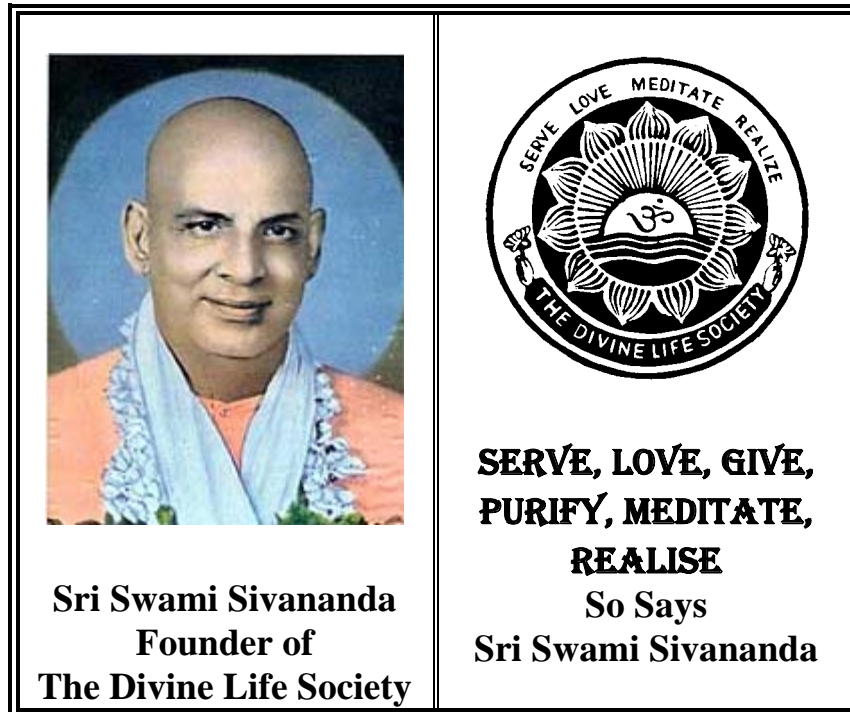


WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

By

SRI N. ANANTHANARAYANAN



A DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY PUBLICATION

First Edition: 1987
Second Edition: 1994
(2,000 copies)
World Wide Web (WWW) Reprint : 1997
WWW site: <http://www.rsl.ukans.edu/~pkanagar/divine/>

This WWW reprint is for free distribution

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Published By
THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY
P.O. SHIVANANDANAGAR—249 192
Distt. Tehri-Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh,
Himalayas, India.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Sri N. Ananthanarayanan, a sincere devotee of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, has written this book on the basis of the writings of the Master himself. The quintessence of the teachings of the great saint has been brought together into a focus by the learned author. The impulsion to bring out this work seems to be an ardent feeling of love and devotion in the author's mind, who decided to dedicate this valued offering at the feet of the venerable Master on the occasion of the holy Centenary. As the author himself mentioned in the prolegomena, the book is intended as a useful and handy introduction to people who are not adequately acquainted with the life and teachings of the Master. As the author says, "Its purpose is to arouse their interest in spiritual life in general and the Divine Life chalked out by Swami Sivananda in particular".

We do not know whether to call the sudden appearance of this interesting publication as a windfall or a Godsend. Either way we are sure that here is something which every spiritual seeker will relish and consider endearing.

12th August, 1987

-THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

FOREWORD

Om Sri Sadguru Paramatmane Namah!

Salutations to holy Master Gurudev Swami Sivananda, the modern world teacher and spiritual awakener of the twentieth century mankind. May his living memory and his sacred spiritual message inspire us to live our life in a noble and divine manner, so that we are a source of abundant good and benefit to our fellowman and to all life around us.

It gives me joy to write this brief foreword to the book, “What Does Swami Sivananda Teach?”, written with much devotion by the well-known compiler of the magnificent volume “Bliss Divine” and author of “From Man to God-man”, a beautiful biography of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji with its many interesting illustrations. This present little book is Sri N. Ananthanarayananji’s votive offering placed at Gurudev’s feet on the auspicious occasion of the holy Master’s Birth Centenary on 8th September, 1987. This is the form of Guru-dakshina which Gurudev would rejoice immensely to receive. As such, the present handy brochure constitutes a most appropriate offering upon this holy occasion. For this reason, it affords me special happiness to write this foreword.

Sri N. Ananthanarayanan, the author, is a direct disciple of Sri Gurudev Sivanandaji, and as such, a Gurubhai of mine. He is a resident Sadhu of Sivanandashram. He has successfully summed up Sri Gurudev’s message to the humanity of the present era and his simple but inspiring and instructive teachings to the human society of yesterday, today as well as tomorrow upto the future.

Covering this subject under twelve well-conceived topics, this book constitutes a call to the life spiritual and serves as an introduction to Divine Life. I have no doubt that it will be of invaluable help to numerous sincere souls who are seeking for a deeper meaning and a higher purpose in their life. May this loving gift of the author to the global human family serve to bring a new light into the life of its readers and to give an upward and Godward direction to their living and striving.

May the choicest blessings of Gurudev be upon the author as well as all the readers. Peace and joy to you all.

Sivananda Ashram,
2-8-1987

Swami Chidananda

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This small book, written specially for the memorable occasion of Swami Sivananda's Birth Centenary, is the outcome of an inner urge. It is meant to serve as an introduction to those who are new to Swami Sivananda and his teachings. Its purpose is to arouse their interest in spiritual life in general and in the Divine Life chalked out by Swami Sivananda in particular.

While this handy book is not a substitute for one or more of the inspired volumes of the holy Master, it does contain within its pages enough material to enable the reader to start living the divine life straightaway.

This book, written in an absolutely simple style, is interspersed with quotations from the Master and carries stories and anecdotes to sustain reader interest. With these few words, I invite the reader to taste the book and derive pleasure and profit therefrom. May the benign grace of the holy Master Swami Sivananda be upon all readers of the book.

Shivananda Nagar,
August 1, 1987.

N. Ananthanarayanan

CONTENTS

PUBLISHERS' NOTE	iii
FOREWORD	iv
AUTHOR'S PREFACE.....	v
1. THE HUMAN QUEST	1
2. GOD, MAN AND THE UNIVERSE.....	4
3. HEALTH FIRST, GOD NEXT	7
4. FUNDAMENTALS OF YOGA SADHANA	11
5. FOR WHOM IS DIVINE LIFE ?.....	16
6. GOOD LIFE AND GOD-LIFE	19
7. THE ART OF KARMA YOGA.....	24
8. THE BHAKTI MARGA	28
9. PRACTICE OF MEDITATION.....	36
10. ON THE CULTIVATION OF BHAV	41
11. THE EGODECTOMY OPERATION.....	48
12. TO SUM UP.....	52

1. THE HUMAN QUEST

Swami Sivananda does not preach from a podium. He comes down to the level of the common man and asks him what he wants. Bang comes the reply: "Happiness!" Happiness is what everyone is after. From cradle to grave, it is the one ceaseless human quest. The new-born baby seeks comfort in its mother's bosom. The dying man seeks solace in a last look at his close relatives crowding round his cot. During their earthly sojourn, different people look for happiness in different places, but their goal is common.

Some call it happiness. Others call it peace. Sivananda sees everyone striving for it, each in his own way, but not getting it. Happiness, the most sought-after goal of all human endeavours, is also the most elusive. Worldly happiness is like the will-o'-the-wisp. Just as one seems to secure it, it eludes one's grasp. Even when secured, it does not last. It is fleeting. It is momentary. Not only that, it is invariably mixed with pain. Lasting happiness thus becomes a never-ending chase.

Why is this so? Sivananda says that it is because man searches for happiness in the wrong place. To illustrate his point, the Master tells a story:

"A simpleton was passing through a dark tunnel. A coin he was holding in his hand slipped down on the ground. He came out of the tunnel and started vigorously searching for it all over the place just outside the tunnel. People got curious. They questioned him. He said, 'I have lost my money. I am not able to find it, though I have been searching for it all day'. 'Where did you lose it?' asked a bystander. 'Inside that tunnel' came a reply. 'And why are you searching for it here?' asked the amazed friend. 'Because it is dark inside the tunnel and bright here!'"

"Who will not laugh at such foolishness?" asks Sivananda, "And yet, such truly is the case with numberless men and women today. They all want peace. They realise that they have lost it. They are frantically searching for it. But where? Where they are able to see. Not where it is, where they lost it!"

Peace lies in God. Happiness lies in God, from whom man has descended. When man separated from God, he lost his happiness. He can regain that happiness only when he returns to God. "Happiness comes when the individual merges in God," says holy Master Sivananda in his last sentence, dictated just three weeks before his Mahasamadhi. Once man is merged in God, there is no coming back to this world of woes.

Scriptures call it Ananda. Ananda is bliss of the Spirit. It is unmixed with pain. It is also eternal. What man really seeks and fails to obtain on this earth plane is this Ananda only. This Ananda, this bliss can be had only in God who is all-bliss.

Instead of searching for this bliss in God, man looks around for it in the world outside. And it is the wrong place in which to look for perpetual bliss. Because, the

WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

world is certainly not meant to be a place for enjoyment. It is meant to be a place for gaining experience. It is a place for action and evolution.

All the scriptures portray the world as an abode of misery. Krishna calls it “ephemeral, unhappy”. Sivananda sees it as a ball of fire. To him the whole world appears as a huge furnace wherein all living creatures are being roasted. This is not a matter for argument. This is a fact of experience. We see every day people all around suffering in a million ways. There is physical pain. There is mental anguish. There is emotional turmoil. No one is truly happy.

The poor man thinks of the rich man, with his wealth, bungalows and cars is happy. The millionaire thinks that the poor man is happy, since he has nothing in the world to worry about, no iron-safe to guard, no wealth to insure. But, in truth, real peace eludes both. It is neither in affluence nor in poverty. True happiness is hidden in Him.

What goes by the name of happiness in this world is a sensory feeling. Sivananda characterizes it as nervous titillation. “Worldly pleasures are like scratching for itching,” he says. And quite often, what man calls happiness is nothing but the removal of want, of misery. Man suffers from hunger. He eats and feels satisfied for the moment. It is but the removal of the misery of hunger. There is no positive happiness there. Man suffers from disease. The doctor cures him and there is a sigh of relief, of apparent happiness. But that happiness is nothing positive, nothing gainful. Examples can be multiplied.

Sivananda concedes that there is a grain of pleasure in sense objects, but hastens to point out that the pain mixed with it is of the size of a mountain. “Pleasure that is mixed with pain, fear and worry is no pleasure at all,” he says.

Unmixed happiness cannot be had in this world, because this is a world of Dwandwas or pairs of opposites. The world we live in is a world of pleasure and pain, heat and cold, smiles and tears, darkness and light, day and night. It is a world of black man and white man, of capitalist and communist, of rise and fall of civilizations, of war and peace. This two-sidedness is the very nature of the world we live in and there is no escape from it. It is only those who have no proper understanding of the nature of the world who expect pure joy from earthly objects.

Pure joy, pure bliss is to be had only in God. God is Dwandwatita. He is beyond the pairs of opposites. He is beyond pleasure and pain, gain and loss, good and bad, beauty and ugliness. He is Anandaghana. He is a mass of bliss. It is by attaining Him, and by attaining Him alone, that man can get everlasting bliss. He cannot get it in this world.

One may ask, “If happiness cannot be gained in this world, can we not perform the prescribed rituals and go to heaven and enjoy the rhythmic dance of Rambha and the melodious music of Menaka?”. Yes, it is possible. Celestial enjoyment is superior to earthly enjoyment. It is so much more subtle. But there is one difficulty. Enjoyment in

heaven cannot go on for ever. Heaven is only a Bhoga Bhumi. So is hell. Heaven and hell are just planes of enjoyment. They are planes where man is rewarded or punished for his actions done on earth. For Punya or merit, man is rewarded in heaven. For Papa or sin, he is punished in hell. Once the Punya or Papa is exhausted by enjoyment or suffering in heaven or hell, the Jiva is automatically returned to the earth. There is no such thing as eternal enjoyment in heaven or eternal damnation in hell. So, going to heaven is no permanent solution to man's problem of finding lasting happiness. Lasting happiness can be found only in God and God can be reached only from the earth. Earth only is the Karma Bhumi where man can do Sadhana, where man can do Tapasya that will take him to God and eternal bliss. He cannot do Sadhana in heaven. He can only enjoy in heaven for meritorious deeds already performed on earth.

So, the first thing that Sivananda would want us to remember is the fact that human birth is a most precious acquisition. It is a priceless gift of God, because it is only as a human being that one can strive for God-realisation. And having been born as a human being in this world, one should not lose that rarest of rare chances to work one's way onward, forward and Godward.

This life is precious. Time is precious. Life is nothing but energy spent in time. The time at the disposal of man is limited. Similarly, the energy at his disposal is limited. Waste of time is waste of life. Waste of energy is waste of life. At the same time, neither energy nor time is useful in itself. The energetic man who does not work and the weak man who cannot work are both as good as dead. An intelligent man should therefore conserve and utilize his time and energy in such a manner as would yield him the maximum spiritual benefit. Acute and constant awareness that with every passing breath our life is getting shortened, and thereby the opportunity given to us to realise God is getting more and more limited, is the key to speedy progress on the spiritual path.

Most people do not recognize the value of time till they hear the gates of death. The Master warns us that death exists side by side with birth. A baby is born. A moment passes; two moments pass; three, four. With each passing moment, the baby ages; its life is cut short and it is brought nearer its death. The march towards death begins with birth. Life is a relentless march from birth to death. It is relentless because time does not stop, the clock does not cease to tick. Time consumes life. No one can escape it. The period of time vouchsafed to us in this life is preordained as a result of our actions in previous births. It is impossible for anyone to alter the life span of an individual by so much as a split second. He who recognizes this fact is a wise man. For, he will so order his life that not a moment is wasted and every moment is well spent in Sadhana, is spiritual striving, in a thrust towards God.

2. GOD, MAN AND THE UNIVERSE

All right, but who is God? God is the very essence of man. He is the core of man. He is the innermost life-principle in man. The God in man is called Atman by the Hindu scriptures. So, anyone who wants lasting happiness should seek it within himself, in the Atman. Anyone who wants bliss should concentrate his mind on the God within, not on the world without.

Further questions arise. If bliss can be had only in God, what is this world? And then, if the core of man is God, what is man? What differentiates man and the world from God? The answer, says Sivananda, is simple. God only is. And man is God in disguise. This world is God in disguise. This world is only an appearance. Man is only an appearance. The whole creation is an appearance only, an appearance of God. Whereas, God is the reality. He is the only reality. He is the only truth. God alone is, everywhere and at all times.

But then, man, this world and all that we see in this seemingly limitless universe ... do they exist or not? Gaudapada would have us believe that they do not exist at all. That answer may be the ultimate truth from the standpoint of the realised sage. But to the layman, it can be maddening. Holy Master Sivananda is more considerate. He does not thrust high philosophy on us, all of a sudden. He does not want us to leap a jump beyond our capacity and break our legs. Rather, he would like us to climb the spiritual ladder step by step, stage by stage. Sivananda does not believe in spiritual revolution; he advocates spiritual evolution. So he says that this world is real to you as long as you live and move in it, as long as your feet are firmly planted on it. As long as your hunger has to be appeased and your thirst quenched, this world is very much real to you and you cannot afford to ignore it. If you ignore it, you will do so at your own peril.

Having said so much, the Master goes a step further and throws more light on the subject. He says that this world is not non-existent like the horns of a hare or the child of a barren woman. It is there for you to see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Something is there. But then, when you merge in God, when your mind ceases to be, when your individuality is lost, when you transcend world consciousness, when you reach the Samadhi state, then, for you, the world vanishes. Then, in that state, your eyes may be open, your ears may be open, you may be like any other person to all external appearances, but the world, including your body and your mind, no longer exists for you. You are gone and only the God in you remains. When you yourself are not there, how can there be the world? The world also is gone so far as you are concerned.

Sivananda gives an example. To the person who dreams in his bed, the lakes and the castles, the men and the women, and all the objects he sees in his dream are very much real as long as the dream lasts. If a small boy sees a tiger in his dream, he shivers and sweats. The tiger is very much real to him. You lose your purse in dream and feel miserable. You wake up and suddenly feel comforted that it was, after all, a dream. So,

when you wake up, you know, you realise, that it was after all only a non-existent myth. But, while you were in the state of dream, it all appeared undoubtedly real and true. The unreality of the dream world is exposed only on waking up. Likewise, says the Master, the unreality of the waking world is known only when you wake up from your spiritual slumber and enter the superconscious state of Samadhi.

In this way, the reality of the world depends upon the level of man's consciousness. The world is thus not an absolute reality, but a relative reality. The reality of the world is relative to the level of consciousness of the experiencer.

To the man in dream, the world is not real. To the man in deep sleep, the world is not real. To the man who is experiencing superconsciousness, the world is not real. The world is real only to the man who is in the waking state of world consciousness.

The next logical question is: what is it that determines the level of man's consciousness? It is the mind in its various states or the absence of the mind altogether. When the mind in man shines, the God in him is shrouded and not seen. When the mind in man dies, the God in him shines. Thus, it is the mind that separates man from God. God plus mind is man. Man minus mind is God. That is the spiritual equation.

One fine morning, Swami Sivananda was seated in his office, surrounded by devotees. There was a sharp noise and everyone turned around. A disciple who was serving coffee to the assembled gathering had dropped a porcelain cup and it had broken into bits. Exclaimed Sivananda, with a broad smile on his face: "in the beginning there was One. And the One became many!" The devotees enjoyed the wisdom in Swamiji's humour.

The Vedas declare that God alone was there in the beginning. And that God willed: "I am alone. May I become many". And all this world of multitude came into being, like a single flame bursting into a thousand and one sparks or the ocean spilling into myriad waves, spray, foam and droplets.

One may ask: "How is it possible for one God to become many?" It is possible because of His inherent power of Maya. What is inherent power? To cite one or two examples. Fire has the inherent power to burn. Ice has the inherent power to cool. We cannot separate fire from heat or ice from coolness. Even so, we cannot separate God from His power of Maya. And what is Maya? Maya is that inscrutable power that makes non-existent things appear existent. It is that power which turns one God into myriad men and mice, angels and devils, planets and pebbles. God only is. Men and mice are not. Planets and pebbles are not. But they seem to be. How? By Maya's power. In this way, God, by His power or Shakti called Maya, acts the drama of this world for His own sport or Lila, as the scriptures put it.

There is nothing apart from fire. The flame is fire. The sparks are fire too. There is nothing apart from water. The ocean is water. The foam is water. The surf, the waves and the droplets are water too. Everything is water and water only.

Similarly, there is nothing apart from God. All that there is is God only. God, man and the universe are not three different categories. They belong to one and the same category. It is all pure consciousness only. Sivananda says that the world is the dazzling of Brahman-consciousness. But it appears different and manifold when seen through the mind. Seen through the eye of intuition, the same world vanishes, leaving behind an all-full God-consciousness. Pure consciousness, pure awareness, God, Brahman, Atman—the layman should not get puzzled or confused by all these terms, by all this jargon. It is all the same. Jargon is inevitable when efforts are made to describe the indescribable, to define the indefinable.

God is beyond definition, beyond description. God defined is God denied. The only definition of God is that He is beyond definition. Says the Master: “There is no paper on which to write the nature of Truth. There is no pen which can dare to write It. There is no person living who can express It. It merely is everything that is and there ends the matter. Every effort to express Its nature is trying to kill Its greatness”.

Mind is the instrument we use to understand this world, to move about in this world, to function in this world, to live our worldly life. But, God is beyond the reach of the mind. He cannot be understood by the mind. The mind is incapable of comprehending God. The mind is an instrument fashioned by God’s illusory Power Maya to delude the individual soul into believing that He is mere man and not God.

Now, the human mind has its limitations. It is an instrument, which can function only within the limits or confines or framework of time, space and causation. Anything, to be comprehended by the mind, should fall within these three categories. All creation is within these three categories. But, God is beyond these three categories of time, space and causation. God is timeless. He is eternal. He is beyond past, present and future. He is eternity itself. Similarly, He is beyond space. He is everywhere. He is like a circle with its centre everywhere and circumference nowhere. God is infinity itself. Lastly, God is beyond causation. No one caused God to come into being. He is being itself. He is self-existent. He is Svayambhu.

The mind, an instrument that is designed to function within the time-space-causation nexus, cannot comprehend God who is beyond that nexus. To comprehend God, one must use an instrument that can go beyond time, space and causation. That instrument is intuition.

Intuition is gained by transcending the mind. By Sadhana or spiritual effort, the mind must be gradually purified or thinned out and made more and more subtle. In the final stage, the thinned-out mind must be obliterated. When that is done, intuition dawns and man slips into the realm of transcendental God-consciousness. We say

‘transcendental’, because then the mind is transcended, the world consciousness is transcended. In the same way as man wakes up from the world of dream consciousness into the world of waking consciousness, in Samadhi, man wakes up from the illusion of world consciousness into the reality of God-consciousness.

3. HEALTH FIRST, GOD NEXT

If God-realisation is the only option open to man to gain unalloyed bliss, where exactly does he start his spiritual pilgrimage?

Certain basic factors have to be taken care of by the Sadhak or spiritual seeker. The foremost of these is health. “God first, the world next, if at all you want the world” says Swami Sivananda in one of his messages. It may be said with equal validity, “Health first, God next, if at all you want God”. Fundamental to all spiritual Sadhana is health. Without health no Sadhana is possible and without Sadhana there can be no Siddhi.

“Strengthen the body,” says Sivananda, “and then do spiritual Sadhana”. He goes on to add, “Bodily mortification alone cannot lead to enlightenment without the calming of the passions and discipline of the mind. Just as striking at an anthill will not destroy the snake within, so also, no amount of bodily torture can kill the mind within.”

It is wrong to say that religion prescribes bodily torture. Religion does no such thing. On the contrary Sri Krishna tells Arjuna, “Do not torture the body and Me who reside therein.” Sivananda describes the human body as the moving temple of God and as the chariot of the Soul. It should be kept clean, internally by Brahmacharya and externally by daily bath. The body is the instrument for Sadhana and it should be maintained in excellent condition always. The Master likens the body to a horse that will take the spiritual seeker to the goal. The horse must be given its food and kept strong and healthy.

How to do this? Swamiji remarks good-humouredly, “Dr. Diet, Dr. Quiet and Dr. Cheer.” He emphasizes that health is not just absence of disease, but a positive state brimming with joy and vitality. He advises the seeker to tone up his health to peak form by taking recourse to Yogasanas, Pranayama, light Sattvic food, moderate sleep, moderate exercise, occasional fasting and a cheerful temperament.

Yogasanas and Pranayama bestow bodily vigour, mental alertness and spiritual tranquillity. By preventing the early ossification of bones and by keeping the spine elastic and supple, Yogasanas delay the setting in of old age. Asanas and Pranayama destroy lethargy and promote an agile body and an alert mind. They make the breath flow harmoniously. Harmonious flow of breath is the basis of sound health and a sure insurance against all disease. Asanas and Pranayama are also spiritually beneficial.

WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

Asanas may be supplemented by some all-round exercise such as walking or swimming; but Swamiji points out and with good reason too, that no amount of exercise can ever be a substitute for Asanas. This is because Yogasanas vitalize and tone up the all-too-important ductless glands within the body, while physical exercises nourish only the superficial muscles.

It is important, therefore, that Asanas and exercises are not combined. The practice of both in quick succession would mean that neither the vital glands nor the outer muscles would be nourished for a sufficiently long time with fresh blood. Therefore, if one is done in the morning, the other should be done in the evening. Morning is the ideal time for Yogasanas, which are best practiced on an empty stomach after clearing the bowel.

Ladies can benefit from Yogasanas as much as men, but in their case certain restrictions are to be observed during monthly periods and at the time of pregnancy. As for the sick and the weak, while some of the Asanas and Pranayama exercises may not be possible or even desirable in their case, others could be helpful. Asanas and Pranayama are wholly prohibited only for children below twelve.

The advanced Yogic postures and breathing techniques should be learnt only under the personal guidance of an adept, but the commoner varieties can be practiced even with the aid of a good book. A useful round of a few Yoga poses and breathing exercises would take just about fifteen minutes, which even a busy man or woman should be able to spare without much difficulty.

Each Asana has its own benefits. Sarvangasana, for instance, tones up the thyroid and helps to maintain youthfulness. Sirshasana increases blood supply to the pineal gland and develops brain power. Vajrasana removes drowsiness, strengthens the spine and helps digestion. Each pose has its own excellence. So is the case with the Pranayama exercises. Bhastrika generates heat in the body and helps digestion. Sitali cools the system and purifies the blood. Kapalabhati tones up the digestive system and improves appetite.

Diseases that defy medical treatment can be cured by suitable Yogic exercises combined with dietary control. Asanas are a powerful antidote to the wetdrems and spermatorrhoea of boys, the uterine and ovarian disorders of women, and the rheumatism, lumbago and other diseases of the aged. Asanas and Pranayama offer the cheapest and most natural form of preventive and curative medicine. They are learnt easily. No extended training is required. No elaborate apparatus need be bought. No gymnasium need be built. All that is required is a woolen blanket. The blanket conserves within the body the current of energy generated during Yoga practice and prevents it from leaking out.

The Yoga practitioner should be choosy about his diet. This is important, because it is the subtlest portion of our food that goes to form our mind and thus to shape our

thoughts and character. By being vigilant over the nature of the food that we take, we can exercise considerable influence over the moulding of our character.

Milk and milk products, as also fresh vegetables and fruits, are highly beneficial to Yoga practice. Honey is an excellent ready-made food which does not have to be digested further. Taken in, it enters the blood stream directly. Lemon juice and honey in a glass of water the first thing in the morning is a beautiful brain tonic. Numberless recipes of this kind are given in Swami Sivananda's health books.

Non-vegetarian diet is taboo for the Yoga student. It excites passion and renders the mind gross. It agitates the mind and makes it restless. Sivananda says that non-vegetarian diet may produce scientists and soldiers, but never a spiritual hero. From the ethical standpoint too, meat-eating is to be condemned, since it indirectly involves the eater in the butcher's violence. Meat-eating is also unhygienic, because the waste matter that is there in the bowel and in the kidneys of slaughtered animals enters into the cooked food. Moreover, the intense fear experienced by the goat or the fowl at the time of killing throws out poison in its system and this, along with the harmful venous blood, is consumed by the meat-eater with the meat of the slaughtered animal.

It is not as if all vegetarian food is good. Onions and garlic, says Swamiji, are worse than meat. Excess of mustard, tamarind, chillies, salt and asafoetida ruin health. So do tea, coffee, alcohol and all stimulating drinks. All these should be given up. As far as possible, fried food and heavily spiced food should also be kept at a distance. Eternal happiness demands that the temporary itching of the tongue should be checked.

Swami Sivananda suggests some simple dietary rules. A meal should not consist of too many items. Half the stomach should be filled with food, a quarter with water and the remaining portion left free for the expansion of gas. The breakfast should be light. The main meal should be taken about noon. The night meal should be finished at dusk and should be very light. Fruits and milk, or fruits alone, would be quite sufficient at night. The principle behind taking light, night food at an early hour is to allow sufficient time for it to be digested before retiring to bed. If the stomach feels light at the time of going to bed, sleep will be undisturbed and it will be easy to get up early.

Excessive eating wears out the digestive apparatus very quickly. It reduces longevity by taxing the system. Whereas, occasional fasting helps considerably in the maintenance of good health. The aspirant may fast for a day once a week or once a fortnight. Or he may at least live on just fruits and milk on specified days. Failing even this, night meals at least should be given up periodically. Occasional fasts are highly beneficial, because they give rest to the digestive apparatus and help to expel waste matter adhering to various corners.

Cheerfulness is basic to sound health. Cheerfulness is a tonic. The Sadhak should be cheerful always. The thoughts should not only be cheerful, but also clean, healthy, purifying and strength-giving. Weak thoughts and bad thoughts result in physical

ill-health. In fact, all diseases originate in unhealthy thoughts. It would be wrong for anyone to presume that Asanas and Yogic food alone will ensure a wonderful physique. No. A sound mind is a compulsory prerequisite for physical health and vigour.

A Yoga student should find no difficulty in getting good sleep. To further facilitate sound sleep, Swamiji recommends the reading of some inspiring spiritual literature for a short while before bed. That will act like a tranquilizer and induce sound sleep. Quality of sleep is more important than quantity. A sound sleep for two hours can be more refreshing than restless rolling in bed for eight hours and more. For the normal adult, Sivananda suggests a sleep schedule of six hours from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. He asks the spiritual aspirant to have his Japa Mala or rosary with him when he retires to bed—round his neck or in his pocket or underneath his pillow. If the sleep gets disturbed or if the aspirant is in the habit of waking up in the middle of the night, Swamiji asks him to tell his beads in order to induce sound sleep once again.

Radiant health can be secured only by living a life of moderation. Buddha advocated moderation. Sri Krishna said the same thing in the Gita. And Sivananda too stresses moderation. He points out: “Extreme indulgence wears you out; extreme austerity makes you a fanatic and leads to reaction. Overeating produces disease; and starvation weakens your system. Too much activity tires you; laziness makes you a walking corpse. Therefore, stick to the Path of the Golden Mean. That is the path through which men have become supermen and supermen have become God”.

The principle of the Golden Mean, then, is the key to success in Yoga. It is imperative that the spiritual seeker should walk the middle path if he is to keep moving forward. No extremes, but moderation. Moderation is the keynote of Sivananda’s theme song, “Eat a little, drink a little...” which he sang wherever he went during his epoch-making Indo-Ceylon tour of 1950.

Sadhana demands energy. Meditation consumes much energy. Therefore, the earnest seeker should conserve every ounce of available energy for being channelized in Sadhana. Generally, people waste a great deal of energy in useless talk and in unnecessary movements. Anger, fear and other negative emotions deplete energy. Sex activity drains energy. All activity consumes energy. Even when a person is just sitting pretty, energy flows out through the eyes to receive the visual impressions of external objects and energy flows out through the ears to receive the external sounds in the surrounding atmosphere. Conservation of energy is a topic on which Sivananda has written much. In this context, the practice of Brahmacharya assumes great importance. Swamiji recommends the life of single-blessedness to Sadhaks who have a strong will and a fiery resolve, but to the vast majority who opt for married life, he advises a dignified life of self-restraint and says that in their case, controlled enjoyment itself would amount to Brahmacharya.

The Master says that Brahmacharya is to the Yogi what electricity is to the bulb. People generally take Brahmacharya to mean abstinence from sex. The real meaning of

the word is much more comprehensive. Brahmacharya really means the Achara or conduct that leads to Brahman. In other words, it is the art of total self-restraint. It means mastery, not only of the sex impulse, but also of all the Indriyas. A true Brahmachari converts the sex energy into spiritual energy or Ojas, which is stored up in the brain and comes in handy at the time of meditation.

So, the golden guidelines to dynamic health are regular practice of Asanas and Pranayama, regular exercise Yogic diet, occasional fasting, moderate habits, a cheerful outlook, and last but not the least, conservation of energy. These and other secrets of abundant health are beautifully revealed in the eighteen autobiographical letters of Swami Sivananda known as “Siva Gita”. Says Swamiji: “I lead a simple, natural life. There is a fountain of youth in me. I beam with joy... I am very regular in doing Asanas. I do Pranayama also regularly. These give me wonderful health and energy... I observe fasting, resting, airing, bathing, breathing, exercising, sun-bathing and enjoy freedom, power, beauty, courage, poise and health”. Inspiring lines these, and educative too!

4. FUNDAMENTALS OF YOGA SADHANA

People have strange notions about Yoga and Yogis. Some think that a Yogi should be able to live on Neem leaves and cowdung. Others think that a Yogi must be able to live on air only. In the eyes of even some educated persons, getting buried under the ground for a certain number of hours is the same as Samadhi. And there are those who feel that a man is not a Yogi if he cannot levitate or if he cannot materialize some object out of thin air. Quite often, the higher the education the less the ability to understand spiritual truths.

When people with such bright and imaginative ideas are told that physical fitness is the first requisite for God-realisation, they may raise their eyebrows, because they are accustomed to visualize the Sadhu as a skeleton. And their surprise and their disappointment may increase when they are informed that next to health ethics is a sine qua non for spiritual life. Like Patanjali Maharshi, Swami Sivananda too lays the greatest stress on ethical discipline. In his teachings with reference to certain external observances of religion or ritual he may be elastic, he may be liberal. But, talk about fundamental and time-tested ethical canons, you cannot find a stricter disciplinarian than Swami Sivananda. His dictum in this respect is: “Be softer than butter where kindness is concerned, but be harder than steel where principles are at stake”.

In these days when the subject of Yoga has gained universal currency, there are any number of people who talk about Yoga and meditation. People hold classes for meditation. Meditation has become a fashion. It beats one’s imagination how anyone can suddenly take to meditation, which is the seventh stage, the penultimate stage, in the Ashtanga Yoga of Maharshi Patanjali. Before the stage of meditation is reached, six earlier stages have to be mastered. Yama and Niyama are the first two steps. Together they constitute the ethical training, the ethical discipline which lays the foundation for

Yoga practice. All vices have to be discarded. Virtues have to be cultivated. Cardinal virtues like Satyam, Ahimsa and Brahmacharya—truth, non-violence and celibacy—have to be perfected. It may take months and years to master just the first two steps of Yama and Niyama. Then comes control of the body through the practice of Yogasanas. After that comes control of Prana through the practice of Pranayama. The fifth step is Pratyahara or sense abstraction. The sixth is concentration. Meditation ranks seventh. Swami Sivananda lays the greatest emphasis on acquiring ethical soundness before proceeding to higher spiritual practices. Without a foundation, there can be no building and Swamiji's books like "Ethical Teachings", "Moral and Spiritual Regeneration of India" and "How to Cultivate Virtues and Eradicate Vices" tell the Yoga students how to lay the ethical foundation.

Sivananda points out how unintelligent seekers blunder in attempting to reach Samadhi through meditation as soon as they take to the spiritual path without caring a bit for ethical discipline. He states categorically that without ethics, meditation will be barren and fruitless.

Stressing that straightforwardness, truthfulness, non-violence, non-covetousness, absence of vanity and hypocrisy, absolute unselfishness, honesty, mercy, humility, respect and tender regard for life, and cosmic love are the fundamentals of morality, the Master declares that mere adherence to monogamy does not make one a moral man.

Where, then, does moral living start? Through dedication to ideal principles and maxims. "A moral man is he who is ever intent on annihilating his defects and weaknesses, who is endowed with good conduct and Sattvic disposition. Tolerance, absence of anger, greed and lust, unprovokable patience, meticulous consideration even for a child's sentiment, belief and emotion, imply morality" says the Master.

He continues: "Having sacred baths daily and worshipping at the shrines regularly, and attending or conducting Ramayan and Bhagavat Katha may, no doubt, aid one's spiritual aptitude, but if you do not fulfill the aforesaid conditions, all these would in no way help you to be a moral or a religious man or ensure Self-realisation. Therefore, please look to the fundamentals, first and foremost".

When fundamentals are not taken care of, the results can be anything but pleasing. Speaking to a gathering of disciples way back in 1945, the Master cited two real-life instances to show how years of Sadhana could end up in smoke if that Sadhana was not rooted in ethics and morality. The Master said:

"Once there was a learned man who had read the Vedas and who had emaciated his body through Tapas. A South Indian officer gave him shelter and food in his house. One day the officer found a small piece of blouse-cloth and a silver vessel missing. Where could they have gone? When the Pundit was away to the river for bath, the officer searched his belongings and found that the vessel and cloth were there. When questioned, the man flatly denied. The officer had to point out that his name was written on the

vessel. At once the man fell at the feet of the officer, and apologized. But his reputation in that village was gone. See, learning and Tapasya had not purified him. He could not get rid of his old Samskaras. There was no ethical culture. So also, as soon as you come out of your cave, the old Samskaras will come back to you with redoubled force. That is no use. One man went to the extent of doing some Tantric Kriyas to kill somebody so as to enable him to swallow some property. In this case, one of the victim's relatives was a firm believer in Ram Nam and she knew when the Tantric Kriyas were being performed. She went to the Tantric and said, 'Remember, I can counteract this effectively by my Ram Nam'. She did so and the man actually admitted that her power was too great for his Tantric Kriyas. He was a learned man, but had no ethical background. This ethical culture can be attained only through selfless service". It is obvious from the stories narrated by the Master that the importance of ethics for the spiritual seeker cannot be gainsaid.

Once health is taken care of and a strong ethical basis is laid, the spiritual aspirant must proceed to develop Viveka. Viveka is the faculty which discriminates the real from the unreal, the permanent from the fleeting, the good from the pleasant. The scriptures mention two paths from which man can choose—the Preyo Marga and the Sreyo Marga. The Preyo Marga or the Path of the Pleasant is what most people tread, whereas the Sreyo Marga or the Path of the Good is what the spiritual seekers try to tread. The pleasant path is alluring. In the beginning it is like nectar, but ultimately it leads to endless sorrow and suffering. The good path, on the other hand, may not be alluring. It may be even forbidding and difficult to tread in the beginning. One may have to undergo many trials and tribulations. But, ultimately, it leads to lasting bliss. All this is mentioned in the Gita as well as in Sivananda's writings.

Sivananda recommends Satsang or association with Mahatmas and study of Vedantic literature to develop Viveka. The seeker should be well established in Viveka, so that it does not fail him when it is most needed. The exercise of Viveka or the faculty of discrimination must become a habit with him. It must become second nature to him.

A prime qualification for spiritual life is Vairagya. Vairagya is dispassion or disgust for worldly life. Scriptures say that the Sadhak should have the same contempt and disgust for the pleasures of the three worlds as he would have for the refuse of a pig. This disgust should be lasting and based on a thoroughgoing analysis of the ephemeral and painful nature of worldly life and worldly objects. Only that Vairagya which is based on Viveka will be lasting. Momentary disgust arising from some personal tragedy or the loss of a dear one will not last. Once the sorrow is thinned out by efflux of time, the worldly attraction will creep into the mind once again. If a person launches himself on the spiritual path and starts doing Sadhana, without having Vairagya, it will be like filling water in a leaky pot. What he gains by Sadhana, he will lose through worldly activity. Sivananda gives another example. He cites the instance of a person who got into a boat at Mathura and went on putting the oars tirelessly the whole night in the fond hope of reaching Varanasi the next morning. But when it dawned, he was stupefied to find himself at the same spot where he had stepped into the boat the previous night. What was

the reason? He had forgotten to detach the boat from its mooring on the river bank. Such will be the fate of the person who starts his spiritual practices without first detaching his mind from the world of sense pleasures.

The mind must be detached from the world. This detachment is Vairagya. To induce this Vairagya in man, Sivananda, like Pattinathar and Bhartrihari before him, has written candidly and powerfully on the stinking nature of the human body, the uncertainty of life on earth, the basic selfishness of man and the perishability of worldly objects. His books, “How to Get Vairagya”, “Vairagya Mala” and “Necessity for Sannyas” are so powerful in their impact that those who read those books will not be the same persons again. Swamiji’s article, “Worldly Man, Wake Up!”, is a challenge to all materialists. In all these writings, Swamiji wants men and women to beware of Maya and her tricks and avoid a senseless pursuit of the philosophy of “Eat, Drink and Be Merry”. Swamiji does not condemn sex. He concedes that the sex urge is the most powerful urge in human life. At the same time, he warns against the disastrous consequences of unrestricted indulgence. He advises the spiritual seeker to sublimate the sex energy into spiritual energy and use it for the purpose of meditation. In his book, “Practice of Brahmacharya”, Sivananda deals at great length with the subject of sex sublimation. Swamiji’s advice and instructions are so thoroughly practical, detailed and minute that any person who is earnestly interested in the subject will find the book a God-sent boon.

A basic desideratum for success in any line, spiritual or material, is strong motivation. It is the possession of a powerful impelling desire. To a college girl who once sought the Master’s blessings to become a doctor, he urged, “Whip up the desire”. A desire, when whipped up to white heat, materializes in commensurate effort to gain the object of that desire. So, the spiritual desire has to be whipped up if action by way of Sadhana is to follow.

In Sanskrit, the desire for salvation is called Mumukshutva. This Mumukshutva has to be Teevra or intense if it is to bear fruit. There should be a great demand from within for God, for real peace. One should be spiritually hungry. The aspiration or yearning for liberation must be like an all-consuming fire. Then alone Sadhana will bear fruit. Then alone realisation will be possible. A dull type of yearning will make the aspirant static and he will remain the same old self even after twenty years of Sadhana.

What is intense yearning? Citing analogies, Swamiji says, “Suppose some dust falls in one’s eyes, the man will hurry up to wash his eyes and get rid of the dust. He will feel a great unrest till the dust is removed. He will forget everything of this world. His sole concern will be the removal of the dust from his eyes. Another analogy for Mumukshutva is that of the man under water. He will be struggling for breath. He will be desiring intensely to get out of the water so that he can breathe. Similar should be man’s aspiration to attain God-realisation. His mind should be exclusively occupied with that one desire to attain God-realisation. He should forget everything else. He should feel extremely restless and should pine for God-realisation. Such intense desire for God-realisation is called Mumukshutva”.

One last question has to be answered before a person can start his spiritual journey. It relates to the need for a Guru. The Master is emphatic on this point. He asserts that a Guru is a 'must' on the spiritual path. It may be fashionable for some to say that there is no need for a Guru, but in saying so, such people themselves become Gurus and founders of a no-Guru cult. When we require teachers to learn music and medicine, cooking and embroidery, wrestling and writing, how can we do without a teacher in the spiritual realm which is a closed door to most of us, where everything is a mystery? Only the Guru, a person who has trodden the path himself, can guide us aright. Only he can warn us of unseen dangers and pitfalls and take us along safe roads to God's kingdom. Scriptures tell us that Guru is God. Sivananda too asks the Sadhak to treat his Guru as God and obey him implicitly to reap the maximum spiritual benefit. He goes further and says that he who considers his Guru as a man is a beast.

There is no need for anyone to go hunting for a Guru. In the beginning stages of Sadhana, senior Sadhaks and books written by realised souls can help. Only in the advanced stages the personal guidance of a great Master may be felt necessary. Swamiji says that the Guru will himself come across one's life's path when the time is ripe for it and assures that competent disciples are never in want of competent Gurus.

Swami Sivananda did not preach for popularity. He spoke out the truth fearlessly, and in unmistakable terms when the need arose. Scattered over his voluminous writings one will find his scathing condemnation of the pseudo-Gurus and Yogic charlatans who roam the world cheating and exploiting a gullible public in diverse ways. While a genuine Yogi or a Sannyasin renounces Kamini, Kanchana and Kirti—lust, gold and fame and does Tapasya to realise God, these pseudo-Mahatmas, these daylight dupes, nurture secret desires to realise just those three things by deceiving the public through nefarious means. It is a measure of the importance that Swami Sivananda attaches to the subject that his writings thereupon run into scores of pages. In these he exposes the methods adopted by these fake Gurus. He has dwelt on the subject not so much to criticize these so-called Mahatmas as to warn the masses and educate them and save them from the clutches of these crooks in holy garb. But the layman will still ask: "Who is truly a holy man? How to identify one?".

Says the Master:

"If you are elevated in one's presence,
If You are inspired by his speeches,
If he is able to clear your doubts,
If he is free from greed, anger and lust,
If he is selfless loving and I-less,
You can take him as your Guru."

In this context, Swami Sivananda has a dig at some of the modern disciples too. He points out that Gurus also can complain that proper disciples are not to be found these days. And the Master describes how the present-day disciple comes to the Guru with

hands in pockets and with assumed airs. And what does he ask of the Guru? Not Self-realisation. He tells the Guru: "Make me a Guru". That is the modern disciple's very first request.

5. FOR WHOM IS DIVINE LIFE ?

Now, for whom is Yoga? For whom is divine life? To whom does Swami Sivananda direct his teaching or preaching? The answer is very simple. To everyone, everywhere. Because, everyone wants bliss. And divine life is the way to that bliss.

God is bliss. God resides within every man, woman and child, no matter what caste, creed, race, religion, colour, nationality, political persuasion, social or economic background the person may belong to. God is neither male nor female, neither Eastern nor Western, neither Aryan nor Dravidian. God is neither Christian nor Muslim, neither Hindu nor Buddhist. God is not the property of any individual or group, but rather the common indwelling essence or life-principle in everyone and everything, everywhere. And this God is to be realised by everyone. All are evolving or moving, albeit without their own knowledge, towards this common goal of realising their own true nature. That is what the scriptures say. And Yoga or divine life is nothing but conscious spiritual effort aimed at hastening this process of spiritual evolution.

When we talk about Yoga, certain popular misconceptions come to mind. Some think that religion is for retired people. There are others who feel that Yoga is for Sannyasins and hermits. Some are under the impression that to practice Yoga one should resort to solitary places and mountain caves, and there are those who say, "We are married. We have wife and children. What are we to do?". Sivananda dismisses all these notions as totally wrong. He points out that even in the case of the man who says "I have no time for God" or "I do not believe in God", the inner life-principle which keeps him alive and makes him talk like that is God only.

Contrary to popular thinking and belief, Swami Sivananda asserts that young age is the time when one should start the practice of Yoga, because in old age when eyesight fails and hearing gets impaired and the man totters with a stick, what scripture will he read? What Katha will he hear? On what Yogasan will he sit for meditation? If that old man should say, "I practice Yoga", it will only be a mockery. Sivananda urges everyone to offer a fresh flower to God, not a faded one.

One day the Master saw a gray-haired man who had come to stay in the Ashram for good. Swamiji enquired, "What is your age?". "Fifty" said the newcomer. "Why did you not come when you were young?" questioned the Master, "You have come here after squeezing out all your energy from the body just as one squeezes out all the paste from the collapsible tube in the course of many days' use". Swamiji's teaching is that youth is the best period for Sadhana and Sannyas.

There is a second reason why one should commence Sadhana in his youth. When one is young, the heart is pure. The mind is not tainted. It is not burdened with all sorts of worldly impressions. In old age it is difficult to do Sadhana successfully after having accumulated so much of worldly Samskaras by leading a worldly life for so many years. The Master likens the man who attempts to do Sadhana in old age, after spending the major part of his life in worldly activities, to “a cat starting on a pilgrimage after killing a hundred rats”.

To those who feel that spiritual life is the exclusive privilege or prerogative of Sadhus and Sannyasins, Swamiji’s answer is an emphatic “No”. He says that divine life is as much for the man with wife and children as for the celibate and the Sannyasin. “Married life, if lived in a perfect ideal manner, is no bar to the attainment of Mukti” declares the Master. He says that a good woman is to man what banks are to the river. She is the rhythm which leads him to Truth. Her love is God’s grace. In Swami Sivananda’s view, marriage is a sacrament and not a licence for sensual indulgence as some are wont to think. Marriage is a God-ordained holy alliance of two souls for the complete divinization of their nature through a well-ordered home life. In Swamiji’s view, Grihasthasrama is a strict life of selfless service, of Dharma pure and simple, of charity, goodness, kindness and all that is good and all that is helpful to humanity. The life of an ideal householder is as much rigid and difficult as the life of an ideal Sannyasin. And it is a safe rung in the ladder of evolution to Godhead.

Many have been the householder saints in the religious history of our sacred motherland—Tukaram, Thiruvalluvar, Eknath, Thayumanavar, to name but a few. Sivananda draws our attention to the case of Tukaram. He says: “Saint Tukaram was married twice and had children; yet he reached Vaikuntha in a Vimana or an aerial car!”.

Sannyasa is really a mental state. It is mental detachment. The shaven head and the ochre robe are just symbolic. They are not the essentials. To practice divine life, it is not necessary to shave the head or to grow a beard. It is not necessary to dye the cloth yellow, ochre or red. All these are unnecessary. These external manifestations have nothing to do with Yoga practice or the shining soul within. If shaving the head can turn one into a saint, all that is required is a sharp razor or some money for the barber and within a few minutes sainthood is yours. If dyeing the cloth can make one a Yogi, again one requires only a couple of rupees to buy the chemical powder sold in the shop.

Yoga is the inner process of conquering the mind and ultimately striking it dead. It has nothing to do with externals. And this Yoga or divine life is for all. Sivananda reiterates that all can and all should ever remember the Lord irrespective of time, place and circumstance. His famous song,

“Jis Halme Jis Deshme Jis Veshme Raho,
Radharamana, Radharamana, Radharamana Kaho
... ..”

makes this point abundantly clear. Freely translated into English, the song would run thus:

“Whatever be your condition,
Whatever be your country,
Whatever be your garb,
Say Radharamana! Radharamana! Radharamana!”

“Whatever be your work,
Whatever be your place,
Whatever be your village,
Say Radharamana! Radharamana! Radharamana!”

“Whatever be your company,
Whatever be your cloth-colour,
Whatever be your manner of living,
Say Radharamana! Radharamana! Radharamana!”

“Whatever be your Yoga,
Whatever be your disease,
Whatever be your enjoyment,
Say Radharamana! Radharamana! Radharamana!”

Wherever the spiritual seeker may be, whatever his personal circumstances may be, the Master asks him to take the Name of Radharamana, to take the Name of the Lord, always. To be good and to do good, to serve, love and, meditate, to sing the Name of the Lord and to remember Him, it is not at all necessary to retire to caves, jungles and mountain-tops. One can practice all these, no matter where one may be stationed. Divine life is for all. Divine life is universal.

Because divine life is universal, Sivananda does not find it necessary to ask anyone to change his religion. In his opinion, all religions point to the same goal and all prophets are true messengers of God. Just as different roads all lead to Rome, the different religions or different paths all lead to God. So, what Swamiji does is to ask people to follow, to practice, their own religion truly. He lays the emphasis on practice.

Says the Master: “The fundamentals of all religions are non-contradictory. Spiritual life is universal and hence the methods of Sadhana should be highly elastic, suitable to the followers of all faiths. For instance, when the aspirant is asked to repeat the Lord’s Name or practice meditation, he must be free to repeat Om, Sri Ram, Hail Jesus, Om Mani Padme Hum, any short kalma from the Koran, or any other Mantra in which he has absolute faith. So, too, about the practice of meditation. You can meditate

on any abstract formula or on the image of Krishna, Ramachandra, Jesus Christ, Tathagata or any saint. What is wanted is a sincere aspiration to grow in spirituality.”

There is one last misconception in the public mind that Sadhana is something to be reserved for special hours or special occasions and that spiritual life is divorced from normal worldly life. Sivananda rejects this contention outright and says that nothing can be farther from the truth. He says that man is not this physical body of flesh and blood, but he is the indwelling, immortal Spirit. Man’s life is really life in the spirit. Man’s life is nothing if it is not spiritual. So, the Master demands that man’s daily life itself should be given the spiritual orientation.

Sivananda repeatedly draws our attention to the spiritual nature of man’s being, the essential soul nature of man’s being and calls upon man to realise that he is the Atma, that he is the Soul, that he is not the fleshy body or the fictitious mind. He exhorts man to remember always, under all conditions, in every circumstance, the unalterable fact of Divinity of his being.

Declaring that man is spirit and not body, Swamiji proceeds to say that this fact is brought home to the spiritual seeker for the first time when, by accident, in advanced stages of meditation he separates from his physical body and gets into the astral plane. From the astral plane he is then able to see his own body sitting on the ground in meditative posture. It is then that he realises, for the first time, by personal experience, that he is spirit and not body. According to the holy Master, this marks a milestone in the life of the spiritual seeker and signifies his entry into the L.K.G. class of the School of Spirituality! Swamiji does not mince matters. He does not give false hopes. The spiritual journey is long and arduous. None but the brave may tread the spiritual path.

6. GOOD LIFE AND GOD-LIFE

An objector says, “Why should anyone bother about Guru, Viveka, Vairagya and Mumukshutva? After all, they say that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. I am happy as I am. Why do you want me to engage myself in all these spiritual exercises? Who knows if there is a God or not? Who knows if there is rebirth or not? I have my job and status, my lovely wife, beautiful bright children, flat, car—what have you? I have all that a man can possibly desire. I do not harm anyone. I do no evil. Why, I even do charity. Is that not sufficient?”.

An engineer once came to Swami Sivananda. First he asked Swamiji to give him a rational explanation for meditation. Then, after a little discussion, he said, “Well, Swamiji, I have another doubt. Can a man not lead a good, virtuous life, be charitable, truthful and noble, work for the welfare of the community and die a good man, without aspiring for anything beyond this life? He too will be completely satisfied with such a life!”. “A dog is completely satisfied with its life!” retorted the Master, “Is such a

satisfaction your goal? If you lead a virtuous life and die, you will die as a good man, not as a saint. You will not attain Moksha”.

There are many well-intentioned individuals who think somewhat on the lines of the engineer who met the Master. Essentially, they are good people. They are certainly superior to the rogues and cheats and scoundrels of this world. They follow certain ethical codes. They pass for respectable citizens.

On closer examination, however, it will be found that the so-called good people are often selfish individuals who are good to their own families and friends. Their heart is still constricted. They are still worldly people. They have some vague ideas about the life spiritual, but are afraid to take to the life spiritual. They have their fears about the sacrifices they will be called upon to make if they take to the spiritual path. They cannot reconcile themselves to thoughts of making charity, loving strangers and enemies, eating in moderation, practicing austerities, controlling anger and jealousy and things like that.

These men of little understanding—of meager spiritual wisdom—identify good life with a pleasant life. They are men of weak will who are unwilling to face the unpleasantness and rigours of a truly spiritual life. You can see these people all over the world, in all walks of life, in all religions. Some of them openly deny the existence of God, but mostly they affirm allegiance to formal religion, because they still have a lurking fear, a flickering conscience. Their inner conscience, the voice of God within them, is still not completely stifled, is not totally dead.

People who boast about their good life will generally be found to have transcended the beastly qualities in them, but that is only a beginning. They are still very much subject to the innumerable human foibles, failings, and likes and dislikes. They suffer still from human vices like anger, jealousy, lust, etc. Quite often they will justify their wrong actions by expressing a thought like this: “After all, I am human. In a fit of passion, I made that mistake” or “in a fit of anger, I committed that crime”. These good people have still to conquer the human vices in them and cultivate the divine virtues enumerated in the Gita.

Swami Sivananda wants man to understand the basic divide between worldly life and divine life. People who live the worldly life take the world to be real and God to be a vague something still to be proved. Whereas, followers of the divine life take God to be the only reality and the world to be a relative reality to be used as a stepping stone to Godhead and as a ground for spiritual evolution. Those who live the good life move on the periphery, whereas those who live the God-life try to move toward the Centre, the still point of the turning wheel.

Sivananda does not belittle good life. He concedes that good life is essential, that it is basic to God-life and commends it. He says that good life is to God-life what the foundation is to a building. The superstructure cannot be raised without the foundation. But, one should not rest content with laying the foundation.

In other words, good life is a 'must' for spiritual life, but a good life is not the whole of spiritual life. Goodness is not Godliness. Goodness is only the threshold to Godliness. Good life is lived at the level of the body and the mind, whereas God-life seeks to transcend body and mind and enter the realm of the spirit.

To men with a little power, to men deluded by a little wealth and happiness, Swamiji would say, "What is your happiness after all? There are kings and potentates far happier than you. Heavenly beings are far more happier than the happiest of human beings. But, all this happiness is fleeting. Once again you will be born on earth. Once again you will have to enjoy Sukha-Dukha. But God is absolute bliss, eternal bliss, everlasting bliss. Try to realise. Try to realise. Realisation only can free you from this endless cycle of happiness and misery, good and evil, smiles and tears, birth and death. Do not be moving around in shadowy circles, Get to the substance".

Sivananda knows that not many people will listen to his exhortation. He laments that despite his preaching for decades that man is not the body but the immortal Self, people continue to identify themselves with the body and continue to run after perishable sense objects. But, that is the power of Maya. God's veiling power of Maya deludes man into resting content with what Swamiji calls "a woman, a few ginger biscuits and some money". A man who is satisfied thus has no need for God. Even among the believers who go to temple, pray to God, ring the bell and tell the beads, the vast majority do so only to gain something from God, some worldly comfort, some earthly gain.

It is only when man gets into a situation where all his power and influence fail to solve his problems that he turns to God. It is total human helplessness that makes, man turn to a supernatural power for solace, for succour, for help, for relief. It is then that the light begins to burn in the Puja room, that flower garlands begin to deck the Lord's picture. Once the problem is solved to satisfaction, no more lights, no more garlands. Cobwebs gather around the Deity. It is like putting the car back into the garage after use. God, to these worldly people, is only a utility article. Be that as it may, it is only pain that generally turns man's mind towards God. That is why Swamiji says, "Pain is an eye-opener. Pain is a blessing in disguise". That is why Kunti prayed to Lord Krishna to give her pain always, lest she should forget Him at any time.

The poem, "Pitiable Rationalists" by the holy Master, illustrates this point beautifully:

“When a man is in affluence,
When he has a car, wife, bungalow,
And a decent position in society,
He says: 'I am a Rationalist; I am a Free Thinker'.
When he loses his job,
When he gets an incurable disease,
When his sons die,

When he has nothing to eat,
He says: 'O God, save me'.
He bends his rational body a bit now
Before the Sannyasins and saints.
He rolls the beads and repeats 'Ram, Ram'.
He starts study of Gita a little."

Man need not wait for some tragedy to strike before he will turn to God. If only he would sit up and ponder a little, exercise his Viveka a little, that Viveka or sense of discrimination would tell him that the peace which he is longing for and which he has failed to obtain in this world, can be had only in God. It would tell him further that to realise God, good life alone is not sufficient, but God-life is necessary, and absolutely so.

We have been through eighty four lakh Yonis or species of births. We have been, in the past, plants and trees, insects and birds, fish and crocodiles, snakes and centipedes, cows and monkeys. We have been through endless human births also. So we have in us the fish nature, the monkey nature, the cow nature, the snake nature and so on. We have to get over all these. We have to conquer our various vices, the chief of which are catalogued under six heads—Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha, Mada and Matsarya. Desire, anger, miserliness, infatuation, pride and jealousy and all their variations have to be conquered. If we do that, then we become good men. Swami Sivananda's universal teaching for everyone, everywhere is: "Be Good. Do good". First man should become a good person and then he should begin to do good to others. This will purify his mind, broaden his vision and make him large-hearted. The divine life or spiritual life or God-life that Swamiji advocates is nothing but a continuous process of mental purification through cultivation of virtues and eradication of vices. It is the mind which separates man from God. The gross mind must be progressively purified and made more and more subtle till the purification reaches a point where it becomes absolute and the thinned-out mind ceases to exist or vanishes, so to say. At that point, man becomes God.

This can be illustrated by an example. Take a petromax lamp. It is dazzling bright. Now, coat the shade with successive layers of paint of increasingly dark colours. Finally, paint it with coal-tar or some pitch-dark substance. Now, no light will be visible though the illumination is very much there inside. Man is just like this lamp. The God within man is the luminous Atman. He is dazzling bright all the time. He is there all the time, self-revealed by His own light. The endless mental impressions that man has gathered over innumerable births cover up that God with layers and layers of mental substance. So He is veiled completely, in the same way as the light in the petromax is hidden completely by the paints covering it. Scrape the paints patiently and slowly, layer by layer. As each layer is removed, the light within will be made visible more and more, better and better, and when the last layer of paint is removed, lo, the light stands fully revealed in all its brilliance. Similarly, as the subtle subconscious mental impressions are destroyed little by little through Japa, meditation and various other Yogic practices, the God within stands revealed more and more, and when the last traces of these impressions are destroyed, the God within, the Supreme Light within, stands completely self-revealed.

It has always been there and now it stands revealed in all its dazzling brilliance. Man becomes God-man.

So, it boils down to this. Man, if he is to realise God and attain supreme bliss, must purify his mind, must thin out his mind to the point where the mind ceases to exist. The method of effecting this purification is generally called Yoga. Now, the Yoga paths are many. There is Karma Yoga or the path of selfless service. There is Bhakti Yoga or the path of devotion. Then there is Raja Yoga or the path of mind control. There is Jnana Yoga more commonly known as Vedanta, the path of intellectual ratiocination. Then we have Mantra Yoga, Nada Yoga, Kundalini Yoga and many others. This categorization is for the purpose of easy understanding and practice. In truth, no Yoga is totally isolated from the rest. At some stage of practice, one merges into another, and ultimately, all Yogas converge on the final destination, viz., Samadhi or God-consciousness.

What Yoga does Sivananda advocate? Certain practices like Kundalini Yoga are beset with risks and dangers. Hatha Yoga is for the physically strong. Swami Sivananda does not consider it suitable for the physically weak modern man. Vedanta is too tough and requires a subtle, sharp intellect and a powerful will and is not for the masses. So, Swamiji recommends a judicious combination of the harmless and easy Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga together with elementary Hatha Yoga and a careful step by step practice of Raja Yoga. A basic knowledge of Vedanta should serve as the background for the practice of all this. Such combined practice is termed by Swamiji as the Yoga of Synthesis or just plain divine life. Nomenclature does not matter. What matters is an intelligent practice of different spiritual exercises which, put together, will develop the head, the heart and the hand of man, and take him fast on the road to spiritual perfection. Swamiji views with disfavour lop-sided or one-sided development. He is highly critical of pure Vedantins with a developed intellect, who will say that this world is a falsity and will not give a glass of water to a dying man. He is equally critical of narrow-minded fanatics in the other Yoga paths who look down with contempt on spiritual practices which they themselves do not follow.

The teaching of Swamiji Maharaj is: “Serve. Love. Meditate. Realise”. Selfless service to as many people as possible, in as many ways as possible, is Karma Yoga. Practice of cosmic love is Bhakti Yoga. Seeing God in everything, everywhere, just as Prahlada did, not hating anyone, but loving all—that is Bhakti Yoga, which leads one to cosmic love or Visva Prem. Mind control and meditation is Raja Yoga.

The simultaneous practice of all these Yogas ultimately leads to the realisation of God which is the goal of Sadhana. Selfless service, motiveless, egoless service done to others with the Bhav that the Lord resides in all, devotional exercises like Japa, Kirtan and prayer, Raja Yogic exercises like sense control, concentration and meditation—all these purify the mind. They are just different methods of effecting mental purification. Without giving rigid and standardized instructions to everyone, Swamiji suggests that each individual may choose his own set of spiritual exercises, may set his own priorities to suit his capacity, taste and temperament. One man may stress Bhakti practices; another

may not like Japa and Kirtan so much, but may plunge into selfless service most of the time. But Sivananda says that while one may give added weightage and preference to one particular Yoga, everyone should practice a little at least of all the three main Yogas—viz., Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Raja Yoga—for integral development. This is his teaching. He assures us that in this way the spiritual unfoldment of the practitioner will not only be integral, but also swift.

7. THE ART OF KARMA YOGA

The physical culturist exhorts, people to build the body beautiful so that they may enjoy life to the full. Sivananda, on the other hand, considers the body as an instrument provided by God for the service of His creation and advocates the perfection of the instrument so that it may be used more efficiently in Sadhana and Seva. In his view, the bodily instrument, perfected through Asanas, Pranayama, Yogic diet and so on should be utilized day and night in the service of God's children.

Service purifies. Just as gold is purified in fire, the human heart must be purified in the fire of service. Service gives strength. The feeling that one is able to be of even a little help to a fellow creature gives immense strength and hope and satisfaction which cannot be bought for money. Service helps to develop virtues like sympathy and compassion. It instills a sense of cosmic oneness and brotherhood in the person who engages in service.

The exact form that service should assume depends upon the talents, aptitude and circumstances of the individual. Man's duty in this world is to do his Svadharma. This is the Lord's teaching in the Gita. What is Svadharma? Svadharma is the Dharma or duty which falls to one's lot. "God has a Master Plan" says Swami Sivananda, "We have our parts to play". The part that each one has to play on the world arena in the cosmic drama should be enacted truly and well. This is Svadharma; this is duty. We are asked to do our duty, no matter how big or how insignificant, to the best of our ability, leaving the results in the hands of God.

A question would arise as to how to know the part that one has to play. The Master says that without exception God has endowed each human being with one special talent or the other. He advises people to do self-examination and find out their own special talents and exercise those talents not only for furthering their own interests in life, but also for benefiting humanity as a whole. This is what the Master means by the word 'Serve'.

Service, to deserve the name of Karma Yoga, must satisfy a number of requirements. First of all, it, must be selfless. Service must not be done to gain name and fame or power and prestige. There should be no motive behind service, which must be rendered for its own sake. Otherwise, it will not form Karma Yoga. Swamiji says that a Karma Yogi should not expect even a thanks when he renders help of any kind.

And then, the person who serves should not entertain the feeling of “I do this” or “I do that”. He should rather feel that the real doer is God only and that it is He who does the work through him. Man is but an instrument in the hands of God. Man is but a tool fashioned by the Creator for His own Lila or sport. So, the credit for the good work belongs to God and is not to be appropriated by man. That is one point. The other is that the Karma Yogi should not entertain any anxiety regarding the outcome of whatever activity he may be engaged in. “Action is thy duty, fruit is not thy concern” that is the slogan for the Karma Yogi. Lastly, the work done and the fruits thereof should be surrendered with love and humility at the lotus feet of the Lord. If all the fore going considerations are satisfied, then it is truly Karma Yoga which will instantly purify the Antahkarana of the person engaged therein.

Swamiji Maharaj gives detailed clues as to how each individual can help himself and help the world also to the maximum possible extent. He gives the clarion call:

“See God in the poor.
Behold the Lord in the downtrodden,
In the naked,
In the hungry,
In the homeless,
In the sick,
In the distressed and the afflicted.
Burn your incense, wave your lights,
Offer your flowers,
In the form of cloth, food, medicine,
Education and shelter.
Nurse the sick with Atma-Bhav.
Serve the poor with Divine Bhav.
Educate the illiterate.
Run up to the villages and the slums.
This will purify your heart,
This will lead to the descent of divine grace.
This will lead you to God-realisation.”

There is an almost limitless field for selfless service. The only limit is the Sadhak’s own resources. The Master would like us to aggressively seek out those who are likely to be in need of our service, instead of passively waiting in our own place for people to come and approach us for our service. Service should be done wholeheartedly and with meticulous attention to detail. All this is necessary because in the light of Karma Yoga, the Karma Yogi is engaged not in service to man, but in service to the God in man. Are you a teacher giving free tuition to poor children outside your own school hours? Or, are you a doctor extending free medical aid to poor people in the villages during your holidays? If you are a genuine Karma Yogi, you will not view your service as service rendered unto man, but will rather view it as worship offered to the Lord.

There is a saying, “Manava Seva, Madhava Seva”. It means that service of man is worship of God. In this way, Sivananda wants everyone to serve others looking at the others as God in embodied form. Everywhere in Sivananda’s teaching you will find his emphasis on keeping up this Bhav that everyone and everything is indwelt by the Lord. Even if you are serving your own wife or father or mother, you should see God in those people and do the service. Then only will you derive the maximum spiritual benefit.

Sivananda administers a warning also. He cautions that in the name of service one should not go about disturbing the peace of other people and hurting the feelings of other people in ever so small a measure. The Karma Yogi should be sensitive to the feelings of others. He should be considerate. Service should be unostentatious. Service should be self-effacing. And the Karma Yogi should not make a distinction between superior kinds of service and inferior kinds of service. There is no superior and inferior in the realm of the Spirit. God will be more pleased with a scavenger who does his daily round of duties with meticulous care than with an arrogant ruler who discharges his duties with callous indifference.

Holy Master Sivananda delighted in doing service to others without the beneficiaries being even aware of who had done that service to them. During his days of Tapascharya on the Swargashram side of the holy river Ganga near Rishikesh, he used to enter the small cottages of aged Mahatmas and invalid Sadhus when they were not in their Kutirs, when they had gone out for bath or Bhiksha, and clean and sweep the floor, and fill their mud-pots with water, and come away quietly. That was his ideal of service.

Doctors have a ready field of service, because the world abounds in sick people. Swamiji advises the spiritual aspirant, even if he is not a doctor, to learn first-aid and homeopathy so as to be of help to the sick and the suffering.

Rich people can distribute food, clothes and medicines among the needy. Literate persons can teach illiterate fellow-beings and educate them. That is also great service. Spreading of spiritual knowledge and Bhakti among the people is first-rate service. Such service helps to transform human beings into divinities on earth. As Sivananda rightly points out, “If you give food to a poor man, he again wants food when he becomes hungry. The best form of charity is Vidya-Dana, imparting wisdom. Wisdom removes ignorance, the cause for taking a body, and destroys in toto all sorts of miseries and suffering for ever”.

Service and charity are not very different. Swamiji advises everyone to spend a tenth of income in charity, no matter what the income is. This leaves no scope for anyone to hide himself under the plea, my income is so small and my family is so large. We ourselves do not have enough to eat. How can I do charity?”. The income may be small and insufficient, but one tenth of that income should be given away in charity. Charity is an act of sacrifice.

WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

It is not only the giving of riches that is charity. As Sivananda puts it, “Every good act is charity. Giving water to the thirsty is charity. An encouraging word to a man in distress is charity. Giving a little medicine to the poor sick man is charity. Removing a thorn or a glass-piece on the road is charity ... To be kind and loving is charity. To forget and forgive some harm done to you is charity”. Charity therefore is not the monopoly of the wealthy few, but is the privilege of all.

Charity is the secret of a full life. Without charity, without selfless service, life will not be worth living. Says the Master: “You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give. Always give, give, give. This is the secret of abundance and divine life”.

It is natural that charity begins at home, but if happiness is the goal, charity should not end at home. The Sadhak should extend his field of service from his home to his neighbourhood, from his neighbourhood to his village or town, from his town to his district and so on till he loses all feeling of isolation and embraces all creation in a supreme bond of God-love.

Swamiji calls upon the spiritual seeker to share with others what he has—physical, mental, moral and spiritual. And he points out the benefits of such sharing. In sharing, there is joy and peace. Sharing generates cosmic love. It destroys greed. It removes selfishness and creates selflessness. Sharing purifies the heart. Sharing develops oneness.

Swami Sivananda himself shared what he had with others. Money, clothes and blankets, books, food—all these were generously distributed by him to needy people. However, it was not the items which he gave away that made him look great, but it was the largeness of his heart.

During the annual birthday festivities in the Ashram, it was always a sight to see the Master give Laddus to the devotees with a face beaming with joy and satisfaction. Someone would carry a basket of Laddus and walk with him and Swamiji would dip his hands into the basket and then greet people one by one with both palms bulging with Laddus. He must always give in abundance. One day the Ashram office was crowded with devotees. A visitor offered Swamiji some “Thirattippal”, a South Indian milk dish. The Master’s aide started distributing it to those who were assembled. Sivananda watched him for a while, and unable to bear it, called out, “Oh, what are you doing? Taking a wee bit with your nails and offering it to the devotees? Bring that here!”. Swamiji took the cup from him and gave generous helpings to three or four people and it was all over. No doubt, disappointment was writ large on the faces of those who were left out. But, lo, soon another visitor came bringing a large quantity of some other sweet and the master called out, “Those who did not receive ‘Thirattippal’, put out your hands now!” and he gave them large quantities of the new sweet. The heart!

“God loves a cheerful giver”—says the Master, “He also loves a giver of cheerfulness”. By personal example, Swamiji taught that happiness came to those who made others happy. If he found a poverty stricken ice-cream vendor by the roadside, he would buy the entire lot to the great joy of the vendor and distribute it all amongst his devotees. If he saw an animal tamer with a monkey or a bear, he would ask the man to stage a show and pay him generously, making him happy and making the onlookers also happy.

Sivananda warns that without service, the spiritual seeker cannot have success in Vedanta, Raja Yoga and Bhakti, because he would then become selfish, self-centered, egoistic and, conceited. On the other hand, the Master gives the assurance that little acts of kindness and little deeds of love will pave a long way to reach the abode of immortal bliss. The seeker should do at least one good action a day. If possible, he should serve any social institution for one hour daily without any remuneration. “The more the energy you spend in elevating and serving others; the more the divine energy that will flow to you” declares the Master and urges the seeker to involve the power of God, in order to harness it for the service of man.

Each night, in the Ashram Satsangh, Sivananda led solemn prayers invoking the power of God on behalf of devotees caught up in diverse problems. Besides, he often prayed for those who were the victims of a rail disaster here or an earthquake there. Finally, and without fail, he prayed for the whole world at large. In this way, both by precept and by personal example, Swami Sivananda taught that selfless service was, indeed, the royal road to the Kingdom of God.

8. THE BHAKTI MARGA

God, without attributes, without name and form, is incomprehensible to the human mind. Therefore man has perforce to worship God in manifested form. What are called gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon are nothing more than manifested forms of the one Supreme Brahman. These manifested forms are called angels in other religions. They are Devatas. It is therefore wrong to say that Hinduism has many Gods. No religion, be it Hinduism or any other religion preaches more than one God. God is absolute and there cannot be two absolutes. It would falsify logic.

In the Bhakti Marga, the devotee worships one or the other of the many Devatas. He communes with the object of his devotion in various ways. As he evolves, he gets closer and closer to his Ishta Devata or tutelary Deity and ultimately comes face to face with It.

There is a certain difficulty here. Some people are genuinely puzzled. They ask, “How are we to love a Deity whom we have not seen, whom we have not known? Is it possible?”. It is a very pertinent question. But that question is answered by Sivananda in a gem of a poem:

“Study Ramayana,
Bow to Sri Rama,
Worship Sri Rama,
Do Japa of Sri Rama,
Remember Sri Rama,
Sing Sri Rama,
Praise Sri Rama,
Serve Sri Rama,
Meditate on Sri Rama,
You will have vision of Sri Rama.”

If the Sadhak does all that he is asked to do, the Master assures that he will not only develop devotion, but will soon have Darshan also of the Lord. A devotee of Lord Rama should study not only Ramayana, but also the lives of Rama Bhaktas like Thyagaraja, Tulsidas, Samarth Ramdas and Bhadrachalam Ramdas. He should do daily Puja to Sri Ram in his own home. He should celebrate festivals like Sri Rama Navami. He should visit places of Pilgrimage associated with Lord Rama like Ayodhya, Chitrakut and Sethu. He should repeat the Rama Mantra and sing Rama Nama Dhwani. He should serve the devotees of Lord Rama. He should ever remember Rama and see Rama in everyone and in everything. He should do total self-surrender to Lord Rama and live to do Lord Rama's will. If he does all these, there is no doubt that soon he will become a Rama-premi or a devotee of Lord Rama.

The poem offered by Sivananda details the technique of developing devotion. The Ishta Devata may be anything. The technique is the same. A Person wanting to develop devotion towards Lord Siva, for instance, should do Siva Puja, observe Paradosha Vrata and keep vigil on Maha Sivaratri. He should study Siva Purana and the lives of the Sixty-three Nayanmars of the South and other Siva Bhaktas. He should repeat the Panchakshari Mantra and visit Kedarnath, Kasi, Rameswaram. Similarly, those whose heart is inclined towards Krishna should read the Srimad Bhagavata, repeat “Om Namoh Bhagavate Vasudevaya” and visit Dwaraka, Mathura, Brindavan. They should read the stories of Mira, Gauranga and other Krishna Bhaktas and feel inspired. They should observe Ekadasi Vrata and celebrate Janmashtami with night-long Bhajan and Sankirtan Devotion towards other Deities should be developed likewise.

Even among the many Bhakti practices advocated by Swami Sivananda, Japa Sadhana stands foremost. The aspirant is asked to choose his Ishta Devata and then take to the recitation of the corresponding Mantra, called Ishta Mantra. Initiation into the Ishta Mantra, known as Mantra Diksha, marks the entry into systematic spiritual life. Japa is a Sadhana which is easy, safe, positively beneficial and one which can be practiced by all. A sick man can do Japa as much as a healthy person. A little child can do it as much as an old man or woman. Hindu, Christian, Buddhist—all can recite the Lord's Name. Apart from the Ishta Mantra meant for all-round progress and welfare, Swamiji recommends resort to particular Mantras to solve specific problems.

For speedy spiritual evolution, the aspirant should stick to one Mantra and one Devata. It is like digging a deep well in one place to strike water. The choice of a Deity is a matter of personal predilection, but where there is no pronounced preference for a particular Deity, Sivananda offers two suggestions. Firstly, if a person has the correct horoscope or knows the exact time of his birth, he can ask a good astrologer to fix his Deity from the planetary positions at the time of his birth. The other clue to one's Ishta Devata is given by the names usually uttered by a person at times of shock such as a scorpion sting. When there is a sudden shock, one man may cry, "Rama! Rama!". Another may scream, "Krishna! Krishna!" or "Siva, Siva!". Such instinctive reaction would tell a person what Deity should be chosen in his case.

There are three ways of doing Japa—loud repetition, repetition in a whisper and silent mental repetition. Then there is what the Master calls Likhit Japa or repetitive writing of the Lord's Name. The Ishta Mantra is written over and over again in a notebook, one below the other, the eyes following the writing of the nib and the ears mentally tuned to the sound-form of the Mantra even as it is written. Likhit Japa thus becomes a powerful aid in the development of concentration as well.

The benefits of Japa are incalculable, Japa purifies the mind rapidly. The Names of God are words of power. They have high potency. Ceaseless repetition of these words of power cut new channels of wisdom in the mind. Says the Master: "A Mantra is Divinity encased within a sound structure ... The repetition of a Mantra has the mysterious power of bringing about the manifestation of the Divinity, just as the splitting of an atom manifests the tremendous forces latent in it."

Japa is easy to practice. While minimum external cleanliness should be observed for loud repetition and repetition in a whisper, mental Japa can be performed anywhere by anyone under any circumstance. In fact, mental Japa is the easiest Sadhana, and a very potent Sadhana too, available to man living in the turmoil of the space age, be he in the skyscraper apartments of dizzy New York or be he in the silent solitude of the sylvan Himalayas. Mental Japa can be done in the office and in the battlefield. It can be done while waiting for a bus and during intervals in conversation. With some practice, it can be done even while engaged in other work. After prolonged practice, it becomes a sort of second nature to the practitioner. His mind will be repeating the Mantra subconsciously even while sleeping. Thus repeated, the Mantra builds an impregnable fortress round the aspirant and protects him from many dangers and guides him through many pitfalls in life.

Japa is a success secret. There are Mantras for drawing the grace of particular Deities, for gaining specific objects. Do you want to get married? Repeat the Katyayani Mantra. Do you want to be blessed with children? Intone the Santana Gopala Mantra. Do you want health and long life? Take to the repetition of the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra. Or, do you want to improve your eyesight? Repeat the twelve Names of the Sun-God and recite the Aditya Hridaya. State your problem and there is a Mantra to

solve it. Mantra Japa is an exact science—make no mistake about it. To achieve specific ends, however, Japa should be done according to certain Vidhis or prescribed rules. The interested reader will find a wealth of detail in Swami Sivananda's "Japa Yoga".

A word about initiation. During Mantra Diksha or initiation, the Guru transfers some of his own spiritual power to the seeker and this helps the latter initially to go ahead with the Japa practice. Initiation gives a boost to the seeker, but one need not wait for Mantra initiation in order to start practice of Japa. A person can start on his own. Later on, if he happens to come across a suitable Guru, he can take initiation into the same Mantra.

Like Japa, Kirtan is an easy means to commune with God. It is a wonderful aid to develop peace of mind. Music soothes the agitated mind. Music purifies. Music uplifts. Music ennobles. Singing the Lord's praise helps to develop humility and self-surrender. It helps to relieve the tedium of meditation and other austere spiritual practices. Devotional music is conducive to spiritual upliftment. Sivananda affirms that God can be reached through music alone.

The occasion was a special Satsangh in the Ashram to bid farewell to a renowned Sankirtanist, Swami Narayan Maharaj of Khela, who was leaving after a few weeks' stay. Swami Sivananda paid rich tributes to the honoured guest and pointed out how he radiated joy and strength while doing Sankirtan. And then he said:

"In this Kali Yuga, Vedantic realisation and Kundalini Yoga are more of tall talk. They are not practicable for all ordinary aspirants. Vedanta demands gigantic will, deep enquiry and wonderful power of understanding and analysis. Very few possess these talents or faculties. For Kundalini Yoga, one needs great spiritual vigour, absolute Brahmacharya for awakening Kundalini and taking it through the Chakras to the Sahasrara. These are more in theory. Practice is rather difficult. So, in this Kali Yuga, in this Iron Age, Sankirtan Yoga is the easiest, safest, cheapest and surest way for attaining God-realisation. Kirtan and the practice of the formula 'Be good and do good'—this alone will give God-realisation. This alone can be practiced by the vast majority of persons ... You can study Kundalini Yoga and imagine that Kundalini is passing from Muladhara Chakra. It is some kind of nervous trouble. Do not mistake it for the awakening of the Kundalini Shakti. Do Kirtan. Kundalini awakens itself and others' Kundalini also awakens. Kundalini can be easily awakened by chanting Divine Nam, Guru Kripa, Guru Mantra, but of all these things Sankirtan Yoga is the best. Though Vedanta is good for talking and good for lectures, for a man of spiritual thirst, Nam is very pleasing. He likes Japa. Name strengthens. Nama is a great potential tonic."

Swami Sivananda himself was an ecstatic Sankirtanist. They called him Sankirtan Samrat. During his days of spiritual propaganda, Swamiji Maharaj used to organize mass singing of the Lord's Name wherever he went. He organized Lorry Kirtan, Boat Kirtan, Kirtan on Elephant Back. He led Kirtan processions through the streets of towns. He convened Sankirtan Sammelans. He organized Akhanda Kirtan or nonstop Kirtan for

days together. His was no mean contribution to the revival of the Sankirtan movement in India.

There is a personal factor to the Master's deep involvement in Sankirtan Prachar. He reveals the secret in his poem, "Teach Me Flute":

"You ordered me to do Kirtan
And to disseminate Kirtan-Bhakti.
I come before Thy presence, O Lord,
As a Sankirtanist.
I sing Maha Mantra daily;
I know Thou takest pleasure
In my singing;
I touch Thy lotus feet
Through the sound-wave of my Kirtan
..... " "

Lord Krishna was Sivananda's Ishta Devata and it would appear from the above lines that He Himself had directed Swamiji to spread Kirtan-Bhakti. No wonder that Sivananda laid so much stress on Sankirtan in his life and teachings. He wrote books like "Bhakti and Sankirtan" and "Music as Yoga". He saw to it that Kirtan constituted an essential item in every programme in the Ashram. He instituted Akhanda Kirtan of the Maha Mantra in the Ashram Bhajan Hall.

Swamiji is a great believer in group Kirtan. He says that when several people sit together and practice common meditation or sing the Names of the Lord, a huge spiritual current or Maha-shakti is generated. This purifies the atmosphere and the heart of the seekers. This elevates the seekers to sublime heights of divine ecstasy. More, these powerful spiritual vibrations are carried to distant places and they bring elevation of mind, solace, strength and peace to all people and work as invisible harbingers of peace, harmony and concord. Sivananda teaches that all family members, servants included, should sit together every evening and do Kirtan for a while. According to him, the Lord's Name is the answer to every problem, be it individual, social, national or international. In the last days of his physical sojourn on earth, talking to a group of persons assembled around him in a night Satsang, he said that Bhajan Mandalis should be started in every town, nay, in every Mohalla and that the Lord's Name should ring in the atmosphere everywhere, if peace and prosperity were to be ushered into the land.

In an inspiring message to the Lahore Sankirtan Mandal sent on the occasion of their Sankirtan Sammelan held in Shimla in, May, 1952, the Master summed up his views on Sankirtan. He exclaimed:

"By Sankirtan you invite the Lord to dance in the beautiful temple of your pure heart. By the very touch of the Lord's lotus feet your heart is made holy and divine. Before His lustre, ignorance vanishes. In His luminous presence, sin is dissolved into an

airy nothing. Where is Samsara for an ecstatic Sankirtanist? Where is death for one in whose heart the immortal Name has taken its abode?

“Glorious devotees of the Lord! Lose yourselves in His Name. Forget yourselves in His praise. Offer your heart at the glorious altar of His lotus feet. Keep not back a ray of your mind, a corner of your heart, an atom of your soul, from Him, the Lord of your being. He loves you all so much that He wants everything of you, your entire being. You cannot resist Him! Surrender yourself to Him. Enjoy the supreme felicity of union with Him. Radiate His Name to the entire globe, to the whole universe. Inject the elixir of the Name into the tired soul, the aching heart, the confused intellect and the deluded mind of your brother walking along the dark path of ignorance: this is your duty. Bring him, too, to the glorious path of devotion to Him and His Name. Then there would be heaven on earth and bliss in all human hearts.”

Prayer is another Bhakti Sadhana which Sivananda regularly practiced and preached. In prayer we requisition the ever-present, inexhaustible and never failing resources of the Almighty instead of depending upon our own frail human resources. But Swamiji warns that prayer, to be effective, must come from the heart and not just from the lips. The response to any prayer breathed in utter sincerity, humility and helplessness and in a spirit of true self-surrender is immediate. Says the Master: “The kitten mews and the cat runs to it and carries it away. Even so, the devotee cries and the Lord comes to his rescue.”

When we say that a particular prayer is not answered, either our whole heart, our whole being, is not behind the prayer or we have prayed without faith. Faith is the essence of prayer. All can pray. The poor man and the illiterate man can open up their heart to God as much as the rich man and the scholar. Sincerity and faith are the only requirements. Where there is devotion in the heart, little else is required. Sivananda assures us that this is so. Says he:

“The child does not know grammar and pronunciation:
It utters some sounds,
But the mother understands!
The Indian butler of a European officer
Is not a professor of English:
He talks some predicate-less sentences,
But the officer understands!
When others can understand the language of the heart,
What to say of the Antaryamin?
He knows what you wish to say!
Even if you make mistakes
In your prayers to Him,
Even if there are mistakes
In the Mantras you recite,
If you are sincere,

WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

If the prayer comes from your heart,
He listens to it,
Because He understands the language of your heart.”

God has always answered and will continue to answer the sincere prayers of devotees made in absolute self-surrender. There is no limit to the power of prayer. The power of prayer is the power of God. On the other hand, man can do very little. Worldly wisdom has its limitations. That is why Swamiji exhorts: “When the wisdom of politicians and social leaders fails, kneel down and pray; for, a pair of praying hands are mightier than rulers of state and winners of battle”. And he assures us that there, are no problems that cannot be solved by prayer, no suffering that cannot be allayed by prayer, no difficulties that cannot be surmounted by prayer and no evil that cannot be overcome by prayer.

Prayer establishes communion with God. Prayer invokes God’s grace. Prayer is an appeal from feeble man to the Almighty for succour and help. It is an expression of helplessness. It is an avowal of human inability. Prayer develops humility. It destroys the ego. It cleanses the heart and makes it a fit place for the descent of divine grace. Prayer elevates and inspires. The aspirant should pray always—in prosperity and in distress, in affluence and in misery.

What should man pray for? Not for worldly goods. Not for perishable pleasures. Not even for release from misery. Prayer does not mean approaching God with a begging bowl. Sivananda repeatedly cautions the aspirant to pray, not for worldly gains, but for wisdom and peace and strength to bear suffering. He advisedly tells us not to pray for the removal of suffering, but for strength and endurance to bear it. Whatever we are destined to suffer we have to suffer and it is no wisdom to postpone the opportunities for washing away old sins.

When we think of prayer, we think of pilgrimage. During his Sadhana days, Swami Sivananda made a selective pilgrimage to a few holy temples and some sacred Samadhisthans of saints. But, here too, he cautions that pilgrimage, if it is to have real meaning, must result in the spiritual seeker ending up as a better person after the pilgrimage than at the beginning thereof. Otherwise, the pilgrimage would be a mockery.

Speaking about the purpose of pilgrimage, the Master says:

“It gives the greatest scope for a periodical drastic flushing and overhauling of all worldliness and impure tendencies that accumulate in one through constantly living in a temporal atmosphere conditioned by materialism, greed, lust, delusion and grossness. It is necessary that you should empty the mind of all worldly thoughts and associations when you undertake a pilgrimage to a sacred place or shrine. Think not of your household affairs, the bank balance and business matters. Forget that you are a wealthy man, a high official or a social dignitary. Fill the mind with pure spiritual thoughts. Let it dwell on the Lord alone. The mind thus concentrated and purified will readily absorb the elevating

vibrations that emanate from the sacred presence of the Lord. The spiritual penance and meditation of countless sages who lived in the sacred regions of pilgrimage in the past have generated a powerful astral current there. That is why you should put yourself in contact with it through a prayerful attitude. You will become regenerated, revitalized and spiritualized.”

Pilgrimage should not be just another hiking and sightseeing trip. The pilgrim should remember God every waking moment of his pilgrimage by way of Japa or Kirtan or prayer or reading of the scriptures or Satsangh with Mahatmas. Should the pilgrim fall sick and cannot do any of these, even then he should remember God with every breath. The Master calls this Smarana Yoga or the Yoga of remembrance of the Lord. Even the man on his death-bed can practice this Yoga.

Somewhat akin to prayer and pilgrimage is another devotional practice which the Master likes to style as Namaskara Yoga. To practice this Yoga, one must have the understanding that God is everywhere, that God fills everything, that there is no place where God is not and that it is only God who has assumed the many forms that we see and the many names that we hear. With this understanding we are asked to salute almost anybody and everybody and anything and everything. It is not always necessary that we should bring our palms together to do this Namaskar. Suffice it that we salute mentally, keeping the proper Bhav within.

Swamiji was one day returning to his Kutir from the morning Satsang in the Ashram office. As usual, a few devotees followed him. Just then, Swamiji saw a Sannyasin prostrating before a householder devotee. Swamiji knew that that Sannyasin had for long been averse to prostrating before others. Seeing her prostrating before a householder, the Master asked her, “Why should a Sannyasin prostrate before a householder?”. She answered, “I found other Sannyasins prostrating before her”. The Master then advised, “There is no harm in prostrating before all, for all are manifestations of the Lord. I do prostrations even to cowdung, for everything is Brahman. Doing prostrations is by itself a Sadhana, Namaskara Sadhana. You should not think, ‘He is a thief, he is a wicked man’. The Lord Himself has said, ‘Dhyutam Chalayatam Asmi. I am the gambling of the cheat’. By doing prostrations, good health is acquired, life is prolonged. There was a Maharashtra saint who used to prostrate before asses and horses. Once he prostrated before a dead ass and the ass came back to life. Such is the power of Namaskara. You may not actually prostrate, but are you ready to do prostrations to pigs, bulls, asses? All are manifestations of God. So you should have the readiness to prostrate before all. There should not be any inner conflict. Your prostrations should be whole- hearted and sincere”.

There is one more Sadhana which the followers of the path of Bhakti—or, for that matter, of any other spiritual path—should practice without fail. That Sadhana is Svadhyaya.

Svadyaya is regular study of the Ramayana, the Bhagavata, the Devi Mahatmya and other soul-elevating scriptures. In the din and bustle of the modern world, it is impossible for anyone not to be influenced adversely by the powerful forces of materialism affecting one from all sides. These can easily make a man forget the valuable lessons he might have learnt by meeting a Mahatma or listening to a discourse or visiting a holy spot. To counteract this, it is important that he should remind himself every now and then and ever so often about the total worthlessness of worldly pleasures and the lasting glory of a life in God. It is here that Svadyaya or daily reading of spiritual literature has a definite role to play. Svadyaya should not be missed even a single day. More specifically, Sivananda recommends spiritual reading for half an hour just before retiring to bed, because he says that in this way the elevating spiritual thoughts will sink into the subconscious and take deep root during sleep.

Svadyaya has manifold advantages. The Master summarizes them beautifully. He says: “When you study the sacred books, you are in tune with the authors who are realised souls. You draw inspiration and become ecstatic. Svadyaya clears doubts. It strengthens the flickering faith. It induces aspiration or strong yearning for liberation. It gives encouragement and illumination. It cheers you up with hope and vigour. It fills the mind with purity. It helps concentration. It weeds out unholy ideas. It cuts new spiritual grooves for the mind to move in. It serves as pasture for the mind to graze upon”.

The spiritual seeker who engages himself regularly in Svadyaya, Japa, Kirtan and prayer develops, in course of time, love of God and a certain Ruchi or taste for His Name. He delights in chanting His Name, in singing His praise. He enjoys the company of His Bhaktas. Not only that, he begins to love all, because he sees the Lord in all. He sees the Lord in every inch of creation. To his eyes, mesmerized by the love of God, everything appears holy, everything looks sacred. The Bhakta has a new vision. And with that vision, he marches rapidly towards the Kingdom of God.

9. PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

A baby’s eyes are riveted on a flower or a butterfly. It keeps looking at the object with unwinking eyes, eyes full of wonder, for minutes together.

A mother calls her teenage daughter to go and have lunch, but there is no response. The call is repeated twice, thrice; still there is no response. The girl just does not hear, though her ears are very much open. Nor is she deaf. What could be the reason, then, for her not hearing? Her mind is immersed in a Sherlock Holmes or a Harold Robbins; her eyes are glued to the lines; her face is buried in the book.

In the dilapidated building of an elementary school, the class is on. The teacher explains something and then asks the children, “Did it enter?”. There is an instant response from the backmost bench: “Only the tail has not entered yet!”. The earnest voice belongs to a boy who has been all along intently watching the struggle of a rat to wriggle

out of the class room through a hole in the wall. It has managed to squeeze in its body, but its tail is still not gone in. Perhaps the hole is blocked.

These are everyday examples of concentration. Attention, concentration, meditation—these are different degrees of the same process. It is fixing the mind on a single object or idea to the exclusion of everything else.

In his book, “Concentration and Meditation”, holy Master Sivananda presents a most beautiful scene to illustrate what is meant by concentration. In this, Dronacharya tests the power of concentration of his students, the Pandavas. A basin of water is placed on the ground. Above, a clay bird is kept rotating. The archer has to hit the bird by looking at its reflection in the water.

Drona: “O Yudhishtira, what do you see?”

Yudhishtira: “O Acharya (teacher), I see the bird to be aimed at, the tree on which it is sitting and yourself also.”

Drona: “What do you see, Bhima?”

Bhima: “I see the bird, the tree, yourself, Nakula, Sahadeva, the tables and chairs, etc.”

Drona: “What do you see, Nakula?”

Nakula: “I see the bird, the tree, yourself, Arjuna, Bhima, the garden, the streamlet, etc.”

Drona: “What do you see, Sahadeva?”

Sahadeva: “I see the bird to be aimed at, yourself, Arjuna, Bhima, Yudhishtira, the horses, carriages, all the onlookers, several cows, etc.”

Drona: “Now then, Arjuna, what do you see?”

Arjuna: “O Revered Guru! I see nothing but the bird to be aimed at.”

That is concentration. Arjuna’s is the power of concentration. Concentration, when developed, becomes meditation.

Yoga is an exact science. Asanas and Pranayama (Yoga postures and breathing exercises) perfect the body. Service and charity expand the heart. Prayer, Japa (repetition of the Lord’s Name), Kirtan (singing devotional songs) and other devotional practices purify the mind and make it more subtle. The aspirant is now fully equipped for the last lap of the journey. It is the toughest part of the pilgrimage to God. It is full of darkness

and the aspirant has to pierce this darkness with his purified mind. The purified mind is the most dependable weapon in the armoury of the spiritual aspirant.

The purified mind must be made to concentrate. Concentration is mental focussing. The mind can be focussed on a concrete object or an abstract idea. For a novice, concentration becomes easy if the object of concentration is concrete. Also, the beginner should choose a pleasing object on which to concentrate. Only thus can he prevent the mind from wandering away from the object of concentration. To start with, concentration can be practiced on the flame of a candle, the tick-tick sound of a clock, the star in the sky, the picture of OM or the picture of one's Ishta Devata (personal God). This should be followed by concentration on a suitable spiritual centre within the body. The Sadhak may concentrate with closed eyes on the space between the eyebrows or on the tip of the nose. There is nothing which cannot be achieved by concentration.

Concentration should be followed by meditation. Meditation is nothing but protracted or sustained concentration. A scientist has to concentrate on a problem, on a given subject, on a riddle, to bring out the answer, to solve it. He has to think, think and think. Then only the answer flashes forth. Likewise, meditation is intense concentration, concerted concentration on the problem of life, on the problem of the inexplicable triad of God, man and the universe. While concentration becomes essential even to solve small problems in science, what to speak of the problem of life which has baffled humanity since time immemorial? The Sadhak (aspirant) who wants God must meditate, meditate and meditate.

Meditation can be practiced on any image of the Lord. This is concrete meditation. After some practice, the aspirant will be able to visualize the form of the image even with closed eyes. Meditation can also be practiced on abstract ideas and on various Vedantic formulae such as "I am Eternity", "I am Infinity" and so on.

Reading of profound scriptural texts like the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras (revealed texts of the Hindus) requires intense concentration. Such reading itself is a mild form of meditation. It should be followed by contemplation on what was read. Repeated meditation on a single idea will bring out a wealth of knowledge on that idea.

While meditating on a particular object or idea, various extraneous thoughts will try to enter the mind of the aspirant and interfere with his meditation. The aspirant should ignore these extraneous thoughts, be indifferent to them and repeatedly try to concentrate on the object of his meditation. Gradually, the frequency of interruption will be reduced and a time will come when meditation will give uninterrupted peace and bliss.

Meditation is digging deep into the mine of truth and wisdom. Swamiji asks the Sadhak to meditate and bring out his own Gita and Upanishads. Says the Master: "There is no knowledge without meditation. An aspirant churns his own soul. Truth becomes manifest".

WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

Meditation confers peace and strength. Sivananda affirms that half an hour's meditation is sufficient to enable the aspirant to smilingly pass through a whole week's life in this world of problems and misery.

Meditation must be regular. Whenever the Sattvic (a state of calmness and purity) mood manifests and divine thought-currents begin to flow, the aspirant must sit down for meditation. Brahmamuhurtha (period between 4 am and 6 am), says the Master, is the ideal time for meditation. Why? He gives the answer:

“There is Sattva in the atmosphere
In Brahmamuhurtha.
The atmosphere is calm
And the world is asleep.
The Raga-Dvesha (like-dislike) currents
Have not yet started flowing in your mind.
You are just returning from deep sleep
When you enjoyed bliss without objects;
You can then easily convince the mind
That real happiness is within.
Only Yogis, Jnanis (wise men) and sages are awake at this time.
You will be greatly benefited by their thought currents.
Never miss the Brahmamuhurtha even for a day.”

It is not possible to meditate the whole day. Without variety, the mind, especially of a beginner, will get tired. It is necessary to guard against this possibility. It is important that the aspirant should be protected from the monotony of one-sided spiritual practice leading to reaction and a return to worldly activity with a vengeance. The beauty of divine life lies in the fact that the seriousness of meditation is tempered with the joy of Kirtan, the happiness and strength of service, the peace of Japa and the understanding of Svadhyaya (reading of scriptures).

In the books of Yoga, the great Rishis (sages) distinguish between Bahiranga Sadhana and Antaranga Sadhana. Bahiranga Sadhana is outer Yoga or spiritual practices designed to perfect the outer instruments of body and Prana (vital-energy). These are the ethical practices and the Yogasana and Pranayama exercises. Once the body is perfected and the Nadis or astral tubes are purified through Pranayama practices, the spiritual seeker attains fitness to start the inner Yoga or Antaranga Sadhana. This includes Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana-sense abstraction, concentration and meditation. The senses and the mind must be withdrawn from the sense objects and the mind must be focussed on the God within. This is inner Yoga. The outer Yoga practices are to prepare the aspirant to gain fitness to practice this inner Yoga.

Where the necessary preparation is inadequate or wanting, meditation cannot succeed. Simply sitting cross-legged and closing the eyes, thinking the same worldly

thoughts and building castles in the air, or falling into a semi-sleep is not meditation. A person who wants to meditate must be free from disease and desire, from cares and worries. He must be free from love and hatred, and from like and dislike. He must be soaked in Vairagya (dispassion). He must be able to sit firmly for hours together in the same posture. His breathing must be slow and even. His stomach must be free from constipation, free from gas and very light. When these conditions are not satisfied, meditation will remain just a pipe dream.

While meditation in itself constitutes a very powerful attack on ignorance, Swami Sivananda suggests that the spiritual aspirant should practice Vichar also. Vichar is enquiry into the real nature of things. Vichara results in Viveka or discrimination between the real and the unreal. It helps the aspirant to sift the true from the false. Swamiji asserts that without cogitation, Truth cannot be known or realised. Vichara sharpens the intellect and leads to the discernment of the Truth that lies behind the phenomenal universe.

How should the aspirant reflect? The Master shows the way: “Who am I? What is Brahman (God)? What is this Samsara (process of worldly life)? What is the goal of life? How to attain the goal? How to attain freedom from births and deaths? What is the Svarupa of Moksha (Essential nature of liberation)? Whence? Where? Whither? Thus should the aspirant of liberation ever enquire, seeking to achieve the purpose of life”. The justification for this method of Vichara or enquiry is contained in the saying, “As you think, so you become”. By constant reflection on the Reality behind the appearances, the seeker attains oneness with the Reality and becomes that Reality itself.

Enquiry opens the aspirant's eyes to new vistas of knowledge. It leads him steadily to Truth. For instance, if the aspirant starts the “Who am I?” enquiry, he will soon find that he cannot equate himself with any one of his sense organs like the nose, the eyes or the ears, because even without one or more of these, he can live and life can pulsate in his veins. So, he is not the body. Nor is he the mind, because even during the unconscious and the deep sleep states, when the mind ceases to function, he exists and his heart throbs. Then, what is this ‘I’ in everybody? Swami Sivananda declares that the real ‘I’ is none, else than Brahman or the Atman who is the motive force behind all existence. It is He who thinks through the mind, sees through the eyes, eats through the mouth, hears through the ears and so on He is the Witnessing Consciousness who dwells in all beings. When a person gets up from deep sleep and says, “I enjoyed a sound dreamless sleep”, it is this Witnessing Consciousness which remembers the fact that the body and the mind rested in sound sleep. It cannot be otherwise. The mind which was virtually dead during the deep sleep state could not itself have consciously enjoyed a sound slumber and remembered it. The enjoyer is the Atman. Swamiji repeatedly advises the spiritual seeker to identify himself with this Atman which is his real Self and not with his perishable body. Constant identification with the Atman or the Witnessing Consciousness in oneself is a shortcut to spiritual success. The aspirant who adopts this technique will soon rise above body consciousness.

The secret of spirituality lies in realising one's essential nature. It is not becoming something outside of oneself. It is not as if man and God are separate and that man should go to a God who is external to him and merge in that God. No. God is already there, everywhere, Within us and outside of us. The body and the mind in which man is encased are mere illusions of an ignorant mind. God only is. All else is not. All else is only appearance. This appearance is made possible by the functioning of the mind. Meditation and enquiry enable the aspirant to feel, to realise that he is, after all, Brahman and not a bundle of body and mind. When divine wisdom dawns, the Sadhak realises his innermost Being. And being is Brahman.

Man himself is God and the entirety of Sadhana (spiritual practices) is meant to enable man to realise his God-nature, to realise that the God he has been searching for is his own Self. Initially, Yoga Sadhana purifies the mind. Later on, the seeker uses this purified mind, to concentrate and meditate on the God within; and at the deepest point of meditation, the purified mind melts in the God within and is itself lost there, destroyed there. And only God remains. Being remains. God-consciousness remains. A telling analogy given in the Yoga texts is the dry twig used in kindling a fire, where the twig itself is ultimately consumed in the fire. The purified mind is like this twig. It helps to kindle the fire of God-consciousness within, and in the process, is itself destroyed in that fire. In Samadhi (superconscious state), the mind melts in Brahman as camphor melts in fire. The separate identity of the individual soul vanishes. Only Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute) prevails.

10. ON THE CULTIVATION OF BHAV

There is one teaching of Swami Sivananda which is perhaps more important than all others, firstly because it best reflects the teacher himself, and secondly because it pervades all his writings through and through. We may even say that it is the most characteristic teaching of the Master. What is this teaching? It is that the foremost duty of the spiritual seeker is to shape and culture and perfect his Bhav. The Sanskrit word is Bhava or Bhavana, but the Master prefers its shortened Hindi form, viz., Bhav. Everywhere in Swamiji's writings you will find his exhortation that one should have the proper Bhav towards men and matters.

Now, what is this Bhav? It is one of those Sanskrit words whose exact connotation and whose manifold implications it may not be possible to indicate in English. Literally, however, we may say that Bhav means attitudinal feeling or the feeling that one entertains in his heart as the result of a particular attitude he may hold as the result of his own angle of vision. The Master stresses, again and again, that man should change his Bhav, should change his angle of vision, wherever it is wrong or unspiritual. What this angle of vision means he illustrates by an example. The same woman, he says, is seen differently by different people. To the child, the woman is the protecting mother; to the husband, she is a dutiful wife; to a lustful man, she is an object of enjoyment; to the neighbour, she is a friend; to the scientist, she is a conglomeration of

atoms; and to a saint, she is an embodiment of Para Shakti. So, it is the angle of vision which shapes an individual's Bhav towards a particular object, in the above case, a woman. The Master advises the spiritual seeker to entertain the Sister Bhav towards girls and the Mother Bhav towards older women. At one point he warns that even the Sister Bhav may not be enough and that the safest method is to entertain the Cobra Bhav towards members of the opposite sex.

How to know what Bhav one should entertain in a particular context? Well, it is not so difficult after all. While engaged in selfless service or Karma Yoga, the Sadhak should entertain the Nimitta Bhav or the feeling that he is but an instrument in the hands of the Lord. He is just a tool. He is just a puppet and God is the puppeteer. The Sadhak is just the medium through whom God's will works itself out. The Karma Yogi should also entertain Narayana Bhav with reference to others whom he may come in contact with. He should view everyone and everything as Lord Narayana Himself and this view, this Bhav, should condition his dealings with those other people or objects. There are many stories to illustrate this point. A dog stole bread from a saint's hut. The saint spotted that, and in great anguish he ran after the dog, Ghee cup in hand, crying, "O Lord ! O Lord Narayan !! Please wait. Please stop. Let me apply Ghee to the Roti. The dry bread will injure your throat". This happened in the life of one saint. It is neither comics nor lunacy. It is advanced saintliness where the Bhakta sees his Ishta Devata in everything. There is the other story of a saint who ran after a thief, with some vessels in hand, crying, "O thief! O Lord Narayan! You have forgotten to take these vessels. Please take these also".

Yet another saint started on a pilgrimage from Varanasi to Rameswaram in those olden days when one had to walk the entire distance. The saint was carrying Ganges water in a vessel for the purpose of doing Abhisheka to the sacred Siva Linga at Rameswaram. After months of journeying, as he was almost approaching Rameswaram, the saint saw a donkey by the wayside. The donkey was dying of thirst. The saint's heart melted at the sight, and in a jiffy, he emptied the Ganga Jal into the throat of the dying animal. It is said that then and there Lord Ramalingeswara gave him Darshan! These stories indicate the great length that the Sadhak has to traverse before his heart gets softened to a point where he becomes a saint.

The Sadhak who follows the Bhakti Marga may choose from among a number of Bhavas prescribed in Bhakti classics like the Narada Bhakti Sutras. He may view himself as a servant and the Lord as the Master; or he may consider himself as the child and the Lord as the parent; or he may consider himself as the lover and the Lord as the Beloved. Or he may treat the Lord as his friend. So the Bhakta may entertain one or the other of these Bhavas in his devotional life prayer and Japa, Kirtan and meditation. Sticking to a particular Bhav helps to speed up spiritual evolution.

The student of Vedanta, on the other hand, identifies himself with the Atma, identifies himself with Brahman, and dissociates himself from all phenomena. He seats himself in the Self and just witnesses the moving panorama of the world process. He

remains a Sakshi or witness and does not allow himself to-be affected or influenced by what goes on around him. It is called the Sakshi Bhav or the Atma Bhav.

The Jnana Yogi also entertains Advaita Bhav, that is to say, a feeling of oneness with all creation. He takes the stand that God only is everywhere and that there is nothing outside Him). And to one who takes such a stand, all problems are solved at once, because where there is only one and there is no duality, there is no scope whatever for all the worldly problems of likes and dislikes, love and hatred, etc., that we are familiar with.

So, Bhav is the all-important factor in spiritual life. The progress that a seeker has made on the spiritual path can be known by studying his Bhav in a given situation. A man is to be judged not by what he does, but by how he does it. A man's real worth is to be gauged from the way he does little things, from the way he reacts spontaneously to certain situations, rather than from his external actions themselves, which may reflect his money and influence rather than his qualities of head and heart. What a person is, is often reflected in his face, in his words, in the smallest of his gestures. As when Swami Sivananda served in a feast in the Ashram, bending before each inmate and calling out, "Roti Bhagavan Dal Bhagavan!", as if he was serving the Lord Himself. I once saw three women who came to have Darshan of Swamiji as he was sitting in the Diamond Jubilee Hall of the Ashram. They exchanged some pleasantries -with him for a couple of minutes. And then, Swamiji, who was having a plate of Dosas in his hand at that time, cut out a small piece, and delicately mixing it with a little Chutney, offered it with infinite love to one of the women. And he repeated it with regard to the other two women also. And with that, the trio took leave of the Master. I wondered if the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati had come to have Darshan of Swamiji—considered by many as an incarnation of Lord Siva Himself—on the eve of His Mahasamadhi, just before his departure from the world.

What a man does is not so important as how he does it. Nurses treat patients in hospitals. But they do it for money and they get money only. Swamiji too treated patients both before his Sannyas and after his Sannyas. But in each patient he saw Lord Narayana and each patient he served and nursed with infinite love and care, with Narayana Bhav. His service was motiveless and he got Self-realisation as his reward. Bhav is the all-important factor in spiritual life.

In Karma Yoga, it is not the number of persons you serve that is important. Gurudev is emphatic that even if it is just one person—one Jiva or one individual soul—whom the Sadhak serves over his entire life-span, that would be enough to secure him Mukti, provided that that service is rendered by the Sadhak with the right Bhav in the true spirit of Karma Yoga. Similarly, in Bhakti Yoga too, it is not the count of Japa or the duration of Kirtan that is important as the intensity of Bhav with which Japa or Kirtan is performed. Even as he does Japa or Kirtan, the spiritual aspirant should feel the presence of the Lord, should feel the grace flowing from the Lord and purifying every pore of his being. This feeling is what brings in benefits.

Bhav ripens over the years and ultimately turns into Mahabhava or Prema-maya when the heart of the seeker is purified so much that he becomes purity itself, love itself, God Itself.

So, that is Bhav. Sudama had Bhav when he went to Krishna with a handful of parched rice tied up in his simple Dhoti. His heart was full of humility and love which the Lord cherished. Sabari had the same Bhav when she tasted the fruit before feeding it to the Lord.

Bhav is a mixture of many virtues. It is a mixture primarily of faith and devotion, of faith and God-love, Sraddha and Bhakti. It is a feeling born of a vision which recognizes the unity of the life-principle or the unity of consciousness. The heart of a man who has Bhav melts at the suffering of others. Selfishness is unknown to the man who has Bhav. Bhav is fellow feeling. Bhav indicates a heart of compassion. When Sivananda says, “Be kind, be compassionate”, what he means is, “Have feeling for others. Have Bhav”. Bhav naturally implies self-sacrifice too.

Years ago, newspapers reported the case of an American tourist who had been so much touched by the poverty, squalor and misery in India that he returned to America, collected some money and came back to India, this time with a purpose. He converted all his dollars into Indian currency—notes and coins—and getting into his car, drove from Delhi to Calcutta. And as he drove, he went on distributing the money liberally to all the poor he encountered on the way. Someone may ask: “How much will the poor be helped by this one-time charity?”. But, that is not the point. The point is: here was a man whose heart bled at the sight of the poor and who went back all the way home, brought back whatever money he could, and instead of theorizing from the comfort of an arm-chair, went distributing it to as many as he could, bringing a smile here and a smile there. Surely, such men as him are Gods in the making. The point of the story is that that American had what the Master calls ‘Bhav’.

There comes, in ancient Tamil literature, the story of Pekhan, a king who went to the jungle on a hunt. Suddenly the dark clouds gathered and there was a chill wind and a downpour. The king saw a peacock shivering. At once he got down from his chariot, went up to the peacock, took off the silk he was wearing and wrapped it round the bird and returned to the palace. There is an even more wondrous example in the same books. Another ancient Tamil king. His name Paari. When he drove out of the palace, in one place he found a faded jasmine creeper, the tendrils of which were sad and drooping for want of support. The sight of the poor creeper melted the royal heart. Instantly the king got down from the chariot, and leaving it there itself for the creeper to grow upon, happily returned to the palace. Paari and Pekhan had the Bhav which would have made Sivananda shed tears of joy. It is not the value of the silken cloth or the chariot which has immortalized the names of those two kings. It is their Bhav, their heart which warmed up to the life-principle pulsating in the peacock and in the jasmine plant, the same life-principle or consciousness which unites all creation into one single whole.

“God asks a man not his caste or creed, but only if there is love in his heart” says Sivananda. And he goes on to add, “If you have the same intensity of love for God which you have for worldly objects, you will attain God-realisation this very second”. In another place, the Master says, “You need neither art nor science, neither study nor erudition for God-realisation, but faith, purity and devotion”. What does all this amount to? What does all this mean? All this means culture of the heart. Culture of the heart is more important than culture of the head.

What makes a Mother Teresa pick up slum children and treat them and nurse them to a life of decency and dignity? It is Bhav.

A saint does not stand apart and aloof, like ordinary men and women. He identifies himself with everything in the cosmos. As a result, he shares the joys and sufferings of all those he comes in contact with, of all those who cross his life’s path by the workings of destiny.

There was a policeman who had wife and children. Suddenly he resigned his job and came to the Ashram with all the members of his family. The reason he gave was that he had come to dislike the sort of harsh work he was called upon to do as a policeman. The first day Swamiji let the man’s son do a little Kirtan. The boy sang:

“Shanmuga Natha Daya Karo
Saravanabhava Guha Kripa Karo”

He sang nicely. Everyone was happy and so was he. But the next morning, when the small boy sought Swamiji’s permission to sing again, the Master was serious. He sized up the situation of the family. A grown-up daughter to be married. A son to be educated. A whole family without any means of support, the breadwinner having resigned his job. It was no occasion for singing. Sivananda was sad because he was a saint, because he had a heart of compassion, because he had Bhav.

The word ‘Bhav’ as used by holy Master Sivananda is a divine mixture of many ingredients like selflessness, compassion, faith, humility and love. We may even say that Bhav is divine nature or saintliness itself. No wonder that again and yet again Swamiji lays the stress on the cultivation of Bhav.

A friend of mine, himself a Sannyasin, was once witness to a Vairagi Sadhu from Ayodhya cooking his frugal meal by the wayside. The Sadhu collected a few dry twigs from the nearby jungle, arranged some stones and lit a fire. He then made a dough of wheat flour and mixed it with minced potato. He made a ball of it. Then he took cowdung, flattened it to a disc, and placing the ball of wheat flour and vegetable in the middle of the cowdung disc, covered it up completely with the disc. And he put it in the fire. After quite some time, when the green cowdung had finally turned into white ash, the Sadhu removed the ball from the fire and tapped it ever so gently with a thin twig and the cowdung portion neatly fell apart in plaques. My Sannyasin friend who was silently

watching everything felt outraged and asked the Sadhu how he could reconcile himself to cooking in such an Apavitra or impure fashion. His religious sensitivity deeply touched, the Sadhu cried out, “Apavitra? Ye Tho Pavitra Hai ! Ye Tho Pavitra Hai!” meaning so much as to say, “Impure? What do you mean? What purer form of cooking there could be than what I am doing?”. The Sadhu venerated the cow as mother, the cowdung as sacred and pure, and his method of cooking the most sacred of all. And he believed in it all one hundred and one per cent. He had faith. He had Bhav. That faith and that Bhav were reflected in the radiance in his face. My friend prostrated to the Sadhu and returned richer for the experience.

Sivananda tells an amusing story about a king and a Sannyasin which brings out the different kinds of Bhav entertained by people with different kinds of background and upbringing. In brief, the story runs thus.

Once, there lived a king named Raja Singh Bahadur. In his kingdom, there was a big Ashram for Sannyasins.

One day, the ministers reported to the king that the Sannyasins and Brahmacharis in the Ashram were always engaged in eating and sleeping and were not doing any austerity. The report was basically false, but the king did not know about it. He sent for the Mahant, Swami Niralambananda.

The Swami came and the king told him what he had heard. “Please come to the Ashram in the early morning and you will know for yourself” replied Niralambananda, “I shall come and wake you up at three in the morning”.

The next morning Swami Niralambananda went to the palace and woke the king at three o’clock. He asked the king’s attendant to bring along with him a pot of water. They went first to the homes of the ministers.

The Swami asked the attendant to throw water on the faces of the sleeping ministers. They all woke up uttering, “Bloody fool!”, “Ass!”, “Damn nonsense!”, “Who has disturbed my sleep?” and so on.

The king and the Swami then went to the stable. The Swami asked the attendant to throw water on the faces of the grooms. They too woke up uttering, “Sala!”, “Badmash!” and other choice epithets.

Thereupon the party proceeded to the Ashram. Water was then thrown on the faces of the Sannyasins and the Brahmacharis. They all woke up uttering, “Sivoham!”, “Hari Om!”, “Ram, Ram!” and such other Names of the Lord.

“Look here, O king!” said the Swami, “Have you noted the difference now? Have you noted the attitude, feeling and the words that came out of the mouths of these different kinds of people? The words reveal the contents of the heart and mind and show

the culture of the persons. O king! Judge not people by external acts. Look to their motives and attitude”.

The king was effectively silenced.

Stories can be multiplied to illustrate or convey the many connotations, the different shades of meaning, implied in the single word ‘Bhav’, but it is not necessary. Suffice it to say that Bhav is Sadhu nature, Sattvic nature, divine nature. The spiritual seeker should cultivate it assiduously. And the best way to do so is to engage himself in incessant selfless service. That is what the Master recommends. Giving instructions to a group of disciples on the 21st September, 1945, the Master dwelt at length on this theme. Among other things, he said:

“Service alone can purify your hearts. Have you ever served a sick man? Have you ever taken a Chandala who was sick and who was passing incessant motions on your shoulders to the hospital and nursed him there for a week? This is much better than just repeating ‘Soham, Soham’. Analyse your thoughts. Don’t get offended by what I say.”

“The other day I found a glass piece in front of the latrine. It would have remained there for years together if I had not removed it. Nobody would bother. If there is a glass piece on the steps leading down to the Ganges, you would not remove it. You are selfish, the embodiment of selfishness. You have no cosmic vision, no cosmic love. You would not think, ‘O, this glass piece would injure another man’s feet. I should remove it’. You would be more particular about your bath and Japa and meditation. You should feel that everyone is your own self. This is real Advaita. This is real Bhakti, cosmic love. And this you can develop only by selfless service.”

“The little things you do with Bhav will purify you a lot. If you are not able to do any tangible work, go to the temple and sweep the temple. But you think you are a Brahmin and you should not do that. There comes pride. This caste pride is your deadly enemy. Conquer it by service. Again and again I will repeat, you cannot develop any good quality without selfless service. Selfishness is inherent in man. It is in his very nature. If you analyze your mind, you will find that you have got so many bad qualities. Counting the beads will get you nowhere, if you have not purified your heart.”

“I will go on saying these things. Somebody will get annoyed. But I can’t help pouring forth...”

Swamiji’s words of admonition had the desired effect on the disciples. They were humbled and chastened and they fell into an introspective mood.

11. THE EGODECTOMY OPERATION

Adapting medical terminology, Swami Sivananda, who was a doctor in Malaya prior to taking Sannyas, coined a new word ‘Egodectomy’ to indicate the removal of the ego. If the visitor who called on him was a surgeon, Swamiji would often mystify him by posing the question, “Do you know egodectomy?” or “Have you done egodectomy?”.

For all practical purposes, we may say that the ego is included in the mind. Mind is only a name given to the thought-process or the succession of thoughts. Even if the advanced meditator should succeed in eliminating all thoughts, one last thought would remain, and that is the ‘I’ thought. The meditator would still entertain the thought, “I exist”. In this thought, if by the grace of God the ‘I’ is knocked out, then what remains would be pure existence or Sat or God. This is the splitting of the spiritual atom. It is the most difficult thing to achieve in this world. Those who have achieved it are the Jivanmuktas.

The ‘I’ thought is not only the final thought before Jivanmukti, but is also the primary thought or root thought which expands into this vast Samsara. It is the first thought to be born and the last thought to die. The ego is the very basis of human existence.

Everything is born of the ego; every action is based on the ego. Life is nothing but the expansion of the ego and its various manifestations. All life revolves round ‘I’ and ‘mine’. ‘I’ and ‘mine’ give rise to all bondage. When ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are given up, there is release, there is freedom. The ego must be surrendered, must be sacrificed before God can be found. This, indeed, is the greatest sacrifice. God likes this sacrifice the most and not the sacrifice of goats and fowls.

“Go wherever you like—Amsterdam, London or New York. Analyse this world of phenomenal experience. You will find only two things—sex and ego” says Sivananda in his immortal work “Bliss Divine”. Sex is also included in ego, it comes under ego, but to facilitate understanding and discussion, and Sadhana based on such understanding and discussion, we treat the two categories separately. Ego, in the ultimate analysis, is what separates man from God. If the ego is eliminated, man shines as God. The progressive thinning out of the ego and its ultimate destruction is the object of all spiritual Sadhana.

Man’s ego assumes many forms. It takes on the form of pride of one’s own caste, position, wealth, beauty, power, etc. All such pride must be given up by the earnest seeker. In one of his numerous songs recorded on the gramophone, the Master sings:

“Give up Brahmin, Sannyas Abhiman
Give up male, female sex Abhiman,
Give up doctor, judge Abhiman,
Give up Raja, Zamindar Abhiman,
Relinquish Pundit, scientist Abhiman,

Crush this professor, engineer Abhiman,
Kill this collector, Tahsildar Abhiman,
...”

Abhimana is attachment to one's own caste, profession, prowess, etc., and this attachment is born out of the ego. Giving up of the ego means also the giving up of all manifestations arising out of the ego.

Where the ego dies, Brahman shines. “When shall I be free?” asks the spiritual seeker. And quick comes the answer, “When ‘I’ ceases to be”. Giving up the ego means making oneself humble, making oneself hollow, like the flute in Lord Krishna's lips. The bamboo is all hollow and Sri Krishna is able to play whatever tune He likes on the hollow flute. Similarly, if we make ourselves totally humble, if we divest ourselves of all negative traits and make our heart a vacant chamber, God will step in and direct our lives in whatever way He deems fit. An egoless man is a humble man. His heart is not clogged. It is an open chamber and God steps in.

A frontal attack on the ego would thus be the practice of humility. A man's saintliness is truly measured by his humility. Humility is the hallmark of a saint, not feigned humility, but natural, artless humility. The greatest saints are also the humblest of men. Swami Sivananda himself was a towering example of egolessness. People who came in contact with him could feel his cosmic love, could see the spiritual majesty in his face, could bathe in the aura of bliss and peace radiating from him, but not for a moment could they notice any sense of superiority in Swami Sivananda. There was not the least trace of a complex in that great saint. He was humility incarnate. He was a man whose ego had fled from him. He was a God-man who had become identified with the whole creation and all that there was in it. To such a man, every other being was not a stranger, but his own Self.

The holy Master taught as much by his personal example as by precept. His every act was a lesson in egolessness. Did he have an appointment with someone? Swamiji would come before time so that the visitor might not be made to wait. And to everyone on whom his eyes alighted, Swamiji himself would offer Pranams first. He would speak to the visitor first even before the visitor could speak to Swamiji. The Master always cited the example of Sri Rama who is described in the Ramayana as a Purvabhashi or one who speaks first.

How to gain humility? How to divest ourselves of the ego? There is no magic trick to do this. But the different Yogas offer us a number of spiritual practices to progressively weaken the ego and ultimately eliminate it altogether. The Karma Yogi forgets himself in the service of others. He never thinks about himself. He never thinks in terms of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. He always thinks in terms of others. His thought always is, “How best can I help others? How best can I serve the sick and the suffering, the poor and the downtrodden?”. All the time the Karma Yogi thinks of God and God only. He sees God in those whom he serves and he sees himself as an instrument of God, not as an

individual. In this way, there is no scope for 'I' and 'mine' in the life of a Karma Yogi. He does self-sacrifice. He sacrifices 'I' and 'mine'.

The Bhakta, on the other hand, practices self-surrender. He surrenders his ego or individuality at the feet of the Lord. Whether he does a Sashtanga Namaskar before the Deity in the temple, or he does Utbhaitak before the idol of Lord Ganesh, his two hands crossing his chest and holding his ears, or he lies flat on the ground and rolls himself in circumambulation around a temple Prakara, essentially it is all a symbolic act of self-surrender only. A Bhakta's heart cries out, "Thou, not I", "Thine, not mine". A Bhakta's prayer is: "I am Thine. All is Thine. Thy will be done, my Lord!". It is this surrender of the ego by the Bhakta which is characterized as Saranagati or Atmanivedana in Bhakti literature and as Isvarapranidhana in the Raja Yoga of Patanjali Maharshi. The act of Draupadi throwing up both her hands, while wicked Duhshasana was attempting to disrobe her, is the ultimate in self-surrender. The prayer of the Gopis whose Vastras were stolen by Lord Krishna and the heart-rending cry of Gajendra are other instances in point.

What the Karma Yogi seeks to achieve through self-sacrifice and the Bhakta through self-surrender, the Vedantin seeks to achieve by self-denial. In his Vedantic assertions he goes on denying his body, his mind, his Prana, his intellect. He goes on asserting, "I am not this body, I am not this Prana, I am not this mind, I am not this intellect." In thus denying everything connected with his Jivahood or individuality, he denies his own ego. This ultimately leads to Brahmanubhava, because as already stated, when the ego is removed from the individual, the Brahman in him shines.

The destruction of the ego being the ultimate aim of all spiritual Sadhana, a number of Swami Sivananda's seemingly simple instructions are actually designed to make a direct attack on the ego. His teaching, "Adapt, adjust, accommodate" is basically a spiritual exercise in bending, in yielding. It is said of the followers of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu that they used to keep a length of grass in their mouth as they went about their work to remind themselves of their Guru's teaching that they should be as humble as the blade of grass. The grass survives the fiercest gale, whereas a stiff branch or twig breaks under the stress of the very same gale. Humility is the key to spiritual survival and ultimate spiritual victory.

As already stated in the chapter on Bhakti Marga, the holy Master asks spiritual seekers to bow before everyone and everything, including animals, trees and stones. "Bow before the world and everybody with folded hands" says Swamiji, "Give up the ideas of barber, washerman, cobbler, etc. The barber is Narayan. The cobbler is Narayan. Bow with folded hands before a scavenger and feel that you are actually bowing to Lord Narayan. Those who are shy can bow mentally. The former one is the best practice to develop equal vision".

In these modern days, it is not unusual to find educated city people, be they students or officers or businessmen finding it next to impossible to bring their two palms together in the age-old—but, in their opinion, old-fashioned-Namaskar. I have seen

haughty city folk—Indians (!), not foreigners—unwilling or unable to salute even a saint like Sivananda in traditional fashion. I have been witness to proud people whose body would not bend before the Deity in the temple, whose physical frame would not do one prostration to its Creator.

But, consider Sivananda. Once, a certain Sannyasini came to Swamiji and gave him a stiff-necked Namaskar. It was just a few months before the sage attained his Mahasamadhi. Swamiji was at that time sitting in his office. He was seventy six then and not too well physically also. With difficulty he raised himself from his sofa-chair, stood up, and before all the assembled devotees, demonstrated how to do a proper Pranam. He bent down his bulky body considerably, lowering his head slightly in the process, and brought his two palms together in a salute which connoted infinite love and respect. As he did this, his eyes were glistening with love and adoration. To me who was an onlooker, it seemed as if the sage was greeting the Supreme Deity Itself.

The egoistic man, even if he chooses to engage himself in selfless service, will pick only those areas of work which to his mind appear respectable. Whereas, in Sivananda's eyes and in Sivananda's teachings, no service is mean and all service is great. Not once, but on many occasions in his life, Swamiji demonstrated by personal example the glory of Karma Yoga. Along with the workers he carried baskets of earth on his head during the construction of the Ashram temple. At other times, he helped in cleaning ditches. He served food in the dining hall. He rang the bell for the Yoga class. He packed books for dispatch by post. To him, no service was mean. All service was sacred. He therefore advises his students not to make a fine distinction between different kinds of service, but to engage themselves in every useful activity, including sweeping and scavenging.

A well-known exhortation, of the holy Master is, "Bear insult, bear injury, highest Sadhana". A layman who reads these lines may wonder, and naturally so, what great spiritual content there is in this teaching. But not so. One has to experience insult and injury, particularly unjustified insult and injury, and then attempt to endure it or put up with it without rancour in the heart, to know how nearly impossible it is to do so. It is there that one will realise that bearing an insult or injury is not ordinary Sadhana, but truly the highest Sadhana. One may do selfless service, one may do charity, one may do a dozen Purascharanas, one may meditate for hours on end, but then, to put up with insult without reacting—truly it is a most exacting Sadhana which will not be possible unless one is willing to abdicate one's ego. And abdicating one's ego is the last Sadhana before salvation.

12. TO SUM UP

Man is a restless creature. He runs after worldly objects. He tries to possess them and enjoy them. He does not want the objects for the sake of the objects, but for the sake of the enjoyment that they yield. It is enjoyment and happiness that man is after, not the objects themselves.

What really happens? The objects of the world are hard to secure. Even when secured, they yield only momentary happiness which is often mixed with a lot of misery. Swami Sivananda points out to misguided man that this world is an abode of misery and that it is downright foolish to expect lasting happiness here. The world is like a vast university for man to learn and evolve. Life here is an opportunity to gather experience. "Experience is the language in which God speaks to man" says the Master. The intelligent man should utilize the rare opportunity of his human birth to gain experience and evolve spiritually, to move more and more towards God.

Man, says Sivananda, is spirit in truth. He is God in truth. Why man alone? The whole universe is God in truth. But this truth is hidden to man's view by God's power of Maya. This strange and inexplicable Shakti of God, this Maya, this illusory power assumes the shape of mind in man, makes him forget his Divinity and diverts his attention to the outside world of visible objects.

Holy Master Sivananda declares that in a situation like this, the only way open to man to succeed in his aim of securing lasting happiness is to swim against the current of Maya and regain his Godhood. Mind is the separating factor between man and God. With equal validity, one can say that the ego is the separating factor. It is all one and the same. Ego is the 'I' thought. So, ego is part of the thought-process, another name for which is mind. So, it may be said that ego is part of mind. It may also be said that mind is an extension of the ego or an outcome of the ego, because all thoughts spring from the rudimentary thought which is 'I'. This ego, this mind is the partitioning wall between man and God. This should be knocked down. This should be broken down. Once this is achieved, man merges in God. He secures the lasting bliss he was dreaming of, he was craving for, because God is bliss itself.

Having said so much, the Master proceeds to tell us that swimming against the current of Maya is no easy task. It requires intense effort over a protracted period of time. This is Sadhana. Sadhana is conscious effort to speed up spiritual evolution. Sadhana has to be practiced through the medium of the physical body. So, the body must be kept in good shape.

Sadhana is a fine art. The Sadhak or the person who does Sadhana has to be like the circus artiste who walks on a tight rope. He has to do the balancing act all along. He has to adopt the path of the golden mean, not do either too much or too little. The Master gives us a song:

“Eat a little, drink a little,
Talk a little, sleep a little,

Mix a little, move a little,
Serve a little, think a little,

Do Japa a little, do Kirtan a little,
Write Mantra a little, meditate a little,

Do Asan a little, do Pranayam a little,
Do Svadhyaya a little, do Vichara a little.”

This song summarizes all that one has to do to gain God. It looks so deceptively simple, but try to practice and you get to know that it is not so easy after all.

Easy or difficult, man has no choice. That is the tragedy of the human situation. There is no choice before man. There is no option open to him if he wants bliss, except to return to God. Sadhana is the only course. Some call it Yoga. Swamiji prefers to call it divine life.

What is divine life? Man is a combination of the animal, the human and the divine. Divine life teaches him that first of all he should shake off the animal nature in him, the brutal instincts in him and become human, become good. That is the first step, eradication of all vices, of all negative traits. The second step is to ennoble oneself by acquiring all virtues by doing good. This way man rises from the human into the divine. Lastly, he has to transcend both good and evil and regain his Nirdwandwa state, his non-dual state. And there ends Sadhana.

The celebration of the holy Navaratri festival, known variously as the Dusserah in the North and Durga Puja in the East, signifies this only. During the first three nights, Mother Durga, the destroying power, is worshipped. What does Durga destroy? All the evil propensities in the worshipper. The worshipper is thus rid of the brute in him. The second three nights Mahalakshmi is worshipped. Mahalakshmi is the sustaining power. She signifies all that is auspicious. She confers on the devotee not only riches and prosperity, but also the riches of divine virtues, Ananta Kalyana Guna. Then the last three nights, the seeker propitiates Maha Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom. Mother Saraswati confers Vidya or Jnana and the worshipper transcends both virtue and vice, both good and bad, and attains a state of pure wisdom, of immaculate purity, of serenity, of balance. That is the esoteric significance of the nine nights' worship of Devi.

It is symbolic worship over nine nights. Sadhana cannot be completed in nine nights and man cannot regain Godhood in nine nights. Normally, that is. It may take nine years or nine births or ninety births. How long will it take to reach the Abode of Immortal Bliss? This is a hypothetical question. The answer would depend on the stage

of spiritual evolution the aspirant is in and the measure of Sadhana he is prepared to undertake. God-realisation is no easy task. The goal is high, the climb is stiff. But, when the ascent is done, the reward is great. After all, to complete schooling and to become a mere matriculate, a person has to toil for fifteen years. And what is Mukti? It promises eternal happiness. It promises freedom from the cycle of births and deaths and all the misery attendant thereupon. Surely, not one life, but thousands of lives can be sacrificed in return for that promise of eternal bliss.

For some people, God-realisation may take hundreds of births. For others who have done various spiritual practices in their previous births, the goal may be reached in the present birth itself. In either case, the time taken to reach the goal can be shortened by intense Sadhana. In this way, it is possible even for an ordinary man with no previous spiritual Samskaras to his credit to cut down hundreds of births and make, as it were, a dash towards God. It is possible. While the present birth is preordained, the future lies entirely in our hands. Sivananda repeatedly affirms that man is master of his destiny. It is man's fault that he bleats like a lamb where he should roar like a lion. There is no doubt that everyone can make or mar his future by his own effort. A man's present birth is only the resultant of his actions in his previous births. Neither God nor man is responsible for the pleasures that we enjoy or the pains that we suffer. It is by our own choice that we have brought upon ourselves the circumstances of our present birth by our actions in the past. Destiny is only another name for the inevitable fruit of our actions. Everyone is bound by destiny. No one is exempt from it. The Law of Karma is inexorable. Even God cannot alter it, because it is His law, His very nature.

The course of destiny can be changed for the better by Purushartha or conscious good action. Through intense Sadhana over a protracted period, the intelligent aspirant speeds up his progress towards the goal. Intensity of application and sustained application are both essential. Neither intense Sadhana practiced by fits and starts nor dull Sadhana practiced over a long period can produce tangible results. Hard, persistent effort is the only secret of success. "No pain, no gain" says the Master. There is no other magic formula in Yoga. Ignorant people alone imagine that Samadhi can be had by swallowing a drop of water from the Kamandal of a Mahatma. Sivananda warns against such ludicrous and puerile notions. Happiness has to be bought by self-effort alone. Sages will guide and God will help, but the spiritual seeker should himself tread the path. In the final analysis, even the grace of God and the blessings of the Guru do not come about by accident or chance, but they too have to be earned through prayer, service and surrender.

Even if God cannot be attained in this very birth, it would not matter. As a result of the spiritual disciplines practiced in this birth, the Sadhak will be placed in better environments in the next birth when he will pick up the thread and continue his Sadhana from where he left off. We have the Lord's assurance to this effect in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. No effort, however small, is lost in the spiritual path. Every thought that is contemplated, every syllable that is uttered, every little deed that is done is recorded in God's register for being rewarded at the appropriate time. Moreover, even while the

aspirant is still on the path, he gets glimpses of the glorious future that awaits him at journey's end. The moments of bliss that are felt, the peace that is experienced, the self-confidence and faith that are generated, the virtues that are developed and the spiritual personality and character that are built up—these and other good results are all well worth the time and trouble spent on Sadhana. The integrated personality that is built up and the grace of God that is invited during the course of Tapasya help the aspirant immeasurably in material life as well. In fact, worldly prosperity which the merely material man may or may not gain in life, is a natural by-product of spiritual endeavour. That is why Sivananda has said, “God first, the world next, if at all you want the world”.

The basic task of the spiritual seeker is to withdraw the mind from the world of Maya and fix it on the Lord. The gaze must be turned from the realm of matter to the realm of the spirit. Swami Sivananda puts it this way: “Detach, attach”. The teaching is so simple, so easy to understand. The whole gamut of Sadhana is thrown into bold relief here. It gives the perspective at a glance. Yoga or divine life is nothing but detaching the mind from the world of sense objects and attaching it to the Lord.

Detaching is Vairagya. Attaching is Abhyasa. Detaching is dispassion. Attaching is Sadhana. The Master offers another slogan also. He says, “Remember, forget”. It means, “Remember God, forget the world”. It means the same thing as “Detach, attach”. If you want to forget the world, you must detach your mind from the world. If you want to remember God, you must attach your mind to God.

A disciple of Sivananda, Swami Kalyanananda by name, once asked Swamiji:

“Swamiji, you have written over two hundred books. Instructions are so many that I am puzzled as to which instruction to follow. Will you kindly enlighten me?”

Swamiji said: “Detach, attach.”

Kalyanananda: “Anything more, Swamiji?”

Swamiji: “Nothing more. Detach, attach. It contains every other instruction. The two hundred books written by me are but commentaries on this single advice... Of what use is it to learn all the scriptures? This one injunction is sufficient to give you Mukti. It is a wisdom tablet of the highest potency, by taking which alone one can free oneself from the disease of Samsara. There is no higher Sadhana than this nor any Sadhana devoid of this. It is the cream or kernel of all Sadhanas and teachings. Practice this and attain immortality.”

The different Yogas are but different aspects of the single process of “Detach, attach”. They are aids to facilitate this single process. The Karma Yogi takes his mind away from selfish pursuits and attaches it to the service of the Lord in creation. The Bhakta likewise attaches his mind to the Lord through Japa, Kirtan, Nama Smaran and prayer, forgetting the world in the process. The Raja Yogi tries to take the mind off the

world, off desires, off all objective thoughts. He tries to forget the world and tries to fix the mind on the object of his concentration. The Jnana Yogi detaches the mind from the objective world of sense enjoyment and attaches it to the Jnana Sadhana of hearing, reflection and meditation—Sravan, Manan and Nididhyasan. The practitioners of other Yogas too attach their mind to their respective Yoga Sadhanas. And as the Master says, “Attachment to the practice of Sadhana ultimately leads to attachment to the Lord or Self, which is the culmination of all Yoga Sadhanas”.

Very recently, a cultured and educated lady made her first visit to the Sivanandashram Headquarters. As she entered the holy Samadhi Shrine, a poster on the wall greeted her eyes. She read:

“Start the day with God,
End the day with God,
Fill the day with God,
This is the way to God.”

This saying of Swami Sivananda went like a shaft right into her heart and she stood where she was as if mesmerized. She stood transfixed.

It is not surprising that the refined mind of the lady got glued to the song, because the whole of spiritual Sadhana, the whole of the method of realising God is crystallized in that simple, yet profound, song which is but an expansion of the word ‘Attach’. The Master wants us to remember God all the time even as we move from one activity to another, from one kind of Sadhana to another, in the course of the day.

The mind, be it clearly understood, can hold only one thought at a time. It is a different matter that it can jump with incredible speed from one thought to another. But, at a particular point of time, even if it be a millionth part of a second, the mind can hold only one thought and one thought only. If the mind is directly asked to give up worldly thoughts, it will rebel. It will begin to think even more of the world and its objects. Therefore, the better thing would be to ask the mind to think of positive things like selfless service and cosmic love, to think of spiritual matters. Because, when the mind begins to think of God, worldly thoughts automatically drop off the mind which, as already stated, can hold but one thought at a time. This fact or law about the nature of the mind forms the very basis of the practice of Dhyana or meditation.

Meditation is nothing but fixing the mind on one object to the exclusion of all other objects. If that one object be God, and the mind is kept fixed continuously on God, quite naturally, for the duration that the mind is so fixed, all worldly thoughts keep away from the mind. And after years and years of practice of deep meditation, a stage comes when the mind gets permanently hooked on to God, gets merged in God. And that is Samadhi, that is Mukti.

Yoga is pure understanding. It is a mental movement towards the living of the life divine, free from sadness and depression. The Master wants us to reflect over what we read in the books of wisdom and be as calm of mind as possible, even though we may jump and dance, laugh and shout outwardly. “Lead a double life” says Swami Sivananda, “Lead a peaceful, internal life and the outward life of the man of the world. From a distance enjoy the hollow and pompous show of the world, without attachment to its fleeting fortunes or deceptive objects. Go on with your day-to-day activities without cherishing even a mustard of faith in the world. Be quiet and feel not sorrow even under the severest waves of depression; never be jubilant over even the most intense of mundane pleasures. Practice equanimity and always rest in the joy of the thought of the Divine, which is eternal bliss”.

Spiritual life is inner life. It is between man and God, between the individual and his Creator. It is something private, something intimate. There is no need for the world to know what you are doing with your mind inside. Continue to appear as a normal person to the world outside. Continue with your external duties. The world is the best training ground.

Sivananda does not ask anyone to run away from one’s family, from one’s duties and responsibilities. That would be betrayal of one’s duty. That would be dereliction of duty. That would amount to an act of cowardice. On the other hand, total devotion to God means giving a spiritual orientation to all acts in life. It is the dedication of all acts to God. It is incessant purification of the mind and constant listening to the shrill inner voice of God which speaks in a purified mind. It is abiding by the Will of God, however unpalatable it may be to one’s individual taste. It is sacrificing the individual will in the cause of God in man. It is real-life worship of God in creation, of God in every living being, be that an insect or an emperor. To such a man of cosmic love, selfless service and deep meditation, happiness and peace of mind come of their own accord. He need not go in an elusive search of happiness. To him, peace of mind is a natural by-product of his God-guided and dedicated activities.

The world would become heaven and man would turn angel if all things were to the liking of everyone on this earth plane. But, this is not to be. God has ordained the world to be a training ground for the individual soul in its onward progress towards its final destiny or goal. Once it is recognized that the world is, after all, the world and man is man, it will be easy for the Sadhak to keep his mental balance in prosperity and adversity alike. Man’s duty is to absorb the best in the world around him, discard the evil and speed up his progress. In this effort, he can succeed only when he learns to bend to the weight of worldly burden placed on him. If he does not learn to “adapt, adjust and accommodate” as repeatedly advised by Swamiji, he will break under the weight of worldly worry and be washed away in the eternal tide of birth and death. “Adapt, adjust and accommodate”—that is the motto for peace of mind. Swamiji gives down-to-earth advice which is, at the same time, spiritual advice. Spirituality is not something which is ethereal.

WHAT DOES SWAMI SIVANANDA TEACH?

An aspirant cannot progress in the spiritual path if he does not follow these golden rules of worldly wisdom. If he cannot adapt, adjust and accommodate, if he cannot bear insult and bear injury, he will fall a prey to the vicious poisons of anger, frustration, enmity, jealousy and ill-will and all his Japa and meditation will be brought to nought. On the other hand, if he can follow these injunctions, he can make life smell sweet. Then, his whole life will be a steady ascent on the spiritual ladder. Step by step the climb has to be made. At each step the gain must be consolidated. Perfection must be achieved in the lower practices of spiritual discipline before proceeding to the higher ones. This is important. With each little good, act, with each little good thought, the aspirant reaps a harvest of happiness. And when he attains the summum bonum of God-realisation, he attains all.