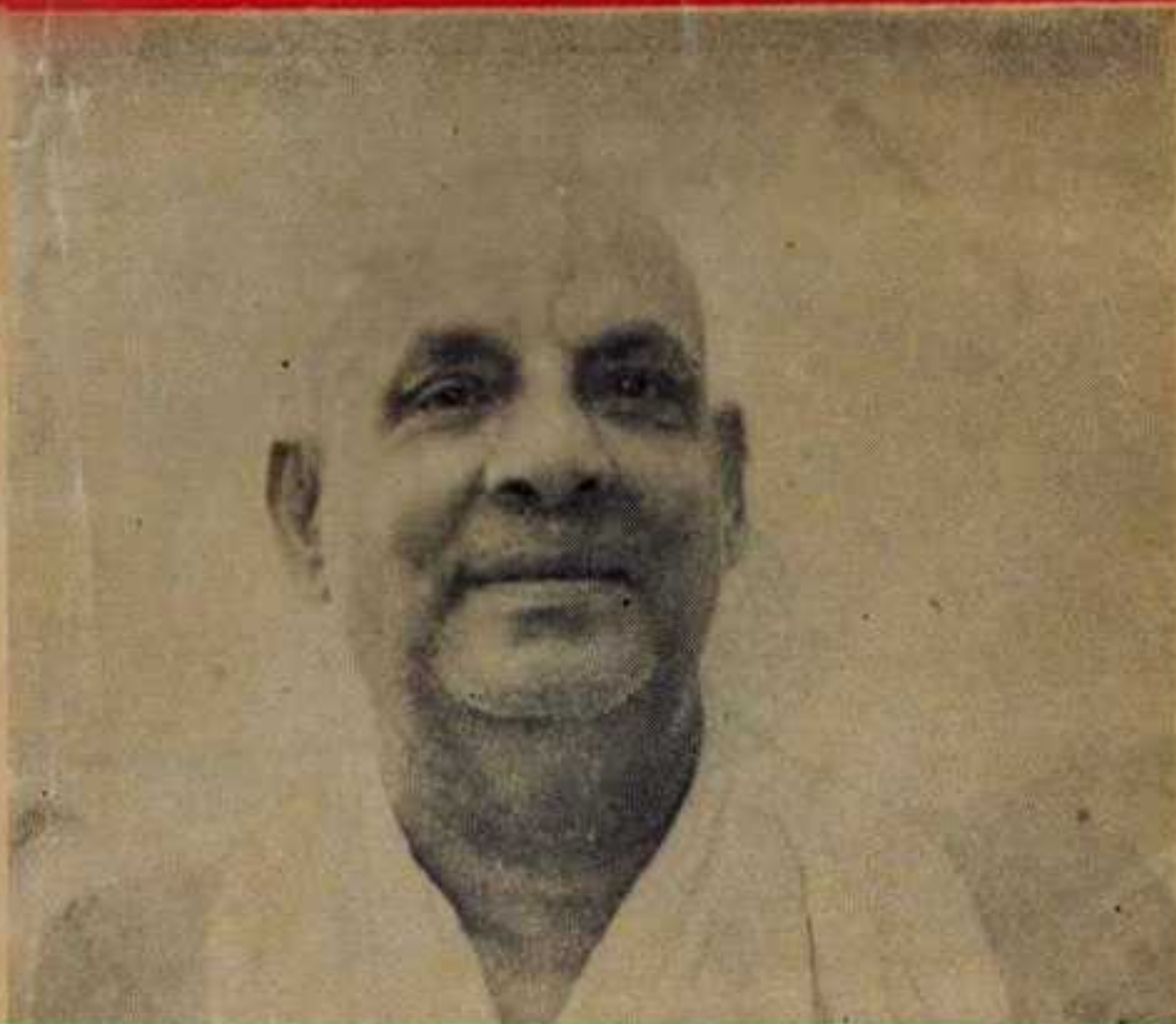


SIVANANDA YOGA



A Series of Talks by

SWAMI VENKATESANANDA

To the Students of the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy

Sivananda Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda

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Sivananda Yoga

In January 1980, Swami Venkatesananda was asked by the Dean of the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy, HH. Sri Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, to share with the students of the Academy His knowledge of the philosophy and teachings of Gurudev Swami Sivananda, the great sage-founder of the Academy and the Divine Life Society.

From His experience of living in close contact with Sri Swami Sivananda for 17 years, from the depth of His wisdom, and with his usual clarity and humour, Swami Venkatesananda made Swami Sivananda come alive, so that we who were privileged to listen, felt that Swami Sivananda Himself was present in our midst.

The talks continued for three weeks. This book is the fruit of these talks. Swami Venkatesananda continued the theme in several talks during the Ashram's Satsangas. Some of these talks have also been included in this book.

Madhavanandaji Maharaj, to share with the students of the Academy His knowledge of the philosophy and teachings of Gurudev

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Forewords

I consider it a unique privilege to write a short foreword to this compiled volume of lectures entitled "Sivananda Yoga" by Swami Venkatesananda, a resplendent star amongst the disciples of Gurudev Sivananda. His contributions have been manifold and of significant rare quality, a proof of His magnificent personality. This chosen disciple of Gurudev had the exclusive privilege of sitting at the Master's feet and watching every word and action of the great saint, Who was an ideal manifestation of Divine Glory. Gurudev has given a practical demonstration of achieving Divine perfection in our day-to-day life at every step, in spite of the dominant mood of wistful, reluctant scepticism of modern ages. Swami Venkatesananda could not have done a better service to mankind; He has given us a 'peep' into the life and activities of the great saint Swami Sivananda, Who (it is incredible to believe) trod seventeen years ago the very earth we tread today. Swami Venkatesananda, in his usual inimitable way, has opened for us, through these lectures, the portals of the Divine Kingdom ruled by Gurudev. Through this spiritual son of Gurudev, we can have the inspiration and bliss of Divine grace gushing from this spiritual fountain of Gurudev. The rays of that luminous sun, transmitted through this chosen disciple, will illuminate the dark alleys in our heart, revealing to us the Supreme Love of this God-man and his unique and profound philosophy of blending Karma, Jnana and Bhakti in our day-to-day activities of life.

All glory to the author of this work, for holding aloft the banner of Divine Life gifted to him by Gurudev.

Let us look forward to many more such 'jewels' from him - the very crest-jewel of Gurudev Sivananda's divine mission.

April 1980 - Dr. D. Kutty

My humble homage and reverential adorations to the sacred and loving memory of our esteemed and beloved Gurubhai (brother-in-the Master) Sri Swami Venkatesanandaji who left us this day, one year ago on 2nd December, 1982.

His was a glorious goingforth from the confines of a limited human consciousness into the ever effulgent realm of Infinite Divine Consciousness. He departed simply and serenely when He decided that his duty had been done. Only those close and dear ones who were near His immediate bed-side until the very last breath He took on earth, only they know the full sanctity, the solemnity, the poignancy and at the same time the indescribable grandeur of His last moments, and of His departure from the physical body. The book Sivananda Yoga, edited by His devoted disciple mother Swami Lakshmi Ananda, is a tribute to the late revered Swami Venkatesanandaji upon the first holy Anniversary of His Mahasamadhi. I was greatly moved and touched when mother Lakshmi approached me, and hesitatingly asked me whether I would like to give a brief

Foreword to this memorial publication. Her hesitation was on account of due deference to the state of physical weakness I was in after a recent acute illness. But on my part, far from regarding this as a task put before me, I consider it an honour and a privilege to have been asked to contribute these few lines to this present volume that constitute a tribute to one whom I hold in highest regard, reverence and love. Though our varying fields of work and activity took us far apart in physical distance, yet there has always been an unseen inner bond of spiritual fellowship, friendship and mutual love and esteem between Swami Venkatesanandaji, and this servant of the holy Master Sri Swami Sivananda. Late Swamiji's own physical earthly mother (also known as mother Lakshmi!) always regarded us as two brothers, referring to Swami Venkatesananda as Lakshmana, and referring to the undersigned as Rama. For, that is what she felt to be the relationship between us both. I deem it my good fortune to give this Foreword to Sivananda Yoga, which gives an intimate and unique glimpse into Swami Venkatesanandaji's personal experiences and observations about the glorious Master, as He lived and moved before us in the majestic simplicity of His saintly day-to-day living in his holy Ganga bank Ashram sanctified by His purifying presence. This is indeed a befitting tribute to the holy Master, containing as it does, Swami Venkatesananda's spontaneous heart's outpourings about the one who was the Light of His life, One Whom He adored and considered His visible God upon earth. May this book inspire numerous seekers and Sadhakas upon the path of spiritual evolution and God-realisation. May it also serve to keep the memory of our departed brother ever bright in our heart. I cherish this book. For, it pays tribute to the memory of one whom I love. I thank Sri Lakshmi. I salute the sublime memory of one of the foremost amongst our brotherhood, one whose whole-souled and unsparing dedicated labours in his Gurudev's Mission are unparalleled. May this example inspire us to dedicate ourselves likewise.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Om Namo Bhagavate Sivanandaya!

Peace!

Sivananda Ashram, Friday, 2nd December, 1983.

At Gurudev's Feet,
Swami Chidananda

1. Theory and Practice

The Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy (originally called a University) was Swami Sivananda's brain child. When He gave expression to this idea, He had a certain vision which was characteristic of Him - that of a synthesis of theory and practice.

In this particular area of the Himalayas, you'll find many enlightened souls (some perpetually silent, others engaging themselves in their own practices) without the urge - and sometimes the ability - to communicate with others. Perhaps, if you go and live with them, through what is known as Shaktipath, you might also reach enlightenment - but it is also possible that you might not.

For the vast majority of people, some form of theoretical introduction is vital before they are even induced to take up the practice of Yoga. The usual gradation in Yoga is that first comes Karma-yoga, then Bhakti - yoga, then Raja-yoga and then Jnanayoga. There was a great Acharya called Ramanuja. It was his theory that Bhakti comes after Jnana, for how can you love something which you don't know? Real Bhakti (or Parabhakti or devotion) arises after you have some knowledge of the person or the principle. Thousands of people may be potential Yogis and may want to practise Yoga. If they are given a glimpse of the theory, they would probably enter the path, but they are neglected by these cave-dwellers, who have reached the goal without an intellectual understanding of the theory.

Krishna suggests this in the Bhagavad-Gita:

chaturvidha bhajante mam janah sukrtino 'rjuna arto jijnasur-artharathi jnani cha
bharatarshabha (VII. 16)

Four kinds of virtuous men worship Me, O Arjuna, and they are the distressed, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the wise, O lord of the Bharatas.

All sorts of people seek to enter the spiritual path. Among them are the Jijnasus, the people who want to know. If they are told that they must become like those silent Yogis, either they are completely turned off, waste their time, or imagine that they have become like the masters, which is even more dangerous. Merely sitting erect and unmoving doesn't make you an enlightened person. Gurudev Himself used to make fun of these people, comparing them to stones in the Ganga. The stones also sit there for thousands of years, unmoving. Are they also enlightened?

Two incidents come to mind. Way back in 1946, when the Ganga bank had not been developed (or spoiled, it depends upon your point of view) there were no steps. There was a longish veranda on the post office complex; that was our kitchen, dining hall, Satsang place, office, and everything in those days. Gurudev used to conduct a morning meditation class there from 4.15 to about 6.00. Right on the Ganga bank, a howling wind blows early in the morning, and in spite of it He used to come out of His room exactly at 4.00, wearing an enormous overcoat

and a shawl tied as a turban. It was an exciting, inspiring sight, just to look at this Jivanmukta walking out of His little Kutir. He was regular and punctual in attending the meditation class. A visitor from Andhra Pradesh was not keen on attending this class, but used to sit up poker-stiff on a huge rock at 4.00 a.m. One day, after the meditation class, Gurudev was seated on one of those cement benches, and we entered into some discussion for about half an hour. In the meantime, that gentleman had finished his meditation and entered through the farther door. Gurudev looked at him with one eye closed. (He usually closed one eye whenever He wanted to say something very interesting!) For a couple of minutes, Gurudev questioned him, and he revealed that he meditated every day from 4 to 7. Gurudev appeared to admire him. But suddenly the whole scene changed. He roared: "Look at him! Sleepy and drowsy. (To him) What are you doing? Sitting and sleeping on the stone? Do you know what meditation means? What Samadhi means? To touch the infinite. Do you know what power, what energy you'll have when you touch the infinite like that? You say you have been enjoying deep meditation and Samadhi for three hours. Yet, when you come out you are sleepy, drowsy. Go and wash your face." In those days there was no water supply here. We used to form a line of water carriers from the Ganga to the downstairs kitchen water tank. Gurudev said to this man, "Join them, fill up the tank, then you will know what Samadhi means." So, Samadhi is not merely sitting. If that is Samadhi, then all the stones on the Ganga bank have attained Samadhi!

The second incident happened to me. One day in 1948, I went down to the Ganga several times at three-hour intervals. I saw an almost naked ascetic seated under a tree with half-closed eyes. I thought he was a very great Yogi who could meditate for over ten hours at a stretch. One night there was some commotion in the temple where he was staying as a guest. The next day he had left. On enquiry, the temple priest said to me that he was not a real Sadhu (holy man), but a bad character, and that his ability to sit unmoving was the result of some drug!

When you see someone sit still for a long time, and you try to imitate him and can't do it, either you give up the whole thing, you pretend that you have also attained this state, or find a short cut to it. Someone comes along and says, "You're wasting your time. Take one sniff of this drug, and then you'll enter into real Samadhi." Then you begin to think that maybe the Guru also does the same thing. It leads to all sorts of perversions. So, when you imitate these enlightened cave-dwellers, you may become like them, but you may not. You may slip into Tamas, which is very easy. So one needs some other knowledge.

It is possible for the Mouni (silent) Jivanmukta to transmit His Shakti to an Adhikari (qualified or mature seeker). Adhikara is the most important thing. A student who is internally ripe (like Sukadeva), only needs a little bit of concentration, and he has knowledge of the Reality. But what happens to the thousands of people who are not so evolved, who still need some more theoretical help? Observing this need, Gurudev said that the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy should impart knowledge of both theory and practice.

A Mouni Jivanmukta may not have much theoretical background. If you go down to Benares or other such places, you will find people who can lecture, but in their own lives they are nowhere near their own ideal. Gurudev did not have any special admiration for them beyond the respect that he gave everybody.

The following incident illustrates this. The present post office was our office then. Three of us used to sit in the office with Gurudev. In those days the work was not so heavy, so there was plenty of leisure, and Gurudev had a lot of time for us. One day, early in the morning, a doctor of philosophy entered the office. Gurudev welcomed him. He sat down and said, "Swamiji, I have a question. Please tell me what the difference is between Nirvikalpa Samadhi and Savikalpa Samadhi." That was an opportunity for us to learn - we would not dare to ask such a question for ourselves - so we all stopped working and listened. It's a million dollar question! Gurudev put His glasses up, and looked at him. "Have you had your breakfast?", He asked him. "Would you have some tea or coffee?" He had to give an answer. He said, "Tea, Swamiji." Now came tea, fruits and books. The doctor enjoyed his tea and some idli. And then came his wife. She stepped into the office, gave one stern look, and said. "How long have I been waiting there for you! Come, let us go." And he quietly got up, bowed down to Swamiji, and said, "I'm leaving." Once he had gone, Swamiji laughed and laughed. It was a beautiful laugh. "He wants to know about Savikalpa Samadhi. The wife gives one look and he goes." This is the type of person you find elsewhere - pandits who have enormous knowledge, who could keep you enthralled for hours discoursing on half a verse of the Bhagavad-Gita. Fantastic. Gurudev loved them, admired their intellect, but that's all!

There was another very amusing incident. During Gurudev's All-India Tour, a few learned scholars met Him in Varanasi. As He was walking past, greeting them, one of them asked a question in Sanskrit. Gurudev turned to him and asked, "Comment ca va, comment vous appelez vous?", (two sentences in French he had learnt). The pandit just stared with dropped jaw. He did not understand the reply. (Moral: The purpose of language is communication, and not showing off.)

So, you must communicate, and you must also learn how to communicate. Theory and practice must go hand in hand. One is not the enemy of the other, but the friend, and one without the other is useless. Apart from the dangers I mentioned earlier, there is another. Gurudev Himself told us that, when He came to Rishikesh, all that He wanted was to sit under a tree, to sing God's names, to do Japa - and that's all. He was fond of Kirtan. There was not a single function which commenced without Sankirtana. Every occasion demanded the singing of God's Names. If somebody was sick, dying, dead, born or married, for laying a foundation-stone, or pulling a building down, He sang Hare Rama. In one of His early letters to His senior-most disciple, Swami Paramanandaji, He had even said that we should transform the whole of India through Sankirtan alone. In accordance with that ideal, when He was still living in Swargashram, He used to

preside over and participate in Sankirtan conferences. Even before the Divine Life Society was started, He had established several groups of Sankirtanists for organising and holding Sankirtan conferences. But very soon He discovered that it was degenerating into some kind of emotionalism - people jumping and dancing, and calling it ecstasy. Ecstasy can be reached through Sankirtan, no doubt, but not all can do that. Very soon there was a power struggle, so within a year or two He changed His mind. He said, "Sankirtan alone is no good. It leads to emotionalism. There must be some Jnana, some understanding. Kirtan is singing God's name, not conducting a musical competition. It is the Bhavana that is important, and one must learn to recognise and understand that Bhavana." As years went by, He evolved a system of synthesis. Practice is extremely important, but not without understanding.

When you gain this theoretical understanding it must at the same time help you and help others. Learn whatever you can here, go out and share it, not feeling that you know everything, but to the extent that you have gained this theoretical understanding and practical knowledge, impart it, offer it at the feet of the omnipresent God in worship. Gurudev used to insist upon that. Whatever you have, share - including knowledge of Yoga and Vedanta. That way your shyness is removed, and your own ideas and knowledge become clearer. Otherwise you are your only and greatest admirer! You are utterly convinced that you are very learned and know everything, and as long as you don't open your mouth at all, there is nobody to challenge that conviction. But when you open your mouth, and some people laugh, you realise you are not all that clever! So there is an incentive to learn more.

Gurudev started this Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy to train us in the theory and practice of Yoga Vedanta - not only theory, not only practice, but both these combined - in order that this knowledge could be broadcast far and wide; in order that they who come to you out of curiosity, might in course of time become Jnanis, because they realise what they are seeking, and they also know the path and the goal.

2. Who Is A Guru?

He who imparts the theory concerning self-knowledge and guides us in our practice, is not a Guru, but an 'Acharya', a teacher. From this teacher you learn about self-knowledge. It is not self-knowledge, but a peripheral knowledge, which may be very necessary, as otherwise we might be easily misled.

Just as the description is not self-knowledge, a technique is also not self-knowledge, nor does it lead to Atma-jnana; but it is necessary. In the Yoga Vasistha you have a fantastic double negative statement concerning this. Vasishtha says that a teacher does not give you Atma-jnana, but you cannot attain Atma-jnana without a teacher. As we go on, this will become clear. The Acharya is the person from whom we gain an understanding of the theory, the peripheral knowledge or a description about (not of) self-knowledge, self-realisation or Atma-jnana. He guides us in our practice, and may even prescribe a practice for us, and if we are responsive to him, he removes the obstacles that we may encounter on the path. He is not exactly a teacher in the modern sense of the word. Here the word 'teacher' refers to some kind of a person who is aloof, who walks into the class, spits out what he has not been able to digest, and walks out. That is what you see in schools and colleges nowadays. In the Gurukula system, where the students lived with the teacher, there was the transmission of theory and guidance in practice without aloofness. There was a certain amount of physical and psychological intimacy, and a certain openness between the teacher and the taught. This is not to be confused with the modern definition of a teacher in the schools and colleges of today, where there is no psychological rapport at all.

This word 'Acharya' to me nearly sounds like the word 'Achara'. Acharya means teacher, Achara means your conduct, your lifestyle. So an Acharya is involved in the pupil's Achara, external behaviour. For instance, he might emphasise punctuality, so that you come at the stroke of nine. He might emphasise that you should not look through the window, or look here and there. There can be training in behaviour, but no Acharya can compel your attention, no Acharya can impose understanding upon you. So, there must be a certain psychological rapport. Only then is there a guidance or governance of behaviour. If you are attentive, he transmits to you information about self-knowledge, and guides you in your practice. That is the only responsibility of the Acharya. So, an Acharya is more a teacher than anything else.

Apart from the word 'student' there is another word, 'pupil'. A pupil is not only the person sitting in front of the teacher trying to learn something from him, but the word 'pupil' also means the diaphragm which closes and opens in your eyes. When you go in the sunlight, the pupils close, and when you are in darkness, they open. That is what happens in the relationship between the teacher and the pupils. If the teacher is brilliant, they close up, they can't take the light anymore. If the teacher is interesting, funny, dark, or stupid, they open up wide - with the result that it seems to be far easier to learn rubbish than to learn something

worthwhile. If someone sits there, and discusses a hundred ways of robbing a bank, it is interesting, there is not a dull moment, the pupil is keenly interested in it. But if someone sits there, and discusses Upanishadic wisdom, not only the pupils, but the eyelids close.

If there is psychological rapport, and if the Acharya is able to govern the pupil's behaviour, then it is possible for some transmission to take place. Psychological rapport is possible only if both the teacher and the taught are on the same wavelength - otherwise you go to sleep. Physical behaviour can be tailored, but the teacher has no access to your mind, leave alone to your heart. In a strange way, Gurudev Swami Sivananda understood this. He understood the psychology of the masses, the problems of young seekers - people who are used to the theatre, to films and an exciting, fast life. If they are put in a Vedanta class, they would probably go to sleep. So, He invented interesting methods of transmission. A dialogue from the Upanishads was enacted here, and people who otherwise fall asleep when exposed to the ideas of the Upanishads, sat up and looked and listened, and something got through. This was Swami Sivananda's wonderful method - and later He invented the Yoga museum - audiovisual instruction where you participate and try to understand.

Still we are at the stage of the Acharya and the pupil. There is mere transmission of information between the two. It is called 'information', because it creates a form in you - information. Gradually, drop by drop, these bits and pieces fall into you, and take form. If you are quite satisfied with the form, you are lost, because you build an image with this information, and treat that image as the truth, as self-realisation. In your study of the Isavasya Upanishad, you must have come across a puzzling Mantra: "They who are devoted to ignorance go to hell. They who are devoted to knowledge go to a greater hell." How is that? If you are devoted to the image that has been formed in you when the theory was imparted, you are stuck forever, there is no way out of it. You have devotedly and devoutly built it up, and the whole being resists any change in that image, so you are lost. But once this image is formed, if you realise that it is only information about Atma-jnana - it is not Atma-jnana itself, but merely a description, then it is possible that you are inspired to go further. The 'Jijnasu' stage is over, and you are creeping into the Jnani stage. Then someone else appears, and that is the Guru.

If you read the first chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita very carefully, you will see that Arjuna thinks he is the Guru. He boldly and arrogantly teaches Krishna what is right, what is wrong. When he discovered that Krishna refused to be his disciple (!) he collapsed, and as he collapsed, the words ascribed to him are very inspiring:

yacchreyah syannischitam bruhi tanme syshyas-te 'ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam (II. 7)

Arjuna said: Destroyed is my delusion, as I have gained my knowledge (memory) through Thy grace, O Krishna. I remain freed from doubts. I will act according to Thy word.

Tvam prapannam - "I have surrendered myself at your feet because I don't know the truth. I thought I knew, but looking at the way you are unimpressed by my teaching, I feel maybe I am wrong. So I surrender myself at your feet." sishyas-te- "I am your disciple." yacchreyah syannischitam bruhi tanme, - "Tell me what might lead me to Sreyas." This word 'Sreyas' is extremely difficult to translate. It has been taken to mean 'your ultimate good or spiritual good, enlightenment, liberation'. That is where Arjuna says: "I am your disciple." Krishna is still not the Guru. It is only in the eleventh chapter that Arjuna bursts out: "Oh! you are the Lord of the whole universe."

What is the state of the disciple when he has found the Guru - not the Acharya? It is beautifully described towards the end of the Bhagavad-Gita:

nashto mohah smrtir-labdha tvatprasadan maya 'chyuta sthito 'smi gatasandehah karishye vachanam tava. (XVIII. 73)

All these are vitally important. Nashto mohah - "my confusion, my delusion has gone." There was a confusion to begin with, but that has completely disappeared. If that happens you are an enlightened disciple, you have found the Guru. Smrtir-labdha - it is not merely gaining or regaining memory but ... Normally, you remember what others did to you, and you remember what happened to you so far, but you don't remember yourself. You don't know yourself, but you know everybody else; you don't know who you are, but you know the entire world! Even when you try to recall a past experience, all that you remember is what others did and what others said. The self is completely ignored in knowledge, as well as memory. So smrtir-labdha means: "Now I remember who I am." Tvatprasadanmaya'chyuta - "By your Grace," not by your instruction! The Acharya is gone. The Acharya merely put up a structure within, and the student became aware of that structure. The structure knocked down false notions and deluded ideas that were entertained before, and created the climate for enlightenment.

It is the Guru's Grace alone that brings about this enlightenment. No amount of theory, and no amount of knowledge can ever bring about enlightenment. If the cloth is dirty, you put it in a bucket of water with a lot of soap in it. Has the cloth been cleaned? You hope so. When you take that cloth out, it is full of soap. That's not clean - the cleaning happens afterwards. In order to get rid of the rubbish called worldly knowledge, you may need a spiritual instructor who gives you knowledge about the self, but in order to gain self-knowledge, none of these would do. It is only the Grace of the Guru that flows directly into your heart, without the interference of your mind, that can bring about this self-knowledge, Atma-jnana. Gatasandehah - "There is no doubt," the mind and the heart are free from doubt, and therefore whatever has to be done, is done without hesitation. That is what is called 'spontaneous action'. The shock of the vision of this cosmic form probably brought that about in the case of Arjuna, because a similar expression occurs even at the beginning of the eleventh chapter:

yat tvayo'ktam vachas tena moho 'yam vigato mama (XI. 1)

Arjuna said: By this word (explanation) of the highest secret concerning the Self which Thou hast spoken, for the sake of blessing me, my delusion is gone.

Who is a Guru?

gukaraschandhakarasha rukarastannirodhakah andhakaravinasitvad-gurur-ityabhidhiyate "

That light which removes the darkness of ignorance is the Guru."

He, in whose presence you gain this, is the Guru; or that is the Guru. That moment or that event where the scales of ignorance drop away, and this inner structure of theory (which has been put there by the instructions of the Acharya) begins to grow and is realised - there is the Guru.

When you go round India, you will meet dozens of Gurus who say: "I am your Guru". Gurudev never said that for one moment. Occasionally He used to say, "You are my disciple", or "He is my disciple"; and some of the older disciples here probably have one letter at least where Gurudev said: "I have accepted you as my beloved disciple, I shall serve you and guide you." But with all respect and adoration to Gurudev, I may tell you that it was meant more as an encouragement to the disciple, than as a statement of fact. When Swami Sivananda said: "I have accepted you as my beloved disciple", you felt that you had a claim over Swami Sivananda, you could write to Him more freely. That is what He wanted. The next sentence is: "I will serve you." You have never heard of a Guru serving a disciple, the disciple is supposed to serve the Guru! So, in that formula itself, He has cancelled this Guru business. He never regarded Himself as a Guru. It was for us, not for Him.

It is the disciple's experience that is the Guru, and the Guru need not know when that experience happened to you. You may say, "You are my Guru"; it is not for the Guru to say, "I am your Guru." I can go to the Guru and say, "I am your disciple" when I am prepared to do exactly what he tells me to do, and not till that stage is reached can I boldly say: "I am your disciple, you are my Guru."

Till then there is no Guru. It is very important to remember this, otherwise you can get into all sorts of muddles. Suddenly you go to somebody, and if he scratches your back and says: "Oh, I see a brilliant light around your face, and you are going to attain enlightenment in three months", you say: "Ah, you are my Guru!" If he asks you to bring a cup of milk from the kitchen you say: "Ach, what kind of Guru are you? You are no longer my Guru - it is finished." This is a travesty of truth.

Gurudev insisted (as does the Yoga Vasishtha) that you cannot attain enlightenment without the help of a Guru, and to Swamis who wanted to be Gurus he said, "Be careful, don't become a Guru." You should not become a Guru, but I must have a Guru. I need a Guru, but nobody is prepared to be my Guru! You see the tangle here? What must I do? Swamiji was emphatic there: "Be a disciple! From head to foot be a disciple! Then you will find a Guru."

Early in 1947, Swamiji was sitting in the office. A young man from South Africa who had stayed with us for about two or three months was leaving that day. He walked in, prostrated to Gurudev, and started crying. With supreme love and affection Gurudev looked at him. He said, "Swamiji, I have to go today, and in Africa where do we get a Guru like you?" Suddenly Swamiji's expression changed, and with a very beautiful, meaningful and mischievous smile He said: "Huh, you don't find a Guru in Africa?" By this time the man's grief had gone, his tears had dried up. He found the Master laughing and smiling. Swamiji then fixed His gaze on this young man and said, "Ohji, it is very easy to find a Guru, it is very difficult to find a disciple!" If you are a disciple naturally you'll find a Guru.

Disciple means discipline. What does the word 'discipline' mean? Not an army drill, but study. The Acharya gave you some information which produced a form within you; and now you wish to study this. The Acharya said that happiness is in you, that it is not in the object of pleasure - but that is not your experience. You have experienced pleasure from that object, and in its absence you are miserable. So what do you do? You are studying this inner structure, studying the workings of the mind, the arising of the self, the ego. But it is not clear, because you are full of impurities, dirt and filth. Therefore, in the course of the study of oneself, an extraordinary discipline arises. It is not discipline which is imposed upon you by others, it is not discipline which is goal oriented, but it is a discipline born of intense search. When this discipline manifests itself in your heart, you will naturally find your Guru. You go and stand in front of someone and ... that's it. You don't need to exchange a word.

Some of us came here in 1944, and found Swamiji and some others. He was radiating bliss, radiating peace, radiating joy. We looked around and saw that all the things that you and I consider vital to peace, to happiness, to prosperity, and all the rest of it, were absent here. There was absolutely nothing. A cup of tea in the morning was almost celestial manna, ambrosia. Living in such conditions, how were these people able to smile, to radiate joy! What is that, possessing which He led such a life? You began to wonder and something clicked. There was no need to exchange one single word. Looking into His eyes you realised that He had found the truth, you had not. That was enough to humble you, make you collapse at His feet.

Truth is not transmitted by word, but is always transmitted non-verbally. I can tell you I am angry with you, but you know the truth because non-verbally you have not sensed I am angry with you. There are occasions (of which I am sure you are aware) when someone might smile, and you sense anger. Non-verbal communication alone is truth, and truth can only be communicated non-verbally. Information you can pass on, so the passing on of the information is the business of the Acharya. Non-verbal communication of truth is by the Guru. I don't know if the Guru also knows that His disciple has been enlightened or awakened. Gurudev never discussed this.

On a spiritual level it was most beautiful to observe how He regarded everyone and everything as His Guru. (It is very difficult to explain this, and probably more difficult to understand it.) That is, when this discipline becomes total, there is total awareness of Guru everywhere. Whether a person wore a yellow, red or green cloth, to Gurudev he was always Swami. Everyone was a Swami, everyone was Bhagavan, everyone was Devi. That is probably the state you will find yourself in if there is this total discipline. Then the whole universe becomes your Guru.

3. Communication

Swami Sivananda did not invent a philosophy of His own, but communicated the fundamental philosophy that had already been communicated to humanity through incarnations like Jesus, Buddha, Shankara, Krishna. Why was (or is) this necessary? The reason is beautifully brought out in the fourth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita.

sa kalene'ha mahata yogo nashtah parantapa (IV.2)

"Mere passage of time seems to dilute the truth", - for a very simple and very good reason. If you are a man of self-realisation, and I come to you as a seeker (not student), you might discover that you cannot adequately put your own experience into words, whatever you do, and however brilliant you are, for the simple reason that language was invented after man fell from self-realisation. Language is perforce dualistic, pluralistic - hence someone like Ramana Maharshi remained silent most of the time, and even Gurudev refused to be drawn into a discussion. At one point in Vasishtha's instruction to Rama in the Yoga Vasishtha, Rama asks a question and Vasishtha simply becomes silent. Rama takes Vasishtha to task, asking, "Can't you answer this question I am asking? Why have you suddenly become silent?" Vasishtha says "It is not because I could not answer your question that I became silent, but silence is the answer to your question."

So the enlightened Guru cannot verbalise His fundamental experience. If you are not in a position to enter into non-verbal communication with Him, and you force Him to verbalise His experience, you might discover that a large percentage of His experience remains inexpressible. What has been written down, committed to memory, or verbalised, is a fraction of the sage's experience. Please remember this all the time. When Swami Krishnanandaji talks to you, it is not that that is all He knows. There is something which He has experienced that is inexpressible. So when you, the seeker, approach a great master, and ask Him to verbalise His experience and instruct you, only a fraction can possibly be verbalised. There is a big loss there. Another point is: for how many seconds can you uninterruptedly listen to what is being said? You are listening - and then you hear those noises across the river, or suddenly you remember having forgotten something. If there is a deep pause, the attention is already switched off to Germany, Austria, Hungary, all sorts of places, so that even that little fraction that the Guru is able to verbalise is lost in the transmission, because the disciple is not attentive.

Gurudev trained us in a very beautiful way. He didn't lecture, but spoke in conversation, and He didn't often encourage people to take notes when He spoke. Even so, He used to encourage us to write down the conversation or dialogue afterwards. You will be amazed (and perhaps ashamed) at what little is really retained by the mind, even immediately afterwards. If the disciple is so keen that the teaching is immediately assimilated, at least that much will remain, but if the

teaching is not assimilated, it tends to evaporate. That is why it is called spirit! Spirit always evaporates. In a few days it is completely lost. Krishna says, "I spoke this to Vivaswan, Vivaswan taught this in the spoken word to Manu." So it has been communicated or conveyed by word of mouth from generation to generation, and it gets lost. Therefore there is a need for a great master or incarnation like Gurudev to deliver the same philosophy.

You can convey information or words. Some of you will know the conveyor belt. You drop something on it - it moves and somebody else picks it up. This is conveying: words are dropped on this belt called language, it enters into your ears, and at random you pick up what you like, and leave what you do not like. (It is like a conveyor belt at the airport.) This is the most dangerous thing in life. When we go to a master, we should not go to Him in order that He may convey what we'd like to hear. If that is what you want, you don't have to go to a master. You can stay at home, pick up a tape recorder, and say all that you want to hear, then play it back - and you will hear all that you want to hear. You will not hear one word other than what you want to hear! This is the first problem in the conveyor belt system. The second problem is that even something which you would very much like to pick up, may move so fast that you miss it. Conveying may be necessary for learning arithmetic or language. Even when they teach you the three R's in schools, they repeat the instructions again and again, so that if you missed them the first time, the conveyor belt comes back to you again (like at the airport).

Communication is quite different. It is almost always non-verbal. Sit here for a few moments listening with your ears and eyes open, then for two minutes close your eyes and listen. It is not the same. When the eyes are closed, you cannot listen properly. Almost all is lost, only a little is left. Worse still, if you turn around and look at something else while you listen, you probably don't really listen to anything at all. We used to write down the dialogues and conversations that Swamiji had with devotees and disciples. Often we found that, when a highly inspiring dialogue was jotted down, it wasn't so inspiring, because - especially in the case of Swami - a "hmm", His smile, and the way He looked at you, meant a tremendous lot. All those things had tremendous impact and tremendous meaning. That is where communication takes place. Obviously this could not be committed to writing. That is why the ancient masters insisted that reading and listening alone would not do, that you should go and sit at the feet of an enlightened master - then nothing may happen, or everything may happen. Not a word may be exchanged, but everything happens because there is non-verbal communication.

Communication can take place when you and the master can become like one. When you and the master are at the same level, and on the same wavelength, then you pick up the teaching without His having to utter a word. That is the famous symbol of Dakshinamurthi. I guess you have heard the story. Four very old great sages felt that they had not reached the supreme state of enlightenment. There was a little doubt, a little restlessness in them. They were wandering in

search of a master who would put their doubts at rest, who would enable them to find the ultimate resting point. While they were wandering, they suddenly saw a young man seated under a banyan tree. They were attracted to him as iron filings are attracted to a magnet, and drawn by this force they went to him. He was a young man, almost naked. They sat down and looked at him. He didn't say a word, they didn't even ask a question, but all their doubts were cleared. Why was it so? Because they were on the same wavelength. What do we mean by saying that the disciple is on the same wavelength as the Guru? Does it mean that the disciple is as enlightened as the Guru? If the disciple had already attained self-realisation or Atma-jnana, why should he go to the Guru?

To be on the same wavelength specifically means you have a certain equipment, and your heart will respond spontaneously, without any difficulty whatsoever - to a certain master - only to a certain master, and not to others. Your receiver is not as powerful as the master's transmitter, but you are still on the same wavelength, which means you, too, are of the same fundamental nature. Go to Him. Then communication is possible, because at a certain level, on a certain plane, you respond to each other brilliantly. Swami Sivananda was an expert in this. He did not regard anyone as His disciple, but He knew that He could serve and guide seekers. There was a Swami here who was not Swami Sivananda's disciple. He belonged to another order altogether. He was the foremost among us, and Swami treated him as one of us. He lived here in the Ashram, but when his Guru came, Swamiji would tell him to serve his Guru. I think many of you have at least heard of the great Yogi in America, Swami Satchidananda. He was here for some years, and then went to Ceylon. A young man came from Bombay who was devoted to Swami Satchidananda. Swami Sivananda gave him Sannyasa, initiated him. Every time Swami Satchidananda came here from Ceylon, He used to say, "Gurumaharaj has come, go and serve him." So as far as Swami Sivananda was concerned, this Swami was a disciple of Swami Satchidananda. In the same way, it is possible that somebody who came to this Ashram, lived here, and perhaps even got initiation from Swami Sivananda, was inwardly devoted to some other great Guru or master. Swami Sivananda did not object to that at all, because He realised that those two were on the same wavelength. He was happy to serve the seeker on a physical level, to provide him with lodging, food, clothing etc., but he told him to take instructions from his own Guru. In one instance, a man is Swami Sivananda's disciple, but devoted to somebody else; in the other, a man is theoretically a disciple of some other Guru, but he is devoted to Swami Sivananda. Both are good, because He recognised that both the Guru and disciple must be on the same wavelength. Where that happens, communication takes place.

In order to make this communication effective, in orthodox Vedanta philosophy, you have what is called the Adhikari-vada, which implies that before you approach a Guru, you had to equip yourself with the four means: Viveka, Vairagya, Shatsampat, Mumukshutva. It has been slightly simplified in the Katha Upanishad:

Uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata.

"Awake, arise, be vigilant, then approach a great one and attain enlightenment."

Viveka, Vairagya, Shatsampat and Mumukshutva are considered to be the signs of this inner awakening. Not enlightenment, but awakening.

In ancient days, according to tradition, the enlightened ones kept themselves aloof from society - maybe physically, but definitely psychologically. It has been declared in many of the Upanishads and other religious texts that the enlightened man should move about in society as if he is a fool - a concept that is beautifully expressed in the Bible, "Do not cast pearls before swine." Only a qualified seeker recognised them. It is a far cry from the modern "Yogis", who proclaim themselves as enlightened, and seek seekers!

Of all the Swamis and holy men I have met, Swami Sivananda was the only one who did not parade His knowledge. This was an extraordinary trait in Him. If you ask many Swamis and Yogis a simple question, "In winter the Ganga water is cold, Swami, can one take a bath?" The sort of answer you want is, "Yes, you can have a bath after the sun rises, or apply some oil and then dip into the Ganga." But they would give you a whole talk on Vedanta, "You are not the body, you are not the mind, the immortal self you are." It is not the immortal self that feels the cold, it is the body and the mind that feel the cold! I never heard this kind of reply from Swami Sivananda. If at all, He erred on the other side. He was more interested in your physical and intellectual welfare, rather than impose upon you a sort of religious instruction every time you sneezed or coughed. He waited for you to ask; *uttishthata jagrata prapya varan nibodhata* - you must arise, awake, then go to the great one. The arising and the awakening are your problem, not the Guru's; but Swamiji went out of His way to admit people to the Ashram, who did not have all these qualifications. He did not hide spiritual truth - it was there, published - and unlike others, He did not hide Himself physically in a cave, nor did He behave like an ignoramus, living in the world as if He were deaf, dumb and blind, as the scripture says one should. He did not parade His knowledge, but when you were keen, He communicated that knowledge in a mysterious way.

It was the tradition in those days for holy men to hide themselves in a cave and wait to be approached by qualified disciples who had experienced an inner awakening, who were vigilant and keen, and who, at great expense (not of money, but of energy and time) went to them and asked for instruction. Swami Sivananda adopted this tradition to a great extent by (I might say) veiling his Atma-jnana in a big overcoat, so that people who went to Him often remembered Him for his affection and love, for His great concern for their physical and material welfare. "How is your son? How is your daughter? Is she married? How is your job? How is your health, are you sleeping well?" These were His main concerns - Atma-jnana came in its own time. When thus, in total affection and love, you became one with Him, then it was easy for non-verbal communication to take place. That was His secret. But He did recognise that, unless a person had wisdom, dispassion, noble virtuous qualities, and a steady yearning for liberation,

no amount of verbal instruction would be of any use whatsoever, and non-verbal communication became impossible.

Preparation was essential. You may have the best radio receiver here, but if it is not connected to the mains or doesn't have batteries, it will fail, it won't receive, however sophisticated your system may be. So, unless your heart is really and truly and fully prepared for the reception of Atma-jnana, no one can ever do a thing to you. Lord Krishna, Buddha, or Jesus may stand in front of you and talk, and you will not be impressed. An impure heart cannot receive non-verbal communication, and if verbal communication is attempted, an impure heart will pollute, twist and distort it. Here Swami Sivananda was unique. He often used to say, "It is impossible to expect these people living in the modern world to develop discrimination and dispassion." It is alright to say theoretically that one can practise meditation, even in a fish market in Delhi, but if you go there, you may find it difficult. You may use ear plugs, and you may wear an eyemask, but something in the atmosphere is so completely unspiritual that it's a waste of time trying to meditate there. Recognising this, Swamiji welcomed even unawakened students to His Feet here, and attempted to awaken them.

Some people had come here out of sheer disappointment in life. In those days it was sort of a joke, that if a young man failed in his exam or in his business, look for him in Sivananda Ashram. People in despair used to come here, and Swami Sivananda admitted them freely, and then tried to bring about an awakening. I will give you one example. One young man came here because his family refused to sanction his marriage to the girl he wanted to marry. He came here because somebody in Rishikesh told him, "You're from South India, you are an educated man, go to Sivananda Ashram." So he came here and Swamiji said, "Alright, stay here. What can you do?" He said, "I can clean this place." Later he turned out to be a great, wonderful Yogi - but not all were like him. (I'm not talking about him hereafter.)

I don't know if you can understand the problems that this sort of thing created. Here is a person who is raw, who comes to the Ashram, not because he wants Atma-jnana, but because he wants to run away from home. He's not a disciple of Swami Sivananda, he didn't come to Swami Sivananda regarding Him as the Guru, because the Guru experience had not taken place. So he is there as a raw candidate, without Viveka, without Vairagya, without any of the qualifications necessary for any kind of communication to take place. He has his own ideas, his own philosophy. Now, slowly he has to be drawn close to the Master. In that process, the Master has to shower His affection upon him - which might be interpreted by several people in several ways. He thinks, "Oh, I'm so important that Swami Sivananda is sending me milk and fruits and Kichidi and looking after me," and the others become jealous. Here is the enlightened Master presiding over all this, to whom this newcomer is as vital, as important, as glorious as all of us. It created innumerable problems for Swamiji himself. Gurudev often used to say, "Never mind, even if this man is vicious, by bringing him here and giving him shelter here I've insured that there is one rogue less in Delhi." That was His

philosophy. "The very fact that So-and-so came here shows that there is a little opening, however minute, through which some sort of communication can take place. Let him stay here, I will plant a seed. In this birth, in the next birth, never mind, that seed will germinate now or years and years later." These were His very words.

It was in this respect that Swamiji perhaps differed from most other Masters who would have insisted "Unless you have all these virtues and so on, you cannot be admitted here, you're unfit to be a spiritual aspirant." Swamiji said, "Oh no, that's too harsh. It is not possible to acquire these virtues and qualities outside of an Ashram in this world. So the modern Guru must even awaken these virtues, or plant them in the seeker and nurture them, and not expect them to be there already." That was the uniqueness of Swami Sivananda. He planted the seeds of goodness in us, He nurtured them, watered them and made them grow; though this created tremendous difficulties to Himself He didn't mind at all.

4. Planting the Seed

Swami Sivananda accepted the supreme and vital need for what is known as Sadhana - chatushtaya - discrimination, dispassion, divine qualities and a keen yearning for liberation. Whereas the orthodox Rishis, sages, Yogis or holy men waited for the ripe seeker (one who was ready, who had disciplined himself, who had prepared himself) to approach them, Swami Sivananda said that it is perhaps too much to expect a person living in the modern world, assailed on all sides by distractions and temptations, to develop discrimination and dispassion. He said that even in the case of a person who runs away from failure, it is possible to find a spark which could be fanned into a big flame. Sometimes if the spark didn't exist, He even ignited it. That was the extraordinary beauty in Swami Sivananda.

One of the methods adopted by Him was massive dissemination of spiritual knowledge. It was absolutely and totally indiscriminate. Viveka is often translated into discrimination. Here was a master who performed indiscriminate charity, and undertook indiscriminate dissemination of spiritual knowledge, in the hope that one of these pamphlets or books, dropping into the hands of a man at a certain psychological moment, might ignite true Viveka, true aspiration, in him. I'll give you just one or two instances. He used to send lots of free books to devotees and non-devotees. Among the recipients of these free books were Sir Winston Churchill (Prime Minister, London, Great Britain), President Truman (Washington) and Marshall Stalin (Moscow). Once somebody said, "Swamiji, these will never reach those men." He replied, "Never mind, they are books after all, and they are parcelled and addressed to Moscow, London, Washington. They have got to get there. Somebody has got to open them, to find out what the parcel contains. He will read them."

Now, another rather interesting incident, which is relevant to the discussion. One day an official letter had been received from a government department. On top of it there was the name and address of the head of that department. Immediately Swamiji autographed a book, "May God bless you, with regards, Prem and Om, Sivananda", and sent it to this address. That man's name was also put on the Divine Life Magazine free register. He received the book, and a couple of days later, a copy of the Divine Life Magazine. Probably he threw it away. Next month again, there was the Divine Life Magazine, so he asked his assistant to write a stiff letter to the Divine Life Society saying, "Do not waste time sending these to me, I don't like them. I can't bother to look at them." When this letter was received Swamiji said, "Ah, he doesn't want, alright. Take his name off the magazine free register. We don't want to impose a thing upon him." It looked as though the story was completed there. No, two years later this man wrote to Swamiji a letter that moved all of us: "I received a book from you two years ago, heaven knows how you got my name and address. At that time I was so arrogant and haughty - I was occupying a position of power and prestige - that when I received your book, I threw it away. I was on top, then a little later I came down - I lost my job, my money, everything went wrong. One day, I had suicidal thoughts and wandered into my study. Sitting dejected in a depressed mood, I happened to

look up and there I saw 'Sure Ways for Success in Life and God-realisation'. Almost mechanically I pulled out that book, opened a page and there was 'Never Despair'. I saw this, and suddenly I remembered that I had received this book two years ago from you, and had callously thrown it into the waste paper basket. But my servant, who cleaned my room, had emptied the basket, and thought I might have accidentally dropped that book into it, so he took it out, dusted it, and put it on the shelf without my knowledge. So I am thankful to him, and I am thankful to you. That book saved my life." Then he picked up the threads of what was left and made a success of his life.

That was Gurudev's method. I am quite sure that of the thousands and thousands of people who received books, pamphlets and magazines from Him, only a few made use of them in this manner. But it might strike a sympathetic cord in the heart of somebody, somewhere, at sometime. In Swamiji's case it was indiscriminate dissemination of spiritual knowledge. If you bestow some thought upon it, you'll probably feel (like me) that he must have been a divine incarnation, because only God adopts this attitude. Only in God's nature you find such an approach. If you look at a fruit tree (or any tree which bears fruits and berries with seeds), you'll understand this philosophy very beautifully. Can you count the number of seeds that one single tree produces in one single season? Imagine what would happen if all of them germinated and became trees. There wouldn't be space even for one species of tree to exist on this earth! But it does not happen. (I'm not interested in explanations, I'm only looking at the truth.) God has created a fruit-bearing tree; that tree yields thousands of fruits every season, and not all of those seeds germinate. This omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God is quite satisfied with that. You may argue that the rest of the fruits become fertiliser. Excellent, that suits me! That is precisely what Swami Sivananda did. He went on planting thousands and thousands of seeds. A few of them germinated, and became mighty trees in themselves, and the others acted (or act) as fertilisers for the preparation of the soil for a future growth. People whom Swami Sivananda loved and trained, served and guided, people in whom Swami Sivananda sowed the seeds of spiritual aspiration - and who perhaps did not respond as zealously as you might have expected them to respond - are now with different Gurus, and there they shine as great Yogis, great Mahatmas, great seekers. So the seeds that He planted have germinated, and become mighty trees in the case of some; in the case of others, they probably fertilised the consciousness of other non-seekers, and made them seekers. When they were inwardly awakened, they found some holy man and followed him. That was his beautiful approach. He was an extraordinary optimist who felt that, given this indiscriminate dissemination of spiritual knowledge, eventually each one will find the path and the goal.

So he agreed that Sadhana-chatushtaya are the essential prerequisites for Sadhana; without these you are not going to get anywhere - you would not even be able to recognise your Guru, and any training that you undertake, would be useless, fruitless. But He insisted that it is the duty of enlightened people (or even senior spiritual aspirants) to plant the seeds, regardless of the readiness of the

soil to receive these seeds. That is our service. These seeds will germinate sometime or other.

There is another very interesting feature. Now the Ashram is modern, life is fairly comfortable. It's not easy in such an atmosphere to understand what the seekers who came here in the early 40's felt. Some of them had read Swami Sivananda's flaming words. Some of those original writings of Gurudev were so inspiring that, if you read them, you wanted to tear off all your clothes, and run away to the Himalayas, and practise austerities, and attain self-realisation at that moment. That was the peculiarity of His style. Many of them were inspired by His writings and came here. Usually they came without even a change of clothing, because in Swami Sivananda's 'How to Get Vairagya', they had read "Renounce everything" - and so they renounced everything; "Seek solitude" - and so they came to seek solitude here. Some of them, on entering this place, might even have discovered that others who had joined earlier had a nice coat. There was a tendency to feel, "Ah, they have lost the path, they have fallen away. Look how dispassionate I am. My aspiration is far greater than the aspiration of these people who have been with Swami Sivananda for such a long time. They don't know what austerity, dispassion and burning aspiration mean. Every morning I am sitting here at 4 o'clock meditating. Look at all these older Ashramites."

Swamiji used to watch them and appreciate them. Whatever you did, first came encouragement. Then he would gently push a little bit. "Enthusiasm is very good. You have got brilliant, wonderful aspiration. You are supreme, you are like a Sukadeva. But juvenile enthusiasm is no good." First a lot of butter, and then a little bitter pill - that was His method. You should never be discouraged, you should never feel that what you are doing is totally wrong. No, do it, it is wonderful, but make sure that it is not only juvenile enthusiasm, something which might lead to a reaction. Burning aspiration is necessary, but it must be steady, not quickly going up and quickly coming down like a balloon. If it is true aspiration, it will continue to stay with you throughout your life. If there is some kind of juvenile enthusiasm, it not only disappears, but it leads to a reaction, which is usually equal and opposite. For instance, for six months you walk about naked, and you don't talk, eating very little. God knows what your motives and intentions are. God knows what goes on in your own mind and in your heart. If, somehow, after those six months you discover that that was useless, then you would never stop talking, never stop eating, and you would go to the opposite extreme. Swamiji was extremely cautious, and He cautioned the disciples also to be cautious. There was one instance which illustrates this. When I came to the Ashram, there was another young man also with me. This young man is quite a wonderful person, there is nothing wrong with him. While here, even though he was very devoted to the Master and his work, he also developed an extraordinary friendship with one of the senior disciples of Swami Sivananda. This is natural - if you stay here for six months or one year, you feel drawn to one or other of the senior Mahatmas here. Some time later this senior Swami decided to leave and go away. Suddenly my friend also decided to leave. He was disappointed with the Ashram, because the Swami he admired was leaving. He sent word to Swamiji

that he intended to leave, and he even wanted me to go back with him. I told him, "Though I came with you, I'm not going to go back with you." I used to be in the Bhajan Hall in those days, and Swamiji lived down below right on the bank of the Ganga. Three or four times on a single day, He came up and down. At that time there were no steps, so He had to negotiate a hill-side. The first time He came he said, "I believe he's going. Ask him not to go. He has lived this life for one year now, and if he goes back, there will be a great reaction. He might lose all this." I told my friend and he said, "No, my father is not well, my mother is not well, and I have to go to support my family." I went down and told Swamiji this. He came up again later and said, "How much will he earn? We will send money to his mother." The Ashram was living a hand-to-mouth existence in those days, but he said, "We will support you. We will support the family. The spiritual wealth is so precious." Gurudev realised that the wealth of spiritual aspiration is so delicate. It is there, deep within you, but it is so deep, and the dust and the ash that cover it are so thick, that it has become precious. The Master has to plant the seed, and only He knows how precious, how valuable it is, and how necessary it is to safeguard it against reaction. That was Gurudev's extraordinary love, and extraordinary attitude.

Since the students were not only raw, but not even awake, even the awakening influence had to come from the Master. The people who came often, came with their own bad habits. How did he handle this problem? Often He turned a blind eye on your bad habit. I know, on some occasions, very senior disciples of Swamiji (who were also authorities in the Ashram), would go to Him with all sorts of complaints. Gurudev had to please the authorities also. He would pretend to be really angry. The secretary was satisfied and went away, thinking that Swamiji would deal with the young seeker. On the contrary, the man against whom the complaint was filed would first of all get a couple of bananas - there was a little boy serving Gurudev in those days who would come running to you and say, "Swamiji gave you some fruits, Prasad." Half an hour later, somebody else might come running to you, "Swamiji gave you some coffee." An hour later you might have His Darshan. He'd say, "You're shining, you're radiant. You're meditating nicely. You're doing Japa - good. You're studying Vedanta? Very good." What happened to all the complaints? He would watch to see if this encouragement worked. Instead of telling you that you are a bad man, Gurudev insisted on concentrating on the good qualities in you, telling you that you were a great worker, even if you had no spiritual aspiration or devotion at all. There are some good qualities in each person, so why not promote them? He would say, "You are a tremendous worker. There is nobody who works as hard as you do." He would throw one seed there - it is planting the seed that is important - then gently add "Whenever you work, see God in all. Why don't you go and serve food in the kitchen? You're a tremendous man, you have got a nice body and a fine voice. When you serve Roti, say 'Roti Bhagavan, Roti Narayan, Roti Maharaj'."

In this manner the seed of aspiration was planted.

5. Self-purification

Swamiji sometimes pointed out that Atma-jnana (self-realisation) is extremely easy. God is real, Brahman is real, Atman is real already. It is the Atman that is sitting there, it is the Atman that is sitting here, it is the Atman that is nodding the head, it is the Atman that is talking. If all this is the Atman, where is the difficulty in realising it? All the other teachers and masters - who caution us that it is extremely difficult - are not wrong. Self-realisation is extremely easy, but the preliminary to it, the purification which is a prerequisite, is extremely difficult. Atma-jnana is easy because it is a gift of God - it is not an achievement. Either you say it is there already, or you say it is a gift of God, depending upon your point of view. If you are adopting the Jnana-yoga approach, you realise that the self is there already. If you adopt the Bhakta's approach, you say it is the gift of God.

Why do we practise any Sadhana at all? Krishna makes it very beautifully and abundantly clear in the Bhagavad-Gita:

yunjyad-yogam-atmavisuddhaye (VI.12)

"Practise Yoga for the purpose of self-purification."

Yoga, meditation, and all the spiritual practices that we undertake, are meant merely to purify the heart and the mind, not to realise God.

When it came to training for self-purification, Swamiji adopted very simple methods, which were profound in their effects. I don't know what your idea of the word 'training' is. Our usual idea of training is by temptation and threat - the carrot and the stick. Training does not mean that. This tape recorder is trained towards me; when you take a photograph you train the camera towards the object (or the subject). So, training means to direct one's attention towards what you are meant to learn or to do, and to observe. That is exactly what Swamiji did, nothing more. There was no temptation, no threat - but there was training. The difficulty here is that it is easy to train a camera, a tape recorder or a gun to point in a certain direction, because they are inanimate objects, they don't think or change their minds - but you and I do. Since we were not cameras or guns which could be set or let go, this training had to be continuous (in the sense of repeated). Swamiji had to do it again and again and again. So far I've not seen anyone in the world who had such patience as Swamiji had. He never treated anyone as hopeless. If you couldn't see it this way, He would turn it that way, the other way - He went round and round, until one day He hoped you would see it. The moment you saw it, you reached the goal. That's why He said that self-realisation is terribly simple. When you enter a room which is pitch-dark, and you don't know where the switch is, you go on groping for it. Switching the light on is terribly easy, but finding the switch is not so easy. He was enlightened and He could see, and so He said "It is there on your right". You turned round, until you didn't know which was right and which was left - and then He relaxed you. He never kept us in a state of tension. He would push you to bring about this training or orientation, but if He

found that you were breaking down, all rules would be relaxed.

In those days there were not many people in the Ashram, and so, for a considerable time, I had the holy, auspicious and unpleasant duty of waking everybody up at four o'clock. Swamiji used to be very particular that everyone should get up at about four and come to the meditation class, or meditate in their rooms - whatever they did, they must wake up - but He used to be very particular that your sleep should not be disturbed otherwise. If you were resting during the daytime, we were not allowed to disturb you. If He passed near your room, and saw that you were resting, He would be silent, and would instruct everybody else around to be very silent.

He taught us a technique of waking you up even at 4 a.m. We were taught to stand outside the door and gently say Ommmm - wait for about a minute, then Ommm, a little louder. If that did not work, then Ommm louder still. Then knock at the door. This was allowed only at four o'clock, not otherwise. Although He was very particular that people should get up and meditate, if He found that you were not used to it, and that you were showing signs of tension or fatigue, He would find some excuse or other, because if you keep up that tension, it is more than likely you will break down, there might be a reaction. Half a loaf is better than no loaf!

If the student had some weakness or the other, Swamiji would turn a blind eye, saying, "He has got some weakness but he has also got some great qualities." If you say to a liar, "You are an embodiment of truth", he might one day become truthful. Swamiji adopted the technique of never pointing out the other person's fault, and when it had to be done it was done so nicely. A bunch of bananas came first, then a little bit of a pinprick, which was followed by butter and honey. After the banana had been digested, and the butter had been used up, suddenly you realised, "My God, this is what he wanted to say!"

Because we are alive and thinking all the time, this training is not a matter of changing one direction or another, but of inner self-purification Atma-suddhaye. You might ask if it is not more sensible, practical, and fruitful, if the impurity is pointed out, in order that you might purify yourself. If you have a short temper, should a Guru not say, "You are a short-tempered man. Stop it." Would that not lead to instantaneous self-purification? More often not, because the ego that manifests itself as the short temper, does not want to look at itself in that light. You don't like it, and if you are given a medicine which you do not like, especially psychological medicine, it will not work.

Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras says: "Choose an object which you like." Otherwise you cannot meditate upon it, your mind will refuse to turn towards it. Since the whole aim of this exercise is to train the mind to observe this, if anything which the mind does not like is suggested, it will prove counter-productive. So, if even a great master tells you that you are a short-tempered man, and should control your temper, you will probably be upset immediately. What is it that gets upset?

It is that short temper that gets upset! If another man said it you would probably knock his jaw out, but since the master says it, you are unwilling to retaliate, and you shed tears. The tears are not tears of repentance or remorse, but the tears of resistance. If you say something, and the other person starts crying, that means the communication is lost, he doesn't want to hear. You cannot train such a person. The tears themselves mean, "Please don't say this again." So, not only was this contrary to Gurudev's inner nature (which was beautifully expressed by Him as "Never hurt other's feelings"), but even when it came to training His own disciples, he refused to adopt that method. By pointing out someone's defects you can never help him get rid of them. He will not see them, the tears blind him. When your eyes are full of tears, you can neither see what is in front of you, nor within you. It needs a very steady and calm mind to observe one's own impurities.

Now you see the difficulty of self-realisation or self-purification, and the difficulty of training a disciple. You are not dealing with a camera or a gun or a tape recorder, but with a thinking, feeling, human being. This understanding or perception is not merely a matter of intelligence or intellect, of readjusting your physical habits and behaviour, or of changing your inner attitude, but it must simultaneously bring about a change in all these. Your mind, your heart, your intelligence, your life force, and your soul, must see this. Is that possible? Let's say somebody has got a bad temper, and he insults another person. Is it possible for you to convince him that that is a defect in him? If you try to convince him, he will listen to you, and then say: "Yes, I shouldn't have called him an idiot, I could easily have called him silly." That means he still has the germ of objectification within him. He doesn't feel that what he did was wrong - that, as a spiritual aspirant, he should not have been so aggressive. Buddha has a very beautiful expression for this: 'wriggling like an eel'. He is not straight at all, but slipping through it. Something in him does not see this. When a defect is pointed out, he thinks the other person has not understood the whole problem. When someone tells you: "You were quarrelling with someone yesterday - it is not right", you think "Why doesn't he tell the other man? He started the quarrel"! The mind turns away from this defect. Neither the mind nor the heart wants to see it. If the mind sees, the heart does not see; if the heart sees, the mind does not see.

Gurudev's Yoga is the Yoga of synthesis. If a change has to be effected, if purification has to be effected, it has to be on all these levels simultaneously, not one after the other. That needed infinite patience, and that infinite patience is called love. He never lost hope, and however impossible the disciples were, and however rudely they reacted to this training, He didn't lose his temper or give up hope. He just went on. If the disciple was not able to see what Swamiji was trying to do, He gently created a situation in which he may have been able to see this. That's how He worked ceaselessly for forty years. The methods He adopted were more often than not unconventional. It used to be almost a joke in the late 40's that, if someone took a complaint to Gurudev against someone else, He would refuse to believe it. Obviously you are not going to fight with somebody else in Gurudev's presence, we only fight when the Master is not there! And so, whatever

mischievous mischief went on happened behind His back. If you took a complaint against me to Him, He would respond, "Ah, is that so?", but He didn't really believe it, because He had not seen it with His own eyes. Of course He wouldn't have seen that, no one would do it in His Presence.

If the secretary or somebody took the complaint to the Master that So-and-so was smoking, and Swamiji felt that there was a germ of truth in it - He would write an article on the dangers of smoking. If the man against whom the complaint was made was a good typist, He would ask him to type it. There was no direct confrontation, but it was possible that, while typing this, the message sneaks into the heart. If he was not a typist, Swamiji would have it typed by somebody else, and ask him to bring it to the evening Satsanga. In Satsanga in those days, there used to be lots of reading from scriptures, and occasionally from Swamiji's own writings. That day he would say, "Mukunda, you have typed this article?" "Yes, Swamiji." "Ask him to read it" - as if at random, as if he was not very particular who read it. So it was given to the man against whom the complaint was lodged. There, in the Satsanga, with all these people around, he had to read aloud, "Don't smoke, it's deadly, it poisons your lungs, etc. Therefore, stop smoking immediately!" It is possible that he got the message. Often Swamiji would ask you to give a talk. Let's say if you were a man of bad temper; at any time you might be called upon to give a talk to some group on anger. You are not going to say that anger is good. You will say that a spiritual aspirant must be absolutely calm and patient and so on. As you go on saying this, inevitably you yourself listen to it.

The fundamental principle in all this was that you were never criticised by Gurudev. If you had been criticised, or taken to task by Him, all this would have been ineffective. If in spite of all this training you still couldn't restrain yourself, picked up a quarrel with somebody else, and the quarrel became so great that it was brought to His notice, and both of you had to come in front of Him, the first thing He did was to praise you. "You've got this quality and that quality. First of all, to be able to renounce the world, and to come here, and have a bath in the Ganga is the greatest good fortune. You must have done spiritual practice (Sadhana) in hundreds of previous births to be spiritually inclined, and you must have earned the grace of thousands of saints in order to be brought here to an Ashram, to lead a spiritual life." Now that He has pointed out that you are fabulously wealthy in spiritual qualities, He would add, "Why do you want to quarrel? It is only a little defect. Don't lose your temper. If you lost your temper you might spoil your prospects, spoil your effort. Did you have your breakfast? What did you have, coffee, tea? Shall I get some more?" Finished. A whole lot of carrots, plus a little bit of stick, and immediately it is sandwiched with another lot of fruits and milk. At some time or the other the person must become aware of the impurity within.

Impurity is not a static thing. We say that a person is characteristically short-tempered, or greedy or dull. Even this changes. It is possible that someone has had psychological habits, and by some sort of constructive criticism (not by the

Master, but by others) he is made aware of these particular defects, and somehow been able to overcome (overcome is the word) many of them, one by one. Then he becomes terribly vain and egoistic, saying, "I used to be a brute, I used to hate everybody. Now I am very, very peaceful." He has slipped from the frying pan into the fire. In the frying pan he would have lasted a few more days, in the fire he is finished immediately! He has enormous ego now. That is no good.

When you attack these evils you come face to face with the ego (the commander-in-chief, as Swamiji used to call it). When you attack the soldiers, then the commander-in-chief comes into view. Your petty anger, greed, and jealousy, are of no consequence at all, not such terrible things in themselves, ultimately, but while you deal with them, you might discover what the ego is. It is the ego that puts on all these forms. The same ego puts on the guise of anger at one stage, and when you have overcome anger, it becomes jealousy or greed. The same ego goes round and round and round. The purpose of trying to understand these psychological traits is not to overcome them - 'overcome' implies arrogance, egoism, vanity - but to understand their essential nature. What is it that flares up? The ego. What is it that is greedy? The ego. What is it that is jealous? The ego again. So, you are never safe. Krishna points out this truth in the last verse of the second chapter.

esha brahmi sthith partha nai'nam prapya vimuhyati (II.72)

"This is the Brahmic state, the state of enlightenment. Having reached this, one is not deluded."

One is not fooled again. If you are fooled you are not enlightened, you just thought you were enlightened, you thought you were a saint. You are not. Again:

sthitva 'syam antakale 'pi brahmanirvanam rcchati (II.72)

"If you are established in it to the end of your life, then you are safe."

When you are completely and totally dead, you are absolutely safe. Till then there is the possibility that, when one defect is overcome, the ego rises as another defect. These were Swamiji's famous and oft-repeated words: "Till the end of your life you must be vigilant."

6. Finding the Wavelength of the Guru

The Guru communicates the theory to the disciple, and trains and helps him in his practice. Gurudev did not wait for the disciple to prepare himself before coming to Him, so He was both the Acharya (the teacher) and the Guru. To many perhaps, He was only an Acharya who taught them, or (what was even more interesting) just a good man, who looked after them. Many came here as destitutes, He looked after them; many came here in despair, He gave them some hope; many didn't know what to do with themselves, He gave them some work. He was several things to several people.

The Guru has a very special relationship - not in the sense of superior or inferior, but of a different kind. For instance, someone who was disappointed with life, who lost his job, his money, his family, wife or children, came here in despair and met Swamiji. Without a word being exchanged, when this man looked at Swamiji, he realised that He did not have all those things which are considered essential for happiness - money, property, wife, and children - and yet He was blissful. This man thought, "There must either be something wrong with Him - or with me." So he began to wonder first of all, if it was possible for him also to live happily independent of those things, and not to suffer disappointment.

According to orthodox tradition, you are supposed to have done all this examination of life before you could even leave home, but Swamiji said, "Come here, we will find out what you are fit for." Once having come to the feet of the Acharya, you want to learn. Such learning is impossible, unless you are also able to tune yourself to the teacher. It's not always his job to do that. The Acharya, especially if he is also an enlightened person (a Jivanmukta), might in His own supreme compassion come down to your level to teach you, but if you persist in remaining at your level, He might leave you there. So, one must make some attempt to raise oneself to the wavelength of the Acharya some time or the other, so that you are able to understand him.

How do you know that you are not on the Acharya's wavelength? The test is very simple. I'm sure you've all played with a little transistor radio. You know that you are not on the exact wavelength for a certain station when it starts crackling. The same thing happens within you. The master says something, and there is a crackling within, a strange form of inner resistance. It is not total rejection, but a sort of grating within you. That means there is probably no inner resistance to the teacher, but a little bit of alignment is indicated, you're not on the same wavelength. You're neither prepared to say yes, nor prepared to say no. So, if the teacher asks you to do something, and there is this inner resistance, it means you're not on the same wavelength, and it is not possible for him to communicate with you. It's not his fault and probably it's not your fault either, but there is some fault somewhere.

So, the student who goes to the master prematurely (according to orthodox

tradition), has to work on himself also in order to bring himself to the same wavelength. If that is not done, communication is difficult, and training is impossible, however great the master may be. Please remember that Krishna (whom we venerate as an incarnation of God), Jesus Christ, and Buddha, were not always able to bring about enlightenment on the part of their disciples, or the people with whom they came in contact. Krishna even had to go to the extent of killing (although they call it 'redeeming') what were called demons, because they could never have come onto the same wavelength as Krishna. In the same way, Jesus Christ could stop the wind and the waves, but He couldn't stop those ruffians persecuting Him. If they're not on the same wavelength, it's not possible to deal with them.

To get on the same wavelength is the foremost duty of a student, if he wishes to grow into a disciple. Disciple means discipline, and discipline means study, studying oneself constantly. You came here under your own volition, you saw something extraordinary in the master, which you couldn't find within yourself, but this factor is very soon forgotten. You came to Him hopeless, in despair, helpless, in internal agony, because you felt you did not have the answers to the questions that arose in you concerning life, and felt that He would have the answer. That is very soon forgotten, and this internal crackling begins - when He says something, you dare not say no, and you cannot say yes.

You must study it yourself. The Guru will not do it. The broadcasting station will not adjust itself to the receiving set, though in His supreme compassion, Swamiji often did so. That was a miracle, an extraordinary phenomenon. He often came down to our level to help us all. The Guru does not come down because he loves your company, but in order to lift you up, and if you refuse to be lifted up, He will leave you there spiritually. Then He treated you as a destitute, by providing the necessities of life - that's what you wanted!

This process of lifting oneself up is beautifully described in the Bhagavad-Gita.

tad-viddhi pranipatena pariprasnena sevaya upadekshyanti te jnanam jnaninas-tattvadarsinah (IV.34)

"Know the truth from the knowers of truth, by prostrating to them, by questioning them, and by serving them."

Three factors are given to us here: surrender, questioning and service. If the student incorporates these three factors in his life, he is enabled to study himself efficiently, otherwise not.

Service of the Guru is extremely important. It is by serving the Guru that one learns how to raise oneself to the Guru's wavelength. It is while serving Him that one discovers the wavelength. You do what you do in a certain manner, in a certain spirit - the Acharya does it differently. It may even be his idiosyncrasy; but then, unless you learn to do what you do his way, you are not going to raise yourself to his wavelength. Hence, this service is valid. It is not because the Acharya needs your service. Swamiji often remarked, "If one man leaves the

Ashram and its service, two more are waiting to come." Even when Swamiji made us feel that our service was an important contribution to the mission, He was actually creating opportunities for us to serve and to tune ourselves to the Master, to align ourselves with Him. This again was a unique feature in Swamiji. He worked very hard, in order to create a field for the exercise of your talent, and thus to help you grow inwardly, so that the communication could take place. I shall give you only two examples. A young man came to the Ashram, and said that the only thing he knew was paper-making. Immediately Swamiji ordered the necessary pit to be dug and the raw material obtained. It was not as though he had hoped that this cottage industry would provide the Ashram with the paper it needed! But that was what the young man needed; and the Master served the disciple, and helped him grow. Swamiji did not encourage a lot of music in the Satsanga during the early years. Then a couple of musicians joined the Ashram. For their sake He organised music classes, bought the instruments necessary, set apart a room for it and so on. This is how the transmitter tuned itself to the receiver! Unless this is realised, the seeker would still not be in a position to enjoy spiritual communication. If you realised this, then you will serve the Master devoutly, and find the wavelength. In His writings, talks and in His own life, Gurudev exalted Guru-Bhakti and Guru-Seva. He unceasingly served humanity, because he saw his Guru-God in all. He even revered His Acharyas, from whom He learnt anything, and literally worshipped the untouchable, from whom he learnt the art of fencing.

One could freely speak with Swamiji on any problem one had. In His case this dialogue took very many forms. By His grace, often a visitor asked 'your' question, and you heard Swamiji's answers. Sometimes you found it in His writings, which He might even have asked you to type, edit or just read. Often an unexpressed question was nonverbally answered.

During all this, a genuine humility arises in you. You observe what the Master says and does. You realise that He is supreme in His wisdom, in His efficiency and His attitude to life. He easily solves the problems that baffle you. In situations where you would have collapsed, He triumphs. Events that would have crashed you do not affect Him. These great characteristics were natural to Swamiji. When you observe all this, a genuine humility arises in you.

This humility cannot be cultivated or acquired. It has to arise. If you wish to turn this light on, you do not blow it or fan it; the switch is elsewhere, and you have to turn that switch on. In the case of genuine humility, too, the switch is elsewhere - not by going through the external motions of humility, but by observing the wonder that the Master is. Otherwise, your pretensions of humility will only make you more egoistic. This humility itself grows into self-surrender. The inner crackling stops. There is joy and eagerness in the service of the Master. You realise that the Master knows everything, and He does everything infinitely better than you could. Realising this, the ego empties itself. Surrender arises. This surrender cannot even be described; it cannot be cultivated; you cannot perform this surrender. Though one may use all these expressions, it is good to

understand that the true spirit of self-surrender is beyond description. You cannot declare today, "I surrender myself to you from now". That is often hypocritical profession. It amounts to, "I shall surrender myself to you. I shall do all that you want me to do now, so that later on I will make you do all that I want you to do." When the mind is silent because it knows that the Master knows everything, when the heart is silent because it longs for nothing else, and when these are effectively turned and tuned in to the Master, then surrender happens. It is the most beautiful thing.

Swamiji emphasised again and again that the disciple should surrender himself to the Guru. But he realised that this surrender could not be forced either by the Guru or even by the disciple himself. It had to happen; but even here he made it happen. He created the necessary field for the exercise of surrender. For instance, He might say something concerning what He wished to be done, but then spread out a whole lot of alternatives. You would naturally choose, and from your choice He would know where exactly you stood - whether you were arrogant or merely vain, indifferent or hypocritically humble, or truly humble with the spirit of self-surrender. At the same time He enabled you to realise where you stood, gave you an opportunity to study yourself in that situation. Thus you were enabled to discover the ego and its play. When you realised the ugliness of this activity of the self, surrender would arise in you.

When the student surrenders to the Acharya, then the Acharya becomes the Guru. Atma-jnana or self-knowledge is simultaneous with self-surrender. Surrender is a supreme experience. That spirit of surrender itself becomes the Guru. You are freed. Grace flows and floods the inner being with light. All your burdens drop away. This is perhaps what they mean when they assert that the Guru takes away your Karma. Your Karma drops away, and there is bliss and peace within.

7. Surrender

You are seeking to know something, and the Acharya provides you with this knowledge. Though in some books you'll find the word 'Guru' used as a sort of blanket description of all this, it is good to remember that till there is total and complete surrender on the part of the seeker, the Guru is not born. When there is this surrender, something happens in the seeker, who suddenly becomes a disciple (probably he has been disciplining himself all the way through), and the Guru is born. At that moment you look at the same Acharya, and he shines in a very different light. We often saw this in Swami Sivananda on certain occasions, for instance during the Sannyasa initiation ceremony. When we looked at Him, then we weren't looking at a human personality. He was completely transfigured. That is a Guru experience. It is unforgettable. It cannot be verbalised or described. It happens with that intensity only once. As children we used to ask a question: "How many bananas can you eat on an empty stomach?" Not even one, because when the first mouthful is swallowed it is no longer an empty stomach! That is it. When it happens the first time, it hits you. That experience can be repeated, but not with the same intensity, or in the same manner.

The Guru experience is when the Guru is born. Surrender arises. That surrender silences the mind (which is the ego) and makes the heart fully open and receptive. You might have heard of Shaktipata - direct transmission of the spiritual experience. Swamiji also has written about it, though He did not openly say He gave Shaktipata. It's obvious it has happened to many, as in the case of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Ramana Maharshi has given a very beautiful answer to the question concerning Shaktipata. He said "When you are able to think with the heart, and listen with the heart, then Shaktipata happens." When your mind is completely and utterly silent, and you approach the master, you think with your heart, and you listen with your heart, then the master is able to impart the highest wisdom non-verbally to you.

To be eager to learn, and to question the teacher is very necessary, but if you doubt the ability of the master, or the validity of the instruction, you can't learn. Yesterday a friend asked "What happens if that person to whom you surrender yourself happens to be a crook?" If you are a sincere seeker you might find it very difficult to surrender yourself without doubt to one who is not enlightened. If you do so, you are looking for something else, and not enlightenment. If you still have some doubt concerning the teaching, there is no surrender.

Grace forms the positive aspect of this surrender. In surrender you empty yourself; when this happens, the Master's Grace floods your heart - you turn round, and suddenly you see the same Guru everywhere. The Guru is that one person, but He is seen in all, and His own presence is experienced in all. For instance, if Swami Sivananda was your Guru, and you had this experience with Him, this young man may say something, and immediately you think "Swamiji said so." You go to another great holy man, and the holy man does something, you think "Ah, Swamiji used to do this." Everything holy, everything auspicious,

and everything spiritual, reminds you of the Guru, with the result that He is there everywhere in all. You might even run into some unpleasant situations, and suddenly what Swamiji said occurs to you: "Be careful in these situations," "Be patient" or "Adapt, adjust, accommodate". All these things float into you, so that you are never without the Guru. The Guru is there in you all the time, because you (the ego) are not there. Since the ego is not there, it is the Guru that floods your entire being, and Him you see in all that is good, divine and holy. He is there, even when you are in unholy situations. If this has not happened, then the Guru has not happened.

If you have been following this carefully, you find all the contradictory teachings reconciled. The Guru is only one, the Acharyas may be many. You might have learned from a number of teachers - a Mantra from somebody, how to do Puja from somebody, how to do Asanas from somebody else. All these are your Acharyas - worthy of your love, your adoration, and your respect - but they are not the Guru. The Guru is only one. When the Guru experience has happened, that Guru himself becomes all. From there on you can learn from all, and relate yourself to all, without losing contact with the Guru. Because if 'I' does not exist, I can never lose contact with the Guru - the Guru alone exists.

Swamiji recognised that this had to happen, and therefore He recognised the supreme importance of freedom in seeking. You cannot be made to seek, you cannot be forced to surrender, or to serve, even though service of the Guru is of supreme importance. Without service, the communication line cannot be established, because you don't know how to tune in to the master. Even if you have the most powerful and brilliant radio receiving set, and are close to the transmitter, it will still not receive the music if you haven't switched it on and turned the dial. One has to work at switching it on and tuning it. In exactly the same way, even if you are sitting in close proximity to the Guru, you'll gain nothing from Him, except through service. It is in this work-relationship that you find out the wavelength, that you find your ego, and how to get rid of it. When the ego itself realises "I am useless, He is great," that is the dawn of true surrender.

Surrender cannot be forced. If the master forces service upon the student the service is not free - which means that the student only goes through the motions of service, there is no service. That is one of the reasons why Swamiji never forced anyone to do anything. As the Master He allowed each student to work out his own salvation, to do what he wanted to do. If you were a paper-maker, He would provide the paper-making stuff; if you said you were a meditator, He would tell you to sit on the Ganga bank and meditate; if you said you were totally devoted to the Tulsidas Ramayana and wanted to read it from morning to night, He would tell you to go ahead; He would ask the kitchen to supply all the things necessary for you. Sometimes He would even create a department, making it look as though it was also one of the departments of the Ashram's activities. So you did what you could, freely, voluntarily. Once you had got into this activity, the transmitter found your wavelength, and the way to communicate with you. From there on, He twisted your tail very gently. He might even start giving ideas in that subject

in which you pretend to be a specialist. For instance, this happened in the case of Swami Saradananda, the photographic specialist. He bought the camera and darkroom equipment, and then Swamiji told him several different ways of using these. Suddenly the transmitter became truly a transmitter. It was no longer trying to adjust to your wavelength, but it transmitted - so that you were free to do your work, but the instructions came from Him. Gently there was a change. When this happened, your inner rebellion began, the crackling began. You were not able to receive. You went to Him in order to be his student, to serve Him, and He did not demand that you should or should not do, but waited till you volunteered. Then, a little later, He gave you some ideas to do your job better. Are you prepared to do it the way He asked you to do it? Are you reluctant to do it? Or are you rebellious? Now the discipline started - a discipline, not in the sense of blindly obeying what Swamiji told you; but if you were clever, you would start studying yourself. You would ask yourself: "I came here to serve Him, I volunteered to serve Him, I felt it a great blessing to serve Him. Now He Himself suggests that something should be done in a certain way. Why does the mind not jump at it? Why does it not eagerly receive it?" That aspect of the mind that rebels, which is reluctant to accept, is the ego.

Swami Sivananda had this extraordinary feature of a synthesis of freedom and discipline. If you were the head of an Ashram you would find it impossible to combine these two. Either you use discipline, or you allow freedom - but He was able to combine these two very beautifully and very subtly, though it involved a tremendous lot of work and adjustment on His part. In freedom He allowed you to grow, and as you grew up He pruned. That's the best way to grow roses. You allow total freedom for the plants to grow, and as they grow, you prune them a little bit, and the rose buds blossom even more beautifully. That is how He trained His disciples. Self-surrender was not demanded, but He created situations in which it became obvious that He was the master. There was nothing He did not know. When once, twice, three times, or four times, it had been proved to your own satisfaction that you were a fool, why would you want to keep on playing the ego-game? Some people did. I'm not saying everybody surrendered themselves to Him. That is the only way in which He brought about this surrender. We would observe, watch for ourselves how things went on, compare what we would have done with what He did, the way we would want it done, the way He would want it done. And as you went on watching, you would see that He was infinitely wiser, infinitely more efficient. Then you would say mentally: "Please take over. Hari Om Tat Sat" so that self-surrender happened in you.

This freedom of growth was practised by Him throughout this relationship between Him and the disciple, because only in freedom is there growth. If there is no freedom there is no growth. You were free to choose the Sadhana that you wanted to practise - this was an extraordinary feature. Usually the Guru prescribes the Sadhana that the disciple should undertake. Swamiji never did it, except in the case of disciples who were perfectly in tune with Him. Even when it came to Mantra-diksha, He would ask you for your Ishta Devata, and give a

Mantra suited for that. He used to give Sannyasa Diksha, and ask what name you would like. And in the same way, He would allow you to practise your own Sadhana according to your own fancy. He might sound you out to see what you like most, but the choice was yours.

There was a funny incident in 1944. We used to conduct a small Divine Life Society branch in Delhi. Swamiji was passing through Delhi to go to Bombay from here. Five of us young people went to the Delhi railway station to receive Him, and the next morning we went again to see Him off to Bombay. Four of us were bachelors, the other was married. Swamiji asked each one of us about our health, what we were doing, and so on. When He came to the married man, He asked after his wife. He replied "She has gone home with the children." "Ah, let her stay there, lead an independent life," said Swamiji. This poor man was very attached to his wife, and asked "How long will I remain alone?" "Bring her, ask her to come at once. She will look after you, she will cook your food and wash your clothes. Ask her to come at once," Swamiji said immediately. That was in essence Swami Sivananda. He might point something out, and that was done so subtly and so gently. That was His method. He had splashed His message. Even so, He might suggest some work to you in the course of a conversation, but if you said you like to meditate, He would say "Very good, go and meditate. Go and sit on the Ganga bank from 4 to 7 in the morning. Three hours you must meditate." He would wait till you yourself found out that you were sleeping. That extraordinary patience He had.

The growth must come from within, not be imposed upon from outside - but there must be growth. Now, how do you reconcile these two positions? Growth must be free and the growth must be free, (I'm using the same sentence merely shifting the emphasis.) That is where I think he excelled. He allowed total freedom, but waited for opportunities to plant His seeds, to prune, to guide, to train - train in the sense of turning the direction. If after doing meditation for six months at the rate of three hours every morning, you went to Him and said that nothing was happening, He would say, "You must do some Hare Rama Kirtan in the Bhajan hall along with it, then the meditation will be deeper." Now it appeals to you. If He had said that right in the beginning, probably you would not have received that suggestion favourably. Then you go and do some Kirtan in the Bhajan hall for two hours every day, but you feel that that also seems to be making the mind dull. If you are able to perceive that, then He might tell you to go and do some work in the office for one hour, or go into the kitchen and cut vegetables. In those days we had to cut vegetables and clean the kitchen and dining hall. It was not as though you were serving the Ashram, but you were tackling your lethargy. Then He would say "Why don't you exercise yourself a little bit. Do some Pranayama or Yoga Asanas." Before you even knew where you were, you were practising what He loved most, Integral Yoga. You didn't realise at all that this was what He was aiming at. He had allowed you the freedom to find it - merely providing the incentive and the guidance now and then - but you had the privilege of freely choosing to do what He wanted you to do. That was an extraordinary attitude. You had the freedom to choose to do what He originally

wanted you to do.

None of us could ever even think of an instance when He forced His will upon his disciples. Never. It was always "go on and on and on - and you found out." Of course the Ashram had to have its own rules or regulations - that was a different story. The Ashram discipline might have been there, but between Him and the disciples there was total freedom - but guided, trained freedom, freedom that enabled the student to grow. And growth there was. The freedom was not so free as to allow the student to wither away. Then Swamiji might gently give a prick and you woke up. The prick may have come in a hundred different ways, but always gently. It woke you up, but didn't hurt.

That was, I think, the supreme Grace - Grace not only in the sense of Divine Grace flowing to us, but it was gracefully done. The supreme grace of Swamiji is perhaps impossible to find elsewhere. He was all these things rolled into one - a father, a mother, a teacher, a stern master, and an extremely loving friend. In all things He was a synthesiser. There was no division. He was always combining all sorts of contradictions. Combining contradictions was His speciality.

8. Karma Yoga

As has been suggested earlier, Swamiji did not have a special philosophy of His own but was a transmitter of already existing knowledge. Where the knowledge had become distorted by non-understanding He infused His own extraordinarily beautiful spirit of understanding. Understanding does not arise in the mind. The mind does not understand, but tries to grasp - and truth being subtle, it cannot be grasped. You cannot grasp air but you can inspire (meaning: inhale) it. Even so, truth has to be inspired, you must be inspired by the truth. Just as air that is inspired becomes your life, so truth must become your life. Then you live the truth, you become the living truth. You flow with the truth, without ever losing touch with it. Your life becomes divine. That is a reason why Gurudev called His mission Divine Life.

You do not grasp the truth, but that does not mean you abandon it. Some tried to grasp the truth, and therefore missed it. And there were others who said, "No, truth cannot be grasped", and abandoned it. They never got started. Here was a wonderful sage, who pointed out that, because truth cannot be grasped, it does not mean that you should abandon it, ignore it. There is another possibility. You flow with it, without ever losing contact, without grasping, and without staying away from it. That was the beauty of Gurudev's method.

In His own books Gurudev has given the essence of traditional teaching, imparting to those teachings the secret message of how to keep in touch with this truth, how to make it an integral part of your life. The teaching was embodied in Him. Truth has to be embodied, it has to be lived. In it, both theory and practice have their place. But living is something other than theory and practice. To live the truth means to know it in theory, and to practise it in one way or the other, but neither of these represents the whole truth. Theory is brainwork, intellectual comprehension. Intellectual comprehension works on the basis of division, it compares and contrasts. The intellect sees that as desk and this as platform, whereas in truth they are both wood. It is only someone who urgently needs firewood who would see all these as one. He would not be interested in the desk or the platform, but only in firewood. The intellect does not comprehend the totality as totality, but divides it.

Though intellectual comprehension may be necessary, it does not become the living truth. Even so, practice is essential, but even that is fragmentary. "I am practising this discipline," "I am meditating upon God." In all of these there is the subject-object division, the doer-deed division - Karta and Karma, Karya and Karana. In life there is no such division, and in consciousness there is no such division. There is no division, even between what is called life and what is called death, because life continues when the body dies, and consciousness doesn't go to sleep when perhaps a part of your mind goes to sleep. Therefore truth doesn't cease to be true.

Swamiji gave us the theory, helped us with the practice and indicated the truth.

The truth can only be indicated non-verbally. While He transmitted the theory in His writings, He hardly ever lectured, for the simple reason that there must be hunger, and a sense of urgency on the part of the student or disciple, before the nourishment could be digested. You have a problem even with food here. At eleven o'clock the lunch bell rings. You have to sit and eat, even though you are not hungry. The natural result is indigestion! The food that is eaten does not become the life-force. Regular meal-times may be necessary in an organisation, and in the same way it may be necessary to have classes. But Swamiji waited for you to have pangs of spiritual hunger, then all He had to do was to give you a mere look, or say just a few words. That was His method. He liked classes and even visualised this Academy, but at the same time He emphasised the need for the spiritual hunger which can be appeased by just a spark. That was His approach. Though He didn't lecture very much, the few words of instructions that His students and disciples might have heard from Him were unforgettable. For the most part He was the living truth. His actions spoke far louder than a loud speaker.

Though His whole life was one of Karma-yoga in the truest sense of the word, His actual writings on Karma-yoga were very meagre. His life was Karma-yoga. Karma-yoga in its truest sense can only be practised (practised is an inadequate expression) by a sage of self-realisation. By its very definition Karma-yoga is selfless service. What is selfless service? Is it merely rejection of a reward? That is, if I come and wash your clothes, and refuse to take even a banana, does that mean Karma-yoga?

arurukshor-muner-yogam karma karanamuchyate (VI. 3)

"For a sage who wishes to attain to Yoga, action is said to be the means",

says Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita. When someone is struggling to ascend the ladder of Yoga, all these things have value. If you wash somebody's clothes without even thinking of a reward, that's very good, but it does not constitute selfless service. You do not want anything for it, but you want people to say you are a great Karma-yogi. If you say "I'll wash this man's clothes when he is not there and go away so that nobody knows ..." Can you complete that sentence?, "... so that nobody knows what I have done." Is that selfless service? Is it possible for a baby seeker, like most of us, even to understand what selflessness means? What we are trying to achieve in our practice of Karma-yoga is minimising selfishness (which is very important from the point of view of your spiritual evolution and of social welfare); but it is not selflessness. What is selflessness? A very special Samadhi is mentioned in the Bhagavad-Gita.

brahma'rpanam brahma havir-brahmagnau brahmana hutam
brahmai'va tena gantavyam brahmakarmasamadhina (IV.24)

"To one who is devoid of attachment, who is liberated, whose mind is established in knowledge, who works for the sake of sacrifice (for the sake of God), the whole action is dissolved."

Brahma-karma-samadhi - "This Samadhi (or state of total selflessness) is

reached when there is direct realisation of the simple truth that there is nothing but Brahman." Full stop. You don't even say, "There is nothing but Brahman in the world", because then you are creating a world. The speaker is Brahman, the speech is Brahman, the words are Brahman, the medium through which these words (sound vibrations) are carried is Brahman, the organs that receive these vibrations are Brahman, the person who understands this is Brahman. In the same way all actions take place in Brahman - they are not even actions, but Brahman. In the light of this truth, where is a thing called self? Where is a thing called the performer of an action, a motive for that action, a person to whom this action is directed, and a goal for the action? None of these things exists. One who is fully established in this realisation is a Karma-yogi.

The fundamental essence of Karma-yoga is selflessness, or the realisation that there is no self - in the sense of ego-self or the doer and the enjoyer. The realisation of the non-existence of the self is co-existent with the realisation that 'Brahman alone exists, there is no diversity'. When there is the direct realisation of this truth, there is utter selflessness. Action that flows from that selflessness is Karma-yoga.

What are the characteristics of such action? Vita-raga-bhaya-krodhah - when one is established in self-realisation, Raga (attraction), Bhaya (fear) and Krodha (hate) are completely absent. There is total non-attachment, a complete absence of fear and hate. This is the fundamental definition of a Karmayogi given in the Bhagavad-Gita. When these are lost, action is not lost, life does not cease. Life flows on without Raga, Bhaya and Krodha, because there is no self to get attached to something, to hate something, or to be afraid of something.

When this supreme oneness is seen, how do delusion and sorrow arise? When one alone exists, the possibility of 'I' getting attached to 'you' does not arise. Before I can experience an attraction to you, before the possibility can arise of my getting attached to you, there must be a division. When the division is not there, what is the sense in being attached? I cannot know that this division has come to an end, because the 'I' will continue to exist only as long as the division exists. The 'I', the ego, the self, can certainly know that there is attachment, that I am attached to you. As long as that attachment prevails, there is no selflessness, and no Karmayoga. But please, try to investigate and understand all this, and to find the truth. You might become less selfish. That endeavour is also called Karmayoga. Gurudev often pointed out that, whereas perfection alone is Yoga, even the effort, or the struggle towards that perfection, can be included in the broader definition of Yoga.

arurukshor-muner-yogam karma karanamuchyate

"For one who is striving to reach the goal, action is said to be the means."

yogarudhasya tasyai'va samah karanamuchyate (VI.3)

"When one has reached that state of Yoga there is utter tranquillity within."

So, both these can be brought under the broad definition of Yoga.

When there is self-realisation (and therefore the direct realisation that the ego-self is non-existent), there is spontaneous selflessness and spontaneous Karma-yoga. This is what one saw in Sri Gurudev. He was totally unattached, though when you were with Him, it looked as if He was greatly attached to you. There have been occasions when He even made it look as though XYZ was very dear to him. There was one Swami here who was not technically Gurudev's disciple, but he was more than Gurudev's disciple. He was bitten by a rabid dog, and Gurudev did all that was necessary for his recovery. He sent him to a hospital to have him attended to. When a telegram came the next morning, saying that he was improving, no one could have been happier than Gurudev Himself. When another telegram came later in the day that he was dead, Gurudev was almost visibly shocked. When the body was brought here the next morning, He didn't even look at it. That night we had a prayer for his soul, and then everything was completely forgotten. He didn't mention that man's name again, or what he did.

Non-attachment does not mean indifference. When you were with Swamiji, He thought of nothing else, it was as if you were His whole life. If you went away, you could go forever, there was no problem! What is that nature? That is supreme, intense love, but without attachment. There is intense activity, intense service, but without attachment. Unfortunately, since we try to grasp this with the mind, the mind wants to mould it into a nice little shape - which means isolating it from other things, and then comparing it with the others. When the mind tries to grasp this, it turns it into a definition: "This is love", "This is attachment", "This is non-attachment." You cannot define these subtle qualities. When you live with a person like Swamiji you see this, but unfortunately even then it is the mind that jumps like a monkey, trying to grasp the significance of the actions of these great ones. He did not live His life in order to be understood by us, He did not set an example, so that we might read His message from His life, but He lived because ... He lived. What else would you want Him to do?

Is it possible to observe such a life without bringing your mind into it? If the mind truly observed this, it could only get baffled - for example one moment it looked as though He was terribly fond of this Swami, and the next moment it looked as though He wasn't. You think that probably He was only pretending to be - but no, He couldn't pretend.

The 'I' does not understand. Then something arises within you, which realises that this is love, a love, that is totally free of attachment. That love is there because of utter selflessness - and the selflessness exists because of the direct realisation of Brahman, or the infinite Oneness.

9. Absence of Attachment, Fear and Hatred

Karma-yoga is not merely doing something without expecting a reward. It is one thing to expect and it is quite another thing to receive without expectation. Gurudev gave of Himself, His services and His knowledge to others, without expecting anything in return. But He also gave you an opportunity to show your gratitude, your appreciation, your devotion. He didn't want it, and He would not have been disappointed at all if you walked away. But He was not egoistic enough to refuse. That which asks for a reward is the ego, and that which rejects an offering is also the ego. Once He told me, in a nutshell, "Don't ask, don't refuse." Not to expect a reward is not exactly the same as rejecting a reward, but that is not the only thing that constitutes Karma-yoga. Karma-yoga is selfless service.

In order to be a Karma-yogi, therefore, the play of the self must have come to an end. As darkness cannot be seen, the self cannot be seen. It's like a shadow - it is, and it is not - but its effects, and its activity can be seen. One effect is Raga, which is mental or psychological colouring. It is not merely desire or attachment, but the mental colouring that bring about such an attachment. Usually it is the feeling that this object or person is a source of pleasure, security and happiness. When this attitude prevails, the mind runs towards that object or person. Gurudev was totally free of this, to such an extent that He was able to detect it in His disciples. I'll give you one example. In the beginning, there was no printing facility here, and therefore Swamiji had allowed a number of private agencies to publish His books. When we acquired a press, which could print and publish them here, a number of books were withdrawn from the publishers. The case of one was being discussed. A senior disciple suggested, "Wouldn't it be better to leave the book with the publisher, Swamiji? He has worked hard, and of course he has earned some money from it, but he has also done a lot of printing, publishing and distributing." Swamiji kept quiet for a few minutes, then suddenly he turned to him, "Whenever you go to that city, you stay with him, do you not? The mind is coloured." It is not as though He was siding with the publisher, but since the mind was coloured, that appeared to be right. To see this demands tremendous insight.

The whole of your mind is coloured, prejudiced. So, with what are you going to see this prejudice? Only a person of tremendous insight can really do this. You may be told that your actions, thoughts, words and deeds are prejudiced, but you may not be able to see this fact for yourself, because the whole mind is coloured. We do not know whether the attachment arose, and therefore the pleasure came on, or whether first there was pleasure and the attachment came later, but the existence of this colouring - of affection, of attachment - denotes the play of the self. As long as that is there, there is no Karma-yoga.

Another effect is Bhaya. Bhaya is psychological fear. It is not the fear that you experience when you are standing on the road and a truck comes hurtling towards you. That is something else. Psychological fear is a totally irrational fear, based only upon the image of the self and the play of the self. You want

something to happen, you are afraid it may not happen; you want something not to happen, you are afraid it is going to happen. You're afraid that your reputation will be lost, that your pleasure may come to an end. You're afraid of old age and death. Unless we all die young, old age is inevitable. Even if you do not reach old age, you cannot escape death. There is no sense in being afraid of death, and yet this irrational fear exists in our hearts. Why is it so? That is another activity of the self. If you are able to observe this, and trace it to its source, the ego-self is discovered.

Swamiji was totally free from psychological fear. It is possible that you have seen some holy men (mostly wandering ascetics) who also seem to act fearlessly. But Swamiji was in a peculiar situation; He was the head of a world-wide organisation and considered a Jagat-guru, God-incarnate, by millions. Fame is one of the most dangerous impediments to the unawakened, because it is sought by the ego-self, and it promotes the ego-self. So, if the ego-self is still there, very much alive and kicking, then fame is a disaster. It will bind you, frighten you. You will do anything, and desist from doing anything to guard it, afraid of public opinion. Swamiji was totally free from all this. He did not do what was not right, not because He was afraid of public opinion, but because it was not right. If it was not right, nothing in the world could persuade Him to do it. What was right He did, and in doing that He had absolutely no regard for what people would say. Once somebody said, "I am afraid to expose myself in front of all these people." He said, "If you're afraid to do something, do it immediately, and thus get rid of the fear." He was not a naked Swami, He was always decently and tastefully dressed, but in early summer or spring, He would sit on the Ganga bank, clad in just a Langoti, and rub Himself with oil. He did not mind - you could look, you could laugh, you could do what you liked, that was your business, not His. He was not afraid of what people would think or say. He also believed in all sorts of natural ways of health. When the sun was up, He would expose His teeth and gums to the sun, and stick His tongue out, without the least self-consciousness or hesitation. You and I can do that because we are insignificant. But remember it was Swami Sivananda - if He sneezed, everybody in the whole town knew. He would do anything He considered right, regardless of criticism.

Before the Ashram was established, He had already become quite famous. In those days it was unheard of for a Swami of His stature (and for an Advaita Vedantin) to sing Kirtan and to dance. I believe people used to make fun of Him, thinking He was a sort of performer, because they belonged to the other school. They felt that a holy man must be very grave and serious, all the time contemplating Brahman. But does one have to reject the world in order to get Brahman? That philosophy didn't appeal to Gurudev. Much later I met one of those old senior Swamis, a very great man. He said, "You know, in those days, when Swamiji used to sing and dance on public platforms, some of us used to even criticise Him. But now we realise that He was right and we were wrong."

Nothing really deflected Him from what He wanted to do, from what was right in the circumstances. He had no fear of contagion at all. Doctors would wash

their hands in lysol even if they touched your cheek, but He was totally unafraid in all this. There was a man who had the most virulent type of smallpox - he died of it. Swamiji used to visit him, and after visiting him, He didn't have a bath or change His clothes. He used to visit even people dangerously ill from cholera and typhoid. He could handle them without any fear whatsoever. I have never heard Him philosophise on these matters. You could see what He did, and sometimes it was so dramatic, so tremendous, that we could not even bear to ask why He did it.

What is the philosophy behind this? The philosophy was drawn by the disciples. He was not interested. I'm emphasising this because of a feeling deep within my heart, that when you are tempted to philosophise, there is either fear in you in a very subtle form, or there is a desire to be respected, admired. All that is the play of the ego-self. If it is natural behaviour you do not philosophise. In the case of a selfless man, this fear is naturally absent, he does not pretend it is absent, nor show off that it is absent in him. That is the ego again, that is not selflessness.

In the same way, He had no fear of losing His reputation. I have never seen a great man of His stature do what He used to do. He would nourish, clothe, house and look after people who would criticise Him. If you were a Sadhak with some spiritual aspiration which was worth preserving and promoting, or if you had talents and faculties which could be of some use to the public, he would allow you to stay here even if you criticised him directly to his face or behind his back. And funnily enough he might glorify you, knowing that you were criticising Him. Again, I am drawing all these conclusions. He never argued about all this.

He never cared for public opinion. Public opinion will take care of itself. One very interesting story I heard from a very senior Swami, Swami Paramananda. It seems that during a Kumbha Mela in Haridwar in the 1930's someone floated a rumour that Swami Sivananda was going to get married. The news was brought to the Ashram by one of Swamiji's own disciples, who was furious. When he brought this to Swamiji's notice, Swamiji said, "Alright erect a platform for him! Let him say all this from the platform. People who hear this will come here to witness the marriage or to find out whether it is true or false, and I will give them 'Twenty Instructions', and make them sing the Lord's names." He was completely and totally fearless.

There is one more incident. A young woman came here. She wouldn't give her name or even say from where she came, but merely said "I'm not married and I'm pregnant. I came to Rishikesh to commit suicide, but I have no strength." Swamiji didn't ask her a single question, and there was no question whatsoever about public opinion. Immediately he sent for two or three saris because she came with just the sari she had on. Some body had to vacate his room for her. Everything was arranged within half an hour. She lived here for a few months, then Swamiji sent her to another city to have the baby, attended to by one of his own devotees. When the baby was born he wrote to a couple who had wanted to adopt a child. This girl came with the baby, gave it to the other couple, and all went away.

Where it was the right thing to do, there was absolutely no question of fear. But one has to remember that it was very different from an attitude of arrogance. It was not because of arrogance or not caring what people think, but "This is right, it has to be done absolutely fearlessly."

The spiritual quality of fearlessness or Abhayam is very different from arrogance, haughtiness or defiance, which are Rajasic and totally unspiritual. Abhayam arises from an understanding of the basic fundamental oneness of existence viz., "I'm not afraid of you, not because I know I am superior or stronger than you are, but because I know we are one." It is only when the Yogi has understood this unity that there is fearlessness which is neither defiance nor arrogance but a natural corollary of this understanding. That is what we saw in Swamiji. He was naturally and genuinely humble and always eager to accommodate. Therefore there was no defiance.

One of the basic qualities or virtues found in the Karma-yogi is that he is ever ready to adapt, adjust and accommodate. If you are unable to do that you cannot practise Karma-yoga, you cannot serve humanity, you cannot serve God. 'Adapt, adjust, accommodate' is not a gospel of weakness, of bending down because you don't stand up, but a sign of the strength of wisdom; so this fearlessness is very different from the fearlessness that you and I imagine. A fearless man (according to us) is a defiant man who can defy public opinion, but Swamiji's fearlessness was born of a spontaneous understanding of what is right. Therefore when he did something, he did it not in defiance of public opinion, but unafraid of public opinion. He neither picked an argument concerning his conviction, responded to a challenge nor tried to convince His opponents. If you were His disciple and you felt you were right and He was wrong about how something should be done, sometimes he said, "Alright, do it your way". And then later on you might discover that you were wrong and He was right! If it was a stranger who tried to argue with Him, He didn't enter into the argument at all. He heard all that the other person had to say, very thoroughly and patiently - and then offered Him a cup of tea, a few fruits and some books. What happened to the argument? He carried on doing what He knew was good with the fearlessness based on the understanding of oneness. Perhaps He felt that one day we would understand also, because we are one.

Krodha or anger is used even in the Bhagavad Gita as a synonym for hate or dislike. We associate hate with some sort of aggressive behaviour, but aggressive behaviour is only one aspect of hate. The fundamental cause of hate is judgment. You judge the other person wrong, wicked, foolish, stupid or incorrigible, and then you hate. You begin to whitewash that hate, saying, "I don't hate him, but I hate his behaviour", as if you are able to exercise such a fine judgment. Is your judgment so fine that you can isolate the sin from the sinner, and hate this abstract quality of sin without hating the sinner? If it is possible for you, very good, but in practice you may find that it is very difficult. Swamiji used to say, "Sin is a mistake that a baby soul commits on the path of evolution." When this

view is adopted there is no judgment. For instance, if your child does something stupid, you don't execute it, but very lovingly admonish it if necessary. Why is it that when it comes to somebody else you get worked up so much and enter into severe judgment, condemn that person and then hate him?

Hate is also associated with fear. You always hate the person you fear, and fear the person whom you hate. So when fear is absent there is not much room for hate, and when judgment is absent there is no room for hate at all. Once again we see in that the recognition of oneness. This was the basic factor in Swamiji's life and in Karma-yoga. Karma yoga is impossible without the direct realisation of oneness. Selfless service is impossible as long as the self keeps playing these tricks of throwing up attachment, fear and hate (or aversion). As long as these three qualities are found in us selflessness is not possible. One might strive for this selflessness but there is no realisation of it because it is not real at that time. At that time the ego-self is real! How does selflessness become real? It is only when this self is realised to be unreal that true selflessness arises without any difficulty whatsoever.

It has been said by psychologists that we are born with these three traits: Raga, Bhaya and Krodha - love, fear and hate - which only means that all living beings that entertain the notion of a self have these three qualities built into them; or, these three qualities together constitute the ego-self. So if these three are pulled away the self is absent; or if the self is pulled away, these three qualities are absent. One goes with the other. One can also see that (assuming that these qualities were born with every creature at birth) they grow fatter and fatter as the years go by, because the self is getting formed all the time. These three qualities also gain strength and momentum so that a child is less afraid than adults; and the child has momentary attachment and momentary anger, not longstanding as in the case of the adults. In the case of Swamiji, too, one might say that if He became angry at all it was very, very fleeting and momentary. He never bore a grudge. That was His characteristic. There are Swamis who might be all the time smiling, but they bear a grudge, and destroy you. In Swamiji's case it was not so. He rarely became angry, but even when there was anger, it passed on in a minute, and then you were His greatest friend. One could also see that He was not forced to become angry, He did not become angry in spite of Himself, but it was as if the switch was in His hand. I think in all my life here with Him for about seventeen years, I saw that on only two occasions. I wouldn't want to see it again. It was ferocious. After manifesting that anger for about a minute or two, He smiled and everything was forgotten. The situation demanded it, so He deliberately switched it on and when the moment the need was over, switched it off. That was beautiful to watch. So once again it was not anger as you and I know it to be, but situational ethics. Therefore fundamentally He was free from these three qualities.

Even a sage has what is called Lesa-avidya, just a faint Avidya. The example given is the petromax mantle. When the mantle in the petromax lantern is lit, what you see is not what the mantle was before you started using it. Those threads are all burnt, and yet it retains its shape as long as you don't touch it. The

moment you touch it the whole thing disintegrates. The sage is like that. He might also seem to have these qualities - Raga, Bhaya and Krodha - but that is only apparent. His personality has been burnt in the fire of knowledge. For the time being, since he wears this body and seems to function in this physical world, the appearance of a personality and therefore the appearance of these qualities also arise in Him.

10. Be Thou an Instrument

In the Bhagavatam there is a very beautiful little story. Krishna was walking into a forest along with his friends, the cowherds and their cattle. On the way they saw a tree laden with fruits. Krishna led his companions towards that tree and said to them, "Friends, look at this. When will we ever be like that tree? When the tree is laden with fruits it bends down, whereas if man is laden with fruits he becomes more arrogant. If you are uneducated, or poor, probably you are humble, but the moment you have a couple of diplomas or become wealthy you look down upon everyone else. Even if you think you have some virtuous qualities (fruits), then suddenly you become arrogant. A tree when laden with these fruits becomes more and more humble and says, 'Come on, please take,' without any bargaining whatsoever. So in a way it is only the trees that practise Karma-yoga in the absolutely true sense!"

A few Bhavanas or attitudes are considered extremely important in Karma-yoga. One is Nimitta bhavana. Nimitta is an instrument. For instance the pen in your hand is an instrument. Though it is the pen that actually does the writing, it is not the writer, you are the writer.

nimittamatram bhava savyasachin (XI. 33)

"I am the doer of all actions," says Krishna, "Be My instrument."

Though it is the perfection in this Bhavana that constitutes Karma-yoga, even an attempt to cultivate it can also be called Karma-yoga in practice. Gurudev recommended this.

To regard yourself as an instrument in the hands of God is very good as a starting point, but sometime or other consider this factor. Does that pen determine what it shall do and what it shall not do as an instrument in the hands of this man? Is it possible for you to be unaware that you are an instrument in the hands of God, but to be so? This was an extraordinary thing which we noticed in Swamiji's life. In all those years perhaps on two or three occasions only I might have heard him say, "I am only an instrument in the hands of God." And this was when he was glorified. If you are an instrument in the hands of God, you may not even say so. The pen does not say so! The person who says, "I am an instrument in the hands of God," may or may not really and truly feel that, and there is the danger here of distinguishing oneself, and thus making yourself an egoistic person. So, one who has realised that he is an instrument in the hands of God, becomes a real instrument in the hands of God, without even feeling the need of having to say or think so.

One knew that Swamiji lived in this spirit, by observing what He did, and how He did it. In all His actions, personal motivation was completely absent. You know that you are living in the spirit of an instrument when there is not the least selfish motivation in your activities. That pen will write the words 'g-o-o-d', 'b-a-d', and 'e-v-i-l' with equal facility, without questioning you. It will write from left

to right or right to left without any motivation whatsoever, without thinking of the past or the future. Similarly the Karma-yogi completely spontaneously does what the Supreme Being determines should be done. This is what we saw in Swamiji all the time. Whatever He did was done with such spontaneity and with such purity, without any calculation or motivation, that one could see that He was not doing it because He wanted to build something or destroy something. When on occasions the Ashram faced economic bankruptcy, He said, "Acha, there's no money. Alright we'll go to Rishikesh and beg for our food." This was said so simply, with no disappointment. You and I might grin and bear it, but He was joyous, happy. This happened when He was past sixty. He said, "I may not be able to walk to Rishikesh to beg for food, so hire a tonga for Me." If we had money to hire a tonga, we could just as well have given Him His food here. The food that He ate was cheap enough to be covered by the tonga hire, but still He said He would go with us to the Kshetra to beg for food, but He would come in a tonga. That was the supreme spirit. Observing this one, realises what it is to be an instrument in the hands of God.

Another Bhavana is Narayana or Atma-bhavana - that is, to see God in all, to serve God in all. Please remember that it is not "I serve God in all," just "Serve God in all". The 'I' has already been transformed into the instrument. As the service proceeds, it is directed to the same omnipresent being, to the same omnipresent God. It is there in the Bhagavad-Gita in the 18th Chapter.

yatah pravrittir bhutanam yena sarvamidam tatam
svakarmana tam abhyarchya siddhim vindati manavah (XVIII. 46)

"Man attains perfection by regarding every one of his actions as a flower offered at the omnipresent feet of God?"

Everyone who comes to you, offers you an opportunity to serve God in and through him. It is as if God Himself comes to you in that form, to give you an opportunity to worship Him. We have heard this at least a million times, but it has to be seen. I've heard from others who were with Him in Swargashram and in Malaya that if He served someone - pressed your feet because they were aching or did some little service - it was almost a super sensuous sight to look into His face. If He was able to give you something, His face lit up. He was delighted, there was gratitude on His face and in His eyes. The appearance of His face was something extraordinary. There was that look of "I am serving God." He may or may not have said so, but His face radiated this message. To serve God in all is the highest form of worship.

These two Bhavanas are essential to Karma-yoga. Though it is possible to think of them, contemplate them, meditate upon them, I still feel that one has to live with someone who lives in such a spirit, to be able to imbibe that spirit.

11. Bhakti Yoga

Obviously the practice of Karma-yoga (as opposed to Karma-yoga itself) has to lean or depend upon either Bhakti or Jnana. Karma-yoga in its purest sense is self-realisation, which is the goal of any Yoga. But the fact is that our day to day life of Karma-yoga is not perfect Karma-yoga, but only an attempt at it. Whereas it was usually believed that Karma-yoga could be practised independently, even as a preliminary to Bhakti or Raja-yoga, it was Gurudev who pointed out that even to practise Karma-yoga you need some idea of Bhakti or Jnana.

The orthodox viewpoint was that we all suffered from a three-fold problem - Mala, Vikshepa and Avarana. Mala is impurity - of heart, mind, habits, tendencies and Samskaras. Unless the impurity is completely removed, spiritual progress is impossible. Once the impurity has been removed through Karma-yoga, then you tackle Vikshepa (restlessness of the mind). For that, Bhakti-yoga and Raja-yoga were prescribed. When the impurities are gone, when the heart and the mind are pure and steady, then you can engage yourself in Jnana for the removal of the veil of ignorance, Avarana. In that context Karma-yoga merely meant performing scripturally ordained routine functions (I don't want even to call them duties). The whole day was packed with rituals from 4 o'clock in the morning till 10 in the night. When that is done without selfish motivation - not even the motivation of going to heaven - it purifies your heart.

The other type of Karma-yoga that we have been talking about (that of the Bhagavad-Gita) must necessarily have Bhakti or Jnana as its basis, because certainly in the beginning of our spiritual career whenever you do something - even sit and meditate, do one Maala of Japa, or do some Seva (or service) to your fellow-man or to the Guru - you might find that it is extremely difficult not to think of a motivation. The mind begins to ask "Why am I doing this?" Even if you refuse to provide an answer, the answer is provided by the mind itself. It may even say, "I am practising Karma-yoga" - which indirectly means that I want to attain enlightenment. Even when I wash your clothes just one day in a Karma-yoga spirit, I tell myself "I am getting rid of all the miseries of Samsara and gaining eternal bliss." But that is also a motivation, and therefore there is no Karma-yoga. Hence one has to bring in Bhakti or Jnana. Bhakti is simpler.

Swamiji had an extraordinary trait, that of bringing together what might even appear contradictory. He was willing to add on, not to drop anything out. I can give you a very funny side of this story which relates to His daily habits. Normally we have thirty-two teeth, but I think that He had a few more than thirty-two. He had lumbago, diabetes and rheumatism, and every specialist who came to see Him suggested that many of these troubles might have been due to some kind of toxins collecting in the teeth, and said that they would like to clean them. Swamiji refused; He insisted that nothing should be removed, but He agreed to add hydrogen peroxide to His 'care-of-the-teeth' routine. Then a nature cure specialist came along. He also had the same diagnosis, but said that Swamiji should use salt and mustard oil. Salt and mustard oil were added. Then somebody else said that

He should use crushed charcoal. That also was added. And then finally someone suggested this toothpowder that we manufacture now. Not only did He adopt it as His toothpowder, but He also had it manufactured for distribution to everybody. "What is good for Me is good for all." Then the simple thing of brushing His teeth took about ten to fifteen minutes in the morning, and it was a big ritual - first this, and then this, and then that, and then this. Even so, the Kirtan with which we start Satsanga began to grow. First it was Jaya Ganesha, Jaya Guru Adi-Guru and Hare Rama, then someone said that Saraswati's grace was needed for us. That was added. Similarly Subrahmanya, Anjaneya, etc. In the same way the Arati at night was extended. You were allowed to add on as much as you liked, but no subtraction was allowed. Nothing should be neglected. All suggestions for additions were accepted, everything had to be included in that mighty big Yoga called Sivananda Yoga. If there was a contradiction, the god who was invoked in that prayer must be able to resolve that contradiction!

Even in the case of Bhakti-Yoga and Karma-Yoga, He had a rather interesting attitude. If something good happened to Him (what you and I might call good fortune or good luck), He would say, "Oh, it's God's grace." And if He performed a miracle and you came and said, "Swamiji, You touched me yesterday and my headache disappeared", He would say "Oh, that's all God's grace." That is the Bhakti attitude. If His legs were bothering Him, or if He had some misfortune, He would say "All these things don't exist." Misfortune, pain and suffering don't exist. There, the Jnana approach was taken. So, He was an extraordinary and beautiful combination of all these Yogic attitudes.

In Bhakti-Yoga, He combined immediately all the different aspects. In orthodox Bhakti literature you have two major divisions: Gauna (which is also called Vaidhi Bhakti) and Mukhya. Vaidhi (or Gauna) Bhakti implies adhering to rules and regulations. You must perform a Puja in a certain way, you must repeat a Mantra with certain rules and regulations, you must have had a bath before, etc. He adhered to them as far as he could. For instance, He celebrated some festivals, and He was extremely orthodox in them. When you observed Him on those occasions, you would have thought that He was an extremely orthodox Brahmin. The way He bathed Himself, dressed Himself and put the Tilak on His forehead, gave the impression that He was a stickler to these rules and regulations. On Sivaratri He wouldn't eat at all, and would keep awake the whole night, even so with Vaikuntha Ekadasi. On Ramanavami He would fast till midday, and on Janmashtami He would fast till midnight. He was very strict in His adherence to the rules. In His own Kutir there was a small altar, and He would not take food before worshipping at that altar. There was a small picture of Siva (or sometimes Krishna), and He used to offer flowers and wave a lamp there every day. In His own way He had evolved a small Puja, and was very regular in that. As long as He could walk, He walked up to the temple three times a day, right from His Kutir.

The message seems to be that where it is possible to adhere to these rules, why not adhere to them? It is the ego that says "I don't want these rules." You are practising Yoga in order to deal with that. If the mind suggests that you don't

need temple Puja, that is the ego. Of course it is also possible to develop the temple-going egoism, and to say "I have never abandoned Puja even for a day," or "I have always been meditating for three hours every morning." The ego keeps doing something - going to the temple, sitting and meditating, doing some Asanas, Japa, Pranayama. You are egoistic about that. If you abandon Sadhana in order to avoid this Sadhana-ego, you are left with nothing except egoism. Egoism plus Sadhana is better than egoism minus Sadhana.

Connected with this Murthi-puja (idol-worship), we noticed something very rare in His case. To Him the Murthis (idols) in the temple were not mere statues, but the living presence. It is the endeavour of a Yogi to see God in everything. If you want to see God in all and in everything, and you refuse to see God in that Murthi, it is arrogance, ego. So, by adopting a right attitude towards all this, again and again you bump into your own ego. It is a beautiful practice if you realise its value, and remember that you are practising Yoga in order to deal with the ego. If it is your sincere intention to find the ego, crush it, remove it, or deal with it in some other way, then all these things are of great help, for they bring it up for your attention. That which rebels within you is the ego.

To realise the omnipresence of God, first see God in the Murthi. It is not a statue, but the omnipresence, and since millions of people have directed the devotion of their hearts to this form it is endowed with a Shakti, a force of its own. Link yourself with it. Gurudev has written very beautifully that, when you worship a Murthi, it remains an idol, but your devotion goes to God. He was very fond of Manasic (mental) Puja also. He would sit on the Ganga bank and offer Manasic Puja to the Ganga and the Himalayas, because these have been specifically mentioned in the Vibhuti-Yoga chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, as the special manifestations of God. Adore the Thames and the Alps if you are in Europe, but if you can, look upon the Himalayas as a divine manifestation. When the mind is trained to see God in these, it learns how to link itself with God. In that process, either the ego gets out of the way (which is a blessing), or if it comes up, you have an opportunity to deal with it. If you are able to look at the Ganga or Himalayas and say, "Manifestations of God, salutations", you're safe, but if you think it is only a mountain, only water, that is the ego. Find it, remove it. So, both Bahya Puja (or the external worship of an idol) and Manasic Puja are important. Not one or the other, but both. If you abandon external worship, thinking you are expert in Manasic Puja, when the Manasic Puja dies down, everything is gone, whereas if you adhere to the external worship, you will probably continue it whether or not you have the right spirit. The right spirit can somehow be added on at sometime or the other.

Then comes what is known as Para (supreme) Puja, which is almost the same as Mukhya Bhakti. In Para Puja you regard everything as a manifestation of God, and you regard your own life as a continuous worship. There are a number of hymns which describe this. One is:

atma tvam giriija matih sahaacharah pranah sariram griham
puja te vishayopabhoga-rachana nidra samadhisthitih

sancharah padayoh pradakshinvidhih stotrani sarva giro
yadyat karma karomi tat tadakhilam sambho tavaradhanam

"This body is Your temple (not 'my' body), and all the enjoyments that it goes through every day are your worship. Sleep itself is Samadhi. You are the one that is the reality in this temple. When the legs walk, they walk around Your temple, and whatever the mouth utters is all Your praise. Thus, O Lord, whatever I do is thus Your adoration."

That is Para Puja. To do this one must have had the training and practice of idol-worship and Manasic Puja in order to have this inner feeling.

If there was one thing that was anathema to Swamiji it was mere tall talk. He was far too practical a person to be satisfied with mere theory. Even when it came to Para Puja, He evolved His own method of ensuring that it was done correctly, not to just imagine that one is in that state. He loved the Vibhuti-yoga chapter very much, and used to recommend it to everybody. As soon as He was ready to come out of His room, the first thing He saw was the Himalayas. He would stand there for maybe five seconds, and mentally and physically prostrate to the Himalayas, then the same to the Ganga. When He came out later when the sun was up, there were mental salutations to the sun. He saw all these as God's manifestations. Then He used to spend a few minutes in My room which was next to His. He would say, "Haro hara, tat-twam-asi, om santih, banami khuda mubarak, namah sivaya, namo narayanaya, namo bhagavate vasudevaya, namo bhagavate ... (using the name of the particular disciple), namo bhagavati ganga rani, hari om tat sat." He had nothing to gain and nothing to lose by doing or not doing this. As He leant on that big stick, and addressed each one of us in turn "Namo Bhagavate So and so" and offered salutations, one could see that That was what He saw. These were not empty words. It's an extraordinary beautiful form of Puja, of Japa and of constant remembrance of the divine. He was extremely fond of this.

We saw another beautiful thing when He came to the office to work. He had a few pictures hanging on the walls right in front of Him, and as He sat down in His chair, He used to turn round and look at each one just for ten seconds. By all these the mind was being reconnected to the divine. It is possible that during our daily activities this connection is lost, however evolved we may be. You may be practising Bhakti, but it is possible that in the heat of the daily activities this connection gets fused. He would not allow that to happen. If one of the pictures was missing, He would ask for it. You and I wouldn't even bother to notice them! He did this every day. This was a must.

Then came the extension of this. Sometimes He would peel an orange, and keep throwing it into the Ganga for the fish-gods, and if a monkey was sitting up there, He would also get his share. In those days fruits were scarce, and we couldn't afford them, but He felt if He could have them, the monkey could have them too. Even in his spectacle-case, shoes, or anything that He handled, He saw the Divine Presence. It's an extension of the same spirit. It started with the Krishna in the temple, and went right down to the shoes and the spectacle-case - the Divine

Presence is there. He would close the spectacle-case very gently; I have never seen anyone who handled fountain pens and glasses as gently and delicately as He used to. He never broke one little thing in his life. If He handled them, it was so gentle, so sweet that you would think He was handling a newborn baby. Even if He took up His scarf, and put it round His neck, it was done so beautifully, so delicately, so artistically, as if He would hurt the God in that shawl if He were not so gentle. When He came to the temple and offered the Bael leaves on the Siva-lingam, He would place them so devoutly, so gently at the foot of the Siva-lingam. Once during Sivaratri, He came to the Puja, took a few leaves and joined in the Archana. A few fell on the Lingam and then I noticed they had stopped falling. I looked up to see if He needed more, and saw that He was offering the flowers at the people around in the temple, worshipping them also. "God is not only there in the Murthi, but in you." Nobody noticed it, and if I had not had the curiosity to look up to see if He had flowers or not, I would not have noticed either.

So, only if total Bhakti-yoga accompanies our practice of Karma-yoga, is Karma-yoga itself effective, otherwise it becomes hypocrisy, social service - service for the sake of name, fame and all the rest of it. Service in itself is good, but it is not Yoga, not something which would lead you to Moksha or liberation. This Bhakti has to accompany the practice of Karma-yoga from day to day, from moment to moment.

12. The Yoga of Swamiji

Swamiji's attitude to the practice of Karma-yoga and Bhakti-yoga - or of Yoga in general - was that none of these can really be isolated from the others, that you cannot possibly become a specialist. He used to make fun of even the medical specialists, saying that about a hundred years ago we had a family doctor, but now there is a family of doctors for each patient. From His point of view (which appears to be absolutely correct) Yoga is inseparable. You cannot practise Karma-yoga, Bhakti-yoga or Hatha-yoga in isolation. Asanas practised in isolation are gymnastics. In Hatha, Bhakti and Karma-yogas, meditation and Jnana are involved. So, the truth which He revealed to us was that each different branch of Yoga (if you wish to call it so) involves all the others.

Karma-yoga involves Bhakti, and without Bhakti there is no Karma-yoga. With Bhakti, and with the right attitude, whatever work you do can be transmuted into Karma-yoga. Without Bhakti even the noblest work that you do becomes social service. It is not that we discourage or look down upon social service, but it is not Karma-yoga. Swamiji instructed a disciple: "When you are massaging somebody's feet, feel that you are massaging God's feet. Sarvatah panipadam - all hands and feet belong to God." If that spirit is there, it is Karma-yoga, but if it is not there, there is no Karma-yoga.

In Karma-yoga you should be free from Raga and Dvesha, and since Karma-yoga necessarily involves your entering into relationships, it cannot be practised in isolation in a cave. You have to be in society, surrounded by people - and you must serve them. Buddha said something very interesting: "No one has been praised by all the world, and no one has been condemned by everybody." There are critics for even the incarnations of God. Rama, Krishna, Jesus and Buddha were all criticised. If even they could not please everybody and win everybody's approval, what are your chances? It is quite possible that, if you are extremely lucky, a few people will appreciate you, but the rest of them will find fault with you, criticise you. Now, is it possible for you to accept it or ignore it? Here Swamiji applied a beautiful dual principle. "I am serving God in you. Om Namo Narayanaya. But if you insult me that is nothing but wind, it is not God who is insulting me. So, when I serve you, there is Bhakti-yoga, when you are insulting me and I am endeavouring not to react, I bring in the Jnana-yoga theory of Maya - that the whole world is an illusion - and your words of insult have no meaning whatsoever."

Swamiji's Yoga was not a joke. Simultaneously it involved the operation of all these principles. So, the Karma-yogi had to be endowed with the principles of "adapt, adjust, accommodate, bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest Sadhana." This should not be done in a martyr's spirit e.g. "I love to be insulted, I like to be abused", so that then you go and tell your friends that when he insulted you, you didn't react. The insult must not even touch you - which means that you should not even know it was an insult. He said something which was merely air coming out of his mouth, and it shouldn't make an impression upon you at all.

Then no Samskara is formed, and there is no resistance, therefore no dislike. You cannot practise Ahimsa or Karma-yoga, nor serve all with love, if you can be hurt. This is the ideal. It is possible for us to evolve some sort of Sadhana to take us to this ideal, and that Sadhana also may be called Karma-yoga, but the essence of Karma-yoga is that you reach a position of non-hurtability. You never hurt and you are never hurt. If you are hurt - whether you react or not - the potentiality of reaction is there, one way or the other. You may not react or abuse the other person back, you may not do anything at all, but if you go on and tell your friends, "You know he insulted me the other day and I smiled at him", you have created one more enemy for the other man. You may not react, but your friend will! That is violence by proxy! You do not want to hit the other person, but you encourage somebody else to go and hit him. So if you can be hurt, you are violent, aggressive. It is the strong, aggressive ego that gets hurt, and as long as this hurtability is there, there is no non-violence and no Karma-yoga - you cannot serve God in all, you cannot see God in all.

In this one theme Swamiji taught and practised a confluence of several doctrines, traditionally attributed to different branches of Yoga. Service is considered Karma-yoga, seeing God in you is considered Bhakti yoga, treating all these things with indifference is considered Jnana-yoga, but here all of them got blended together.

In the same way you cannot practise Bhakti-yoga in isolation. Because, as the Bhagavad-Gita very beautifully says, "The devotee is keenly interested in the welfare of all." What you do may not be as spectacular as what somebody else does. That is not important. I don't know if you know the legend related to the Ramayana. The Vanaras were building a bridge across the ocean to go to Lanka. They were mighty people who could pick up a whole mountain and throw it into the ocean. They were doing this task when a little squirrel nosed around, and found out what was going on. The squirrel wondered what to do. It couldn't lift a rock or a tree, so it went into the ocean and got its fur wet, rolled on the beach so that its body gathered sand, ran towards where they were building, and shook its fur so that a few particles of sand fell on this bridge. When Rama saw this, it is said that he was greatly pleased and stroked the back of the squirrel with three fingers. Even now you see the three white stripes on the back of the squirrel. What somebody else can do may be fantastic, but what you can do may be just a few grains of sand. That's enough, because it's the spirit that matters. There are dozens of stories in the Mahabharata and other scriptures to illustrate this. It is not the quantity but the spirit that matters.

If you are a devotee of God, it is impossible for you not to be involved in the welfare of all beings, because you begin to see (in the words of Gurudev) that God Himself comes to you in different forms. If a sick man comes, he is God coming to you in that form; if a poor man comes, it is God coming to you in that form, to enable you to express your devotion in service. While you are rendering this service, if you are not attentive to what goes on within you, it may cease to be selfless and devotional service, and may become mechanical or selfish service. So,

in order to preserve the purity of the Bhavana (inner attitude), you ought to be aware of your mind and your own heart. That is constant meditation. Unless you are in a meditative mood all the time it is not possible to practise Karma or Bhakti-yoga.

Murthi-puja should graduate into Manasic Puja and Para Puja and so on. The difference between Manasic Puja and Para Puja is nothing but the innermost attitude. In order to know that this attitude is present, you must be ever watchful of yourself. That is constant meditation. As a matter of fact, from that point of view one does Murthi-puja, in order to gain an experience of what it is to see God in another person. How do you know you are seeing God in him? You go to the temple, and while you are doing the Puja there is an inner feeling. This is the feeling of being in the presence of God. Is that the same feeling that you have when you are with everybody or not? So, there is a touchstone on which to evaluate. If you don't have the same feeling when you are in another's presence, it means you are not seeing God in him. There in the temple you felt the presence of God, here you feel he is your friend (or student or teacher). It is the ego that reacts differently. You must observe that. If you do not learn to observe that, you will never progress, you will never learn to practise Karma-yoga or Bhakti-yoga.

It is extremely important to learn to serve some person, for instance your own Guru. Worship Him. Literally feel the presence of God in Him. But why is Murthi-puja prescribed? Because it is easier. That image has no ego, and so it's a completely neutral entity - it stands there unmoved, unmoving, unblinking - and so there is only one problem for you, and that is yourself. When serving your Guru, it becomes a bit more difficult to adapt and adjust and so on, because He is also alive, and the moment you look at Him, the mind immediately says, "He is So and so. He likes this; he doesn't like this. I must please Him. This will please Him, that will displease Him." Here there is a personal relationship. In regard to the Murthi there is no personal relationship possible, so Murthi-puja is easier than the Guru-puja.

Try to learn the simple lessons in worshipfulness, surrender, dedication, love, affection and devotion while doing the Murthi-puja, and then apply it to the Guru. Your heart expands in concentric circles. It is possible that you may have one impulse, and the whole thing bursts and you have enlightenment; it is also possible that your heart may have to expand in concentric circles. First you do Murthi-puja, cultivate the Bhavana, observe your own heart and mind to see what the feeling is when you stand in front of something which is regarded as God. Then come to your Guru, bow down to Him, worship Him, see if you have the same thrill, or if the ego comes up and says, "What kind of Guru is this? He is teasing me all the time." Or, "He does not do what I want him to do." The statue in the temple does not do what you want it to do! Here is an opportunity for you to study your ego again, and then slowly the ego drops the expectation. You are able to worship God in the temple, you are able to worship God in the Guru. Then you look at your Gurubhais. You don't have the same feeling. Examine yourself again. It's possible that in this manner your experience of the omnipresence of

God expands in concentric circles. This is Bhakti-yoga. If this is not understood, you remain an idolator all your life.

Even though Gurudev was well established in supreme Bhakti, He did not 'give up' idol-worship. The thing that says, "I am enlightened, and therefore this is not necessary for me", is the ego. So, right till the end of his earthly career, Swamiji did not abandon His own personal worship, though the time taken might have been abbreviated. After 1956 or 1957, He couldn't easily walk up the hill, so He didn't often come to the temple. He did not abandon anything, but it became physically impossible, so it dropped away.

One of the most important Sadhanas - not only associated with Bhakti, but Jnana and all forms of Yoga - is Satsanga. In the 40's the Satsanga consisted of the 'Jaya Ganesha' with which we start, and then somebody would chant one chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita in Sanskrit - with or without translation. Then He would lead the chorus in some Kirtan, and others would read the Upanishads, Vishnu Purana or Bhagavata or some other text, and all of us would take our turn leading the chorus. It took about an hour or so. Satsanga is important, because it is the Satsanga that sustains the spirit of all this Yoga practice. Without Satsanga, if the spirit decreases, we do not even know what has happened. So, Gurudev was extremely fond of Satsanga. Sometimes when the body was very ill and weak, He would miss coming to the office, but He would never miss Satsanga. Normally if you even stretch your legs in Satsanga, it's frowned upon, but when Gurudev could not sit on the floor, He sat on His favourite easy-chair and the Satsanga went on. When the body couldn't do even that, He used to literally lie down - but He would not miss coming to Satsanga. Once a visitor had come and missed out on the Satsanga on the second or third day. Gurudev noticed it and asked the next morning why he hadn't come. The visitor replied that he was not very well. Swamiji said, "That is the reason why you should come to the Satsanga. If you are not well you must definitely come. You will get well there." Another young lady had come from South India. She was probably shy. After the reading was over, one by one everyone had to lead the chorus. This girl said, "Swamiji, my throat is not very well today. I'm a little hoarse." Swamiji sent for some bitter cough mixture. She didn't know whether to take it or not! She probably wanted to escape from the singing, and so said she had a sore throat. Nobody was exempt, because it was in Satsanga that you found your foothold in Yoga, and found out where you were slipping and how to steady yourself.

In Satsanga there was systematic study of scriptures - Swadhyaya. Swadhyaya is classed under Raja-yoga and Jnana-yoga, but is important also, not only for Bhakti and Karma-yoga, but probably for every branch of Yoga. So, Gurudev's Yoga essentially was integral Yoga. But why must we call it integral Yoga? Yoga means integration. No Yoga can be practised in isolation and, therefore, there is no specialisation. You must integrate all those Yogas into yourself, you must pick out the best practices in all branches of Yoga and evolve your own system. Then it becomes Yoga. Especially Swamiji's Yoga, or Divine Life.

13. Integral Yoga

Three vital elements in Karma-yoga which also lean on Bhakti are Yajna, Dana and Tapas. Yajna could mean sacrifice and also worship or adoration. Dana is charity. Tapas is austerity or a simple life. Without these no spiritual life is really and truly spiritual. In regard to these, again, we have the Sivananda touch - the ritual and the form are not abandoned but the spirit discovered in it. This was the supreme and unique glory of Swamiji. Unlike most holy men who abandoned one thing in reaching for another, He never abandoned anything. Yajna to Him meant not only self-sacrificing service but the ritual called Yajna, so in the Ashram we had an endless series of rituals. Every day there was some Havan or ceremony in progress. We used to perform Pada-puja also, nearly every other day. Everything was allowed - so that it could be suggested that He sustained every form, so that, by the mere agitation of the form, the spirit could be generated. If you rub two dry sticks, fire is produced, but what happens if one stick is wet? Swamiji might perhaps have answered the question by saying, "Keep on rubbing. Never abandon the form with either the feeling that it is useless, or that you have reached the goal. Keep on rubbing, and the spirit will come up one day." So, He did not abandon the ritual called Yajna or the Homa (Havan), but as He was sitting and watching these rituals, He reminded Himself and others of the spirit of self-sacrifice. One should not merely pour oblations into the fire, but this sacrifice must pervade your lives. Incidentally, the word sacrifice implies 'making it sacred', so that in Christian theology, when you offer the bread and wine as sacrifice, you make them sacred. When you pour ghee and all sorts of other things into the fire in sacrifice, you make them sacred, and therefore a sacred ash comes out of it. Whereas the things that were thrown into the fire were not sacred, the ash that remains after the event becomes sacred. In the same way, if we can offer all our actions as sacrifice into this cosmic fire of God, our whole life becomes sacred. That becomes Brahma-karma-samadhi.

Dana (or gift) had a very peculiar twist in his case. There are formulas which suggest that spirit. There is one beautiful formula:

tvadiyam vastu govinda tubhyam-eva samarpaye

"I offer You, Lord, what is Yours."

What you give as a gift? Fruits, food, clothes, money? Did you create any of this? All these things are produced by God's nature. All these things themselves are God's own creation. And you pick these, and then offer them to God as if you have done a great thing! There is a nice story to illustrate this. A very poor man was asked by a Pandit to perform Ganesha-puja for about forty-eight days. The Ganesha itself had to be made of raw sugar. This man had to worship that Ganesha and offer some sweet to him as Prasad. He went on doing this Puja for more than a month, but absolutely nothing was happening. If anything he was getting slightly poorer, because of the Prasad he had to offer every day. One day he forgot to get the sweetmeats (or perhaps he didn't have the money). He sat down for his Puja half-heartedly, because it was a routine, and because he was

also afraid that if he didn't do it something bad might happen. When the time came for him to offer some Prasad, he looked around, there was nothing. He looked at Ganesha and thought, "This is also made of sweet", so he pinched a little bit from the statue itself, offered it and said, "Ganesha, please accept this."

That is more or less what we do. Everything belongs to God already, everything is created by God. We have created nothing, and yet we want to offer it to Him, or to His manifestation which is a living being, and claim some credit for having given in charity. Gurudev didn't believe at all that the giver was in any way superior to the recipient, the beneficiary. No one could convince Him of that. To Him, to give was itself a blessing. So whenever He gave, He always used this formula that occurs in the Bhagavad-Gita,

patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati
tad aham bhaktyupahritam asnami prayatatmanah (IX.26)

"Whoever offers Me with devotion and a pure mind, a leaf, a flower, a fruit or a little water, I accept."

He took the greatest delight in giving, in sharing, and on each occasion, He would say "patram pushpam" meaning, "I am worshipping you through this." That was also His attitude in the management of the Ashram. Students, disciples and seekers came; He admitted them and gave them what they needed, knowing that that which was given to them belonged to them already. The same God provides it with one hand, and receives it with the other. So even the feeling "I am giving all this" was not there. This extraordinary attitude was found in Him.

Tapas is an austere simple life. Only he who lives a simple life can practise Karma-yoga. If you are a luxury-loving person, you cannot practise Karma-yoga, you cannot give anything in charity, you cannot do anything self-sacrificingly. Tapas forms the bedrock of the whole of spiritual life. It should not be done in an ostentatious manner. For instance, if it was pointed out, "Swamiji, you say one should practise Tapas and yet you are wearing a nice big overcoat", He gently reminded you that the same shawl with which you are covering your shoulders, had been cut and made into a coat. The shawl hampers your work, but the coat does not.

Another form of charity or service which He strongly recommended was prayer. Prayer was not so much praying for yourself (not even for your salvation). but it was recommended as a form of service, of charity. So to pray - not only for the peace of all in a general sense, but in a specific sense - was part of His life. In the early days this was another service performed by the Ashram. Swamiji had great faith in the Mrityunjaya-Mantra. Devotees used to write to Him saying that they (or a member of their family) were sick and asking Gurudev to conduct Mrityunjaya-mantra-japa. We were all made to participate in this Yajna. There were only about ten of us in those days, and we were each allotted so many Maalas a day. We had to report to the secretary, who kept an account of how many Maalas of the Mantra were done while remembering this person. We may not have seen him, but we had the name at the back of our mind, and thinking of

him, praying for his welfare, we did Japa of the Mrityunjaya-mantra on the Ganga bank. This was another form of service that He used to encourage. In this, all the vital elements of Sadhana were immediately introduced. Doing Japa, sitting on the Ganga bank for about one hour, is Sadhana for you. At the same time it is a service to the other man, a service to humanity. You gain nothing out of I, and so you are taught how to be unselfish. An unselfish service covering also one's own Sadhana is a beautiful blend. This used to be very regularly performed. When the required number had been completed, there used to be a Havan, feeding of the poor people and so on, and the ritual came to a conclusion. By that time another man might have asked for the Mantra-japa again; so it continued.

Praying for the welfare of others, not only in a general, but a specific way, was greatly encouraged by Him. When you pray for the health, happiness and peace of others, you become a channel for the flow of divine grace. The water that is collected in a pond may become dirty sometime or the other, but the water that flows along a pipeline never does, because it is flowing all the time. So if you continue to be the channel for the flow of divine grace, your heart is always pure, you are always filled with divine grace. That was His trick. Through prayer you become a channel for this divine grace, and you are full of divine grace. Since you are not seeking anything from this for yourself, you are unselfish, and therefore you become divine. There's nothing now in this, people have offered prayers for millions of years, but it is in this combination that Swamiji's genius lay. In combining what is essentially regarded as a Bhakti practice with a tremendous ideal of unselfish service, He performed a miracle. Japa and prayer were vitally important to Him, not only for your own personal evolution, but as an act of service of humanity. When you do that, naturally there is personal evolution. You don't have to struggle for it.

As we have been reminding ourselves, it is the ego that is the problem. So, instead of praying for 'me' as if the 'me' is here in this body, if I pray for the 'me' there in your body, selfishness is gone. There is a 'me' in you also, so why not pray for the 'me' in you? Isn't that the same as me? What is the difference? When you begin to chant your Mantra, "God please save me," watch very carefully. You are not doing it for your own sake, but for the sake of this man who is sick. So, every time you say, "God save me", you are going to visualise the 'me' to be him, and the division between the me and the him is gone. That was Swamiji's magic. Pray, but pray for the happiness, health and long life of others - and as you go on doing this, the illusory or false distinction that the mind has created between you and him disappears - which means the ego is being eroded. As this goes on, meditation becomes effortless.

Though we have been discussing Bhakti-yoga and Karma-yoga, in essence we have really been dealing with Raja-yoga. There has been no distinction at all. All the time we have been contemplating, meditating, introspecting and growing in some of the great virtues mentioned in Yama and Niyama. Almost without our knowledge we are practising Yama and Niyama absolutely effortlessly, though we have not even mentioned the names so far. All the time we have been doing

Tapas, Svadhyaya, Isvarapranidhana. When you sit on the Ganga bank and do Mrityunjaya-japa for the peace and happiness of somebody else, since there is no personal ambition, there is no restlessness. If you are doing it for your own sake, you are tempted to scratch and see if it is coming true. But since it is for the health and happiness of someone whom you have not even met, and since you are doing it only because Swamiji asked you to, you don't even know whether the Japa is having its benefits or not. So, without any restlessness of mind, you are sitting there and repeating the Mantra as an act of service as instructed by Swamiji, and therefore there is absolutely no restlessness.

Any Sadhana (even meditation) done with an aim or goal in mind becomes counter-productive. It not only does not become useful, but it aggravates your restlessness. Every three minutes you are thinking, "Why am I not levitating? Om Namah Shivaya. After this first Maala, I must be at least two inches above the ground, Om Namah Shivaya". That anxiety to progress itself blocks the progress. So, when Sadhana is done for the sake of another, strangely enough it becomes effortlessly beautiful.

Swamiji also recommended the practice of Yoga asanas and Pranayama independently, in order to maintain the body. He taught us not to regard it as a body, but as a temple in which God Himself dwells for the moment. It is good to keep it clean and healthy, not for its own sake, but in order that it might serve efficiently as the temple of God. He was extremely careful in treating His own body. In spite of the illnesses that assailed it, He was in fairly good health and He did all that was necessary to keep it in working condition. In that phrase both the words are important. Working and condition - the condition necessary for working. During the All-India Tour, the programme in Madras was really extremely heavy. Swamiji was sixty-three at that time. From seven in the morning till ten at night He was taken round and round from one programme to the other. A talk here, Bhajan there, a visit to the school, lunch somewhere. It went on and on and on. Masses of people surrounded Him all the time, and even if there were only five or ten people around Him, He used to talk and sing as if there was a crowd of five million. He made no distinctions at all. In Madras He was running a temperature and His throat used to get dry. We used to keep a jug of fruit-juice for Him to sip now and then. We were about to drive into the Museum Theatre in Madras for a big public reception. An orthodox Brahmin, who was also a judge of the Madras High Court, was sitting next to Swamiji. He was the chairman of the reception committee. As the car entered the Museum Theatre compound, Swamiji asked me if there was any juice left. It was finished. I said, "If you go on the stage we'll get some"; but no, Swamiji ordered the car to be driven to a little corner shop where they sold soft drinks. The High Court judge himself bought some soft drink, opened it, and gave it to Swamiji. Then we went back. The function was beautiful. On the last day of our stay in Madras there was the last public meeting, from where we were supposed to go direct to the railway station. Swamiji was running a high temperature and the hall was packed with ten or fifteen thousand people, with another four or five thousand outside. All the VIP's were on the stage. Swamiji was holding onto the microphone most of the time, for

He could not even raise His voice. The same High Court judge was now getting worried. He could see that Swamiji was not in good health and was shaking - and still he went on! What would happen if He suddenly collapsed on the platform? We were all getting worried. One by one the officials came up to us saying, "Please ask Him to stop, it's enough. He is tiring Himself. People only want to see Him, to look at Him, to have His Darshan." No, He went on with His talk and kirtan. Even though He went as close to the microphone as possible, He could hardly be heard. So the body had to be kept in working condition in order that it may work, not for pleasure.

To regard the body as a temple of God in which He dwells and through which He serves humanity, was woven into His life. If you have this feeling, you would not neglect your health, nor would you regard that health as your private possession. Be as healthy as you can, because your health, happiness, welfare and peace belongs to God, Who is in all. In that single statement is combined all the Yogas - Hatha-yoga, Raja-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Karma-yoga. It was that attitude which was a special feature in Swamiji. This is Integral Yoga, and as you practise this, you are in constant meditation. If you are established in it, you are in constant Samadhi, Sahaja Samadhi. But what happens to us? When we were near Him, naturally we were in Samadhi. There was no distraction at all. It was a beautiful feeling. But we were not always in His physical presence. When we went away, or when He went away and we were surrounded by other forces, there was the possibility of distraction. What happens then. He used to recommend Japa itself as the sheet-anchor of Sadhana. His term for that was 'background of thought'. The idea is that you use your Ishta-Mantra constantly. As soon as you wake up, you start repeating your Ishta-Mantra. Then get out of bed, have a quick wash, sit down and continue with the Ishta-Mantra as a Japa, until you enter into meditation. Meditation must happen. Swamiji never described meditation. To him Japa itself was meditation. If you try to practise meditation, you will invite distraction. You will not be meditating, you will only be trying. But go on with your Japa, you will slip into meditation without effort, without desire, without your trying and struggling for it. Try to keep up this current of repeating the Mantra as much as you can. Of course when you are talking to somebody, you forget your Mantra, but make it a habit of withdrawing yourself for ten or fifteen seconds occasionally - for instance, every time the clock strikes the hour. In those few seconds you have re-established the contact with God. Then begin your work again. If you go on like this, very soon you will realise that the undercurrent of Japa goes on even when you are talking to somebody, when you are doing something actively or even when you are asleep. It becomes natural. It is then that meditation becomes easily possible.

In a more practical sense, this background of thought can help you tremendously in what Swamiji called battlefield Pratyahara - how to withdraw the mind and introvert the senses at will. If there is a temptation, a threat, annoyance or irritability, if somebody comes and argues with you and you realise that the next minute or so you are going to blow up, the repetition of your Mantra can defuse the situation. Swamiji was a genius at that. Even when two Ashramites

started arguing in front of Him, He would seem to participate in it for a few moments, then say, "Om Namah Shivaya", and the whole thing was wound up. It didn't matter where the argument lay, how far it had developed, or who was the winner or the loser. You were fighting about something extraordinarily important, and suddenly He put an end to it. He could cut it short at any point, even if you were arguing with Him. "Om Namah Shivaya" in that context meant 'enough'.

This can be of tremendous practical help in our lives. At the same time it enables us to sustain this background of thought, so that without any effort whatsoever the mind slips into that, and into meditation.

14. Remembering God

In the beginning the Ashram Satsanga was very austere - even the cymbals were not allowed - there were no electric lights, and even other lamps were scarce; it was usually conducted in almost complete darkness, except for a little lamp at the altar and a hurricane lantern for reading purposes. Gurudev was always looking for a sincere expression of love, of devotion. He did not encourage hypocrisy. He used to say that when you chant Kirtans you should sit with closed eyes, feeling that you are singing to God, not to entertain an audience. The picture Gurudev recommended to us was very much like a picture you might have seen of Surdas singing and little Krishna sitting in front of him, listening. When you sing like that, you are not worried about your voice, your throat condition or your expertise in singing, but you are singing with devotion.

During occasions like Sivaratri or Janmashtami, when the Satsanga had to be extended, after 10 pm. we were allowed to use some cymbals and stand, or walk and chant. Even on such occasions Swamiji would very often not even get up. He would sit next to the first pillar on the left as you come up into the temple, and while we were all shouting He would chant very quietly, "Om Namah Shivaya", with closed eyes and a deep voice. Only He could do that, we would go off to sleep. It requires tremendous alertness to do that. He was the only one who managed to sit there continuously, he hardly ever got up from that seat from nine pm. until about three am.

When you are sitting and singing Kirtan, it is not only Bhakti-yoga, but Raja-yoga has already come into it. You are in a contemplative mood. Japa also should be done in a contemplative mood, so that the deed and contemplation could be integrated. Usually we think meditation is possible only when we are not doing anything. Gurudev did not accept that. You must be able to meditate even while you are fighting; but first learn to meditate while doing something, like singing Kirtan or doing Japa, instead of feeling that there is a contradiction or distraction. If you can do that, probably you can keep meditating with open eyes; whatever the body may be doing, it is possible for the contemplative mood to be sustained. That idea was introduced where it was easiest - when you were chanting. While chanting and doing Japa, can you sustain the meditative mood, then get up and walk around the temple still sustaining this mood? If you can, then it is possible for you to find a way to sustain it whatever you are doing.

Swami Nihshreyasanandaji explained it very beautifully. There are two Mahavakyas - Aham brahmasmi and Tat twam asi. Aham brahmasmi means "I am Brahman", Tat twam asi means "Thou art that" - you are Brahman. The Swami said, "When you are sitting with closed eyes, meditating, you realise Aham brahmasmi, "I am Brahman", when you open your eyes and deal with others, you realise Tat twam asi, "You are Brahman", so that this Brahman-consciousness continues throughout, unbroken. That was Swamiji's Yoga: an unbroken God-consciousness, which is not confined to what is called spiritual practice, to what is called 'my Sadhana time'. Usually you find that, from four to six, you are

absolutely divine; six to nine you are half this, half that; nine to five you are a beast; and then you come back to being divine again. Instead of doing that, can this God-consciousness pervade all your activities, whatever you are doing? It is not so easy for a beginner to arrive at this point while cooking, serving food, or administering the Ashram. So, try to bring about this synthesis while you are doing Japa and singing Kirtan, and see if it can go through the other parts of your daily activities.

Creation of the background of thought was the second important feature, and the third was to introduce this Japa or repetition of God's Name with all sorts of what are normally called 'worldly activities'. I'll give you a few examples. First, kitchen work. Swamiji Himself used occasionally to take a bucket and serve in the early days, and He taught us how to do it. Instead of shouting, "Roti, roti, roti, roti", He would say, "Roti Bhagavan, roti Mataji, roti Maharaj, roti Narayan", as He gently put it down. This way you are introducing God's Name into this work. It's possible that you do it mechanically for some time, but you are bound to fall into the spirit some time or the other. As you go on saying, "Roti Bhagavan, roti Narayan," you will hesitate to be rude, because you are not going to shout at God. So you are bringing your God-consciousness into the simple act of serving food. Again, greeting each other "Om Namo Narayanaya, Om Namah Shivaya, Hari Om," may even become mechanical, but consciously, unconsciously or subconsciously the current will be kept up. Swamiji wrote a few pages everyday, and the first few lines were always, "Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Om, Om..." While doing so, the consciousness falls into the background of thought, which is divine thought, so that whatever else you might have been doing just before this is cut off, and the mind is pushed into the lap of God. Swamiji used to inspect book parcels and packets before they were sent off, to make sure that the addresses were correct. As each packet was shown to Him, He would say, "Om Tat Sat, Om Tat Sat, Om Tat Sat," instead of saying, "Right."

So if you want to, you can always adopt some positive method of bringing in this contemplative mood. Though all these practices may seem rather too simple, they work. Truth is very simple. If you introduce all these simple practices into your life, the cumulative result is fantastic. Swamiji was so certain that the 'background of thought' was so great, in its psychological or spiritual effect, that He recommended it for the solution of all problems in life. A very great national leader came to see Him once. There were these two national leaders - one political and the other spiritual. This gentleman said, "Swamiji, I will give You a picture of the world situation and the situation in this country now." For forty-five minutes he gave a most beautiful monologue - and it was brilliant. Swamiji did not interrupt except for saying "hum, hum," sometimes. "This is the condition of the world. It's about to blow up. And this is the condition of our country, it's about to go down." Then he asked "Swamiji, I have given You a picture of what I consider the world situation, and the situation in our country to be, now what is your solution to this. What do you suggest we should do?" He was getting ready for a counter-talk of at least half an hour, but Swamiji only said, "Repeat Ram Nam, that's the only solution." He was not evading the issue, He was serious.

Whatever be the problem, it is the mind that creates it, and it creates the problem because it considers the fragment to be the totality - a Vritti (thought wave) to be the whole consciousness. If the Vritti is seen just to be a Vritti, your problem is solved. If you get up and call me a fool now, that's nothing - you are probably angry, and one word of insult is nothing - but the mind does not stop at that, it brings together a whole lot of other things. For example, "Oh, this man has been rude. He insulted me six years ago. He always hates me, and I have always been victimised." All that put together makes it a calamity. First there is tremendous self-esteem, then a martyr complex, and perhaps the linking of something he did, or did not do in the past. All these put together make that one word 'fool' appear to be as big as the universe, whereas it is nothing.

Is it possible to isolate each little bit of what happens to us in our lives, and look at it just as it is - a tiny little fragment, not worth even looking at again? Like a movie film, this thing moves on. Each frame has got only one little picture, and there is no movement in it, there is nothing terrible. If I can view the present - a thought, an emotion, an experience, an event - as not more than a Vritti, then it is easy to deal with. It is the mind (with all its memory, imagination and so on) that makes it big, magnifies it. Put an end to that by remaining in that background of thought, in that God-consciousness, in that Japa mood, in that meditative mood all the time - coming out just for a little while. That 'little while' may be a million times a day, but you are merely coming out in response to an external stimulus. For instance, you are in that contemplative mood and someone asks you your name. 'Swami Venkatesananda.' 'How old are you?' 'Fifty-nine.' 'Were you married?' 'No'. 'Have you any children?' 'No'. Finished. This is what Jesus said also: 'When someone asks you a question, let your answers be yea or nay.' You are not being abrupt or rude, but to the point. Come out, work, go back into your background of thought.

If every experience in life is thus looked at and treated as it is - recognised for what it is without being linked to the past, present and the future and all the rest of it, then it is very easy to deal with all problems in life. Or, probably, no problem arises in life, because you are able to deal with each situation immediately. You are not hesitant. A question arises, you deal with it immediately. Something has to be done, you do it and go back. Therefore no problem is created. If a problem is brought to you by somebody else, again you are able to deal with it quickly and withdraw. One blow, and it's finished. When the pandits cut the pumpkin during a religious ceremony, it has to be one blow. Even so with the problem in life - one blow and the problem must be destroyed. It is only when you are not in that state of God-consciousness that there is hesitancy, procrastination: "Shall I, shall I not, is this right, is that right?" In this the problem becomes a thousand times magnified. I have not seen Gurudev hesitate. He might contemplate a problem, but when it came to action, it was quick. Even so was His answer to this politician.

It has suggested that meditation is impossible, or even dangerous, if it is

practised before you are established in Yama-niyama (ethics and moral discipline). Swamiji accepted the doctrine that without these no serious meditation is possible, but I don't think He accepted that it was dangerous. He used to point out, with humour, (whenever He had a very serious statement to make, He introduced it in a funny way) that if you wait until you are established in Yama-niyama before attempting to meditate, you might just as well give up, because it is not possible for you to become established in Yama-niyama for several life-times. Even to find your foothold in one discipline (for example, Ahimsa), it might take a few lifetimes, Satyam might take another few lifetimes, and in the meantime your Ahimsa might have gone! According to orthodox tradition you are established in one of these Yamas (or Niyamas) if you have practised it for a period of twelve years continuously. So, if you want to practise Ahimsa, you must be perfectly non-violent in thought, word and deed for a period of twelve years. If you have done it for eleven years and eleven months, and suddenly one morning a mosquito bites you and you hit it, your Ahimsa is gone. From there you have to start on another twelve years! How long would it take you to get established in one of these virtues? So Swamiji pointed out that instead of waiting for yourself to be established in all these before starting the practice of Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara and so on, it is better to practise them all at the same time. Don't neglect Yama-niyama, but at the same time also practise some Japa, meditation, Pranayama and Asana. A little of everything. It is possible that one helps the other, and you grow harmoniously. That was His view.

Swamiji did not contradict orthodox tradition. As a matter of fact, most of His books relay orthodox tradition, though even there you will find His own genius, His special stamp - which was to find the spirit while adhering to the tradition, to infuse the traditional practices with the spirit of wisdom, of Yoga. Then it is possible for you to develop in all aspects at the same time, harmoniously. In all these practices, understanding becomes extremely important. Neither Karma-yoga, Bhakti-yoga or your practice of Yama, Niyama, Asanas, Pranayama and Samadhi can be done mechanically. They must all be done intelligently, with a tremendous understanding - understanding of their spirit and meaning, and understanding in the sense that you are vigilantly observant of a motivation arising. You are not doing any of these with a specific motive, purpose or goal.

You have heard that God-realisation is the goal of life (Swamiji also used this expression), but if you understand what it means, you will realise that it is not a goal at all. What is realisation? Materialisation is when somebody performs magic and materialises an object, for example he waves a hand and ashes pour from his fingers. This means he is materialising ashes - which means again that the ashes were there in a spiritual form and he has materialised them, he has made them material. What was only spiritual, invisible, has been materialised. Now in the same way what does 'realised' mean? That which was not real has become real, has been made real. But when you talk of God-realisation, are you suggesting that God is not real, and that when you and I sit and meditate, God becomes real? No, obviously not. God is real all the time. But, if we observe our thoughts, words and deeds, if we observe our experiences in life, we see that they

do not show that we realise that God is real. If you knew that God is real, would you behave in the way you do? Would you regard life the way you do? No, your actions in life, your thoughts, words and deeds, make it clear that you do not feel, you do not know that God is real. You do not even accept that God is real. So, there is this non-acceptance of reality, there is non-seeing of reality, there is non-knowing of reality, there is ignorance of reality. The removal of this ignorance is God-realisation, it is not that you and I are going to make God real. To you as at present, God is unreal because that reality is covered by the veil of ignorance. The removal of this veil of ignorance is God-realisation. For instance, if it is very dark and you enter this room, you don't see any desks. When the light is switched on the desks are seen. The switching on of the light represents Yoga. The switching on of the light did not create the desks, but merely revealed the reality which was all the time there. Therefore God-realisation cannot and need not be a goal. Therefore understanding of what we are doing means not understanding the motive with which we are doing it, but understanding this inner light in which the shadow of motivation is prevented from arising.

Yoga has no goal at all. In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali suggests that whatever we are doing is merely an attempt to remove the obstructions for the free flow of consciousness. In the Bhagavad-Gita also Krishna suggests in Chapter VI, "One should practise Yoga for self-purification." When you purify yourself, the truth which exists all the time, everywhere (and in you, too) stands revealed, without any difficulty whatsoever. This Yoga is to be practised at all levels, at all times. It is not something which can be confined to one day in the week or an hour of the day, but it is to be practised throughout our lives. And that was the teaching of Swami Sivananda.

15. The Path of the Ego

When one is engaged in Sadhana, the following questions often arise: is it so necessary for us to engage ourselves in what is known as Sadhana - Japa, meditation, Kirtan and Satsanga? Is it not enough for us to do selfless service, unselfish service? Is it necessary for us to worship formally? Is it not sufficient if we meditate or do some Japa? This way we assume that one form of Sadhana is necessarily superior or inferior to the others, with the result that if we understand which was more essential than another, we might choose to do that which we prefer - and drop that which we consider not so essential. There is a brilliant snag here - the choice, the comparison, is made by the ego, and it is the ego that seems to perform all this Sadhana.

The final word, the ultimate truth, has been beautifully put in the Bhagavad-Gita:

Ishvarah sarvabhutanam hriddese'rjuna tishthati (XVIII.61)

"God dwells in the hearts of all".

We usually say beings, but the text does not say so. 'Bhutas' may even mean the fundamental elements of water, fire, air and space. This verse may mean that God dwells in the very heart, the very core or the very centre of these elements themselves, so that God is the reality in all things. The problem then resolves itself into something very simple, though the way this question - if God is omnipresent, why don't we experience Him - is framed, is a tragedy. In that 'if' there is already a doubt. If God is omnipresent, why don't we experience Him all the time? Why is there not only this diversity, but a confusion in this diversity? Diversity itself is not a serious problem - for instance the hair on your head has numerous strands, but that's not a problem because you have the feeling that the head is one, and therefore the hair which grows on the head is referred to collectively as one. But in life this diversity creates a confusion. The creator of the confusion is the 'I', the ego. We have never bothered to examine it or reflect upon it, because the examiner also becomes the ego. This is the tragedy.

There seems to be no reliable Sadhana to get rid of that ego. One may very easily say, "Be good, do good, the ego will disappear. This is the highest Sadhana." Possibly. Is being good, doing good, as simple as these words sound? Somewhere else it is said "That is not enough, you must cultivate Yama and Niyama, then the ego will disappear and you will enter into deep, Nirvikalpa Samadhi." Marvellous, high-sounding expressions! If you read any simple text-book on Yoga that merely gives the basic definition of Yama and Niyama, you might discover that they are capable of being misinterpreted. What is Ahimsa? What is Satyam? One of our colleagues was often rude and very fond of offending people. We asked him, "Why do you do this?" He said, "You people are diplomatic, but I am very frank. I don't hide anything. If I think you are a fool, I tell you." That is not being frank, that is being rude! That is not Satyam, that is Himsa. If, for instance, by God's Grace, you can safely say that you have been a truthful man for years and years

and years, then you become so vain and arrogant that the ego waxes gloriously instead of being eliminated.

It is said that during the Mahabharata period the hero of the day, Yudhishtira, never uttered a falsehood, and Krishna himself made him tell a white lie. If Yudhishtira had not been persuaded to tell that simple white lie, probably he would have been mighty proud of himself. It is better to have told a lie and be a little humble, rather than being a Satyamurti and arrogant! We get into these, and forget why we entered this discipline in the first place, for even the discipline is taken over by the ego. The argument is that if you are established in these Yamas, your heart is purified, and then in that pure heart divine grace dispels the darkness of the ego. Possibly - but before you get to that stage, the ego becomes so great that the earlier idea is completely forgotten.

Similarly, we think that Jnana-yoga is the right thing to practise. In order to practise Jnana-yoga, one must equip oneself with Sadhana-chatushtaya, Viveka and Vairagya and so on. This Viveka becomes some sort of intellectual gymnastics, because it says that one should discriminate between the real and the unreal. It's perfectly true, but (there is always a but) discrimination between the real and the unreal keeps on dividing everything, and where there is a division the ego arises - because the ego is born of the division, the ego thrives on the division, and the ego is the divider. Both the Bhagavad-Gita and the Yoga-Sutras exalt Vairagya and Abhyasa as of supreme importance. Long, long ago I went to Uttarkashi, and met a very great Avadhuta there who hardly ever spoke. Somehow Chaitanyananda Swamiji and I persuaded him to utter a few words, and the topic of Vairagya and Abhyasa came up. He said something very beautiful. "Abhyasa is to become aware of Brahman, to realise that Brahman alone is real. Vairagya is not to see the world." Two great sentences. Remember Brahman all the time and forget the world. Beautiful, but to do something about it is nearly impossible. The practice of Abhyasa and Vairagya can lead you to become a sour, dour personality. Is that the sort of Vairagya that you want? If you are thus cutting yourself away from everybody else, your ego is going to be as big as a mountain.

How does enlightenment arise? How does the realisation "God dwells in all beings" arise in such a heart? It is not possible. All these are very beautiful, and have their own wonderful meaning, but it is one thing to have an intellectual grasp of it, and quite another to bring it into realisation. Who is it that does all this? The ego again. It is the ego that thinks "I am doing unselfish service in order that I may purify my heart, or go to heaven", and then you realise that it is this motivation that is adding to the impurity of your heart. As Swami Krishnanandaji very beautifully said the other day, "Karma-yoga is possible only for a Jivanmukta" - so Karma-yoga is not so much a Sadhana as a post-Siddhi activity. It is the Lokasamgraha Karma of a Jivanmukta. But, what about you and me? We are also supposed to practise Karma-yoga with all its imperfections imported into it by the ego. I can practise Bhakti, I can go to the temple and do puja day and night, but again there is the ego. I can sit and meditate, again it is the ego that

meditates. Is there a Sadhana that can directly deal with this ego? God's Grace, yes, and how does one earn God's Grace? We are back to square one immediately. I have to earn God's Grace. And someone says that God's Grace is His gift, God has no partiality, God does not look into your good and evil and reward you, but His gift is absolutely free. In the Bhagavad-Gita also Krishna says "On account of pure compassion I bestow knowledge on My devotee. I give it out of compassion, not because he deserves it." When you hear that you say "Alright. O God, please bestow your Grace upon me out of Your own compassion, I won't do anything at all." Either I will do it, or I won't do it - all the time the ego arises and exercises its will - even with the feeling that I am going to get rid of the ego.

One may even approach a great Guru and become his devoted disciple and serve him devotedly. Once again this same ego comes up. Whether you express it openly or not, at least inwardly you congratulate yourself that you have the greatest master on earth, because "I declare him to be so." Again the same ego.

Yet God (the Self or Brahman) is omnipresent, and there should be no difficulty at all in realising it, because it is real - and really omnipresent. In the Yoga-Vasishtha and some other scriptures we are told that self-realisation is easier than crushing a flower that lies in the palm of your hand. In order to do that you have to close the fist and do something, but in order to realise Brahman, no such doing is needed. Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj also pointed out the other day that we are merely asleep spiritually. This world and its unhappiness and misery, its sin and sorrow, exist only in our own dreams. We are in this deep sleep of ignorance and, experiencing this dream called 'the world of sin and sorrow'. How does that dream come to an end? The dream comes to an end when you wake up, but how do you wake yourself up? The same question can be asked about Yama-niyama. How do I know what Ahimsa is and how do I practise it? How do I know what Satyam is, and how do I practise it? Without the self or the ego interpreting these disciplines, defining these disciplines, how do I know what God is, how do I know what it is to worship God and feel His presence? We use all these lovely expressions, and we congratulate ourselves that we have understood these things, without realising that it is the ego that interprets all this, feels quite happy and secure that the truth has been understood, and expects enlightenment to drop into its lap. How does one wake oneself up when one is fast asleep? This is the problem.

This play of the ego pervades your whole life. Everything that is done - sacred or secular - is done by the ego. Even when there is apparent unselfishness, even that is tainted by the operation of this ego. It is possible for you and me to observe and to realise that "This is selfish, there is a motive here, though it is not as bad as it was, I was a lot more selfish." So, it is possible that there is a difference in the degree of selfishness. "According to myself I'm not so terribly selfish as I used to be, or as others are, but I am selfish. I am worshipping God in the temple, but I am certainly vain, egoistic. I can sit in meditation for three hours, but I am very proud of it. I am learned, I am not attracted to sense-pleasure, and I am very happy about it." All these are nothing but the play of the same ego. The ego in the

one man says "I am a wealthy man", and the ego in another says "I am a very righteous person." Exactly the same ego. The difference is academic and arbitrary, verbal.

The inner intelligence in which the ego is reflected can become aware of this. When the inner intelligence sees this, when there is this awareness, a tremendous anguish arises, and the heart sheds tears of blood, unable to solve the problem. In Bhakti this is known as Viraha, but it can happen whether we are Bhaktas, Jnanis, Karma-yogis or Raja-yogis. Tremendous anguish arises. Your heart cries: "My God, what am I going to do? I can't get rid of this, I cannot deal with it." When such a position has been reached, then you value Satsanga, then you value Guru-seva. You serve the Guru motivelessly, all the time observing the simple truth that you are selfish. That's all that can be very clearly observed. Here you behave like the proverbial Chataka bird. It is said that the Chataka bird could drink only rainwater - not just any rain-water, but rain-water which fell from the sky on a certain auspicious day. For the rest of the year it stayed with open mouth waiting for that one drop of rain-water to fall on an auspicious day, to quench its thirst. Like that you come here and attend Satsanga, hoping that one day by the miraculous grace of God or the Guru, someone might switch the ego off and enlightenment on.

The ego does not 'go away' by merely substituting some pet phrase for the 'I'. As long as the body is alive and the mind functions in and through the body, what is known as the ego or the personality will arise and exist. This ego or personality is not a permanent and unquestionable reality. It is a temporary phenomenon; it is ignorance that invests it with permanency. It is a concept; it is ignorance that elevates it to the status of reality.

It is unnecessary to pretend "The ego is not there at all." It is foolish or ignorant to assert "It is there in reality." The intelligence that realises that it is only a concept is enlightened, and is aware of the reality.

Being enlightened, Swamiji saw a concept as just a concept and did not regard it as the reality. For instance, He had a name - 'Swami Sivananda'. He did not decline to be known by that name; but He did not allow the name to become bound up with His spiritual essence. In the same way, when He was subjected to praise and censure, He was able to distinguish the facts presented, and the reference to the name and concept (which had only a functional reality) as not more than that, and therefore unrelated to His essence or the truth.

Three incidents come to mind: during the Parliament of Religions a Swami wanted time to speak. It was Gurudev who overruled the objections of the organiser and granted him time. The Swami spoke, not of religions or their essence, but against Gurudev speaking and writing in English while living in Hindi-speaking North India. The expression on Gurudev's face as He heard this speech was a mixture of intense attention (to what the Swami had to say) and amusement. He took note of the facts that the Swami presented, but personal

attacks on 'Swami Sivananda' meant nothing, because to Gurudev 'Swami Sivananda' was only a functional name assumed for the time being with no corresponding reality.

When a lady dignitary visited the Ashram and sharply criticised the publication of biographies by the Ashram press, Swamiji similarly listened to her attentively with bliss radiating from His face, and responded, "That is what brought you here, I think." She had made a point to which he had to respond; the criticism of His personality was a waste of time, and to respond to it would be further waste of time - to Him it did not exist as a fact.

Even so, when one of Gurudev's own disciples criticised Him, complaining that the food was unbalanced and unhealthy, He listened with great attention and patience, and at the end requested an Ashramite to cook specially for the complaining disciple. The personal remarks had no relevance. He was never upset when someone criticised Swami Sivananda, and He was never elated when someone sang the glories of Swami Sivananda - Swami Sivananda was a name which had only a functional relevance. But in the censure and the praise, there were hidden facts which He never allowed to pass unnoticed. Seeking the truth to Him did not mean looking for some sort of a truth which is different from what is. To know a concept as a concept, a name as a name, and nothing more, is itself the reality. When this is actualised, then the reality of consciousness independent of names and concepts is realised.

16. Selflessness

If we practise all that we have been discussing so far - some service, charity, study of scriptures, Japa, Kirtan and meditation - and we strive in our own way to develop the virtuous qualities enumerated under the heading of Yama and Niyama, will we attain self-realisation? Will we attain enlightenment or Moksha? Will we be free? If not, why not?

Ultimately, all that we do is done by the ego. How does the ego get eliminated? Or how does the ego eliminate itself? By doing a lot, you will certainly become a better man, no doubt about that. But there is the very pleasant risk that you will become a very Sattvic person with a Sattvic bondage. You will be tied with golden chains, not iron or even copper or silver - but you will still be bound.

There is another subtle risk in this. If you (a layman) are egoistic, somebody or other will point it out. But if you put on these ochre clothes and become a Swami and are egoistic, people will worship you. "Oh, see with what authority this man speaks". If you are rude and unkind, they say, "He's a very strict person. He trains us in such discipline." The moment you put on these clothes, you get a brilliant licence!

Even when you are Sattvic, and doing all these spiritual practices, there is no guarantee that you will attain self-realisation as a result, because self-realisation is not a result or an effect, produced by a cause. So they said *Nastyakritah kritena* - "That which is not the effect of a cause cannot be reached by any cause or by any method whatsoever." For instance you cannot make yourself fall asleep. When sleep comes it overpowers you. You can go to bed, but sleep has to come of its own sweet will and pleasure. Hence the Kathopanishad declares

Nayamatma pravachanena labhyo na medhaya na bahudha srutena -

"This Atman (or self-knowledge) cannot be attained by talking a lot about it, by being very intelligent or by listening to a lot of talks."

How is Atma-jnana or self-knowledge attained, if it is an attainment at all? *Yamevaisha vrunute tena labhyah tasyaisha atma vivrunute tanum svam* - "Only when the Atman, or God, wants you to, will you attain Atma-jnana, for God has to reveal Himself." It is not man that realises God, but only God can realise Himself. Pick up your Maala and say "Only God can realise Himself" as a Mantra a thousand and eight times, and a new truth will emerge in your own heart - "Lord, I can do nothing." This truth has to emerge. There is no use saying this just because you are lazy and don't want to do anything. I hope you understand the distinction between these two! For instance, you don't know if you can lift the desk in front of you until you try. So before you can sincerely say, "I cannot", you have to try your utmost. That which says, "Oh, I cannot do it. God please do this", is sheer laziness. Sadhana (all that we have been discussing so far) is trying your utmost. You have tried. You have meditated, done Japa, Asanas etc., with the aim of attaining self-realisation. Whatever the ego does (whatever I do) only adds to

the number of veils which cover the self. Therefore the obstruction of this vision increases. At the end of all this, you realise that the ego is getting stronger and stronger and stronger, that whatever you do feeds the ego.

Self-realisation is nothing but a complete and total absence of self or selfishness. You cannot know "This is the self," because self is not an object but a subject. But you can definitely know what selfishness is. I'm only saying that you can know, not that you do know. Most selfish people think that they are very selfless, very unselfish. "I'm not doing it for my sake, I'm doing it for God's sake," or, "I'm doing it for the sake of humanity, or the nation, or my community." If you scratch the surface, you find the same ego, the same selfishness there. There are doctors and nurses throughout the world who pretend that they are doing unselfish service to the sick, but would they be prepared to do all that if they didn't gain money or name out of it? We are here talking to you of Yoga and Vedanta, very unselfishly serving humanity through you. Would we still be doing all this if our happiness or honour or security was at stake?

Unselfishness or selflessness is not an easy matter, and it cannot be known - but selfishness can be known. If you vigilantly watch yourself and recognise that however much you may pretend that what you are doing is not selfish", it is still selfish. You don't get paid for doing this - it doesn't matter. Food, clothing, shelter and medical facilities and whatever is needed is provided. So one could say that you do not receive any wage or salary for what you do, but that is not necessary. There may still be selfishness - you want to be protected, to be secure, to be appreciated, to be admired, you want to become some kind of dignitary. All that could be selfishness! If even that could be avoided, may be you are looking for heaven. You are prepared to suffer here for a few days and go to heaven. Or, even if this can be avoided, you are still looking for enlightenment. It is the 'I' that is doing all that, it is the play of the I, the ego-self. Can you see that? In the same way, you can see that even when you are praying to God, it is again the play of the self - because your relationship with others, and your actions, behaviour, thoughts, words and deeds are still characterised by lust, anger, greed, envy, jealousy, egoism and hatred. Is it possible for us to see that all our actions are tainted by these evils which are the activities of the self?

If it is possible to recognise these in ourselves, then it may be possible to get rid of them. What is it that gets rid of all these qualities? That is also the ego-self. "I want to get rid of all these evil qualities in me so that I may attain God-realisation." So, the awareness that gets rid of all these Rajasic and Tamasic qualities of lust, anger, greed, fear and all the rest of it, stands baffled! "I can do all this - I can become pure in thought, word and deed, in my behaviour, in everything. In other words, I can become entirely Sattvic, so to say. It's not impossible. I can become entirely Sattvic . . . but that's all. Where do I go from there?"

The awareness which detected all this transformation suddenly becomes aware of the shattering truth that the 'I', the ego-self, is still there. The same ego-self

that thought a few years ago, "I am a wicked person," now thinks, "I am a saintly person." A few years ago you thought, "I am Mr. So-and-so," now you think "I am Swami So-and-so." This is very, very simple. If you hold an object in your hand, and you don't like this side, you turn it to the other side, which is neater, nicer, good to look at. You have turned it, but please remember that the other (first) side is still there! It has not gone. You were once a wicked person and you didn't like it, so you turned and became a good person. It doesn't take even that long to become a wicked person again, because the other side is still hanging there. There are innumerable stories in our Puranas to illustrate this. Gurudev once very beautifully pointed out this truth. He was writing a book called, "Ashrams and Saints in India", and in that, with fantastic memory, He had brought out a list of all the prominent holy men, Swamis, Yogis and saints in India. He was devoting a page to each of them - a brief biography and the work they had done. He had Himself kept a list and was ticking off one after another. Then came the name of one Swami who was a Yogi and a holy man for a long time, but who suddenly got married and so left whatever he was doing and began to do something else. I was standing by Swamiji's side when He said, "What about this man? He was a great yogi. Later he got married and... All the same I will include his name. A good man becomes a bad man. A bad man becomes a good man. This goes on changing. That should not influence or affect us." In the same way a Swami who had been His own disciple and quarrelled with Him and did something very nasty, had gone away from the Ashram and returned in 1948. Swamiji was sitting on that flag post near His room and as I came up He said, "So-and-so has come." I merely looked at Him. "He is a big man. Has somebody told you what he has done?" I said, "Yes, Swamiji, I heard about it". "Hm, the man might have acted in a vicious way, but people change. He might have changed. Let us give him another chance". But later he proved to be wicked again and left. You think you change from a Rajasic or Tamasic state to a Sattvic state, but the other state is still hanging there. The awareness becomes aware of this.

There is one extremely subtle (but perhaps extremely simple) leap from being the object, to being the subject. That is, you are all the time looking at something, looking at yourself as an object. "I was a Rajasic person, a Tamasic person, now I am a Sattvic person." It is still an object. The attention has suddenly to leap back into the self, to remain self. The awareness must suddenly freeze and become aware of itself, or be awareness only.

That is not possible by self-effort, but has to happen by Grace. All this that we have been discussing so far is possible for you and me to do (and we should do it), but this final leap from objectification to the 'being' as the subject is not for human effort to do. Only Grace is of any use there. That is why that state is left undescribed. Even Gurudev refused to describe it. That has to be experienced, or, that experience has to arise. In the Srimad Bhagavatam there is the most inspiring story of Jada Bharata who, while instructing his famous disciple, Rahugana, said, "This knowledge that I am describing to you does not arise by study, by doing this or doing that, or even by abandoning the household life and becoming a monk or an ascetic." All these are aids, but "the only thing that will

enable you really to experience this is service of the holy ones, service of the Guru, service of the master, bathing yourself in the dust of the holy feet of the great ones." Then this subtle and perhaps very simple leap from object to subject happens. There is enlightenment, God-realisation, self-realisation - which means that the ego-self (to which you have been clinging for such a long time, regarding it as truth) has suddenly gone, and in its place you see (or there is) the Atman.

The objective world has suddenly ceased to be the objective world, but it does not disappear. In its place, God shines. That is the beauty. It is not as though all these worldly things will go away and you will see something else which you call God. Then it would become another object! Everything remains as it is, but nothing remains as it is. The tree is still a tree, a man is still a man, a woman is still a woman, the building is still a building - everything is still there, but nothing is there. Suddenly it is realised - not that you realise - that this is a rope and not a snake. That which you saw does not disappear. Whatever it was in truth, does not disappear. It is still there. But whereas you saw a snake, now a rope is. You saw the world with worldly eyes, now you see Brahman with Brahman eyes. If your inner vision becomes Jnana, then the whole universe becomes Brahman.

17. Discovering the Ego

Anything that is done in accordance with the dictates of the mind is a trap. So even the so-called Yogic or spiritual practices undertaken through the incentive of the mind can at best be a golden trap, a prison. The intelligence within has to realise this. It is capable of this, though it cannot get out of it. 'I' cannot liberate itself, but it can see the defect in all these practices, the danger in this trap. If you are doing Karma-yoga it is glorified social service - which is very good as far as it goes because it is of tremendous use to others. If you choose to practise Bhakti-yoga - Japa for three hours, Puja for two and Kirtan for two - that's also very good, because during those seven hours you didn't do any mischief. If you do Yoga-ASANAS, Pranayama and some sort of meditation, you enjoy good health, and therefore are less of a burden upon others, which is a tremendous contribution. It is a sin to be sick - you are a nuisance unto yourself and an unbearable burden on others. To be healthy is one of the greatest services you can render humanity. If you are thoroughly forgotten by others, you are the greatest servant of humanity. If others are constantly worrying about you, you are a nuisance. But, as a Sadhana for self-realisation or Moksha that is not of great value, unless you are doing it because the Guru says so, and not because the mind likes it.

Through none of these is Moksha or liberation possible. All are traps, whatever be one's attitude towards them. Self-realisation is independent of all these. Gurudev has crystallised the essence of his teachings in a little song; the first line of which is "Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realise." Please, do Karma-yoga to the best of your ability. Above all, love God, do charity, purify yourself through all sorts of Yoga practices - Japa, meditation, and all that. Meditate and realise the Upanishadic truths. The next line is: "Be good, do good, be compassionate." The third: "Enquire who am I, know the self and be free." Combine all these in your daily Sadhana.

Now comes the tricky part of it. The next line of the song is: "Adapt, adjust, accommodate, bear insult, bear injury, highest Sadhana". Is that possible in your life? One would expect the ethics to come first and the self-realisation to come last. In the first part - serve, love, meditate, realise - it is possible to indulge in what is commonly called self-deception, thinking that you are doing Karma-yoga, thinking that you are doing Bhakti-yoga, thinking that you are doing Hatha-yoga just because you can do a few Yoga postures nicely - and if you are able to sit on one posture for a considerable time, you can tell yourself and others that you are in deep Samadhi. All this is possible. But adaptability is not so easy because it hits at and destroys the ego directly - whereas all the rest beat about the bush. It is easy to give up what you think you possess - a shirt, a book, a little money, fruit - because the mind or the ego says, "Oh, I'll get some more". But to abandon one's opinion and ideologies is more difficult, and to abandon one's opinion of oneself, one's self-esteem, is extremely difficult. Of all the images in the world, self-image is the hardest to crack, leave alone break.

Is it possible for you to look at someone with whom you totally disagree and say, without hypocrisy, "Sir, you may be right"? During those few moments watch what goes on within you. There is a combination of an earthquake, volcano, tornado and a tidal wave, all together. That is the ego. You've got it! Don't try to fix it. It hurts, it hurts. Good grief, it hurts. Watch what is happening inside you. That is the ego.

The external situation takes care of itself. Someone argues with you, you say, "You may be right" and then he's satisfied and he goes away - or he's dissatisfied and he goes away. That's not of very great importance. You are not doing this in order to please somebody - that is another trap. Nor are you doing this in order to displease yourself - that is masochism, equally useless, and that feeds the ego - "I'm a man of tremendous adaptability (or humility)." Nobody is interested in it. Absolutely nobody in this world is interested either in your happiness or in your salvation. So there is no sense in doing all this to please others, or in striving to convince others that you are a great Yogi, Sadhu or holy man. All this is a total waste of time. Instead, try to adapt yourself to others, to the man who vehemently opposes you. Say to him, "Yes sir, you may be right", or "You are right," and at the same time watch what goes on within you.

When Gurudev Swami Sivananda emphasised the spirit of service, He exalted adaptability above all. He emphasised: "The aggressive, self-assertive, Rajasic ego is your enemy." This has to go. Karma-yoga will help you - or, this Karma-yoga may become possible only after you have destroyed the self-assertive ego. Even the little bit of service that you render to others may help you, because in the course of that you will be forced to adapt yourself. There will be opportunities galore of adapting yourself. Bhakti, Raja and Hatha-yoga may help you, but they are only aids, not the master-key. The master-key is "Adapt, adjust, accommodate."

I have never seen a great saint with such a supple non-ego as Swamiji had. The whole Ashram owes its existence to Him, and every brick has been laid by Him. It used to first intrigue some of us youngsters in the 1940's, to see Him stand in front of one of His own disciples and ask for his opinion, in a tone that would suggest that the master was a subordinate. There was a Swami here known as Swami Vishuddhananda, who was our postmaster and also in charge of the construction of the temple and so on. One day, Swamiji and this Swami Vishuddhananda were standing a few paces from each other, and Swamiji was giving some suggestions for the temple verandah. It was as if He was the subordinate, a new recruit to the Ashram. He asked "Can we do this? Would it be alright? What do you think?" Never have I seen Him lay down the law or give a command. Even when He wanted something done very badly, He would merely ask, "Shall we do such and such?" If you began to agree with Him, if you made Him feel comfortable and He knew that you were with Him all the way through, then He might have said, "Go and do this quickly." But, if you raised one objection to it, immediately He suspended the whole proceeding. He would give you some fruits and milk, and praise you to the skies, "Ah, you are a marvellous

man. No one has such brilliant ideas as you have." Then half an hour later He would come back to it, "You said this should be done this way. I think it may not be so good. What about this?" First cancel your ego. Here is an opportunity, a contradiction, someone who opposes you. That is a direct challenge to the ego. Let it melt, let it disappear. Then, what has to happen will happen.

"Adapt, adjust, accommodate, bear insult, bear injury." This is the highest Sadhana and the most direct path to self-realisation, because it cuts right through the ego. It does not mean that we should so live or act in this world as to invite criticism, insult and injury (then, of course, you deserve nothing else!). But to do your very best, to do the right thing, at the right moment, in the right manner, in the right place, is your duty. That is Yoga. There is no compromise on this score. In spite of that, whatever you do you will always find someone who is annoyed, someone who doesn't like you, or what you do or look like. What is your attitude towards such a person? Your first impulse is to eliminate him or run away from him, to eliminate, remedy or avoid such a situation. If you do that, you have destroyed the best opportunity for practising the highest Sadhana.

In one of His very early letters to Swami Paramanandaji, Gurudev had written, "I want around me people who will criticise me, vilify me, scandalise me, even hurt me, injure me." This is not masochism. He did not enjoy being persecuted, nor did He suffer from a martyr complex. He neither invited nor looked for criticism. He was extremely careful in His behaviour. He conformed as far as He could to the norms of society, and there was no objectionable behaviour on His part - it was all exemplary. But in spite of it, when He was inevitably criticised by someone or the other, it was there that His uniqueness was seen. There were occasions when even His own disciples openly or covertly mocked at Him or criticised Him - He knew it - but even then you couldn't find the least trace of disapproval or displeasure. His love was uniform. Occasionally the critic would get preferential treatment - only occasionally, because even that was not made a religion. It was not that He relished or enjoyed it - that's another trap. It hurts - it must hurt. If you have done your best to do the right thing, and yet you are criticised, you don't enjoy it, but you utilise that opportunity to discover this great ego. That is an opportunity to enquire, "Who am I?" Who is it that is hurt, who is it that is insulted, and what is insult?

Gurudev often pointed out that insult or criticism is nothing but so much wind, air. There's another way of looking at it. Most of you are familiar with these Kundalini-chakras, and probably you know also that according to Shat-chakra nirupana the chakras are supposed to have a certain number of petals. It is said that certain sounds are associated with those, and if you add up the whole lot you get the Sanskrit alphabet. The first of the vowels is 'a' and the last of the consonants is 'ha'. Aham in Sanskrit (or I is nothing but all these sounds put together, and all the words attributed to it are also words, mere sounds. 'I' (Aham) is non-existent sound, 'fool' is another non-existent sound, and 'idiot' is another non-existent sound. That non-existent sound is attributed to this non-existent sound. What does it matter? It is air blowing on air - absolutely nothing.

One who practises this Yoga regards injury as a blessing, not revelling in it, not remedying it, but utilising it to discover this Aham, to discover who this 'I' is.

One should distinguish between physical pain and psychological sorrow. Physical pain may have to be dealt with and remedied. The body itself demands it. Gurudev was extraordinarily careful when it came to the protection of the physical body, and during the last few years He took more medicine than food. Physical pain may have to be dealt with, avoided, treated, cured or got rid of, but psychological sorrow should not be treated, got rid of or avoided. It should be utilised in order to discover that which experiences this sorrow. With each experience, if one is able to trace the source of that sorrow - which is the ego - then that ego is got rid of once and for all and there is liberation. Only then is there liberation. Therefore, Gurudev exalted this. When there is a tremendous inner urge to find the ego, in the light of that urge the ego (the 'me', the self) is seen to be non-existent.

In that situation virtue flows effortlessly. All the Yama-niyama take their abode in you, all the disciplines that we have been discussing all these days become yours, effortlessly. You are unselfish, effortlessly - not because you think the unselfish self is going to lead you to Moksha, but there is Moksha already. You are freed from the self, and therefore you are unselfish. There is no alternative. You love God, not because you expect to be given a right to heaven. There is no because. That life itself is a continuous meditation. This urge to liberation sought to find the truth concerning the ego, and having discovered its non-existence begins to realise that it was possible for it to arise on account of inattention, and if you are not attentive and vigilant throughout your life it can arise again - so there is constant vigilance.

That vigilant watchfulness of the potentiality of the ego arising is itself meditation. There is no other meditation. In that meditation the ego is prevented from arising. That vigilance itself is the inner light or insight, and as long as it is shining bright, the demon called ego doesn't arise. That is meditation. And that is also self-realisation, God-realisation or liberation, whatever you wish to call it.

18. Love That is God

We have been contemplating the philosophy and teachings of Swami Sivananda, our divine Guru, and perhaps tonight we might contemplate His personality and His life in particular. Because whatever was described or discussed during the past three weeks concerning Swami Sivananda's philosophy and teachings, was derived directly from His life. His life was His teaching, His teaching was His life. He seldom lectured, but He wrote considerably, and even His writings were mostly transmission of tradition. While transmitting the tradition, He infused His own genius into it. Especially in that, He made the most difficult processes look simple, and the forbidding truth look attractive. There was great sense of humour and, more than anything else, simplicity - both in His life and in His teaching.

Unpredictability is an extraordinary characteristic of an enlightened person, one who is totally in tune with the infinite. There is a certain rhythm in such a life, and a certain unmistakable unchanging factor. But at the same time, there is an unpredictability. It is like the weather - you know winter is winter, but in that winter there is unpredictable change, unpredictable difference from day to day. You know the sun rises in the east, but there is an unpredictability connected with sunrise - you may be able to see it or you may not, because the sky may be overcast or clear when the sun rises. What was unchanging in His life was the spirit of renunciation, of love, of devotion, of self-discipline. When we speak of love, we have all sorts of crazy notions, which are far from the truth concerning love. One had to see a person like Swamiji in order to appreciate what that love might mean, and one had to see a person like Swamiji in order to know what discipline should mean. One had to see the exemplar of these teachings in order to know the truth concerning them - what it is, not its description. But then, why do we want these exemplars? Are we going to imitate them? By imitating a saint, do we become saints? No, we become imitation saints - like artificial diamonds, which sparkle even more than real diamonds, but are still worthless, useless. So, an imitation saint may shine even more brilliantly than the real one, but he is worthless. Swamiji was wholeness, the imitation saint is hollowness.

There is a beautiful statement in the Bhagavad Gita:

yad-yad-acharati sreshthas-tad tad-eve'taro janah (III-21)

"Whatever the superior man does, is also done by the others."

I am not going to affirm or contradict this statement. A few verses further on Krishna tells us:

*yadi hy-aham na varteyam jatu karmanyatandritah
mama vartma-'nuvartante manushyah partha sarvasah (III-23)*

"If I neglect my job everybody will follow my example. If I set a bad example everybody will follow."

What happens to us if we see a holy man, a saint, a great Yogi who sets an

example in life? What happened to the devotees of Rama, Buddha, Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Sivananda, Swami Dayananda, Guru Nanak Dev? These are the exemplars - what have we done with them? We have completely and totally ignored their teachings and built temples for them. But if by chance we are able to detect some sort of 'imperfection' in their life, we are eager to follow those imperfections. "If I do not fulfill my duties, then people will follow my example." That was what Krishna said in the Bhagavad-Gita.

So, it is not our aspiration, or hope or endeavour to imitate a saint. We are attempting to inhale the perfume of these saints, so that, having entered into us as a perfume, it might work in our own souls, it might bring about within us an unfoldment to the extent we deserve, and in the manner in which it is to happen to us. Just as food eaten becomes the living body, even so it is possible that these truths absorbed through our ears and eyes may also be assimilated into our very souls, they may become the living truth in us, the truth that lives. That is possible.

Swamiji was an embodiment of love, but of a type which was distinct. It was not the sentimental, romantic feeling which we associate with that word, but a love which could only be called divine. It included all forms of love that you and I are aware of, but it excelled and exceeded all of them. At this point we have to put the teachings and the personality together, and derive a possible understanding of that love. Right from His infancy, He was able to see God in all, and to love that God in all. These were His oft-quoted, His most favourite expressions - "See God in every face", "Love God in all", "Serve God in all". He gave expression to these ideas, though in Him they were not ideas, but living truths. I have heard it from those who were His schoolmates, who were part of His household when He was young, and from a man who was fortunate enough to serve as His cook when He was still a doctor in Malaya. Such was the love and the magnetic attraction that this wonderful man had, that when He left Malaya His cook felt drawn to look for Him when He disappeared from circulation, and nobody knew where He had gone. When he discovered that Swamiji was here, he rejoined Him as cook, and became a Swami himself. What must have been the affection of this divine person - not when He had become a Swami or attained self-realisation and all the rest of it, but even when He was still a young man in Malaya, working as a doctor! About ten years ago I happened to go somewhere near Malaya, and I was eager to visit those places which were associated with the early life of Gurudev. I even went to the estates where Swamiji worked as a doctor more than half a century ago. There was an old man who still remembered the doctor. He must have been very young then, probably a teenager. "Yes", he said, "I remember, He was someone special!"

What was his speciality? Unlike other doctors who usually treated patients as numbers or as a sort of case - a lung case, a heart case, a nose case - to this doctor each one was a personality. "Each patient was treated as a special person," was how this old man expressed it. From our position of advantage, perhaps it is easy to see that He saw God in each one of them, and each one of them was a special manifestation of God.

Another extraordinary feature which the old man told me was that to the doctor everyone was important, and He actually worshipped them. His worship of God took the form of service of those patients. It was extraordinary. Those were days of the ascendancy of orthodox medicine, when anyone who did not toe the line was considered a quack. Here was a doctor who, especially when there was a serious ailment, would give some medicine and then also a Tulsi leaf. He used to perform Puja and keep the Tulsi especially for those who were seriously ill, advising them "After all, I am only a doctor. It is God's Grace that will help you. I have prayed for you, here is the Prasad." In His own little courtyard, He had an enormous Tulsi plant, and someone who came to the Ashram here long afterwards mentioned that the Tulsi was there for years after Swamiji had left.

What was that love that moved the heart of this doctor to treat His patients as God, to give them medicines, to give them Prasad, to give them His love, and to pray for them? The cook also told us that when the illness was serious, the doctor would accommodate the patient in His own house, especially if the patient came from a long distance. The cook had to serve him also. When the patient was discharged, if the doctor discovered that he had no money, he gave Him some pocket-money. Such was his love.

At that time the doctor had really no idea that He was going to become a Sannyasi. He was what you might call a normal doctor. A normal doctor nowadays is interested in money. That was the only thing Swamiji was not interested in! There were also wealthy patients, so naturally money came in abundance, but it passed through His hands. Even as a young boy He was mischievous - Krishna was mischievous too - but He was also extremely affectionate and loving. He would go to any extent to serve a friend, with the result that many of His schoolmates came here years later. What must have been the affection and the love that radiated from this young boy that people should remember Him after half a century of separation? Not only His friends, but His schoolmaster and the postmaster who knew Him also came here.

When He went to Pattamadai (his birthplace) about half a century after He had left that place, He was adored and welcomed. There we were looking amazed at the falsification of the proverb: "A prophet is not honoured in his own home town." He was honoured in His own home town, and even today He is worshipped there. Standing on a platform in Pattamadai, He said, "I was born here, I am just one of you." When He met some old relations or acquaintances, there was this pure friendship, pure affection - none of the supercilious attitude "I am a great saint and you are only an ordinary householder." One did not see this at any time in His life.

Whatever situation He was in, He became totally one with that situation. If He was playing with children, He was a child. He never even treated His disciples as disciples. Before you bowed down, He folded His palms, and asked "Jai Bhagavan, are you all right?" Those words were packed with honey, with love. They were not mere words - words we can all use - but the Bhavana which

flavoured those words was extraordinary. Once Gurudev was in bed with typhoid. On the fifteenth or sixteenth day when the health had been completely shattered, Krishnananda Swamiji as usual came in to enquire what we could do. As he entered the room Gurudev asked, "Om Jai Bhagavan, Krishnanandaji Maharaj. How are you, how is your health?" When the Guru asks a question, you first give an answer. Krishnanandaji was giving answers, "Yes, Swamiji. I'm all right." Gurudev was sick and the secretary had gone to see Him, but for about five minutes He was enquiring after Krishnananda Swamiji's health. In all this there was absolute genuineness, honesty, sincerity and purity.

One day during the same period He wanted to have some fresh air, to look at the Ganga and the Himalayas, so He went outside. He was standing holding on to a stick, shaking. He saw an old Parsee woman called Zalmataji. She was seated on the Ganga bank. Swamiji said, "Ask her why she is sitting there, it is very hot. Ask her if she has had her lunch, give her something to eat." I don't know if you can put yourselves in that position and be so concerned about others when your energy is completely depleted, when your own health and life are sinking and you are yourself half dead. What is that love that worries about some old woman sitting there? Sitting here today after dinner all these things perhaps do not make much sense, but in that situation it was really shattering that a person in such a physical condition could think of the welfare and comfort of others.

Such was His love. It is this love which has taken the form of this Ashram, it is this love that radiates through all these great Swamis, like Swami Chidanandaji, Swami Krishnanandaji, and Swami Madhavanandaji, who preside over the destiny of this Ashram. The same love is flowing through all of them. It is the same love that protects and guides us. But that love was not sentimentalism. I don't know if I can introduce you to my definition of 'sentimental'. Sentimental is like centimetre. As centimetre is one hundredth of a metre, so sentimental is one hundredth of your mind. When you merely give one hundredth of your mind to some object, you are sentimental. Swamiji was never known to submit Himself to such fragmentation. He was whole, total - so there was no sentimentalism there. Not only His mind, heart and soul, but His whole personality was in every act, in every thought, word and deed. He was wholehearted, whole souled.

That total being, total personality, was totally in tune with the totality (with God) all the time, so that even when He appeared to be harsh, it was because He loved you. If at all He admonished a disciple, it was only because that disciple happened to be part and parcel of Him. The more distant you were, the more love He showed. When you came a bit closer, it was then He wanted to burnish and polish His own instruments. It was only then that He appeared even to be slightly harsh, and that very, very rarely. But even when such a thing happened one could see that it was because of His extreme love. I have had occasions to observe this. Once, before He tackled one of His own disciples who had erred in some way, He said, "I have been thinking about this for the past three days. I have not even slept during the past three days." We were all little boys, not worth a sage's second thought. Anyone else would have caught hold of this disciple and said,

"Don't do this." But no, it might hurt him. So, even when such a thing had to be said, He delayed and delayed. He thought about it, meditated upon it, and slept over it hoping that it would go away, that the other person might wake up and discover his error. If nothing worked, then He might say a word - and then shower you with fruits and honey. Such fantastic love. This love is not human but something divine, though it has all the human elements. He was affectionate, He was deeply and tremendously interested in our physical welfare, most of all.

The thing that gave Him the greatest joy was distributing Prasad. In 1947 Swamiji's Birthday Diamond Jubilee was celebrated. I don't know how it happened, but they had a surplus of laddus. About three to four thousand people ate to their fill on the birthday, the day before and the day after. After having distributed laddus to all these people, one of those rooms downstairs in the post office line was half full of them. Laddus were lying on the floor right up to the ceiling. From then on (from the 10th September for about ten days) He was in bliss, He was in the sixteenth heaven. Everyone who went there was given two handfuls of laddus. Nothing gave Him greater joy than to distribute food, fruits, Prasad.

In those days we were only about thirty people here. When there were a number of visitors, we used to sit on the post office verandah to eat, and when there were not too many visitors we ate inside the kitchen itself. One day Swamiji was sitting on one of those cement benches. He said, "You think the Ashram is small. You'll see one day, the queue for food will extend from the Ashram to Lakshmanjhula." If you put all the people who are fed now, forming one line, the line will probably reach Lakshmanjhula already. On the same day He said, "You think we are going from one financial crisis to another." Every six months we had a financial crisis. Either we went bankrupt, or we couldn't pay any debts, or there was nothing to eat. "Money will come. So much money will pour in that you won't have time to count it." Whatever He said has come true. Why? He did not want anything, He did not ask for anything. Even after the Ashram had grown He was still living in that miserable Kutir on the Ganga bank. It was the most unhealthy place, it was damp, cold, dark and miserable, but He was quite content with that, and did not want to move from there. On the other hand, He was even then extremely concerned about our comfort: "Do you have enough blankets? Do you have all that you need? Would you like to have a coat, would you like to have a cap?" This solicitude for the physical welfare of everybody was extraordinary. But that was not all. He created the Ashram for the spiritual evolution of all of us. Every brick here sings His Glory.

Second only to the distribution of Prasad He delighted in the distribution of spiritual literature, books. He was sending them free to hundreds of people round the world. The parcels had to be registered and each one had to be touched and blessed by Him, and the address checked by Him. He used to say, "This is how I am handing the book over to the recipient, though that recipient is thousands of miles away." Giving, giving, giving, giving - and the giving sprang not from vanity, not from expectation of a return, but from this pure divine love. His love

took the form of service, of giving food, giving knowledge, and giving Himself in every aspect. Such was the glorious nature of the divine being at whose Feet we are all seated today.

19. Yoga of Synthesis

Sri Gurudev's approach to spiritual life in general was a Yoga of synthesis. It is not a special Yoga called Synthetic Yoga, Yoga of Synthesis, or Integral Yoga, but Yoga. Yoga means integration, therefore there can be no specialisation in Yoga. One cannot be a Karma-yogi if one does not know what one is doing, why one is doing it, who is doing it, and to whom it is done, and if the right attitude is not there. One cannot be a Bhakta or a devotee of God if that devotion or love does not express itself in right action. You have the clearest warning in the Bhagavatam, that he who sees God only in statues, images and temples and dislikes the smallest, the meanest of God's creatures, is not a devotee. In the same way, Gurudev Himself used to warn us that, if you isolate yourself from the world, you may not even grow in virtue. There is no virtue in isolation, it cannot be cultivated, revealed, manifested or seen in isolation. So no Yama, Niyama, meditation or Japa is possible without Karma-yoga, without Bhakti.

In the case of those who had the good fortune to live at His feet, Gurudev prescribed an extraordinary beautiful Sadhana which embraced simultaneously, personal spiritual advancement, evolution, and common good or service of humanity. Often words and sentences are quoted out of context. Sometimes somebody points out, "Did not Swami Sivananda say that work is worship, dedicate it to God?" Yes, for certain. Work is worship, and we should dedicate all our work to God. Gurudev Himself used to say that whatever you do - it doesn't matter whether it is a ministerial job or a scavenger's work - it should be dedicated to God, it should be regarded as worship. True, but what does 'to worship God' mean? Is it possible for you to treat these actions as worship of God if you have never worshipped God? Is it possible to dedicate that action to God unless you have contacted and dedicated something to the divine presence in another form? Because, while you are doing something, your mind is busily engaged in the action itself. Where do you cultivate this Bhavana (inner attitude) of feeling the divine presence, so that you can regard this action as worship of God? How do you adopt this worshipful attitude in your daily activities - not only activities here in the Ashram, but outside where it is even more of a madhouse and a rat race?

"Work is worship" - but in Gurudev's language it meant work and worship, not one at the expense of the other. If you say you are doing your personal Sadhana and neglect service of humanity, you become self-centred, selfish, an island unto yourself, a parasite on society. So, Swamiji did not encourage complete and total isolation of the individual, even in the name of Yoga-sadhana. He indicated that great sages might remain in total seclusion, though in the nature of the things they are bound to be very, very few in the world. For us who form the majority, He prescribed seclusion of a different type. Not to neglect one's Sadhana, or spiritual practice (whatever that may mean to you), and at the same time not to neglect service - of the Guru, humanity, society or the nation, and to combine these at each step. To combine active dynamic service, and at the same time an inner attitude of worshipfulness - seclusion and a mingling with the crowd,

together. This was the beauty of His approach to spiritual life, and that was the difficulty also. When you are amongst people, realise you are completely alone - and when you are alone in the forest, realise you are one with humanity. He demonstrated it in His own life. One who walked with Him even a few paces could see on His face, in His demeanour, in His behaviour, that as He was walking surrounded by people, He was severely alone, untouched. Often He used to say, "I didn't sleep at all last night. Lying in that small room, I am in contact with the whole world," and then He would tell us to write to So-and-so, send books to So-and-so, and Prasad to So-and-so. So there in His own Kutir (which is literally a cave), He was in contact with the whole world, and when He was surrounded by humanity, He was completely free, independent. How to combine all this was the Yoga He taught us.

If one does not do this, what happens? If you say, "I am a Vairagi, a man of renunciation, I don't like company, I want to remain alone without any contact whatsoever", it is possible that to begin with you are full of aspiration, of the spirit of Vairagya and Viveka - especially if you have been surrounded by people for a long time, and you go and isolate yourself in a cave. You might feel, "Now in a few days I'll catch hold of God." But that God might prove to be lethargy, laziness, idleness and sleep - unless you are marked out for such a life, unless you are a Dattatreya, a Ramana Maharshi or a Sukadeva. It's possible that there are not too many of us that qualify for this. Your own selfishness gets very well established because, while the mind may think, "I am striving for Moksha", it is the 'I' that is striving for self-aggrandisement. As long as 'I' am striving, there is no Moksha. It's quite simple. Since Moksha is Moksha 'from the I', as long as 'I' am striving, there is no Moksha, but it is total selfishness. Gurudev has often pointed out that there are a few aspirants or Yogis who alone can fruitfully lead a life of seclusion and shine as spiritual suns, radiating their wisdom and blessings to the whole world. We recognise that such people did and do exist, but alas they are very few. For the majority a life of seclusion is dangerous. Shall we then engage ourselves ceaselessly in selfless service, using the famous slogan: Manava-seva is Madhava-seva (service of Man is service of God)? It's poetic, inspiring and it sells, it is easily accepted by everybody. If you go and tell people, "I am dedicated to the service of humanity", everybody gathers around you. I suppose you have already seen the danger there. You are supposed to do selfless, motiveless, desireless service. Selfless service is self-effacing service, where you remain almost unknown. But the moment you get into this path of service of humanity or selfless service, you are prevented from making it selfless. Even if you try, a few people hover around you, saying "Oh, Maharaj, what a great service you are doing." For ten or fifteen days you say, "Oh no, no, I am only an instrument in the hands of God, only God does" - then slowly you begin to feel, "Yes, all this glory belongs to God. That God is in me. All that glory belongs to God." It is selfless, but the self is growing more and more, because you have neglected the other aspects of Yoga. One limb is being developed at the expense of the others. Whereas there is tremendous social welfare achieved through you (or by you), your personal Sadhana is gone.

Perhaps some of you feel that Guru-seva does not share this danger - because the Guru is unlikely to inflate your ego. So you think that when it comes to Guru-seva, one can completely neglect everything else and treat Guru-seva itself as the supreme Sadhana. It's possible. Perhaps there is some validity in it, though I remember at least one incident where I found that Gurudev was not at all pleased with this attitude. This happened in 1946, when there was a lot of work to do, and very few hands in the Ashram to do it. Swamiji used to work where the post office is now, and some of those small rooms along that block were also used by us as office rooms. I was sitting in one of those rooms, typing, at about five or six in the afternoon. Suddenly I found Swamiji standing just outside the room on the kitchen verandah. He looked rather sternly at me and He said, "What are you doing?" I told Him what I was doing. "Did you do some Japa today, did you meditate today?" I stood up, looked at Him and said, "I am doing this." I didn't argue with Him. The placard on my wall said 'Work is Worship!' He said, "Take the typewriter and throw it into the Ganga, go and sit and meditate for some time."

He showed us this Himself in His own life. Comparatively, the Ashram was quieter in those days, but still He had all the responsibilities of running the Ashram and all the headaches that go with it. Yet He had certain periods allotted to specific activities - so much time for attending to correspondence, so much for study and writing, so much for office work, so many hours for Satsanga, so many hours for morning Darshan in the office, so many hours for His own personal Sadhana. In spite of His age, in spite of all these factors, He still had time to do His own Puja. When He could not bend and sit on the floor, the altar was raised, and there He did His own Puja every day. The Puja was probably nothing according to the Pandits, but according to God probably it was the best Puja in the world. Perhaps He did not need to do all these for His own salvation, but there we had an example.

If you think that one practice will do, that you do not need something else, again the ego has come in. You are not free. Only if all these are combined simultaneously, is it possible for us even to detect the existence of the self. Only when the self has been discovered to be non-existent, is there selfless service. As long as the self has not been discovered to be non-existent, there is no selfless service. As a matter of fact, all service is selfless service, because there is no self which does anything! It is all God who does it. So, even if I am sitting here, feeling proud and happy that I am talking to you, it is indeed God that is doing all this - but that truth has to be discovered, not imagined nor just thought of. It is no good just to think you are selfless, unselfish. If God is mysterious, this ego is even more mysterious, because it is a non-entity. And this false non-entity (like a shadow on the wall) cannot be taken out, destroyed or removed, except by shining a light on it. If you attempt to remove this shadow by any means other than illumination, it becomes ineffective. If you struggle against the ego by means other than enlightenment (Atma-jnana), you might even be creating an ego. Struggling against it, visualising that it has gone, will only make it stronger and stronger. That is why in one place Ramana Maharshi is reported to

have said that even Dhyana (meditation) is egoistic - the work of the ego - and therefore is no solution. Vichara, according to him, was the only solution.

Without neglecting personal Sadhana (Japa, Puja, meditation and all the rest of it), and at the same time without neglecting service of the Guru, of society and of God in various ways, if you lead a life of Yoga or integral perfection, there is no room for the ego to arise. Through morning meditation, Japa, Puja and so on, you raise the consciousness, you become alert to such an extent that it becomes like a shadowless lamp - a type of lamp which sheds its light in such a way that no shadow is formed, the rays come from all sides. Morning meditation, Puja, study of scriptures, and so on, all together create a shadowless lamp which prevents the ego from arising. Whatever you do during the rest of the day, you are forever vigilant, forever alert. You feel the presence of God within you when you meditate, you feel the presence of God within you when you go and worship in the temple, and you feel the spirit of worshipfulness within you as you offer even a leaf at the feet of the Lord enshrined in the temple. This is the spirit in which all that is done must be done. This attitude is generated by personal Sadhana. But if you confine your life just to this personal Sadhana - though it is impossible to prevent the spirit from expressing itself in life - then this spirit finds no outlet or expression. Therefore there is no touchstone on which to evaluate whether this spirit has really been kindled within you. So go out, mix with people, do your duty, or your Seva, and while doing all that, observe yourself to see how effective your Sadhana has been. Has it been effective, or is the mind still subject to the same old thoughts and feelings of hate, jealousy, likes and dislikes, cravings, vanity, greed? It is then that we can really and truly live the divine life.

It is then and only then that we can glimpse the state of the Yogi who is able to say, "I do nothing, it is God who does it. It is God who does even the Sadhana that is called 'my personal Sadhana' - Japa, meditation and Puja. It is God alone who does all this. He serves Himself through Himself."