - and I am carrying my luggage.' Similarly, you feel you are responsible for your family. But who is responsible for you?

The forest sages had no self-arrogated feeling of responsibility, but complete faith in the working of God's Grace. Jesus also preached utter trust in God's Care, like the birds that need not take thought for tomorrow. He promised that God would look after His children. Men who renounce everything, leaving all worldly possessions behind, have total faith in God. Realising God is responsible for them, they know He will look after them. It is said that, as they pray, they benefit the world, as the sun far away benefits us.

Pupil: What are the profits to be derived from Yoga?

Swami: I am not fond of the word 'profit'. Let us talk of the benefits of Yoga. First is health. Do you know what that means? You say health is 'when everything is fine' - but there may be sunshine and yet I may be ill. Health is, if you like, the condition when everything is fine in me. But I met someone yesterday who takes a glass of beer every so often to convince himself that everything is fine. The word health is connected with the words 'whole', 'holy'. You cannot have health - everything cannot be fine physically speaking - if everything is not fine on the mental plane. I have seen a very healthy fine couple who, after a few months, were reduced to a very poor state - because the man had fallen in love with another woman. The benefits of Yoga lie, physiologically, in the health it brings, and psychologically, in the clarity it brings to the mind.

On Self Culture*Bhujoharry College, Port Louis*

You ask, 'What am I?' Someone answers, 'A devotee.' That does not tell us much - there are devotees of God, of film-stars, of humanity.

Do you know India? Only on the map. All right: show me India 'on the map'. You see how difficult words are? If you want to talk sensibly, you will in fact keep quiet.

What does 'horticulture' or 'agriculture' mean? It is not a study, but doing. If you merely read a recipe, it will never become anything - you must follow it, make it. So, what you must do in 'agriculture' is to prepare the ground, make the bed. You plough and till and hoe, you sow the seeds and water to a certain limit. If you plant something, it will grow, but you must take care of it - not just sit and look at it. You have to go and check, take trouble, and ultimately you will reap some fruits.

Similarly, if I want to culture myself, what must I do? Firstly, prepare the terrain. Close your eyes. Do you see the ground? It is the mind that is the bed in which you will have to cultivate the growth you require. What do you want to get ultimately? Intelligence, will-power, purity, good behaviour - all these things we want to grow inside. If I have papaya seeds, I cannot grow mango from them. If these are the fruits I desire to reap, then this is what I must sow. It is difficult to clear the ground properly, to remove all rubbish. We want to tell lies, to bluff and cheat - and at the same time, we want to reap good from the seeds sown. We put papaya in - and expect mango to come out. There is also the danger that the bird will take away the seeds, if they are merely left on the surface. For proper growth, the ground must be freed from all impurity and be suitably prepared and protected. In the case of children like you, there is not too much rubbish cluttering up the ground - the mind. The first step then is cleaning of the bed.

In self-culture too there is the need for 'tilling' and 'ploughing' - turning the land upside down. We older people are afraid of this turning upside down, because of the dirt that is hidden underneath. We are unwilling to look at it. We do not want to face something uncultured, something bad in our mind. It goes without saying that we do not want to show it to others. We do not want even to expose it to our own view. I want to have nice mangoes - but I refuse to turn the earth upside down for their growth. At your age, you must be able to sit quiet and face yourself. Cultivate the habit of honesty, refusing to tell lies, etc. If you are a coward, how will you ever develop will-power? If instead of denying having smoked - hiding the cigarette and wiping your mouth - you admit without fear that you have smoked, I will give you full marks. At least you were honest. But I do not want you to tell me your secrets. Supposing you have done something bad and come to confess it, I may send you away mumbling, 'Do not worry, God's

grace is with you', but later, if in need of money, I may blackmail you. But if I confess to God, as I come face to face with what I did, my own inside is turned upside down, the ground has been turned - culture has begun. I have prepared the bed, not to sleep, but in the opposite sense: to work, to till, to watch.

You observe yourself to know what your inside is. Can you see within you? You can see me? How? With eyes. Yet, if there is no light but total darkness, you are unable to see. You require eyes and light for vision. How can I see myself, see inside me? If I want to see in front of me, I must not look behind. To see inside me, I must exclude external vision, shut my eyes and concentrate on what I am doing. I look within and find both 'good' and 'bad'. While I do this, I leave everything else aside. I alone am responsible. Looking deep within, thus concentrating, one is turning the ground. No need to explain to anyone. In thus looking inside, one is turning the ground to prepare it for the reception of the seed that one desires to grow. All poisonous seeds are thrown out - all that obstructs, all that is not needed is discarded. If you require mango trees, get rid of all that is not mango. If you want to be a good girl, remove all that you find preventing you from being a good girl. Throw it away.

After the suitable preparation of the bed, you must check if the seed you planted is really what you want. All the time we do what is wrong, what we feel we should not do, what we do not want to do - and yet we want to become good and holy. If my aim is to be intelligent, then I must not be a fool - I should not sow the seeds of foolishness. If I desire will-power, I must not sow seeds of cowardice. If I want to be honest, I must not cheat.

If I want the seed to grow, I must water it, look after it, protect it. The equivalent to watering - concerning the development of a good habit - is to keep it going, to keep on. If you wish to learn getting up early, it may be difficult to start getting out of bed say at 6 am. You feel it is wonderful if you manage. Next day, as the alarm rings, you may not be able to repeat this, but instead hit the alarm on the head. As growing plants may be disturbed by some insects, so in the cultivating of good habits, some so-called 'friends' may call you to cinema and other distractions. Then you go to bed late and cannot rise early as you desired. You must take all bad habits including outside interferences and distractions and eliminate them. It is surprisingly difficult to be regular in the establishing and keeping up of a good habit - but very easy to be regular in irregularity. So, throw away all temptations to interrupt a good habit you have started on, till it has grown into the, nice plant you desire.

Instead of asking what are your rights in the sense of privilege, find out what is your duty, what is right for you to do. This is again a question of the right 'culture'.

On Sivaratri Festival*Bhujoharry College, Port Louis*

Pupil: What is the Sivaratri Festival?

Swami: If I ask you whether Siva exists, you say 'maybe'. If I ask you about Hitler, you will reply in the affirmative. Yet, both you have merely heard about.

Siva is the third aspect of the Trinity - meaning three, nothing more. He is that aspect of Godhead that brings about fulfillment, not destruction. He is the Redeemer.

In agriculture, we plant seeds because we want to make something grow. First, we have to clear the land, prepare the ground, make suitable beds for the seeds. It requires some sort of order, planning. Then we sow the seeds and to feed them, we must provide water and manure. Until there is proper growth, we have to protect the plants. As we water them, weeds will come up and must be removed. Then, when mature, the plants are harvested and consumed. The most important part of agriculture is the eating of the product. Why do you plant? To get food to eat. Culture is turning something wild into something ordered, beautiful, useful. The world too, is created, preserved or, protected, and must eventually find its fulfillment, just as the fully grown plant is consumed.

In physics we have the principle of conservation of matter. Matter can neither be created nor destroyed. When nothing can be destroyed, what is the use of 'creating' a God of destruction? Siva is a name, but it is also a word with a meaning - 'ega' for example, means 'one', as well as being a girl's name. 'Siva' stands for auspiciousness, prosperity, all that is good. How can you regard this God of goodness as God of destruction?

When someone tells you anything, do not be fooled, but examine it carefully for yourself. Does God exist? How do you know? You have heard about it. As you have not seen for yourself, what can you do? Believe? Accept? Maybe, if you are curious, serious, you can go and see for yourself. In order to go and verify, for example, if the river Ganges is really there - as you were told - you go to India, spend money, time, energy. While going, you inevitably have to put up with difficulties - your breakfast will not be available at the habitual time, and you will find other inconveniences. Similarly, if you have faith in Swami, you will do what he tells you is necessary to go and see if God exists.

Like a farmer, God creates, preserves, and redeems. A married teacher has different roles: at school she is a teacher; at home, while she nurses her baby, she is a mother; and walking hand in hand with her husband, she is a wife. It all depends on what she does. Similarly, when God is creating, we refer to Him as Brahma, the Creator; when protecting His creation, we call Him Vishnu, the

preserver; and when He redeems, He is Siva, the Redeemer. Siva's power - Shakti - is supposed to be His consort - a wife named Parvati. Whereas I can leave any possession such as my spectacle case behind and go, my power of speech e.g. I cannot leave behind. When we are talking of Parvati representing a Power, it is not like a real wife, a woman sitting beside Him. We cannot visualise or paint picture of power.

There is a story that once Siva and Parvati were discussing which of them redeems this world. She claimed it was She, and He claimed it was He. She came from behind and closed His eyes, covering them with Her hands. The whole world was blotted out - 'destroyed' by this. The Gods cried. So Siva reopened His eyes and the world was recreated. Both Power and Wisdom are necessary. Only when I keep my eyes open is my power active and can I see what goes on. This is the background to the festival of 'Sivaratri', commemorating this event.

On Self-Discovery*Bhujoharry College, Port Louis*

Pupil: Is it possible for someone to discover his own abilities?

Swami: Look at this basket: it is covered. You can discover what is in it by taking hold of it, removing its cover, looking inside and finding out what is actually inside.

The ability to fly is not in me. Therefore, I cannot discover a bird-like ability to fly, however hard I try. Nor can I get diamonds from this food basket, because it contains none. Discovery implies that something is in you, that must be looked for to be revealed. How can you open something unless you see what it is you have to open? First of all, to know if the ability is there, you must face it, become conscious of it. You must know what it is that contains the ability - and then open it. Find where the ability lies hidden in you. In the mind? You can see neither your mind nor mine. So, you cannot see where your abilities lie hidden.

Sometimes in life abilities are manifested, discovered accidentally, as if someone knocked the basket top off without intention, and then you see what is inside. Unless you see where the abilities lie, you cannot find or know them. To make this discovery, you must deliberately grasp the 'container' and look inside. You must work at it - not leave it to accident, but observe, discover.

To see, as we said before, one needs eyesight and light. How does one know, see the mind? Imagine someone sitting here of whom you are very fond, while you continue looking at me. It is clear that I am made of flesh, blood, skin and bones. What is the person you have been thinking of made of? Nothing. Was it a ghost then? No, you saw some image in the mind with your eyes open. The form you visualised is not present here, is not of flesh and blood, like I am. Where then did you see it?

Here is a bit of a clue as to how to touch the mind mentally, to see it and observe it. This is exactly what we do in meditation. You take up any picture - it does not matter what: Rama, Krishna, Christ, Buddha - but not the boyfriend or the husband, as then the mind would get excited. Sit anywhere and look at it. Completely forgetting what you see outside, try to visualise only that picture. When you can successfully visualise it, then you see the mind. While you were looking at me and imagining some person not actually present, you were seeing half and half. Looking at me without seeing me, but visualising the imagined form, you came face to face with your own mind. This is Dhyana, meditation or whatever you like - when the mind is calm, not disturbed, not excited. It is only when the basket is kept still that it can be opened, not while it dangles to and fro.

So, to discover anything, you must become aware of it, see it, 'hold' it in your

hand, and steady it. To know what is in the mind, you must see it, know what it is made of, examine it, and therefore must make it still. This steadiness of the mind may be achieved in any way you like - maybe by thinking of God. We are not so keen on fixing one specific name or form on God. We are not really interested in what God looks like. Do not ask me - I do not know. It is for you to find out. You cannot be saved by anything I or anyone else says or does. God is within you, and you must discover Him in your own mind, your own abilities. This method is to make your mind absolutely still and look at it. How? By closing your eyes - or leaving them open - and turning the mind within. When it is calm and quiet, it is easy to uncover it and discover your abilities. God who is within you will make you enjoy the search.

On God and Man*Trinity College, Port Louis*

Pupil: Did God create man or did man create God?

Swami: May I ask a question in return: which came first, the hen or the egg? Do you understand the question? If you do, you already know what God is, what man is, and if you know, you will be the right man to answer the question. The first thing is to see if we know what we are talking about. What is 'God'?

Pupil: Divine power.

Another pupil: Spirit.

Swami: He likes power, you like spirit.

Another pupil: He who controls the universe.

Swami: He has determined the sex of God and sees Him as a kind of ombudsman in charge of the universe. Does He in fact control or does he appoint ministers? Lovely - someone else is suggesting 'God is man'. Here the question is avoided, ie. neither God created man, nor man created God. A nice way of sidestepping the dilemma. I wonder whether you would like to become a lawyer or the next best thing: a politician.

To a silent pupil: He is wise: a man of wisdom keeps quiet. This is what people think of God: He is this ... or that ... I think'- all this is obviously your own creation, unless you agree with our clever friend that God is man. Then the question is dissolved.

What do you think God is? Since we have a mixed class, we will take it for granted 'man' includes 'woman'. Let us talk of 'human being'. Come on, do not be embarrassed - I know as much or as little as you do. What is man?

Pupil: God's puppet.

Swami: No, unfortunately you define it as something without a will of its own. Let us amend it: 'a man is a creature at the mercy of others - devil, woman or God'.

Pupil: Man is a creature living by himself.

Swami: What exactly is the thing you refer to as 'man'? What do you see when you look at a man? Flesh and bones. This you see in animals too. But what distinguishes man from animals? Someone says that the former is a rational being, has a reasoning capacity. How do you know that a dog does not reason, because it is an animal? How do you know it is an animal, because it does not

reason? That is called arguing in circles. Are you sure you are a rational being, that there is a thing called reason inside? Can everything be rationalised? Neither I nor you can answer the simple question: whether hen or egg came first. Am I right in assuming that man is a rational being? If man by definition is rational, then I am not a man.

Very often we do not know what we mean by a question. Since we do not understand the question, we cannot understand the answer. How do I understand the question? Instead of referring to the Divine Spirit, I talk of Illimitable Wisdom. 'Cosmic Spirit' - sets of words. I am like a grammophone record. To what extent can we define these things? When I define 'God', I am 'creating' Him, projecting my own conception, my own mind. This is what we always do. We are always running round in vicious circles. We hear a question, we are thoroughly convinced that we have understood and the answer comes back as whatever suits us - like a boomerang, like the ball attached with a rubberstring which bounces back after being thrown to the wall. You and I want it so. We have our own conception of God, which is not God at all, but a projection of our mind.

A teacher: We have scriptures to inspire us.

Swami: Who is reading the book - this young man or God? This God is inevitably a creation of man, because man creates God according to his own conception. As a mother conceives a child, God is conceived by my mind. Give six copies of any book to six pupils to read. When they discuss what they have read, it will appear that they did not read the same sentences. It is not the same ideas that appeal to all alike. What you read is again your own projection. Have you seen a lizard catching flies, sticking the tongue out? Every time I read any scripture - Gita, Quran, Bible, Buddha's writings - it is always my projection. I read or rather, 'I' reads it. I stick my tongue out to catch the particular little fly I desire. I am not interested in anything else.

This question that was asked was very good: does man create God? Instead of 'creating' God, why not try to 'understand' Him? In Algebra, we talk of XYZ and in language of ABC. The three letters GOD stand for God. If instead of interrogation mark, you put a full stop after the question 'What is God?', this gives you a fantastic sentence: 'What is God'. What is God. If you keep your mind, heart, intellect, open all the time and keep on enquiring 'what is God?', then perhaps you have understood something of God. Perhaps merely playing with these three words, may give you the meaning 'What is God.' Do not ask me - find out yourself.

Also concerning man, the rational 'flesh - blood - bones', start looking and asking: what is this thing standing here? Thirty years ago, it was not called 'Swami'; forty years ago it was not a man; fifty years ago it did not even exist. Even now, what is it? He calls it 'rational', but whether I am rational or not, we are not sure. If it is so, you must be able to demonstrate it. You can only see flesh and bones. What is

this flesh? Tomatoes, rice, sandwich, curry ... What is man then? Trace this to its roots. Strip the man of all components.

What remains is God. So when you said 'God man', you were right and 'XYZ = ABC' is also right - provided you know neither of these quantities, and provided you have not come to any fixed conclusion about either 'entity'.

This eternal spirit of enquiry is God. 'Is'. Since It alone 'Is', it creates man on the one hand and lizards, mosquitoes, etc., on the other hand. The eternal Spirit of enquiry, which is Truth, alone can be said to exist. This is what 'Is'. This is what is meant when we talk of God as omnipresent. We use this word with the greatest facility. It can however only mean one thing: that God alone is. Neither God creates man nor man creates God. When That alone exists, there is no 'creation'. 'That' is what we 'are'. In this understanding, keeping ourselves open, is Wisdom. If you develop this understanding, you may be open to the word of God. But as long as man 'creates' God, he projects his own image of God - it is as if a nothing creates something.

The eye of the cyclone starts moving with the wind in cyclic motion. When we describe this, using words, more confusion comes. Does the 'eye' of the cyclone mean 'I' am the cyclone, or 'I' is the cyclone? Is cyclone like Swami coming to talk to us? It does come, but not in the same sense. Although it certainly comes and 'talks' to us. And how. But does cyclone exist in fact? No. What is cyclone? A gust of wind. Why call it cyclone? Because XYZ called it so - and I repeat it. Our authority is a dictionary, or someone sitting in the meteorology department. Can you however give to the cyclone any material object as you can hand to me? It is nothing but empty space, an absence of air surrounded by winds, gusts - and before it hits me, I run inside to hide from it, even if it has a sweet name. It is and yet, is not. It seems to have an identity to which people give names - and yet it is not. What you label 'man' is a non-entity - yet it too can move something around.

If you cut up my body, you will not be able to see the 'I'. If you cut my heart to pieces, you will find nothing there but flesh and blood. Yet this nothingness is surrounded by sound and fury, like a cyclone, and assumes for itself an identity: 'I am Swami Venkatesananda'. This zero assumes 'I' and because it is so stupid, it can cause a lot of havoc like cyclones, like the 'eye' of the cyclone.

Nothing ... yet, when you look in a mirror, you see an image. Is it real or not real? You say it is real? All right. Here is an expensive watch which I want to exchange for your image. Can you pass on your image to me - not a photo, nor a statue, but your image? No. What you cannot give me is not real. If I look into the mirror, I cannot see your image. Assuming the boy takes the mirror home to see his girlfriend's image, when he looks at it, he does not see her reflection, but his. The wind is real, everyone can feel it. But only you can see that image. So, is it really there? Without jumping to conclusions, without preconceived ideas, look into the mirror and ask yourself: is that image real or not? It is real because I see it. But it is not real, because it is not material and cannot be handled; also because it has

no separate existence at all. It depends entirely on my seeing it. The moment I go away, it is no longer there. Even when we all go away, the air is in this room, the wind is still here; but the boy who took the mirror home had no image of his girlfriend in it after she had gone away. One cannot say it is there, it is real. Nor can one say it is false. This is what the Bible means by 'God made man in His image'.

No assertion is possible, no declaration, no answer, no conclusion. If you thus keep your mind, heart, brain - every braincell - perpetually open, then one day you will perhaps agree with our friend that 'God is man'. An atheist is not one who does not believe, but one who denies God. If I did not believe in the existence of God, I would not talk about it. Poor atheist. He is terribly worried that God may exist. He claims not to believe in God, but has a constant anxiety: 'Suppose God is there?'

The theist who affirms God's existence is also not basically happy, because none with a closed mind, no one who states dogmatically 'I know' can be really happy. He runs around in circles, getting nowhere. But you and I, who are honestly confessing to ourselves that we do not know what God is, what I am, what 'I' is, must keep our ears, mind heart and mind open and keep enquiring. And in perpetual enquiry there is great joy. There is greater joy in courtship than in wedding. Once the courtship is over, the quarrels start. In religious life, the seeking is more important than the getting. God is unseen because, once we get Him, we would chew Him up - we want this and that - and we would keep on asking Him for it. In this courtship of perpetual enquiry is wisdom and great joy.

On Judging*Trinity College, Port Louis*

Pupil: What is beauty?

Swami: What is beauty? What is strength? What is goodness? As you list these, you also ask about the opposites: What is ugliness? What is weakness? What is evil? If you say that one should ask oneself, I will reply: 'Whom should you ask?'

It is the mass of conditioning that is in us that is asking and judging. If you understand this, you are either a holy man or a madman. Let us try and see what these questions imply.

When I was a young man, I was taken - as is the custom in India - to have a ceremonial look at a girl someone had suggested as a future bride for me. On such occasions, the girl comes before the man bedecked with jewelry and in fine silks. But you cannot hide an ugly figure. In fact, this girl was so ugly that there was no question of marrying her - even my family did not approve. Some years later, I met a most charming, handsome, well-educated man, in every way my superior, who had married her. His eyes found beauty where I had seen only ugliness. This is applicable to the whole list of 'what is?' What is valid for one person, is not for another. What is sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander. When you look at someone and say she is beautiful, when you look at some action and find it is good, how do you arrive at such judgement? You decide whether it is good or not before you take the action. Personal satisfaction from it may or may not come later. What is the criterion on which you base your judgement?

Pupil: Taste.

Swami: Yes, in the case of sweetness, which can in fact be tasted, this is clear. But in relation to beauty and goodness, how does taste come in? He loves a certain cake and will walk miles to obtain it, yet to me it is death. What is my aversion due to? Has this taste been formed, or is one born with it? When in 1961 I saw for the first time an African, the unexpected sight startled me. After I had become accustomed to them, I found that certain facial features that had surprised me at first, now seemed charming. European children playing with African children do not react to them as they will when adult if taste is inborn, inherent and natural, it must be found in the very young child already. Is the child thrilled by the filmstar's face and does it turn from what you call an 'ugly' person? Does the child know the difference between 'beauty' and 'ugliness', 'good' and 'evil'? It probably knows the difference between 'sweet' and 'not sweet' things. At two or so, it has already acquired a taste due to what appears the foremost job we seem born to: eating.

Tastes differ: to see anyone hook a fish is horrible to me, whereas a young boy,

even from a Brahmin family, may have his mouth water as he catches what will be his curry for the next day. Ultimately all these distinctions and judgements are a matter of conditioning, acquired as we grow up. Jesus is supposed to have said: 'Let the little children come to me. Of such as these is the Kingdom of Heaven made.' You must be like little children to be allowed admission to heaven. When you get there, please tell me about it. The moment you see who is the judge within, who is it that says 'he is good', 'she is beautiful' etc, you become deconditioned. We have all been conditioned to think in a certain manner, eat in a special way, do things the way we have been brought up. I still have to pinch my ears on entering a church so as to remind myself not to leave my sandals by the door. For me to enter a place of prayer with shoes on is not right, since I am conditioned in this manner. When I see priests and monks eat fish, whether they be Christians or Hindus - some Hindu Swamis do eat fish, though this is very rare - I say: 'And he is supposed to be a holy man.' We are living from morning till night for 365 days a year in a world of conditioning, which includes my father, my grandfather, the society, the country I live in and so on. All my judgements are based on conditioning. For me for instance, because you look like my younger brother who was naughty, you appear potentially naughty too. Can this thing called 'I', the soul, be completely deconditioned?

If there is a baby where you live, less than six months old and therefore not yet taught anything, please try this experiment: let any object, say a wristwatch, dangle in front of its face. The child will be seen to follow it with its eyes. You and I may be confused - the baby never. Because, to be confused, one must have been conditioned. Confusion results from the disturbance of this conditioning. The mind has registered 'no shoes in a place of worship', and when one sees people enter it with shoes on, one wonders 'is this not a place of worship?' Yet you try and go in to worship. The baby who has not yet been conditioned is not confused, but does real concentration: with its entire being it wonders. We, when sitting with closed eyes supposedly meditating, what do we really do? We dream. Wonderment is a state of unconditioned being. In that state of total unconditioning, there is absolutely no idea of 'good' or 'bad', no idea of 'beautiful' or 'ugly', 'success' or 'failure'. Just one great sense of wonderment. If you look at this baby, forget yourself completely. Look into its eyes and try to get into its brain to see what it thinks. Since early on, a baby gets slightly conditioned, so that anything that is felt to threaten its life or security may make it cry. All life is conditioned to the abhorrence of death, and any living thing wants to flee from that which seems to threaten its survival. So, if you come too close to even a very young baby, it may develop some fear. Because, from the moment of birth, we are conditioned to 'living-ness'. This animal instinct of preservation is already active in the new-born baby. But it has not yet learned the conditioning we acquire as we grow up. If we uncondition ourselves like the newborn baby, we too can look at everything in wonder. That leads us to two beautiful and very important statements. In the Upanishads it is said: 'Only when you reach the unconditioned state can you have real Joy and Bliss'. In any state of conditioned existence, you cannot have total satisfaction or happiness. There are supposed to be four Vedas, one of which is the Sama Veda. If you hear someone recite the Sama Veda, you

would come across a strange, long drawn out sound. Ancient sages had a glimpse of this unconditioned state and all they could do to communicate it, to express it, was to utter this sound. Perhaps this is your answer to 'what is beauty?' Not being conditioned at all is Beauty.

Pupil: What distinguishes swamis from other priests?

Swami: Why must you assume that there is a difference? In certain sects, priests are allowed to marry. If a swami marries, he is not a swami. What is the motive behind being a swami, a maulana, a priest? There is no basic difference between swamis, maulanas and some other kind of priests. One difference may be that some in all these groups are leading a truly religious life, some perhaps not. There are hypocrites, humbugs everywhere. There are brown, black, white and yellow sheep. Not all are alike.

The distinction between the priests is not according to the religion each professes. I like to wear wooden sandals. I have a choice between wearing these or leather shoes or going barefoot. I have only two feet. So I cannot at the same time do all these three things. It so happened I became a swami. Why did I not become a maulana? Not because there is any fundamental difference between his profession and mine, not because mine is superior to his. Although his polished shoes are wonderful, I shall carry on with my wooden sandals. When does someone dedicate himself to the religious life? When he finds all other life not interesting, not worth living.

On Concentration*Aleemiah College, Phoenix*

Swami: Do you know why you are here?

Pupil: Yes - to study.

Another Pupil: To know something more.

Swami: But why are you here just now?

pupil: To listen to Swami.

Swami: Why?

Pupil: To know more about Yoga. To learn something that we do not know.

Swami: All of you said you have come to listen. If you want to listen, you must be silent. If you talk, you cannot think, listen. The mind must be quiet - with eyes and ears open, and mouth tightly shut. If you are thus alert, observant, you note many things - e.g, the sugarcane moving all the time. If we did that, we would collapse. I want to know why, how this sugarcane does what it does. I have to feel as if I am one with that sugarcane - only then can I know.

You are all students, here to study, to learn - not how to brush your teeth - but to acquire knowledge you have not yet got. Suppose something is written on the board. I look here, look there, scratch - then I cannot learn. Because I am not concentrating. To take in properly one must concentrate. What is concentration? Yoga is concentration.

Concentration means applying your mind to one thing. If while reading French grammar, you are not thinking of cinema, etc - you are concentrating. If you imagine a film show while you are in class, you will get a 'full' mark - namely 'o'. And when you go to see the film, you will remember your bad mark and will be upset, and therefore neither in the cinema nor at class are you concentrating.

Concentration means keeping your mind on what you are doing, and not allowing it to think of anything else. If you drink a glass of water, then you drink a glass of water - and do not think of anything else. Can you, while you are listening to me, so concentrate the mind, that here and now you are not thinking of home, nor of the girl in front, and just think about what I am saying - about what we are discussing?

Concentrate now only on the thought of how to concentrate the mind. How to do that? Why is he looking here and there? Why is he or she not able to concentrate?

Someone says, 'Because the mind is elsewhere.' Ah. Is that why she closed the window - afraid the mind might fly out. No. The mind cannot 'go' elsewhere. The mind is all the time with you. If the mind really left the book and went away, you would be dead. But why, while sitting here, do I allow my mind to think of something else? You see with the eyes.

With what do you think? You think with the brain. When you are asleep or unconscious, or dead, then you do not think. Now, does the brain think or not? If it is really the brain that thinks, it should continue to do so when I am dead. The brain thinks when I am alive, when I am awake. What happens in my brain that makes my brain able to think?

Circulation brings nourishment for the brain cells. If I do not give enough food to the brain cells, they will not work. Then there is no concentration. If you are sitting here, with your mind elsewhere, you are not alert, but as good as asleep - you are dreaming. When I sit here and dream, my mind is absent - I am not concentrating. When one dreams with eyes wide open it means one's brain, one's circulation is weak

Yoga teaches you how to nourish the brain, how to keep the circulation healthy. When you are able to concentrate, you will learn better. Intense concentration lifts you to another thoughtless plane. When the mind is absorbed in the object of concentration, meditation comes.

Question: What is transmigration of the soul?

Answer: If you believe there is a soul in this body, as you believe there is a mind, you look deeper within to see what the soul, what the mind is. If you do not believe, you are welcome - no compulsion here. But consider: if I lose both arms and legs, am I still called Swami Venkatesananda - or will I be called 'Swam'? Will the 'I' of 'Swami' be cut out? No, I am something separate from my body. If you cut off my legs, my arms, my stomach, and remove my lungs - so long as I am still alive, the 'I' is there. I will still be fully 'Swami'. Just as I have a house, or an Ashram, relatives, a motorcar, I have these arms, legs, organs - I have this body.

So what is 'I' - which seems apart from all that? I go deeper and deeper, trying to discover if I have a soul, a Jiva, 'XYZ' - the name you give, it does not matter. It is something subtle. 'I' is something different from this mind. Then I ask this simple question: what happens to that 'I' at the point of death? Do 'I' die - or does the body die? When my legs are cut and thrown away, am 'I' cut? Swami Venkatesananda continues to be Swami Venkatesananda, even when the legs are lost. I am not cut - I am distinct from that body. If the body dies, it is not I that dies.

From this a theory was evolved: our hair, nose, body are formed from the nourishment taken. Yet, when I eat food, the hair that grows is grey - while he, eating the same things, gets black hair. A baby boy and a baby girl take in the

same bread, rice, vegetables - yet he grows as a boy, she as a girl. We manufacture different bodies from the same food. I was born, came into the world, into a body, just as in a few minutes I will leave this room and go elsewhere. In the same way it is thought that I, my soul, manufactures another body - ready for moving into when the present abode has to be left. Each one must think about this and reach his own conclusion. The soul can be said to drive, control the body, or vice versa. As in the case of a car, you can say you drive the car - but the car also drives you. Yet I am free to stop the car. The car is not free to stop me. Similarly, real control is with the soul.

The Swami asked about life and the children answered

by Cathy Arnone

River Vale

An unusual sight awaited anyone who happened to wander behind the Public Library yesterday afternoon.

There, seated on the grass in the shade of a huge oak tree was a dark-skinned man in an orange-coloured tunic. Around Him were about 60 people of assorted sizes, mostly small, who listened, laughed, and spoke in response to his clear, deep voice.

Indian philosopher Swami Venkatesananda, the Laughing Swami, visited with the children for about an hour. The topic - life and love and pride - were complex. But the words were simple.

'That dog is making a lot of noise, and I make a lot of noise,' said the Swami as a dog barked in a nearby yard. 'What is the difference between humans and animals?'

'We speak English and he speaks a different language,' piped a little girl in pigtails.

'We have a mind,' said another.

'Why do we have a mind?', asked the Swami.

'So we can love and care for each other,' said a freckle faced blonde.

'The little girl has a great mind,' said the Swami, spreading His arms towards the girl as if to present her to the group. 'She has said it all.'

Through the same question and answer technique, the Swami drew the children to make other observations:

That animals kill one another only for food or survival.

That humans, driven by hate, do hurt and kill each other.

That we are all brothers and sisters, made by the same creator called God.

As one little girl put it, 'If God did not make us, who did?'

That children do not have the fault of pride that causes hate.

'Children will insult each other and then make up the same day,' said the Swami.

'Adults' pride can carry on the resentment for years,' he said, as several parents nodded their heads in agreement.

'How can we become more like you?', the Swami asked the children.

'You can try to remember how you were when you were small,' offered the strawberry blonde.

'Some people can, and I guess, some people cannot.'

Why Pride?

As the discussion broke up, a young couple approached the Swami.

' But why the pride?' asked the man. 'We have been trying to answer that question all our lives.'

I do not know,' said the Swami with a serious shrug, ' Maybe it is pride that keeps us from finding the answer.'