

SIVANANDA'S INTEGRAL YOGA

By

Siva-Pada-Renu
SWAMI VENKATESANANDA



Sri Swami Venkatesananda



**SERVE, LOVE, GIVE,
PURIFY, MEDITATE,
REALIZE**
So Says
Sri Swami Sivananda

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PRAYERFUL DEDICATION TO BHAGAVAN SIVANANDA

Lord!

Condescend to accept this humble flower, fragrant with the aroma of thine own divine glory, immeasurable and infinite. Hundreds of savants and scholars might write hundreds of tomes on your glory, yet it would still transcend them all.

In accordance with thine ancient promise:

yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati bharata
abhyutthanamadharmasya tadatmanam srijamyaham
paritranaya sadhoonam vinasaya cha dushkritam
dharmasamsthapanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge
(Gita IV-7, 8)

You, the Supreme Being, the all-pervading Sat-chidaranda-Para-Brahman, have taken this human garb and come into this world to re-establish Dharma (righteousness). The wonderful transformation you have brought about in the lives of millions all over the world is positive proof of your Divinity.

I am honestly amazed at my own audacity in trying to bring this Supreme God, Bhagavan Sivananda, to the level of a human being (though Sage Valmiki had done so while narrating the story to Lord Rama) and to describe the Yoga of the Yogeshwara, the goal of all Yogins. Lord! I cling to Thy lotus-feet and beg for Thy merciful pardon.

If, however, these pages do inspire some others to take up Thy cross and follow Thee, my Gurudev, I shall have been amply justified in this misadventure. What is Sivananda's Cross ?

It is:

Meditate
|
Love—|—Serve
|
Realise

This is what has been dealt with in this humble attempt at the presentation of Sivananda Yoga.

Sivanandarpanamastu.

SIVA-PADA-RENU
(Dust of Sivananda's Feet),
Swami Venkatesananda.

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CHAPTER ONE

A LITTLE OF ALL

In the history of the world there have been sages, saints and prophets who have practised and preached one or the other modes of approaching the goal, which is self-realisation. It was Gurudev¹, the prophet of integral yoga, who insisted “It is not enough to practise any one kind of spiritual discipline, however well you may strive to do so. Every aspirant should incorporate in his spiritual programme all the items of all the yogas or modes of approaching God.”

Gurudev had no doctrine of his own. He re-delivered the same message that has from the beginning of time been given to us by the divine. His were the lips of God. He was one with God. Yet, if we can audaciously read a doctrine into his teaching, his own unique approach to the science of yoga can be called “The Yoga of a Little” or the yoga of synthesis. He warned us that only the harmonious development of the entire being could take us easily to the goal. A weak spot anywhere in the structure would ruin the whole.

He composed a rather simple but beautiful little song, which he himself sang in the Mahamantra tune at every meeting he addressed, especially during his All-India-Ceylon Tour in 1950.

hare rama, hare rama, rama rama, hare hare
hare krishna, hare krishna, krishna krishna, hare hare
Eat a little, drink a little;
 talk a little, sleep a little.
Mix a little, move a little;
 serve a little, give a little;
Work a little, rest a little;
 study a little, worship a little.
Do asana a little, pranayama a little;
 reflect a little, meditate a little,
Do japa a little, do kirtan a little,
 write mantra a little, have satsanga a little.
Do all these, little, little. You will have time for all.

Was the Master against doing more of these wonderful things—like japa, asanas, or meditation? You ask, “Why only a little, why not much?” Then, we go on to interpret this to mean, “Do at *least* a little . . .” But he really meant just this, “Do a little of each, don’t specialise.” That was the message—because the thing that clamours for specialisation is the ego, for the specialist is admired by the crowd. Specialisation fattens one’s ego, weakens the spirit of tolerance and understanding, and creates contempt and hatred.

¹In this work, “Gurudev”, “Swamiji and ” the Master” refer to Swami Sivananda.

Yoga is harmony. A beautiful, symmetrical and integral development of the total being, which means exercising every aspect of your personality every day. Otherwise there is an imbalance of personality, which is no yoga. In Gurudev's way therefore you cannot spend too much time per day on any one practice, whatever it may be. A true follower of Swami Sivananda can only do a little of all. Thus there is harmonious development, health (wholeness) of body, mind and spirit.

Gurudev, while still a senior student at the medical college, was very eager that people should know the art of healthy living rather than the technique of healing. The need for curative treatment arises only when you have been foolish enough to fall ill. Why not prevent it? Soon after leaving college, he started a magazine called "Ambrosia" and in that magazine he published every little hint, secret or non-secret, that he could unearth. People must be educated on how to prevent themselves from falling ill, not so much on how to find a cure. Curing is only emergency treatment.

Throughout his life he was passionately devoted to making knowledge and service available and free to as many people as possible. These two were unique passions of the Master—health and service. He had no use at all for secrets ("I have this special exclusive remedy, come to ME.") If he came upon a secret theory, it had to be published the next morning. Once when someone in the ashram wished to prepare a correspondence course from Swamiji's writings, publishing one lesson a month and making money from the project, Swamiji agreed. But once it was done, Swamiji immediately put the lessons back into book form and had them published for immediate distribution, mostly free.

He was a professional doctor, who sought by every possible means to help you not to go to a doctor. Even so the practice of yoga asanas, which he enthusiastically commenced with the aid of some books while in Malaya, became part of this whole approach to health. His book on hatha yoga contains the fundamental essence of the basic ancient texts. The importance that hatha yoga played in the total scheme of his teachings was how to keep yourself healthy, really healthy.

How to be healthy? What does 'health' really mean? Health by definition means WHOLENESS. You cannot have physical health at the expense of mental health. There is no such thing as physical health. Health being wholeness cannot be divided into physical, mental and spiritual. A harmonious development of both body and mind was Gurudev's speciality. Frequently in his writings on yoga physical culture, he comes back to mental health, spiritual well-being. If the mind is completely, disorganised and neurotic, the body cannot be healthy, however many asanas you practise, for however long, however perfectly.

Yoga Asana

Gurudev did not neglect his yoga asana practice even for a day. He himself only started practising them when he was nearly thirty. He insisted, "It is never too late to start, and there is no condition under which the asanas should be given up; even in disease the asanas should only be modified to suit the condition of the body." At the best of times he did the sirasasana (headstand) for five or ten minutes. He also did sarvangasana (shoulder stand), and to these two he added a few more; a little forward bending, mahamudra, paschimottanasana and halasana.

Similarly, some mild physical exercises formed part of Gurudev's daily routine. "Sitting on your bed, just after you wake up you can finish these exercises in five minutes" he used to say. Sitting cross legged, he bent forward, then leaned backward, supporting the trunk with the palms planted on the bed, then twisted the trunk left and right. Catching hold of the toes he would roll and swing backward, making a seesaw with the back. Getting out of bed he would stand and lean forward against a wall and do some mild trunk twisting exercises. Anyone can do these, they are so easy and the benefits are incalculable.

What Gurudev loved he enthusiastically encouraged others to do. He was by no means a yoga asana specialist, yet if he talked to you about it his enthusiasm was so infectious that you would feel, "Oh I must start right away." While still in Malaya, Gurudev's cook, Sri Narasimha Iyer, was also swept up by the doctor's enthusiasm and eagerly joined him in the yoga asanas (Many years later he became his Sannyasin-disciple). Swami Sivananda often taught yoga postures to young men wherever he happened to be, on the platform of a railway station, or on the pavement. He used to call it 'aggressive service.' "Don't wait till someone comes to you, pays your subscription and joins your class. Teach him here and now, wherever you are." Gurudev was not fond of theories which say: 'This is the perfection in this asana.' His teaching was: "Do what you can now today, to the best of your ability, sincerely, seriously, honestly—this is perfection." If you reach out to that today and if you are regular, it is possible you might develop a little more, and a little more. But do NOT look at somebody else, with envy or to copy.

This was another unique feature of Swami Sivananda—he could really genuinely and sincerely appreciate someone who did something better than himself. There was not even a trace of jealousy in him. It was remarkable. For instance if some great hatha yogi visited the ashram (and many did) and this man performed some fantastic feat, Swamiji would talk about this man for years to come, with no reservations: "He is a yogi! He must be unique in the world!" He would openly glorify his own disciples too.

The Master was also fond of gymnastics and sports, and he loved walking. Even as a school student he was so efficient at gymnastics that his instructor often made him teach the class. In the early years in the ashram life, he used to run around the bhajan (prayer) hall. Can you imagine this large man, this great world renowned Swami Sivananda, sage of the Himalayas, the Great Yogi of India, etc. etc. tying up his dhoti (cloth around his waist) and jogging around a public hall? He was not self-conscious at all. With an old tennis racket and a ball, he also used to play with himself against the wall.

In summer Gurudev loved to swim. He had a bald head, and he would sit on the Ganges bank, naked except for a loin cloth, and rub his body nicely with oil. He had his own health hints and sunbathing ideas. Not only must your skin be exposed to the sun, but your tongue and teeth also. He would sit there, right in the open, smiling, and grinning at the sun, sticking his tongue out, bathing them in the sunlight.

Health is a vital pre-requisite for spiritual practice, and even for enjoying life or for running your business efficiently, but health must include the body, mind and soul. There must be emotional balance, and rest and diet are also important.

Diet

“This is right and that is wrong.” I have never heard him lay down such categorical imperatives. You find them in his books—but there he is only relaying traditional teaching. As regards diet he used to say: “Take sattvic food”, food that does not excite you, throw you off balance, or disturb your equilibrium. You have to understand the principle, understand the teaching, and then see what suits you at the particular stage you are at. The Master himself took very hot, spicy, pungent food—but that was alright for him. You cannot copy him. You must discover what sattvic food means to you; as Swamiji also used to say, “Use your common-sense.” That seems to be difficult!

With food, as with asanas, Gurudev emphasised more the psychic effects: psychic in the sense of the effect on the nervous system, the mind, and the inner psychic principle, rather than mere physiological reaction. So one has to put all this together and imbibe the spirit—the truth being neither “this” nor “that” but something in between.

Pranayama

Gurudev was a great believer and exponent of pranayama. He loved it. His ideal being integral yoga, both exercise of the body and control of breath (and thereby the life-force) had their place. Pranayama floods the system with peace and bliss. It is an astonishing fact that Swami Sivananda devoted several hours of his extremely busy day to his practice.

He was extremely fond of what he called ‘Sukha Purvaka’ or the ‘Simple Pranayama’ very easy and comfortable. In the winter he also did bhasrika: it was beautiful to watch him do this. He did not insist that you should hold your breath as long as possible (as the orthodox texts seem to imply) but as long as comfortable. Do you immediately notice the problem? “Inhale as long as comfortable. Hold as long as comfortable. Exhale as long as comfortable.” Two words are equally important—‘long’ and ‘comfortable’. It is not as ‘short’ as comfortable—then just anything will do. No. It must be prolonged. This made Gurudev’s yoga a bit more difficult than the traditional approach, where a definite rule or measure is laid down to guide you.

Gurudev’s pranayama involves vigilance. There must be watchfulness, seriousness, sincerity. You must set out to find your limit, but not to exceed it. There must be no violence, no force, and no tension at all. In this way inner harmony is promoted. Yoga has to be practised seriously but without violence, without the spirit of competition. It is a beautiful thing. This is Sivananda’s yoga.

Invariably he woke up before 3.00 a.m. which was well before the time he asked all the spiritual aspirants to rise. At this time he used to devote over an hour to pranayama alone, and during an extremely busy day, he would spend at least another three hours in this practice, in several sessions, whenever he found the time. In the last year of his life, when he was not able to do very much in the way of yoga asanas, he said, “At every opportunity I do pranayama; even lying down I do pranayama and especially at night if I can’t (don’t) sleep.” If he could, he would prop himself up on some pillows and do it. This was his advice to almost everyone who met him, “If you can’t do the yoga asanas properly, just do the best that you can, but practise a lot of pranayama.” He realised that

pranayama, not merely breathing exercises, has a direct effect on the nervous system and on the mind. It promotes an inner state of well-being quite different from that we conventionally call health.

Health Redefined

If someone hasn't been to a doctor for the last six months, we think that is health. In Gurudev's case health meant something more. He had diabetes from the age of about thirty-five and lumbago later on and there were other problems. But his face was radiant and shining, his eyes sparkling with energy and humour and his every movement full of love and wisdom. His mind, his brain, was supremely alert even when the body was weak. Even physically he was extremely attractive. A robust figure, which if it had belonged to somebody else might have been ugly and uncouth, only added to his charm, added to his majesty. Even the skin was clean, clear, sparkingly well maintained. His clothes were always spotlessly clean. Even when his body was ill, there was that extraordinary glow, that radiance.

Once he was down with typhoid, and his body had been so weakened that on one or two occasions we thought he would pass away. Even then, his eyes were sparkling, his face radiant. He had been confined to his room for about three weeks and wanted to see the sun and the Ganges. Slowly we brought him outside and he lay in his favourite chair. If you had looked at him then you would have said that there was nothing wrong. He was beautiful to look at and he was laughing, joking, and talking to people. After about an hour or so he said, "Alright, let me go back to bed. Wait, I'll try and get up by myself." He planted both his feet on the floor and holding the arms of the chair tried to lift himself off ... and collapsed ... luckily, back into the chair itself. Perhaps you can visualise the whole scene. You and I would probably have been full of gloom, despair. As he was collapsing, he started to laugh, "Hm, my legs have lost their strength." These were his exact words. "My legs", not "I."

The way he reacted to the many ailments and illnesses that assailed his body can be used as a revolutionary re-definition of the whole concept of health. Health is a state of mind, a state of inner well-being which enables you to function, to do your work, your allotted task without moaning, grumbling. Health is not the body being declared medically free from illness. Gurudev didn't mind taking medicines at all; on the other hand, there was a whole plate full of them after lunch. His philosophy was that if you can take food for the body, you can also take some other thing called medicine.

Never once through all his illnesses did he moan or groan and when doctors entered his room, it was hard for us to convince them that *he* was sick. Swamiji would ask, "And how is your health?" Likewise when some of the ashram swamis went to see him, he was only concerned about *their* health, and requested them to look after themselves. Who was the patient, who was the doctor? Lying in bed he used to continue his work marvellously well. He was so tremendously alert and there was always this state of inner well-being. Sometimes the body functioned 100% sometimes only 80% or 70% and he was prepared to adjust, prepared to take the body along with him. It looked as though he graciously allowed some ailments to dwell in his body.

Once he remarked: "There are two or three things I need. So I'm very careful about them." He was careful with his eyesight. His voice was also very important to him. He had a ringing bell-metal voice throughout his life and he had his own special exercises for it. He was careful with his teeth. He said: "If you don't have proper teeth, you can't speak well and you can't eat well." He would adopt any measure that any doctor recommended to keep them clean. Brushing his teeth in the morning was a big ceremony with him.

Thus he protected certain organs. He did not want to be totally and completely dependent on others. Also, he did not want to lose the instruments with which he served humanity. When later on he couldn't move about freely, he used a walking stick. He would give it to somebody else to carry, just in case the need arose. "Keep it with you, if I feel a bit giddy, I'll take it from you." The body should not be helped too much as this would weaken it. Later it became a bit more difficult and he himself used to hold the stick and walk; then, even this was not sufficient and he would hold somebody's hand. But the body was not excused; what had to be done, had to be done. The Master's mind was alert, vigilant, energetic, powerful. He refused to give in to the whims of the body. When the legs would hardly move on account of lumbago and rheumatism, he still insisted: "I'll come out. I'll work in the office".

What is that state of mind that is able to overcome physical ailments? What is that state of mind which sees that though the body is weakening, it is still capable of some functions and those it should be made to perform cheerfully, whole-heartedly, brilliantly? That is health.

At one stage he used to spend about half an hour in my room before he went to the office. The steps next to the room were very steep, and he had to climb them to get to the office. It was alright for some time when the body was in good health. Then when he had lumbago and could not walk so easily, he asked for a long stick with the help of which he used to climb those stairs. Why did he have to go that way? Nobody knew. One day he could no longer even use his stick and literally bent down and crawled up. He could easily have said 'I am not well, come to my room.' There was absolutely no despair, no excuses, no moaning at all; there wasn't even self-consciousness.

That spirit, that state of mind is called health, where even an ageing body cannot dampen or weaken the inner spirit even for a moment. He had this sense of spiritual well-being at all times throughout his life.

One might attribute some of these to what is popularly known as the kundalini shakti being awakened. This was never discussed. From within him came an abundance of energy. It filled him and flowed from him constantly.

In 1953 the Parliament of Religions was held in the ashram. Hundreds of visitors had come and for three days the ashram was a hive of activity. The last day's programme was prolonged by Swami Sivananda and concluded after midnight, and then Swamiji retired. One of the visitors, the Speaker of the Indian Parliament, wanted to leave very early the next day, and had asked Swami Sivananda, "Can I have your darshan (audience), just to see you before I leave?" and Gurudev had agreed. The Speaker called on the Master at five o'clock that morning. We could hardly keep our eyes open, but there was not a trace of fatigue on the face of Swami Sivananda. He had hardly gone

to bed two or three hours before and here he was, talking and chatting freely. That was an extraordinary feature. No matter how hard he worked, or how much he worked (and let us not forget that while we were only in our twenties, he was in his sixties) he always had more physical and mental energy which filled him and overflowed, filling others with enthusiasm—call it awakened kundalini, call it self-realisation, call it anything you like.

In 1950 he was sixty three when he undertook an intense two month tour of the whole of India. During this period he had to address over five or six mass meetings a day. At each of those meetings Gurudev spoke, sang and danced as though he could give his very life to those he addressed. There were small private gatherings too and informal visits to some institutions, and there also Gurudev would speak and sing with the same zeal and fervour that he displayed whilst addressing mammoth gatherings. Even if the audience consisted of only four members of a family, to him it was an opportunity to spread the Gospel of Divine Life, the glory of the Divine Name, and the gist of all spiritual teachings. To him it was as great an opportunity as that of addressing five millions.

To him the moment mattered more than the years to come. To the work of the moment he gave his heart and soul without reserves. While in Malaya, where for ten years he unceasingly and untiringly served the people as a doctor, he took upon his shoulders the work of a number of his colleagues. He expended every ounce of his energy. He could not withhold anything because he was enthusiasm itself. Anyone else in his position would have grown old at 38, when he renounced the world and started a new life!

The life that awaited him in Rishikesh was in no way helpful to the restoration of the energy spent in Malaya. The meagre fare of an anchorite, food that he was not accustomed to, and the conditions of life that prevailed, far from replenishing what was lost, could only have been expected to drain off what energy was left in him and hasten the advent of old age.

But it was not so. In 1930, after seven years of rigorous austerities, when Gurudev addressed his first audiences in U.P. and Bihar, they found in him a full-blown yogi, youthful, with ebullient vigour, his powerful voice ringing with a soul force that had conquered old age and put weakness to shame. What power Gurudev's words had! They came from his heart, from his soul.

Once after returning from a tour in 1930, Swamiji received a letter from a parent of a student of a high school that he had addressed in Sitapur. It said that after hearing Gurudev speak their son had run away from home, leaving behind a note: "I am going to meet my real Father, Swami Sivananda." Similarly, Dr. Roy joined the ashram as its medical officer soon after the All-India Tour in 1950, having heard Gurudev's lecture at Chidambaram. Such was the awakening and transforming power of Gurudev's words.

Gurudev ascribed this continuously bursting inner fountain of energy to the regular practice of asanas, pranayama, meditation, and the repetition of the Lord's name, but particularly to pranayama. This endowed Gurudev with a phenomenal memory and a marvellous capacity to do ashtavadhana (doing eight things simultaneously). Pranayama purifies the nadis (the subtle energy channels) and the nervous system, and strengthens the mind. Gurudev's powerful brain could give directions for work to a hundred people at the same time. Every visitor to "Ananda Kutir" (literally

translated as the “Abode of Bliss” which was Gurudev’s room, and thus the nucleus of the now world-renowned Sivananda Ashram) knew that he was registered in Gurudev’s mind and that even after a decade, he would still be recognised should they meet again. He could remember a face for 30 or 40 years even if the face had changed. If someone whom he had seen as a little girl went back after thirty years he would remark: “You look like a little girl I saw...” and she would say, “Yes, Swamiji, that was me.”

There are instances galore. During the All-India Tour, he met the then Chief Minister of Mysore, Sri K. C. Reddy at Bangalore airport, and conversed with him for a few minutes. Two years later Mr. Reddy came to Rishikesh and Swamiji recognised him instantly, though Mr. Reddy was dressed differently. Sadhu Murugadas visited the ashram in 1940 and sang beautiful bhajans (songs of praise of the Lord). He visited again in 1948 and gave another wonderful programme. When he was about to conclude Gurudev reminded him: “What about the beautiful prayer with which you concluded last time—’asato ma sat gamaya’?” Murugadasji was surprised at Gurudev’s exceptional memory.

There was something extraordinarily special about Gurudev; that attractiveness, that glowing and sparkling vitality and effervescent energy. Swami Paramananda once said: “If the Master just walked along any road, he would gather a crowd around him. It is not necessary that there should be any advance propaganda. Let him merely walk along a road in London, he would attract a whole crowd there.” Once we went to Dehra Dun, a town not far from the ashram. It was winter then and Swamiji had a huge overcoat on, so that looking at him you wouldn’t say that he was even a swami. As he was walking along the shopping centre, quite a crowd gathered around him for no reason. They just wanted to walk with him!

Why do we want all this health? Why do we even want the body to be alive? Is health so important in itself? Don’t forget that Gurudev was a medical doctor and as such it is inevitable that he should have seen the futility of pampering to the body. He had no illusions concerning human life, no illusions concerning vitality. He knew that the physical energy supply is limited; that there comes a time when the body ages and the energy level falls. He knew that.

Once Swami Sivananda was walking up a flight of steps to go to the temple and about half way he sat down on a step. Just then a young boy who was also living in the ashram came running, tumbling down the ‘steps. Swamiji looked at him, full of admiration. “Haah, he is full of energy. I also used to be like that once, but now for this body it is not possible.” He knew that.

Only once have I heard him refer back to his life in Malaya with a touch of regret. He said: “If I had known then that I would be engaged later in this kind of activity which benefits not only one patient or one neighbourhood, but everyone in the world, I would have conserved a little more energy in my youth. I would have taken better care of myself and would not have spent so much energy in Malaya.” He knew that because the energy supply is limited, it has to be spent fruitfully, intelligently, wisely. He knew that death is inevitable however long you live. Therefore he was not fond of ‘health’ for its own sake. He would not have loved to live in that body if it was not of some service to others. And therefore he declared once: “I live to serve. I live to serve all.” Every moment of that life, the body was whipped into service—not just cajoled, but whipped into service. It was looked after very well, and work was extracted from it also very well.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SECRET OF SELFLESS SERVICE

Gurudev Sivananda was such a radiant person that just to look at him was already an inspiration. I think the greatest service that he did was to make himself so easily available, so accessible to everybody at large. This was a unique factor. In the ashram, he was the most easily accessible person. At least three times a day he was out in the open. He took part in the morning “classes”, the worship in the temple and from about ten a.m. he worked in the office. It was open, anybody could walk in. Children would even run in and ask, “Swamiji, what is the time now?”—and he answered them. People who walked along the road could feast their eyes on him, “Aah, there is Swami Sivananda!” Just that was a remarkable service, Karma Yoga.

What is Karma Yoga? An American businessman had come to the ashram in 1947 for a few days visit. It was the custom that visitors addressed the evening satsang on their last night. The American visitor had wandered around the ashram and observed us doing various things. He said, “Some of you practise bhakti yoga, some of you practise hatha yoga, and so on. We in the United States practise karma yoga. We are all working very hard, working day and night, earning a lot of money.” Later Swamiji told him, “This is not really karma yoga. Karma yoga is different. *Isavasyamidam sarvam—God alone pervades all. God alone is Truth. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient. He who has this vision, he alone is a karma yogi.*” Karma yoga is not some form of service which we pretend is unselfish, but karma yoga is the spontaneous action, the non-volitional action, the non-egotistic action, the totally unselfish action of an enlightened person, in whose eyes only God exists, within and without.

Karma yoga is perhaps not what a student of yoga practises, but rather how a perfected sage lives. It is not karma yoga if the action is done with any motivation whatsoever. It is not only a matter of the action being motivated by selfishness, egoism or vanity. True spontaneous action is possible only when the mind has become totally unconditioned. As long as even the feeling persists, “I do this”, the action is still within the bounds of selfishness; there is some motive there, however noble it may be.

We must remember however that the Master wanted all aspects of yoga to go hand in hand every day of our life. For us, karma yoga is any sort of service that involves the least selfishness. Karma yoga as a spiritual *discipline* is what purifies the heart of selfishness. It is prescribed as a preliminary purificatory practice before entering the inner court of contemplation and Gurudev amply demonstrated this during his life in Malaya and Swarg Ashram.

In order to understand the spirit of karma yoga, one has to live with Someone who is an exemplar of this. Otherwise there is misunderstanding!

For instance, Swami Sivananda has said something very beautiful in his ‘Song of a Karma Yogi’: “Scrutinise always your inner motive”. We often pretend to ourselves, “I am scrutinising my inner motives.” We do not ask ourselves, “But why am I doing so?” for the answer might well be, “In order to prove to myself that I am spiritually taller than the next man.” What is the inner

motive for scrutinising the inner motive? Are you even a little bit closer to God for doing this? If you scrutinise your inner motive, motivelessly, you will be. That is what we saw in Gurudev. But for the example the words are lifeless.

But, can you see someone else do something and ask yourself, “Oh God in that situation, would I have acted as he does?” Without justifying your defects or idolising the ideal? (Don't make a mistake—I have the greatest devotion to the Master. I worship him in every way. In the ashram every other day someone performed padapuja (worship) when we would wash his feet and drink the water. All that is good and important. But you must not *merely* idolise him). There is the ideal—you have seen it, you have observed it, watched it. Perhaps it is far, far above you. It is not for you to look at as we look at a cloud, but to be imbibed just as the fruit of the cloud (the rainwater) is. We must enter into this perfection. Otherwise there was no need for Swami Sivananda to have lived among us.

It was not when Dr. Kuppaswamy became a renunciate that this spirit of karma yoga was born in him. Even as a child it was there in him. Gurudev's elder brother's wife who looked after him after his mother had died told me, “He was a normal boy, there was nothing extraordinary about him. He was mischievous. He was energetic, very energetic and he could also bully and fight. But one thing—he loved to share whatever he had with others.” In later life that became more or less a mantra with him. “Share whatever you have with others.” (Another characteristic that this lady mentioned was that he liked good food and it had to be prepared exactly right; if it was a little less than perfect, he would not have it. That was also there throughout his life). He could never eat anything hiding himself behind the cupboard. He always had to call a few friends and have a party. This party spirit was always there. He could never do anything alone, enjoy anything alone, which extended to cover even the bliss of self-realisation. He was a compulsive giver. He had it in his blood.

Free distribution of literature was born with the medical journal ‘Ambrosia’ which he published as a young doctor. In Malaya Gurudev shared his knowledge of medicine, especially preventive methods. Also he would give away food, money and clothing. Patients were not treated as patients but as friends. The doctor would bring them into his house if necessary, make provision for their convalescence so that they could receive a proper diet; give them train fares home, help them to find suitable jobs, and follow up their welfare personally, socially, etc. No sacrifice was too great for him in the service of ailing persons. Gurudev concerned himself more with the poor than with the rich—that the poor could not pay did not matter to him.

Gurudev was charity itself. Indiscriminate and unrestrained charity. Those who attended the sraddhas in his house (sraddha is an annual ceremony in memory of one's parents) used to receive an offering of ten dollars in addition to valuable presents in clothes, silver vessels, etc. In most other homes they might get two dollars. A monk who once visited the Master's house in Johore-Bahru was warmly welcomed and treated like a prince. When he left Gurudev gave him a hearty send off and a first class train ticket to his destination.

That Gurudev lived a simple life goes without saying. A simple life is one of the prerequisites for charity and any self-sacrificing activity. If you love luxury, then neither of these is possible. Gurudev gave and gave and gave, and he also received—obviously, you can only give out

of the cash box what it contains, not more than that. He emphasised what he described as 'spontaneous, overwhelming generosity.....' I can still hear these words ringing in my ears. He gave and he received and in his case on both occasions he was thankful to the other person. If you gave him something, he would be delighted and when he gave you something, once again, he was delighted and full of gratitude—to you for having received and for having given him the opportunity to serve you. I have heard it from his lips a million times—"When there is a poor or a sick man at your door whom you have the opportunity to attend to, know that it is God himself, who has come in this form to give you an opportunity to serve. Thank the Lord for having come here?"

When Mr. Narasimha Iyer² had joined the doctor as his cook, they had agreed upon a certain salary, say 30-40 dollars, plus food, clothes and household expenses. On the first day of the following month, Gurudev ran into the kitchen with a tray in his hands. On it were fruits, flowers, new clothes and about 50 dollars. In Indian houses, this is how they welcome and honour a guest, a holy man or a brahmin—as God. The cook was expecting his wage, and looked questioningly at the doctor; Gurudev prostrated in front of him saying, "This is your sambhavana, Iyer.....is it adequate?" The word 'sambhavana' has a holy connotation. It implies "an offering made with devotion and reverence." Gurudev would never use words like 'pay', 'salary' or 'wages'. He looked upon his servants as manifestations of God. This was his attitude throughout his life. Whatever he gave, including his service, was always a humble offering unto God.

Compulsive Sharing

Whatever Gurudev had was available to anyone who was in need. When a beggar comes and stands in front of someone's house it is usual (to our disgrace) to dispose of "garbage". You have a bunch of bananas and have eaten the best ones. What is left is overripe and rotten. If a beggar comes to your door, he gets them! You could never persuade Gurudev to do that. I saw it at least once: He was about to eat something and found that it had become a bit stale and someone suggested, "Keep it, Swamiji, we can give it to the cow or the monkeys." He replied, "No. Throw it away. What is not fit for my consumption, is not fit for anybody's consumption."

Here is a typical oft-recurring incident: A beggar comes to the door of the doctor (Gurudev) in Malaya. What does he expect? A few odd coins, or some scraps? There is just enough food for a meal, and the doctor is about to sit and eat when the beggar calls at the door. The cook says: "I'll go and give him something," but the doctor fetches him inside and the astonished beggar is made to sit down in the kitchen and is served with food first. There is not enough food to feed three people! Together the doctor and his cook share what remains of the meal. The doctor tells the cook: "Come, you have satisfied a hungry man, now we can share whatever remains. His satisfaction will satisfy our hunger too." That is the spirit of karma yoga.

Above all, it was feeding people that gave him the greatest delight. He was happiest when he could persuade people to eat a little more, and therefore one of his own Twenty Spiritual Instructions was ignored by him as soon as you entered the ashram. "Eat a little, drink a little....", he

²Mr. Iyer rejoined the Master who accepted him as an ordained disciple. Much of the material concerning the Master's life in Malaya was gathered from him.

used to sing, but you could only do so when you got back home! When he gave prasad—or some fruits or sweets—he would scoop out with his huge hands and give you. And you had to eat it immediately, right in front of him. As he watched you, it gave him endless delight. He was thrilled, thrilled to see about a hundred or two hundred people sit down and eat to their heart's content. I don't think that he ever felt that this was a contradiction to his teaching. In the beginning he used to be rather strict with regard to some observances, like fasting on Ekadasi (eleventh day of the lunar fortnight), but later even these rules were relaxed. People brought fruits and sweets into his office and in no time the whole lot was distributed to those around him.

Once this turned into a rather tricky situation. A very good devotee, a South Indian lady from Bombay, had come to the ashram and had brought a very special sweet preparation that she knew Gurudev was fond of. She was an expert in preparing this and had obviously gone to much trouble. She knew of the Master's habit of distributing to others and had taken that into account, but she was almost in tears when she saw Gurudev handing the plate around to everyone and not taking any for himself. Her heart was sinking. Gurudev turned to tell the distributor, "You must also give a portion to her," when suddenly he noticed her expression. He "ordered" the Swami distributing it, "Stop it, stop it..... Oh Swami, wait, bring it here, the rest is for me, I'm going to eat it. Don't give it away." He saw the lady's face begin to blossom, her cheeks become rosy. "Bring it here. I'm going to eat it." He put one bit in his mouth and somehow again the plate went round. The joy that he had when he shared, and especially food, fruit, or books, was indescribable.

On another occasion—this was even worse. It was in 1948 or '49 when the ashram was very poor and fruit was not only rare but expensive. If anyone entered his kutir they had to receive something. I had taken him some work and Gurudev asked his cook if there were any oranges. The cook had bought some oranges exclusively for Gurudev. He had tremendous devotion to his Guru and he wasn't going to move. In the meantime Gurudev walked into the kitchen. He could see where the fruits were. So he picked one up and gave it to me. Before long he had given some to the monkeys and fish as well, and one by one all the oranges were finished. Such was his compulsive giving nature. If oranges were rare then even the fish and the monkeys should also enjoy their share!

There were only about ten or twelve people in the ashram in 1944-45 and ordinarily all of us used to come to the kitchen and eat. What became the dining hall later was used more as an office in those days. Sometimes Gurudev would come and sit on one of those cement benches and talk to us, and say: "You think it's a small place now, but one day you'll see. From here to Lakshman Jhula people will sit and eat." It happened. We didn't actually serve people all along the road, but if you lined up all those that ate in the ashram in 1958-59, it would have been at least one mile—easily four to five hundred people. That vision he had.

Once he had typhoid and he couldn't even stand. He was very weak and dizzy. To go to the bathroom, he literally hung on two people's shoulders. From the bathroom one day he was looking out of the window at the Ganges. He asked, "Who is that sitting there?" One of us answered. "Oh it is very hot there," Gurudev replied. "Go and tell her that she should not sit there. How long has she been sitting there? Perhaps she hasn't had any lunch." He told his cook, "Go and ask her if she has eaten, if not, ask her to come here and take something."

That was his sole wish! You must be fed nicely, you mustn't suffer, you mustn't go without anything. I have never seen anybody else behave like that. First food for your body and then food for your soul. This giving was totally indiscriminate. It had to be done. Both food and books were distributed completely indiscriminately. Charity—giving, giving, giving, all the time—had to go on; and in that there was a vision which we can possibly not even contemplate. If we try to understand it intellectually it is reduced to a set of words.

Spontaneous Overwhelming Generosity

Once a wandering beggar came to the ashram. Swamiji enquired how he had travelled since he did not look at all tired. The beggar replied that he had travelled first class on the train, since those coaches were emptier, and in that way he was not inconveniencing the overcrowded third class passengers. This beggar also happened to have a very good voice and a wonderful innate musical talent. Gurudev asked him if he could sing. "Swamiji, I guess every beggar knows how to sing a little bit." "Wonderful. Today we'll have your concert during the satsang." All the ashramites and visitors gathered in the Bhajan Hall. For once this poor beggar was really in trouble. You have never seen a more frightened face! He didn't know what a satsang was; he had never given a concert in his life. He was put up on a platform, and when he saw a swami coming with a garland, he froze. He didn't know what to do—and he didn't know how to run away either! On top of all this Gurudev gave him a nice title, "Sangita Ratna", which means, a music expert. It is impossible for either him or anyone else who witnessed this whole scene never to forget it.

Once in a while, overwhelm the other man with your generosity; when he expects just two cents, give him a few dollars and see what happens. See that glow in the other person's face, feel the delight in his heart. Perhaps that is the 'light of God.'

Why don't we practise such overwhelming generosity? There seem to be two inhibiting factors. The first is "Well you know, if I do this once, he will expect me to do it again and again and I'll become bankrupt in ten days." Quite true. Swami Sivananda also didn't do it every day—obviously—for then he would not have been able to build even a small cottage, let alone an ashram. But, once in a while do yourself a treat, two dollars is nothing to you—but when it is given to a poor man, to this beggar, all at once, when all he expects is a few cents, it creates a tremendous reaction. "Hah!" He looks at you. "My God, you have really given this to me?" Once in a while give yourself a blissful, beautiful feeling, a heavenly pleasure.

The second inhibiting factor is; "How do I know that he deserves it?" (If God started asking that question we wouldn't even be alive. If God asked himself: "How do I know these people deserve all that fresh air?", what would be the answer?). Such a question arises only when we contemplate some charity! What about the new dress that you bought yesterday?

Gurudev had no use at all for what is called 'discriminating charity.' During the Kumbha Mela (a festival) in 1950 there was a continuous stream of pilgrims passing along the road that went through the ashram. We had set up a sort of ad-hoc office on the roadside and Gurudev used to sit there for an hour or two giving darshan to the pilgrims. A small band of young men with a few musical instruments were singing. Gurudev heard it. "Call them." Swami Paramananda called the whole band. The Master was delighted. "Come on, sit down here and sing for an hour or so." They

did, and sang beautifully. Gurudev took out some money, put it on a plate with some fruits and flowers and gave it to the leader of the band. Someone noticed this, and remarked, "They are hawkers, Swamiji. They are selling cigarettes. They are not devotees singing the names of God. The 'Hare Rama, Hare Krishna' is probably only to attract the crowd". I still remember the mischievous look on Gurudev's face, "Is that so? Then add some more money. Give them another ten rupees. They were singing Mahamantra, singing God's names very beautifully. Charity is charity. You must give. What he does with it is not our business. That is God's work."

Spontaneous, overwhelming, unquestioning generosity. It had no motives at all. Where you find some need, give. And I have never heard him refer back to it. The feeling one got watching the Master do this was—do charity in exactly the same manner in which you will drop your body, when you die.

Trying Situations

You can well imagine that it was a headache to the secretary, and the treasurer, and so on, of an organisation, i.e. the ashram, to have a person like Swami Sivananda as the head. He just went on giving, giving, giving—he did not seem to have any notion where the money came from or where it went. But, I think he knew, though others thought he did not. He was aware all the time that the source is also the goal. "It comes from Him and returns to Him: We are merely channels. We think we are running this institution, this ashram, but we are only trustees."

At least once a year the ashram experienced a financial crisis. Gurudev would seriously consider the position and say; "We will be very careful. We won't admit any new aspirants into the ashram." Usually this only lasted a few days. Soon a poor man would walk in without even a change of clothes asking to stay at the ashram, Swamiji would say: "Yes, yes..... better let him stay. Where else will he go? Do not worry about expenses. Every man brings his own ration with him. Before God sends him here, God has already delivered to the kitchen the food supply that he will need."

These were not just words; if you looked into his face, into his eyes, you knew he was speaking the truth. In him there was no doubt at all, there was no questioning. In him this truth lived. He knew that what you and I call God's will, alone prevailed. If we are going to be bankrupt, we will be bankrupt in any case. There is nothing to worry about! And the secretary submits "Alright, Swamiji." And then the flood-gates are open again—otherwise the next financial crisis wouldn't come so soon.

Another time we had a classical tragedy. A young man joined the ashram. He was a ceaseless and untiring worker, brilliant in every way. He had captured the heart of the Master. Gurudev loved him and admired him, and took him into his confidence. He had made him nearly the all-in-all. He was the post-master, he was the treasurer, he was almost the secretary too, unofficially. He was the cashier and on top of all this he was also doing some literary work for Gurudev. He was such a dynamic personality, and it was only half an hour after he had left the ashram one day that it was discovered that he had embezzled, heaven only knows how much! He was the cashier and the post-master, so nobody could really estimate to what extent the ashram had

been robbed. All we knew was this—there was not a single cent in the entire ashram, which was heavily in debt to local shopkeepers.

So for once we started with a minus balance, and the news spread to Rishikesh. Once again, the grocers very politely told the secretary, “For some time it is better to pay cash for whatever you take,” because the ashram owed a lot to them already. That was the worst calamity I have ever seen in the ashram’s life. And what did the Master do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. He was enjoying the whole thing as a big joke: “How was it possible for him to cheat us like this? He was such a good man! He must be a genius.” Two things he went on repeating. “He must have been a genius to do this.” And, “But he did a lot of work.” He added, “We must have owed him some money—but he could have asked me, I’d have given him.” What is that vision, that realisation, established in which one can say this? That is the vision of God.

One more example of this. In 1946 a businessman came to the ashram from South India. He knew that the Master was very fond of dissemination of spiritual knowledge and that the shelves were full of books which had been printed and published by the ashram. So, he said to Swamiji, “I can distribute and market all your books in South India. He took a large consignment. Six months later the secretary wrote to the address given by the businessman—the letter was returned, ”No such address!” The secretary was amazed. Gurudev said, “Ohji, if you think that you are the self of the man who cheated you, you won’t be disappointed.” If God is one, omnipresent, what is stealing? Stealing is only transferring the object from the right hand to the left hand. You *think* that you are Swami So-and-so, and that you have an ashram, and that those books belong to the ashram, and someone *else* took them, and made a profit, and so on. This makes you angry. “If you see your own self in that other person, not only would you not feel sorry, but you may even feel happy.” Nothing more was said about the whole affair.

“Be equanimous; balanced, even-minded in success and failure, gain and loss.” It is not grinning and bearing it—not at all. “He who cheats me, and that which I call ‘me’, are but the two hands of the omnipresent being, who alone exists!”

But sometimes, to the discomfiture of the authorities of the ashram, Gurudev could make a big joke of this whole thing. One night the ashram temple was broken into, although a number of people were sleeping on the covered verandah which went around the four sides of the temple. The silver pot and other silver vessels were missing. The priest who had discovered the loss, reported the theft to the Master. But instead of getting serious, the Master was curious. “People were sleeping right there at the time when the theft was taking place?” Then he burst out laughing. “He must be a very clever thief. If he is found, I’ll award him a title ‘Chora Shikhamani’ (which means a super-expert in stealing).”

That was all. Gurudev made it look as if there was no theft. He who needed them took them away. He used a very beautiful expression. He used to call it ‘Gupta Daan’—secret charity, in which the receiver saved you from even the trouble of giving it! He needed it—he took it.

Once we decided that instead of Swami Sivananda, he should have been called Swami Givananda—he who rejoices in giving. He knew that the supply came from the source, and to the source it returned. Material considerations of accounting did not bother him at all. He proved in his

own life that in such generosity, there was no bankruptcy. He used to say very often, "Giving has never made a person poor; charity has never made a person poor." In 1924, the Master arrived in Rishikesh, with only the clothes that he had on his body. In 1973, hardly fifty years later, the ashram that he had built was worth a few million rupees, and yet he went on giving, giving, giving. He himself used to say, "Such an attitude puts you in direct communion with the inexhaustible source of all prosperity."

Gurudev's service was the sun before which all the mists of distinctions of colour and creed, caste and sex, vanished. As a doctor in Malaya, he served all nationalities, all castes, everyone, especially the poor. Similarly in Swarg Ashram, where he lived as a mendicant, his service especially of the sick was his first concern. Later, the doors of the Sivananda Ashram were ever open (and still are) to people of all castes, creeds, and nationalities—South Indian Brahmins, non-Brahmins, Christians, Europeans, Americans, Jews, Muslims, Parsees, and Buddhists were all received by Gurudev with equal respect and were entertained with uniform love and hospitality.

Swami Sivananda never bothered about what your religious faith or belief was; he never interfered with all that. He never suggested that one religion was valid, and another was false, or that one was superior to another. Once the Master was scheduled to meet a multi-millionaire, who was a fanatical Hindu. All he wanted to hear was these few words. "The Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) is alone the truth." While the Master was being escorted to this meeting the secretary of this millionaire, dropped a few hints, that the wealthy man could be of great help in Gurudev's mission. The Master listened to him. Gurudev was gloriously received by this rich man, and as predicted, he asked the standard question, "What do you think, Swamiji, of Islam, is it also a religion?" "Oh yes. Yes yes. Yes yes." "The Qu'ran is also the word of God?" asked the millionaire. "Yes yes, yes yes, yes," replied Gurudev. Gurudev returned with a plate of fruits, most of which he distributed there itself! Swami Sivananda was not for sale! Your religion is what appeals to you. Ultimately, religion is an adventure between you and God. Gurudev was not interested in imposing his doctrines, his belief, his faith, even his realisation on others.

The Razor's Edge

Where service was concerned, even the distinction of sex disappeared. Once during his early days in Rishikesh, a young South Indian lady who was staying at the Kalikamliwala rest house fell ill. The manager there advised her to consult Gurudev, which she did. Swamiji gave her some medicine, but since the lady was modest and shy, he gave up the idea of massaging the patient's feet, although he considered this more beneficial than medicine. On returning to his kutir he reflected on the matter and decided that he should not have neglected what was necessary for her welfare. "After all the same Atman (self) that dwells in me dwells in her too. I should not have shrunk back from this service." Early the next morning Gurudev along with his disciple called on the lady again and having given her the medicine, explained to her that he saw only the Divine Mother of the Universe in her to allow him, her child, to massage her feet. She made a speedy recovery.

Gurudev would never tire of warning the monks against moving too closely with members of the opposite sex, and he sternly admonished them not to spend the night in a room adjacent to which a lady is sleeping alone—this is the code of morals. But there is a superior code, the code of

service. Once, while at Lucknow, Gurudev discovered that the old Maharani (his hostess) was seriously ailing with acute rhinitis and he then slept in the corner of her room, ready at hand should she need someone to attend to her. Even her own family would not serve her with such solicitude.

When the need arose, Gurudev was ready to do any kind of service.

In Gurudev, the fear of public criticism was conspicuous by its absence. We should not be arrogant and violate the laws of society, but yet we should dare to do what we know is right. "If you are convinced that you ought to wear an overcoat in order to carry on your spiritual practices undisturbed and to serve humanity best, and if the thought enters your mind that people may criticise you, at once put on the overcoat! This is the way to overcome the fear of public criticism. People may criticise you, but soon they will understand you."

The question he asked himself constantly was, "What is the appropriate, the right thing to do in these circumstances?" and never, "What will people think?" The old Maharani of Singhai frequently used to visit Rishikesh. If she walked along the road in the hot sun, Gurudev clad in the fiery robes of a sannyasin, would hold an umbrella above her head; and his fellow monks would, in their pride of sannyasa, laugh at this bold renunciate serving the mother instead of treating her as a mere householder and asking her to bow at his feet.

Once Swami Sivananda went with the Maharani on a pilgrimage to Ganga Sagar (the holy confluence of the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal). En route the pilgrims had to wade through the sea for a few yards and the old lady could not do that. Gurudev at once lent her his broad and muscular shoulders. The Maharani was reluctant, but without the least hesitation, Gurudev picked her up and carried her to the boat. On another occasion, at the Maharani's palace in Lucknow, a lady mendicant became infuriated when the Maharani declined to satisfy her inordinate demands for money to perform some kind of worship. In the frenzy of anger this mendicant lost all control and fell down unconscious. Gurudev carried her on his shoulders to the nearby hospital and had her attended to. The Maharani had a liking for soda, which she invariably took early in the morning. Her servants, often lax in their duties, might neglect to give it to her at the appointed hour; but the honoured guest, Gurudev, whom the Maharani revered as her preceptor would anticipate his disciple's needs and would, without her knowledge, make sure that the soda was ready waiting for her, ready at hand.

However, when the Maharani planned to make Gurudev stay permanently in the palace as the Royal Preceptor, he quietly slipped away from there and undergoing great sufferings and hardship en route, walked back to Rishikesh. He walked, without informing anyone at the palace, without even taking a blanket when it was midwinter; he suffered cold and hunger on the way but he was determined to rescue himself from even the least touch of worldliness.

In the life of this single, mighty individual, selfless service flowed along many different channels. He used especially to exalt the service of the sick and the poor. He had seen disease and its consequent suffering at very close quarters from his very youth and he intensely felt the pain that afflicted another man. An old friend of Gurudev from Malaya visited the ashram and told us, "We could not recognise Swamiji's greatness in those days. We had more or less concluded that he was full of unusual eccentricities." It was the spirit in which he served, which was unique in Gurudev

Sivananda. He was dynamically, busy, active all day—not in order to gain anything, nor to lose anything, not out of fear, without any expectation of.....

There was no 'because' in his case at all. So, why did he do it? How does a person who has no ambitions, no desires, no cravings, no hopes, no expectations, function at all? We are trapped in this idea that without some motivation, man would be idle. Swami Sivananda questioned, "Why should we be idle? When you do something you ask 'Why should I do that?', but when you don't do it, you don't ask yourself, 'Why do I not do that?'" When the self is seen to be non-existent, you are neither interested in doing anything nor interested in refraining from doing anything, in being lazy, idle. Idleness is useless. Idleness is just another form of vanity or egoism. When the self is seen to be non-existent, the energy and the consciousness in you (which we call God) function. This is where the expression 'God's will' or 'God's grace' is appropriate. In the life of Swami Sivananda, that is exactly what we saw.

Fearlessness

There is no danger in true selfless service; rather it is the Divine Realm where the faithful have absolute immunity. During the early days of Gurudev's life at Swarg Ashram he earned a reputation for daring to venture into regions which anyone who valued his life would avoid from a great distance. Cholera and typhoid cases were earmarked for him as were most contagious and infectious diseases. When Swami Anantanandaji was suffering from cholera of a most virulent type, and people feared to approach his hut, Gurudev was in constant attendance at the Swami's bedside. Gurudev had absolutely no revulsion or dislike to handle the offensive discharges of patients. He would with his own hands clean the bedpan and wash the excreta from the patient's body. When Swami Anantananda was very ill, Gurudev readily and without the least hesitation inserted his own fingers into the rectum of the Swami and removed the faecal matter, without revulsion, without fear. This was an assurance which was not born even of medical knowledge—"I can wash myself in antiseptic solution." I have never seen him wash his hands in antiseptic solution. At best he used just pure water. Similarly, when Sri Veeraraghavachari's disciple was suffering from cholera, it was again Gurudev who volunteered to attend him. People were wonderstruck at Gurudev's service; and many were like Sri Kalyanandaji who, when he fell sick, would send for Gurudev alone—no-one else would do. "Whatever you do with your miraculous healing hand will cure me", he would say.

Much later in 1948-49, Gurudev lived in a basement apartment and upstairs was a family man stricken with the most virulent smallpox. The man's skin was not visible at all. Only the eyeballs were sticking out and the rest of the body was covered with smallpox. And the Master was still there downstairs. Nobody could persuade him to leave that place and go somewhere else in the ashram. One could see from his face that there was no anxiety at all. In the same way, when he himself had typhoid, it did not bother him.

On the psychological level too, as we have seen, he was utterly fearless—fearless first of all of public criticism. It is very important to distinguish this fearlessness from callousness or defiance. There was no defiance in him. I have seen this; if he wanted to do something and one of his own disciples said, "No Swamiji, it should not be done like this, it should be done that way", he would very meekly and simply say, "Yes, alright, let us do it that way." However when it came to what the

whole of him wanted to do, he did not bother at all who said what. In the early years of this century, till he changed the fashion, it was unthinkable for a swami wearing the flaming orange robes to sing and dance, even if it was the Mahamantra—Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare; Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare. A Swami was not even allowed to bow down to others. It was Swami Sivananda who started bowing down to all. He was criticised! H.H. Sri Swami Tapovanji vividly recalled how Gurudev used to carry three little cloth bags wherever he went. One contained leaflets, pamphlets and notebook; one had sweets and biscuits or some fruits, and the third had some common drugs like aspirin, dressings etc. On the roadside he would stop at a hundred places making enquiries about anchorites and villagers and he would distribute the pamphlets and give medicines to anyone who needed them. The sweets he gave to children. While he was at Swarg Ashram Gurudev lived only on alms (from the almshouse) which consisted of soup and dry bread (rotti). After he had left his home in South India, someone discovered that an insurance policy of his had matured and was valued at about five thousand rupees. If he had been rigid he would have refused the money, but instead he used it to buy medicines, fruit and curd for the sick and to serve the sadhus. He established the Satyasevashram Dispensary where all patients, both anchorites and laymen, received medicines, food and money if they needed them and also sincere gratitude and Sashtang Namaskar (complete prostration) much to their embarrassment. The patients were treated as living divinity.

Gurudev was criticised for all this by the swamis and holy men who used to say about him, “Oh, he is a house-holder swami though he wears the orange robe, because he handles money and he publishes all this literature. A swami should walk absolutely bare-handed. He shouldn’t even carry his own water pot—a disciple should do it.” They who had adopted this as their rule, naturally criticised him but he was not moved nor did he react. Only weak men react. Later I myself heard this from one of the critics. He was a wonderful man and he said, “We all used to criticise your guru and now we have all joined him. He was right and we were wrong.”

It is not that the Master ever wanted to prove that he was right. It was so natural—it had to happen. He was so totally and absolutely fearless. Fearless because the false identification that ‘I am the body’ had gone. The body is the body and the ‘I’ does not exist. What functions is the Chit Shakti or the power of God. This is karma yoga. Only such a one could afford not to hate anyone, not to harbour a trace of ill-will. It was only pure love and humility embodied in this gigantic figure that could openly face an assailant and at the same time bow down and fondly look after a little child.

When Gurudev moved over to the present ashram locality, he again established a dispensary and all the ashram inmates were put through a rigorous training in service of the sick. Gurudev would “aggressively” catch hold of pilgrims returning from pilgrimages in the Himalayas and rub their bruised legs with turpentine liniment; he would ask another disciple to rub the other leg, thus giving his disciples practical training in selfless service. It is this Sat-Sankalpa (holy wish) that has taken the shape of the Sivananda Eye Hospital and the gigantic Sivananda General Hospital with all its modern equipment. When Gurudev had lumbago in 1953, we took him to a nearby military hospital for dio-thermy treatment for his back. He said, “What about buying a dio-thermy machine? Then all the poor people in the area can use it free.” That was his temperament.

The Refuge Of Destitutes

The three greatest hallmarks of Gurudev's selfless service were compassion, tolerance, and a resolute determination not to see evil. His compassion did not demand any justification for giving away food and money to old and destitute people who walked into the ashram without the least idea of leading a life of renunciation.

They approached him seeking only to be fed, clothed, and provided with shelter. "Where will he go? We will have to look after him." This expression very often amazed the ashram authorities and visitors too. Gurudev took over responsibility for maintaining a destitute who called at his door with the simple logical reason that the destitute person had been prompted by the Lord within him, to seek refuge at Gurudev's feet. How was the ashram to maintain those people? The question was answered by Gurudev with equal ease, "The Lord who sends them here will provide for their maintenance also. At present the State is not looking after these aged people, so it is my duty to do so, as best as I can."

Among the destitutes were widows, whose husbands' untimely death had left them helpless; women who had been driven out of their homes by the ill-treatment of husbands or parents-in-law, and orphans and old people. To all of them doors of the Sivananda Ashram were ever open. To them all, Gurudev was mother and father. He never questioned them about their past, nor about their future plans; they were in need, and first that need was satisfied. Invariably, after a month or two a 'miracle' would happen. They would rise in the estimation of their kith and kin, and the wound would be healed. There was often a happy reunion of broken families. Once a destitute person was lying outside Rama Ashram. No one even cared to look at him, but as usual, as soon as it came to Gurudev's notice, he had the man brought into the ashram and made everyone of the disciples attend to the man. Often Gurudev stepped in at the most crucial psychological moment for a person and saved that person's life. Many, who in utter despair, stood on the brink of life and death, and preferring death to a miserable existence here, were directed by the supreme mercy of the Lord, to the divine compassionate embrace of Gurudev's love. A miraculous transformation would take place in their lives, gloom and despair yielding to peace and hope.

This sort of service was rendered by Gurudev even in Malaya. Narasimha Iyer told us how young men, completely broken and hopeless had stumbled into the doctor's house. They wished to end their life and their misery, and the doctor always showed them how to end the misery, and gain a new lease on life. He would look after them as he would his own brothers, pursuing their life's careers until such time as they could take their place honourably in society.

Throughout his life this service continued, and the only reason given for admitting such persons into the ashram was, "God has sent them to us in order that we may serve them." People who were suffering severe shocks, whether due to the loss of beloved ones, or set-backs in their official and social careers came to Gurudev for protection. They found that they were welcomed. Gurudev's Abhaya-Hasta (the hand that guarantees fearlessness) granted them freedom from all kinds of tensions and anxieties allowing the sun of hope and joy to dawn in their lives. Such indiscriminate protection is granted only by the Lord.

It was this attitude that made Gurudev assert that there was no one in the world who did not deserve his service, no one in the world who did not deserve charity. It is this feeling that was behind his indiscriminate service and charity—and that is the key to yoga.

The Spirit

Are there not in the world, individuals and institutions that render one or more, or even all the types of services described? Perhaps there are. So, what is it that distinguished Gurudev in this respect? What is it that a mere social worker often misses, which if it had not been overlooked would have raised him to the level of Godhead? It is this inner bhava (attitude) which later blossoms forth as anubhava (experience). If while being engaged in service, one reminds oneself that all hands and feet are HIS, then the service becomes a sacred duty. The rendering of the service is itself the greatest reward, and no result is even anticipated.

That then is the secret of Gurudev's untiring training of aspirants, even if a number of them proved false and unworthy, and of serving them even if they had behaved badly towards him. Had you offered him an opportunity to serve you, he would have done so without a second thought. What you might do in return to him, was not his concern. The service has already fulfilled itself. This attitude was the secret of Gurudev's perfect detachment.

Gurudev's tolerance had no limit. If some Swami X had once done some service to the ashram and then began to lead a life of comfort without doing any work, Gurudev wouldn't ask him to work again or to leave the ashram. On such an occasion, he said: "For the work that he has done, I am bound to look after him for five or six lives to come." Gurudev himself was busy twenty-four hours of the day, every day of the year—no holidays, no Sundays, nothing. Even when he was sick he was active; active in the service of humanity, yet he would never find fault with another for not following his example.

See God In All

Gurudev could see no evil at all anywhere, and there was nothing that he could not forgive. His power in this capacity was also tested to the very limit of human endurance. This happened on the night of the 8th January, 1950. We did not have electricity in the Bhajan Hall in those days. On the altar there stood pictures of Rama and Krishna and just a wick lamp. For the readings we used a hurricane lantern and as soon as the reading part of the satsang was over, it was put away. So it was quite dark in the satsang. The Master always sat immediately next to the door, the entrance.

Once someone asked him, "Why do you sit there, why not sit somewhere a bit less draughty?" and he replied, "You know, I have loose bowels and I'm diabetic, and sometimes I may have to get up and go to the bathroom, I don't want to disturb the whole satsang. So I sit here. Also I might come late. I don't want to cause any disturbance." Never once did he actually leave the satsang. He was never late either; usually he was the first there.

On this particular day the satsang had started, the readings were over and the light was put away. It was winter and the Master used to wrap a shawl around his head but usually he would remove it immediately on entering the hall. For an unknown reason he did not do so that night. A

young man, disgruntled and probably mentally deranged, walked into the satsang with an axe in his hand. He knew where Swami Sivananda usually sat and he aimed three blows at Gurudev's head. The first blow that came down fell on the turban. Nothing happened. There was only the sound of something hitting something. So, hurriedly the assailant raised the axe again and in doing so he hit one of the pictures hanging on the wall above Gurudev. More noise was created, by which time this man had become thoroughly nervous and even though he aimed another blow, he somehow hit the open door, and only slightly grazed Swami Sivananda's arm. People got up and caught hold of the man, thus discovering the whole horrible truth. All that Gurudev was interested in at this stage was that satsang should be continued and brought to its usual end with all the concluding prayers and so on. Some of us were working down in the office when someone rushed in and told us. Immediately we ran up, and then I heard the whole congregation chanting "sarvesam svasti bhavatu, sarvesam santir bhavatu..." and I said to my companion, "Swamiji must be alright," because only he could have the nerve, the calmness and the presence of mind to continue the satsang and treat the whole incident as if nothing had happened. Gurudev was sitting there calmly repeating all the mantras!

Later we discovered that this was Gurudev's second miraculous escape of the day. This man, whom Gurudev maintained in the ashram out of purest compassion, without asking him for even a scrap of his time and energy in service of the institution, had calculated another attack. He had been waiting for Gurudev at the turn of the road, at the time when Gurudev usually walked up for the morning meditation. The Master always walked alone. But that morning was the one morning that he missed the meditation and he was unhappy about it. When he came to the office later he said, "Today I slept so heavily..... I don't know what happened—I just overslept." Only later we discovered that if he had come, probably he would have lost his life, as this man had been waiting. Having missed that chance he came to the hall in another attempt.

After the incident, this man had been taken to a room near the present printing press. Gurudev went there and stood before the assailant, folded his palms and said, "Are you angry with me? Are you satisfied? Do you want to give me some more blows?" It was a beautiful scene. What love! The next morning the police inspector said, "We are going to charge him." Swamiji replied, "No. There is no charge. He has done nothing; only my karma has been worked out. Why should he be punished for that?" The police wanted to take proper action. So Swamiji eventually agreed that the man be sent back to his home town in South India. The morning of his departure Swamiji himself went down to the police station with a plate on which he had put a flower garland, fruits, clothing, books and money for the train fare and pocket expenses. He garlanded this man, fed him, and worshipped him, falling at the assailant's feet in prostration. None but Gurudev could have done this. Then he said, "God Himself came in that form for His own reasons. God comes to you not only as your benefactor, as a beggar, as a sick person, but God comes to you even as your murderer. Even that person is none but God." He still continued to walk to the bhajan hall in the dark. He still took his regular evening walk all alone. This is called faith. It is easy to see God in one who has murdered your enemy, but if you are able to see God in one who has come to kill you, then you have gone beyond all division.

Gurudev said, "Honour those who have bad characters. Serve the rogue first. Treat him as a future saint, or as a saint himself; this is the way to purify your heart and to elevate him also." In one of his earliest letters to Swami Paramanandaji (1934-35) he wrote, "I want around me a number of people who will abuse me, insult me, vilify and injure me. I want to serve them, educate them and

transform them.” In a crowd he would seek out the bad characters first, whether they be in white or ochre robes and greet them with folded palms. He would address them in the most respectful terms. Gurudev said, “Acclaim the rogue as a saint; publicly honour him and he will be ashamed to continue his evil doings. Persistently tell an ill-tempered man, ‘You are an embodiment of peace’ and he will be ashamed to lose his temper. Call a lazy man a dynamic worker and he will plunge himself into service. But the praise must come from the very bottom of your heart and you must pour your soul force into every word, sincerely feeling that behind the apparent negative quality, there is a resplendent positive virtue latent, waiting only to be established. If you do this both of you will be benefited.”

If this spirit of karma yoga is awakened within our hearts, then our every action must necessarily reflect this attitude. In the Master’s case one could see that he felt the presence of God, not only in shrines, temples, in holy people and holy places, but even in plants, in animals, and also in inanimate objects. The way he closed his fountain pen was a delight to watch. He would place it—not drop it—on the table. It was beautiful. It was an art. There was a delicacy about it. When he picked up a shawl and wrapped it around himself, there was beauty. The art was there, because the heart was behind. Even when Gurudev was bedridden and someone gave him a parcel, though he couldn’t reach the floor, you could see how much he would strain not to drop it. I don’t think he ever broke anything. Only once a monkey picked up his fountain pen and took it away and later somebody gave it a banana—it dropped the pen. Otherwise I don’t remember an accident ever happening to the things that he used. People; especially foreign visitors, often used to give him things, then he would give the old ones to somebody else. Nothing ever went out of order. Even in these things he could feel the presence of God.

It is not that in order to practise karma yoga you must go and seek out some poor people to do charity, or find the sick (or even make them sick) to render them some service. For Swami Sivananda, everything was sacred. All the Objects in the world were sacred. The Master did not confine karma yoga to special departments. He was definite and emphatic, “Unselfish, motiveless action is possible wherever one may be, whatever one’s lifestyle or profession. The right spirit demands—do your allotted duty or work, without any motivation whatsoever and your actions will be peaceful, blissful and fruitful.”

Training Of Disciples

In the Master’s ashram in Rishikesh, swamis themselves were engaged in every kind of activity you can think of. Once Gurudev himself said, “Not only do I work hard, I know how to extract work from others.” It is a beautiful expression. How did he do this? Sometimes he would lean back in his chair and put his spectacles up; sometimes he would close one eye and look just look. And then he would smile. What was there in that voice, in those few words, in that mere look? And something in that face, something in those eyes was bewitching. He conquered by love.

Gurudev was extremely patient with sloppy work, with inefficiency, mistakes. These he did not mind at all. There was virtually nothing he would not put up with, except, he used to say, laziness. How does one make another person work? The first answer is that you must set an example. Swami Sivananda was himself the best example.

There was another method which he adopted. If you were lazy, first you would get from the Master some fruit, and milk and coffee, and some other gifts. Whenever you went near Swami Sivananda, he would greet you and praise your good qualities. This was an indirect way of suggesting, "You are such a wonderful man, why don't you do something about it?" Sometimes you take the hint, and at others you say, "I am meditating six hours a day," and he would respond eagerly, "Very good, you must meditate, do some kirtan and bhajan." You think he is encouraging you to do that and you become even more lazy. Even the fruit and the coffee do not inspire you, stimulate you. Then in your presence he starts talking about somebody else; "What a dynamic man he is. Everybody ought to be like that." This applies to you, but you already have an image of sitting and meditating for six hours and so do not heed it. If all this does not work, he might say, "For a change, get up and do something." He could come down like a thunderbolt for a few minutes and then he would be milk and honey again. If even that failed, when there was a financial crisis the first ones to go were the lazy people. Laziness, he would not tolerate. Even when he had typhoid and therefore he was extremely weak, he often enquired about lazy people in the ashram. "We should not entertain lazy people here." He himself was never lazy. The body was looked after very well, and then it was made to work hard. Why do you want to drop a healthy body in the grave for the worms to consume? Squeeze it; extract the last ounce of "juice" from it before you throw it away.

Gurudev was more than father and mother for the aspirants in the ashram. If someone manifested the least trace of a hidden talent, he would almost dedicate himself to awakening it, cultivating its unfoldment to the fullest manifestation. Gurudev would incessantly contemplate ways and means to do this. Each must express himself fully for the benefit of mankind. One young man who said he knew the technique of paper manufacturing walked into the ashram. The next morning Gurudev asked for the pit to be dug, and raw materials were ordered. Gurudev encouraged this man to experiment with his ideas, though he had absolutely no credentials and Gurudev never asked for any.

A good musician joined the ashram and the very next day a new harmonium and tabla were ordered for him. Gurudev himself would take such a keen interest in all these enterprises, that you would think that he had been waiting just for you to come along and help him in this work. Such was his enthusiasm that in a short while, he would be giving the adept in his field, hints for improving his work.

Swami Saradananda joined the ashram in 1947. When Gurudev found that he had an aptitude for photography, immediately a photographic department was formed, and Gurudev was all encouragement. Eventually, it was one of the best equipped studios in the country. One must remember that all this took place at the foot of the Himalayas, not in a technologically advanced metropolis.

Another interesting event occurred when a cook, who had not come to stay at the ashram, was encouraged by Gurudev to open a restaurant and carry on a business for his own profit. Gurudev's attitude was: "First make him stay here, and then slowly convert him to spiritual practice."

All ashram departments were run by the swamis themselves. The swamis did all the correspondence and maintained accounts. These activities were not shunned as “worldly” activities.

Gurudev was not ashamed to do whatever had to be done. In the early days of the ashram, Swamiji used to conduct yoga camps for a week during the Christmas and also the Easter holidays. Visitors used to come from all over India, as well as from abroad. Some of them were magistrates, police officials, advocates, business people, but in the ashram they were treated as spiritual aspirants. One morning the Master would announce, “Today is karma yoga. Come on, we are all scavengers—today we shall clean the roads.” And there were no distinctions at all, the Master was there first. When you set out to clean the roadside in some of the villages in India you may find anything—cow dung, dead rats etc. Now comes the problem: the professional road-sweeper has his broom with which he shoves all the dirt away, but we may not do that. That is not the right spirit at all, because even in that cow dung there is the divine presence. When Gurudev carried that dripping basket of cow dung on his head, it was not as though he was carrying cow dung at all, it was the Lord who was seated on his head. And everyone had to do this, such was the training; special training no doubt, but here we were taught that it is not what you do that matters so much as the inner spirit.

Sometimes we would be asked to work in the kitchen, peeling potatoes and cutting vegetables, and he used to insist that during all this we keep repeating God’s name, and sometimes we would all sing together, “Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama...” and go on doing the job, and the chant or whatever it was, would keep reminding us that it is God that does it, and unto God it is done. The subject is God, and the object is also God, and therefore the action in itself becomes divine.

One day we were all working in the office, right in front of the Master. Some of us were typing, some writing, some doing the accounts. He had a very lovely way of indicating when he wanted to say something funny. He wore spectacles, he would put them up on to his forehead and close one eye and look. He had his elbow on the table looking at us. There was this radiant and half mischievous smile when he said: “Were you not doing this kind of work in Delhi also?” “Yes, Swamiji.” “So what is the great purpose in coming here? You go to an ashram, a holy place looking for moksha, for liberation, and there you do exactly the same thing that you did before in the government service. Why do you have to come here at all? Isn’t it possible for each one, remaining in his own station in life to practise karma yoga?”

All of us were silent. Then he himself provided the answer. “It is here that the spirit is awakened.” It is very difficult, while you are still engaged in the battle of life, when you are confused, to cultivate the right spirit. Only if you live at the feet of a master can you discover this spirit. When you return to the world, it is still the same world, but you are not the same, and therefore the world is not the same either. You have a new vision. To train you in this, was the role of Gurudev’s ashram.

The real, sincere, thirsting aspirant was Gurudev’s God. He lived for such aspirants. The only comparison one can draw to this is the relation between a father and an only son, born to him late in life, and on whom the father lavishes all his love, and for whose welfare he considers no sacrifice too great.

Not only in the field of work but in the field of spiritual practice also, Gurudev created the atmosphere necessary for each aspirant to evolve in accordance with his own individual temperament and aptitude. Never was an aspirant compelled to change his mode of spiritual practice. If you liked to study Vedanta, he would provide you with all the comforts and conveniences necessary so that in seclusion you could study and evolve. He would never ask you to do any work and he would openly praise your wisdom and make you a Professor of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy. Similarly with earnest aspirants pursuing other modes of spiritual practice.

Gurudev worked ceaselessly so that the most fortunate aspirants who had taken shelter at his holy feet could be saved from experiencing the difficulties that he himself had had to face during the early days of his life at Rishikesh. He would go to any length to save them from wasting precious mental energy in anxiety over the ordinary creature comforts of the body—food, clothing, shelter and medical care—so that they might be free to pursue the path they had chalked out for themselves. No one in the ashram had greater physical disability than Gurudev himself, and yet there was no one who worked harder than he did. The moment he found an aspirant not well, even if it was only a mild headache, he would say, “Please go and rest”, and depute a doctor and half a dozen others to attend to him. However when he himself was ailing, he would sternly brush aside the doctor’s plea that he should rest the body a little. This was one aspect in which there was a vast difference between Gurudev’s precept and practice. He practised self-sacrificing service which cared not for comforts, but to others he preached “Please take care of your health.” His love for the sincere spiritual aspirant was incomprehensible.

In 1946, we were fairly poor and did not have many rooms, nor did we have many conveniences and comforts. We didn’t even have secure protection against the monkeys that used to invade the ashram. There was a very small room, which we called the office, with a couple of rickety doors and adjacent to this was a room with a low ceiling and a low entrance. Gurudev used to call this the ‘humility entrance.’ Unless you bent down you would lose your head—which is true of life also. Between these two rooms was an interconnecting door. One midsummer’s midday, it was hot, so we had closed the door of the office, as well as the interconnecting door and were in a small adjacent room. When the Master had his lunch, he would always ask for another plate and he would take a portion of whatever he ate and put it on that plate. After finishing his lunch, without resting, he would take that plate in his hand, cover his bald head with a thin piece of cloth, and walk around from room to room, giving each of his disciples a little of that food. In those days, this in itself was an extraordinary thing, because many of the swamis wouldn’t let their disciples, or anyone else, even see what they ate! Gurudev was an exception to the rule. Whatever I eat, whatever I have, you must also have, you must also share"—that was the spirit. So about 1 o’clock in the scorching sun, he came walking to the office, plate in hand. Seeing all the doors closed, he presumed that we were sleeping. He went into the kitchen which was just next door, and found a swami there. Gurudev gave him two or three cups of something or other and told him, “Those three boys are resting, please do not disturb them, but when they wake up, give this to them.” A couple of minutes later, one of us laughed and the swami in the kitchen, hearing it, came in with three cups saying, “Swamiji came and gave these for you. He thought that you were resting.” That was Gurudev’s spirit; throughout his life he was more considerate of others than he was of himself. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why his body was so riddled with illnesses—the body just could not take it.

When you lived with such a person, it was difficult even to watch him. You had to have eagle-like vision to see through all these masks and to perceive the real Master and his teachings. How does one study the teachings of such a great Master who had this perfectly symmetrical dual relationship with his students? No doubt he wanted to teach, to train his disciples, but he loved them so much that the teachings were heavily sugar-coated, so that quite often we just sucked off the sugar and threw the pills away. You had to have great persistence to suck through all that sweetness and then come to the (maybe bitter) pill. Both sides of this relationship were equally powerful: his eagerness to teach his disciples being matched only by his love for them. The desire to teach sprang from the love, and the love sprang from the desire to teach.

When he did something, you had to look into his face, look into his eyes, and there you saw something quite different from what we are used to. When he gave you something, when he did something for you, in that face there was no pride, there was no look of arrogance, no suggestion of smug self-satisfaction.

In that face, in those eyes, there was humility, there was love, and what was even more important, there was gratitude.

When it came to teaching, the Master had a delightfully beautiful and intelligent method. He said: "You cannot attack the commander-in-chief, but you can tackle the army. Selfishness is not a single soldier who comes to attack you, but he comes with a retinue, a big force. If you are sincere, and careful, you can easily detect one or other of the members of this army. Greed, lust, anger, fear, the pursuit of pleasure, desire, hatred, jealousy, ambition, the desire to dominate and the desire for power, position and wealth, all these spring from selfishness—deal with them."

How does one deal with even the retinue? How do you know what desire means, what craving means, what jealousy means? How do you deal with them? It is here that the guru becomes valuable. It was in Gurudev's training of his disciples that we saw the best way in which to deal with inner evil, evil habits, evil thoughts and emotions and vicious nature. It is only when it comes to the master-disciple relationship that these can be easily overcome.

The greatest service that a saint can render to humanity, is to leave behind him many images of himself. Gurudev was like the Philosopher's Stone and with a magnetic force he attracted all metal to himself and transformed it into pure gold. He had the knack of turning stones into precious gems.

Not all people who sought the shelter of Gurudev's lotus feet were good spiritual aspirants. Many were the products of modern civilisation, who before they could renounce the world, had already been stung and injected with its insidious poison. Furthermore, not everyone could shed these evils on the road to Rishikesh. What was Gurudev's reaction to them?

He was the Sun of Supreme Good, before which no shadow of evil existed. He saw only the good in the new aspirants; to the evil, he was blind. This purest form of love would never condemn a person, could never even be hard on someone who might manifest an unfortunate evil trait.

When a disciple's misdemeanour was reported to him, unless he saw it with his own eyes, he refused to believe the complaint. If you pointed out that so-and-so had some evil qualities he had a counter-list of his own—that person's many good qualities. First he refused to recognise it. Secondly, for the next few days Gurudev would shower his love and affection on this person. If the complaint still persisted, it meant there was some truth in it. He would send a great beam of love flowing from him to you and only when he was sure that he had you in his grip, that your heart had been completely conquered, completely won over, only then would he gently drop a hint. Very gently. Remember, he would not even drop his fountain pen. So even this hint was not allowed to hurt you, because if criticism hurts, it is counter-productive. You are merely going to rebel against it and turn away. He would never allow that to happen. For the sake of the good that surely everyone has in him, Gurudev would give a long rope to the evil, thus gaining one more brother to the spiritual family.

To him, there was no wicked man on this earth who did not have his own good points. None was incorrigible. In his vision the eternal sinner did not exist. Seeing God and godliness everywhere, this vision and the supreme dynamism in him transmitted his own soul force which instantly awakened the dormant good in all and strengthened virtue where it already existed. Even the beneficiary was often unaware of this. It was in his attitude towards the spiritual aspirants that Gurudev manifested the highest degree of adaptability. No sacrifice was too great in this work of moulding men into saints.

If it was a mere surface defect, like a bad eating habit, the seeker would soon get over it in the spiritual atmosphere. Lest the aspirant should be tempted away by other minor weaknesses or love of luxury, Gurudev would himself provide these, thus immediately preventing the great downfall, with the conviction that sooner or later the aspirant would overcome the weakness and abandon the luxury. Even if it was deep-seated enough to prevent him from rising very high in spiritual practice, he would work as an instrument in Gurudev's divine hands and that work would elevate thousands of others. This was the magic of Gurudev. The very person whom the world scoffed at was taken up by Gurudev and transformed into a very useful citizen. The magic wand was—concentrate all your attention on the good and magnify it. There is only gain for everybody concerned in this. To spurn a man for the evil that you may see in him was a terrible loss. Gurudev never did that. He would get very good work out of even the devil.

Gurudev often illustrated this by an example. "If you are walking near a thorny bush and suddenly there is a gust of wind and the shawl you are wearing round your shoulders gets caught in the bush, you can't just drag it. If you do, your shawl will be torn. You have to stop your movement, and very gently disengage each one of those thorns. Such patience is necessary if one is to deal with one's own evil nature." It was Gurudev who gave us wonderful, actual and almost daily demonstration of this attitude. If you had lived with Gurudev for a couple of years, you would have been astounded at the way in which he trained aspirants.

The first class disciples resorted to his lotus feet in the way in which aspirants resorted to the Guru in the days of yore, with the blazing fire of renunciation, dispassion and discrimination. They might become established in God-realisation by a mere glance from Gurudev's eyes, or by a mere word from his holy lips. They were few. The vast majority with whom Gurudev worked were lukewarm aspirants, who might scale great heights in spiritual experience after receiving some

training imparted by him. But even the worst aspirants were soon transformed by his limitless forgiveness, inexhaustible patience, boundless charity and supreme love. Adhikari-bheda (the classification of aspirants according to their fitness) may govern the rapidity of their evolution to sainthood, but it was certainly not a criterion that Gurudev applied. He himself had (most) often to sow the seeds of vairagya (dispassion) in them. It is perhaps easier for you to infuse vairagya into your own son, than for Gurudev to do so in a young man joining the Ashram. Gurudev's heart was all love, and not even for the sake of securing moksha (liberation) for him would he give the aspirants the least offence, put him to the least deprivation, or ask him to lead an austere life.

I have myself heard Gurudev overestimate the difficulties that face the aspirant and say, "What a mysterious thing this mind is! How to control it? And then, over and above all this, how is man to apply himself to strenuous spiritual practice and deep meditation? I think God should give liberation to all, even if they utter His Name only once a day, or if a man does even a few good acts of service in his lifetime." If Gurudev had been appointed in the realm of Gods to preside over the destinies of mankind, he would have (in the words of Winston Churchill) actually "presided over the liquidation of the empire" of maya (ignorance or the illusive power of the Lord) and granted liberation to everyone.

If there was a misunderstanding or quarrel between two aspirants, Gurudev would often pacify both, but sometimes one or the other might wish to leave the Ashram. Gurudev would do anything to prevent an aspirant straying away from the path, or retracing his steps. There was no offence or sin which he would not pardon. He would often tell the aspirants: "It is extremely difficult to acquire a little bit of sadhana-wealth and very easy to lose it again. It is like bouncing a ball up the stairs with great effort—the moment you neglect it even for a few seconds, it bounces back to ground level immediately."

An aspirant might yield to the sage's sculpturing of his personality; indeed he was then truly blessed. Or, he might manifest his weakness and even rebel against his own benefactor. Gurudev's forbearance was often severely tested. Falsely imagining that he was a saint even at birth, a foolish aspirant would resent the chisel with which Gurudev tried to create a form out of the ungainly mass that the aspirant was. A beloved son might anger his father by such behaviour, but Gurudev would merely suspend the chiselling and shower his love upon the ignorant man, allowing him time to come to his senses. The young man might even go away from the protective shelter of the Master and strangely enough, the very Master who took the greatest interest in shaping the aspirant, would then look on apparently unconcerned as the misguided aspirant, yielding to egoism, anger or greed, shattered in a moment the beautiful edifice, constructed with years of patient and persevering labour. Gurudev seemed to immediately forget all about it—but no. It was then that Gurudev performed the greatest miracle. Before he coolly gave the aspirant leave to go, he would unobtrusively spread over him the invisible armour of his blessings that one day surely would bring the aspirant back. Where else in this world could he get such a Master? Where else in the whole universe would a Master serve thus? Where else in the world would a guru obey the will of the disciple? The cool shade of Gurudev's benign presence had obviously lost its glory for him on account of over-familiarity. There was a need for the aspirant to learn a few more lessons, a need for him to walk a few more paces in the scorching heat, on the burning sands of the world, before he could truly appreciate the oasis, nay the paradise, that was the lotus feet of the Lord. He would return.

A swami who was senior to all of us, though he was not very old, had left the Ashram after some trouble. After a few years, he returned around Durga Puja time, 1948. The Master was sitting on the roadside and I happened to pass near. He called me and said; "You know Swami has come?" He closed one eye, "He is a big man! There's a long story" He didn't want to tell the story nor to perpetuate the scandal. I said: "Yes Swamiji, I've heard about it." Now, immediately, suddenly and dramatically he changed. He said, "But that was before; he might have been a bad man before. Probably he has changed now. A wicked man can become a good man." Then he added: "Let's give him another chance; I've asked him to stay."

People often use the expression: 'Forgive and forget', but this is more easily said than done. Gurudev used the one and only foolproof method: Judge not. Suspend all judgment whatsoever. If he *does* something which you don't approve of, take appropriate action then. but realise that he himself is not a wicked person.

On another occasion he mentioned the two-way traffic. He was writing a book called 'Ashrams and Saints in India.' In it he had to give a brief biography of a holy man who subsequently got married—not a commendable thing for a swami to do. Gurudev remarked: "He was a great man but he fell into disgrace. But good people become bad and bad people become good. One should not judge." The biography was included in the book. Once you see that this two way traffic is possible, then you are vigilant, constantly vigilant. I have never heard Gurudev mock at such people, even in jest.

When such an aspirant returned to the Ashram, Gurudev would treat him as though he had always been part of it and had never left. Yes, and so it was in reality, for wherever he might have been, he was always in Gurudev's heart. Swamiji would dance with joy and glorify him in the presence of all, for this man was living proof of the victory gained by Gurudev's supreme love. The aspirant too, would then be in a better position to appreciate Gurudev's indescribable glory, and to open himself with greater receptivity to his grace. These disciples of Gurudev are the inestimable assets of humanity.

Gurudev held out a fair hope even to wicked men and sinners. He, who was the incarnation of love, understood that the wicked man, being full of evil impressions, finds it almost impossible to take even the first step towards the divine.

Lord! you do not even wait for us to take refuge in you. You attract us by your sweet songs and your inspiring lectures, your loving conversation and inimitable humour. With amusing pictures and films, delicious prasad (sweet-meats offered to the Lord), good food and life full of comforts and free of care, you literally drag us to You. You demand nothing from us and you give, give, always. You understand our difficulties, and sympathise with our frailties, leading us by the hand. You infuse devotion into us, You inspire us with dispassion. You breathe wisdom into our souls. Lo, one day the world finds that your disciples are wise and talented, but little does it realise what infinite pains you have taken upon yourself to perform this miracle. To you, the Good Shepherd, it was not pain. You took real delight in running after the lost sheep. Lead us Lord, lead us to Thy Lotus Feet.

CHAPTER THREE

SEE GOD IN ALL

What is bhakti yoga? The word 'bhakti' is taken to mean devotion to God, love of God or surrender to God. One of the Master's favourite expression was "See God in every face, see God in all. Serve God in all." Gurudev, this God incarnate in human form, who descended to this earth in order to fulfil His promise to take birth over and over again, to subdue wickedness, protect virtue and uphold dharma, gave us precious and practical instructions. For our sake, in order that we might watch, admire and emulate, the divine in human garb undertook spiritual disciplines. To him, narayanabhava was swabhava. (The attitude that the Lord indwells all beings was his innate nature). He was therefore best qualified to teach us how to cultivate this narayana-bhava (feeling of God's omnipresence) and how to sustain it.

Mantra Repetition

If you had met the Master personally, you might have come away with the impression, depending upon when you approached him, that he was tremendously and overly fond of people repeating a mantra, repeating God's name. This is true. This was one of his fortes no doubt. Every day, people young and old would come to the Ashram in Rishikesh and ask a very simple question: "I want to practise yoga; I want to lead a spiritual life. What must I do first?" and instead of beating about the bush with splendid theories about God, and about self and non-self, the Master used to say, "Repeat Ram Nam, repeat God's name." These people who came asking to be his disciples were of varying temperaments and belonged to different religions. But the answer was always the same; "I'll give you a mantra. Repeat it day and night." And this answer was very soon followed up with, "What would you like, tea or coffee?" No further questioning or discussion was encouraged. "What is God? What is your conception of God?" The Master avoided all these speculative expressions.

What would happen if someone, a scholar, descended on the scene and asked a highly metaphysical, philosophical question? Once, in 1947, a brilliant man appeared at our office at 8 a.m. and asked Swami Sivananda to explain the difference between savikalpa samadhi and nirvikalpa samadhi. The three of us who were working in the office looked up expectantly, though we would never have dared to ask this question. Swamiji, who had been doing some work, suddenly put his pen down and looked at the visitor. There was total silence for a couple of minutes and then the Master asked, "Ohji, what would you like to have—some milk, tea, coffee?" When the Master asks a question you have to give the answer first, before he answers your question. So this professor replied, 'I think I'll have some coffee, Swamiji.' "And some fruit, some idli?" (idli is a South Indian breakfast dish). "Yes, Swamiji," the man replied. The Master asked a disciple to get all these. Then Gurudev asked another man, "Bring me some books for the doctor." About ten minutes passed in this way. In the meantime coffee and breakfast arrived. Gurudev went on instructing attendant on how to serve the professor. In the meantime, his wife had been looking for him. He had come to the office alone. A few minutes later she walked in, gave him one stern look and said, "How long are you going to stay here? Get up! Let us go." Meekly the professor got up and left. After he had gone the Master burst out laughing. He laughed and laughed with his whole abdomen trembling, and

wiping his eyes he said, "He wants to know the difference between nirvikalpa and savikalpa samadhi and the wife merely looks at him once and says, Get up, get up, and he gets up, and walks quietly behind."

Gurudev had no patience for vain discussion. His message was: "Repeat Ram Nam. Take God's name, do japa. You will discover the answer to all these questions within yourself."

There was another incident which was highly revealing. A renowned political leader came to the Ashram, sat down and presented Swamiji with a picture of India in the context of the present world situation, as he saw it. He spoke for forty-five minutes. The only audience he wanted was Swami Sivananda. One had to admire the Master's patience. Gurudev had his elbows on the table, looking straight into the visitor's eyes, listening. He never said a word. This politician gave a beautiful lucid synopsis of the world situation. When he had finished he looked at Gurudev as if to ask, "well, what is your advice? What is your solution to all this?" Now the ball was in the Master's court. He looked at somebody, he looked at somebody else. Poverty, hunger, overpopulation, oppression, suppression, depression, compression, the whole lot—what is the solution? His response was beautiful—he said: "Only Bhagavan Nam. Only God's name is the remedy. Repeat God's name." I think this poor politician felt that the floor was slipping under his feet. He expected Gurudev to say, "You must become Prime Minister, or form a new party to reconstitute, change, destroy, and so on." But Gurudev replied, "Repeat God's name."

Gurudev said this a million times. As far as he was concerned this was the solution for all problems. It was THE solution to ALL problems. For anything, repeat God's name, whether it was a personal psychological problem, a health problem, a social problem, or a national, international or universal problem—all these problems are solved by just one thing; by the devout and dedicated repetition of the divine name.

Does it seem too simple? What is your trouble? Is there any trouble apart from the restlessness of the mind? Is there any maker of anxiety, any source of sorrow, other than the mind? When the mind is not functioning (as in sleep), there is no anxiety, no sorrow, no problem at all. There is no sense of responsibility, no wish to work for 'world peace'—then the world IS peaceful. It is only the active, uncontrolled and undisciplined mind that creates all problems and makes you feel that the problem is so tremendously important that you MUST solve it. Why not dissolve it? When you see that all problems spring from a restless and undisciplined mind, then you merely provide an activity which—if nothing else—is harmless. Of course these mantras have great spiritual value in themselves, they have mind-and-soul purifying effects. But by merely allowing the mind to be constantly engaged in this mental repetition of a mantra, you are engaging the mind, and utilising its energies in a positive, non-harmful way. It forgets to bother you, forgets to create problems. Thus the creator of the problems is dissolved.

Life takes its own course. Life does not stop, and therefore the mantra should not be repeated as a substitute for life's activities. When the Master said, "Repeat the mantra day and night," he actually meant that the mantra should be repeated simultaneously, along with all life's activities. He used to demonstrate it very nicely. They make chapatties (flat round unleavened pancakes) by the clapping movement of the hands. He used to say, "As you go on doing this, keep singing Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram,—both jobs get done at the same time."

If Gurudev gave you a mantra and a mala (rosary) and you said, “I am going to do japa for three hours in the morning, three hours in the afternoon and three hours in the evening without doing any other work,” he would say, “Throw your mala away and come and do some work.” Someone who goes on endlessly turning the beads without caring even to give a cup of water to a thirsty man, is a hypocrite and a pseudo-devotee. You don’t have to sit down and look at your nose to repeat your mantra. You can also do that sometimes. But the mantra can go on throughout the day and night. The Master was extremely fond of cultivating “the background of thought,” as he called such practice.

Some of us thought that by doing a lot of work we would please the Master more. I remember one day in 1946. Gurudev descended on me like a thunderbolt: “How much meditation did you do today? How much japa? Throw your typewriter into the Ganges; and all these other things too. Go and do some japa and meditation.” ‘All work and no worship’ was not after Gurudev’s heart. ‘Work is worship’ is indeed the motto, but in practice it should mean ‘work *and* worship.’ So, it was in working out a balance in which nothing was neglected at any time, that Gurudev excelled.

Cultivate this background of thought. Whatever be the mantra or name chosen, whether it is a Hindu, Christian, Muslim or a Jewish mantra, it does not matter. Whatever be the chosen formula, repeat it in such a way that it forms a background of thought.

The technique is quite simple. As soon as you wake up in the morning, even before you get out of bed, mentally repeat your mantra and let the mantra be synchronised with your breathing. This is the trick. In a way, it is making use of the mind’s own habit, trapping it in its own rhythm. When the mind finds something rhythmic, it wants to get lost in it. Make it automatic. Automatic—not mechanical.

Afterwards get out of bed, wash your face and then sit down for an hour or half an hour’s deliberate repetition of the mantra. Once again associate the mantra with the breathing so that it becomes smooth, delightful and then effortless. There is no effort at all involved in this. Gurudev used to say, “The greater the intensity of the japa done in the early morning and the greater the intensity with which HIS divine presence is felt within and without during the meditation in the brahmamuhurta (the period of an hour and a half before sunrise) the more perfect will be the attitude with which service is done throughout the rest of the day”. Immediately on waking up Gurudev would do japa for some time even before stepping out of bed to wash his face. You could correct your watch and set it at 3.30 a.m. when the light was switched on in Gurudev’s kutir (cottage). He was extremely punctual in getting up at this hour. At the stroke of 4 a.m. he would be back in his asana (meditation seat) for the practice of japa and pranayama. Every disciple of Gurudev’s knows why he always insisted upon japa and meditation in the early morning hours. Just after we return from the grip of sleep our mind is at its most impressionable state.

After this early morning meditation, get up, do whatever you have to do. If the mind has also to participate in the work you do, you will not be aware of the mantra. But as soon as this job is over, sit back, relax, quietly breathe with awareness and if the mantra goes on in the background, the mind will easily and effortlessly slip into it.

If you have been watching your own mind you will notice that it is not when you are really and truly engaged in some work, mental or physical, that the mind cooks up the problems, but when it is doing nothing. When you are gazing at the ceiling, all these problems drop from there. With the practice of japa, as soon as the particular job you are engaged in is finished, the mind slips automatically into the japa, so that there is never a vacuum for the mind to create some mischief in. This can go on throughout the day at intervals.

The Master used to recommend, in addition to the japa mala that you wear and use, another small mala (rosary)—in India it is called a ‘smarani.’ The Catholics also use something like this—a wrist mala or finger mala that can be kept in your pocket—nobody need notice it. Whenever there is a small break in whatever you have been doing, and when the habit of mental repetition of a mantra has not yet been formed, this might help. This rosary around your finger reminds you to repeat the mantra. I have seen the Master do this: he might be talking about some big plan or other and when he did not want the burden of this discussion to be carried over to the next job (which is what most of us do) he would withdraw the attention into himself, silently repeating a mantra. Soon he was ready for the next job. If this interval is not created, you are loading the brain more and more and more until there is a break down—called a ‘nervous breakdown.’

The Master, on completing the office work in the evening, would go into his room and pace the verandah up and down, gently intoning “Ommmmm OOOMMM..... OOOMMMMMMMM, OOOMMMMM”, and one could literally see the involvements of the day being shed like scales. This is what keeps the mind constantly fresh, full of energy and therefore full of wisdom.

The effect will be all the more wonderful if we can “take japa into our very sleep itself so that even during sleep we manage to carry on subconscious japa” as Gurudev exhorted us to do. How can we do this? By making japa habitual. The Master often said, “Last night I did not sleep very well, I woke up at about 2 a.m. and did japa for about half an hour. I fell asleep and got up again at the usual time.” If we thus train ourselves to utter the Lord’s names whenever possible, our mind will become filled with God-thought. When japa becomes habitual, the brahmamuhurta meditation will become intense and the presence of God will be felt not only then but throughout the day’s activities.

It is not so much the number of malas of japa that counts, but rather it is the perfection of the concentration of the mind and the depth of consciousness from which the name springs which is more important. Once Gurudev revealed to us that early in the morning he used to repeat quite a number of mantras: VASUDEVAH SARVAM: “All this is God (Vasudeva)”, SARVA BHUTASTAM ATMANAM: “One Self, God, pervades all beings.” YAT-CA KINCIT JAGAT SARVAM DRISYATE SRUYATE PI VA ANTAR BAHIS-CA TAT SARVAM VYAPYA NARAYANAH STHITAH: “Whatever there is in this world, whatever is seen or heard, Lord Narayana, God, pervades all, inside and out.”

Gurudev once remarked, “Sri Sastriar says that unless one has done worship of the Divine Mother through a special branch of knowledge called Sri Vidya (Sri Vidya Upasana), one could not achieve as much material success in life as I have done. I am a worshipper of Sri Vidya. I repeat the Sri Vidya mantra a couple of times each morning as also whenever I happen to meet a lady; I

mentally prostrate to her, feeling that she is an embodiment of the Divine Mother Tripurasundari. This constitutes my Sri Vidya upasana.”

The Master was also fond of repeating a few chosen mantras while standing in the Ganges water. He was certain that this was productive of the quickest mantra-siddhi (perfection in the practice of mantra-japa). To the busiest man in the ashram, Gurudev often said, “Even if you cannot find time to do one rosary of japa, when you take your Ganges-bath, stand in the Ganges water for a few seconds and repeat the mantra three times—this is equal to three million repetitions.”

Mantra-writing was also greatly eulogised by Gurudev as a spiritual practice that would enable the aspirant to achieve concentration of mind very easily. Once he told us. “Always keep with you wherever you go, a pocket note-book for mantra-writing, a rosary and a pocket Gita. Whenever you have a little leisure, instead of building castles in the air, or allowing the mind to remain idle, write a few mantras in the note-book, silently roll a few beads, or read a few verses of the Gita. This is the best way to acquire perfect control of the mind.”

Besides this he gave us quite a number of other ways in which the likhita japa (mantra-writing) can be woven into our daily life. For instance, begin every note you write with the mantra “Om Namō Narayanaya”. You and the recipient of the letter or note will be benefited by this. Also if you write any article, your daily account, etc., start with a line or two of mantra-writing thus:

OM
OM OM

Religious Freedom

It is good to remind ourselves at this point that technically the Master was a non-dual Vedantin. He belonged to what is known as the advaita cult. Perhaps this doesn’t mean very much to you. Belief in a God is not an essential part of the advaitins’ doctrine. The non-dual doctrine implies the total absence of all duality. There is a distinction between monotheism and monism. The Master’s official cult was monism, not monotheism. Monotheism still has some sort of duality built into it. It implies the unity of Godhead—God is one, so that “we” are all still outside that. Monism says, “There is only ONE”, and it is only because you are standing in front of me that I *say* so, otherwise I shouldn’t even do that. So it is true to say, as did the monists, that God is not in an idol, or in a temple, in the sense that he is not confined to that form. BUT God, being omnipresent, is everywhere.

When this doctrine is heard, the obvious question that arises in the mind is, “Then why do you want to worship a God in a temple, in a church, in a synagogue, why don’t you worship God everywhere?” But when you look at this paper, you see it as paper, not as God! For the mind has been so conditioned and it is not able to drop this conditioning. You seem to be trapped. So that in practice Gurudev had a rather interesting and remarkable theory which was reflected in his own daily life. He didn’t ridicule the views of people belonging to other sects who were opposed to monism and who declare that “God and man are eternally separate, and it is ridiculous to say that man can ever become one with God”.

Paradoxically the Master was both a bhakta (devotee) and a jnani (sage). He did not say that he was a bhakta and would therefore not study Vedanta or meditate. No, he preferred the integral yoga approach—not merely *this*, not merely *that*, for the simple reason again that the mind is capable of playing all these tricks. Both the bhakta and the monist, by each denying an aspect of yoga, are caught in the same ego illusion.

The Master never criticized either attitude. That was his genius. He tried to include all this, knowing that at a particular stage, to a person of that temperament, all this is essential. He knew that all these are steps that lead to the same goal. He knew that if once in that idol worship you recognize or touch the core, you are bound to realize that that which you worship there in that image is here in 'you' too. As it is said in the Upanishad, "That which shines in the sun, is also that which shines in me." The genius of the Master was in the blending of these, what superficially appear to be, conflicting doctrines.

In Rishikesh, when he first came there, there were these two completely opposite camps. One which said, "Forget all your Vedanta, your enquiry and meditation. To have a vision of God is the highest goal. For this you must worship an idol." The other camp called them idolaters, men who were unfit for meditation and who did not understand the sublime philosophy of the Upanishads.

It was given to the Master to bring one group up and the others down a little, and this was done in a very beautiful and subtle way. I have seen the Master deal with all these people; never once did he challenge anyone. If someone said, "God is in this idol," immediately he would agree and add "Come on, build a small shrine for your image. Worship there." Then someone else came along and declared: "I don't believe in all this, Swamiji. I can raise my consciousness to the seventh plane." And the Master never argued with him, never. He was prepared to understand and did not condemn even the fanatic, because this person sees something and is just not mature enough to see that it is not the whole picture. He must be allowed to come to maturity in his own time. So, often Gurudev bowed down to satisfy even the fanatics.

In the ashram temple there used to be puja three times a day—morning, noon and evening. Swami Sivananda who lived on the Ganges bank at the foot of the hill would climb all the way up to be there three times a day. This was when his health was still good. But a younger swami who was living nearer the temple would not attend the worship. What was Gurudev's attitude? As soon as the arati was over and the prasad (food offering which was also our breakfast in those days) was about to be distributed, he would call one of us, "Take some prasad to Swami So-and-so." But that is not the end of the story. That swami is not in the ashram now, he has since set up an ashram of his own, and I believe that there, puja and chanting of mantras goes on 24 hours of the day and that he insists that his devotees worship some form of God or other in a small private shrine in their rooms. If that is not the miracle of the 'prasad', I don't know what else it is. That maturity must happen within yourself. Gurudev did not even fight with fanatics. If you fight with a fanatic, you become another fanatic.

This was a marvellous aspect of the Master's teachings. He was eager to listen to everyone; even to someone holding a diametrically opposite view. You pursue your own path, you have your own philosophy of life. You don't have to abandon your religion, your method of worship and

meditation, or your mode of life. The others may also have something interesting to say. Study others' points of view and develop friendliness, affection and understanding. One of our Master's most famous sayings was, "Break down the barriers that separate man from man." He repeated this hundreds of times, whenever he spoke, and it is ringing in my ears even today. As long as there is a feeling that you are completely and totally different from me, either because I am a Hindu and you are a Christian, or because I am an Indian and you are a European, or for any other reason, the danger of hatred and destruction is also there. Swami Sivananda said, "Realize that you are a human being, What your religion is, is your personal affair."

One scholarly and very devout orthodox Muslim used to come to the ashram. As an orthodox Muslim he would not do certain things, and certain other things he would do. Gurudev instructed his disciples thus, "He will be doing namaz (Muslim prayer) now, so please don't disturb him. He doesn't like this, don't give it to him. He likes that, let him have it. Keep a prayer mat in his room." He had great respect for the other person's religious practices.

This is an important point to remember, Gurudev had faith in all these, but he himself practiced what he wanted to practice. He adopted his own mode of life, undisturbed by what others said. It is not possible for one to practice many different faiths. All roads lead not to Rome, but to 'roaming'.

Know that there are many roads, and if possible get acquainted with them, but continue to tread your own path to the centre.

True Catholic

In India, even amongst Hindus, there were in those days a few major cults, as there are in other religions. One day Gurudev received a visitor to the ashram, who was the head of the Siva cult, which meant that he should not adore Rama, Krishna or Vishnu, only Siva. This Swami had written to Gurudev explaining that he was going on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas and would like to stay at the ashram for a few days. Gurudev had replied, "Most welcome." The day before this holy man arrived, Gurudev called us all and said, "As from tomorrow for three days, only Lord Siva's picture must be kept on the altar, and don't sing 'Sri Ram Jaya Ram, Jaya Jaya Ram', but only the names of Ganesha and Siva. And don't read the Gita or the Vishnu Puranam, only scriptures relating to Siva, everything Siva".

Does it sound hypocritical to you? The Master was not a hypocrite. He was the purest crystal that reflected "the other" without the least conflict. "This Swami is devoted to Siva, as I am to the truth that God dwells in all." Gurudev's attitude was not, "He is as devoted to Siva as I'm devoted to Krishna or Christ". That might breed conflict. But it was, "I feel that all religions are one, all religions are equally valid, equally great, equally sharers of truth." Whoever came to the ashram gave us an opportunity to serve him and an opportunity to hear him—however fanatical he might be. One type of fanatic cannot cure another. Why offend the other person, why even provoke him? The principle is to deal with people at their human level. It is possible that each religion represents a partial view—there is no perfect total view. If you look out of the window, you see the sky. It is not the total sky, it is only a small portion of sky. Nobody in the world has seen the total sky, the whole space, nor the whole truth, nor God. You can never have a vision of the whole—that is God. But,

what you are seeing is the sky, let us not forget that. You are not seeing the total sky, but you are still seeing the “sky”.

Can you regard religion as your own extremely private encounter with God, your personal spiritual adventure, and in relation to others in society, remain a human being? Swami Sivananda's extraordinary genius taught us what it was, not merely to tolerate, but to understand one another. What is understanding? Respect—"I respect your views even if you don't respect mine"—that is the beauty. Gurudev also used to say, “Even he who denies God, affirms the existence of God, because the very self of the denier is God. That substratum for the intelligence that says, ‘God does not exist’, is God”. In the evolution of that person, maybe this is a necessary step.

The Master never challenged anyone, never forced anyone to go against his own conscience. Never. In the ashram his own disciples held widely divergent doctrines and views but they were all loved and respected by Gurudev. To me, this seems to be the essence, the cream of the realization that God is omnipresent. Not the word, not the concept, but the realization of the omnipresence of God. This realization lived as Swami Sivananda.

Another remarkable incident nearly shook everyone out of their wits. In 1953, Swami Sivananda organized what was known as the Parliament of Religions. A number of learned scholars belonging to different faiths had been invited, and there were other people who had come merely to participate in the function. Obviously this was an occasion when the congregation was not made up entirely of disciples and devotees of Swami Sivananda, and the mood of the audience was a bit difficult to gauge. Because it was a cosmopolitan crowd, the proceedings were conducted mostly in English except for one or two swamis who could not speak English (they spoke Hindi or Tamil or some other language).

On the second day, one swami who was sitting on the platform passed a note to one of the organizers, “I want time to speak.” The organizer said “No, there is no time.” Gurudev, who was also seated on the platform, watched this through the corner of his eye. The note was passed to him. Gurudev said, “Let him speak. I won't speak today, let him speak.” What did this man do? He stood up and grabbed the microphone so that no one could snatch it from him and for ten minutes spewed forth nothing but criticism and abuse of Swami Sivananda. Nothing else. He went on, “He is living in North India, where the language is Hindi, yet he writes in English, speaks in English.” This was meant to be a parliament of religions, not a parliament of languages, but this man was totally unconcerned with all that. He had come merely with the intention of attacking the Master in public. You should have seen Gurudev's radiant smile. He kept saying “Very good, very good”, (in Hindi of course). You could see the steam coming out of other people's ears, their brains were boiling, but Gurudev was quite calm, as if to say, “That is your opinion, your view, your path—go on”. He did not even want to try to justify himself in this man's eyes or convince this man that because there was a world-wide circulation of Gurudev's books he had to write in English. That was our Master's wonderful attitude and therefore again, it was extremely difficult to pierce through all these veils and come face to face with his real nature.

It does not make any sense at all to *give up* being a Christian, or a Hindu or a Muslim. What for? What are you going to be instead? Will you practice a new religion, a universalist religion? What is a universalist? The Universa 'list' has a list all of his own, in which there is condemnation

of every other religion. This is a waste of time. Be what you are. Gurudev tells you, “Seek God wherever possible. See God in all.”

Worship Of God In An Image

But what exactly was the Master’s own practice? Right from his Swarg Ashram days, when he was a mendicant ascetic, till the last moment of his physical life, he was not only a believer, but a firm practitioner of what you would call idol worship. Sometimes he used a picture of Siva but most often he used the picture of Lord Krishna with the flute in hand. It is a beautiful picture and once Gurudev himself referred to it saying, “The artist who painted it must have had a vision of Krishna. It is highly inspiring.” This picture was kept in his own puja (worship) room all the time, and there was not a single day when his body could move from the bed, that the ritualistic worship of that picture was neglected. Every day, as soon as he had had his bath, he would go and offer a flower at the feet of Krishna, take a lamp and do arati. He once said that he did not know very many mantras, but whatever few he knew, he used in the worship.

This is how we saw the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita embodied in Gurudev’s own life. There is a verse in this scripture whose meaning is as follows: ‘Whatever my devotee offers to me with love, even if it is only a leaf, a flower or a little water, all that I accept with great relish’. And here was this holy man, this sage, who when he had some charity to perform, or some fruit or some money or clothes to give to his own disciples would repeat the first two words of this verse, “patram pushpam” (leaf or flower) indicating “I am the devotee, you are my God, and I am offering this, just a little nothing—patram pushpam. Please accept it.” Such worship can be performed to an image (murthi-puja) or to the Lord seated in one’s heart (manasic puja) or to the omnipresent being (para-puja) who dwells in all beings.

Gurudev did not neglect any of these. The whole world was to him the manifestation of the Lord and he lived every minute of his life in this consciousness. Greeting the sun in the morning, he would offer mental worship to it repeating “Om suryaya namah”, (the mantra for propitiating the Sun God) and mentally offer dhupa, deepa, naivedya, and archana (incense, lights, food-offering and offering of flowers) in the order in which they would come to his heart. Sitting on the bank of the Ganges, gazing at the sparkling divine water, he would offer mental worship to the river with milk, flowers etc.

On no account would the Master take his afternoon meal without first offering formal and ceremonial worship to the Lord at the small shrine in his own cottage. In only this one item of his daily routine, did Gurudev claim and insist upon privacy—perhaps only to illustrate his own precept that you should pray to Him in secret for the sake of obtaining His Grace and not ring the bells and sound the gong in order to attract public attention and earn appreciation for your “marvellous devotion”. He attached no value whatsoever to ostentation. Only once did one of Gurudev’s personal attendants by chance witness the moving spectacle of the Master lying down on the ground in full prostration before the deity. There was nothing mechanical in this worship or prostration. It was symbolic of total self surrender, in his case the symbolism was real and whole-hearted.

To Gurudev, the deity whom he worshipped, either mentally or physically, was more real than the things that are solid realities to us. For some time I used to do the puja, the worship, in the

ashram's Vishvanath Temple and Gurudev used to come quite often to participate. When he offered some bael leaves and looked at the little bull (Nandi) and the Siva lingam there, it was clear that Gurudev did not treat them as statues at all. When he looked at the beautiful Krishna there, the expression on his face was much the same as that on ours when we meet and greet a life-long beloved friend. You could see it in his eyes. It was a beautiful thing to watch. Indescribable.

If you can commune with what may be called an 'idol' like this, already there is a transformation within. If once you learn to cognise what it is to be in the presence of God, to cognise the divine in some name and in some form, you can go out and recognise "Thee in all these names and forms." This vision of God, as it expands, does not restrict itself to what the mind labels as 'good'. Whatever Gurudev did in his life, was related to this expanding consciousness.

As long as you have a body treat it as an instrument in the hands of God. As long as you have the 'I-am' consciousness, recognise God in all, serve and love God in every being, and at the same time try to discover His omnipresence. This is the magic and mystery of what is known as 'idol worship'.

Bhakti is expansion of consciousness, expansion of vision, expansion of the heart. You begin by seeing God somewhere, perhaps in a temple, an image, perhaps in a saint or holy man, or perhaps in some natural phenomena, and gradually, step by step, the vision is allowed to expand and expand, continuously and unceasingly until all division is abolished, until even the artificial distinction between 'good' and 'evil' is lost. It is then that one attains cosmic consciousness.

On no account would the Master let us confine our devotional practices to the shrine only. Worship in a shrine is no doubt the necessary initial training ground but the aim of this (which he constantly hammered into our hearts) was to treat the entire universe as Vishva Brindavan (abode of Lord Krishna) and every being in it as Lord Vasudeva Himself—VASUDEVAH SARVAM.

Worship Of The Omnipresent

There were a number of other ways in which Gurudev performed this worship of the cosmic being. We have already discussed how he treated service of the sick itself as worship of the Lord.

At his insistence special varieties of worship were instituted at the ashram; like the worship of the virgins during Navaratri and worship of scavengers on Gandhi's birthday. On the sacred Guru Purnima day (when worship is offered and homage paid to the great-grand-preceptor, Sri Vyasa, who commenced writing the Brahma Sutras on that day). On these and many other holy days at the ashram Gurudev would keep plenty of flowers ready with him. As devotees poured into his abode or office he himself would worship them.

On the days when worship was offered to his own feet by some ardent disciple, Gurudev would himself go round, flowers in hand, individually worshipping all the devotees who had worshipped him. Only those who intently observed the mood reflected on his face and the expression of devotion in his eyes, would realise that to Gurudev every devotee standing before him was a veritable manifestation of God.

Once on Sivaratri (a day sacred to Lord Siva) we were engaged in the all-night worship of Lord Siva, which consists of pujas (worship) performed four times during the night every three hours. On the temple verandah continuous chanting of the holy five-syllabled formula of Lord Siva (Om Namah Sivaya) was being conducted by Gurudev himself. After the last session, flowers were offered to the Lord, and the devotees filed into the sanctum sanctorum, devoutly placing the sacred bael leaves on the Siva lingam (the symbol or idol of Lord Siva). Some threw the bael leaves on the lingam: some half sleepily allowed the leaves to slip from their hands. A few pious devotees performed this ceremony as a religious duty; to them the Siva lingam was but a stone which somehow represented God—they did not know how. Last of all came Gurudev, bael leaves in hand. His radiant face shone with an extraordinary light. He let a few leaves drop at the foot of the holy bull, Nandi—very softly, sweetly and devoutly seeking his permission to worship the Lord. When Gurudev gazed at the lingam, before offering the bael leaves, he neither prayed nor recited hymns, nor did he repeat the Lord’s name aloud but his eyes spoke to the lingam. For him it was a living presence; such tenderness, such gentleness, characterised every movement. Right then, in the twinkling of an eye, and unnoticed by anyone else, he turned around and worshipped the worshippers with the flowers. ‘God is not only *there*, he is everywhere’. Gurudev worshipped the Lord in all, worshipped the cosmic form.

Vibhuti Yoga

Gurudev was the greatest and perhaps the only recent exemplar of the Vibhuti yoga (the yoga dealing with the glories and the manifestations of the Lord) as described in the 10th Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Those who heard his inspiring lectures either during his epochal All-India Tour or on important occasions at the ashram itself, could not have failed to notice how the Master laid the greatest emphasis on this practice. He exalted it, putting it on a par with raja, bhakti, karma and jnana yoga. It is a dynamic jnana-bhakti yoga. To the list of vibhutis (glories or manifestations) given by Lord Krishna in the Gita, Gurudev added quite a few of his own. He sang the Song of Vibhuti Yoga:

soham soham sivoam soham
om om om om om om om om
I am neither mind nor body, immortal self I am
I am witness of three states, I am knowledge absolute
I am fragrance in jassamine, beauty in flowers
I am coolness in the ice, flavour in coffee.
I am greenness in the leaf, hue in the rainbow,
I am taste bud in the tongue, essence in orange.
I am mind of all minds, prana of all pranas,
I am soul of all souls, self of all selves.
I am atman in all beings, apple of all eyes,
I am sun of all suns, light of all lights, etc. etc.,
I am that I am, I am that I am
I am that I am, I am that I am.

This is obviously what the Lord meant in the Gita, where He only indicates the line of approach to this practice, and Himself admits that He has not exhausted the list of his vibhutis.

How did Gurudev practise vibhuti yoga? Everything reminded him of the manifestation of God. When he came out of his room and saw the Ganga, he would remember Krishna saying, "I am Ganga among rivers", and while gazing at the Himalayas, "Among the immovables, I am the Himalayas". The sun, the moon, the stars, the peepul tree, intelligent people, and even robust wrestlers, boxers and gymnasts, are manifestations of God. When you look at their strength, you realise it is something divine. Often it looked as if Gurudev favoured wealthy people, but to the Master this man's affluence was just another vibhuti of God, that prosperity, that brilliance of his intellect is divine. Lord Krishna said, "I am the brilliance of the brilliant". It needs some training to see, not the human physical personality, but rather the spark—the light—a manifestation of the divine.

Even things which normally 'feed the senses' appeared in a different light to him. Delicious food not only tickled the nerves of his palate, but reminded him of God who is the deliciousness in all dishes. Music, rather than drawing his consciousness outwards and disturbing his mind, helped to preserve his sahaja avastha (the natural and continuous superconscious state). He saw only the power of the Lord in all these. The silence in the forest was no longer frightening; it was the manifestation of the Lord. Thus in everything the loving beloved Lord was seen and realised. This Continuous awareness of the presence of God is sahaja avastha.

This practice is not as easy as it might appear at first sight. The mind is a creature of likes and dislikes—clinging to or shying away from objects. The senses have been accustomed to regard the objects as food and sources of pleasure and run riot at the least chance. These have no place in the practice of vibhuti yoga, the practice of the presence of God, where the ruling characteristic is one continuous unbroken love for all beings, for the Lord who dwells in all beings.

To get the spiritual aspirant established in this habit of seeing God in all, Gurudev taught, "First see God in all the special manifestations of divinity. Look up. See the vast infinite blue sky. Doesn't this remind you of God? Look at the resplendent sun and contemplate the self-luminous self. Gaze at the holy waters of the Ganga and see the Lord. Mentally prostrate to these manifestations. Gradually the vision will expand to behold the Lord in even asses and donkeys. Root out the idea of evil from your mind. When you see someone whom your mind regards as a wicked person, mentally repeat, 'God is the gambling in the cheat' (dyutam chalayatamasmi). See God in him and all contempt will vanish at once. You will neither hate nor dread the dacoit, for the Lord himself is the chief among them—'taskaranam pataye namah'. In course of time you will be firmly rooted in the practice of the omnipresence of God. To aid and intensify this practice, Gurudev asked the aspirant to select some good mantra, verse or formula to use in conjunction with the object seen. For example:

- (1) akasavat sarvagata nitya (Brahman is all-pervading and eternal like the sky).
- (2) pusannekarse yama surya prajapatya vyuhar-asmin samuha tejo yatte rupam kalyanatamam, tat te pasyami yosavasau purusas-sohamasmi (Upanishad) (O Sun, our nourisher, the sole traveller of the Heavens, controller of all. O Surya, son of Prajapati, I behold thy glorious form. I am He; the Purusha within thee).

- (3) jyotismamapi tat jyotih tamsah paramucyate jnanam jneyam jnanagamyam, hridi sarvasya visitam (Gita) (That, the light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable, the goal of knowledge, seated in the hearts of all).

Closely related to this practice of vibhuti yoga, is namaskara yoga—the yoga of humble prostrations. A practitioner of this yoga, without entertaining the idea of high and low, invariably offers humble prostration to all beings, even to asses, trees and seemingly inanimate things etc., and thereby succeeds in effacing his inordinate and unbending ego, the little self, to obtain serenity of mind and purity of heart—the two prerequisites for any higher attainment in spiritual practice.

This valuable practice had been totally neglected, especially by monks and the great paramahansa sannyasins of Rishikesh, until Gurudev made it an integral part of his spiritual practice. Having clothed their unwillingness to bend with the high philosophical question, “Who is to prostrate to whom?”, they discovered a missing link in their practice and learnt from Gurudev that in the absence of wisdom, the vanity stemming from spiritual practice, philosophical thinking, dispassion for and renunciation of worldly objects, is a more powerful factor to contend with than the vanity born of wealth, birth and education etc. Namaskara yoga done with the correct attitude is one of the best ways of keeping this subtle vanity away. In his own disciples, Gurudev constantly strove to instil this natural humility. The Master treated all his disciples as though they were gods. He would not even send for his disciples (even when he was over sixty) if he had something to ask or tell them, or some work to be done, but would himself go from room to room and the expression on his face was indescribable, as if he was saying, “You are my Master, you are my God.”

Swami Paramanandaji, Gurudev’s first disciple, recalled this very beautiful incident that happened to him very early in his contact with the Master, in Swarg Ashram in the 1930’s. This young man—he was not a swami then and still very young—came to the Master, seeking to become his disciple and Swami Sivananda asked him, “Do you know how to behave towards a swami, how to greet one?” He himself provided the answer: “Stand there, this is how one does it,” and he fell flat on the floor, prostrate at the boy’s feet.

Visitors to the Ashram and those whom Gurudev contacted during his tours, recall that whenever they met the Master, it was he who first bowed down and touched *their* feet. Often they would only later be able to touch his, but this never made the slightest difference to the Master. He went on with his practice and eventually the contagion spread to others who also came to understand that nothing that enables one to cultivate real humility should be neglected. I am not suggesting that just because he bowed down or fell at somebody’s feet that that is humility. No, you had to look into his face and into his eyes, to see that he was not seeing ‘you’ at all. With the prostration Gurudev would invariably repeat, “Om namo Narayanaya” (salutations to the Supreme Lord) signifying that he was not bowing to the physical being of that person in order to curry favour but to the Lord who is manifest in all beings in the universe. A beautiful peace and radiance was on his face. Afterwards he might talk and joke with you, but when he greeted you it was if he was standing in front of God Himself. It mattered little therefore to him whether the person was a renowned monk, venerable anchorite, pious householder, devil’s disciple or habitual criminal; everyone received his salutation—even people far below him in age. Age belongs to the unreal body and not to the eternal Narayana hidden in it. This salutation was not an empty show, but one which sprang from the core of Gurudev’s heart, from the direct realisation of the all-prevailing oneness of

God, and it was coupled with a genuine veneration of all. This humility I have not seen in any other person on earth.

This walking divinity and world preceptor would always use the respectful plural mode of address for anyone, even a child; “Aap” in Hindi. “neengal” in Tamil. Not one harsh word or insult could ever escape his lips, not even in a dream. He never spoke to people as human personalities but regarded everyone as God.

Gurudev’s disciples therefore had to undergo this unenviable experience daily. Not only would the Master fold his palms and reverently bow to the disciple, but he would repeat the disciple’s name in the same manner in which the Lord’s name is repeated. Here is the sacred formula with which he greeted his disciples as he emerged from his abode in the morning to go to the office:

“Haro hara, tat-twam-asi, om shanti, banami khuda mubarak, namah sivaya, namo narayanaya, namo bhagavate vasudevaya, namo bhagavate (using the name of the particular disciple), namo bhagavati ganga rani, hari om tat sat.”

We have heard of preceptors extracting service from their disciples and lovingly imposing hardships and enforcing stern discipline upon them in order that they might evolve. They taught their disciples using the rod if need be, admonishing them at every turn. One of the traditional interpretations of the guru is, ‘one who grabs you by the hand and leads you to God-realisation: to whom you dedicate *tan, man, dhan*, (lit... body, mind and wealth)’. You hand over to the guru everything that you possess and after such surrender he imparts to you the knowledge of the truth.

Gurudev was unique because, first of all he did not expect his disciples to surrender themselves to him. He gave them complete and total freedom because he pointed out that you should in yourself, of yourself and for your own self, free yourself from the self and the world at large. He served his disciples, and willingly imposed hardships upon himself in order that they might have all the facilities necessary for their practice and spiritual evolution. He would never dream of *enforcing* any kind of discipline on his disciples. The only method by which he taught was EXAMPLE, and this without even directing the disciple’s attention to that example. Daily, he would go on demonstrating the tenets of divine life, so that one day, someday, the disciple might learn—to be humble, to bow down to all, to see God in all.

Devotional Singing

Sankirtan is the devotional singing of the Lord’s names. Sankirtan and Gurudev are almost synonymous terms. Sankirtan was revived through him and in this, as in several aspects of his life and mission, Gurudev represented a synthesis of the foremost saints of recent times. Like Gauranga Mahaprabhu, he danced and sang the Mahamantra (the greatest mantra for this age of Kali which easily bestows liberation on those who resort to it) on countless platforms throughout India. The mantra is:

Hare Rama, Hare Rama: Rama Rama, Hare Hare
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna: Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.

With Sri Chaitanya, Gurudev shared erudition in the scriptures and a firm grounding in Vedanta which meant that his sankirtan was born of wisdom and not of mere blind sentiment. Like Mirabai he sang songs full of devotion, and like Kabir he composed lyrics full of the spirit of dispassion and wisdom.

In fact Gurudev's whole mission started with sankirtan conferences which he presided over in Punjab. He had a good singing voice and musical talent, so that through his sankirtan, he was able to inspire and transform the lives of many, and convert atheists into devotees.

He loved to sing and dance. The Master's was an imposing and marvellous figure whether he was dancing or not and it was delightful, beautiful, inspiring to watch him dance, singing; "Chidanand, Chidanand, Chidananda Hum." It seems this was what he had set himself to do in the beginning, in the early thirties. He had written in a letter to Swami Paramananda, "This is what we must do—sing kirtan and through sankirtan alone, we should conquer, change and bring about a spiritual revolution in India and the world."

The whole mission started by his allowing himself to be associated with societies established to promote such singing and dancing and other such devotional practices. But then very soon he discovered that where a devotional society got established the society predominated more and more and devotion grew less and less. He thought it was dangerous. He also discovered that mere chanting developed into emotionalism. This would not do. So, the Divine Life Society was formed, where sankirtan was integrated with all the other forms of yoga.

His philosophically inspiring songs contain the very essence of his teachings, and are couched in the language which has enabled them to travel throughout the world. Here is one of them:

“sunaja sunaja sunaja Krishna
tu-gita-wala jnana sunaja Krishna—
Serve. Love. Give. Purify. Meditate. Realise.
Be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate.
Enquire 'who am I' know the self and be free.
Adapt. Adjust. Accommodate.
Bear insult. Bear injury. (This is) highest sadhana.
Be honest, be sincere, be truthful.
Be patient, be obedient, be tolerant.
Be gentle, be humble, be noble,
Be bold, be pure, be wise, be virtuous.
Be still, quiet, know thy self.
Purification, concentration, reflection, meditation.
Illumination, identification, absorption, salvation.
These are the eight stages to self-realisation
Inspiration, illumination, revelation.
Ecstasy, rapture, vision of truth
These are the signs of spiritual progress.
Find the knower, find the hearer, find the taster.

(Find the seer) (find the smeller)
You're not this body, not this mind, immortal self you are.
Devotion, dedication and discipline,
service, sacrifice, sublimation.
Simplify, purify, intensify.
Simplify your life and purify your heart,
Intensify your sadhana and meditation
Intensify your vairagya (dispassion) and mumukshutva (yearning for liberation)
Satsang, santosh and shanti (peace, contentment and company of truth)
Seclusion, silence and sat-vichar (pure thinking)
Re-integrate, rejuvenate, renovate,
Co-operate, collaborate, co-ordinate.
D.I.N., D.I.N., D.I.N.,
Do it now, do it now, do it now.
T.I.N., T.I.N., T.I.N.,
Try it now, try it now, try it now.
K.I.V., K.I.V., K.I.V.,
Keep in view, keep in view, keep in view.
Nishta, bhav, mahabhav, prem (*grades of relationship with God*)
Seek, find, enter and rest,
Enquire, discover and recover.
This is the way, this is the truth, this is life divine.

The Mahamantra was of course Gurudev's favourite.
Hare Rama, Hare Rama; Rama, Rama, Hare Hare.
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna; Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare.

It is a divine boon to the people of this age and the Master left no stone unturned to enshrine it in the heart of every aspirant. In fact, he was so fond of this Mahamantra that he instituted the continuous chanting of this great mantra at the ashram on the 3rd December 1943, and this chant has been going on there continuously day and night, generating an all-powerful spiritual current, invisibly helping all aspirants in their spiritual endeavour. Gurudev encouraged all organisers of conferences and other functions and celebrations of importance to arrange for the continuous chanting of this mantra to synchronise with the event, and assured them success in their endeavour.

A remarkable characteristic of the Master's songs is that they are non-dualistic at base. They vividly portray his ultimate realisation of godhead and his catholic understanding that the Lord is thought of and worshipped in an infinite variety of ways by people of various temperaments and spiritual equipment. Though the mahamantra is more or less a common feature at the Ashram gatherings, Gurudev had his own special songs for invoking various deities each day of the week. The Sun God on Sunday, Lord Siva on Monday, Divine Mother and Lord Subramanya on Tuesday, Lord Krishna on Wednesday, Guru (preceptor) on Thursday, Divine Mother on Friday and Hanuman on Saturday. During the festivals Gurudev would always sing songs in honour of the particular deity adored, such as Durga, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati during Navaratri; Lord Siva on Sivaratri, Lord Rama on Sri Ramanavami and Lord Krishna on Janmashtami days.

Gurudev's love of all religions was amply portrayed by his songs on Jesus, Allah, Zoroaster and Buddha. These were sung on all important occasions in the Ashram and also whenever the prayer meeting was attended by people belonging to various religions.

Again, by his own example, the Master showed aspirants how to sing hymns for the sake of the Lord, and not for showing off. He had no use for much noise and instrumental accompaniment, neither did he set much store by the frenzied singing of the Lord's names, which is often followed by a state of nervous exhaustion, frequently mistaken for the superconscious state. He said, "Sing the hymns sweetly, melodiously and softly, always feeling that the Lord, seated in your heart, is listening. Such singing will lead you to superconsciousness (samadhi)."

Satsanga

Another vital spiritual practice that the Master emphasised was satsanga. Sat means truth, God, reality, or that which exists. Sanga means keeping company, association, sitting together. Satsanga also means getting inspiration from a holy man. It is not so easy to be inspired by a holy man. How do you even recognise a holy man unless you are also holy? It is for this reason that there is so much insistence on self-purification. Purify yourself, prepare yourself and equip yourself with the proper insight, then of course you will recognise the truth, you will recognise holiness wherever it is found.

What is holiness, what is truth, what is God? You cannot measure the degree of holiness in everyone that you meet. You must keep the company of holiness, the company of truth. Satsanga is that company in which your mind, your thoughts and your inner being draws closer to truth, closer to God. One who enjoys this satsanga finds that within him something is awakened. Satsanga merely reminds you of something that has somehow been overlaid with the ashes and the dust and dirt of modern living. In satsanga an inner glowing and blossoming is experienced, as the ashes that have piled up on this inner truth are blown away.

Two of the greatest oriental scriptures exalt satsanga in just this fashion—the Bhagavatam and the Yoga-Vasishta. The Bhagavatam—the Book of God (which is comparable to the Holy Bible), tells us that it is in satsanga that we are reminded of the glory of God and of the evanescence of life.

The Master explained why such frequent reminders are so important. He used to say, "Maya, or illusion, the illusory power of God, the power that deludes and confuses the mind cannot be described. It is as indescribable as God. However it is possible to point out what this Maya is capable of doing. For instance there is what is known as "smashana vairagya" (dispassion which arises during a funeral. There you are reminded that you too will die, perhaps tomorrow, so you resolve that from today you will be good. The resolution does not even last until you get home. That illusive power which makes you forget your resolve as fast as that, is called Maya. Gurudev declared that it was satsanga that sustains wisdom and saves us from such delusion.

The Yoga Vasishta also mentions that there are four gate-keepers to the mansion of truth, and one of them is satsanga. It says: "Keep company with satsanga and he will let you in very easily".

The Master was so very fond of this satsanga that we had it every night in the ashram, seven days a week, every week of the year, without one day being missed. The number of people who attended did not matter. Sometimes there were three, sometimes thirty, sometimes three hundred—who was there and who was not there was also not important. The personalities were not important at all, but rather it was the spirit in which we get together that mattered.

Even though over the years the satsanga underwent quite a lot of change, still the basic structure was preserved. Gurudev began at one stage to celebrate events like Christmas, New Year's Eve, his own birthday and some auspicious holy day in the Hindu calendar, as part of the satsanga. On New Year's Eve the satsanga lasted until quarter past twelve, when the Master would look at his watch, "The New Year is rung in—OM. Hari Rama " Easter was also celebrated as well as some of the holy festivals of all religions in the world. The Durga puja was celebrated on a very grand scale every year. The Master was not at all averse to rituals; on the contrary he loved them. Sometimes dramas or plays were enacted. All these were incorporated into the basic framework of the satsanga, which remained unchanged.

In 1924 when the Master entered his little town called Rishikesh at the foot of the Himalayas, he had only just become a swami and was still a mendicant and almost unknown. He was about forty and as such fairly junior to the other great holy men in Swarg Ashram. But as a bold and practical idealist, Gurudev discovered even then that Satsanga was *the* fan to keep alive the fire of God-love in the spiritual aspirant's heart. Gurudev's work then was to bring all these holy men together in satsanga. Previously they had all had their own followers and it was he who suggested, "Why doesn't everybody get together on the same platform, so that all the people may see you and listen to you?" This was Gurudev's genius.

He used to stay in the background and said, "I am not so important. I am not even necessary for the satsanga, except to create the platform, spread the mats and prepare seats for these holy men to sit on." When he moved over to the present ashram site, the first thing he did was to ensure that there was a satsanga every night in the ashram—summer, winter, rainy season or monsoon. In winter they used to go up the hill where it was less cold and in summer satsanga was on the Ganges river bank, where it was cool. Even when his body's health was deteriorating, he did not miss a satsanga, and we were blessed that he did not, for it was he who was the Sat in the Sanga: i.e. the divinity whose company was sought by those who gathered there. He was a holy man; he didn't need anybody's company, and yet, walking with the aid of a long stick, he used to come to the prayer hall every night. When the body didn't allow even that much of walking, he used to hold the shoulders of two people and walk—still he came to satsanga. Nobody could prevent him from doing that. Later, when he was not quite sure whether the legs could even sustain the body, hold it up, he said, "Oh, the legs are a bit wobbly, what are we going to do?" He was a doctor, so of course he knew the solution. "Bring me a wheelchair." I don't know if I can convey this to you. A Swami, a Yogi, who but a few years before that was in radiant health, wonderful health, better health than all of us put together, this holy man was not reluctant at all to be wheeled in this chair to the satsanga. Later he couldn't even sit in the satsanga. I wonder if you can enter into the spirit of this—for instance it is even considered improper for someone to lie down during a church service, but he said, "I am not able to sit. I will come to the satsanga, lie down there, but I *must* come."

To the aspirants who made the ashram their abode and to those disciples who lived in the hundreds of cities where Divine Life Society branches function, Gurudev gave this wholesome advice: “Pray together, meditate together, sing together”. If any aspirant missed a satsanga, saying that he was engaged in individual spiritual practice, Gurudev, with a mischievous smile playing upon his eyes and lips, would enquire, “And you had a wonderful superconscious state?” Often he remarked, “All that individual practice means is sleep; in congregational prayer and meditation however, a powerful current is generated and the individual aspirant’s mind is elevated to great spiritual heights.”

Gurudev’s satsanga was itself unique in many ways. It was very beautiful and wonderful, and combined songs in praise of the Lord, chanting his names, music, study of scriptures, discourses etc. It catered and appealed to the needs and temperaments of all; it satisfied everyone’s hunger. In the early days, there were only about ten or fifteen of us and perhaps ten visitors. We all sat in two rows and there was a little altar with a wick lamp on it. There was also a hurricane lantern on a small stool, which had to be passed around to help some of us read from the scriptures. The satsanga started with:

om om om

jaya ganesha jaya ganesha jaya ganesha pahimam
sri ganesha sri ganesha sri ganesha raksha mam
jaya guru siva guru hari guru ram
jagadguru paramguru sadguru shyam
adi guru advaita guru ananda guru om
chidguru chidghana guru chinmaya guru om
hare rama hare rama rama rama hare hare
hare krishna hare krishna krishna krishna hare hare
(later this was greatly expanded)

Then the lamp was passed to the first person sitting on the Master’s left, who would read a chapter of the Gita, with or without translation. As soon as that was finished, that person would lead in chanting a kirtan and then the lantern would be pushed to the next person, who read from some other scripture. This person would also lead the next kirtan. And so it would go round.

Sometimes the Master used to ask somebody or other to read an article which he had written that day. This was very interesting. Someone might have gone to him to complain that someone else rebuked him in anger. The Master did not rebuke the person who rebuked because it might hurt him. Instead he would write a nice article, “The danger of anger”. (Sometimes he would give it to the person concerned to type.) He would bring it to the satsanga to be read by the one who lost his temper. It hits home! It is meant for him.

From there on, everyone had to lead in singing a kirtan. It was not enough to sing in chorus. The Master would not accept any excuse or explanation. He pointed out that shyness was an obstacle to spiritual progress. When everyone had finished, the Master would conclude with the mahamantra kirtan and the mahamrityunjaya mantra. The satsang concluded with arati and the most sublime peace chants, beautifully expressive of his innermost feelings;

Om sarvesam svastir bhavatu,
sarvesam santir bhavatu,
sarvesam purnam bhavatu,
sarvesam mangalam bhavatu,
sarve bhavantu sukhinah,
sarve santu niramayah,
sarve bhadrani pasyantu,
ma kaschit dukkha-bhagbhavet.

asato ma sat gamaya,
tamaso ma jyotir gamaya,
mrityor ma amritam gamaya.

Om purnamadah purnamidam
purnat purnamudachyate
purnasya purnamadaya
purnameva vasistate
Om santih santih santih

The spirit of the above chants is as follows: “May all be blessed with well-being, auspiciousness, peace and fullness. May all be happy and free from illness. May all see only good; and may no ill befall anyone. O Lord, lead me from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light and from mortality to immortality. The Lord is full; the creation is also full. The latter has appeared in the Lord, and yet the Lord is everfull. Om. Peace. Peace. Peace.”

After this the Master would walk away very quietly so that the profound thoughts and ideas heard from the scriptures would still be fresh and ringing in our minds and heart as we went to bed.

This was the whole basic structure of the satsanga. Gurudev encouraged people to have satsanga in their own homes, perhaps with a few neighbours, choosing their own scriptures.

Gurudev was one of the greatest living votaries of practical prayer, prayer which rises from the heart and thus pervades and nourishes every cell of man's being, even as the heart's blood pervades and nourishes the body. At satsanga and at other times too, one would often hear Gurudev say, “Mr. So-and-so passed away today. Let us pray for the peace of the departed soul”, or “Today is Mrs. So-and-so's birthday, let us pray for her health and long life”. Then he himself would conduct the congregational chanting of the Lord's names and conclude with a two minute silent meditation and prayer. Only subtle eyes of intuition could notice the powerful spiritual current generated by a whole gathering of devotees at the holy feet of this incarnate divinity, offering silent prayer to the Almighty to bless the person on whose behalf the prayer had been offered. This prayer has literally wrought miracles.

Prayer

Apart from this the Master always insisted on our praying for all, and absolutely unselfishly. For instance, while praying for the health and long life of someone visiting the ashram, Gurudev

would always sing, “May the Lord bless Mr... and family, and the whole world, with health, long life, peace, bliss and immortality”. And after giving the usual three cheers, “Long live Mr. So-and-so and family”, he would give the fourth cheer to the whole of mankind.

This prayer was not confined to human beings. An injured dog or monkey would invariably evoke from Gurudev, the mahamrityunjaya mantra (the holy formula dedicated to Lord Siva), which wards off all kinds of accidents, bestows health and long life and ultimately confers immortality on one.

om tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pustivardhanam
urvarukamiva bandhanan mrtyor muksiya mamrtat.

(We worship the Lord who promotes health and strength. May he liberate us from death). A dead lizard on Gurudev’s path would earn the mahamantra prayer for the peace of the soul. To Gurudev, all beings were equal and prayer was always universal.

Gurudev asked us to make our entire life one long prayer, by living for the realisation of God and for the service of humanity. Until prayer becomes habitual, Gurudev exhorts us to take the help of any prop that is available. Temples, idols, images, pictures, saints and sacred books etc., all these should be made the best use of to keep up the constant current of prayer. Pictures of Gods and Goddesses were hung in the office and the prayer hall. Gurudev did not, as almost everyone does, hang a picture up with the best of intentions, and then forget all about it. He wove their existence into his daily life. As soon as he entered the office, he would glance at them all—they were part of his ‘staff’—as if to affirm: “So, here am I, to do Thy will, as Thy instrument”. A moment’s silent prayer was offered before Gurudev commenced his work. When one task was completed and the next job was about to begin, or when one visitor left and the next was about to enter, he would lean back in his chair, close one eye and with the other just throw a glance at one of the pictures of God. That split second was eternity, infinity, supreme peace and bliss—thus the contact with the absolute was continuously kept up.

The Master was so serious about this practice that if one picture was disturbed or removed, he would at once notice it and have it restored. What need had Gurudev, the supreme being, to resort to these props of devotion? He was consciously rooted forever in Brahmic consciousness! Only to set an example for us to follow.

This is the beautiful and soul-elevating Universal Prayer which Gurudev composed:

O adroble Lord of mercy and love
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee
Thou art sat-chid-ananda (existence, knowledge, bliss absolute)
Thou art omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient;
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.
Grant us an understanding heart, equal vision, balanced mind, faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength to resist temptations and to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, anger and hatred.
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms.
Let us ever remember Thee.
Let us ever sing Thy Glories.
Let Thy name be ever on our lips.
Let us abide in thee forever and ever.

There is no doubt that one who offers this prayer morning and evening will obtain the Lord's choicest blessings and rapidly evolve towards Godhead, to shine as a liberated soul here and now.

Faith In God

The Master used to say very often, "You are talking about God's grace. Do you know how to experience God's grace? Not by paying lip service. If you want to enjoy God's grace, depend on nothing else for sometime. Without telling anybody, leave the ashram and walk away. When you feel hungry, somebody may give you food. When you feel tired, lie down. Live like this for a few days, you will then come to know what God's grace is. You will find that an unknown person, someone whom you have never met in your life, might come and say, 'Where are you coming from? Won't you come in and have a cup of tea?' You will look into his face and see God's grace. You will feel, 'Here is God's grace. I don't deserve it. I have done nothing for this man and he is probably very poor. He offers me a cup of tea.' This is God's grace. You are lying down somewhere, someone sees you shivering with cold and comes and throws a blanket over your body. You look at him and realise, 'This is God's grace.' Somebody may even slap you—that too you enjoy as God's grace." God's grace is not something which the brain can invent. It has to be experienced.

The Master himself did this in 1941 when there were still only a few people living with him. No one has been able to discover why he decided to leave the ashram. One afternoon the Master did not return to his office as usual and his room was empty. They found a note, "I am retiring. I have appointed Swami Paramananda to be the president after me and I would like the work to continue." He had gone. It seems he kept walking towards Hardwar. One night he spent in a temple and the next morning he went on walking aimlessly. Aimlessly—that was the aim. When night fell, he looked around, there was a haystack so he got in there and fell asleep. The next morning he discovered it was a muslim's house. This muslim looked after him for a day or two. Then Gurudev kept moving and was eventually picked up by a man who had a small sugar-cane farm. This man made him stay there for a few days and gave him sugar-cane juice. In the meantime everyone in Rishikesh, Hardwar and throughout the entire district knew that Swami Sivananda was missing. A swami had gone in search of the Master, and finding him, begged, "Oh, please come back to the ashram." It was only then that this sugar-cane man realised that he had been host to a very great sage of the Himalayas. This man then became a great devotee of the Master's and every year he used to bring two big drums of sugar-cane juice in commemoration of that wonderful event. And Gurudev also used to point out straight away, "I stayed at his house for two days."

It is when you have such experiences that you begin to have faith in God. From belief, you have graduated to faith. It is still only faith, but it is strong enough to sustain us, in life until one day, by God's grace again, we have a direct experience of God's omnipresence and realise that God

alone is, nothing else is. At this stage one realises that 'I' cannot realise God. God alone is real. When the ego dissolves, then God knows Himself. Self-realisation is the cancellation of the self. God-realisation is God realising Himself. 'I' does nothing at all, it is God who does all unto himself. This is the heart of bhakti yoga, the essence of God-realisation.

Though as the natural 'fruit' of Gurudev's bhakti yoga practices he enjoyed the visions of divinities and sages, though his prayers for the sick healed them and his prayers for the afflicted removed their afflictions and even altered the destinies of devotees (many of these are recorded in the book "Miracles of Sivananda"), his utter egolessness was the supreme manifestation of bhakti. Such egolessness is indeed love that is God.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIRTUE AND VISION

In raja yoga, as in all the other yogas, the first step is discipline. This has been emphasised by all spiritual Masters, some more than others, some of them preferring the extremes, and others not. In raja yoga this foundational discipline is called yama. Yama in sanskrit means 'the restrainer' as also 'death'. Gurudev said, "Remember God and remember death." Bring death into your daily life, this is called yama.

According to the Yoga Sutras, this yama is five-fold, Ahimsa—non-violence or non-aggressiveness; Satyam—truthfulness; asteya—non-stealing or non-hoarding; brahmacharya—a state in which the mind dwells constantly in God (or in a more restricted sense, celibacy, purity) and aparigraha—non-greediness. The observances or niyamas consist of saucha (internal and external purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), svadhyaya (study of religious books) and ishvara-pranidhana (self-surrender to the Lord). Some Masters suggest that unless you are already equipped with all these, you should not set foot on the path of yoga. Gurudev however with a twinkle in his eye and a beautiful smile on his lips would say, "If you wait till you acquire all these, it may take you ten lifetimes. By all means cultivate them, but side by side go on with your japa and meditation and other yoga practices, however imperfect they may be".

Even among great Masters, Gurudev Sivananda was endowed with an abundance of common-sense. When it came to discipline, he often pointed out, "Don't make any violent efforts to control yourself, as there will be a reaction". If on the other hand the discipline comes from within you, it is so natural that there is no effort involved in it at all. Any imposition will cause an inner rebellion. Gurudev said it so often, "Don't go to extremes. Beware of the reaction." The Master was not fond of such extreme asceticism, extreme rigidity, any extremes. Even vows he didn't like. Though he used to encourage people to make resolves, he clearly distinguished between the two. Resolves yes, vows no.

I remember a rather unpleasant incident when there was a misunderstanding between two of Gurudev's disciples. One accused the other of impertinence—of insulting behaviour. The Master

was resting on his easy chair, when both of them arrived. The man who had misbehaved was standing near the Master's feet, when suddenly he was overcome with some sort of sentiment or emotion, and lifting up his hands, he said, "Swamiji, I take a vow...". "Oh, stop it, stop it," said the Master and would not let him complete the sentence. This man was going to vow that thereafter he would never again insult anybody. Gurudev said, "How do you know what you will do later on? You take a vow now, and tomorrow if you break it, you will be haunted for doing so. Rather say, 'I will try not to... I resolve to... Please God, may I...' Resolves, yes; vows, no."

One can tell another, "This is good and this is not so good." It is good to lead a simple life, eat moderately, not take spicy food, etc., but to impose this on another does not work. I have never seen the Master do that.

In 1944, the Master, en route from Rishikesh to Bombay, was passing through the Delhi railway station. Some of us youngsters, who were working in Delhi at the time, and who were also conducting the Delhi branch of the Divine Life Society, went to see him at the railway station. And Gurudev arrived there and was talking to us—bubbling with energy and enthusiasm. One had to see him to understand and appreciate what a radiant personality meant. He asked us all, "How are you and what are you doing, etc. etc." Amongst us there was one married man and Gurudev asked him, "How is your wife?". "She's not here, Swamiji. She's gone home to Madras." "Let her remain there," said Gurudev. "Lead a single life, an independent life. Let her stay there." But this man was very fond of his wife. He said, "But how long will I have to remain alone, Swamiji? I don't feel so very happy about it". "Is that so? Oh, in that case immediately bring her back." He had said what he wanted to say, but if you had other views he changed immediately. It was amazing to watch this happen.

Another incident. A fairly young man, already a renunciate, a mendicant, had come to the ashram. He had a wonderful flowing beard. He said to Gurudev, "I would like to stay here as your sanyasi-disciple." "Then you will have to shave your head and beard", said Gurudev. He hesitatingly consented. Noticing this, the Master quickly added, "But you can grow it again immediately afterwards. The shaving is only for the initiation ceremony." That was the beauty. Gurudev said what he wanted to say, but he watched very very carefully, very cautiously, to see if you were responding to it joyously, happily, or whether you were responding because you felt you were under some compulsion—in which case he would immediately pull back. It was a fantastic and remarkable thing to watch.

Whatever discipline the Master advocated, it had to enter into you, and then blossom like flowers from within. The flowers come from within the tree. You and I have to go to the florist to buy a bunch, the tree does not. This is the difference between something that is natural and something that is artificial. The artificial discipline which comes into being, because you were made to under duress, does not last—usually it leads only to a dreadful reaction. This was not the Master's way at all.

For some time, he was an extreme ascetic. Something else came along and he was prepared to adapt all the time. He could sleep on the floor, and if you provided him with a little mat he would sleep on that with equal joy and cheer. He could sleep on the most comfortable bed also if that was there. Rigidity, as also extremes, I never saw in our Master. And no vows were taken. In prayerful

mood, you contemplate the virtues and the disciplines you wish to cultivate. In a prayerful mood, meditate and remember these things every morning and let them grow in you. This was beautiful and wonderful teaching.

Yama-Niyama

The divine qualities that constitute the first two angas (limbs) of the ashtanga yoga, Gurudev had at birth. Each quality might require several births for an aspirant to acquire, but all of them had become second nature to him, whose very actions portrayed the perfection that is attainable in these. Ahimsa, for instance, was inevitable to him. He was incapable of wounding the feelings of anyone. Those who met him knew that his words were full of honey and nectar. Not a harsh word, nor an unkind remark could ever escape his lips, for they were not in his heart at all. He was not able to entertain a thought of hatred or ill-feeling towards anyone. I have seen that nothing in the world could make him restless except the thought that perhaps a well-meant word, misunderstood by a disciple, might have hurt his feelings. It happened only once in all the years I was with Gurudev—a guilty conscience was pricked (hurt) by a noble piece of advice given by the Master. And the extent to which he went to reassure that devotee that he had only the highest opinion of him, and that he lived only to serve that disciple, was incredible.

No doubt Gurudev's writings are full of admonitions, and his lectures too, contained quite a few of them. However, in conversation he was always all-love, all-praise, all-encouragement.

“Never hurt others' feelings: be kind to all.” This was one of the most emphatic teachings of the Master and there was no one who practised it to perfection more than he. In practice, he disapproved even of righteous indignation and in a case where other Masters would demand and justify, “the use of rod,” Gurudev adopted none other than the methods that he himself had placed before us, “Serve, Love, Give, Meditate.” Serve the person you wish to mould and re-form; love him, meditate and pray for him. This is the path of non-violence. In Gurudev, non-violence became the positive virtue of cosmic love; love in thought, word and deed; love in everyday life, every minute, with every breath. It pervaded even the way he walked. He was a gigantic figure but the feet fell so softly, so lightly, no one could even hear. When Gurudev walked along the road, it was a delight just to stand and watch. Sometimes he used to hold a bag in one hand and a hurricane lamp in the other. In that step there was non-violence, in that foot-fall there was love; so that even if there was a dry leaf it wouldn't be crushed, even if he trod on ants they would not be injured; so soft were his movements.

The touchstone of one established in non-violence is that he cannot bear for a moment the sufferings of others, without literally running to relieve their pain. If Gurudev was taking a bath in the Ganges and a living insect came floating by, struggling for life, he would, without a second thought, take it into his palm and place it on the bank. Once he revealed to us without the least trace of disgust on his face, “If a worm or an insect is struggling for life in faecal matter, I remove it and protect it.” He would not allow others to harm any being on earth.

I have seen this with my own eyes. An ashramite had taken out for airing the cot on which Gurudev used to sleep and discovered that it was an abode of bugs. Devotion to the guru surged in his heart and he prepared to exterminate them. But Gurudev appeared on the scene and said, “Ohji,

please don't do this. Rather take the cot and leave it in the jungle for a few days; in the meantime give me another bed."

Similarly was his protection of the rats that had taken refuge in his dwelling. A few of them had begun to eat away the papers and destroy the bedding and clothes. The attendants working there had managed to catch them, but all that they were allowed to do, was to give the rats a joy-ride to the forest in a cosy gunny-bag, and they invariably returned to Gurudev's cottage the very same evening. They even began to appeal to Gurudev's mercy by nibbling at his fingertips at night, and for a diabetic this was dangerous. An expert arrived at the ashram and gave his expert advice on the elimination of the rat nuisance—which was of course, the simple solution of poisoning them. Gurudev who always listened sympathetically to every kind of topic, whether pleasant or unpleasant, sacred or secular, for the first time refused to listen. He vigorously shook his head, "The rats should not be killed. On the contrary, we should take care of the things that we wish the rats should not destroy. Manuscripts should remain in a steel cabinet, bedding and clothes too, should be well protected against them. The rats should never be killed." If the expert had said anything more, he would have earned a regular food supply for the rats, just as others had done who pleaded that the monkeys living in the ashram's neighbourhood should be driven away. This suggestion had been quickly countered by Gurudev's sanctioning a regular supply of nuts for the monkeys.

Gurudev was an apostle of love and peace, spreading harmony amongst all beings by placing his own sublime life before them as an example for all to emulate. Whenever the occasion arose and Gurudev ascended the platform, he discoursed not upon high philosophical themes but on the practical application of the understanding that one common consciousness pervades all beings, i.e., self-less service and cosmic love. His apostolic mission was not confined to platform lecturing and pamphleteering, but to the adoption of practical methods of enabling all those who gathered in his fold and all those whom his message reached to love all and to serve all beings. Thus this incarnation of God radiated the principles of non-violence, in order that the rays of love might dispel the gloom of hatred, disharmony and ill-will. Gurudev assured us that anyone who cultivated ahimsa to a high degree of perfection, would automatically become the abode of all virtues; and he himself was the proof.

Satyam: Absolute truthfulness in thought, word and deed was Gurudev's very breath. Truth does not only mean that you speak the truth concerning everything, concerning your life and your environment; facing the facts without bluffing yourself. What is the truth concerning life? Life is subject to death. Life is subject to illness, disease, ups and downs, success and failure, happiness and unhappiness. Face that.

Gurudev's discipline brought death into life. He died every day, every minute and this was one of the secrets of his perpetual youthfulness. There is no sudden death, one is dying all the time. The body is growing old continuously, moving towards death all the time, If you see this, then you are not afraid of sickness or death, nor of what is called old age. Laugh and smile, surely, but also know that these things are there. Then you are free at once. Truth is an extremely simple discipline. Become aware of the fact or the truth concerning life then it is possible that you will also see that there is something, beyond—beyond that happiness and unhappiness there is something else, something more valuable in life.

Gurudev sang,

“Is there not a nobler mission, than eating, drinking and sleeping?”

First you must face the fact that your life is being spent day in and day out, in eating, drinking and sleeping. Whatever you do is also motivated by these! Till you face that, there is no sense in sitting looking at your nose and saying, “I am the immortal self.” You are not the immortal self; you are very much the body. Have you asked yourself why you should eat at all, why you should live at all, what is meant by life, what is meant by death? Only when you face the truth concerning life, will you find out, not otherwise.

Gurudev lived and moved and had his being in the Supreme Being and therefore practised the highest kind of brahmacharya (continence). Asteya (non-stealing) and aparigraha (non-covetousness) being the concomitant virtues of truthfulness and continence, were natural to Gurudev; it was our blessed good fortune that he committed a truly wonderful theft—he stole our hearts and took away from us all our sins.

The niyamas: Gurudev was a living illustration of the three-fold austerity described by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 17, verses 14-16. For instance, as regards austerity of speech, he would not utter words that, even though truthful and beneficial, were even *likely* to be unpleasant; instead he would, in his own words, “Leave it to God.” Gurudev had absolute control over his speech. He did not waste one word. His words were measured, calculated to educate the listener and elevate his soul. Vain philosophical discussions and worldly topics dared not waste his breath. He was not fond of showing off his knowledge and would shame a poking pundit with his studied silence.

As regards self-control, it was there in him to the extent of cell control. There was nothing involuntary about him; every cell of his being obeyed him. One who watched him remain seated for hours on end, attending a satsanga which dragged on till past midnight, would hardly believe that he had chronic diarrhoea or diabetes or lumbago, and neither sleep nor tiredness could compel him to retire.

The supreme austerity that he and perhaps he alone practised (even among saints of his calibre) was what he called the highest yoga: “BEAR INSULT, BEAR INJURY.” No austerity is greater than this. If you begin to practise this, you will know that this is real austerity; there is terrific burning ‘inside’. If it is allowed to die away within, without fuming outside, it will burn away all your evil impressions and tendencies; burn away your vanity and egoism. I have seen it with my own eyes; Gurudev smiling and blessing his own disciples, people who were unfit to brush his shoes, when they insulted him and tried to injure his feelings. I shudder at the very thought.

Gurudev’s austerity was, as was everything else about him, complete and all-comprehensive. Absolute surrender to the divine will was the supreme factor that characterised every act, resounded in every word and radiated through every thought of Gurudev. Thus he became one with God. His actions were aimed at the bringing about of human weal, his words were truthful, soothing and beneficial as also authoritative and life-transforming and his thoughts were ever divine.

Renunciation

Basic however to all other disciplines, there is one discipline and one virtue and in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna confines himself to only these two terms, Abhyasa and vairagya. Abhyasa means constant and repeated practice. Vairagya (dispassion or renunciation) is the turning away from the pursuit of pleasure; curbing the pleasure-seeking mentality; turning desire or craving back upon itself.

Unless you renounce the world, you cannot attain self-realisation or God-realisation. Unless you let go of your attachment to this world, you cannot reach your (spiritual) destination. The Master expressed this in his own song; “Detach the mind from the objects, attach it to the Lord.” Detach the mind from your worldly desires, ambitions and cravings, and attach it to God. This renunciation is basic to any spiritual life. If it is not there, there is no spiritual life. In this respect again, the Master had no dogmas, neither in his teachings, nor in his own life. He was not fond of dogmas.

When you think of a holy man, a swami, Swami Sivananda, the basic idea that occurs to you is that he is a man of renunciation. “Swami Sivananda renounced the world”—that is the expression we use, but it is not quite correct. It was *Dr. Kuppuswamy* who renounced the world. A swami is what remains after a man has renounced, it is when the spirit of renunciation has matured that one becomes a swami.

The spirit of renunciation was there in the case of Swami Sivananda, right from childhood. At one stage it meant that he had to abandon something and pick up something else—as all of us do. You abandon your toys and pick up something else, which you call friends, you abandon the friends—again for something else, called children, etc., and so it goes on: eventually you are picked up by somebody else. This is done by everybody, but when it is done by someone who has the spirit of renunciation, it has a different character. The spirit of renunciation as distinct from the form of renunciation, is extremely difficult to understand.

Renunciation is not done by the ego. What “I” renounces—what the ego renounces is not renunciation. It is like the barometer which you keep outside for maximum-minimum temperature readings. The quantity of mercury is the same—if this thing goes up, that one goes down. When you renounce “this”, there is something within you that keeps growing, growing and growing—egoism, vanity, tremendous vanity, inconceivable vanity. If ‘I’ truly renounce the world, I do not touch the world again. If ‘I’ have given up all idea of ‘mineness’, then I do not go about saying, “This is not mine.” When people keep telling you what they have renounced, it only means that they have not renounced. If you have truly renounced, why talk about it? When you say it, the desire for the object is still there; some attachment is still there, while you pretend and profess that it is not. The person who consciously undertakes renunciation does not renounce. He treats it as a form of ritual. He rigidly avoids what he thinks he has renounced.

Gurudev never magnified his renunciation. On the contrary, he always exalted the little renunciation of a mediocre aspirant. He had given up much wealth, a prosperous career, princely comforts and a great position overnight, to wander about as a penniless, homeless mendicant. Nevertheless, he extolled the spirit of renunciation of one who had given up an insignificant slavish

job which had earned him thirty rupees a month. He would point to an austere seeker, who did not wear a shirt in winter as one who far excelled him in austerity and would not reveal that during his Swargashram days, he had put himself through far greater austerities, when he would give away all the good blankets that devotees gave him and sleep on gunny. He called himself “an overcoat swami” as though to belittle himself. Yet, when he presented an overcoat to a young disciple, he would explain, “Why imagine that an overcoat is something other than a mere woollen blanket? Wrapping oneself in a blanket is clumsy and unsuited to active service. We are wearing the same blanket, only cut and stitched so as to move about and work more efficiently.”

This is the way to overcome the formidable sannyasa-abhimana (the vanity of being a monk or swami). It is a difficult practice and it is only Gurudev’s grace and God’s blessings that enable one to know when spiritual practice ends and vanity begins; when licentiousness masquerades in the garb of the absence of vanity.

Gurudev was an embodiment, a manifestation of this continuous spirit of renunciation. Living with such a sage—being in his very presence, one can see it and probably admire it: rarely is one able to be inspired by it. To ‘inspire’ is to inhale. Unless you are alive, awake and mature, the inhalation or inspiration is of no use to you.

The first thing that the Master had to abandon, and this was very difficult in those days, was the vanity and pride of the caste into which he was born—the Brahmin vanity. When Gurudev was a young man, his fancy took him to an expert in fencing, who, by caste, was an untouchable. Gurudev himself belonged to an orthodox family of Saivite Brahmins (persons of the highest caste in the Hindu social system who consider Lord Siva to be the highest being), and to him to approach a pariah (untouchable) was to invite the fury of the elders in the family. After only a few days’ lessons, Gurudev garlanded his teacher, and gave him rich presents—guru dakshina (humble offerings to the teacher) and worshipped the outcaste. For Gurudev to bow down and fall prostrate at the feet of this peasant meant abandoning much social pressure and conditioning. This was the first thing to go: the pride of caste and ancestry. Incidentally, this also shows how much Gurudev valued honouring, worshipping and serving the teacher.

Gurudev was an extremely loving and lovable person and there is no doubt that in his younger days, he must have been capable of being very attached. When one watched him meet some old men who were his boyhood friends—a few of them came to the ashram—one realised that Gurudev must have been very fond of them, because even after a separation of half a century, they returned to his contact. When Gurudev was 65, his schoolmaster came, the seventy-five years old postmaster of his birth place came, several others also came and Gurudev was so familiar, so affectionate, so friendly in spite of the fact that he was a swami and that fifty years had elapsed in the meantime. He was so playful with them that one could easily see that he could have been positively attached to them before. To suddenly drop them and go off to Malaya was a wonderful act of renunciation.

In Malaya too, the then Dr. Kuppuswamy built up a nice circle of friends. A prosperous career had earned for him a wonderful reputation. He was a great friend-maker, a very sociable person. His friends from Malaya also came to the ashram and I too contacted a few others who were still there when I later went to Malaya. They remembered him vividly. One of Gurudev’s

colleagues had a daughter who was about 4 or 5 when Gurudev was in Malaya and she remembered him. So, the Master had had a wonderful time there with plenty of opportunity for practice and service, and plenty of friendship. The Master once said that in his young days he was very fond of good clothes and also jewellery. He led a very good life in Malaya. His old cook used to narrate to us stories of what a charming young man he was.

Perhaps in his youth Gurudev was greatly helped by the fact that he took up medicine. People who constantly deal with the sick, the dead and the dying tend to become completely immune to it. Either they become immune or become like Swami Sivananda. As a doctor, at one stage or another, the question had to arise, "What is the use of all this? What am I doing all this for? Why earn money? I am earning money in order to enjoy my life. What is this enjoyment?" If a doctor treats a patient and even if he is cured, another illness develops. It is progressing from bad to worse. Everyone must die—no doctor can prevent that.

Such a meaningless life had to be given up. Gurudev liked the service and the work there. He was also attached to the people. All this was given up. For such a sociable person to suddenly abandon the whole thing and walk out is renunciation of a very high, degree. The renunciation of his career in Malaya was not born of disappointment or failure or despair. He was a very successful person. Nor was there a craving for something else, for psychic or spiritual development or to become a great swami. It was also not craving for reputation, name and fame, or a great following etc., that drew him from Malaya. It was a supreme act of self-surrender. Like the Buddha he was able to see, from what went on around him, the truth concerning life. Renunciation is incidental to the realisation of the truth. This spirit of renunciation kept Gurudev company throughout.

In answer to a query by Sri Indrajit Sharma, one of Gurudev's biographers, the Master said, "The one consuming thought with which I came back to India was, 'I MUST REALISE GOD NOW', I Never wanted to build an ashram, or to found a society. I wanted to efface myself completely, sit under a tree, sing the praises of the Lord and do japa."

That was the moment when Gurudev surrendered completely at the lotus feet of the Lord, all the aims, ambitions and ideals that had motivated his life until then. Human will had burnt itself up in the fire of intense yearning for the realisation of God. Even the desire to render selfless service to the sick and suffering had temporarily been offered as it were into this fire of self-surrender. All was surrendered to the will of God. The man who had been offered as oblation into this fire emerged as God Himself. This was God-realisation in the truest sense of the term. From then on, God became the only reality; God's consciousness became Gurudev's consciousness; God's will became his will and his life became one with the divine life.

Gurudev had renounced his career, his profession and his wealth. He came back to his village, got down at the railway station and hired a cart. He had quite a lot of baggage. The cart carrying the heavy load of his personal effects (the small portion of his Malayan wealth that he had brought over to India) halted in front of his ancestral home in South India. Gurudev let the relatives unload his things and pretended to supervise this operation. In the meantime he had kept aside a small cloth bag into which he had stuffed a change of clothing and a few rupees. When no one was looking, quietly he slipped away and walked back to the railway station. They thought that he must have gone to the temple or to a neighbour and did not take any notice of it. He got into a train and

left. Whatever had been weighing him down had been given up, abandoned. It is extremely important to understand this phrase. Whatever was weighing him down was abandoned. The feeling, “I am a doctor, a very popular doctor, a wealthy man. I am this, I am that” all that had to go.

He took the train to Benares. Somehow he thought Benares was close to the Himalayas. He wanted to go to the Himalayas to do penance and meditate. The little money he had left, he gave away. It was bitterly cold and he was not used to the cold, he was used to the warm climate of South India and Malaya. He had no idea what the North Indian winter could be like. Perhaps he had just a shawl and it was totally insufficient. During the epochal All-India Tour in 1950, Gurudev himself pointed out the railway station platform which he had exchanged for the comfortable house in which he lived in Malaya. He had renounced the world and its possessions, everything had gone. There he was, crouched beneath the railway platform, shivering, but his mind was soaring far above the earth, helping the body to ignore the cold and neglect the hunger. The first phase of the austerity had commenced, but to Gurudev, reaching the goal was of much greater importance than bothering about the body.

Gurudev did not know the local language. He knew only English and Tamil. Later a ‘Good Samaritan’, observing this wonderful man shivering with cold but so indifferent to it that he would not ask anyone for a blanket, said, “Here, take this and cover yourself, otherwise you’ll die of pneumonia.” A blanket was the first charity Gurudev *received*. The hand that gave and gave to all—and in plenty, for the first time received alms. This has to be experienced to understand the magnitude of this austerity. It would perhaps have been easier to say, “I don’t want it. I am a renunciate.” That is a trap called ‘renunciation’. He threw that rigidity slightly aside and received the blanket.

Then came the next problem. He was a wealthy man from a respectable family. He did not know what to do in order to beg for food. Nobody came to him and offered food. He was a strong, healthy looking young man, why must someone offer him food? So he suffered for a few days. Soon he decided that this was not where he wanted to be and someone gave him a ticket and guided him to Pandharpur, a famous place for devotees, yogis, and so on. He wandered about here and there in this strange land amongst strangers who neither understood his language, nor the ways of this educated robust young man. When hunger tormented him he started begging from door to door for a few days. But how to do this? How to beg? He developed a formula: he would stand before someone’s house and say “I am a Madrasi Brahmin, I am hungry. Please give me some food.” Sometimes they gave him and sometimes they did not. He never questioned or grumbled. He would humbly take what was given, silently bless the giver and walk away. It requires a discerning heart to understand this austerity.

What really worried him was not being turned away, but the possibility of standing in front of a *poor* man’s house, and depriving *him* of his food. He used to say this quite often to us: “How can you accept charity from someone without deserving it?” Begging was foreign to Gurudev’s nature, even though it is in accordance with scriptural sanction for a monk to beg for his food. To accept charity without giving something in return didn’t please or appeal to him at all. So the next thing that had to be renounced was the idea “I am going to be a mendicant.” Even that had to go. When that wandering mendicant life became an obstacle in itself, he abandoned it. Later he often used to make fun of it. Whenever amongst his own disciples somebody rebelled against the ashram

discipline and said, "I want to go away and wander about," Gurudev would say, "Here when two or three people order you and you don't want to obey them you think of running away from the ashram. You think that this is freedom. You will soon discover that it is not, because from morning till night you will be meditating on who will give you your next meal. That life is also bothersome, also an obstacle." So Gurudev abandoned this wandering life.

Gurudev thought, "Instead of wandering around like this, let me go and get a job." The thing that had been abandoned in Malaya had to be picked up again. The spirit of renunciation is still there, but it is not rigid, it is alive. It keeps burning like fire and it burns whatever you throw into it. "That job there with all its paraphernalia was weighing my self down, so I gave it up. Mendicancy means that I am a parasite on society, so this also must go, I must accept a job which is not very strenuous." So he accepted a job as a postmaster's domestic servant. Here you see a beautiful new approach to the gospel of renunciation. What is it that is renounced? Not food, not clothing, shelter, medical attention, study and service. What is renounced? The thing that is pulling you down, tying you down to this earthly life, whatever it may be. In the personal service of this postmaster, Gurudev would draw water and hew wood. For this he was given some money and that was enough to live on. This job involved no strenuous responsibilities. Somehow the postmaster soon realised the greatness of his domestic servant. He found out that Gurudev was not a beggar, but a doctor and so on. The postmaster was a bit embarrassed. He sent Gurudev away explaining the set-up in Rishikesh. "You want only simple food, clothing and shelter without troubling others. In Rishikesh you will get all you need without having to be a domestic servant." So that was the next thing to go.

In Rishikesh Gurudev joined an ashram, an institution whose purpose it is to provide free food, clothing and shelter, to swamis. Yet again, he did whatever he could in whatever way he could to contribute to the welfare of the institution. Renouncing the world did not mean renouncing service. He was a doctor and the divine will sought to utilise his medical talents. The healing grace of the Lord made Gurudev's hands its instruments, flowing through them once again to bring comfort, relief and solace to the distressed.

Gurudev had settled down in the Swarg Ashram which he found quite congenial. He could easily have stayed there. It was quite comfortable and he had no problems at all. He often said that it was an ideal place. The swamis who lived there did not have to own anything, possess anything or do any work at all. Medical facilities were also available. There were facilities for seclusion, which is equally important. "I must be able, wherever I am, to tear myself away from all company for a short while," Gurudev used to say. Lastly, there was a library close at hand, which meant that the mind and intellect would not be starved. He said that an ideal place should have these. He found all these in Swarg Ashram, where he settled down to practise his austerities. 'Swarg' in Sanskrit means 'heaven' and it was heaven, as far as Swami Sivananda was concerned. He had no responsibilities, nothing to weigh him down at all.

During this period, Gurudev performed all the common forms of austerity, such as standing in the freezing waters of the Ganges and repeating the Lord's name; sleeping on the bare ground; fasting for days on end, etc. In the latter days however, he deprecated such practices as being of not much spiritual value.

You may call it God's will or Karma, or God's grace, but he had attracted a few of his own admirers and devotees who provided whatever other things he needed. A few young men had also come to join him as his own personal disciples. The Swarg Ashram rules allowed two young swamis as personal disciples for each of the senior monks living there. The ashram would look after them, so that they could serve their guru. Gurudev had his two disciples, that was no problem, but soon the two became four and the four became eight. That created a problem in the organisation.

Although the Master himself never mentioned this, there was some trouble. Once while Gurudev was away, the disciples wrote urgently to him, "There is trouble, please come back." Gurudev sent them a letter in telegraph form, "Out of evil comes good. Bear it. Keep quiet." Gurudev returned and without any recrimination, or retaliation, without justifying his actions, without condemning, he just went to the head of the institution, folded his palms and said quietly, "I'm leaving, going across the river," and walked out. It was beautiful. In Swarg Ashram there was freedom, but limited freedom, restricted freedom (restricted freedom is not freedom). So he had to renounce that too. Not for a moment did Gurudev's heart entertain the least dissatisfaction. With the result that even when he had his own ashram he was still on excellent terms with Swarg Ashram.

As early as 1948 the Master and some of us went over to his old ashram. Gurudev had become a world renowned swami with a great number of disciples, and his own ashram had grown and prospered. He was greeted and welcomed by the management of Swarg Ashram, and we spent a couple of hours there. You should have seen him there. He was giving them ideas, and asking us to help them in various ways. It was fantastic.

Gurudev moved over to the other side of the river. Once again there was a little bit of mendicancy, but not so hard as before. There was a bit more freedom, a bit more elbow room. But the four or five people who were with him at the time had also to walk three or four miles twice a day, to get a little food. At this stage Gurudev thought that if he could get a roof over his head, it would be possible to do some stable work. So they found a stable to do the stable work. It was an abandoned cowshed, which they cleaned up and occupied. As no one questioned them they did not investigate to whom it belonged. It was disused, misused, so it seemed better to clean it and sit down and get on with some work. They got a rickety typewriter and started.

Now again this might puzzle you. Can I go and occupy somebody's house while he is away on vacation or pilgrimage? But then from their point of view it was the purest manifestation of the spirit of renunciation, "We don't own this place, we are merely utilising it and if the owner comes along and demands, we will get out at once and hand it back to him." That was the spirit. They were not going to fight and stay. They were not going to claim that they owned it. They were merely using it, just as we are using this body.

As soon as they moved to the new abode, the Master and his first disciples had already commenced the mission. They started working very hard. Today at the ashram we have first-class printing presses, beautiful books and tape-recorders, but if you knew under what conditions all this started, you would be shaken. At this stage, there was no money to buy paper. What did he do? He would cut open the envelopes containing the letters that people wrote to him, cut them right through, so that the inside could be used as writing paper for recording his thoughts. They could work at night, but what about light? There was no electricity in the ashram till as recently as

1952-53. There was not even enough money to buy a proper lamp. So, they found some old bottles with the old-style cork tops, they made a hole through the cork, made a wick from a few threads of material and filled the bottle with kerosene. It became a lamp.

How did this great man find his first publishers? He did not know anyone. Gurudev used to write some notes, some instructions on bits of paper, put them together and send them...to whom? To the postmaster of just any town. Every place has a postmaster, even though it may have very little else. He would address the packet to (for instance)—"The Postmaster, Madras," with a covering letter saying, "These are the thoughts that occurred to me yesterday. I think they are inspiring. So please have a small leaflet printed. You can distribute them. Print as many as you like but please send me a hundred copies." One such recipient actually did it and sent Swami Sivenanda the 100 copies of what he had printed saying, "I admire your confidence."

Slowly an ashram seemed to be growing around him; growing and growing and Gurudev allowed it to grow. There was no haughty pride of renunciation to block it. Earlier, Gurudev had insisted that no ashram should be built or disciples accepted. This was now confronted with the divine will which had it all otherwise, and there was no "rebellion." The comfort of staying alone, independent and free—even that had to be renounced.

When you feel that you are being weighed down by your own resolutions and dogmas, by your own personal, individual will drop them. It is easy to give up your shirt, but it is very difficult to give up this vanity. This is the acid test in which even saintly souls have failed. Afraid of losing face, they cling to the expressed ideas of their spiritual childhood, never allowing themselves to grow in the garden of divinity.

Renunciation is not a practice; not something you do one fine morning. It is a continuous and never-ending process which concerns both your inner and outer life. This continuous spirit of renunciation burns within, breaking all ideologies down. It manifests as freedom, non-attachment; freedom from your own image, your own internal ideas, ideologies, schemes, hopes, fears, freedom from being dominated by yourself. It is easy to renounce wife, children and so on. But it is not so easy to renounce the ego unless one discovers this spirit of renunciation without which there is no renunciation at all. This spirit of renunciation, even when it applies to external relationships, springs from within. Therefore, it is a spirit not a mechanical, physical, material action. This is the Master's song:

"The eye is not a fetter;, form is not a fetter Jaya Jaya Ram.
The excited desire is a fetter, Sita Ram."

And in the same way, he has given a whole lot of them—"Sound is not a fetter, music is not a fetter" etc. The excited desire is within you, not outside. If you do not understand this, you keep the excited desire even more excited, while pushing everything else away. Nothing binds you except the 'excited' desire.

In the Yoga Vasishtha there is a beautiful little verse which says, "For one whose feet are covered with leather shoes, the whole world is covered with leather." You don't have to reform the world, you don't have to renounce the world. Wrap your inner being with the spirit of renunciation;

it will destroy all the obstacles on your path. Therefore Gurudev once said that he had no obstacles whatsoever in his practice of yoga.

Swami Sivananda was not a floating feather, to be wafted where the wind chose. He had his own ideal, but in the words of Jesus Christ, “But not my will; Thy will be done.” Can this spirit of renunciation be kept alive every moment of your existence without saying, “I don’t care what happens,” (which is callous indifference) nor saying, “No! I have vowed to do this, and it shall be so,” (which is being an egotist). That was Gurudev’s secret.

This total surrender meant that Gurudev’s life was never a mechanical life, never a repetitious life; so much so in fact that it might suggest a series of contradictions. If for example you had come to the ashram in 1944 or ‘45, and said, “Swamiji, I have bought a pair of kartals (small cymbals); can I play them in satsanga?”, he would have replied, “No, when you sing kirtan, you should sit as if you are sitting for your meditation and enter a meditative mood.” Yet if you had gone back around 1953, you would have found them singing and dancing with tablas, harmonium and all sorts of instruments. When there is no sense at all of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ then the whole stream of life is allowed to flow on, without interference, without stopping it, without pushing it. As the ashram grew, Gurudev had to make enormous changes from day to day, from moment to moment, as each new situation developed.

Gurudev’s whole mission had started with sankirtan conferences, but soon the whole thing was changed. He discovered that any form of specialisation leads only to vanity and greater vanity, whereas renunciation must reduce vanity, make it thinner, and make the heart more transparent. So Gurudev decided, “Sankirtan alone will not do. We must combine something more, we must combine service and study and also meditation.” So, the Divine Life Society was formed. In its first constitution it said that the Society should spread the knowledge of the ‘Hindu’ religion. That was the first framework, the prevailing concept and sentiment and it was accepted—but not for long. When the Master’s radiant personality and teachings attracted people from other faiths, he re-drafted the constitution—modified it and widened it. One had to live with him to understand this. We ourselves did not know where we were from day to day because that renunciation was not only progressive but aggressive and constant. He did not allow anything to stay stagnant.

The Divine Life Society was started in 1936 and towards 1947 Gurudev had the idea of starting what was called the Yoga Vedanta Forest University. For this he had some stationery printed. He told those of us who were in charge of correspondence: “Hereafter, don’t use the Divine Life stationery—use this. You must popularise the Yoga Vedanta Forest University.”

Watch and see where a new bondage arises and snap the thread then and there. This spirit of renunciation or inner watchfulness will stop all forms of bondage without preserving some—even as fire burns everything! In Gurudev’s case this fire went on unceasingly breaking down all ideologies, all barriers, whatever they were.

At one time the Master had said that women should not be allowed to stay in the ashram, but when one came to stay he said: “Alright, change the rule.” In the words of Christ, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for sabbath.”

The renunciation of Gurudev's also manifested as a unique form of non-attachment. Most of us do not know the difference between love and attachment, nor between non-attachment and indifference. Perhaps this is not possible to explain, one has to see it—watch it, to appreciate its beauty. I have never seen a man who loved humanity more than Swami Sivananda did. It was most easily evident in his attitude towards his disciples. There was virtually nothing he would not do, virtually nothing he would not put up with. Yet

There was a swami in the ashram who was working heart and soul. We all thought that without him the ashram could not go on. He was so vital, so important and he was deeply devoted to the Master, who in turn had tremendous admiration for him. One day this swami was bitten by a rabid dog. Such was the strength and vitality of this young man that even though he had been mauled from head to foot, he recovered in two or three weeks. And how the Master looked after him during his convalescence is not for words to describe. This swami started working again, when suddenly he developed a pain in his left arm. Someone went and told the Master. Immediately a taxi was hired, this swami, accompanied by a doctor, was sent about two hundred miles away to a special hospital. The Master himself told the doctor, "Do all that you can for him. Never mind what the expense is." The next day, we received a telegram from them; "Swami improving." We gave it to Gurudev. Oh joy, joy. What delight shone in his face! He was thrilled. Two or three hours later, the Master had just finished having his bath and was preparing for lunch. Another telegram arrived. The man who had brought the telegram was so choked he could not even read it. He gave it to the Master. Gurudev didn't even put on his spectacles, he looked at it. I have never seen such profound shock on any face. He exclaimed; "Ha! He is dead?" The telegram said he was dead. The sage of self-realisation, a great yogi, is not inhuman. We have strange notions regarding yogis and sages and think that they would behave as if they were marble statues. You had to see Gurudev to appreciate that a yogi is the purest of humans; perhaps he is the only human being. After the initial shock, he said: "Alright, ask the doctor to bring the body here. Consign it to the Ganges, that is what he wanted." So suddenly one thinks, "Ah, here is one person that the Master is attached to. He likes him so much." The next morning the taxi arrived with the body. The Master was on his way to the office. He didn't even turn to look. As long as the person was alive, he did all that he could. Once he was dead, he did not pay any attention.

Within minutes, the Master was in the office, carrying on with his work, as though nothing had happened. This holy man, who but twenty-four hours before had dropped everything so that this one person could receive all attention and be carefully looked after, who had sent away his own doctor to accompany him to Simla, the same Master, once that person was dead, wouldn't think of him again, except in the evening satsanga when he conducted prayers for the peace of the departed soul. You must see a living example of one who loves without being attached, who is unattached without being indifferent.

Out of this spirit of renunciation is born true humility because this renunciation does not stop only with burning what is outside (your attachment to others), but continues to burn deep within you, freeing you from yourself.

That is what we repeat in the Universal Prayer that he wrote: "Free us from egoism (that's the first thing), lust, greed, anger, hatred and jealousy." When you pray, "Free me from egoism, lust, greed, anger, hatred and jealousy," it means that all these are in you, perhaps in their manifest

state, or may be in their potential, hidden or latent state. Even the most amateurish attempt to overcome egoism involves the direct realisation that it is there, and it is in this that true humility lies. Often Gurudev used to say these wonderful words in Tamil:

kadeshi varaikkum ushaaraa irukkanam

“You must be vigilant until the end.” The knowledge that egoism is potentially there as long as the body lasts, enables one to be truly humble—not hypocritically or superficially humble, but truly humble, with the humility that comes only when one’s whole being is possessed by this burning fire of renunciation.

This incident happened on the last day of the All-India tour. The Master had been round the whole of India and Ceylon. He had been literally worshipped by millions of people. Of course you realise that it was not possible for Gurudev to literally fall at the feet of all these millions of people who crowded round him, though he would have loved to do so. On the last day he was in Delhi. His health was not good and he was resting, not at the place where the organisers had arranged but in the house of a devotee, an army officer. Gurudev was sleeping after lunch. He was supposed to meet someone at 3.15 p.m. At five past three we heard Gurudev clear his throat...He got up and asked, “Isn’t it time for us to go? Has the car arrived? We said, ”Yes, Swamiji, the car is here,” and immediately he got up, took his bag and his towel and got into the car. From inside the car he looked into the hall and saw the officer’s wife standing there at the door. He asked us: “Are we coming back here?” We were not. Gurudev turned to her and took leave of her with folded palms. The car moved. Two or three minutes later he said, “Ask the driver to go back to the house.” The car came to a halt at the entrance to the house. It was a beautiful scene there. He got out and went inside. The lady of the house was not in the lounge, she was in the kitchen, so he went right through without even calling or making a sound. He stood in front of that lady, folded his palms and said, “Please forgive me.” It was an unforgettable scene. He was tall and hefty and she was shortish, lean and thin. He bowed down, “Please forgive me,” and with tears in his eyes, he repeated “Please forgive me.” She couldn’t say anything; she started to cry. Gurudev said, “I should have come and taken leave of you properly, I said ‘thank you’ from the car. I should have come in and taken leave properly. Please forgive me.” This poor lady was in tears. She didn’t know what to do, she collapsed, caught hold of his feet. Then Gurudev went back and sat in the car, “Right, let’s go.” As we moved on he did not talk for about five minutes. Then he turned to me and said, “From somewhere a little vanity tried to creep in. One has to be very vigilant.” If one is able to do that, then it is possible to be free not only from all attachment to things outside, but more important, from one’s own vanity and self-esteem.

There was no weakness in the Master’s heart or his behaviour. He could be strong, inflexible—so that in his case even humility was not a trap or a prison. Gurudev’s humility was saturated with intelligence and wisdom.

We saw this is his ‘encounter’ with a world famous ‘spiritual’ leader. This leader was really and truly a leader of millions throughout the world, who even before he died was worshipped as an incarnation of God.

In 1953, the Master was in bed with a severe bout of lumbago. He couldn't even sit up in bed but his mind was alert, perfect. Oh, it was a delight to watch him, propped up on pillows, eating nicely, talking and working. He had big legs, big thighs, which he used as his table, and he was carrying on working. He said, "The only thing I cannot do is turn my waist." Unfortunately for this spiritual leader he came during that period so that he was the only 'holy' man Swami Sivananda did not salute properly. On Gurudev's face you could see the tremendous pain, "Such a world renowned spiritual leader has come and I'm not even able to get up and greet him, welcome him properly." The leader came in, along with his disciple. He stood there and the Master, lying in the bed, lifted up both his hands to his forehead and folded his palms, "Jaya bhagavan. Jaya bhagavan." This man merely nodded in acknowledgement. He had come on very serious business. The disciple conveyed his message: "I have come to know that on one occasion you spoke ill of me." Swami Sivananda looked at him and then he realised that this was not a very congenial meeting between two holy men, this was an invitation to fight. Gurudev looked at him and said: "I don't remember I don't remember having said anything against you." "I have the proof that you scandalised me," the man said. "I don't remember anything. I don't usually criticise others," said Gurudev. The other man continued, "I have got disciples all over the world and I'm going to let all of them know that you are a scandal-monger." Immediately one saw Gurudev's face tensing. Within seconds that soft face, which exuded love, became stern. He said sternly: "Alright. Do what you like. Go." We all stood there, flabbergasted. Swami Sivananda was not weak, he could be very stern. "See God in all," that is what he taught everybody and what he did. Even in this instance—"If you, my God, come to fight with me—well, come on." This leader was the only holy man who was received and dismissed so abruptly by Gurudev.

So, humility should not be confused with weakness. Humility can only arise when there is this spirit of total renunciation coupled with the realisation that God is all; not only that God is in all, but God alone *is* all.

Gurudev was quite happy to have his birthday celebrated. As a matter of fact he used to initiate the whole thing. Right in the month of April, one morning he would come to the office and say, "Venkatesananda Swami, have you started preparing the circulars inviting articles for the birthday souvenir booklet? The first circular must be like this, the second circular must be like that Call some musicians, do this, do that." He used to initiate all that himself.

Why? Gurudev himself gave the reasons. "Any occasion for celebration is good. It doesn't matter what you call it—birthday, Guru Purnima or Sivaratri. When people come together, we have some nice satsang. Who is interested in this body being worshipped or not worshipped?" On the birthday, we had a huge big plate and about twenty or thirty people would sit around it and throw flowers at his feet. While we performed padapuja, he would sit there, looking around to someone or the other, enquiring about their welfare. Would the people have come to the ashram if the birthday were not being celebrated? No. So, this was an opportunity to bring them there.

Gurudev also took a keen part in having his biographies published. The wife of a great political leader visited the ashram once. As usual she was welcomed and greeted and offered coffee and fruits. It was also usual for Swami Sivananda to give every such visitor a set of whatever books there were, especially the newly published ones. It so happened that at that time we only had biographies of Gurudev, written by several people. All these biographies also contain one section of

teachings, just as the teaching books also contain one section of biography. However, all the *titles* were, “Sivananda, the World Saviour,” “Sivananda Lord Incarnate”, “Satguru Sivananda,” “Jagatguru Sivananda,” and so on. This lady looked at all those books, she was not pleased at all. She looked at Gurudev and said, “Swamiji, why do you allow all these biographies, this self-glorification to be published in your own ashram?” Her face showed displeasure. His answer was something fantastic; nobody else could have come up with such a simple answer. He looked at her as if she was his own daughter, his own child and said. “That is what brought you here, I think!” And that of course was the truth. There is a saying, “When the flower blossoms, the bees come and gather around it.” But that is true only if you are a bee. How do you know that there is a person called Swami Sivananda here? Through these very books. The lady was deeply impressed. I have never seen such a proud and powerful person do namaskar (salutations) as humbly as she did then and she never asked another question, And Gurudev had only his great smile, no offence was taken. Even there, there was neither vanity nor the vanity called ‘humility.’

Vanity can take two forms. First, the guru thinks or says: “Look what a great man I am. So many people have written about my life.” Second, there is another kind of vanity: “I don’t allow any of this nonsense to go on in my ashram. I don’t approve of people glorifying me. What, they’ve published my picture? Destroy it.” Gurudev used to call it maha-vanity (supreme vanity) on the model of maha-yoga. Gurudev had none of this. You could write what you liked about him.

One more instance: which not only shocked, but worried us. Someone from Madras sent two books with flashy titles for review. And the price was even flashier, one cost 25 rupees and the other about 40. In those days books were cheap; none of our publications was more than 10 rupees. Gurudev said, “Write some nice review to be published in the Divine Life magazine.” I took the books to my room and opened one at random—the language was familiar. This whole page I had read somewhere before! I had a bookshelf with Swami Shivananda’s books there, so I pulled down his “Hatha Yoga.” There it was—absolutely word for word. It had been copied. Then I looked at the new book again and on the back of the title page was printed in big bold letters, “Strictly forbidden to reproduce any of this the copyright rests solely with the author.” So I took the book back to Gurudev the next day. His only comment was “What a first-class title he has given. He has brought out something nice. After all, it is also dissemination of knowledge, which is very good. It doesn’t matter.” It is only in the complete absence of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ that it no longer matters whether my name is there or your name. Then perhaps one can experience this spirit of renunciation.

When people started to recite, “Om namo Bhagavate Sivanandaaya” or “Jaya jaya Aarati Sivananda,” he himself would join in. “Why identify myself with this name and form? Renunciation is not born of an idea of renunciation, nor of the feeling, ”This is something terrible and must therefore be renounced." When you say, “This is terrible,” you have given it a value which it doesn’t have at all. This body is only a walking corpse! As long as it breathes, it will walk; and it will breathe as long as it has to breathe. Are ‘YOU’ this body? Do ‘YOU’ have something to do with it? And all that is related to the body, is it ‘yours’? They are only yours if you are this body. When this idea is dispelled, there is no ‘I’-feeling, no ego-sense towards the body, nor a ‘mineness” to what is related to the body.

If by celebrating the birthday some more people can be reached—go on, do it. If by publishing these biographies more people can be inspired, do it. Gurudev was unattached to name

and fame, but in an effort to abandon or shun name and fame, he did not abandon opportunities to serve. If name and fame would widen his field of service, enabling him to serve a greater sector of humanity, if more people would be attracted to the path of the divine by a feather being added to his cap, Gurudev would welcome it. The wider the field, the more intense became the service and the more constant and deep was his attitude of devotion to the welfare of all beings.

The fear of public criticism which stops this kind of activity, springs from the non-renunciation of the ego. Why are you afraid of public criticism? Because you have such a tremendous self-esteem; you do not want to be hurt. Drop that also. This spirit of renunciation says, "Kill this little 'I'," then there is humility, which at the same time leads to the vision of God in all.

Pratyahara (Abstraction of the Senses)

We have already seen how Gurudev was extremely regular with the practice of Yoga Asanas and Pranayama. In regard to Pratyahara he had something interesting to teach and demonstrate to us. He himself called it "Battle-field Pratyahara." In the every midst of din and bustle, noise and nuisance, disturbances and distractions, you should be able to concentrate on a thought, or on the work in hand at the moment. You should be able to withdraw your mind from the external objects and concentrate it within. This is what Gurudev did. Visiting aspirants often sat near Gurudev in the office and wondered how he carried on all his important work there with half a dozen typewriters clattering, surrounded by men and women of all nationalities and temperaments. In the busiest centre of the Ashram, where people come and go, run and shout, there the sage used to sit, intently absorbed in his work, paying as keen attention to it as he would do if he were alone in a cave. The technique for this has already been explained. Close the eyes and mentally repeat the Name of the Lord every few minutes, thus learning to withdraw the mind from the external objects.

Meditation

Gurudev's extreme fondness of meditation was recalled by the monks of Swarg Ashram: how, in spite of his consuming love of selfless service Gurudev would frequently hide himself beneath a rock on the Ganges bank and would be missing for a number of hours. Sometimes he would disappear into the surrounding jungle and remain in isolation for a few days; then he would suddenly reappear in their midst as mysteriously as he had disappeared. In his personal diary too, there are notes like, "I should meditate more: sixteen hours at a stretch." Gurudev was very regular in his practice of meditation. Early in the morning and at night before retiring to bed meditation was a must for him. All spiritual gatherings and singing of the Lord's Names would invariably end with a two minute silent meditation. Besides this, Gurudev would every now and then, withdraw himself and become deeply meditative.

Most of us when we were very young, were tremendously attracted by one brief pamphlet from the pen of Swami Sivananda, and it was "Samadhi in six months." When people went to his Ashram for gaining Samadhi in six months, he said, "It is quite simple. Sit down in the lotus posture, focus all your attention on this mantra and do not think of anything else." It doesn't even take six minutes—if you can do it. You can have samadhi in six months, no doubt, provided you can concentrate your total attention on a mantra and stop thinking. Then the Master went on, "If you

cannot do that then do some service and quite likely after a few years you may be able to do something about samadhi.”

If you went up to him and asked him, “Swamiji, can you teach me meditation?” What did he say? “Repeat God’s Name.” But then he did not stop with that, he demanded that the entire mind-stuff should be saturated with the mantra, or conversely the mind must merge completely in the mantra. How does one do that? What do we know about mind-stuff? What is it to saturate the mind with the mantra? Even if you adopt Swami Sivananda’s method of repeating this mantra whenever the mind is not otherwise occupied, even then the mind will soon get saturated with the mantra.

What does it mean to merge the mind in the mantra? Or what does it mean to saturate the mind entirely with the realisation of God? What does it mean and how does one attain this? *This* is called meditation. Meditation cannot be taught. Even the Master did not attempt to teach meditation; however, unlike some others, he did not shy away from the word, nor from the concept of teaching meditation. He presented a technique, a method and said, “But be careful. This is not the whole thing.” If you pick up his book called ‘Concentration and Meditation,’ there are dozens of techniques and methods given and even other things are dealt with like, for instance, exercises for the cultivation of will-power and memory. All these methods aimed at the training of the mind.

When you are training to meditate, can the whole, the total mind-stuff, the total attention flow towards one—whatever it is. That is concentration and what happens afterwards is meditation. Meditation is an indescribable inner experience or self discovery. When we asked Gurudev, “What is meditation?” he said, “It is like the flow of oil, the continuous flow of God-consciousness within the heart.”

One man in his thirties came from South India to stay with us, and spent a large proportion of his time in meditation. This man could be seen sitting bolt upright on a rock by the Ganges from at least 4 a.m. to 7 a.m. every morning. We finished our class at 6.30 a.m. but one morning the Master was talking to us, and at 7 a.m. the man came into the dining hall where we were assembled, and approached Gurudev devoutly.

The Master turned to him and said: “Om Namah Sivaya, you were in meditation?”

“Yes, Swamiji”—he thought the Master was appreciating him.

“Ah, you are very regular?”

“Yes, Swamiji,” and the Master also seemed enthusiastic.

This man thought he had won Gurudev’s admiration at least, if not grace.

“Yes, Swamiji.”

“From how long were you sitting there?”

“Since 4 o'clock I go at 4 and get up only at 7.”

“3 hours!”

“Yes, Swamiji, whether it is summer, winter, spring or autumn, snowing or hailing, whatever may happen; 4 to 7 I sit there.”

“Hah, that's very good, and you enjoy deep meditation?” And as usual, the Master closed both his eyes and then opened one—that meant something very important, we knew it. Gurudev continued, “Deep meditation, samadhi ?”

“Yes, Swamiji.” The man still thought that Gurudev was praising him. But then Gurudev went on, “Well, be careful, lest you get drowned in the Ganges.” The man was a bit puzzled—and Gurudev added, “Do you know the quickest way to enter into that blissful state? I'll tell you. Take some nice cold rice and curd prepared from buffalo's milk. Stretch yourself on a nice bed with good soft pillows. Breathe deeply, with just a little sound. Relax. You will instantly enter into a blissful state—sleep! Do you know what meditation is? Meditation means touching God, touching Brahman, communion with the omnipotent God. Meditation is touching this cosmic being, touching the infinite”—and then Gurudev opened both his eyes. “But you are sleepy, drowsy. If you touched that infinite consciousness, you could transform the world, work wonders; you would be able to take this whole universe, the whole cosmic space and roll it up, like a piece of leather—such energy you would have, such power. And here you are coming out of meditation, dull, sleepy. Huh, What is this?” (Perhaps you have seen babies changing mood—it was like that during those five minutes. Now he was teasing, now he was cross, angry, stern, severe and then there was a supreme compassion and love).

“Ohji, don't waste your time. Sitting there like a stone on a block of stone is waste of time. Give it up. Sit there and do japa for a little while—half an hour, one hour, that will do. The rest of the time do some useful work. Take a couple of buckets, fetch some water and fill the kitchen tanks (in those days there was no running water system and we ourselves had to carry all the water for the kitchen from the river)—then you will know what samadhi means.”

“Be active. Serve. Your lethargy will go away. Then you will know what purity is. Only when your mind is filled with purity will you be able to meditate.” Now we understand why Gurudev combined dynamic selfless service with complete seclusion and meditation during his Swarg Ashram days. The one provided the acid test for the other. Selflessness in service is the touchstone for the depth of meditation and the natural ease with which meditation becomes possible is the test of real service rendered with the proper perspective. This is what Gurudev asked everyone to practise.

If you blindly adopt any of the techniques which you pick up from books, you may not know the difference between sleep and samadhi. You can watch your breath, listen to your breathing, Gurudev suggested something slightly different, although the principle is the same. Instead of listening to the breath, things of God, repeat a mantra, associating it with the breath. As you go on mentally repeating your mantra, concentrate fully, focus *ALL* your attention, all the rays of your mind on that one spot, this will lead to meditation and to samadhi.

Siddhis (psychic powers) or (perfection)

What attainment can be greater in this world than the achievement of God-realisation, the Supreme Reward of Yoga. Gurudev himself did not trumpet his own realisation nor did he go about canvassing admiration for his wonderful vision of God. The philosophy that he applied to himself and to all others and all else in the world was “know him by his works...” Palmists and persons endowed with psychic power and clairvoyance assured us that even before he got himself permanently established in the highest plane of Cosmic Consciousness, Gurudev had had a face to face Vision of God not less than three times, and that, mark this well, he had had the first even before he left Malaya and renounced the world.

What matters to us, however, is what he was able to do for us, the help of the highest type that he was able to render to mankind. People who have had nothing more than hallucination, parade the streets proclaiming that they have seen God. Mankind is not saved, but deceived, by them. In Gurudev humanity has a Saviour.

Gurudev regarded miracles or psychic powers as the greatest obstacles and warned the spiritual aspirant against them. Though he himself undoubtedly possessed miraculous powers of the highest order, he never openly admitted them, but rather disowned them when they were brought to his notice, saying: “The Lord is performing these miracles in order to create faith in more and more people.” He did not like psychic powers and never encouraged the spiritual aspirant in pursuit of them.

Somebody might come and say, “Swamiji, you appeared in my dream and put your hand on my stomach and my cancer was cured.” His response always was, “Ah, it’s all God’s Grace.” He never owned it himself. People used to come to him: “I saw you in a vision and my life was saved,” and he would say, “Yes, Bhagavan (God) does all this.” When something had gone wrong according to our judgement, somebody perhaps had robbed the Ashram, harmed the Ashram, or done some mischief; even then he would say, “God is doing all this.”

This happened in Malaya. A Tantric Yogi approached Gurudev (then still Dr. Kuppuswamy) and promised to teach him a formula enabling him to do wonderful things with the help of Hanuman. It seems Gurudev liked the idea of repeating the mantra, but not that of calling upon Lord Hanuman to answer queries. “Gods should be worshipped and adored, not made to serve us,” he said, and sent the Yogi away with a small purse.

Gurudev was not really conscious that he was doing something wonderful. When he met you, your inner personality revealed itself to him, as clearly as this paper appears before your eyes. He did not have to exercise any special powers. Your heart and mind were an open book to him; the thought that you might think would just occur to him too; and the wish that arose in your heart would easily be understood by him, it would be audible to him. It was all perhaps just a happy coincidence “I also thought like that,” he might say, or doing what you had mentally prayed for, he might merely remark, “I thought you would like this.” You would be amazed, not he; to him it was natural.

Miraculous cures had been effected by prayers conducted at the Ashram by Gurudev. People who had faith had attained the object of their desires by opening their heart to him, by sincerely praying to him and by devotedly serving him. Quite a number of these experiences were published in the book, "Miracles of Sivananda." Similarly with Gurudev's miracles reported by devotees from abroad. They are all true: they have seen him and heard him. Gurudev often thought particularly of quite a number of devotees, in order to send them books or to reply to their letters. His was a supermind, endowed with phenomenal psychic faculties, therefore the thought would at once establish a psychic contact between the preceptor and the disciple. Through this channel, the most powerful and concentrated beam of Gurudev's consciousness flowed, understanding the disciples' needs and bringing about miraculous visions and messages. It was something like a 'reflex action' with Gurudev; it was natural and normal.

It is now easy to understand how people living physically far, far away from him, felt drawn to him and got visions of him. They needed his service and Gurudev was eager to serve them, adopting the basic attitude that all bodies belong to the one Virat (cosmic being) and all minds constitute the one Hiranyagarbha (cosmic mind). This attitude was Anubhava (direct realisation) for him.

It is equally easy to understand how those who did not receive any message from his lips, nor even listen to his lectures or songs, people who had merely had his Darshan felt a greater satisfaction than they would have had after listening to the inspiring lectures of other monks. By his constant eagerness to serve all and to relieve the suffering of all, and with this eagerness itself being a great perennial prayer for the welfare of mankind, Gurudev won the hearts of all mankind. He became spiritually one with the whole of mankind, constantly radiating supreme joy, peace, life and light. In his very presence, therefore, people enjoyed healing vibrations, peace-giving light emanations. His very look elevated, transformed and sublimated everything it alighted on. Godliness wafted around him: the darkness of atheism, worldliness and undivine elements vanished from the heart which the light of Gurudev's grace penetrated. Meditation had imparted such lustre to Gurudev's countenance, such power to his eyes, such an irresistible magnetism to his entire personality, and Gurudev's aura was such that people who approached him with a hundred complaints were silenced and enmity fled his very presence. This aura had actually been seen by some of Gurudev's devotees.

Gurudev readily initiated every devotee who approached him into any Mantra or formula that the devotee chose and instances have been countless when the devotee thus initiated, felt the initiation as the most important turning point in his career...the day on which he began to experience inward peace and inexpressible bliss. Naturally, for Gurudev had attained at-one-ment with Godhead, the goal of all Mantras; and thus earned perfection in all Mantras. Gurudev himself was the supreme channel through which divine power and grace flowed; and when during the Mantra-initiation ceremony, Gurudev repeated the Mantra of the tutelary deity for the disciple to utter it after him, the Mantra was instantly linked to the spiritual force of Gurudev which enlivened the Mantra and implanted its flaming spirit in the inmost core of the recipient's heart. Those who had thus been initiated by Gurudev, themselves attained perfection in Mantra very easily.

He demonstrated wonderful miracles through his soul-elevating divine songs. Those were the days when fashion reigned supreme and educated people were shy to repeat God's Name. And,

there were those, too, who were against singing the Names of the Incarnations of God like Rama and Krishna since God was ultimately nameless and formless. That was their view. Listening to Gurudev for a brief while was all the remedy that these people needed; and they invariably sang the Divine Name and danced with him on the public platform throwing their delusion, their foolish fashions, and their doctrines, to the winds. What miracle can be greater than this? Gurudev became such an embodiment of supreme devotion to the Lotus-Feet of the Lord that anyone who came into contact with him received the waves of devotion in spite of himself.

By his own glorious example Gurudev has demonstrated that the true devotee of the Lord is completely free from evil qualities like jealousy, hatred, anger, pride, etc. Gurudev rejoiced at the prosperity of all institutions, blessed and promoted the cause of what we regard as rival societies, and was all admiration for all. This is a very rare divine virtue, which even the great ones often lack; and its presence in Gurudev in its positive dynamic aspect, was the fruit of the practice of intense and ceaseless devotion to the all-pervading Divinity.

Gurudev's Divine Life Mission, the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy, the Ashram and Sivananda Nagar that have grown up rapidly on the bank of the Holy Ganga are the most tangible proofs of the mysterious power that this Divine and incarnate God-head possessed.

The Sivananda Ashram is a wonderful and eloquent monument to the Yoga of Synthesis that Gurudev preached. Take bath in the Ganges flowing close-by and purify yourself. Repeat the Lord's Names on the Ganges-bank. Have Gurudev's holy company in the office. Serve the sick in the hospital. Do some selfless service in the office and take part in the Jnana Yajna (dissemination of spiritual knowledge). Study spiritual literature in the library. Sing Lord's Names in the bhajan hall. Worship the Lord in the temple. Practise asanas and pranayama under the guidance of adepts in Yoga. Listen to the illuminating discourses of highly evolved souls and Vedantins. Study scriptures on the temple verandah. Retire into the forest adjoining the ashram for a period of seclusion, Brahma-Vichara {Enquiry into Brahman the Supreme Being) and intense meditation.

The ashram provides you with food for the body in the kitchen, food for the mind in the office and library, food for the intellect during the Forest Academy classes, and food for the soul in the invisible presence of Gurudev.

Let not those who enjoy looking at the lovely Sivanandanagar, who dwell in it and partake of its comforts forget that every brick of the numerous buildings and every one of its varied activities owes its existence to this Divine Being who, in order to demonstrate the glory of devotion to God, walked into Rishikesh with nothing more than the shirt on his back, without a penny, lived on alms for a number of years, served and worshipped the Lord in multifarious dynamic ways, which today have grown as the wonderful institution admired the world over.

The Mighty Intellect Of Gurudev

Besides these psychic powers, the Yogi also acquires some marvellous powers of the mind and intellect. It was this absolutely perfect control of the mind that enabled Gurudev to give the world such a ceaseless stream of the most sublime spiritual literature, writings, which sprang from

the infinite source of consciousness, highly inspiring, able to pierce the heart of the reader and tear asunder the veil of ignorance.

He was the author of over 300 books, no doubt, but remember that he was the head of a dynamic institution (with all its interpersonal, financial and administrative problems) with a world-wide network of branches, and he managed an ashram housing 200 permanent inmates and a floating population of an equal number of visitors. And the books flowed steadily from his pen, not by fits and starts in an eccentric manner. He did not depend upon the mood, as all of us must. He created the mood, he commanded the mood. He had not to sit and wait for inspiration, as most religious writers have to. He was perpetually in an inspired state of mind, and he had just to open the tap to let the fountain of inspiration flood the world. He did not need a modern well-furnished up-to-date “study” for his study and writing. The corner of his room, crowded all round with trunks and almirahs, would do for him. For, the moment he applied himself to the task, he forgot his surroundings. And, he did not gather material and then go to a hill-station, as the most famous novelists do in order to complete the work.

Intense and protracted practice of meditation had a most miraculous effect on Gurudev's mind. It was ever longing to turn inward for a brief moment. During devotional singing, this indrawn look of bliss was clearly noticeable. Gurudev's half-closed left eye had a vacant look and the face radiated joy. Meditation on the various deities (Bhairava, Narasimha, Surya, etc.) had conferred various miraculous powers upon Gurudev. These manifested themselves at the proper moment, even without Gurudev inviting them.

Many were wonderstruck by the motley crowd that surrounded Gurudev every day in the office. People of completely different temperaments, of different nationalities, of different aspirations and with various desires, all came to the lotus-feet of the sage seeking sympathy, solace and the solution to their problems. People used to be puzzled at the minute-to-minute changes that took place in Gurudev's personality, behaviour and attitude in regard to the people-around him. All in the same breath he cheered up the distressed, consoled the bereaved, comforted the afflicted, dictated his directions to the disciples, initiated a novice, demonstrated pranayama to an aspirant, nodded his head and “thanked” like an Englishman, folded his palms and greeted like an Indian, closed his eyes and contemplated like a supreme recluse and laughed and made others laugh with his educative humour.

How did he do all this? Even though all these were varied expressions of the one cosmic love that flowed from his heart, they differed in accordance with the needs of the person to whom they were directed. Everyone got what he needed. The problem that were placed before him were often preposterous, but not so to him. Impossible things were asked of him, but he had nothing but love and sympathy for all and he knew exactly how to deal with each case, for the simple reason that he at once became one with the person approaching him. When he was conversing with you, you would feel that he was your fond mother, full of love and compassion. Half an hour later, he was addressing a small gathering: “Renounce the world as though it is a straw. Wake up!” Then we found him worshipping in the Ganges and now he was something else. And on the day he initiated his disciples into the holy order of Sannyas, again he was different—a blazing fire—you couldn't touch him, you couldn't even approach him. He was all radiant and in that state, aspirants could hardly gaze at Gurudev's divine form without being struck with awe. Gurudev himself was

unaware of these different manifestations of his spiritual personality. So here was an example of complete and total perfection—perfection in perfection. That was his nature. Most important, however, was his peace-radiation. Sitting in his solitary abode on the bank of the holy Ganga, Gurudev radiated peace and bliss to the entire world.

CHAPTER FIVE

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Gurudev's Jnana Yoga was something unique, wonderful. It is here that he distinguished himself from all the great acharyas (teachers), and from virtually every saint or sage of the past. He did not neglect vedanta, as some karma yogins had done; nor did he neglect Karma Yoga as those who profess to be non-dualists are often inclined to do. Even as regards the yoga asanas, he often warned aspirants against the wrong application of the vedantic formula—"I am not this body" to cover up their lethargy in this very important respect and neglect their health.

A little caution is necessary in order not to let the mind escape into idealism. Gurudev, therefore, gave a clear-cut formula: "Realise that the sum total of all physical bodies constitutes the Virat (macrocosm); the sum total of all minds is Hiranyagarbha (cosmic intelligence) and the sum total of all the souls is Iswara (supreme Lord)." This at once allows a relative reality to the body, mind and individual soul. He fused wisdom and action, and refused to concede that the vedantin must shun the world and rigidly seclude himself. He defined Karma Yoga itself as dynamic practice of vedanta or of bhakti.

On the 15th January, 1956, Gurudev was discussing with the ashram authorities the exorbitant charges that a printing press had made for the printing of a small book. It was the general feeling that the printers had cheated the Divine Life Society. Like a flash of lightning came Gurudev's remark: "Well, think that you yourself are enjoying the money from those who have cheated you and are none but your own self. This is the key to peace and happiness." This is a supreme vedantic formula for perennial peace and supreme bliss. But it takes a lot of hard inner work to feel that the man who has robbed you, who has cheated you, who has harmed you, for his own enjoyment, is your own self, and that his pleasure or enjoyment is yours. With Gurudev this attitude was natural and hundreds of instances can be cited where he had readily applied this formula.

Gurudev emphatically declared that Vedanta provides the spiritual aspirant with the ideal to strive for, the goal to be reached here and now. What is the goal? The realisation of the one common consciousness. In order not to forget this goal and to keep the inner zeal afire, Gurudev exhorted the aspirant: "Resort to the company of the wise, hear vedantic discourses, reflect and meditate upon vedantic formulae. But your actual practice will of course be selfless service and devotion to God." He discouraged vain discussions of vedanta and did not lend an ear to dry, vedantic talk.

During the All-India tour, Gurudev visited Benares, the supreme seat of Sanskrit learning. At a reception, given by the scholars of Benares, a member of our party, was worried that the Master might be asked questions in sanskrit, since he had written commentaries on many of the classical sanskrit texts. I said to the man, "Wait, we'll see how he handles it." Sure enough, during the reception, the Master was led between two rows of scholars, and someone asked him a question in sanskrit.

Instantly, and without the least hesitation—and that was the beauty—he turned around, "Comment ca va? Comment appelez-vous?" and walked on. Two sentences in French that someone had taught him. That poor person didn't know what the Master had said—he just looked, his jaw dropped. Gurudev had no use at all for such showing-off tactics.

He often said, "Vedanta is not something to be learnt from books. Nor can vedantic realisation be transferred from one person to another. Serve, serve, and go on serving all selflessly and egolessly. Be dynamic, untiringly so, and while doing all this, can you at the same time watch yourself, to see where there is selfishness, where there is vanity, jealousy and greed; and can you at the same time destroy it there—there at the root? Then the same service takes on a different form; the form of worshipfulness."

In due course you will attain vedantic realisation. When the heart is purified through the practice of untiring selfless service, and steadied through the practice of devotion to God, then the light of the self must shine in it. Then the Vedantic aroma will waft around you and all people will be automatically attracted to you. You need not go about advertising. That is what we actually experienced during Gurudev's All-India tour in 1950 and in the ashram thereafter. Millions of people crowded round Gurudev at every centre; millions heard him. By mere sight of him they felt they had got everything.

Gurudev's life itself was vedanta illustrated. He practised and preached vedanta in daily life, not dry, lip-service to vedantic truths. But to him the world of names and forms did not exist; there was only Brahman, the supreme being. He had this cosmic vision; therefore he had no desires whatsoever, except the fulfillment of the divine plan. The Master used to sing very beautifully:

"Sarvam brahmamayam jagat, sarvam Brahmayam
Sarvam brahmamayam neha nana asti kinchana."

(Everything is Brahman, there is no such thing as diversity).

And he would improvise as he went along:

"Mata Pita Brahman, larka larki Brahman Father and mother brahman, son and daughter Brahman, Milk and yoghurt Brahman, hot hot tea Brahman ..."

Jnana Yoga stands on the bedrock of vairagya (dispassion) and Gurudev was born with it. This dispassion in him was always based on wonderful viveka (wisdom). Even in his early days, he was full of wisdom and it was this that eventually led him to Rishikesh.

Of the sixfold virtues Sama (control of the mind), Dama (control of the senses), Titiksha (endurance), Uparati (satiety in contact with sense-objects), Sraddha (faith) and Samadhana (proper concentration); suffice it to say he was full of these. He had no attraction for the goods of the world, and applied himself to doing good to all. He took up, carried out and completed every work with a zeal, faith and devotion that pertain to a man full of ambition, but Gurudev's inner attitude was different. This inner attitude demonstrated the fourth of the four means i.e. Mumukshutva (yearning for liberation). Elsewhere his very words were quoted to show that when he came to India after renouncing the world, the only central idea in his mind was, "I should realise God now." Also he always behaved in such a manner that everyone of his actions inspired the highest type of Mumukshutva in other aspirants. His actions were so perfectly selfless, egoless, and desireless, that they snapped the bonds of karma. He lived, moved and had his being in a state of liberation, beyond even the desire for liberation. Who will desire a thing that has already been acquired? He was established in that. Titiksha (endurance) was effortless in his case. Regarding endurance of physical pain, there was surely no one else in the world who could equal him in this respect. Over-work, especially of the brain, gave him diabetes. The disease had to be kept in check if it was not to hamper Gurudev's work. The most common treatment for diabetes is, of course, insulin. An injection every day. (In the later days, two!). And this went on for many years, until the end. Before a qualified doctor was employed for the ashram's charitable hospital, Gurudev himself would give the prick on his own body. During the epochal All-India tour in 1950, we witnessed one of the greatest miracles of Yogi Sivananda. Strain of unprecedented nature proved far too much for this ageing body. Really, it was killing, literally killing. We were in the city of Madras, and the programme there was especially heavy. From early morning 6 a.m. till 10 p.m. at night, Gurudev was constantly on the move, talking and singing.

This particular incident happened on the 2nd October 1950. There was a reception organised by the citizens at the museum theatre. Because he was going from one meeting to another his throat used to get dry, so we kept a couple of flasks handy with apple or orange juice, and he had a drink before he went to the next meeting. On this particular evening, the flasks were empty, and although there was an orthodox Brahmin high court judge in the car with us and a large crowd assembled to hear Swamiji, waiting in the hall, he refused to go in and speak until he had had some orange juice. Then we went back to the theatre. Yet the same Swami, who insisted on having orange juice before lecturing, three days later, in the same city, demonstrated something quite different.

For three or four days he was running a high temperature and his throat was highly inflamed and full of dangerous ulcers, so much so that a little cough or sneezing caused bleeding from mouth or nose. Doctors were frightened. But Gurudev never even mentioned his condition to the organisers of the tour and never allowed his physical troubles to interfere with the programme of his soul-awakening service of the masses. Thousands and thousands of people in Madras had heard and seen him speak, personally and on the radio. Everybody agreed that he had conquered the whole city. The last meeting before we left Madras was held in another big hall. There were about ten thousand people inside the hall and about 4-5,000 outside, who could not get in. Swamiji's body was so shattered by this gruelling programme that he could not stand. He was holding onto the microphone stand for support, perspiration pouring from every pore of his skin and drenching his clothes. Yet he would not stop. The body, whose needs were supplied on one occasion must also be made to perform its due function now.

Gurudev's Preceptor

After equipping himself with the four means, the aspirant is asked to proceed to the lotus-feet of the preceptor to undergo intense spiritual training for self-realisation. To whom should an incarnation of God, in whom there was neither mala (impurity of the mind), nor avarana (veil of ignorance) go? Gurudev needed no teacher to awaken him to the realisation of the Self to guide him in his spiritual practice, and to remove the obstacles on his path. Gurudev himself admitted that he never felt any difficulty in meditation; no obstacle could dare bar his path. This was so even before he renounced the world, even before he embraced the order of renunciates.

Yet in order to emphasise the supreme need of having a preceptor or teacher, Gurudev sought the holy feet of H.H. Swami Viswanandaji Maharaj. Or, did he? Some time after Gurudev had arrived at Rishikesh, he spent a night in 'Charan Das public resthouse' verandah. A few feet away from him a venerable old monk was resting. The young man confided in the monk the purpose of his coming to Rishikesh. That monk did not take much time to recognise the future Bhumandaleshwar (the Lord of the earth) and hastened to grasp the supreme honour of being his preceptor! The very next morning, Viswanandaji initiated Dr. Kuppuswamy into the Holy Order of Renunciation with the sacred name "Swami Sivananda Saraswati", a name which has become a bye-word in the aspirant-world. The initiation over, Viswanandaji took leave of his divine disciple and went away to Benares.

The uniqueness of Gurudev's life stands as an example for people of different temperaments,—for the aspirant who should resort to the lotus-feet of the preceptor, as also for those others, though their numbers may be extremely small, who are so highly evolved and whose hearts are so pure that they do not have to run after a human preceptor. What should they do? Gurudev's own life is their guide.

Gurudev's attitude paralleled that of Lord Dattatreya. To him everyone who gave expression to a noble thought, who performed a noble deed, was his preceptor. He listened attentively to the lectures of even baby-souls, lest he should miss the admonition of his preceptor. He often openly declared that his own disciples were his teachers. "I have learnt many lessons from them," he used to say. This extraordinary attitude is extremely difficult for ordinary people to conceive of. By this Gurudev has demonstrated that, far from being convenient escapism, the independence of the aspirant who does not seek and live with a preceptor, obliges the aspirant to humble himself to such an extent as to be able to treat everyone, even his own servants and disciples as his preceptor. Here, as in every other spiritual practice, Gurudev had discovered the best means of keeping vanity away from its hide-outs. If you do not want any preceptor well and good; treat everyone as your preceptor.

Experience was Gurudev's greatest teacher. From every experience that he passed through, and had seen others pass through, he drew a lesson, and these lessons, he never forgot. For instance, he had seen in his youth, a whole bazaar being reduced to ashes because the shops had thatched roofs. He drew the lesson that these roofs were insecure. Never in his life thereafter did Gurudev allow anyone to live in a house with a thatched roof; he would much rather let you live in the open than in a cottage with a thatched roof.

But Gurudev himself very often pointed out that this path (i.e. no preceptor in the conventional sense) is only for the aspirant who is very evolved and who is endowed with divine qualities to a very high degree. The others should approach a preceptor, get initiated by him and perform spiritual practice under his immediate guidance.

Sravana, Manana, Nididhyasana

During the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy classes, Gurudev frequently used to pull up a slumbering aspirant and question him: “Do you keep notes of the important points that you hear during the class?” Most often, the aspirant did not! But Gurudev was not like that. He once said, “After the class is over, as soon as I return to my room, I reflect on the ideas I gathered during the lecture. Deeply meditating over them, gives rise to related sublime thoughts. All these I incorporate in an article and present it to the world.”

Here in brief Gurudev had explained the threefold Jnana Yoga practice of Sravana, Manana and Nididhyasana. Writing down the thoughts heard at a spiritual discourse or grasped during the period of study of scriptures is a sure way of ensuring that the mind does not slip into lethargy. This practice also helps reflection and eventually profound meditation.

For instance, one fine morning, Gurudev had studied a Vedantic text in which the nature of the Supreme Being had been described as Satchidananda (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute). He meditated upon this single formula and from this emerged the following poem which he gave to the world as a wonderful aid to Nirguna meditation, i.e., meditation on the attributeless Being:

Sat-Chit-Ananda.
Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.
Truth Consciousness Bliss.
Life Light Love
Immortality, Wisdom, Happiness.
All mean the same.
Love melts into bliss.

“This is Nirguna Meditation,” said Gurudev after reading the poem to us in the office. “Think of Sat-Chit-Ananda. Think of Atman or Brahman (the Supreme Being). Then think of the equivalents of the attributes Sat-Chit-Ananda which nearly denote the nature of Brahman. Parallel attributes will suggest themselves to your mind. Then go on meditating upon them. This is Nirguna meditation. You will have to go on thinking and thinking. Suddenly it will flash within you.” ‘It’ means the Truth.

Similarly from the scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, Gurudev selected some passages for reflection and meditation.

Ahamatma Gudakesa Sarvabhutasayasthitah
“I am the Self dwelling in all beings.”
Isavasyam Idam Sarvam
All this is pervaded by God.

Ekameva Adwitiyam Brahma
Brahman is one without a second.

Gurudev also applied this wonderfully unique method to the Sharanagati Formulas. “Surrender is something which is easier to do than to keep up! And the fire that dies out is soon covered over by the ash of the self-assertive egoistic nature. The frequent repetition of these formulas will prevent this

Hari Sharanam Mama
Sri Krishna Sharanam Mama
Sri Rama Sharanam Mama
Durgam Deveem Sharanamaham Prapadye
Sirman-Narayan Charanau Sharanamaham Prapadye
and the Gita verse:
Sarva Dharman Parityajya
Mamekam Sharanam Vraja
Aham Twaa Sarvapapebhyo
Mokshayishyami Maa Sucha

(Abandoning all duties, take refuge in Me alone: I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not).

The realisation of Vedantic Unity was not a theoretical concept with Gurudev who lived the dynamic realisation of the spiritual aspect of this truth. He lived the Divine Life. Divine Life does not mean cutting yourself away from life and going to something divine; this life *itself* can be divine; divinity is to be discovered in life, while living a full life—the fullest life. This is Divine Life. Wherever you are, whatever you may be doing, discover the divinity inherent in life. This is in fact and in truth to discover this cosmic being, cosmic consciousness. The only thing that is absent from this kind of divine life is the ego-sense.

“Kill this little ‘I’
Die to live
Lead the Divine Life.”

KILL THIS LITTLE ‘I’—is a figure of speech, it doesn’t exist. When the inner light of consciousness is awakened, unveiled, then the little ego-sense is seen to be non-existent. It is not necessary to destroy it, to kill it, in the usual sense of the word. You cannot destroy darkness; you cannot kill a shadow. When the light is brought in, the shadow is not there. That is Divine Life. That was his life. He enjoyed and he suffered everything, like you and me, except that in his case, there was no ego-sense at all. When we were with him we never felt that he was something other than us; he was not a holy man who was constantly looking at his eyebrow centre, and never caring to look at us. No, no. He was one of us, he joked with us, and ate with us and bathed with us. He sang with us. He played with us. He cried with us—yes, he could cry.

On the other hand, during the All India Tour, he became the Lion of Vedanta, roaring at a public meeting, and surrounded by dignitaries. There he was, Gurudev, The Supreme, the Mighty

Incarnation of God in whose presence ministers and judges were but children listening spellbound to his stern admonitions. They too, must have felt that glory which is self-realisation, compared to which the greatest mundane glory fades into insignificance. Whether it be a mighty ruler of the earth, or a poor beggar, a learned pundit or an ignorant babe, to Gurudev, all were equal, equally worthy of his veneration and love. He was one with all. The fruits of his self-realisation were enjoyed by all mankind. Everything was for every-body because all are sparks of the one Divine flame which and which alone, Gurudev saw in all.

CONCLUSION

This Integral Yoga, this Yoga of Synthesis is Gurudev's greatest gift to humanity, his greatest contribution to world peace, to commonweal and to the cause of the cultivation of human brotherhood. This yoga is broadbased and represents the cream of the teachings of all religions of all scriptures of all countries. It is the universal common ground.

The practice of this Yoga of Synthesis ennobles man, broadens his outlook, softens his heart, enlightens his intellect and awakens his soul-consciousness. In the light of this yoga, man lives, loves and serves all. He strives to perfect himself, to remove his inner weaknesses and to cultivate virtuous qualities. Irrespective of the religion he professes, the creed he follows, and the country he belongs to, Gurudev's disciple becomes a better man and strives to realise universal brotherhood and universal Atma-hood, in his daily life. This is the ideal Gurudev placed before his disciple. Striving to reach this ideal, man can become a superman. In reaching it he realises God. Gurudev's yoga is the yoga of the coming age.

May Sri Guru Bhagawan, Lord Sivananda, Yogeshwara, the Supreme Refuge of us all, and the luminous dust of whose lotus-feet purifies us, protect us and serve as our sole prop in the dark and dreary desert of samsara (worldly life). May he the Incarnation of the Almighty for ever guide humanity by his invisible hands:

from falsehood to Truth
from darkness to Light
from mortality to Immortality.

Glory to Gurudev!