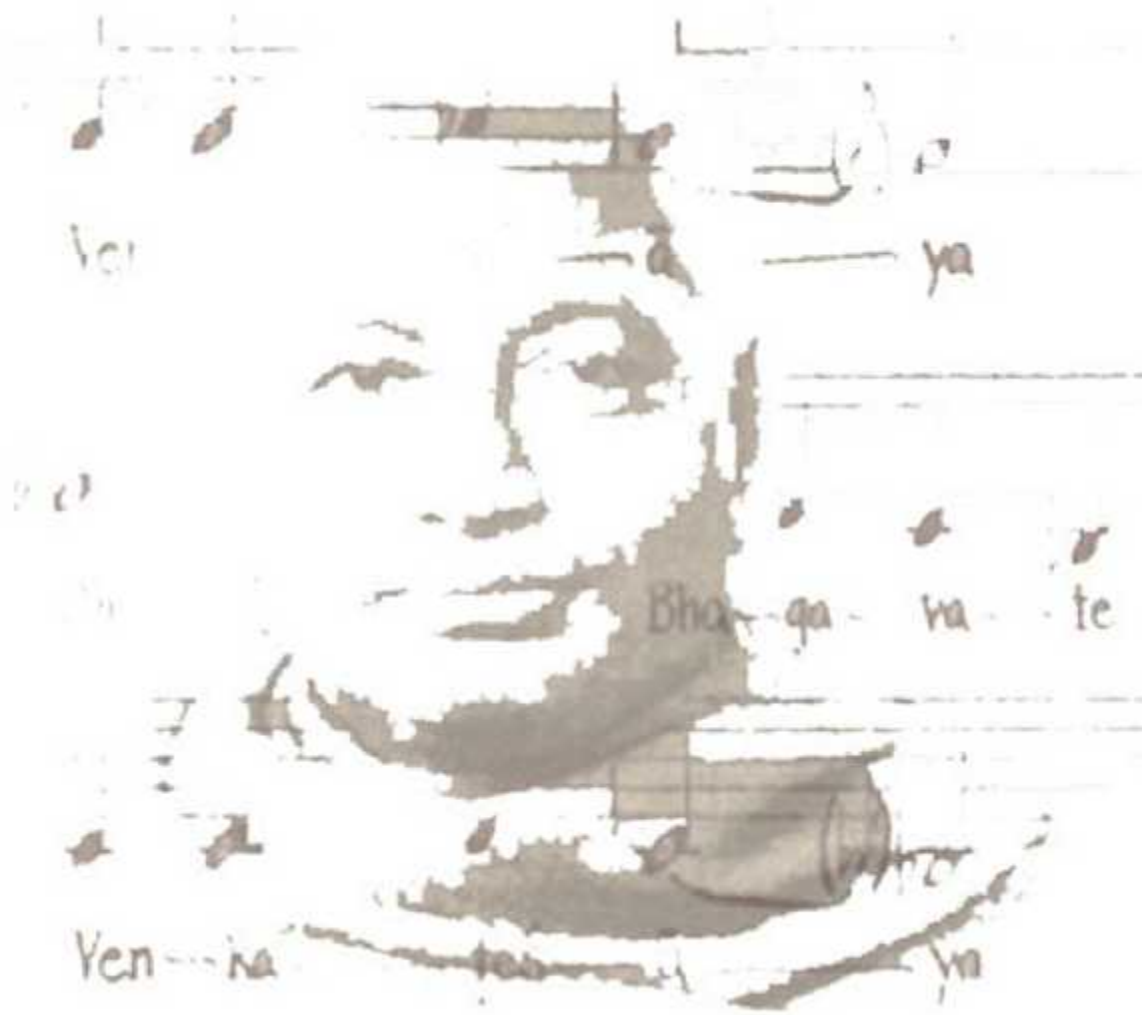


A Season's Harvest

1977

Living at The Feet
of the Guru



Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Living at the Feet of The Guru

Swami Venkatesananda

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Volume 1 - part 1
Living at the Feet of the Guru

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1 - The Spirit of Gurudev - The Eternal Disciple

His life and His teachings were not different except in certain respects. When we say 'the teachings', it is better not to confuse the teachings with what is published in His books. Most of the books were transmission of traditional teachings, for instance a lovely book called, 'Practice of Nature Cure'. That is the transmission of the teachings concerning nature cure, not necessarily His own teachings.

Even they received His spirit in as much as they were neither fanatic nor exclusive, but the practice of nature cure. In that, Sri Gurudev gave the traditional teachings, flavoured by His own spirit.

His own teachings were quite another thing. They were entirely His life, an extension of His own life. And so, when we discuss the life and teachings of Gurudev, we are really contemplating the spirit that lives with us as Sri Gurudev.

I have no doubt that His presence is still here. We may not be able to see Him now only because our vision is limited. It may even be as it was in those days when, on certain occasions, He wouldn't come out. So, even though one may not be able to see the physical presence, the spiritual presence is ever here.

There is one fundamentally vital question that should occur to us concerning, which we should be quite clear. Gurudev was a phenomenon, and so are you. Is it possible by listening to His life or his teachings to become like him?

The thought itself is absurd. I suppose we can imitate Him, that's not difficult - but it's not the reality. This is one aspect. Another aspect is more important, that He Himself was not an imitation. You may wonder, so what? In that, there was a teaching. When He was in Swarg Ashram, He was only an ordinary sadhu. At the same time, around Him, there lived others of His own age or even younger who had acquired fame and name and a great following, because they were specialists. One was a great scholar. Well, it was too late for Swami Sivananda to become a sanskrit-scholar - He was 36 or 39 when He came here. There was another who could be imitated, he was a mouni. All of us can imitate this. You can all become mouni sadhus, because it only demands that you should not talk. Swami Sivananda was not tempted to become a mouni or an ascetic or even a Kundalini yogi. He didn't pattern His life on somebody else.

What you are looking for is self-realisation, not 'other-imitation'. That is the example. Imitation is a waste of time, absolutely useless, apart from the fact that He Himself could not be imitated. He was too great. You could perhaps in a whole lifetime of contemplation on the Guru catch a glimpse of one aspect of his personality. When you think you have understood Him, you suddenly discover that there are too many other aspects which are baffling. So it was not possible to imitate Him - a second Sivananda could not be produced by the same Brahma, not in the same kalpa. Then one might ask, 'What is the sense in listening to these stories, these teachings, if they cannot be imported, not just imparted, but

imported - lock, stock and barrel?'

Perhaps some of you have read some scriptures, The Bhagavad Gita or The Ramayana or The Yoga Sutras. There are doctrines in these texts whose words seem to be simple enough for the brain to transmit. The Bhagavad Gita is one such scripture. The words are quite simple, and the brain suggests that the translation is easy. But then the meaning is impossible! For one who has not seen an elephant, it is impossible to describe an elephant. We read the doctrines in the Gita, the Upanishads etc.. Do we know what they mean? The brain can provide the dictionary meaning, but this is not it.

What is the meaning, for example, of samadhi? There is a brilliant translation of the Yoga Vasistha, the only one of its kind, which was produced about 150 years ago. Every time the word 'samadhi' occurred in the original text, it had been translated 'anaesthesia'. The translator probably looked up a dictionary which told him 'samadhi' is 'anaesthesia', 'where one is not affected at all by the external influences.' That meaning is misleading. It does not lead me to nowhere, it leads me to somewhere else, where I do not want to go. Reading these scriptures, how do you know that this is possible? How do you know these teachings are real or valid? Look at him. As it says in the Narada Bhakti Sutras, 'Scriptures are validated by Saints'. That is the only way scriptures can be verified, otherwise they are just words, meaningless words which can be misunderstood. So, here we are on the horns of a dilemma.

I need the example of Sri Gurudev to understand the scripture. Yet I am afraid I cannot imitate Him. In any case, He Himself didn't like it. So, why do we listen to His life and teachings? In order that the spirit of Sri Gurudev may enter us and become life. Is it possible for us to inhale the spirit of Gurudev's life, as we inhale air, and let it enliven us? If we listen in that spirit, I am sure we shall all be blessed and benefited.

There is however a problem. First of all, to come to grips with the concept of Guru. Some of you who have not had His Darshan have one difficulty: you have not seen Him, and therefore you depend upon someone else's interpretation; and please remember that whoever it is that interprets Sri Gurudev, can only give you a passing picture. Nobody could describe Him totally. Nobody has seen Him totally. This is your problem.

Our problem was even more complex and complicated. First of all, though we saw Him constantly, He was such a dazzling infinity that every day we saw a different facet. Sometimes one facet was almost contradictory to another. You are left wondering which one is true. The whole thing was true, and in that He represented the infinite in its truest spirit. You see smoke going up, and you see water flowing down, both of them part of the same infinity. There is no sense in asking if the infinite seems to be confused. The question is absurd. Similarly with Swami Sivananda Himself. One day He did this, another day He did something quite the contrary, like fire going up and water flowing down - both of them are

the infinite, not just part of the infinite. They constitute the infinite, another facet of this infinite - that was the problem.

When it comes to understanding this sadhana, there is more difficulty. He had passed through an austere life, He had renounced the world. Many of us didn't have any world to renounce. I didn't have to renounce my wife - she is not here, I didn't marry. Most of us have nothing very serious to renounce. Some of us have renounced poverty, some have renounced boredom, some have renounced unpleasant situations. He had something else to renounce, and having renounced all that, He subjected himself to tremendous austerity. We came as young men. We had never been subjected to any hardship. Most of us came when the ashram had already been established. All that you had to do was to go there, knock, and somebody said, 'Yes. I'll give you some tea'.

Once Swami Sivananda was very angry. What is the present post office was then the office, and He used to work there at a small chair and table. Three of us were sitting in front of Him, working, when for some reason He said, 'Ha,- what is this? You have all become like baboons. You came here as sadhus, but you all become like baboons'.

We didn't have tables and chairs in those days, but still we had something. 'When the bell rings you go and have your tea, have your lunch. Do you know what the hard life of a sadhu means?' We just looked at Him. Then He went on, 'You want to be a swami - do you know how to beg?' 'No Swami'. 'Come on, I'll show you'. He took one of those little towels, tied it around His hand. 'Hold your bag like this - and you must have a little vessel, and when you go near the people, you must open this and say 'Narayanaya' and keep quiet. Have you clone that?' I said, 'No - of course not, the kitchen was established, then we came.'

He was so wild that two of us decided to go begging the next day down into Rishikesh! You know, we went along a road, singing, and received some alms from some houses and so on, but that is not begging. At the back of our minds was the sure guarantee of food. All that we had to do was to go round. Even if we collected nothing, we could go back to the ashram and have our food. What would be the feeling in your heart when you were not sure of that? That is different. That is begging. This is merely showing.

That was when He pointed out that our life is a mendicant's life. You must learn not to depend upon these things, but to depend upon, for want of a better word, God.

Though on this occasion, He was stern in His admonitions, on most occasions He behaved like our mother. No, not even like a mother, more, like our grandmother. He loved feeding us - it was non-stop. This is one respect in which His teachings dramatically and diametrically differed from His life. He underwent all sorts of hardships, but He would not let you ever think of it. He was very abstemious in His eating habits, but nothing gave Him greater pleasure than to

see people eat. He was a very big man with an enormous hand. Even when He gave you just a little, it was enough for lunch and dinner. Usually He was not very sophisticated in this - He didn't serve you the prasada on a plate or a leaf, He gave it from His hand to your hand, saying, 'Eat, eat it now.' He would tell you a very common sense reason why: 'Otherwise the monkeys will take it away from you - so better eat it now', right in front of Him. You had to eat, and as soon as your hands were empty, something more would come. Every time a visitor brought a basket of fruits, it went round. Half an hour later, another visitor came along; it went round again. Some visitors used to sort of complain - not really complain. 'Swamiji, you said to eat a little, but here you keep feeding us'. 'Huh. When you go home, you can fast.' That was the attitude.

Therefore, for most of us who lived with Him, it was very difficult to follow His example. He was fond of austerities, yet He almost discouraged people from leading an austere life. He had a complete double personality, being a teacher - if you listened to Him and responded to Him, then probably He would teach you. But more often than not He was a grandmother, not even a mother.

To be with Him and to watch Him, and pierce through all these to perceive the spirit of Sri Gurudev was difficult. One has to watch, observe minutely, in order to see what this spirit may be.

Firstly, let us look at the problem of the Guru. Unfortunately for us, this has become a problem. Why is this so? We often repeat a very beautiful and inspiring verse,

*ishvaro gururatmeti murtibheda vibhagine,
vyomavad vyapta dehaya sri dakshina murtaye namah*

Ishvaro gururatmeti murtibheda vibhagine - One alone appears as this trinity, the three words - God, Guru, and Self - indicate exactly one truth. They are not three different things, but one truth. We who are ignorant of the Self or of God, how do we pretend to understand the Guru? One who does not understand God, does not understand the Guru. One who does not understand the Self, does not understand the Guru.

When this ignorance is there, there is only misunderstanding. And therefore we often appoint, disappoint, and dismiss the Guru. This is a famous pastime. I don't know if you have come across people who go about saying, 'Ah you are my Guru today'. As long as you scratch my back, as long as you satisfy my whims and fancies, you are my Guru. And a few days later I'll disappoint you. The disciple appoints the Guru - the disciple disappoints the Guru. All these sound too much alike!

This is the question - to know who the Guru is - to know Who the Guru is in relation to me? Is it possible for an ignorant, immature person to answer this satisfactorily? We are all emotional, sentimental beings, we have our own inner images, we have our own ideas about the Guru. He must have a nice flowing

beard and sit erect all the time.

If you had had Gurudev's Darshan, you would never have seen him rigidly erect. He sat curved forward slightly - He used to call it Hanuman asana. Even sitting erect like this suggests a certain vanity, a certain arrogance.

Because we have our own ideas about what a yogi or Guru should be like, when we come to Him, we don't recognize Him. If you do not know yourself, you cannot know the Guru. Guru is the manifestation of the Grace of God, evoked by your aspiration? The three are closely interlinked, they are three facets of the same being. If there is no aspiration, there is no Guru.

It is this inner aspiration, directed to the Omnipresent Being, that appears in front of you as the Guru. Only then can you recognize the Guru. It is therefore discipleship that is important. It is possible to say that the spirit of discipleship itself is the Guru. If that spirit of discipleship is there, you will recognize the Guru immediately, because that is the Guru. Naturally, in order to verify this inner spirit, it is necessary to go and resort to the Lotus Feet of a living Satguru and follow Him. All that is important. But the first aspect of this Guru is within - the spirit of discipleship. And that is what we saw constantly in Gurudev.

A young man had come from South Africa and spent some time with us; then the time came for him to return to his country. Gurudev was seated in the old office. When this man came in, he sat down and looked at Gurudev, and started shedding tears. When Gurudev saw a sincere person like this, His face shone. There was something extraordinary in all this, a radiance, a bliss which is indescribable. It was God, grandmother, father, all these things rolled into one. He looked at this young man with such compassion, such love, such affection, that it is impossible to put it into words.

Then He said, 'Ah, what is it?' 'Swamiji, I have to go back to South Africa.' 'Huh, you must go back to South Africa.'

Looking at Gurudev's face, smiling, cheerful, compassionate, he was consoled. Then he said to Swamiji, 'Where do we get Gurus like you in South Africa?' 'Ah! You don't get Gurus like me in South Africa. Hah - you don't get Gurus at all, Achaah.' Then He fixed His gaze on the young man's eyes and said, 'It is easy to find a Guru - it is very difficult to find a disciple.'

That is what He was throughout His life, He was a disciple. I know what He used to write occasionally, 'I have accepted you as my beloved disciple and I will guide you.' He may have written this, but when you came in front of Him, he would treat you as His Guru. The moment you entered the ashram, He saluted you, prostrated to you, bowed down to you. He never used the second person singular in regard to anybody - even to small children. Everyone was an elder, everyone was worshipful, adorable - everyone was His Guru.

It was one of those comic situations, when the Supreme Being Himself used to sit or lie down in the satsang. Somebody used to deliver a lecture - some silly man who had probably not even entered the spiritual path would discourse on Vedanta and other spiritual topics. Swamiji used to say that He listened to everybody's lectures with great keenness. He was a keen student - an eternal disciple, an eternal student. Even when a little child stood up and sang a song or recited a poem, Gurudev said, 'I listen extremely carefully'. Even though the talk might not have substance in itself, it used to trigger a train of thought, a chain of reflection in Him, and He would go to His room and contemplate thus. Many of the books were products of such contemplation. Is that possible for us to be an eternal disciple, a genuine disciple, a serious disciple? That discipleship itself being the primary Guru, the secondary guru appears in front of us in human form. As Gurudev used to say, referring to particular people from whom He had learned, 'I have learned a lot from him.'

One who had this receptivity, who was eager to listen, even to the humorous stories of one of His disciples, in order to learn, was an eternal disciple. The perfect Guru was an eternal disciple in whom the aspiration was never quenched or put out.

If that aspiration is awakened in us, if that discipleship comes to dwell in our hearts, it is then that we might come to know what Guru means. That same discipleship, that same aspiration which is the primary Guru, by God's Grace, and in God's Light, appears to be an external human being. But first and foremost we must be perpetually burning with aspiration.

2 - Gurudev's Attitude to the Guru-disciple Relationship

In the life of a Jivanmukta we find what superficially appears to be a contradiction, something which defies logic. Logic is the child of the intellect as well as being the governor of the intellect. Like your children, it is born of you and yet it governs you. The intellect cannot function without logic, therefore it creates logic and gets bound. The Sage however is free from all that. Those of you who have devoted some thought to life, may have realised that life itself is not logical. So, these two guiding lines have to be born in mind. Firstly, you don't jump to any conclusions, and secondly, if there are contradictions, then that is the unmistakable sign of a liberated Sage. He is not bound by anything. There is a truth which shines through Him and which has to be seen. There is a fragrance that emanates from Him, a fragrance of divinity that has to be inhaled like a perfume. As we inhale the life breath, can we inhale the perfume of a divinity? May it also enliven us.

Gurudev had an extraordinary attitude to the famous Guru-disciple relationship. I suppose you are already familiar with these two extreme views. One says that the Guru is the one that does everything, and the other claims that the Guru is not necessary at all. There are some who say that not only do you need a Guru, but that the Guru Himself does everything. This is a point of view, a theory - that's all. There is the other theory, the teaching, that no Guru can uplift you, that a Guru is absolutely useless. Gurudev was right in the middle. So, in most of these issues, where there are two extremes, He trod the middle path. It was beautiful.

How did He do this? Those who said that the Guru is not necessary - He didn't argue with them. If that person came to the ashram, sat there and delivered a discourse attacking all this guru business, Gurudev Himself would have applauded! He was not afraid at all of any criticism, of any other point of view being expounded here, right at His own Feet. If immediately after this talk we wanted to perform pada-puja, He would sit and allow it to be done. He didn't fight or argue with them, but quietly He said, 'Without a Guru you may be lost'. Even if you are enlightened and light is pouring out of your ears and nose, it is better to be a little humble and treat yourself as a disciple and seek a Guru.

On the other hand, there was a rather stern, tough article written by Gurudev Himself, entitled, 'Gurudom, the deathly Cancer.' He wrote it, had it read in the satsang, then had about 20 or 30 copies typed and sent it to all the journals that He was connected with.

Now there seems to be a contradiction. He is not supposed to be a Guru, and I am supposed to seek a Guru - if He refuses to be my Guru, it is like preaching brahmacharya to the boy and insisting that the girl gets married. There was this most beautiful synthesis, a middle path. It is possible that He may regard you as the Guru, but within yourself, be careful. You do not even have to tell Him, 'Do not take me as your Guru.' Then you become the Guru. If He obeys you, He becomes your disciple, and you become the Guru. If you tell Him, 'Go away', He

goes away and becomes your disciple. And if He stays, you become the Guru. Never mind all this, mind your own business.

How did He put the middle path into practice? Consider His attitude to new aspirants. In the letters we drafted for Him to new disciples, after signing, He would with His own hand write just two or three lines, 'I have accepted you as my beloved disciple'. That was only the first line. The second line is the most important one. 'I shall guide you and serve you nicely.'

You accept me as your disciple and you are going to serve me? That is the beauty. That is what I meant by saying that this is the most delicate middle path.

On the contrary, Gurudev used to talk to other people in the ashram as if He was the disciple. Every moment Gurudev was supremely conscious, vigilant is the word, that this Gurudom did not enter His heart. A thousand people might worship, bow down to Him, sing His glories, but He was not affected. This was the beautiful thing I saw.

He did not have the feeling 'I am the Guru' towards His disciples. His disciples could openly profess devotion to other masters. There was no problem at all. What happens if this disciple deserts you and defects to another side? It is alright. I am not a guru. It was an extraordinary thing to watch. His own disciples could be devoted to anybody. In the ashram there were senior disciples of Gurudev who were openly followers of other saints. That did not make any difference to Him at all. Not in the least.

But what is even more interesting - now comes the danger point - when the avowed disciples of other swamis and holy men came to Him, He accepted them. One was Swami Poorna Bodh, he was one of us and probably the best of us. He belonged to another order, the Avadhuta order. In this order you do not wear clothes, you grow a beard, and so on. Gurudev Himself sent Him to South India when his Guru's Guru was sick. When he returned here, initiated into the Avadhuta order, Gurudev said, 'Stay here, it's perfectly alright.' One day, this Swami wasn't quite pleased with his hair and beard. I am not sure whether Gurudev told him or he asked for permission. Gurudev said, 'Ha, shave it off.' That is a paradox again. Here is somebody who is not my disciple, I am not the guru, so I have no business to guide him. He looks up to me for guidance and so. Though he is the disciple of somebody else, I simply tell him, 'Shave it all off.' An extraordinary thing.

The master had transcended all limitations, so that for a moment He was the avadhuta swami, there is no difference at all - spiritually, between that swami's Guru and Him. The whole thing was beyond all distinction. It seemed to be an absolutely open heaven, where anybody was welcome to come and go. So, this is the paradox: the disciple needs the Guru, but that is his business. One should not feel that one is the guru. If the disciple feels that you are the Guru, that's his problem, not yours. Without denying your permission to treat him as the Guru,

or yourself as His disciple, He refused to allow the Gurudom to enter into it. And therefore He was a perpetual disciple, even though millions all over the world regarded themselves as His disciples.

This spirit was evident in Him right from boyhood. He always remembered anyone from whom He learned anything. As a young boy, He learned fencing with a stick - only for a few days, I believe, because His teacher happened to be an Untouchable. But a Guru is a Guru, one who taught me something. When it was time to go, Gurudev went to him, prostrated to him, offered him flowers, worshipped him. Somebody had objected to this Brahmin boy learning fencing from an Untouchable; but then, in response, the young Brahmin boy goes to him, worships him, falls at his feet.

In 1923 or 1924, when He was initiated, He had only a brief contact with the swami who gave Him sanyas. This I have heard from Gurudev's lips. 'Even though I spent only a few hours in the company of My Guru, I remember Him every morning.' That Swami merely gave Him the mantra; he didn't perform any ceremony. Everyone from whom He learnt anything He remembered every day. Even when He was worshipped by millions and regarded by millions all over the world as their Guru, He Himself felt He was a disciple, and He devoutly remembered all His teachers and regarded Himself as a disciple of all these great masters - that was His greatness, His glory. He could learn from anybody because of the spirit of discipleship, because of the absence of the feeling 'I am a Guru.'

Another interesting feature. We were half His age, almost nobodies on the spiritual path, we were His disciples. He was the master, He was our father, our mother; he fed us, sheltered us and guided us; he was our Guru, our God. Yet, if He had some work to do, if He wanted to tell us something, He would not send for us. He hated the very idea of treating you as someone inferior. He had to go to you. Only in the last few years the body couldn't take it, and there was no alternative.

Even when something unpleasant had to be told to you, He would try not to do it directly. He would get hold of somebody else or invent a little story, something indirect, hoping that you might catch it. That was the beauty. Only if we appreciate this, will we also appreciate why Gurudev went to all that expense of issuing so many publications, and even why He got so many biographies published. His teaching was His example. Therefore this example had to be brought to the attention of the disciples. How do you do that? Gurudev sets an example, so it has to be brought home to you that this is the example. One can say, 'Look at me, look what I am doing.' That is boasting and Gurudom again. And so He allowed others who saw the truth concerning these actions of His, to write about them, and He encouraged those things to be published. It was beautiful. A simple trick. The example had to be pointed out to the seekers, without the Gurudom entering again. That was the method by which Gurudev avoided the extremes of the Guru-disciple relationship.

3 - Renunciation

A fundamental principle of sadhana or spiritual life is renunciation. We recite this mantra quite often, 'Only by renunciation does man realise immortality.'

But what is renunciation? What should be renounced or what should not be renounced? What is the spirit of renunciation - not merely the external form of behaviour, but the spirit of renunciation? If we do not understand the spirit of renunciation, we are battling with the forms, imagining we are holy men. The holy man must be wholly man, not just a holy man with many holes.

There are two diametrically opposed schools of thought. What does the mantra say? Literally translated, it means, 'Not by any type of action, not by leading a house holder's life, not by earning or distributing wealth, but by renunciation alone'.

We are fond of jumping to conclusions: ah, not by these means. They must be renounced, so all actions must be renounced. No relationships, no progeny - so relationships must be renounced. No money, so wealth must be renounced. This is one view.

When you use such illogical logic, you are jumping to conclusions, you have come to a conclusion. That means, you are not alive any more! The scripture says that you cannot attain enlightenment or realise immortality by inner action. But where does it say that action should be renounced? The scripture does say that no relationship is going to help you, but where does it say that you must renounce them? The scripture says that this realisation is not attained by means of wealth, but where does it say that you should not touch money?

In the early fifties, a certain Maharashtra Saint visited the ashram in Rishikesh along with his group. Gurudev was there and He asked him to conduct bhajan. He had a powerful voice, he was a brilliant man and the author of a number of compositions - and he sang mostly his own compositions. He wore white clothes, and still he was called a swami. Please remember the hall was literally filled with orange robes, and there he was sitting on the platform banging away at his musical instrument. One of his bhajans was a satirical song at the expense of all these swamis. I remember the words very well. 'These swamis, you go to them and ask them why they do not do some work. 'I have offered my body,' they reply, 'Everything has been burnt to ashes. I am Buddha, a dead body, and a dead body does not function. I have offered myself in the fire of sanyasa. So, I am dead, I cannot participate in any activity.' I remember the last sentence very well. 'When you ask him to work, he says he is Buddha - but when this dead body becomes hungry, my God, he can eat the world.' So, that is renunciation of activity.

But is renunciation of activity of action itself?

Krishna says, 'You fool, what are you going to renounce? You cannot remain here

for one moment without engaging yourself in some action.' Sitting, lying down, are actions, blinking is an action. Once we understand the spirit of renunciation as declared in the Bhagavad Gita we see that Gurudev was a manifestation of that spirit of renunciation.

The other point of view is expressed by many of these social service swamis, who say we do not have to renounce anything - we must go on working. There are others who say that sanyasa itself is not meant for this age. One should not take sanyasa at all. Renunciation was meant only for satya yoga.

Gurudev was exactly in the middle. Just as in every other respect He lived the philosophy of neither-nor - it is neither this nor that - 'neti neti'. One should not say that everything must be renounced, but neither should one say that renunciation is unnecessary. Renunciation is necessary, but one should know what is to be renounced and what is useless to renounce. Krishna specifically declared, 'These three ought not to be renounced - self-sacrificing service, charity and austerity - or simple life.'

Even these should be practised without attachment and veiled rewards. When will I practise self-sacrificing service, charity, austerity or a simple life, without attachment or an 'I' - eye - to its reward? Only when it becomes absolutely and totally natural - when it does not involve the ego. When you are breathing, you are not even conscious - you have no motivation for breathing or not breathing. Can you become as natural as this? Can charity become that, can an austere simple life become totally natural - not unconscious, not motivated?

So, what is to be renounced? The motivations are to be renounced, the attachment is to be renounced, craving for result is to be renounced. Can this be done? It does involve a certain action. Yagna is a certain type of action, Dana is a certain type of action, charity is a certain type of action, as is tapas. But even these must be lived without motivation. Once again, defining sanyasa, Sri Krishna tells us in the Bhagavad Gita that the renunciate is one who does not reject nor desire.

Once, at the suggestion of one of our senior gurubhais, there were some swamis here who used to recommend all sorts of disciplines to new aspirants - such as giving up salt or sweets, or tea or coffee for a month. This is alright to develop will power and all that. As suggested by this swami, I thought I would go without sweets for a month. And I was standing outside the present post office, which was the office at that time. Gurudev came along, He had some sweets in His hand, and offered me one. I had also been told that Gurudev would test you, and so, not to fall, naturally I said, 'No, Swamiji, I am not eating sweets now.' He looked sternly at me, His eyes were smilingly stern. 'Take it.' He says take it - so take it. As I was trying to put it into my mouth, He said, 'Do not ask - do not reject. Then you will know what sanyasa means.'

This spirit of sanyas must become natural to us. I do not know whether it can be

cultivated. We shall see as we go on. And yet sanyasa or renunciation is necessary. Without renunciation, the realisation of the infinite cannot be had. Which means that as long as you cling to the finite, the infinite is unrealised. It is not that the finite compels you to cling to it, but that you are clinging to the finite. Here is the bondage, here are the chains, and unless I abandon the finite, the infinite cannot become truly real.

I will give you a very simple example. You want to go up that mountain. What do you do? You first go to the Ganges bank. As you go down, you watch how your feet behave. This is exactly what they do. You leave one step and go to the next step - the next step is not your goal. You do not want to stay in that next step; but, without it, you cannot proceed further. And when you go down to the Ganges bank, unless you leave this shore, you cannot go to the other shore. The boat tied to this shore has also to be released.

Perhaps this is the significance of the famous sanyasa ceremony. You leave your home and shave your head, throw out the other clothes and put on orange clothes. It is just getting into the boat; but the boat is not your destination. It takes you somewhere, then you jump out of it, otherwise you will be drowned. Still your destination is not reached. You go there, step after step, you keep on leaving each step behind.

That is renunciation. It is not one event in a man's life, it is an ongoing spirit. One cannot say that on the 12th of September - I renounced - what? I did not renounce 'I', because I am here to say that. I renounced one form of life and jumped into another form of life. I gave up this shore and got into the boat - but the boat is not my destination. It is an ongoing endless affair.

Kadeshi varaikkum ushara irukkanam. 'Be vigilant to the end.' This was Gurudev's favourite expression. I have heard Him say it a thousand times. To what end He did not say. To the end of all this finitude, be vigilant and let that vigilance sustain this threefold activity - charity, self-sacrifice, and simplicity, and keep this spirit of renunciation alive.

There is one other intricate, subtle and therefore complex principle. Yet it is so simple. Coming back to our journey; if, while you are going down, seeing that you have to get to that step ten steps below, and before lifting your foot off the step on which you are standing, you reach out, then you are finished. Everything must happen at the proper time. That is why I insist that this spirit of renunciation must become natural. What is renounced must drop away without your knowledge, without your ego participation. Without the use of will, it just drops away. Because when these three - yagna, dana, tapas - have become natural, spontaneous, then every form of renunciation happens at the appropriate time. It does not hurt. It becomes a joyous event.

I have seen Gurudev in the most trying circumstances, when He had to do things He would not have liked two or three years before, but then the face was

blooming with joy. He might even tell you, 'I didn't want this, now it has happened,' not with a sour face, with no regrets. This has to happen now. I took this step, and then the next, and the next one is this. So these steps of renunciation have to happen at the appropriate time. One cannot renounce anything prematurely, then there is danger. I suppose you also realise that in order to renounce you must have it. A beggar does not renounce a kingdom, he doesn't own even a house.

We will go back to Gurudev's life. The first thing to renounce is tamas, laziness. And therefore, in His own life and the life of those who sought His refuge, He tried by every means in His power to knock out laziness. Do something. That was His gospel. Express yourself, only then will you get a clear look at yourself. You sit and close your eyes and look at the tip of your nose. It is easy after a few days practice. 'I have no desires at all. I have no ambitions at all. I am Brahma ...' That is easy. There are hundreds of vultures hidden in you. Let one of them come out. Just see what happens. You know how to sing, come on, sing; you know how to type, come on, type; you know how to write some nice articles, come on, do that. 'I was very sattvic and had no desires, no ambitions, no ego, Oh, I was so calm and peaceful.' But put this man to work in something, immediately all those things come up - jealousy, hatred, ambition, desire, disappointment, greed.

Even in His childhood, we are told by those who knew Him, He was a very active boy. Wherever there was action, there He was. He was also a fighter. He used to fight, and if somebody in the household took Him to task, it seems He would walk out in a huff. He was very sensitive. When later He gave us the formula, 'Bear insult, bear injury, this is the highest sadhana' - that was also cultivated. He was a very sensitive person. He lost His mother very early in His life and His elder brothers and sister used to look after Him. I met the woman in Mysore. She told me how, when He quarrelled with somebody and was taken to task or scolded, He would disappear from the house, go away for a day. A little boy, where could He go? He could not renounce the world and become a swami. After a while He would quietly come and stand under a tree. Somebody would notice Him and say, 'Come on, come inside.'

He was sensitive and He was a hard worker, a hard fighter, right from childhood, very mischievous. But there was one golden quality in that little boy - the quality of charity. Simplicity was also inborn. You can see immediately that if you do not lead a simple life, you can do very little charity. If simple living is not natural to you, you may have ten shirts, but if someone gives you another, you will keep it, saying, 'This may be useful.' But if simple living is natural, then even the third or fourth you will tend to give away. So, charity and simple living go together. This was His nature. He was devoted to simple living, although the definition of simple living changed. Self-sacrifice was His nature. He would do anything for anybody in distress or trouble, even as a young boy. Many of the fights and quarrels He got into were also due to defending weak people. Please remember that I am not describing a young saint, but a young boy.

He had very fastidious tastes in food, and this lasted quite a long time, though He could adapt Himself to very simple food. Whatever little He took had to be nicely prepared. Gurudev's sister said that if one day the dahl was not prepared to His liking, He would throw it away, get up and walk away. He loved ghee, and the ghee had to be fine, pure and a certain quantity; if that was not there, He would get cross. Later we discovered that ghee is very good for the voice and the throat. He probably knew then and there that His kirtan would thrill the hearts of millions of people.

So, here were these two qualities - on the one side, intense dynamic action, on the other side, its corollary, sensitiveness, aggressiveness. This may not be new to you. Gurudev was very aggressive and dynamic and very powerful. He was not a weakling at all. Weakness He did not approve of. Weakness is tamas. Unless you get over that tamas, you will never get anywhere. You cannot reach the other shore unless you are prepared to abandon this side. This side is tamas. Get onto the flowing river, it is rajas. Even if you commit mistakes, be active. If you are ambitious, all right, be active, and express your action, your talents, and you will see the ambition standing in front of you. Then you will say, 'My God, all this was in me, all this craving, all this ambition, all this desire, all this attachment was in me. It is thanks to this dynamic service I am able to see it in front of me.'

Later, while He was undergoing training as a doctor, He started a journal, called Ambrosia. On the cover is an extraordinary illustration: a muscular man flexing his muscles on one side and holding Ambrosia, the journal, on the other. The message seems to be: 'Read this magazine and you will become like this.' Everybody must become like that. Strong, muscular, hefty, dynamic. There again, He was intensely dynamic and at the same time charitable. All that knowledge was distributed. There was nothing kept for Himself. It was self-sacrificing service; simplicity itself. He used to write the articles for the journal, get it printed and distribute it, ask for advertisements, collect subscriptions - three rupees per year.

You can see there a combination of many factors, some saintly and some perhaps not so saintly. But we are talking about Swami Sivananda when He was still a young man. There was self-sacrifice, there was charity, there was the desire for disseminating knowledge - at the same time there was ambition, happiness at some little factor. Tamas had been left behind, now a rajasic life was being led.

Then He was not satisfied with the scene there was in India, and He went over to Malaya. Gurudev Himself said that Malaya was full of mosquitoes, malaria, money and prostitutes. It is our good fortune that Gurudev was not bitten by any of them. His own boss, the doctor for whom He worked had malaria, and had to be carried around. It was a good life for the people who went from here. He was ambitious, and it was there that this rajas took a certain form. He saw immediately that, whereas service is good, pleasure may not be so good - it may be misleading. And He also saw what renunciation is. What must be renounced? Anything that stands in your way as an obstacle must be renounced.

Why did Swami Sivananda go to Malaya? To serve. In order to serve, what do I need and what are the obstacles? I need money, so I get money. I need good health, so He was cautious, He did not expose Himself to malaria and he did not expose Himself to the pleasure-seeking life of Malaya. These are obstacles, renounce them, keep off. And at the same time, there are good things. Service is good, charity is good, the simple life is good. These He deliberately promoted, for these were also natural to Him. The other temptations could not even touch Him, because He was too busy.

You see. It is not when you fight against the so-called evils that you succeed, but when you are too busy to pay any attention to them. Virtues are not cultivated in themselves, by themselves. When you are too busy doing something good, you have no time for vice. Because we do not understand this, we knock our heads against stone walls and bleed. When you want somebody to smile, you do not pull his cheeks away, you tickle his foot and the mouth smiles. So the action is here, the result is somewhere else. In order to cultivate good qualities, I do not have to go on manipulating them. Tickle somewhere else, that thing becomes good. What must I do in order to overcome some evil habits or evil thoughts? Be active here, then that will disappear, you have no time. That was what he demonstrated in Malaya.

If in this manner life is kept at full tension, there is absolutely no possibility of the mind indulging in useless thoughts or harmful emotions. At the same time, this self-sacrificing service, as also charity, continued. What had been renounced? The pleasures of life had been renounced, had been seen to be hollow. Renounced is not the proper word - they had no value at all. It is only because the mind, or something else, sticks the label 'pleasure' on certain experiences that the mind thinks of them. When does the mind not think of them as pleasure? When something else gives you pleasure. When service and charity give you pleasure, when satsang gives you pleasure.

These three, Swami Sivananda had in abundance in Malaya. In that service there definitely was a tremendous ambition: to be the best doctor. It seems that when Swamiji went to the person who was supposed to employ him, a young Englishman, he simply asked Swami Sivananda, 'I have a vacancy, but that is for a doctor to be in charge of a hospital. Do you think you can manage a hospital?' Swami Sivananda said, 'I can manage not one or two, but five hospitals! Put me in charge.' That ambition was definitely there. There was also the spirit of self-sacrifice. So, when the accountant did not carry out his duties, Swamiji would also do that. If the ward-boys were absent, He would sweep the whole hospital. If the nurses were absent, He would do their job also, without grumbling, without making a fuss. Only *tamas* had been abandoned, the desire for pleasure had not arisen at all. It had no chance to arise, as *tamas* never had a chance to come up.

His family was not very prosperous. They were ordinary Brahmin landlords in South India. So, as a young boy He had probably not had much wealth. And in

Malaya there was a tremendous opportunity to earn and handle a lot of wealth. He said, 'That I would like, I am going to have it.' So, even though He led a simple life, which meant there was plenty to spend in charity, He did not stint himself. He did a lot of charity to Himself also. Swami Shraddhananda told us that He used to visit two stores regularly - once a month. One was the book-store, the other was the jewelry shop. Any nice new ring - all his fingers had to have rings. Then He would go for a walk one day on the beach, and the next day throw them away. That was renunciation. 'I have seen what it is to wear rings, now I can discard it.' Not without knowing what it is to be wealthy; so He earned a lot of wealth. He enjoyed Himself, He enjoyed the feeling of being wealthy. Then He gave all these things away. I do not know if you can appreciate it. Not be merely abstaining - 'Oh, no, no, I do not want to touch it at all.' Then it is possible that, at the back of your mind, something is bothering you; or much later, when you are old and incapable, you say, 'My God, if only I had in those days got a small bank balance or something like that, I would not be suffering now.' I never heard this from Swami Sivananda. Yet He was leading a simple life in a different way. He was not indulging Himself as the other doctors were indulging. He earned a lot, and He spent a lot.

Slowly something else was happening. Some questions: what is life? Because during this period in Malaya He was also directly exposed to spiritual thoughts and ideas. There were many swamis wandering around, and He used to be a permanent host, open house to them all, swamis, beggars and wanderers. Anybody who went from India was always welcomed, lavishly entertained in that house, worshipped in that house. And He also used to read spiritual literature voraciously. The seeds of the satsang that He used to conduct later were also sown then. What is it that leads a man astray? Mostly bad company. Swamiji had an extraordinary way of manipulating. He would go to the book-store and order all the latest religious books. He did not choose, I would add that he did not even read them. He would buy them and keep them in His own personal library. When a friend came along, He would say, 'Doctor, have you read this? It is very interesting'. He had read one page or maybe the publisher's foreword. The doctor would take it home. He comes back a week later. 'Ah, did you like the book?' This had two purposes. One, He got the essence of the book without reading it, and two, He cultivated a sort of reputation in His own village that He was a man only interested in religious matters. So, if you wanted to have a drink, you did not go to Him. The best way of ensuring that the company that resorts to you is always good company.

All this at the same time must have had some effect on His consciousness. I am serving, and there is a feeling that I am relieving distress, that I am saving life, I am able to prolong life, I am able to relieve distress, promote happiness, health and so on. This was getting shaken as time went by, and another step had to be taken. From this side, He got into the boat of action, and soon another step had to be taken.

4 - Vigilance

When we realise that renunciation is spirit and not form, it does not mean that there should not be a form of renunciation. Renunciation, whether it is manifest in external form or unmanifest, is still the spirit. It is important to bear this in mind, because if sannyasa or renunciation is to be confined to people belonging to a monastic order, then moksha is also restricted. Then self-realisation or God-Realisation becomes restricted, the monopoly of a few. The spirit of sannyasa is available to all. It may, in the case of some be accompanied by a formal renunciation, an externally discernable form of renunciation, and in the case of some it may not be so.

The spirit of renunciation is not a matter of effort, it is not the end-product of a series of actions. Effort is invariably associated with 'I'. Renunciation is completely and totally free of this 'I will'- 'I will not' problem. Does this mean free indulgence? No. That also has to be renounced, because that also is a manifestation of the same ego. 'I will do what I like', 'I will not do what I like', or 'I will renounce'. These are identical statements, the distinction is merely alphabetical. There is no vital spiritual difference. 'I will' and 'I will not' are totally opposed to the spirit of renunciation. When 'I will' and 'I will not' are both dropped, effort is dropped. When effort is dropped, everything is not dropped, there is no indulgence. The real spirit of renunciation is when the divine will prevails.

Here is a simple illustration. You may say, 'I will take a shower' or 'I will not take a shower'. But this is the play of the ego. Whether you want to do something or you do not want to do it, or you decide to do something you do not want to do, all this causes problems.

There is another problem. It is raining heavily outside and you have no umbrella or raincoat. You dare not say, 'I will not become wet'. Somebody else is the controller - that is what I am talking about. Here is something which is not my choice at all. It is one of choiceless renunciation. Renunciation becomes a choiceless, effortless happening, not because 'I will' it or 'I will not', but because it is willed.

Is there no effort involved at all in renunciation? There is an effort. Once again, Gurudev's fundamental philosophy ought to be borne in mind. It is neither - nor. One extreme is to say, 'Everything depends upon my effort, I will or I will not renounce'. Another extreme is to say, 'Some karma is in charge, I have nothing to do'. It is a matter of total passivity, if this is possible at all, which I am very doubtful about. Gurudev's was the middle path again here. One has to make one effort, one single perpetual unending effort. That is vigilance.

Vigilant watchfulness, this was His word, throughout His life. To be awake, to be alert. This I have to do. This cannot be abandoned. This cannot be renounced. If this is renounced, then you are worse than a cabbage. This intense watchfulness,

to be perpetually awake, or never to be spiritually slothful or asleep, that much of effort is called for. Then that itself determines what renunciation is. That watchfulness is able to observe the immediate situation, the immediate problem, and that is removed, not dropped but removed. It disappears even as darkness disappears before light. This is what we saw in Gurudev.

So from moment to moment, there appeared to be a change, the renunciation appeared to be perpetual. At times one might even have wondered whether Swamiji was compromising. There is - a big difference between compromising and renunciation, being perpetually sustained as an ongoing event. In compromise, you wish it were otherwise, but you are constrained to accept the situation in which you find yourself. There is remorse, there is despair, there is self-pity, self-condemnation, sorrow. This we never found in Gurudev. The spirit of perpetual renunciation, which shone as a blazing light within Him, dispelled darkness wherever it existed, in whatever form it might exist, even if it meant the dispelling of an external semblance or form of a thing called renunciation.

Another beautiful characteristic of Gurudev was His intense humanness. I have seen, and so have you, thousands and thousands of people who look like human beings. But in Him we saw the perfection of what humanness can be. Perhaps that is self-realisation, or renunciation, or God-Realisation - to be exactly what God created you, without the least perversion. It was so beautiful to watch, and one of the most beautiful human qualities is love. What is love? I do not know, perhaps you know. There again this Love was born in Him as Him. Swamiji was a very loving person, not only lovable, but also very loving. This was true of His childhood, as well as of His youth and of His days as a doctor in Malaya. And it was true throughout His life. It is natural that, when this love resides in a young heart, there should be an intensity of friendship. One could see from the description of Him provided by His friends, from their attitude towards Him and the way He responded to their friendship, that Gurudev was capable of intense personal friendship. Once Gurudev received in His own Kutir a retired postmaster; the way He patted him, slapped his arms and thighs, carried on with this old man, made us realise that, if this was possible after half a century of separation, then it must have been a tremendous thing when both of them were young. Similarly, when He saw somebody He had known 30, 40 or 50 years before, there was a thrill on His face, not just the impersonal, passive, what we call divine love, but an intense, human friendship, a thing which we do not normally expect in a sanyasin. We noticed the same thing when Gurudev visited Patamadai. There was joy in His face to see the places associated with His childhood. He must have enjoyed life there, including the company of friends. When we also remember that He loved His patients and looked after them with greater love and affection than they received from their on parents, one can easily imagine what intensity of friendship must have characterised His life in Malaya. To snap those ties, just like that, that is renunciation of a very high order.

There was this friendship, possibly bordering on attachment, and this inner light, this vigilance, being alert, being luminous, looked at this friendship, at this

attachment, which naturally flowed towards people, around Him. It was dark a few minutes ago. Now that the electric lights have come, we say the darkness has gone. But did it? No door was opened. Where did the darkness go? All this sounds glorious, wonderful. I am serving sick people, poor people, and deriving some kind of a satisfaction from this - 'that I am relieving distress, that I am saving people, helping more babies to be brought into this world.' In all that there is some ignorance, some foolishness. When the inner light shines upon that ignorance, what happens to it? That is what happened to Swami Sivananda.

That is the happening called renunciation. He just left Malaya and came back to India. Why did He come back to India? The question does not arise at all. He had to go somewhere. If He did not go, you are going to ask, 'Why not'. There is no question, as there was no motivation. Just then, the situation changed, and renunciation happened.

Why do I labour this point? Because there was no regret at all in His heart, there was no feeling that He was abandoning His friends, deserting His job - no question at all. There was no regret over what might or might not have happened in the past. Whatever dropped, dropped. There was neither a dis-satisfaction, bordering on pride, saying, 'Oh, look how much I have renounced', nor was there, 'I should not have renounced that, I should not have allowed this to happen.' There was no regret at all. It was a continuous march of bliss because the light was there constantly. And, in that light, what had to drop away, dropped away. What had to go, went. Even these are mere expressions.

He came back to India and, after some magic vanishing trick in his own home town, He came north. Somehow He got back into the train and found Himself in Benares. And though He was a highly educated person, somehow He believed that Benares was in the Himalayas. He came there, the ticket had expired, He had a few rupees left, so He gave them away. 'Now that I have reached my destination, what do I need money for?' But what He did not appreciate was the difference in climate. It was probably early in March or round that period, so it was cold. Madrasis are not used to this kind of cold. He was shivering, and He could not understand the language. He did not know how to beg. All His ignorance was coming out. So what do you do? He spent a night in one corner of the railway station. Some man noticed Him. He had a spare blanket, took it and gave it to Swami Sivananda.

That was tremendous renunciation to pick up that blanket and cover Himself. What is not difficult to renounce is your bank balance. You do not possess it in any case, it is in the bank. Nor your wife and children, they are all independent beings. The most difficult thing to renounce is pride, the feeling that I have been at the giving end, I have never received anything from anybody. That is renunciation of a very high order.

Something somehow told Him that Benares was not what this inner light was looking for. 'Where do I go?' Gurudev went to Pandharpur. 'I thought this was My

destination', and that thought also has to drop away.

The first lesson to learn as a sadhu is how to beg. How do you beg? What do you say? You go to somebody's house and stand in front of it. He was in white clothes, not even in orange; so people did not recognize Him as a sadhu or a mendicant. And they were Maharashtrians. They would ask this man in Marathi, 'What do you want?' He did not understand Marathi, so what could He do? And after a lot of reflection, He decided to stand in front of somebody's house and utter this formula, 'I am a Madrassi Brahmin, I am hungry, can you give me some food?' Can you do that? In the light that shone within, He had seen the vanity of the other type of life. In that light, what appeared to be ego earlier on melted away. There was no embarrassment. When I say this now I, am terribly unhappy even thinking of what happened to Him. Yet He was not.

This went on for some time. Probably He was able to enjoy the satsang of the devotees in Pandarphur. But there was another problem, and this throughout Gurudev's life was an extremely serious one. That problem had two aspects. How do I know that the person in front of whose house I am standing can afford to give me this food? In Malaya it seems He used to give food away very often. There were only two people in the house, the cook and Himself. When somebody came, He would sometimes give His food away and go hungry. How do I know that this person is not going to go hungry too. That was problem number one. Associated with this was the other problem. I am asking for this, receiving diksha from this person. What right have I to do that? What do I give in return? This was another principle that He held fast throughout his life. He used to tell us often, 'Do not be a parasite. When you go somewhere, when you receive something from somebody, make sure you can give something in return. If you can do nothing, offer a prayer. Do not be indebted, to people.' This was His constant refrain.

How did that inner light solve that problem? He took a job. It may sound rather strange that this person who had renounced, who had abandoned being a doctor in Malaya, could suddenly seek another job. The one that was readily available was a job as a postmaster's domestic servant. Can you do that? There it was, the job had to be taken. Soon afterwards the postmaster found out His real identity and asked Him, 'What are you here for, why must you work as my domestic servant?' And yet Gurudev was not prepared to live as his permanent guest; so a compromise was arrived at. It was that postmaster who directed Gurudev to Rishikesh. And so He came by train to Rishikesh. He lived for a little while in various places before eventually settling down in Swargashram. 'All that had to be given up and here I am in Swargashram.'

Even as a swami in Swargashram this principle was there. 'Here again I must not be a parasite, I must not take something for nothing.' So what do you do? About the same time, someone who had found out His whereabouts, wrote to Him from Malaya. 'You have an insurance policy here which has now matured. If you sign the following document and send it back to us you will get Rs 5,000.' What do you do? Do you say, 'No, no, I have renounced the world and all that. I want

nothing to do with money.' That is the usual reaction. He said, 'With this money some service could be done for the people amongst whom I live.' And so He got His money back. He invested it in the post office savings bank, and with the interest, without spending anything on His own comfort, He once again started to serve the sick.

That was a talent, that talent had not been renounced. You have that faculty, that experience, that knowledge, that need not be renounced, as long as it does not act as an obstacle. He got that money back, invested it, and with the interest got some common medicines milk and curd and fruits, and distributed it amongst the sadhus and sanyasins without keeping anything for Himself.

From now on there is another paradoxical situation - money began to flow into His hands. What is the attitude of a man of renunciation, a man in whom the spirit of renunciation is constantly alive and alert? What does He do? Does He shun this? This is as much a crime as that of a person who runs after money. In the consciousness of both these persons, money predominates. There is a common factor - psychological contact with wealth. There is this virtue, known as aparigraha. If you repeat these two words within yourself - pari graha, aparigraha - you will realise that these two words have the same root; grh - which is closely related to the English word greed, and also the other English word grasp. How does money create a problem? Only when you grasp it. When you are greedy and you grasp it, then there is grhana. Grhana means eclipse also, the inner light is eclipsed. You are holding only this wealth - graha - and there is this eclipse - grhana. Why not allow it to flow. In which case there is aparigraha of a dynamic type. That was what we saw in Gurudev. That was His teaching too. Treat your own property as though it has been entrusted to you, you are only a trustee of this property which you mistakenly feel that you own. Do not hold onto it, grab it or grasp it, let it flow through you if it has to be. That was the attitude from Swargashram onwards. Therefore when things grew into the ashram, later into the Divine Life Society, into the Forest University, money kept pouring through Him like this rain pouring over the roof. When something like this flows, it is of universal benefit. The person who refuses to let this flow, rejects God's blessings, and his ego is as strong, as powerful, as much of an obstruction as the ego of a multimillionaire who says, 'I am rich.'

At that time Gurudev said quite plainly, 'I do not want disciples, I do not want ashrams, I do not want to have anything to do with any institutions. I merely want to sit here - sing God's Name, do bhajan, meditate, serve and that's it.' Serve - love - meditate - realise. But then disciples came, people were attracted to Him. And people also took Him away from Swargashram to preside over sankirtan conferences. The inner light suggested that this was no obstacle. The service part is the very reason for your existence. Therefore He travelled, and thousands of people used to be thrilled, literally thousands of people used to experience the ecstasy of the divine Name when He sang and danced. And there was no obstacle there. It was on the contrary the very fruit of His renunciation, the constantly ongoing renunciation. And when He returned, there were inevitably some people

who would follow Him. Some came and some decided to stay. Therefore even the idea that 'I will not allow anybody to become My disciple' had to go. It just dropped away in the light of this inner intelligence. All the ideas that one may entertain in the infancy of one's spiritual life may have to be renounced, or may have to be allowed to drop away. This also dropped away.

Then something happened in Swargashram. He liked Swargashram very much. It suited His temperament perfectly. But then there was a problem. The Swargashram authorities' rules would not permit too many disciples for any one Mahatma living there, and even that residence in Swargashram, which He really loved, had to be allowed to drop when He went over to Ramashram. Even that had to go. The thing that He valued most for its spiritual quality had to go. For a long time he resisted, forming a society; and even that resistance had to go. Then He did not want a big ashram, that had to go too. To begin with, they occupied a cowshed. Gurudev wanted to do some stable work. So they cleaned it and occupied it, and that again was an act of supreme renunciation. I am occupying this building without knowing to whom it belongs. If someone comes and says, 'This house belongs to me, you must get out, we would immediately leave. I do not want this at all. I do not want an ashram. I am not fond of disciples, but, if this is the divine will, it shall be done without any resistance.' Then the Maharaja of Tehri gave Him a piece of land. If it is the divine will that an ashram shall spring up, it shall happen. I do not want it, it may happen. But there was no resistance.

When it came to the ashram, there were some principles, which He Himself had set for His own work. For instance, in the beginning, ladies were not allowed to come and stay alone. No musical instrument was allowed during satsang. We would all sit and sing kirtan as if we were meditating. Then came electricity. Then came Raghava. 'Ah, you can sing, all right, sing'. 'Swami, I need a harmonium in order to sing well.' 'All right, we will buy a harmonium.' Somebody else came, 'I know how to dance.' 'Dance'. Here was this man of supreme renunciation, who participated in the Divine Will. He did not endure it, but participated in it, made it possible. Then came a family who stayed for a couple of years - welcome. Then some ladies from Dehra Dun came. 'You want to stay for a few days? Stay.' In the words of Jesus, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. If this is the Divine Will, I will myself co-operate with it and make it possible. Because there is no personal 'I' here at all. The word 'I' is nothing but the first letter of the word Idea. When the 'I' drops, all your own ideas drop away. You become perfectly transparent, an absolutely free channel for the flow of the Divine Will. This is what the spirit of renunciation ensures from day to day - from moment to moment.

5 - Sadhana - The Means

Sadhana has a very simple definition, if we can be content with a universal meaning of practical application. It means 'means' - the means with which you put forth effort to attain.

From Gurudev we learned one simple lesson. Everything - your body, your environment, your life, your physical and psychological equipment, the world outside and the world inside - all of these constitute the means. The end is perfection. This may not be clear. But the moment you look at His life, His behaviour, His teachings, His words, then it becomes clear.

In the mid-fifties, a young man came and joined the ashram. He was called Kandaswamy; a very talented young man. Gurudev encouraged everyone to develop his or her own talents, and somehow managed everything in such a way that your talents were used not only for your own self-improvement or self-realisation, but for the common good. Kandha had an interesting battery of talents. He was not shy at all. He had no use for modesty, humility, that sort of thing. He was a forthright person. So Gurudev noted that against his name. This is a quality - good quality; bad quality was not his concern. This is a quality which can be made use of. Bring it out.

At the same time a Hari Katha performer had come to the ashram. Hari Katha is telling a story interspersed with music and some kirtans. These pundits could entertain you for a long time, it was a very interesting art form. And Kandha had an idea. He said, 'Why don't we frame another Hari Katha based on the life of Gurudev?' He was definitely the right man for it. And so this plan was hatched. We agreed to bring in Gurudev's own english songs.

Kandha wanted information about Gurudev's life. Gurudev used to come every morning to my room for about half an hour or so to do some work. And at that time this man also came. 'Swamiji, we want to make a Hari Katha of your life story.' 'Ah, yes, yes - it is a good idea!' 'But I need some information, Swami'. 'Ask Venkatesananda, he has all the biographical material.' From then on we started working on the life story, putting in some songs and so on. I told him all I knew about Gurudev's early life and his life in Malaya. Then came the life in Swargashram, and I told him Gurudev used to practise all sorts of intense austerities, and intense meditation sometimes for 2 or 3 days. He attained self-realisation and then began to tour. He got me there. 'But what sadhana exactly did He do? And what do you mean by meditation? What do you mean by self-realisation?' I also wanted to know! Naturally I was curious, but I dared not ask Gurudev Himself. Here was a man who had no inhibitions at all; he would blurt out anything in front of anybody. I told him, 'Swamiji is coming in a few minutes, why don't you ask Him?'

Swami Sivananda came in at about 8:30. As soon as He sat down, He looked at us questioningly. I looked at my associate and he shot. 'I have reached the

Swargashram period but afterwards I do not have enough information.' 'What do you want to know? 'What is meditation? What sadhana did you do? What austerities did you practise? What and how did you meditate? What is meant by self-realisation?' 'Ask Venkatesananda, he will tell you everything' 'He does not know anything, you must tell me yourself.'

I was petrified, absolutely silent. I was not even breathing. Gurudev reacted in an extraordinary way. He closed one eye, looked at me, looked at him, looked at me, looked at him. I was silent, innocent, because I also wanted to hear. We really knew very little about Gurudev's sadhana. We had been repeating what somebody else had said or heard from some other source. Now I would hear the truth from the Lion's mouth.

'What do you mean by self-realisation?' 'Peace. Bliss.' But this man was still not satisfied, and he could argue with anybody, Gurudev included. 'Peace and bliss! Then Venkatesananda is also enlightened - he is always peaceful, always smiling!' Now something had been opened up. 'Ah, that is only one part of it - enlightenment is not a joke. Atma jnana is not a joke. Ah, you must be serious!' Then this man also became silent. This was about 8:45. From this time to 12 o'clock, Gurudev went on saying you must do this, you must do that. At the same time, it was our good fortune, He also gave some instances of that had happened in His own life. 'Atma jnana means you have direct intuitive knowledge of the cosmic being, direct intuitive understanding of cosmic oneness, cosmic power. Hah, it is not a joke. Your ego must completely disappear in all its facets, in all its games it must be defeated. Can you do that?' And then He gave us, just the two of us, a three-hour lecture - it was most thrilling, most inspiring. It can never be forgotten.

In the meantime people were getting worried in the office. Gurudev had not come. They knew He had left His Kutir and He was in this room. So, first somebody came to spy, he heard Gurudev shouting! And he went and told those people up there, 'Oh, Venkatesananda is in trouble.' Then one or two others came and found out He was talking. Soon there were also a few people on the steps, sitting and listening. Inside the house was full, outside an audience had formed.

What He told us that morning in essence was what is called Integral Yoga. The first principle of that Integral Yoga is that you do not become a specialist, however capable you may be. Gurudev's approach was a very beautiful simple one. 'Eat a little, drink a little, do asana a little, pranayama a little, reflect a little, meditate a little.' If I can meditate for 5 hours, what is wrong with that, is meditation not good? Gurudev says, 'I insist, meditate only a little.' Otherwise you become a specialist, and any form of specialisation is an excellent tonic for the ego. If you are an expert in Hatha Yoga, you have one horn growing up here. This 'I know better than anybody else' is a danger. And what is worse, the same ego can take innumerable forms. If you have played with a half-inflated balloon, you will know what I mean. You squeeze it at one end, and all the air bulges at the other end. Squeeze it in the middle, and it bulges at both ends. That is the ego,

squeeze here, it gets inflated somewhere else. The quantity of air being constant in this balloon, nothing has even happened. Squeezing is a waste of time. So, any lopsided development is a waste of time, you will gain nothing out of it. Instead, you have to get hold of that half-inflated balloon and lie down on it. Then it bursts. When there is equal pressure throughout this balloon at the same time, then you have achieved your purpose. If that is possible, then that is what is called Integral Yoga. That is the famous 'little, little' song. Do pranayama a little, not too much. Do asana a little, not too much. Do kirtan a little, not too much. Study a little, not too much. So that you will have time for every aspect of your sadhana. And then serve a little, in that you see the world and your own role in it in a different light. Nothing is neglected.

I do not know if you have heard a little story from the Mahabharata called Nala Charitra. There was a great king called Nala. It is said he was a very pure man, very, very holy. And there was no defect, no sin in his personality. And he was supposed to be afflicted by Sani. Sani, could not enter him as long as his personality was whole, holy. It is said that Sani was dogging his footsteps constantly, watching for an opportunity to enter. One day, after this Nala had taken his meal, he washed his face, his hands, his feet, but not quite properly. One heel was left unwashed. And at once Sani entered him, a pin-point approach. This story can be interpreted to mean that if you leave one little pinpoint open in your personality, the ego will re-enter it. You can congratulate yourself: 'I practise yoga asanas, I practise pranayama, I sit and sing, attend satsang,' but still, if something is missing, one aspect of your personality has been neglected, and as long as that is neglected, there is no salvation, there is no self-realisation, because the ego is cosily at rest there, thriving there. That was Gurudev's most beautiful and unique approach. I have never heard of other holy men of India who have insisted upon this. Nothing is to be neglected, everything is to be converted, turned into sadhana - the means. If you know how to do something, treat it as sadhana. If you have work to do, perfect, use that opportunity. That was the ideal which Gurudev built into this ashram.

One other incident I will narrate to you. I will not give you the unpleasant part of the story. This happened in November 1945. I was living in Ramashram. You cannot even imagine the conditions in those days. We had hardly any accommodation for ourselves. When some visitor came, we were summarily dismissed from any room we might be occupying, bundled our things and came to the Bhajan hall. In the office there was a little table on which we kept a typewriter. At night we would spread a blanket over our own papers, and sleep there.

Well, one day I saw something not very pleasing in the ashram. Of course, I had an image of what the ashram should be like and what the swamis should be like. My ideas got a little bit of a shake up, so I went back to my room, and just sat there. This was the first, the most super wonderful miracle I experienced in our relationship. Half an hour later Gurudev walked in. In those days, I never talked to Him except through a medium, a swami who also came with me. He used to

get work for me from the office and when I had finished the work, I would give it to him. I never spoke to any other swami here. Suddenly here was Gurudev Himself. There was a charpai, a woven bamboo bed. He had His usual bags in His hand. He threw them on the charpai and sat down. I did not know why He had come or what for. I just stood in front of Him. What He said was fantastic. Even now I can see Him sitting there, looking straight into my eyes with one eye closed. Later, when He closed one eye, and talked to us, it was very beautiful. That day, I remember, it was shocking. It was a new experience for me talking to Him that close.

There is a river near Rishikesh called Chandra Bhaga. It has swallowed quite a few people. So Gurudev said, 'Do not think that, because you have come beyond Chandra Bhaga, you have come to the Kingdom of God, that all that is Maya and all this is Brahman.' I dared not say a word, I just listened. When, even if you go to the top of Mt. Kailas, you will find Maya there!' Something was coming clear, but still I was quiet. 'I have created a field here. If you want, you can bathe in the Ganges, sit and meditate on the Ganges bank, do some work in the office, go to the Bhajan hall and sing Hare Rama for one hour or two, do puja in the temple, read some books, do Svadhyaya, go to the jungle, meditate if you want. Even here, you may find the same Maya and the same Brahman, right up to Kailas! But if you have the aspiration, you can convert the whole thing into a field of sadhana. Everything that happens to you in life can be turned into a sadhana, a means for God-Realisation.'

These were His words. And then, 'Hmm, acha!' He picked up His bag and went away, disappeared as mysteriously as He had appeared. That is the very essence and the heart of His message. If you want, not only this ashram but the whole universe can become a field for sadhana. Everything you do can be utilized for performing your sadhana, where your life itself becomes a part of your sadhana. The sadhana being a total transformation of your being, the purification of your entire personality, and the total dedication of all your talents and faculties to the divine. Here it was to the Guru, which means the same thing. If you live in an ashram, all the talents and faculties in you are dedicated to the Guru, all your energy is directed towards Guru seva. Even if you do not live in an ashram, the same thing can apply, the entire personality can be transmuted. All your talents and faculties can be offered in the service of God who is omnipresent.

6 - Four words - 'Serve, Love, Meditate, Realise'

Gurudev's yoga was Integral Yoga, represented by the four words 'serve, love, meditate, realise'.

Integral Yoga suggests not a step by step progression, but an expansion of integrated consciousness. There is a slight difference. Take for instance the famous word ashtanga in Raja Yoga. It is not one step following another, but more like the birth and growth of a baby. On the very first day, the baby has all the limbs of the future grown-up. But they are small, undeveloped. As this person grows up, his limbs attain their fullness of perfection. Similarly, in this Integral Yoga, all the limbs of the Integral Yoga are found in the very beginning of the sadhak's career. If that is not there, then you are deluding yourself again. You may feel you are progressing in karma yoga, but then something else is lacking. Your jnana is lacking or your devotion is lacking. Then, as you go on, you find your karma yoga is no better than social service. Gurudev never tolerated that.

Gurudev was dynamic in comparison to the other 'holy men' we found in Rishikesh. Some of us went round and saw Swamis sitting under a tree gazing at the sky, or on the Ganges bank, meditating or reading or gossiping. Here was one who was dynamic, constantly engaged in some form of activity, and we young men inferred from this that Gurudev liked activity. When we started doing some work, we could see from Gurudev's behaviour that He was very happy. The only thing that Gurudev would not really tolerate was tamas. You are active, He was thrilled. But not entirely. About 15 minutes after we walked into the ashram - two of us came together - we were both provided with typewriters. Half an hour later came paper, and another half an hour later some books or manuscripts for us to copy. So the first impression that we gained was that Gurudev liked work and workers. This was true, but not entirely. So we went on working, doing more and more and more - sometimes the best part of the night was spent in work. It was pleasing to Gurudev, no doubt about that.

One day, very early in 1946, He walked in the old kitchen which was part of our office. He looked in. 'How many malas of japa did you do today? Did you meditate at all? No? Take the typewriter and throw it into the Ganges! Go and do some japa.'

And in the same context, one other story of our life in the initial stages of the ashram. In those days there were no steps, no ghat, nothing like that on the Ganges banks. There was an enormous rock, with a platform built over it. And there was a young man who used to sit very straight, a human rock over a mountain rock. We had a morning meditation session which also included some asanas, some prana yama, some japa and all that. The class used to conclude usually at about six. Everyday Gurudev used to see this young man sitting on the rock, and every day Gurudev used to see him sitting there when He went back to his kutir. And occasionally Gurudev would just glance at him and walk by. One day it so happened that after the morning class, Gurudev was still sitting on one

of those cement benches, discussing something with somebody. This gentleman who had been meditating got up in the meantime and walked into the kitchen. 'Aha', Gurudev closed one eye and looked at him. 'Hmm, meditation - Ah, samadhi.' He thought that Gurudev was really admiring him. 'Yes Swamiji'. 'How long did you sit?' 'Three hours, Swamiji.' 'Every day?' 'Three hours every day, Swamiji.' 'Ah.' We were all very happy that this man was being encouraged. 'Hmm.' Suddenly, within one fifteenth of a second, the whole thing changed. 'Ah - look at this. Sleepy, drowsy. What kind of meditation are you practising?' The young man did not know what to do. I cannot describe to you the speed with which the expression on Gurudev's face changed in those five minutes - like a baby. Once He seems to be serious, then He seems to be almost cross, next He seems to be compassionate, next He seems to be full of affection and love, and then He seems to be mocking - mischievous. 'What you are doing is useless! Meditation is useless? No! Meditation is not useless, what you are doing is useless. It is not meditation.'

Then Swami Sivananda explained, 'Do you know what meditation means?' Now the mood changed again; those of us who were standing there could see. You have heard about meditation, you have read about meditation, you have thought about meditation. But for those few moments, we saw meditation. 'Hah - do you know what meditation means? Touch Brahma - touching the infinite, touching the absolute.' When He said that, you could see the touching. 'And if you touch this absolute infinite power for even one moment, you leave the energy, the strength, the wisdom to roll up the whole sky and play ball with the whole earth.'

This is important. The other thing is important too, but one is not more important than the other. All of them together have to be done. One goes with the other. It is an integral yoga - ashtanga yoga. The whole thing must be done at the same time, and therefore a little of each - that was His joy. Even though we may consider these factors one by one, please let us not go away with the impression that they follow in a sequence. We have to print the four words - serve, love, meditate, realise - one after the other. Is there any way in which these four words can be printed together? You may jumble them, put this before and that after, but the truth is, they are integral, together.

That will be immediately clear if we realise that what is called service - nishkama karma, or what is even more beautifully put in the English language - self-less service, itself involves bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. Otherwise it is not possible. Nishkama karma is not selfless service or unselfish service as defined by someone else. How do you know if I am doing it unselfishly or selfishly? You consider it unselfish as long as I do not demand any fees from you. I may not be! I may be looking for something else, I may be more selfish than you think or realise. So what is unselfishness, what is selfless service? This selfless service is not possible without a certain realisation. So - serve, love, meditate, realise. Service follows and accompanies realisation - self-realisation. It is only when the self is realised to be non-existent that selfless service is possible.

I do not know if you are interested in playing with words. Aham kara and aham bhavana - very interesting words. Do you know from where the word aham comes? It is quite simple. They picked the first letter of the sanskrit alphabet 'a'. They picked the last letter of the sanskrit alphabet 'ham'. They put them together and one dot on top. So what is aham? Aham is nothing but a word! If you challenge the yogi, he says, 'Alright then, show me what this aham is.' This is nose, this is right ear, this is lower lip. Aham? It does not exist! So he says, 'Aham is merely a word.'

This word, as a concept, arose or was introduced into our consciousness, which became the mind, the individualised consciousness, at some stage in our life when we were young. That has remained unquestioned, unexamined until today. It has been taken for granted, nobody has bothered to enquire if this aham is a reality. We have taken that for granted and built a whole edifice of avidya - ignorance around it. When this aham became a bit more intangible, it became aham bhavana. Aham bhavana means it is an inner feeling of aham. It is an inner feeling, I am the body. There is the mischief. This birth of the word and the corresponding concept gain the stature of a feeling. The feeling being aham bhavana or 'I am the body' - the root cause of all our troubles. This has somehow been introduced into us and it has been left unexamined. Therefore it has been taken for granted. When it becomes functional, the same bhavana becomes ahamkara! And so we have more or less got trapped into the idea, the feeling, the concept that aham is ego-sense, that it is somehow real.

Selfless service is possible only if this whole drama comes to an end, if this myth is exploded, if this ghost is laid. Only when a man realises that the self is not there, it is absent. Not when I think I am selfless, but when I have truly realised that the 'I' is non-existent. If I want him to smile, I tickle his foot! Selfless service becomes natural when the self is seen to be non-existent. Therefore selflessness means that in the case of that person the ahamkara does not exist at all! In which case his entire life becomes service. Gurudev used to insist upon this. That service of the poor, the sick, the destitute is important, but you need not go in search of all this. For whatever service you do, can be done with this ahamkara bhavana. There is a most inspiring verse in the Bhagavad Gita. 'He from whom all the beings have evolved and by whom all this is pervaded - worshipping Him with his own action, man attains perfection. (XVIII-46) Krishna here does not even suggest that this karma should be your dharma. Svakarmana - whatever you are doing, whatever you are made to do - right, wrong, virtue, vice - whatever it is, by treating all those actions as flowers offered at the Feet of the Omnipresent Being, man attains perfection. This was Gurudev's life's attitude.

If you have read some of the biographies, you may have noticed that we have published instances of what has been described as 'self-sacrificing service'. I am sure you have heard this expression before. What does sacrifice mean? Literally it means 'to make sacred'. So here self-sacrifice literally and truly means realising the sacred self, not your assumed self. You realise that what you have been regarding as your self is in fact not that - but something quite different. Jiva,

atma, corresponding words do not exist in any other language. We make these subtle distinctions. In the English language they have a thing called soul. I do not know what the soul is. Here sacrifice means to examine what you have been taking for granted - the self. When you look into it, you realise that it was a shadow. And the substance was something entirely different - atma. An attainment of this atma jnana is self-sacrifice. So service that is made possible by the attainment of atma jnana is self-sacrificing service.

In the case of Gurudev the self-sacrificing service took the initial form of braving danger. What was our original difficulty? It was the overcoming of this notion that 'I am the body'. In order to overcome this 'I am body' feeling, you engage yourself in tapas or austerities, or in self-sacrificing service which involves braving danger. Since Gurudev had been trained as a doctor, the service naturally took the form of service of the sick. 'I am the body' is a wrong notion, a dangerous concept. But the talent to serve the sick which is in consciousness, there is no danger in that. Why doesn't the 'I' allow this faculty to function? That is the idea. When He came to Swargashram, He was the one who was constantly on demand whenever there was a serious case of illness. And if you and I were afraid to go near a small-pox patient, it was always Swami Sivananda who went. Gurudev did not even take any antiseptic precautions. He used to attend to some people, rub His hands on His head and walk off. Wash your hands? What are you going to wash off? And He walked away. He had that realisation 'I am not the body', that's it! So the body can be put to any form of service, without fear, without anxiety. The body itself is endowed with what you call karma and it knows when to come to an end, when to stop breathing - you will not have to tell it. If right now you do pranayama and hold your breath for more than one minute, you gasp. You are suffering. One of these days you will not breathe for a long time, and you will not feel any discomfort. That is what prarabdha means. Prarabdha means the body has started to live, breathing has commenced, hunger has commenced, thirst has commenced, sleep has commenced, when you are conceived, when you are born, and that will take its own course. When all these things will come to an end only they know, you and I do not know! This is what prarabdha means. Life has started, So 'I am the body' is the wrong idea, and when that goes, the yogi is able to brave danger.

There are a number of stories of how Gurudev served the dangerously sick, with great love and affection. This is part of bhakti yoga. You might want to chop these up into several compartments - this is karma yoga, and love is bhakti yoga, and he has realised the oneness and that is jnana yoga, and so on. But all are integrated, it is integral yoga. There is another risk in regarding these as separate compartments and in regarding service of the sick or of the poor as something of tremendous importance. And that is that you are constantly looking for sick or poor people, almost praying that there may be sick people and poor people. This Gurudev never did. He made everybody happy, He made everybody healthy, He made everybody feel healthy, feel happy. He was not looking for sick people. Another danger in this is that any form of specialised service is ostentatious. Any form of specialized sadhana is ostentatious, whether you wish to accept it or not.

Specialization is ostentation. That again defeats the very purpose of integral yoga. And therefore when Gurudev did this, no one knew. Later, in order that the example might be communicated to others, these incidents were told and allowed to be published. When He did them, no one knew. The service has to be as action which has to be done, 'kartavya karma', 'Kartavya' is one who regards an action as something to be done, without motivation whatsoever. It is he that performs nishkarma yoga, or what we prefer to call nirahamkara yoga. And this nirahamkara yoga embraces devotion, seeing God in the other person, and jnana, self-realisation - realisation that what has been regarded as 'I', aham, does not exist, except as a in the dictionary. The life of such a person is constant meditation.

Therefore in the case of Gurudev we saw that He was constantly in what the Vedantins call sahaja. To Him, samadhi, meditation was sahaja avastha. 'Sahaja' in the sense of natural, easy, spontaneous, continuous. It is when one is in the sahaja that self-sacrificing, selfless service happens. Gurudev did not have to look at somebody and say, 'This young man is having some trouble, headache - No, not young man! He is God. God comes to me in the form of this young man with a headache, and now as an instrument in the hands of God, I am going to serve him.' Too much time wasted in all this!

One of the most extraordinary features in the case of Gurudev was that action came at once. Words came much later, if at all. First do what you have to do! There is no thought, there is nothing involved, there is no consideration. The brain was not working here at all, no motivation. Action was spontaneous, action was instantaneous. It was not even considered service. It has to be done, and what has to be done springs from utter and total selflessness, from the realisation that what has been assumed as the self, as aham, is nonexistent. That was the beautiful selflessness that we saw in the Gurudev. That is extraordinary. Only if we realise that, will we also realise that once the self is realised to be nonexistent, the yogi does not go on torturing the body - what for? In later years in Gurudev, you saw these two go side by side, together. He did not want you to suffer, and He did not want even that body which was called Swami Sivananda to suffer.

Only if you clearly understand this, is it possible to see why Gurudev massaged Himself with oil, why He had all sorts of tonics and drugs and insulin injections - insulin for the body, not 'I'. This body is sick, put some insulin into it. This body is capable, push it, make it work. Exactly like a car, exactly like another instrument or vehicle. Not 'I'. The aham bhavana is not there, this 'I am body' idea is gone. Then you are neither interested in perpetuating it by feeling 'I am doing this', nor interested in torturing the body because 'I am not the body, what are you torturing?' If someone does that, it is usually in order to show off'. Which means you are still clinging to the 'I am body' idea. Only in the case of such perfected beings, siddhas, is it possible to see that the 'I am body' idea is completely non-existent. Whatever they do, that action springs from them spontaneously, instantly. This body is as important, as valuable as the body we call the bodies of others. There is no distinction. And so, what started as self-

sacrificing service, eventually blossoms into totally divine selfless service.

7 - Never Hurting Others' Feelings.

In an enlightened being it is not the aham bhavana that functions as ahamkara. Actions do not spring from what we have accepted as a solid reality - the ego-sense. In their case, actions spring spontaneously from whatever is. Isvara - Is'a - what is.

Is'avasym idam sarvam - what is pervades all. And yet as long as these enlightened sages choose to dwell in the physical body, even they have their own guiding principles. Those of you who have read the Srimad Bhagavatam may have come across the great personality called Jada Bharata. He was born illumined, enlightened in the third incarnation. He did not care for scriptural or worldly duties and responsibilities and so forth. It is said that when he walked, he watched his steps so that even unwittingly he might not step on any insects and crush them.

Kartavya karma springs from this cosmic consciousness which is in all. Even one in whom there is no ego-sense - there is no ahamkara, there is no ahambhava - even he is cautious. In the words of Sri Gurudev - 'Never hurt others' feelings, be kind to all'. This was His life-breath.

Now even this kartavya, even that which has to be done, has somehow to be reconciled to this self-discipline. Even that kartavya - what has to be done - has to pass through this test, that it does not hurt anybody. This was evident throughout His life in His dealings with everybody, and it was even more abundantly evident in His dealings with his own disciples. Such a Guru has never been born - probably never will be born again.

I mentioned before that He would fold His palms, and bow down to His disciples. In other places one disciple carries the water pot, another carries the kusasana, the third carries the stick and so on. You never heard Gurudev call someone to carry anything for Him. In the last few years, when He was helpless and just could not get up and walk to meet the disciples, when He had to call, there was such sweetness, such love. When He was in His own kutir and wanted to call someone, it was not calling a servant or somebody, it was love. Great joy, it was lovely to hear that. So the other person did not even think, 'Why is He calling me?' Even if I am an egotistical person, I must be pleased, I must feel a thrill of joy to hear calling me.

All the disciples were there to be trained, to be moulded. I do not know if you have ever seen stone images being chiseled. How do you mould something without hitting it? It is impossible. You cannot even prepare chapatti without hitting it. Believe it or not, He fashioned these chapatti without hitting, without in the least offending. It was fantastic. And it was this seva that Gurudev rendered that has now spread out to the whole of mankind.

How He trained the disciples, why He did so, is a thrilling story. It is the greatest

service that a sage, an enlightened being can render mankind. Somebody is sick, and a doctor or even a swami gives you some medicine, and the sickness is finished. After some time, you are also finished. Maybe some of us go to the swami hungry and he gives us some food. The next morning, we are hungry again. That is finished. Maybe we go to the swami as idiots - he blesses us, gives us a mantra, teaches us how to meditate, and somehow you become a good man. An intelligent wise man, you have helped. It was in so training those who resorted to His feet that they in their turn became channels of communication for Him. When we contemplate that service, we really wonder how it happened at all.

He Himself used to say, 'You do not have to go around the world, come and stay in the ashram, the ashram is a miniature world'. There were as many temperaments in the ashram as there were people. And Gurudev being cosmic, He never imposed the same discipline on all. I still remember one story. There was a young swami. He did not believe in puja and all that. Gurudev used to come all the way from His kutir to the temple, three times each day. There was another swami who used to prepare kicheri very nicely. In those days there was nothing for us to eat in the morning, and a cup of tea was the only thing we could get. Gurudev used to come, and while the prasada was being distributed, He would be particular that some would go to the swami who did not attend at the temple. And today I believe the same swami is a great devotee, and offers continuous worship day and night.

If you were a hatha yogi, He would not encourage you to practise more hatha yoga, but He would introduce you to everybody, 'Oh! He is a fantastic hatha yogi, he has a body of rubber'. If someone liked to study, He would tell him, 'Go and get jnana, go and study'. I have heard it with my own ears. 'Stay in your room, study and do japa, everybody must attend to you - see that he gets his tea and food. Whatever he wants should be supplied. He should not be disturbed.' If you had a disciple, would you do that? You expect your disciple to serve you - that is why you make disciples. But here is a master who says, 'This person is something special, he has his own ways, nobody should disturb him, even I will not disturb him. Everybody should serve him. Serve him, that is equal to serving me.' That is something difficult to understand.

Without disturbing anybody, never hurting others' feelings - that was His maha mantra. Now all of us came here when we were very young, and naturally these raw young men had to be trained in some way or another. How did He do that? How do you make a chapatti round without rolling it, without heating it? How do you sculpt a model from stone without chiseling it? It is possible if you keep rubbing it with your bare hands, in about 500 years you can make a small head. That is what He did.

One day, shall we say two of us might quarrel. We are both young and hot-blooded, he says something and I say something. Somebody goes and reports this to Gurudev. If he felt that it was not a very serious thing, he would not come and tell you. 'Oh no, I might offend him. Maybe he is in the right.' Instead Gurudev

might write an article: 'Anger your worst enemy' or 'Never hurt others' feelings - be kind to all' or 'The tongue is such a terrible weapon'. If the quarrelsome swami in question was a typist, He would give him three copies to type. It is very difficult to type without reading what you are typing; so perhaps you wonder, maybe it is for me? Even if you do not wonder, some seed drops into your heart - that this thing must go. Even afterwards, when you gave it back to Him, would He say, 'Did you understand it?' Nothing at all that you did was immaterial. And if he was not a typist, the article would be typed by someone else, and he would be asked to read it aloud in the satsang at night. In the satsang, he becomes the guru, reading this article aloud, and maybe a few people laugh, a few people smile. Somehow the message must go home. If it does not, and he continues to be the bully, what would you do? Call him and give him a piece of your mind? That was very rare. The next trick was to shower him with milk and fruits. Somebody complained about you, that he is a very rude man, he is abusing everybody. As soon as that complaint reached Gurudev, half an hour later someone comes running with two bananas. Fifteen minutes later Govind Swamiji sends some Upma, half an hour later somebody brings coffee. 'Swamiji sends this.' And then when Gurudev meets him later, 'Ah, how is your health, are you alright? Have you had some Chyavanaprash, can I send you some Brahmi oil?' And the man who complained about his bad behaviour stands there thinking, 'My God, what is this, I said he is rude, instead of ticking him off, this swami seems to pamper him more and more'. But all the time this young man's heart is being won.

So, the main thing was to notice you, make you completely one with him, with your heart, completely one with him in love and affection. Then, once you were completely in His hands, He would wring the juice out of you to serve everybody in the world. But it was a delight to be squeezed. You just wanted that he might do some more. Whether He was scolding you or making you work hard, whatever it was, you knew it was lovely. My God, when will He do some more. Then you have become part of Him. Even then there is this supreme, inexhaustible love. Only through that love He tried to teach, He tried to mould and He tried, if it was needed, to correct.

Even then, if it was something serious, and some serious admonition had to be delivered, first of all, He would never listen to others' complaints, He had to see some symptoms of it for Himself. And even if He had sufficient proof and He had to tell you, He put it off again and again. 'Ah, we will see tomorrow'. He would look at you and probably want to say something. But no, 'Poor man, he might be offended, he may be upset, give him some fruits'.

I have heard Him say this: 'I go to my room and think about it'. He spends a sleepless night for an insignificant mosquito's sake. The next day He says, 'I pray for him.' Another day, 'God must look after all this.' Then finally, when it has to be done, then He would come and tell the disciple in as sweet a language as possible. He would even rehearse the whole thing in His kutir. What for? Is a disciple not capable of taking a bit of scolding from a guru? But that may be your point of view. His point of view was, 'Never hurt other's feelings, be kind to all'.

So there was this constant dual attitude in His case. Kartavyam - yes, what has to be done, has to be done. But what has to be done should not cause unpleasantness, let alone harm.

How could Gurudev reconcile what superficially appears to be self-contradictory? This action has to be spontaneous.

But what are the guidelines for this spontaneous action? And how can action, which naturally involves diversity and devotion which at least involves dualism, be reconciled with realisation of absolute oneness?

There is a beautiful verse attributed to Hanuman. It is said that once Rama asked Hanuman, 'You have performed wonders in my life and you are still devoted to me. You are a wise person, well versed in the Vedas. What is your attitude towards me? What do you think is our relationship?' It is said that Hanuman replied,

Deha budhiyastu dasomi jiva budhya tyadamsakah atma buddhya tvamevam iti me niscita matih.

You asked me what is my relationship to you. Whenever I am body-conscious, whenever there is a feeling, however subtle it may be, however weak it may be, that 'I am the body', then I am your humble servant. And when this body-consciousness has melted away, and there is pure 'I am' consciousness, I am a living soul. Then I feel I am part of you, I am a cell in your cosmic body. When that is also gone, and there is no distinction at all, then 'You is me - I is you.'

It is in that spirit that Gurudev lived constantly, and therefore this triple relationship was experienced in His presence by everybody. He could deal with you, His disciple, in these three attitudes. He could take work from you, He could feel in some way He was one with you, and He could feel that He was part of you and you were part of Him.

The next important feature associated with this was the beautiful practice of vibhuti. Vibhuti yoga was woven into His daily life. He was extremely fond of it. It goes on to be the basis for all the other yoga combined into integral yoga. Integral yoga can be regarded as a functional aspect of vibhuti yoga. In the 10th chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes certain specific manifestations as his own the moon, the Himalayas, the Ganges etc.

Yad-yad vibhutimat sattvam srimad urjitam eva va tad-tad eva vagaccha tvam mama tejamsambhavam.

All these are my own manifestations, feel this and be devoted to these. (X-41)

These vibhutis are mentioned only as samples, not as an exhaustive list. Learn to see God in these. As soon as He came out of His kutir, the first thing He saw was the Ganges - salutations. It takes not more than one tenth of a second to do this. You see the Ganges, ah! here is a manifestation of God. You look at the

Himalayas, here is a manifestation of God. These two concepts arise simultaneously and immediately. One is Ganges, the other is God. Here is Ganges, that is God. The objectivity is not obliterated from your vision, it is not that you walk about like one in a daze, but the sight of the Ganges or the Himalayas or whatever provides a constant reminder of the omnipresence of God.

He was a great sage, a vedantin, He was enlightened, He was all that; but He was also extremely regular in his own Murti Puja. There was a little picture of Krishna in the room and there was a little lamp burning in front of it day and night. Everyday after His bath He used to do His own little puja, He would say His own mantras for two to five minutes. Without puja He never started the day.

He used to go and bathe in the Ganges, stand in the Ganges waist deep, and very quickly without anybody noticing it, offer some prasadam and repeat some mantras. He was extremely fond of the Ganges. Till the day He was unable to climb down those steps, He would get into the water and splash a little, swim a little - it was like a baby swimming on the breast of the mother. This is a manifestation of God. So, right from the dawn of the day, without interrupting your kartavya, your duty, let whatever you see remind you of God. He had His own mantras, He would repeat a few of them in the Ganges - Om Namah Sivaya, Om Namo Narayanaya, Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya, the Shree Vidya mantra, Tattvam asi, Aham brahmaasmi, and the Praise Mantra or the Paramahansa Gayatri. Then, looking at the sky, He would repeat: Akasavat sarva gata nitya. Like the self also is omnipresent and eternal.

That is what Krishna taught. Do not think you can seclude yourself in a cave and keep saying 'Hare Ram, Hare Ram'. It would not be possible, you will have to come out and do your work. But neither should you think that merely by working you can attain salvation. That again is not possible. Combine the two. How? By seeing God, and God alone, in all - in all beings. That was the secret by which He was able to appreciate artists, musicians, dancers and even fighters and gymnasts. There was a fellow who came in 1948 from Ceylon and demonstrated his strength. Somebody picked up a huge rock and dropped it on his chest, nothing happened. He walked away. Gurudev admired all that. That strength is God, in that man's cleverness is God. In this girl's musical talent is God. In this lady's grace in dancing is God. Whatever there may be in this world which is beautiful, which is flourishing, which is prosperous, there in that beauty or prosperity is God.

In Rishikesh in the early days, we used to sleep on the temple veranda in summer. There was a swami who used to do the puja at that time. At eleven o'clock at night, everything is locked. At half past three, the temple is opened again for the morning puja. One day, this swami was horrified to see that some silver vessels had been stolen. And with a little bit of fear he came down to the office when Gurudev had arrived, saluted, prostrated, Swamiji also greeted him, 'How are you?' 'Everything is wonderful, Swamiji.' 'Then there must be

something else for which you have come?' So, he told Gurudev what had happened. 'Huh, abya - Hare - he must be a very clever thief. He has found out when you close the door and when you open it again - and who sleeps where, and how soundly, and without waking anybody up he has cut the chain and opened the door, collected all these things and gone away.' Even the cleverness of that thief is divine, is a manifestation of God. Then He said in fun, 'If the thief is caught, I will award him a title. An ordinary thief is sometimes foolish and gets caught. Here is a man who is very clever.' That was the attitude - but please do not let me give you the impression that He was callous or indifferent towards the ashram property or whatever it is. I have also seen Him pick up from the road or the path or the floor of the ashram clips, pins or needles. Very carefully He would pick them up, put them in His bag and go away. Not to waste anything is the principle, but when something has happened, not to regret or worry about it either.

So, once you have cultivated the habit of seeing God in all, something else happens. He would come out off His room, and as He saw you with folded palms, He would salute you with: 'Hara hara, tat tvam asi, namah sivaya, namo narayanaya, namo bhagavato vasudevaya, namo bhagavate venkatesaya.' It was not done mechanically, nothing that Gurudev ever did was mechanical. If He bowed down to you, His whole being bowed down to you. There was no hypocrisy, no showiness, nothing, If He said, 'Om namo bhagavate Ganga Rani', you could see from His face that He felt it.

So, one develops this faculty of seeing God in all faces as a culmination of this vibhuti yoga. First let all these manifestations remind you of God, and by and by let this consciousness expand so you learn to see God in every face. It is then that nirahamkara seva becomes true and selfless service. You are serving God, and then you look within, the ego is not there, and it is God's own energy that flows through you, through this body. This is a vital point to remember: I am not an instrument in the hands of God, but this body-mind complex is an instrument in the hands of God. Through this, God serves his own manifestation in all beings. Towards the external objects there is Narayana bhava or Atma bhava, and psychologically there is this Nimitta bhavana. When these two are combined, then life becomes divine.

8 - A Totally Intimate Love Affair

Gurudev's integral yoga rests on these two fundamentally vital factors, one: to see God in every face, and two: to ensure that the body-mind complex, which has somehow been considered an individual personality, becomes a free-flowing channel for the divine will, grace, or power. Therefore the whole thing appears to be one of selfless service, nishkarma seva, and it has to partake of the vital elements of what we usually consider other yogas. In Gurudev's mind there was no other yoga. There was only one yoga, integral yoga - yoga means integration, so 'integral yoga' is already a redundant expression.

Gurudev often used to liken the best devotee and the best yogi to Krishna's flute. The more empty it is, the more divine the music. So, the first part involves what we have come to regard as bhakti yoga, and the second part involves what we have come to regard as raja yoga - dhyana yoga - jnana yoga. Therefore He included in His sadhana vital elements of the bhakti sadhana. Why do I say vital elements and not just bhakti? When we think - 'think' is the most important word in this sentence - of bhakti, we have an image, and the image is made up of largely showy emotionalism. One must wear some kind of a tilak and some kind of a cloth around one's shoulders; whether the man repeats 'om namah sivaya' once or twice a day or not, he has a whole shirt and shawl made of om namah sivaya. Or he must sing and shout and do all kinds of things. All these practices may have their own benefits, but these, according to Gurudev's life and teachings, are of secondary importance.

There were some vital practices in His sadhana. First and foremost of these was murthi puja. Amongst Gurudev's initial devotees were great Arya Samajis who do not like murthi puja at all. As a matter of fact, Gurudev even attended the wedding in the house of one such devotee. He mixed freely with them and even sang the maha mantra. Gurudev Himself has said somewhere that when He presided over sankirtan conferences, even Arya Samajis who came to criticise and disrupt the proceedings, joined in and started dancing. When He performed murthi puja, it was not as many of us do it, regarding the statue as a statue, as a stone, but as a living presence. There was this deep-seated realisation, not conviction but realisation, that it is God I am worshipping, not a stone. He did not even use the expression 'through this I am worshipping God.' Through this stone image, which somehow represents Lord Krishna, I am worshipping God. No. I am worshipping Krishna here. This is Krishna.

I used to be Pujari in the temple for quite a number of years, and Gurudev used to come three times a day. He entered the temple every time with some flowers or bael leaves. It was an unforgettable and indescribable sight. I used to stand with my back towards the window and watch Gurudev's face. He used to look up, and in that look there was distinctly and definitely the unmistakable look of greeting a friend. During Shivratri particularly there used to be puja in the evening, and after the arati some people used to be given bael leaves. It was customary to drop some leaves on the Nandi, the bull, as a token of seeking the bull's permission for

worshipping Siva; then they used to offer a few bael leaves or flowers on the Siva lingam. I have never seen Gurudev throw a flower or a leaf. He placed it so softly. Why? Because it is a living thing, it is a living divine presence. If I throw flowers at your face, I do not think you will appreciate it very much. When He looked at Krishna, it was friendship, supreme intimate friendship. 'Hello, how do you do?' You could almost read it in His eyes. 'Ah, how are you, alright today?' Just as He used to ask me and you and everybody, 'What would you like to have, some tea or some coffee?' - that same blissful look of intimate friendship.

In the office, where He used to sit, a few pictures hung in front of Him from the ceiling, and those pictures had to be there in that order, they were not pictures at all. They were living beings - the divine presence. As soon as He walked into the office, He just tossed a glance at them. If somebody meddled with them, 'Hmm, what has happened to that!' Because my friends have gone, they are my friends and assistants here in my work, and they have been disrupted. In all this, there was absolute and total naturalness, there was no showiness at all. We greet each other, laugh at each other, make fun of each other - 'Narayana!' - He would never do that. And sometimes we shout while stretching or when we hurt ourselves, 'Hare Ram, Hare Ram'. All that showiness was completely absent, but deep within Him, He believed, He taught, and His life was a continual demonstration of the fact that this bhakti is a totally intimate love affair between your soul and God. No one need to know, you do not have to parade it, you do not have to exhibit it to anyone else.

I mentioned a minute ago that He used to look at those pictures. Even that was done in a very subtle almost imperceptible way. Unless you were very carefully watching, you could not have noticed it. Sometimes He would close His eyes and just with one eye, lift it up and take a look and close the eyes again. In those five seconds, some magic thread was re-established. Very often we think that we are so highly advanced that worship is unnecessary. He never forgot His worship. Only when He could not come to the temple did He confine Himself to the worship in His own room.

He was very fond of sankirtan, the use of mantra in several different forms. In sankirtan again there was no ostentation. If sankirtan has to be sung aloud, sing it aloud, but without ostentation, not doing it for the sake of showing others. There was no demonstration in His case. Do you know what demonstration means? Spell the word and count the first five letters! He was not interested in demonstration - it was within Him. Bhakti is an affair of the heart and nobody need know. Perhaps the less known your love for God is, the more powerful, the more sincere it is likely to be. One has to see this. He was thrilled when someone sang God's Names with bhav and devotion. And that is the characteristic of a devotee. He was so full of divine love that He was delighted even if others sang God's Names. And the externalisation of this devotion was adapted to suit the context.

If there was a big audience, such as the birthday celebration, we used to have a

big satsang. Gurudev would stand up and start singing and dancing maybe about 1 o'clock at night on the 31st of December. He had a powerful voice, it could ring throughout the Himalayas. When He sang, people would shed tears. If He did Om chanting before an audience of a couple of thousand people, it was ringing, loud, for the occasion demanded it; but when during satsang He sang kirtan, it was only meant for the few that were around Him, so it was in a subdued mellow beautiful voice. And Gurudev used to say, in the beginning when there were not even musicians present in the ashram, 'You should sit in a meditative posture and sing kirtan as if you are meditating, and while you are singing kirtan, feel within yourself that the Lord himself is seated in front of you listening to your kirtan'. That is a very different spirit altogether! That is a different quality. You have seen the picture of birds singing and little Krishna sitting and listening. That is what Gurudev wanted; otherwise it becomes a totally externalised affair. When the affairs of the heart are externalised, they lose their value completely, they become useless, they become showy, spiritless, essenceless. Devotion or bhakti being an affair of the heart, it must be felt there, experienced there, and so we experience the welling up of devotion, and the divine presence itself. God Himself is sitting close to you, listening, so no need to shout. So, during satsang it was very soft, but inspiring and devotional.

During akhandakirtan - we used to have akhandakirtan a few times a year - the whole night we used to sit in the temple singing Om Namah Sivaya. Once Gurudev was sitting leaning against the left side pillar of the temple, with closed eyes, and since nobody was leading the Om Namah Sivaya chant, one half would repeat once and the other half would repeat the next time. He was also part of one group and He was chanting the Om Namah Sivaya in such low tones right at the back of His throat. I happened to be near Him and heard this. I thought, 'Aha, if you repeat it like that, maybe you enter into samadhi more easily, and maybe you do not get tired or sleepy.' So, sitting right behind Him, I also started. I was asleep in one minute! And yet He was sitting there unmoved, without even changing His seat for the whole night, repeating this Om Namah Sivaya in a very low tone. There it is a totally and completely meditative mood. When He saw others dozing, He would say, 'Oh, get up, get up and sing or clap'. That was the one occasion when we were allowed to clap our hands while singing kirtan, or to use cymbals, or the clappers or even the harmonium or tabla. There the important thing was to keep awake; if you are awake, it is enough, what happens in your heart we will see later. But in His own case, it was deep, deep within Him! In the case of japa also, when He used to conduct meditation classes, He used to start the class with 'Om', and the Om sound came from His navel. He also used to go to His kutir and pace the veranda up and down, very deeply uttering the om kara. What it is to see God in every face might come later.

What is the inner experience when you are face to face with God? If you know that experience, then you can ensure that the same experience is had when you see this little boy. First you must acquire that experience wherever you like, maybe in a temple, maybe in front of a great swami or holy man or yogi, maybe in front of your guru. The experience has to manifest in your heart. And once that

experience is manifest and you have tasted it, watch and see if the same experience arises in you when you meet every person. Then you can really say, 'I see God in every face'. That was one vital aspect of His sadhana, whatever there was, puja, worship, and the celebration of holy days like Durga Puja and sankirtan. Through all this He sustained this peace of Divine Love, constantly He sustained this attitude of seeing God, and seeing God in every face.

We all worship Krishna in the temple, we offer flowers and fruits in front of Krishna and sweets at his feet. 'Oh Krishna! I love you, please accept this, I have brought it specially for you from Delhi.' And that Krishna does not smile, that Krishna does not nod, that Krishna does not say, 'Thank you'. He says nothing, and yet you feel quite happy within yourself that the lord has accepted your service and you go away fully satisfied. Would you not do the same if you saw God in the face of the person whom you are serving? Yet you take some flowers and fruits when you meet a Swami, put them at his feet, 'Namaskara Swami', and if he doesn't care to nod, or smile, you are offended!

So, here again, if you are able to feel the divine presence in the temple, then it is possible that by and by you will see God in every face. The next is to ensure that the body-mind complex is an egoless, free-flowing channel for the Divine Grace, which is meditation. And Gurudev's meditation was continuous. Whenever He mentioned meditation, what He really meant was japa. It is through mantra japa you enter into ... no, you do not even enter into meditation. You go on doing japa and meditation supervenes, meditation takes hold of you. Meditation is like sleep, which cannot be practised. You cannot practise sleep. Your consciousness can be led towards it, but then it has to come. You can invite it, you can do all manner of things, but sleep has to come, and if it has to come, it will come here right now! So when Gurudev used the word meditation in personal conversation, it always meant japa. When a new aspirant came and asked for instruction, He always said, 'Do japa! Take a mantra.' Sometimes He would give a mantra, any mantra is as good as any other mantra. It depends entirely upon your appreciation, your faith, your sincerity and dedication. Having given the mantra, Gurudev would instruct aspirant how to use it.

As soon as you wake up - not get up - as soon as you open your eyes in the morning, start repeating the mantra. If you are alone in the room, you can say it aloud or whisper it; or if you are not alone, you may do it mentally. After a few minutes, when you are fully awake, get out of bed, wash your face quickly and come back and sit in your asana for more japa. This time you can use a mala. And then synchronize the mantra with the breath, this is the trick. Then the breathing itself becomes the japa mala. Repeat the mantra once while inhaling, repeat the mantra once while exhaling, and form this habit. Once the habit is formed, this mantra repetition or japa will become natural, second nature to you. Then, to make it even more firmly grounded, devote a few seconds to it every hour or every two hours. That is what Gurudev used to do in the office. He would be signing letters or talking to people or examining addresses on parcels, and He would lean back and close His eyes. You think He is fatigued, you think He is

resting. He is not resting. No one knew what He was doing. Sometimes I noticed when He was in the office, one eye would be half-closed only. The right eye was completely closed, the left eye only half closed. I have never dared to ask Him what it meant. There was a completely blank expression there. My first impression was that something had happened. Then I saw He was deliberately doing it. There He was for a few moments. Nobody knew what He did, but for a few moments He had reestablished that link with the mantra. That can be done - just synchronize the mantra with the breath and listen to it. And at the end of the day, before you go to bed, the mantra can be repeated properly, sitting in your meditation room in your meditation posture. Gurudev used to insist that before you go to bed you should spend half an hour at least in japa. It is not a waste of time. You will have a better sleep and a more restful, more blissful, more fruitful sleep. If His sleep was disturbed, the disturbed period of His sleep was also spent in japa.

This japa mantra itself will lead you to meditation if you leave faith and dedication, if you are cautious and careful. Because one day or the other you are bound to question what it is that is repeating this mantra. 'I'. Who is I? Where does the sound come from? From me. Who is me? When that quest arises, there is meditation. You are not meditating, you are merely entering into this quest. Who is repeating this mantra? From where does it come? I hear the sound of the mantra within without vocalizing it. How is it possible to have a sound without making a sound? When such inquiry arises from within, the mantra japa goes on, and it merges into meditation. When it is realised that this meditation is happening, this mantra japa is happening without my volition, without my will, without my individuality participating in it, then all actions in life happen without the 'me'.

9 - One Season Flows into the Other.

We have been considering the principal aspects of sadhana as expounded by Gurudev and illustrated in His life. I think we should remind ourselves once again that neither the teachings nor the illustrations in His life could be positively described as 'this is it'. Then you miss it. It is 'neither nor' - the extremely subtle middle path. What is considered the middle path is imperceptible and, if we invent a new word, inconceptable. Not only imperceptible but it is inconceptable. You cannot form a concept with it. Gurudev had supreme renunciation, but not as a concept. Gurudev had the highest form of karma yoga, but not as a concept, not limited to it, not only this.

Why do we slip into specialization instead of following the subtle middle path, the path of neither-nor? Because in this neither-nor yoga, in pursuing this subtle middle path, one has to be constantly vigilant. One little wink or nod and you slip on one side or the other. Of course, by God's Grace you wake up and go on. The subtle middle path is neither this nor that, but something which partakes of both. That is what we have to bear in mind throughout our study of the life as well as teachings of Shri Gurudev. If we forget this, then we become fanatic. That is almost contrary to what Gurudev was.

So far we have gone over His teachings concerning what we call karma yoga and what we call bhakti. And it was pointed out that even the essential raja yoga sadhana of meditation was made to flow on from the bhakti practice of japa.

Flow on reminds me of a beautiful thought which I would like to share with you. These yogas - karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, and hatha yoga - are not separate watertight compartments, but can be compared to the seasons. This is an example which is given in the Yoga Vasishtha. One season flows into the other, it is not as though one fine morning winter comes to an end and spring commences. One season flows, it is an unceasing flow. In the same way, one yoga blends into another. This was His own word. Karma yoga blends with bhakti yoga etc. If it does not, there is something wrong somewhere. You are chewing the words, hoping that you might get enlightened or illumined. Gurudev's is an intelligent practice of yoga, not a bland ritual, not a superstitious, repetitive, mechanical set of practices, nor a set of dogmas to which we could give our intellectual assent - it is intelligence in operation, it is intelligence alive. Previously, jnana yoga was isolated from the rest on the understanding that first we practise karma yoga, and once our heart becomes purified, then we go to the temple, and once we develop a little devotion, then we sit down and practise a little raja yoga. All this may take some two hundred years, never mind, we come back again end again and pursue, and then we will go to the forest, go to a guru and learn the Upanishads from him.

The Sanyasins in Rishikesh sit and listen to the Upanishads at the Feet of Swami Krishnananda, because Shri Gurudev insisted that these too shall form part of our daily sadhana. This aspect of jnana yoga was introduced into our life as

Swadhyaya. I do not know what this word Swadhyaya literally means, but to me the first two syllables suggest something. Swa means self, dhya - dhyana, meditation. Maybe it is swadhyaya - someone sitting alone and reading a scripture - I do not know. It is also possible to see that while I am reading it there is contemplation. It is not a mechanical reading of the scripture, but an intelligent reading of the scripture. Gurudev often repeated, 'Study daily a chapter of the Gita'. Why must I go on studying this? We ask this question only when it comes to the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads. You do not ask this question when it comes to a physics text book or Shakespearean drama. We read these again and again, we even memorize them. Why? In order that the message may be inscribed on the tablet of one's heart. These words are also Gurudev's. This Swadhyaya or daily reading - I am deliberately avoiding the use of the word study - of the Gita, Ramayana, Upanishads or other scriptures, the Bible or the Koran, is like the continuous flour of a river.

You have heard it said that you cannot take a bath in the same water twice. Every moment the water is flowing, as you dip and come up and dip again, it is fresh water, not the water in which you had your previous dip. Something has happened. Here it is the other way round. The scripture seems to be the same, but you who read the scripture, you are not the same. You are not the same as you were last year. Something has happened. Therefore, keep on reading this, and it is possible you discover that newer and newer facets of meaning are revealed to you. That is the beauty of swadhyaya. That sounds mechanical, perhaps. Therefore Gurudev said, swadhyaya is important, but not the mechanical type. Keep your heart open, keep your mind open, be alert and vigilant as you read this, whether you understand the meaning or not. Let your heart be open.

How did He achieve that? I was particularly interested in this because as Vaishnava Brahmins of South India we had become accustomed to this routine, mechanical reading of at least Valmiki's Ramayana. We did not read the Gita or the Upanishads. But we were asked to recite at least one chapter of Valmiki's Ramayana before breakfast, otherwise we would not get our coffee. I still remember the delightfully jet-age speed with which we read the Ramayana! Why? The mind was on the coffee, not on the Ramayana. We were not interested in the Rama story and we did not even bother to look up the story. We just read it in Sanskrit, it was considered a ritual. That was not enough. Swadhyaya is necessary, but not that.

Do not however come up with the other extreme, saying, I must understand every word of it, every syllable. Neither total ignorance nor complete understanding, somewhere in the middle. Read it, try to understand it, open your heart. If you do not understand something, leave it. That was done miraculously and most beautifully in the satsanga. Gurudev combined these two so beautifully, the satsanga and the swadhyaya.

What is satsanga? I think most of you know. I was exposed as a young boy to the satsanga of the South Indian variety. You know how it is spelt - satsang - that is

precisely what happened. They sat and they sang. And it used to be glorious, beautiful, classical. I must explain this too. Often classical means not musical. If you do not want to hear it, it is called classical music. Very classical, but often very musical too. They were supposed to be singing God's names, but where is your attention? Your attention is on what raga he is singing in, what tala he is singing in, who is making a mistake, who is singing a wrong note, the attention is not on God. So, there was 'sat' and 'sang', but no bhavana. Gurudev liked kirtan but it had to be full of bhav. His whole mission started with sankirtan conferences. But not that type of emotionalism. It had to be sankirtan, but not emotional, not demonstrative, not showy, and He used to insist that when you sing kirtan, feel that God himself is sitting in front of you, listening.

Now to combine all of these. Swadhyaya had to be combined, not blind reading, nor an insistence upon understanding the entire philosophy. 'I must become enlightened tomorrow morning' and 'I must not read anything which I do not understand'. Neither of these two extremes. Sankirtan must be done without any emotionalism, but with some bhavana. Neither this nor that. And He beautifully combined all this in the satsanga we had in the ashram in those days, especially before 1950. The satsanga as it was in those days had an extraordinary quality of being integral yoga in itself, being an immediate combination of sankirtan, contemplation or dhyana and swadhyaya - devotion all together. Devotion being an exercise in contemplation and an exercise in dhyana yoga.

What Gurudev did was an extraordinary and beautiful thing. Obviously there were not so many people in those days, hardly about 15 or 20. In summer, satsang used to be held on the veranda of Gurudev's kutir and in winter it was held in the bhajan hall. In the bhajan hall, He sat next to the door. In His kutir He sat at the north end of the main veranda. There used to be a small thin piece of folded cloth; that was merely to indicate where Gurudev was to sit. Right on time He would come out of His kutir and sit there. There was no electricity, no light, except for a wicklamp at the altar and a hurricane lamp to read by. Gurudev hid a flashlight which was half a walking stick long. He would put it next to Him and look at the person who sat at his right. That's all, then He closed His eyes. Immediately He opened His eyes; the swami who was sitting to His left would start the 'Jaya Ganesha'; it was routine. Then the next person would read one chapter of the Gita, sometimes with meaning, sometimes without. Once his reading was over, he would lead with a kirtan, and then the lamp was passed on to the next person. He would probably read a few mantras from the Upanishads, with or without meaning, and follow it with a kirtan. The lamp was passed on to the next one - Bhagavatam. Then somebody might even have to read an article by Gurudev, if it was topical and useful. Then the hurricane lantern was put out and discarded; from there on, everyone had to lead, not merely follow in chorus, but leading singing a kirtan. No, it was not a one-man performance which others enjoyed, but everybody had to play a part.

Two very interesting incidents I might narrate here. One was when a girl who had come from South India. She said, 'I do not know how to sing kirtan, what you call

kirtan. I could sing bhajan but my throat is hoarse, I have a little cold.' Swamiji said, 'Ah, go and get some medicine". This poor girl had to swallow this bitter medicine because she said she had a sore throat. Gurudev always took everyone seriously. He was not going to be taken for a ride. The routine always had to be continued. One person had finished his reading and the lantern had been passed on, which meant that the next person had to lead in a kirtan. When there was a silence, it meant that somebody was evading. It was then that this flashlight was used. He would pick up the flashlight, shine it right on his face. 'Ah, sing!' 'Ah, no Swamiji. I do not know how to sing!' 'Sing!' 'I am not used to singing in this manner.' 'Sing!' Unless he at least said, 'Ram Nam' twice, he would not be excused, he could be the Maharaja of Mysore, it did not matter. No one was excused.

We have a gurubhai, who is now in Gangotri, Swami Sharadananda, a wonderful man. When he came the first night, Gurudev said, 'Come on', 'I do not know any kirtans, Swamiji.' 'No, no, Ram Nam.' He was quiet for one moment, then suddenly he remembered the 'Raghupatiragava raja ram patita pavana sita ram'. He had heard it whenever the Congress had a procession in his local town. Of course I remember it. So all of us had to repeat it in the same tune. You dared not change his tune. He was the leader. So all of us followed in chorus. He was thrilled, he enjoyed it. Such a wonderful innocent childlike person, Swami Sharadananda. Swamiji said 'Sing!' So he went on singing without changing the tune or changing the tone, without changing the words - nothing! He went on six times, seven times. Swamiji asked me to sing, he did not ask me to stop! Then Gurudev cut in, 'Jai Ramachandra ki jai'.

So, everyone had to sing. When Gurudev heard the last person sitting on His right lead the kirtan in this manner, then He brought the satsang to a close; sometimes He would merely sing the maha mantra kirtan, or on rare occasions some of His own poems and things like that. This was the pattern of the satsang. Later Hareshwarananda came and a few nice little stories were introduced now and then. Then came musicians and physicians and what have you; so the satsang took all sorts of forms.

But let us go back to the original satsang. In it was a combination of bhakti, which is sankirtan. The sankirtan was not for show and in it was contemplation. When you are listening to the scriptural readings, you are watching your mind, you are listening to the scripture with your heart open, your mind silent. In it was most valuable study. What happens when we say, 'I am a scholar, I will study the Bhagavad Gita'? I do not think you watch yourself. What happens when you say, 'I have got the bible, I have learned it at Sunday school'? You tend to take the same passage or chapter again and again. Your own favourite chapter becomes your continued favourite. There are some unpleasant truths in the Bible, there are some unpleasant truths in the Bhagavad Gita. There are some unpleasant truths in other scriptures, I do not want to look at them at all. I am very happy with this. That means once again your ego is very cosily asleep, never exposed to the truth. One had to read from cover to cover. One day or another, your heart

will also be exposed to the truth that you have been shying away from. Then it hits you. 'By God, I never read this chapter! I never saw this.'

Once we were discussing the teachings of Jesus in the Bible, when I mentioned the expression, 'Resist not evil'. Somebody who was supposed to be a scholar jumped up and said, 'I have never heard that in the bible'. He had been reading all the other chapters very religiously, but avoiding this? It did not suit him. In that satsang, that simple thing was combined - bhakti, jnana and dhyana. That was not all. After all, if the message of the scripture enters our heart, it will come alive and it must become active. Gurudev often reminded us that the scripture must come alive in you. That the truths of the Upanishads must come from your heart. I have heard the words, and now in my daily life, during my activities, I am watching to see if the truths of the Upanishads are coming from my heart or not. So it is not enough to study or listen to the scriptures, but the truths must also come from the heart. This is true - now what do you think! The moment one hears the reaction of one's own mind, 'Ah, you know, I am not yet ready for the Upanishads, so you know...' Neither this nor that. Neither must the Upanishads or the scriptures be confined to your mind, nor should the consideration, 'I am not yet mature enough for the study of the scripture', be the reason for not studying it. So, I must study it, and I must try my best to live up to it, but without the anxiety that accompanies this kind of trying. I must honestly imbibe the teachings of the scriptures and follow them, but not with the sense of anxiety, 'Oh! What am I going to do? I am not able to practise this. Oh! What must I do?' Without this anxiety, can I listen to the scriptures, inscribe the teachings on the tablet of my heart, keep my heart open to the light, without anxiety and without ego participation? I am not saying I am enlightened, I am not saying I am anxious that I may not become enlightened. Without anxiety and without hypocrisy, let the heart be open to the reception of this light, and the magic will happen.

I am sure those of you who have been to Gurudev's satsang know that this magic happens. It is a very subtle magic - spiritual growth is not a very dramatic growth. We have all grown. I can even picture Gita playing the Krishna Lila outside my old kutir. Gurudev used to preside over it. She was a little girl then, now she has grown, but if I ask her, 'When did you grow from three feet to four feet?', she will answer that it did not happen in one day, and she has been looking into the mirror every morning. I am sure it is impossible for her to say, 'I looked at the mirror this morning, my nose is half an inch longer than it was last night'. It does not happen that way. Real growth is imperceptible. I look at my shaven head, it is the same every day. If one morning I look and find a real growth here, then I will probably run panic stricken to the nearest doctor. It may be a tumour, it may be a cancer. A growth that is noticeable is often cancerous. Spiritual growth is so subtle and beautiful. And that subtle and beautiful spiritual growth is effectively brought about by this satsanga, if it is conducted in the way in which Gurudev taught us. Without anxiety and without hypocrisy.

One beautiful incident I might narrate is an illustration of this last thing. Gurudev was not anxious at all when it came to putting the scripture into

practice. Once a few of us were there on Gurudev's veranda. It was winter and He was in His big overcoat and had a nice shawl as a scarf around His neck and I think stockings too. The refrain of His talk that evening was, 'They are truly blessed who are quite content with loin cloth, who roam free clad in the loin cloth.' And the person who says this is clad in an overcoat and scarves and so on! Sometimes you and I feel self-conscious, anxious, afraid of criticism - look at him! He is saying something and doing something else. Truth is truth, and that is always truth, whether you are able to practise it or not. It is still truth, and truth is unchangeable, and that is why it is called truth. 'He who is contented with the loin cloth and owns nothing in this world, he is a blessed man.' This is the truth. That Gurudev had to wear an overcoat on that occasion may be due to something else, but that does not detract from the strength and power in His voice, in His words.

So, without any anxiety whatsoever, and without making it a mere ritual of listening, one should listen to the scriptures, study the scriptures. If it is done in satsang in this manner, it becomes extremely effective. The scriptures studied are read, and then, while the person is leading the kirtan, all the others have an opportunity of letting the message soak through the heart of their being. At the end of the satsang we had two or three minutes of silent meditation and the arati; then as soon as the satsang was over, especially when it was in His kutir, 'Om Namah Sivaya', He would quietly walk into His room, He would not even look at anybody. He used to ask others also to do so; without disturbing the satsang mood, go to your room and sleep!

10 - Anahamkara - Yama and Niyama

We have so far been discussing some of the important, and from the spiritual aspirant's point of view, vital aspects of the life and teachings of Gurudev. Those of you who have been attentive might have felt that His entire sadhana or integral yoga is not so much the outcome, but the very blossoming of total selflessness - Anahamkara. It is only when the self is discovered to be non-existent that its play stops. Our life is plagued by the play of the self.

Selfishness and all the rest of it are based upon a false notion of a self which is assumed to be true. And then one half of humanity struggles to fulfil, to pander to the needs of this self, and the other half of humanity suggests that this self must be crushed, eliminated.

From a close observation of Gurudev's life there arose the feeling that, either way, the self was created and brought into being. When you stand facing a wall with your back to a lamp and you see a shadow on the wall, whether you admire that shadow or you struggle to remove it, you are creating a thing called shadow. The shadow suddenly becomes a thing, and however much you struggle it is not possible to remove it. By trying to apply some lipstick and powder to it, you are wasting your time and deluding yourself. Both these attempts are useless.

He started by saying that in order to make the lips smile we have to tickle the foot and not pull the cheeks apart. And so, in order to do nishkama karma yoga or nirahamkara karma yoga, it is no use battling with the ego in order to meditate. You may wish to remove or deal with the intruding thoughts, but you soon discover that it is no use battling with them. Gurudev used to sing, 'When evil thoughts enter your mind, do not drive them out forcibly. Substitute divine thoughts and they will pass away, Ram, Ram, Ram'. It is no use battling with these evil thoughts. Then you are making them stronger. When you try to remove what appears to be selfishness, you are creating it, making it stronger. Tickle the foot somewhere else. The key is somewhere else. So, in order to practise nishkama karma yoga, nirahamkara karma yoga, one has to discover the self and become aware of the truth of the non-existence of the thing called self. In the same way, in order to practise bhakti yoga, to love God and to do self-surrender, one has to see that there never was a self which had to be surrendered. In the same way, one has to meditate, and in meditation discover that this self has never been non-existent. What was, is, and will be - was, is, and will be! 'Nasatho vidyatebhavo na bhavo vidyate satah.' That which is illusory does not exist. Do not battle with it. When you battle with it, you are creating it. The reality is there, why do you not get closer to that? That was the essence of Gurudev's attitude to life itself, not merely to the practice of yoga. If this is seen or realised to be the basis of integral yoga, you instantly realise that, whatever may be the branch of this integral yoga that may suit your temperament, and which may therefore be the predominant constituent of your integral yoga, you cannot help combining all practices at the same time, including what is called meditation. It is impossible to do nirahamkara karma yoga without being at the same time in a state of constant

meditation, constant devotion, constant jnana. All these are constant.

It is usual when someone expounds any form of yoga to emphasize what are known as yama and niyama. So far we have not mentioned these two words. But, when one observes the life and daily conduct as well as the teachings of Gurudev, one realises that this yama and niyama happen! When you practise integral yoga, yama and niyama just happen!

Most of you know what yama and niyama mean, but without questioning the orthodox interpretations of these two words, we might take a look at them from a different angle. Most of us know that the word yama also means the name of the god of death. In raja yoga, yama signifies a five-fold self-discipline, and in mythology Yama is the name of the god of death. Gurudev used to insist in the early days, 'Remember God, remember death'. If you put these two together you become an abode of virtues. Virtue does not spring from a desire even for attaining liberation or God-Realisation. Then there still remains to be a motive. I will give you a rather crude example just for illustration. A gentleman in Europe came in contact with a swami and that swami was a vegetarian, celibate. He told this gentleman that if you do not become a pure vegetarian and celibate, you cannot attain God-Realisation. The man immediately took a vow. 'From hereafter, I will become a vegetarian etc.' But he did not like any vegetarian food, he missed something very vital in his diet. Anyhow he was progressing in sadhana I suppose, when suddenly another holy man walked into his life and that holy man asked for chicken for lunch. 'Huh, you are a swami?' 'What has that got to do with my spirituality? You do not know what Jesus said? 'It is not what goes in but what comes out that matters!' Immediately the man dropped his vegetarian thing and became non-vegetarian again.

That's it. If there is a motivation or a desire that prompts the virtue, then, as soon as that motivation or desire is questioned, the virtue is cancelled. So we are told that yama is important. We are vicious only because we have kept death away from our life. Bring death into your daily life, you will at once become virtuous. That is what Gurudev told us, remember God, remember death.

One incident comes to my mind just now. There was a retired schoolmaster from South India who had come to the ashram with the intention of spending the rest of his life there. On the Ganges bank at Gurudev's Feet. Winter set in. November was a bit shivery, December was a bit difficult, and he also had a temperature for a few days. One day, as Gurudev was coming up from His kutir, this retired schoolmaster met Him at the top of the steps. 'Swamiji, I want to go home, I will come back later.' Gurudev said, 'What's wrong? You wanted to stay here, die here.' 'But this cold is too much, I cannot bear this cold', he said. Gurudev as usual closed one eye, looked at him and smiled. He was much younger than Gurudev. Gurudev said, 'Ah, be prepared to die. You will get acclimatised to any place!' A beautiful expression!

Be prepared to die, you will get acclimatised to any place. So, is it possible for us

to bring this death into our daily life? It is not as though I am completely alive now and that only on a certain day in the future will I cease to be! Death is happening even now as we are sitting and talking and listening. Death is happening to some cells in the body, some part of the body is dying. Why not bring this death into your daily life? Immediately you become virtuous. All the five canons of yama - ahimsa, brahmacharya and all that - become your second nature if this death is brought into your daily life. This is what we learned from Gurudev. It is not by battling to acquire a thing called virtue, it is not by battling to get rid of vice that you can really become virtuous, but by doing something else. Why is it called vice? Because it grips you. How do you get out of something which grips you? No amount of your wriggling is going to help you out of it. But when you do something like tickling the foot, when you remember death and remember God at the same time, then virtue springs forth spontaneously without being invited. And then virtue springs forth spontaneously, vices just drop away. They have no meaning, they have no sense. The self is seen to be non-existent. This was Gurudev's speciality. In His case again, what you and I might regard as superhuman virtue was so natural that we have never heard Him boast about it. In our case, when you and I grind our teeth and gird up our loins and practise this virtue, my God, the whole world is deafened with our boasting.

I have never heard Gurudev say anything like that, except on that one occasion, when He was provoked, that is, when He opened a window, as it were, on His own life, and told us some things that might be of use to you and me. Not because He was wanting to boast, for the events that He narrated had taken place years and years ago. But so that you and I might be benefited. Virtue had become so natural, such second nature, that there was no sense of 'I could not have been otherwise, I could not leave done otherwise!' That was the nature of Gurudev's work here, and that is what He reminded us of constantly. If, on the other hand, you struggle and somehow you succeed in subduing a vice, it is there lying in wait for you to relax your attention. Then pow! It jumps up. Gurudev Himself used to warn all spiritual aspirants, 'Beware of reaction'. Any violent effort or endeavour to control the senses and to control the mind may lead to equally violent reaction. Whereas, if you are able to remember God and to remember death, if you are able to remember the reality and the changing unreality, there is no problem. Greed has no meaning, lust has no meaning, envy has no meaning, jealousy has no meaning, faced with this thing called death. I do not need to be proud of it, to stand up so you know who I am. The next moment there may be a heart attack and I may be lying at His Feet, maybe He is jumping on me to revive my heart. That was it. That was the beauty. Remember God, remember death.

When it comes to niyama, again we shall abandon the raja yoga definition and take a common connotation of the word. Niyama in common parlance means regulated, systematic methodic life. And those of us who have been with Gurudev have noticed it a million times, that He was absolutely methodical. If he had to wake up at half past three, he woke up at half past three, even when the body was sick. If He had to get up and go to the bathroom at four o'clock, He got up and went to the bathroom at 4 o'clock. Never mind what the state of the body, the

weather or the climate was. Absolutely methodical.

Someone asked Him, 'You are the head of an organisation, and you are so busy meeting people and interviewing people, and you are so kind, you are considerate to your own disciples, you look after their physical welfare and their mental welfare. You do all this, you are regular in satsang, you come and participate in the meditation classes and you even come up to the temple thrice a day. When do you find time to write all these books?' And Gurudev revealed the secret in one simple word, 'I am regular'.

That is, a certain period of the day had been set apart for study. A certain period of the day had been set apart for book work, a certain period of the day was set apart for correspondence, a certain period of the day was set apart for meeting people, interviewing people, and nothing was done out of its time. So He said, 'Two pages a day, I have been regularly writing two pages per day'. In the same way with yoga asanas, in the same way with pranayama, in the same way with study, everything a little, and that done regularly, systematically, methodically. There is time for everything, and everything gets done so smoothly, so easily, nothing is a strain. It is as if one compartment of the brain was opened up at eight o'clock - satsang. That compartment is open, all the rest is closed up, so that sitting in the satsang there was absolutely no tension.

'Oh, I forgot ... I ought to have written so and so'. That was no problem at all. That compartment will be open in half an hour's time - 9:30. And when He did attend to correspondence, all the other things were closed. Only the correspondence branch of the brain was opened up. And then it flowed when He had to talk, there it flowed. When He had to study, there it flowed, and when He had to write there it flowed. Niyama!

If you bestow some thought on this interpretation of this yama and niyama, you realise at once that these two, interpreted in this manner, act as effective curbs to the play of the self. Nothing is allowed to get out of hand, out of control. Everything is naturally disciplined. Not disciplined because I have to. The question never arose in Gurudev's mind, 'Why should there be discipline, why should I discipline myself?' There was no motivation at all, and it was because there was no motivation that discipline became natural, yama became natural.

He was once asked, 'Did you have to struggle hard?' There were no obstacles at all in the meditation. Why? Because yama and niyama had become natural. This discipline of the mind had become natural. It had become part of His life, not only His spiritual life but His whole life. We saw that even just after the All-India Tour. For two months Swamiji lived in a completely different world. There was no ashram, there was no correspondence, nothing, no books, a completely different world. Those of us who were with Him knew that He never thought of the ashram, not for a single moment. Then, when we came back to Rishikesh, the procession stopped outside Gurudev's kutir and He took leave of everybody, walked downstairs, had His bath. An hour later, there He was, sitting at the table

in the office, and now the whole tour had been completely forgotten. Now the other compartment had been opened. 'Have you sent some copies of this new book? What happened to ... ?' Such an absolutely disciplined mind does not encounter any obstacles at all in the path of sadhana, in the path of yoga, in the path of meditation, and in daily life. When the sadhaka understands this, and practises yama and niyama - by bringing the god of death into his daily life knowing that he may die at any moment - virtue arises spontaneously, and discipline becomes natural and effortless. When there is no effort even at self-discipline, virtue and self-control, then the self is realised to be non-existent. It is then that selflessness, self-surrender and self-control and self-realisation become totally natural.

11 - Enlightened, and nothing more.

In this Integral Yoga, is there a goal? Is there some way by which I can know, or I can reassure myself that I am on the right path, I am progressing, that I have nearly reached the goal, that I have reached the goal, or I did reach the goal the day before yesterday! How does one know? How does one ever know whether one is on the right track or not?

We never discussed this with Shri Gurudev Himself, but on rare occasions He gave some kind of a hint that what is called self-realisation or enlightenment is not for the mind to describe nor for speech to describe - that one who has reached self-realisation is touching Brahman. He did not suggest that this is the goal. He did not even suggest whether such a person would have special vision or other such phenomena. We started these talks by narrating an incident where Gurudev said, 'One who is enlightened or who has self-knowledge is ever in bliss, and in peace', which again is not easy to understand.

What does peace mean to us? Does peace mean a state of inertness, dullness, stupidity? What is the distinction between *tamas* and *sattva*? Once again you are at a loss. Such expressions as, 'One must have peace, one must have bliss,' raise more questions than answers.

When you forget all this and look at His life, what sort of clue do we get as to the state of a Siddha, a perfected, being, one who had reached Siddhi? It was obvious that in His case there was this cosmic vision, a vision in which there was no division. What does this mean? Does it mean that a sage does not know that this is a towel and this is a key? Would He try to open His door using a towel, and start wiping Himself with a key? What does it mean? There is an expression in the Bhagavad Gita which has been grotesquely interpreted to mean that the sage would not know the difference between a stone and a nugget of gold. I am not sure it means that. I have watched Gurudev very carefully, and I have seen Him pick up clips and pins from the roadside and put them into His bag, and I have at the same time seen that He took theft, cheating, calmly, as though nothing had happened. Great loss meant nothing, but one pin or a clip lying on the roadside had to be picked up. If someone cheated Him of ten thousand rupees, that's alright.

So, there again, did He walk with His eyes turned into His eyebrows as though He were not interested at all in life? No, He was deeply interested in life, and that again is the Bhagavad Gita's definition. *Saarva bhutahi divata*. He would not even allow His own devoted disciples to kill the bugs that were keeping Him awake at night. When we were using some insecticide, Gurudev said, 'No, don't do that, take the can, put it in the forest. Let the bugs go away, but do not kill them.' So, once again we are where we started. What are the signs of enlightenment. Are there any signs at all? What are the signs of total egolessness? Are there any signs at all? If there are signs, they must manifest themselves, and not be produced by the sage. Is that right? If this person is egoless, he is not going to produce signs

and proofs for you to admire and give him a testimonial. He is not interested in all that. And so, whenever they who were very close to Him were watching Him, occasionally they would get glimpses of what egolessness may mean. But then, before you tried to grasp and admire it, it changed.

I do not know if I must submit for your consideration that the surest sign of an enlightened person is unpredictability, which does not mean that all unpredictable characters are enlightened. There is a description in some scriptures of the sage. 'The sage behaves like a child, or a madman or a goblin', but that does not mean that all madmen are sages. In His case we found this unpredictability. That is, there was no ego-sense to determine or predetermine an action, and direct the action towards the attainment of a certain goal: the people's admiration, more and more disciples, more and more name, more and more glory. When that goal is set up, it is easy for you to guide your life in such a way that that goal is reached. There was one swami who did not belong to Gurudev's ashram, but stayed there doing tremendous tapasya. What was the goal? He said, 'I am going to have rajas and rasis as my disciples. That is all I want.' He had rajas and rasis as his disciples. He did achieve that!

So, the goal oriented practice of austerities, of yoga and meditation is easy. Then it is possible to know that this is the goal and this I have reached. I know also how far I am from that goal and when I have reached that goal. But in the case of this practice of yoga we have been discussing whose aim is aimlessness, the total eradication of the ego-sense, what are the signs? Practically none at all. Now comes the crux. Since there are no goals, there is the continuing goal, which is to be vigilantly watchful for any sign of the resurrection of the ego. And here Gurudev used to insist upon this vigilance: be vigilant till the end that the ego does not come up. That the self does not start to play again, whether that play be superficially diagnosed as worldly or otherworldly, sacred, secular or even spiritual. Spiritual vanity is as good or as bad as vanity of wealth or pedigree. It is all the same.

'I am so and so' is the devil, is the obstacle. Can that be kept away? How? When can I be sure that 'I am' has been eliminated? It is an absurd question! Therefore this inner awareness or intelligence has to be kept constantly awake. Utthisthata jagrata. Utthisthata is probably fairly easy. To be awakened is fairly easy, but to be alert is not so easy. Because the mind and the ego have this wonderful habit of adapting themselves to changing circumstances. 'I have given up the world, I have taken sanyasa, I have changed my name, I have shaved my head, and I do not touch this and I do not do that.' The ego is capable of adapting itself to this new environment, to this new nomenclature, to this new situation. Ego has not changed. One may say that this is subtler, more refined, but it is of no real and serious value to a good spiritual aspirant.

There is one definition found in the Bhagavad Gita which may be regarded as some sign of enlightenment. This definition may be applicable to Gurudev, which was not of course the only criterion. What is yoga? 'Having attained which, he

longs for naught else.' This we saw in Gurudev. There was no longing, there was no eagerness to do this, to do that, except that if there was an opportunity to serve, that opportunity was taken. Even that opportunity was not deliberately sought, but when it came along it was taken. But there was no eagerness to excel, no spirit of competition in Him - that I must be better than, greater than, my ashram must be better than, greater than, more prosperous, none of these things. And even right from the days in Swargashram there was never a wish to imitate somebody else.

There were quite a number of yogis around Him in Swargashram. There was a great Sanskrit scholar, Tapovanandaji Maharaj, there was a great hatha yogi, Yoganandaji Maharaj, and there were bhajan experts in sankirtan and all that. He was not tempted to imitate them, He was not tempted to excel them, compete with them. There was a Maharaja called Shahinsha, I think he was a swami, but he was greater than a swami. Gurudev went to his ashram once. He was an old man, much older than Gurudev. He told us a story. It seems that when Gurudev was still living in Swargashram, this Shahinsha noticed during a conference that here was a young swami, very alert and dynamic, who could speak only English, and this Shahinsha thought that if only he were to learn a little bit of Hindi, he could stir and thrill the whole of North India. It seems he got hold of Gurudev, took Him to his tent and said, 'Come on, stay with me, I will teach you Hindi in two or three months, and then you can take the whole of North India by storm.' A marvellous ideal, a beautiful carrot dangling in front of Him. It seems Gurudev slipped out of the place late at night without telling Shahinsha, and afterwards He did not even see Him. There was no eagerness to acquire more talents in order to outshine somebody else - what for?

If people went to Him in Swargashram, saying, 'I would like to learn Sanskrit', 'There is Tapovan Swamiji, please go and learn'. Some young man comes to Him and says, 'I want to learn kundalini yoga', 'There is Swami Yoganandaji, please go and learn from him.' Even in Rishikesh He used to do this. You want to study Vedanta? Go to Krishnananda Swami. You want to study some asanas and pranayama? Vishnudevananda Swami. So, He was really a director in the ashram. One who directs people to go to this room or that room. There was no desire in Him to excel anyone else. All these are manifestations of myself. When a person has gone beyond the ego-sense, you are himself. Why must I make a distinction between this person called Swami Sivananda and another person called Swami Tapovanandaji Maharaj? You can go to him. I am he. Soham. Incidentally I should mention that when the arati was being sung, 'Jays Jaya Arati Satgurunatha, Satgurunatha Sivananda,' He also used to sing it! You are singing 'Sivananda.' Why must this ego-sense arise and identify this body and this mind with that name, and pride over this? He was quite satisfied, totally and permanently satisfied, and that satisfaction was never disturbed by whatever happened. 'Having attained which, he longs for naught else.' This definition given in the Bhagavad Gita is only fifty percent of it. The second half is a bit more difficult.

'Being rooted in which, the yogi is not disturbed inwardly even by the greatest calamity'. One calamity that was almost constant was financial crisis. There used to be a financial crisis, in the best of days, at the rate of once a year and sometimes twice a year. Secretaries and auditors and accountants would go in a deputation and say, 'Swamiji, we are broke.' 'Ah, is that so! What can be closed? The kitchen can be closed. Why? Because we can beg for food in Rishikesh. We will do a little bit of work. Even the postal expenses can be eliminated, we will not send any parcels of free books hereafter. 'But are you not concerned that your life work is ruined?' That is not treated as a calamity. It is treated as another event in this procession of events which we call your life or the life of the ashram. It is as important or as unimportant as the greatest or most hilarious event. This is another event, its characteristics being that we are financially broke. So let us immediately take the necessary steps. We will close the free book dispatching department. You do not have to lock the shelves containing books. People can help themselves. We are saving postage. If someone comes and finds that he likes that book, let him take it and go! Packing and postage are saved. Keep all the doors and windows open, let anything happen. And so the financial crisis passed away. If the financial crisis passed away, that is also alright! Yaminstito na dukhena. 'Even in the worst of all calamities the yogi remains unmoved.' There was even a mischievous joy, as if He was eager to enjoy even that situation. It is disaster in your eyes, not in my eyes. Here is something funny, let us enjoy it.

I should like to describe two last incidents, one which threatened Gurudev's life and one which almost threatened the life of the ashram. There was a swami, a brilliant man, exceptionally dynamic. And Gurudev had great confidence in him, and therefore he had been entrusted with all sorts of departments. He was the postmaster, the cashier, the treasurer, the secretary, he was everything. And, in addition to all these dynamic activities, he was also engaged in another dynamic activity which it was revealed half an hour after he had suddenly left the ashram. There was no money in the ashram. No one knew how much he had embezzled, how much he had taken away, and how much he had sent to whom, where and how. No one knew anything. All that we knew was that there was no money in the ashram, the banks had overdrafts, and, since he was the postmaster, there had been some pilfering there also. Everything had gone. Then for once there was an ultraserious financial crisis, it was not merely an ordinary financial crisis. Then we were broke, here we started with a minus balance. Naturally the police had to be called, and all sorts of enquiries made, because the postal monies were also involved. But Gurudev was calm, wailing, laughing. 'Ah, hum, that is wonderful, is that so?' And whenever somebody went to Him to complain about this mail, He would say, 'He was a good worker, wonderful, a very able worker.' This man had compiled two books and published them - Self-realisation and God-Realisation. First class titles. And Gurudev kept those two books by His side throughout that period, so that if someone came complaining, 'Oh, he was a brilliant man, he produced these two books!' It does not matter how much he stole or how thoroughly he robbed the ashram, nothing mattered, not even what happened to the reputation of the ashram, including its financial credit. Even the shopkeepers in Rishikesh said, 'Please hereafter will you pay money before you buy your

goods.' Never mind all that.

Meantime, a small miracle was going on. There were quite a number of visitors in the ashram, and everybody was getting ready for a diet of nothing but roti and dal - but strangely, or not so strangely, everyday, without knowing what had happened, someone came and said, 'Today I would like to donate for a bandhar, a feast. We were broke, completely, utterly broke, insolvent. And everyday we were having khir and sweets, not at the expense of the ashram. So, for 15 days in succession we were having feasts. And this old man was sitting there and laughing. That was the beauty. Even then He was not moved at all, not bothered at all. They even said, 'Shall we employ a CID man to trace this man?', and Gurudev said, 'Ah, forget it, somehow we will make good the amount that he has stolen, forget it!'

Another incident was an attempt on His own life. This happened in 1950. There was no electricity, and the only illumination in the satsang was the little wick-lamp burning at the altar and a hurricane lantern which used to be turned off and put away as soon as the reading part was over. In the bhajan hall, at the central entrance, just on top of the steps, Gurudev used to sit on one of those little mats. The reason why He sat there He described himself. 'You know, I am a diabetic and I have got loose bowels. I may want to get up and leave, or I may come a bit late to the satsang and I do not want to disturb anyone.' Never once was He late and never once did He get up during the middle of the satsang to go to the bathroom or anything like that. So that was His seat.

This happened on the 8th of January. Somebody had been waiting for Him. Later we learnt that this man was waiting for Him in the morning. Gurudev used to walk alone up the hill from His kutir. It was winter. And I believe this man was sitting on one of the hilltops ready to roll down a stone as Gurudev walked up. But that morning Gurudev missed coming up. The whole morning He was repeating, 'I do not know what happened, I overslept today.' He was repeating this the whole morning as if He had committed a great crime by not coming to attend the morning meditation in the bhajan hall. So He escaped. At night He would come and sit there. He had a big turban made of His own shawl, a black shawl, tied as a turban. And as soon as He came and sat down, He would take it off and put it by His side. That night He forgot. Thank God He forgot. And this man had come into the bhajan hall, axe in hand. He aimed a blow right on His head, missed, and the handle hit the turban, so that the head did not receive even the handle. The man realised that he had not hit Gurudev, so this time he was a bit nervous, and he lifted the axe again, but only hit a picture hanging above Gurudev's head. That gave another warning, and by the time he recovered he had been overpowered, and then the people in the bhajan hall knew that there had been an attempted assassination. Two swamis came running down. Some of us were working in the office, and this swami was so excited that he could not even convey the news properly. He wanted to run to the police station to get the police. Then two of us went up.

Now this is the most important thing I want to bring home to you here. As we were coming up the hill, half-way there we heard, 'Om sarvesam swasti bhavatu Om ... The whole congregation was singing, 'Sarvesam shaanti bhavatu.' I said, 'Swamiji is alright'. If something had happen to Gurudev nobody would be there to say, 'Sarvesham swasti bhavatu'. As we entered the bhajan hall, He was very nicely chanting, 'Om purnamadah...' Visualize yourself in such a situation. Even if you had escaped unhurt, even if you were young, your heart would still be palpitating, your voice would not be steady. Yet, there He was steadily continuing with the satsang, and here was not a trace of disturbance. He had brought the petrolmax lantern. People got hold of the would-be assassin and started hitting him, and it was Gurudev who saved him. 'Do not beat him!' Later on Gurudev gave him a wonderful send-off, worshipping him with flowers and fruits.

Here we saw two things together. One - the comic vision. In the Yoga Vashishta there is a very specific mention of the enlightened person's behaviour. Someone comes to worship you and at the same time another man comes with a dagger, ready to kill you. Is your mind undisturbed by this as well as that? Then the ego is gone. There is no need, no desire to live longer, and there is no craving to die. Neither this nor that. That seems to be the simplest sign by which others can recognize an enlightened person. Whether ever these meant anything to Him or not I do not know, because I do not think Gurudev even referred to this incident later. To Him it was something natural, there was no thing extraordinary about it to boast about. It was nothing. It was immediately forgotten. Second - the egoless person does not even know his own egolessness, just as the sun does not know that it is a luminous body. Its luminosity is valuable only in contrast to other non-luminous, inert, dead bodies. When there is no contrast, there is no awareness of one's own glory, one's own uniqueness, of one's own saintliness, of one's own enlightened state, of one's own egoless state. Is there a mark? The mark is only discerned by one in whom ignorance still pervades. The enlightened one is enlightened, and there is nothing more.